

# ***Tales of Flowers, Trees and Birds***

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## I. A NEW HOME

In 1993, around the month of August, I settled in this garret on a fourth floor. My friends had said to me: "There's a fourth floor apartment available. Why don't you go and see if it suits you." "What's the use in my going back and forth?" I answered. "When I can have the place, you can arrange the whole affair for me all at one time."

My people settled the rent with the landlord. After the sum was agreed to, they induced him to lower the advance payment to three months instead of six. But when it came to discussing the contract, the gentleman introduced complications. He made it a point that he was not going to rent the apartment without talking to the person who would live in it. My friends returned to me and reported what he had said. "It's not far," they told me. "Only three houses away. Wouldn't you like to go there and settle the contract?"

I answered unequivocally: "If I happen not to like the flat, or if I cannot reach an agreement with the landlord, this whole renting is not going to materialize. It is you who wish me to leave my present home, sending me elsewhere, so that you can have my place. This won't be possible. I have a better idea. Why don't you go to the landlord and invite him to return here with you? Then we can discuss the matter here."

Later I began to have doubts as to whether the landlord would consent to cross the threshold of my monkish cell just to honor the whim of a would-be tenant. But, when my people returned, they reported that the next morning my future landlord would go to the mosque for morning prayers. After praying, he would return home for breakfast. After breakfast he would step out for his "morning walk" [as they quoted his use of an English word]. On the way back from his walk he would stop by and talk with me. They recited the landlord's morning schedule in full detail. From this report I imagined that the landlord-sahib must be quite a fastidious person.

So, my future landlord would be presenting himself the very next morning! This momentous news engendered extra chores for me that night. I set about cleaning the dust that had accumulated in my room during the week. With a long-handled broom I swept the cobwebs from the walls. I arranged the books neatly on their shelves. I collected all my worn clothes that lay scattered about and I sent them off to the laundry. I straightened out the rest of the clothes and put them on the clothes rack. I replaced the old bed sheet with a new one and I did not forget to change the pillow case.

That night I was in such turmoil that I was unable to sleep. The next morning, my new landlord would be coming to talk to his prospective tenant! If he disliked my present residence, there was a fair chance he would not rent his apartment to me. I rose early. I shaved well. I took a shower and put on a freshly pressed pajama and a panjabi-shirt. I remembered that the landlord is a pious man, devoted to Allah, and a man who walks far every morning to a mosque for saying prayers. I brought out the

prayer cap that I had purchased for last year's alms-giving festival. I blew into its fold to open it up and I positioned it carefully on the table. I expected that as soon as the landlord saw it, he would consider me a dutiful person both in faith and practice. This good impression might then encourage him to rent his apartment to me.

After breakfast I waited anxiously. At last my future landlord made his appearance. I went to greet him. Holding his hand with respect, I guided him to a chair. He sat down. He let his eyes roam slowly over everything in sight. It seemed to me that his eyes from behind the powerful lenses of his glasses penetrated every corner of my room. I felt quite pleased; all the cleaning and sweeping of the previous night had not been in vain.

This landlord is a very tall, thin person -- so thin that should the wind strike him while he walks, it seems he might break in two. On that morning he was wearing a maroon panjabi and of course his head was adorned with a prayer cap. He was chewing pan, keeping it well at the back of his mouth. Unless you watched him carefully, you would not notice it. He spoke in a quiet voice. He wished to know how much I earned in a month. In order to assure him that there would be no failure in my payments, I gave him a figure three times the amount of my salary. Then he asked: "How many of you are going to live in this apartment?" I answered: "Myself, my nephew and another young man -- three people for now." The landlord let me know that if the number of occupants exceeded three, he was not going to rent his apartment to me.

At that moment the dear landlady of my current residence [appeared at the door]. As she lives close by in the neighborhood, she knows this landlord well. She said to him, "Why are you putting so much emphasis on the condition that not more than three people can live in your flat? The previous tenant in that apartment had a family total of six or seven members. I used to see them while drying clothes on my roof."

My would-be landlord saw no point in answering her. He turned his attention to me: "Where is your begam, your honorable wife?" I told him that I had no "begam." He expressed sympathy by a clucking sound. As he still had pan in his mouth, he could not say his words clearly, so he stepped outside to spit the juice. After this he inquired, "When did she die? How long ago was it?" I answered: "From [where/when] could she die, sir? I have not married her at all!"

When the landlord heard this, he stiffened in his chair. Then he spoke with faltering words: "It is not my custom to rent the apartment to a "bachelor." [He used the English expression.] I said, "Why talk of customs? If you wish to rent your apartment to me, I will come to live in it. If you don't, I won't. That's all there is to it." After pondering awhile, the landlord replied, "You must understand, I live in the same building with my whole family -- with sons and daughters. If I take in a "bachelor" in my building, what will I do if something goes wrong? And there are neighbors to consider. They may have objections. It's a difficult matter." I answered: "Well, since in my case

no wife exists, I knew this issue would arise. I have told you all I have to say. Do as you like; you can rent me the apartment or not, as you please."

The landlord answered, "It is not so easy to rent an apartment to a 'bachelor.' I shall have to talk it over with my wife and sons." My landlady spoke up: "There's nothing to consult about. Just rent your apartment! Where will you get such a trouble-free tenant as this man? He has been living in my building for the past three years. Has any neighbor ever said anything against him?" At the words of my landlady, the landlord seemed to come half-way toward assenting. Then he ventured: "Well, if..." Quickly my landlady interrupted him: "What's this 'if'? Just shut your eyes and close the deal."

Perhaps the landlord was desperate to get a tenant, so he agreed. This time he spoke completely in English: "Before you take the possession, terms-conditions-everything must be mentioned in The Agreement." When I heard English spoken by my future landlord, I asked him to tell me where he used to work. The gentleman answered, mixing English with Bangla: "It is five years since I 'retired' as a 'Section Officer' in the 'Ministry of Education'."

The "Agreement" was finalized with the gentleman and three months rent was paid in advance. Now my friends insisted: "You see, everything has been settled. Go take a look at the apartment yourself." I refused to budge one bit from my original position: "I have told you that on seeing the apartment, if I do not like it, I will not go to live there. Hasn't the contract been agreed upon? Now if I choose not to go there, I shall not go there. But you can start shifting my things."

All day long my people worked hard at moving my bed, bedding, table, kitchen utensils, the "fridge," the clothes-rack, shelves, even the toilet-jug -- everything to the fourth floor apartment, except for the cane bedstead. They were not able to carry it to the fourth floor because the staircase was too narrow. I told them, "I'm not at all acquainted with this work. You must find a way out for yourselves."

Then one of them went to the market and came back with a long rope. They fastened one end to the bedstead and hoisted it to the fourth floor terrace. They arranged everything in their own way. They returned to me and said, "All is 'ready'. Now you can go there." They delivered the key to me and one of them waited to accompany me.

I felt like crying. I had lived three years in the present house. It seemed to me that everyone was conspiring to eject me onto a ground for butchering. In the yard where I lived I had planted the sapling of an apple tree and a cutting from a grape-vine. I had brought them from far away and with great care. By now the sapling had grown tall with abundant branches and leaves. There was a jasmine vine on which pure white buds had begun to flower. I had recently added an evening creeper. If at night I woke

from sleep, I would go quietly to caress the grape-vine as it stretched its head skyward. I would whisper endearments in the ear of the apple tree child. I believe with all my heart that these plant-children understood my affection. I now approached the apple tree and spoke softly to it: "Today I am going to leave this house. Who is going to look after you, my grape-vine daughter? My apple tree son? Who is going to take care of you all?" I was grief stricken. I watered their roots for the last time.

My people said: "Everything is in perfect order. Now, if you wish, you can go and sleep there." I put on [clean] trousers and my best jama-shirt. I took my umbrella and held it as if I were going to visit some far off country. Finally I left my old home and came to my present fourth floor apartment only three houses away.

I decided that I would not check on anything that night because I was afraid that if the apartment did not please me, I would feel depressed. My heart was still moored to the previous residence. I took off my sandals, lay down on my bed and began to read a novel. I tried to imagine that I was still in my previous home. While reading the novel I fell asleep.

The next morning, when I woke up, it seemed that I had come to a new country. I toured all the rooms. I was instantly pleased. The whole apartment resembled a toy house. The rooms looked as compact as the cabins on a ship. Only the bathroom was disappointing.

When I opened a door, the sight of the terrace greeted my eyes -- an oblong, roof-top space lying along the eastern wall of my flat. Right away I fell in love with this terrace. When I viewed the city from there, I was dazzled. The blue dome of the sky arched above me. Trees raised their leaf-laden heads on all sides. How beautiful my city looked! -- to the north, to the east and south! Even tall buildings raising their heads to block the sky appeared to me lovely from this terrace.

By now I had a chance to compare my old residence with this new one. I had spent the last three years on the ground floor of the three-storied building. On this morning it seemed to me that I had spent a long time in my mother's womb, and just now had come to earth. The change of residence gave me the feeling of a new birth. What else could I call it? I seemed to discover a connection between my own existence and the vast sky, the rows of buildings, the trees and the birds in flight. Whatever I saw around me, each thing was becoming a part of my own being. A feeling came over me that I was sharing in the life of the sun, moon and stars -- all those bodies circling above me. I was standing as they stood, moving as they moved. The realization that I was a part of all these things -- this was a new birth. New birth! New birth! These two words began to echo and re-echo within me.

## II. A TERRACE GARDEN

A coconut tree stands near my terrace. Its long, slender leaves shiver in the breeze. One of the branches touches my terrace. Yellow flowers bloom on this tree. At first no one can see them, but with careful scrutiny, you can detect their presence. Another coconut tree stands beside the first one. Its top branches reach above the roof of my building. Through a window I can see only its trunk. A mango tree peeps through a southern window. It is not as tall. Its abundant branches and leaves intertwine to form the tree's own domain. Crows spend the night within the dense shelter of its foliage.

Doel-birds start to sing long before day-break. When the sun begins to ascend, a good number of bulbulis come from who knows where. They move about from branch to branch. Then comes a flock of zhuti shaliks, then gang shaliks. When two raj-gugus swell their throats and sing, they make me think of a rural home abandoned in the countryside. From where do so many birds arrive in throngs as they join themselves one by one in mated formation! Can I know the land of these birds? A flock of green parrots circles in the sky. Their harsh voices pierce my ears. The beating of their wings, like the heart-beat of the vast sky, mesmerizes my consciousness and holds it in thrall.

One house after another borders my street on either side. Seen from this lofty height, the houses are lost from view within the trees, but when seen from below you get a completely different picture. Then you see only the buildings, not the trees. On my side, two houses away, there is a five-storied building. The top floor is still unplastered; you can see its red bricks. Near the boundary wall of that house a nona tree is on its way toward the sky. This is a rare tree in Dhaka. It looks quite out of place. I think the tree itself is aware of this. It knows well that it is a misfit in this city of brick and steel. A kind of rustic stubbornness causes it to try to reach the sky.

When I stand on my terrace I feel I have come close to Ishwar, to God. At the moment this spot on which I am standing is located far from the sea, far from mountains and rivers, and from the zigzagging roadways of the world. Where I am standing is a fascinating place. From here, if I study the world around me, I seem to encounter my own self. At the same time, if I look into myself, I meet there with the world.

On that first afternoon Shushil came to get news of me. I consider him a son. He has a meticulous eye when it comes to examining anything. He checked on my every article. He was convinced that something might have been left behind by mistake when I moved to this new place. Since at the moment he could find no trace of anything forgotten, he found something with which to keep himself busy. He brought a long-twigged broom from the kitchen and began to sweep the terrace. Shushil gives so much attention to a piece of work that even an insignificant task turns into an extensive project. I was shocked to see the filth he swept together: rotten leaves, feathers, the

wings of a dead chicken, a deteriorated rat, fragments of glass, a rusted iron nail, the handle of a kettle, and a crippled plastic doll that had lost both its legs. Everything was there. Shushil dumped all this trash into a basket. Then he said: "I'm going to throw away this stuff downstairs. When I return, I shall show you something interesting." I lit a cigarette and stood waiting to see Shushil's "something interesting."

When Shushil returned from throwing away the trash, I asked him, "Where is your 'something interesting'?" Shushil answered, "Please wait a bit while I wash my hands and feet with soap. I have handled a lot of dirt." After washing, he came out wiping his hands on a towel. He said, "Now follow me." He directed me toward the southern corner of the terrace and drew my attention to a half dead seedling as slender as a thread and not more than three inches in length. Shushil asked, "Can you tell me the name of this seedling?" I said, "Whatever may be its name, it is half dead. Do one thing. Pull it out and throw it away." Shushil answered, "Look, it's a tulsi sprout. It's a shame to let it die." I answered, "Shushil, aren't you a Christian? Tulsis have no significance for you. Pull it out. Don't you see it is already half dead." Shushil replied, "A tulsi is a beneficial plant. I will try to keep it alive." I was at a loss. What could I do with a tulsi seedling? Perhaps I could write a short story about it, but that task was accomplished by Syed Waliullah long before I was born. Shushil is a determined boy. Whatever he starts, he will not leave unfinished.

I thought that after showing me the tulsi sprout Shushil would let me be, but he summoned me again. This time he drew me toward the wall on the eastern side of the terrace. There I could see two bricks lying on the ground. He moved them aside and I saw three small sprouts of noyontara plants struggling for life. Shushil said, "I shall try to keep them alive, too." I said, "Don't wait for my permission. Do whatever you like." Nevertheless, I began to marvel at how the tender shoots of the noyontara plants had managed to blast their way through the thickly cemented floor. What an incredible life force!

Suddenly Shushil seemed lost in thought. He went down to the second floor and borrowed a hammer. Then he loosened his lungi-skirt, squatted down and started breaking the bricks. I asked him what he was doing. He replied, "I shall build a little wall around the tulsi and noyontara plants so that water does not escape." When I saw the determination of Shushil to give new life to this half dead vegetation, I looked at him with increased appreciation.

I do not know how I became a partner in Shushil's venture. There was a layer of compost formed of rotten leaves in the northwest corner of the terrace. I collected this with a kodal-spade and spread it around the roots of the seedlings. I told Shushil, "You cannot keep seedlings alive with only water and no soil." The previous tenant had stored tea leaves in a container in the kitchen. I spread the contents of the container on the roots of the seedlings.

Shushil made a practice of watering the seedlings two times a day. Dear Mother! Within less than two days I saw that all the seedlings were rising to their feet, as if by mutual consent at a meeting. A miracle! Their sunburned leaves had disappeared. New green, tender leaves started sprouting. Day by day there were so many changes in the seedlings that it became difficult to remain indifferent to them. Every day the tulsi and noyontara plants began to woo our hearts afresh.

When guests visited my place, the sight of the deep green leaves on the tulsi and noyontara plants enchanted them. Both the tulsi and noyontara children were growing with joy. Every day, when Shushil watered the seedlings in the morning and evening, his whole body seemed to move in tune with the growth of the plants. He brought dry cow dung from wherever he could find it in the street and placed it on the roots of the seedlings. Neither I nor my nephew raised any objection.

Within three or four months the tulsi plant became stout. Sometimes my landlord's wife would send her maid with a request for some tulsi leaves. She often suffered from colds and cough. Tulsi leaves are a good cure for these ailments. However, whenever anyone speaks of plucking a leaf, Shushil's expression hardens. Then he doesn't look at any one's face. He becomes so downcast that even if you call him many times he does not respond. On listening the other day to the kirtan-hymns of Chavi Bandhapadhyay, I newly perceived the glory of the tulsi. As the beloved plant of Shri Krishna, the tulsi inspires devotion for this god.

At some time in the past, the singer, Anima, presented me with a clay candle stand. In order to add to the glory of the adolescent tulsi plant, I put a sizable candle on the stand and I placed it at the foot of the tulsi plant. When my young friends from Jaganath Hall used to visit me, I would have a little fun with them saying, "Chinmoy, Ratneswar, Pranav, and Shamir... just look! I'm burning the candle. See whether it produces any devotion for Sri Krishna in your hearts!" Fearing that devotion for Sri Krishna might really overtake them, one of them stole the candle stand. Since then the ritual of candle burning came to an end.

Within a short time the whole tulsi plant was covered with small white flowers. At around the same time, the red blossoms of the noyontara plants started to appear. Each day I saw many new flowers. I felt a surge of affection for the tulsi and noyontara plants. But why is it that I remained indifferent to other flowers? I found a reason. Perhaps I had not established a heart-connection with them. As for the tulsi and noyontara children, I had seen them return from death to life. Under Shushil's fine care, they grew up like sons of the house. When I see the tulsi and noyontara flowers in bloom, they appear to me like crowns of victory in the long struggle of life.

When I see the tulsi and noyontara flowers, my faith and confidence in life are born again. Within me someone seems to be saying, "Whatever may be the sorrows and hardships in your life, don't break down. A time will come when you will be able to



stand erect. Go and work quietly. There is no alternative for plant children but to keep blooming."

The relationship between the tulsi and noyontara plants on my terrace was quite intimate. When the noyontara plants became covered with reddish blossoms, then the tulsi plant also wanted to bloom. When the seeds of the tulsi started falling from the center of its flowers, the noyontara flowers transformed themselves into dangling seed capsules. Both plants gained a new birth in their mutual struggle for life. This explains perhaps the wonderful friendship between the two plants at the time of their blossoming.

When the tulsi seeds started to mature with a brownish color, flocks of sparrows came to thrust their beaks into the leaves and to feast greedily on the seeds. Sometimes the sharp chirping of the sparrows deafened our ears. There was no fixed schedule for meals. Irrespective of time, they came in the morning, in the evening, in the afternoon. They chirped and chirped while relishing the tulsi seeds with their small beaks.

For a reason unknown to me the sparrows have no interest in noyontara seeds. As a result, it happened that after the capsules burst open, the seeds lay scattered all over the terrace. Meanwhile, the sparrows made it a point to invite their relatives from far away to enjoy the fortuitous great feast of tulsi seeds. Although the sparrows busied themselves all day with pecking, their clan could not finish eating all the seeds. After fully maturing, some seeds remained on the ground where they fell.

When the rains began to come at the end of the month of Baishak, the young tulsi and noyontara plants started to stand erect with their ears perked. They bathed themselves in the moisture of the rain and in the rays of the sun. Swaying in the breeze, their stems grew stout. They blossomed. Half of my terrace became covered with tulsi and noyontara flowers.

The noyontaras of my terrace belong to the magenta variety. From somewhere Shushil obtained a noyontara plant with white buds and planted it in a pot. For the first few days the new plant remained inert. I worried that the poor thing would kill itself because it had been displaced. In the meantime, a life force was pulsating in the leaves and stems of the red noyontaras. So the white noyontara plant reasoned to itself: "It is pointless to commit suicide when others are growing at such a tremendous speed." The white noyontara joined the race. Through this process the whole terrace became a heaven of red and white noyontara and tulsi flowers. People pointing to my noyontara and tulsi flowers might say, "Such flowers as these are commonplace. In the hierarchy of flora they have no rank. So, why all this fuss about them and what is the use of writing about them?" The answer is very simple. These plants grew not only on my terrace, but also on the soil of my heart.

One afternoon Farzana came and made a suggestion: "If you put some pots of roses among the noyontaras, if the plants bloom, your terrace will look really nice." The suggestion was good, but I had some misgivings. Of course I could buy aristocratic flowering plants from a nursery, but how did I suppose that the noyontara and tulsi plants would accept them? Wouldn't they feel hurt? They have had their birth partly in my soul. That evening my nephew Anwar brought four large pots of rose plants. He placed them among the noyontaras. During the night I had a feeling that my noyontaras were crying because I had been unfaithful to them.

Among the four rose plants I could easily recognize one of them, a kalo raj-kumar or Black Prince, from its striking blood-red color. Its petals are like the ears of Alsations. The second rose plant was of the common rose-pink variety that you see everywhere. If you lower your head near to this rose, you can easily inhale its smooth, sweet fragrance. The color of the next rose resembles somewhat the hue of a shindhu, the red spot on a Hindu married woman's forehead. I do not know the name of this variety. What is in a name? A rose is a rose! The color of the fourth rose was yellow like raw turmeric. Since I do not know the exact name, I shall find a new name for it.

When the roses started blooming, I found no sign of discord between the noyontaras and the roses. Both kinds of plant were living quite compatibly with good neighborly feelings. But why did I have the idea that the noyontaras would be displeased with the arrival of the roses? Now I realize that the noyontaras had no such idea. I had imposed my human ways of thinking on the plants. Humans are not sensitive creatures. They take pleasure in dumping the dirt of their thoughts on the petals of flowers.

Noyontaras do not bloom throughout the year, but when the flowers appear they remain a long time on their stems. They are not easily shaken even by a storm. The rose is a flower for all seasons. It agrees to bloom throughout the year, provided that it receives proper care. No other flower except the tulip has claimed so much human attention. It is impossible to name all the colors, all the shapes of roses that people have attributed to them. There is such a closeness between humans and roses, so much giving and taking, that the rose has become somewhat dependent on man. It is difficult for roses to bloom without human intervention. For this reason, when roses have fully bloomed, their stems need to be trimmed. When the plant becomes tired of continually producing flowers, its whole stem must be cut short.

Every new twig of a rose plant gives the promise of a tiny bud. When it blooms into a flower with color and perfume, you will feel that the splendor of Ishwar is gradually expanding within it. It seems to me Ishwar dwells more or less in the heart of every flower. How does He do this, I really cannot tell. If it should be the case that no god exists anywhere in this whole universe, I shall have to manufacture one so that I can offer floral wreaths to him as homage.

The roses gave me a troublesome question. This graceful flower is not used in rituals for the gods. I do not know whether this is due to a chance misfortune of the gods or to the jealous conspiracy of priests. I began to understand a little now why flowers are needed in the worship of gods. A flower is the connecting link between the tree and its fruit. So both tree and fruit are contained in the flower. In the same way day and night reside together in the glow of twilight. Likewise, present and future holding hands, rest peacefully inside a flower. I gave much thought to this. I cannot imagine any better use for flowers than to offer them to gods as homage. The god whom I cannot embrace, whom I cannot touch, whom I cannot see --if I offer flowers to Him -- perhaps He will feel inclined to look at me. So much said about this is enough.

### III. THE APPLE TREE

Meanwhile Shushil did a considerate thing. He went to a bird vendor in Nilkhet and bought a crested shalik. He brought it home in a cage. I had to buy a larger cage at considerable cost. Each day I dyed the bird's coat with a new color. On some days it was red, some days yellow, and sometimes it was brown. Every day I gave it a fresh color. The dyes concealed the bird's true identity. When people asked about the name of the bird, I would answer one thing at one time and something else at another. Sometimes I would say that the bird was brought from Kamchatka. Sometimes I said it came from the mountains of Kilimanjaro, or from Uruguay. People stared at the bird in amazement.

I once loved a shalik in my childhood. I wound in my heart still burns because of it. For now let this new bird with his foreign identities move about in his cage, or let him eat his barley paste. I must first tell you what I learned about trees.

Long ago an idea took root within me: Allah has imbued the lives of plants and trees with a part of his hidden power. Therefore, in at least one stage of our human life, we should get in touch with the world of plants and trees, or else the complications of life will drag us down a path to suicide. Allah is indeed wise! The simple flow of life that passes through the body of plants, has a close likeness to the circulation system of humans. In essence both are expressions of a living energy. The difference is in degree and motion. The Greek pundit Aristotle defined human beings as walking trees.

Just as a man develops a close relationship with a woman, so a man can form a close relationship with trees. Actually humans can develop an intimacy with trees, but not everyone can do this. Only someone who is gifted with the simple faith that a tree is also a living being and that it has a soul of its own -- only this person can be in phase with the secret wave lengths of the voiceless trees.

I shall tell you a few experiences which I had before shifting to my present apartment. When I lived in a room on the ground floor of the three-storied building, there was a small yard in the front of the house. In it the landlord had planted a guava tree and a cutting from a lime tree. A madhavi-vine spread its tendrils happily over the iron fretwork of the yard's gate.

I have a custom of my own. In any house where I dwell, whether for a long or short time, I plant a few trees with the idea of transmitting something of myself to the next tenants. I have an urge to be remembered by others. Quite some time ago I purchased a two-room apartment in Rupnagar in Mirpur. On the balcony of the apartment I planted an orange sapling in an oil drum which had its lid cut away and which was filled with soil. The plant grew like a child of the family. Very soon its branches touched the ceiling of my balcony. I transferred it to a place near the pump house and it survived. Later, when I sold the apartment to the artist Sultan, I took fifty-

thousand takas less because he promised me that he would take care of my tree. I often requested a report on the condition of the tree. The other day I heard the news that the tree had been cut down. If Sultan ever stands before me, I shall have nothing civil to say to him.

Let me begin with the three-storied house. Nearby there was a nursery in front of Mr. Azizul Huq's house. One day while we were talking I asked him which varieties of plants were available in his nursery. The gardener promptly informed me that recently he had collected some apple saplings and some cuttings of grape vine. I wanted to know whether apple trees could grow on our soil. With a broad smile the gardener responded with confidence, "Yes, Sir! By now many people are growing apples." He began to offer factual evidence: "Mrs. Tamana in Gulshan has produced apples, and, in Dhanmondi, in the garden of Sabir-saheb, many, many apples are available now." Joining his cupped palms together he demonstrated the rounded shape of the apples. If I had inquired further, I am sure he would have provided me with the names of many more successful apple growers.

I bought an apple sapling for one hundred twenty takas and a cutting of grape vine for twenty takas. Even though I bought the apple sapling, I did not believe that apple trees could grow on our soil, but I could not resist the challenge to grow an apple tree. It was possible that the cunning gardener did not tell me the truth, but why not let me have a try? Guavas, lichees, kamrangas, shabari bananas, pineapples, round potatoes, shalgoms, cabbage and cauliflower -- all these fruits and vegetables have been introduced by foreigners to our country. So why not let me attempt an apple tree?

I prefer not to speak about the grape vine cutting. This wretched maiden gave me a thorough disappointment. Two years of toil on her behalf were in vain. From two and a half to three thousand takas flew from my pocket for manure, for soil, for everything to make a trellis, etc. Did she produce any grapes? Not even the hint of a flower appeared among her tendrils. And what was even stranger -- one and a half years later, the cutting which I gave to Baby in Kashimpur produced two and half kilograms of sweet grapes.

I planted the apple tree sapling in the yard of the three-storied house. When any foreign guests visit a Bengali home, we Bengalis become exceedingly meticulous in entertaining them, lest they find any fault with Bengali hospitality. Since the apple tree was an outsider, it, too, could claim for itself an equivalent welcome. I took responsibility for the apple tree sapling so that the plant would not feel the slightest trace of negligence -- not even subconsciously.

Every month I arranged a special dinner for the plant, offering it urea, phosphate and cow dung. I believe the plant found the meals tasty. Each morning on waking up, I caressed the tree and touched its branches, stems and leaves. I repeated this greeting whenever I went out. From showing tenderness every day, a time came when I started

feeling a kind of attachment for the plant. If ever I failed to caress it, I could not shake off an uneasy feeling for the rest of the day. I was unable to sleep at night unless I had shown affection to my apple tree child.

As the apple tree grew in the yard, it slowly but surely occupied a place in my heart. If I was to go elsewhere even for one day, I felt a pang of regret. In my absence the plant child might feel lonely. Just as love grows between one individual and another, so a kind of lasting inclination for the tree developed within me. This kind of feeling I cannot disclose to another person. If other people hear about it, they will laugh. Let them laugh. Truly, my feeling is not a false one. I don't know how the following idea came to me: just as one friend recognizes another friend, so the tree, too, came to know me. I am sure that a permanent attachment to the tree took hold of me. Did such a feeling for me come awake in the apple tree?

One evening I received the news that a close relative had died. The death of this man stirred many childhood memories within me. I was so stricken with grief that sleep would not come to my eyes. During the night I brought a stool and sat near the apple tree. I thought about my relative. Just then I experienced a strange thing. The apple tree was touching my bare body by bending towards me and gently waving its branches and leaves. I felt that the apple tree was showing sympathy for my grief. On thinking rationally, however, this was nonsense. Maybe a breeze was stirring the tree.

I wanted to test my idea. At first I was sitting on the north side of the tree. Now I moved to the south side. I found that the top of the apple tree started to lean southward and to touch my chest. I changed my position to the east, to the west. Every time the same thing happened. Next I drew myself further back and extended a hand toward the tree. Do you know what the apple tree did? One of the branches began to stir and gradually it touched my finger.

Since that night I was forced to alter my sleeping hours. Half way through the night I would wake up feeling a strong impulse which I could not resist. I would place myself in front of the apple tree. Time was needed for it to respond. The movement of the plant was very, very slow, in the way that the unexpressed forces of history remain active beneath the surface of written history. The movement of the plant could be compared to this. There was no haste. It was awake but quite devoid of motion. Man can learn from trees how to acquire the practice of mute awakening and only then can he learn the art of tapasya- meditation.

One day a soils expert came to me and addressed me with much condescension: "If you improve the quality of your soil, your tree will bear apples and they will be very sweet." He advised me to apply fresh lime to the roots of the apple tree. So I dug out the top soil and applied one kilogram of fresh lime.

Soon after performing this act, I had to go to Calcutta. I stayed there for a week and was supposed to stay another week. One night my apple tree visited me in a dream. The tree looked discolored and sickly. From the stems of the leaves I saw drops of water falling in the shape of tears. I started to tremble. Instinctively I could feel that certainly my apple tree friend was in danger. Otherwise, why should water drop from the leaves in the shape of tears? I felt sharp pains shoot through me. Had I killed the apple tree child by applying fresh lime? My heart stood still. My friends in Calcutta requested me to stay some more days. "Not possibly!" I answered. I threw myself on the mercy of the Bangladesh Biman airline officials begging them to advance my return date by three days. Off I went.

When I arrived home I found all the leaves of the apple tree had turned gray. I was dumbfounded. The lime was eating into the life of the plant like a poison. I became desperate and risked everything to bring back my tree-child to life. I had a friend in Joydevpur who was doing research on plants. I rushed to him and expressed my concern. He called me a pig. "How could you put fresh lime on the roots of a plant!" I answered, "My dear friend, first show me a way to save the plant. Then scold me. Call me a pig, an ass, a goat, whatever you like!" With clinical detachment he spoke to me in a dispassionate tone, like a doctor at the deathbed of a patient. "Well, pull out the tree with all its roots. Then plant it elsewhere. Maybe it will survive or maybe it won't. But wash the roots carefully so that the slightest effect of the poisonous lime no longer remains."

I planted the apple tree in a new place and it survived. Within a month, its branches and leaves began to show new vigor. However, an even more painful experience awaited me. Now, when I approached the tree, it did not respond. It was filled with anguish, hatred, and disbelief against me, for I had once tried to murder it. Why should it cherish love for me! It took me four long months to dispel its doubts and hatred. Plants never forget anything. They remember everything.

#### IV. SOFA - FARMER

On a day in August of 1980 I was on my way to Tipu Sultan Road, to the office of *Ganakantha, The Voice of the People*. By now I was certain that this newspaper was at an end. I wanted to cry. All my efforts -- my labor and all else that I put into this paper -- it was all going to be for nothing. From how many people did I beg for money! How many hands did I press, foreign as well as local! In spite of all this, what was suspected would happen was going to happen. By the next morning the mouthpiece of our working people was going to kill itself without saying a word.

When flood waters recede, mud begins to show its ugly face. Likewise, when the elan of our revolutionary fervor wore off, suspicion, recriminations and distrust began to surface. As I thought about our long processions and thundering slogans, it seemed to me that I was hearing the roaring of Niagara Falls melting away into thin air. Where had the revolution gone? To where was it vanishing like a colorful rainbow when it fades in the eastern sky? So many years of my life had been spent chasing phantoms! I felt exhausted and deserted. There was no one around -- in front or behind, to the right or left. I wanted to shout curses, but I could think of no one to blame except my youthfulness and the times.

I walked in a trance from the office to Nawabpur Road. Now that the prospect of the revolution had come to an end, all my wishes, joys, dreams and yearnings were shattered. Although I was young, I felt weaker than an old man. I was walking forward, but going nowhere. As often happens, the mind may be numb, but the body continues to function mechanically.

From Nawabpur Road I walked to Gulistan where I took a bus. I got down at Shahbag. At that time I was a resident of the International Hostel of Dhaka University. Zia Hall, Mujib Hall and other such hostels were not yet built. The area between Shahbag and the International Hostel was quite vacant. A path close by the Museum led to the University campus. Slum dwellings lay scattered over the whole of this area called Katabon. There was no Katabon mosque at that time. There was only a prayer house with walls of bamboo matting and a corrugated "tin" roof. From the prayer house another path led past the corner of Shurja Sen Hall.

I walked westward along the Shahbag road. I decided to reach the International Hostel by taking the path near the Katabon prayer house. Suddenly I chanced to see an eggplant sprout lying trampled on the path. On seeing it I felt sorry for it. "Poor thing!," I thought. "How it has suffered from the uncaring feet of who knows how many people!" I stooped to pick it up. Why I did this, I don't know. Maybe the ears of my heart could hear the soundless appeal of this living thing.

I arrived at the hostel holding the seedling in my hand. Shahana was at the entrance. She is like a sister to me. She asked me to tell her what was the little thing



that I held in my hand. I said, "It is an eggplant seedling that has been crushed underfoot." Shahana said, "What are you going to do with this wounded sprout?" I answered, "I will plant it near the wall of the hostel, under the cornice. Please bring me a jug of water." With the jug in hand, I approached the wall. With my fingers I dug a small hole near the wall and planted the seedling.

The next day, while returning from my morning walk, out of curiosity I glanced toward the wall to check on the seedling. Miraculously it had come to its feet. It seemed to be thanking me with a shy smile. When I saw that yesterday's trampled seedling now stood erect after the effort of only one night, I was deeply moved. If this poor seedling could make a stand so bravely, then why should I desert it! An invisible hand seemed to brush away the painful feelings weighing on my mind. A light seemed to shine through my depression. I began to think that not all the paths of my life were closed. Yes, there was still hope for me. I, too, could start life again with new vigor.

Since my return from the *Ganakantha* office, a spear of pain had been penetrating my thoughts. That night I could not sleep. I paced about while events from my past filled my mind. The darkness around me entered my heart. But in the morning, when I saw that the seedling was still growing, the sinews of my mind seemed to stir like the limbs of a newly born child. I considered that I was still a young man. I need only wish it and I could achieve whatever I wanted.

After breakfast I put on a shirt and rushed to the place near Dhaka College where seedlings and seeds are sold. In my excitement, I forgot that the seller would not be there at such an early hour. I was ashamed of my enthusiasm. I decided to pass the time at a friend's house close by in Azimpur. On my way home I bought twelve healthy eggplant seedlings for two takas.

Again I met Shahana. I said to her, "A jug of water won't do. Bring me a full bucket of water." She asked, "What has happened to you? What are you going to do with so much water?" I answered, "I will plant twelve eggplant seedlings which I have just bought from the market." As she brought the bucket she asked me, "Why are you planting so many eggplants?" "For the joy of it," I answered. She persisted, "When the seedlings bear fruit, what will you do with it?" I instantly answered, "I shall eat it. I shall give some away. I shall sell some in the market."

I planted the twelve seedlings beneath the same cornice. This time I had a little trouble. The narrow strip of soil was covered with many kinds of weeds. I had to pull them out and loosen the solid earth with the help of a kitchen knife. Then I watered all the seedlings. I stayed awake far into the night. My thoughts hovered around the newly planted seedlings. When they would raise their heads the next morning, what a beautiful sight this would be!

On the following morning I omitted my walk and went near the wall to check on the state of my plantation. All of the seedlings were standing erect! What joy flowed through my heart! This time I decided not to bother Shahana. I myself would carry the bucket of water for the seedlings. In my whole life I had never felt the value of my own labor so intensely.

That day, before dusk, I went to the seedling seller and said to him, "Brother, give me ten taka's worth of eggplant seedlings." The man looked at me and asked, "Which kind of eggplant seedlings would you like?" I answered, "Eggplants are eggplants! Why do you ask?" Then the seedling seller disclosed to me the secrets of eggplants. They come in many varieties: brown eggplant, longish eggplant, "twelve-months" eggplant, and "Gafargaon" eggplant. He stocked all kinds of eggplant seedlings. He insisted that I specify which variety I wanted. I was at a loss for an answer.

Then a thought came to me. I have a friend, Abul Kasem Fazlul Haq. He came from Pakundia Village and Village Pakundia is not far from a town called Gafargaon. I realized that this was a chance to honor my dear friend Abul Kasem Fazlul Haq. I said to the seller, "All right, give me the seedlings of the Gafargaon variety." An amused smile spread on the lips of the seedling seller. He said, "You wish to buy Gafargaon eggplants? That's all very well. But first you must tell me the nature of your soil."

Now the man's question put me into a predicament. I was doing my cultivation on a mere strip of vacant earth along a building wall under a cornice. How would I describe to the seller in front of others the nature of my land? People would laugh at me. Yet it was necessary that I describe the soil in which I was planting my seedlings. The seed seller listened. Cutting short my description he said, "I get it. The kind of planting you are doing is kitchen gardening. Gafargaon eggplants will not do well for this. It is better that you take the seedlings of the 'twelve-months' eggplant. This type of eggplant will grow very well in your kind of soil."

I realized that the superior agricultural knowledge of the seedling seller was going to undo my decision to honor my friend Fazlul Haq. I said, "Let us agree to both your words and mine. Give me five taka's worth of Gafargaon eggplant and another five taka's worth of the 'twelve-months' variety." The seller showed his teeth as he laughed and commented, "*Shah'b*, you are not an experienced eggplant farmer, just an amateur one."

Since I was about to spend a full ten takas on the seedlings, the seller made a concession and put his price at ten seedlings for one taka. He handed me a hundred seedlings -- a rather large bundle. If cooked, it could provide a meal for a family of eight. Shahana was amazed on seeing such a huge bundle. She said, "Have you gone crazy? What will you do with so many seedlings?" I said, "I shall cover the entire length of the wall from east to west with seedlings." Her husband Habib said, "How are you going to manage so much work alone? You will need a hose at least one hundred yards long, a

water sprayer, some phosphate, urea, cow dung, and so on." I answered, "I shall procure a hose, phosphate, cow dung, and whatever else is needed."

I called Ninu and Koel, sons of Shahana, and said to them, "Little Uncles, your school is closed for vacation. Are you going to help your Big Uncle to plant his seedlings tomorrow? If you assist Uncle in his agricultural activity, he will buy you a cricket bat." The younger boy gave a wink of acceptance. He was afraid to say anything out loud in front of his mother. No mother can allow her son to get involved with such a mad man.

So, Koel, Ninu and I planted the eggplant seedlings every half yard along the strip of soil. When we were finished, a tranquil feeling came over me. I thought, "It is untrue that I have nothing worthwhile to do. I have acquired a vocation!" Shahana turned to me and said, "Now you must buy a hose for the seedlings." I answered, "Shahana, for whom do you take me? By this evening I will have bought the hose and watered the plants."

That evening I bought the hose and watered the seedlings. Koel and Ninu inquired, "Is this the end of your farming, or are you going to expand it?" I answered, "There's no rush. Let's first see how the seedlings which we planted today survive. Then we can decide." That night I was lost in blissful anticipation. "Just imagine!", I thought, "if all those eggplant seedlings raise their heads, what a beautiful sight it will be!"

I had worked at least ten years for the revolution, but I would never be able to see the results of my day-and-night labor during all those years. This situation reminded me somewhat of "The Grazing Cows of Shri Krishna." In our childhood we used to look through the lens of a bioscope. The bioscope-*wala* would be busy changing the picture cards with his right hand and ringing a bell with his left one, all the time chanting in a sing-song tone: "Have fun! See the war of *Germany*! See cannons, guns and soldiers! See the Taj Mahal at Agra! See Ram and Ravan in battle! See Hanuman standing over there! And have a look at wailing Sita and the temple of *Shri* Krishna!" In this "See!... See...!" series of spectacles there was a scene in which a man was running through a large pasture with a stick in his hand. He was clearing away cow dung. But the cows remained invisible. This scene was called "The Grazing Cows of Shri Krishna." If one wanted to see cows with one's own eyes, why go to see "The Grazing Cows of Shri Krishna"? My efforts for the revolution resembled the "Cows of Shri Krishna;" I worked hard, but the results always remained invisible.

I woke the next day much earlier than I usually did. I was eager to see how the hundred seedlings which I planted the night before were getting on. I paused near the hostel doorway. The guard was snoring in his sleep. I would need to wake him. It was still dark and the *muezzin* had not yet called the *azan*-chant for morning prayer. When I woke the guard, he could not understand why he should get up when it was still dark. He rubbed his eyes and asked, "*Saheb*, are you going to the railway station?" "No, Little Father," I answered, and in order to give him an explanation I told him that I had

planted a hundred eggplant seedlings along the building wall. "I want to see whether they have raised their heads," I said. The guard glumly opened the door for me, then returned to bed.

The field in front of the hostel was moist with dew. The moon was in its "black" phase. I could see a small piece of it in the sky above me. I went over to the wall and began to check my seedlings. They were standing erect in a straight row like a line of soldiers. Why did I make this comparison? I had no immediate explanation. Perhaps it was because I had witnessed so many soldiers for such a long time that this image came to my mind automatically. The sky gradually changed color. Patches of fading darkness hung midway between earth and heaven like fluffy fragments of yogurt when it has been stirred with a spoon. As darkness turned to light, the familiar world looked exquisitely beautiful.

While I was strolling in the field, from various directions I heard the call of four or five *doel*-birds. When I heard their sweet song lighting the shadows of the dying night, it brought an idea to my mind. Possibly there exists a link between the song of the *doels* and the rapid growth of my plants. I heard the crows calling as they fluttered their wings. The cocks began to crow loudly from the Provost's side of Mohshin Hall. I felt the glow of the morning sun in the crowing of the cocks. Then the *muezzin* began to call the believers to bow before the Lord, the Creator. When the *muezzin* finished his call, the songs of birds of different species could be heard within the branches and leaves of the trees.

I was inspired to extend my walk. From the University mosque I went along the side of Suhrawardy Garden and through Ramna Park. Leaving Ramna Park I approached the mosque on Kakrail Road. Congregational prayers had already started. I could hear the worshipers reciting the Koran. After prayers they drifted out from the mosque. Some of them made a breakfast of rolls and ripe bananas. Others ate *chapati* (flat bread) layered with *dal* (lentils). As they milled about in their long, white shirts, the white prayer caps which they all wore produced for my eyes a meadow of white blossoms. Viewing this scene, I felt as if I had stumbled into a foreign country where I was a stranger and yet comfortably at peace.

This quiet morning had stirred up such soft vibrations in my heart that it seemed to me the whole world had come to dwell within me. The grass was growing inside of me and I could feel the eggplant sprouts lifting their heads. Within me trees were stretching out their leaf-laden branches while the birds filled the foliage with music. Everything made my heart swell with happiness. The world about me appeared as delicious as pieces of bread soaked in a bowl of milk.

When I returned to the hostel the sun was shining brightly. Most of the boarders were up. I could see them along the verandahs of the second and third floors, brushing their teeth and spitting the foamy waste over the railings. I attached one end of my

plastic hose to a tap in a bathroom. I carried the other end across the verandah and over to the seedlings. Water began to flow through the hose with a hissing sound, gushing out like fresh milk. The sight of the flowing water brought to mind an intriguing thought. A river is flowing through my hose; a sea is roaring. Water means the sea. Water means rivers.

An accident occurred which disturbed the tranquil atmosphere of that morning. Asma Begum, wife of Professor Nahid, set out for the school where she teaches. She was dressed elegantly and her long hair dangled pertly behind her. She walked on high heels, stepping delicately like a veteran acrobat. There was a leak in my hose. One side of the verandah became wet from the escaping water. As the lady passed through, a shoe betrayed her. She fell flat on the cement floor, like a banana tree chopped down at its base. The lady was painfully hurt. But that was not all. Her sari and petticoat were displaced and I had to behold the private portions of her body. What an embarrassment! I hoisted her up and carried her to her room.

That day Mrs. Asma Begum missed going to school. The incident caused a great commotion. Her husband, Nahid, a lecturer in statistics, was furious. It took much pleading on my part to convince him that it was a pure and simple accident. There had been not the slightest design behind it. If Nahid had disbelieved my explanation, there was every possibility that my agricultural project would have come to an abrupt end.

That morning, as soon as Koel and Ninu woke up, they went to check the seedlings. They came to my room. Koel's voice was tense with excitement. "Uncle!" he said. "A wonderful thing has happened! The seedlings have raised their heads!" That boy clearly possessed an element of pure plant love within him. Koel spoke on with suppressed emotion in his voice, "Uncle, quite a lot of your money has been spent away. When the plants of eggplant bear fruit, how much will you get in return? How many eggplants can you eat in a whole year?" I replied, "I shall not eat the eggplants. I shall start a booming eggplant business." Koel replied, "What business can you do from the eggplants of these few seedlings?" "Why do you consider only these seedlings which you see?" I answered. "We shall cultivate eggplants in the whole field out front." Koel said, "Uncle, that's not possible." I wanted to know why it would not be possible. He replied, "It is impossible! Ox and plow Where will you get all these things?" I said, "There's no need for ox and plow. We shall till the whole land by digging it ourselves." "In that case, Uncle, you will have to buy a *kodal*-hoe, a *khurpi*-spade, a water-sprayer, cow dung, fertilizer, and so many other such things! Agriculture is not as easy as writing books. It is quite difficult!" I answered "I am the son of a peasant." Koel said, "You may be one, but you do not do peasant work yourself." I said, "We'll see about that later. Now let us go to New Market and buy all the necessary materials."

We bought a *kodal*, a *khurpi*, a water-sprayer -- everything useful for field work. Quite a lot of money was spent. Now we came to a new problem which was related to the *kodal* and *khurpi*. You can buy a *kodal* and *khurpi* in the market, but the

shopkeepers do not provide the handles. Why this should be so presented a real puzzle for us. Much research was being conducted in the laboratories of the University, but no one could supply the slightest information as to where we could get handles.

While we were at a loss as to a solution, Ali Akbar, our hostel peon, came to our rescue. He made a proposal. One of his in-laws who lives in Dhaka city was engaged in farming in Jurain district. He kept a good stock of farming tools. According to the proposal, I would pay one hundred takas in advance to Ali Akbar who would go to his brother-in-law and fix the handles. I agreed and handed over one hundred takas.

On Sunday morning he came straight to the field bringing the *kodal* and *khurpi* newly fitted with handles. With these tools now in our possession we were eager to start working at once. As I held the *kodal* in my hands, I could hear the field calling to us: "Come and dig me!"

Unfortunately, on the same day, the sky was covered with thick, black clouds and it started to rain heavily. For the next few days we could not work in the field. All of it was filled with muddy water. It was impossible to dig the ground with the *kodal*. We had to wait. When the field was dry, we finally began to dig. A problem arose. Akkadus Ali-saheb, the hostel warden, admonished us that digging the field was illegal. This was the reason he produced: The place where we were digging was, in fact, a volley-ball court, although nobody had played there for the last five years. Anyone who might be interested, he claimed, could start a game at any time. I gave him a simple answer: "Since the volley-ball court has been unused for the past five years, it is quite likely that this year it will also remain in this state." Akkadus Ali became officious in his claim, "Why can't you see the legal side of the matter? Is it not unusual that you will turn a volley-ball court into a vegetable garden? If this comes to the knowledge of the Vice-Chancellor-saheb, can you imagine how he will react?" I said, "Why don't you go to the Vice-Chancellor-saheb yourself and ask him to give me a job? As I have no vocation, I have opted for agriculture." The warden picked up his brief-case saying, "I see you want to get me into trouble!" and walked off.

Koel, Ninu and I went to a restaurant for a hearty breakfast before we started digging. I told them to eat all they wanted because digging would take a lot of strength. On making my first strokes with the *kodal*, I felt I was losing my breath. After eight or ten strokes, I had to give up. Koel said, "Uncle, don't you know anything about farm work? Does anyone hold a *kodal* the way you do? Give it to me. I shall show you how to use it." When I handed it to him, he started striking the ground with moderate speed. Within a short time he had dug up almost five yards.

At the same time we faced a new problem. With every stroke of the *kodal*, large earth worms began to pop out. Some of them got cut into several pieces. When Ninu saw the worms, he began to make retching sounds. I myself do not like worms. When I

saw the squirming creatures, I felt strangely heavy. I said, "This is enough for today. We'll make our next attempt when the field becomes drier."

Koel did not agree with my proposal. He said, "I want to continue the digging for some more time." "Don't you feel tired?" I asked. Koel answered, "I do, Uncle! But there is joy in becoming a peasant. Just imagine! The field that I'm now digging will some day later be filled with crops. When I think of this, I get a thrill. I do not feel as rewarded by other work as I do by this. And besides, Uncle, when I see the reddish soil undressed by the *kodal*, an exquisite feeling makes me want to dance." I warned him, "If you dig too much with the ambition of becoming a peasant over night, you'll have sores on your palms." Koel said, "Uncle, you have no sense. I already have them!" With a smile he showed me both his hands. I observed he had a blister on his left palm and two others growing on his right one. I said, "Well, stop digging today. Since you have sores, nobody can prevent you from becoming a farmer."

Maulavi (Reverend) Kuddus was watching our work. Suddenly he questioned us, "Why have you stopped work in such a short time?" I answered, "This much is enough for today." Maulavi retorted, "Count up how many yards you three people have dug. You should be ashamed!" Ninu said, "Uncle, you can talk big without doing anything. When you have the *kodal* in your hands, only then can you feel what hard labor this is." Maulavi took the challenge. "I shall show you how to use the *kodal*. Wait a bit while I change out of my trousers."

When Maulavi accepted the challenge we became curious. Now we began to discover that everything about Kuddus was not all "Maulavi". There were some other aspects to him as well. I should give Kuddus a little introduction. He did not study at a madrasa. All the time that he wore *pajama*-pants, *panjabi*-shirt and the Muslim round prayer cap, he was treated as a Maulavi because of his clothes. The goat-style beard on his chin emphasized this identity. In what year Kuddus passed mathematics at the University, perhaps Kuddus himself could not remember. He came to live at the hostel after I did. His white *pajama-panjabi* outfit and the round prayer cap gave me a thought: I have been seeing Kuddus in such clothes since my birth; at times it seems that Kuddus came from his mother's womb wearing *pajama-panjabi* and prayer cap.

We all knew that Kuddus had made two firm vows. The first one stated that he would wait until offered the post of Assistant Professor in the Statistics Department, rather than accept a lectureship. Even if he were offered the post of lecturer, he would not accept the offer because to obtain a Doctorate he would have to wait as much as ten years. If he started with an Assistant Professorship he could skip all those years. The second vow stated that he would not marry a woman of any profession except one who was a doctor.

We hardly ever heard Kuddus say a false word about anything. Even when sorely provoked he did not say anything vulgar. We believed that at some time Allah would

fulfill both of his vows. What was wrong in believing this? We already had to believe in the torturing of the soul while in the grave, and in the Day of Judgment, and in so many such things!

After saying prayers, Kuddus used to go for a morning walk. On returning, he would gossip at the breakfast table about retired judges, government Secretaries and all other high officials. So, when he felt challenged to teach us how to dig our field, we were eagerly waiting to see this new aspect of his character.

Maulavi Kuddus returned wearing a *lungi* (man's skirt). He tied his *gumcha* (thin towel) tightly around his waist. He shortened his *lungi* by tucking the bottom edge of it up at his waist. Then he bent a little forward and made his first stroke of the *kodal*. When we saw how he did it, we instantly understood he was an expert. He continued chopping with big and small strokes appropriately. Anyone who saw Kuddus at this job would think he had been digging the land since his birth. Within half an hour he dug thrice the amount of land that we three had been digging.

Dropping the handle of the *kodal*, he untied his *gumcha* to wipe off sweat. Then he declared, "See, I have taught you how to dig the land." With pride in his eyes he surveyed the portion he had dug. Koel remarked, "Kuddus-Uncle, a peasant has been living in disguise under your *paijama-panjabi* and prayer cap. Today he has come out!" Kuddus disliked this remark. Saying "I am expected somewhere else," he left us behind on the field as he strode off with long steps like a crane. So ended our first lesson in farming techniques.



## V. PLANTING BEGINS

(A sample chapter from *Pushpa, Brikkha Ebong Bihanga Purana*, by Ahmed Sofa, published in Dhaka, 1996, and translated here by Ahmed Sofa, Mary Frances Dunham and Salimullah Khan)

(The context: Ahmed Sofa reminisces about his venture into farming on a piece of University land while he was living at the Dhaka University International Hostel in the 1980's. In a previous chapter Sofa tells how he was inspired to plant more seedlings after his success in reviving a trampled eggplant seedling which he found on a Dhaka road. With the help of two young boys on vacation, the sons of a couple living in the hostel, Sofa starts to cultivate the vacant field in front of the hostel, although the hostel warden has declared that it is illegal to use university land in this way. How Sofa procured a hose and basic digging tools is told in a previous chapter.)

We realized that it would take a lot of time to hoe all the land. Fortunately we found many farmers in disguise -- people who had lost their connection with the soil. When we dug our field, as we did regularly twice a day, many erstwhile farmers disguised by shoes, suits and ties would gather to watch us digging. Some of them would take it on for sport. Borrowing our kodals, they would start to dig. In order to provide for these leisure-time participants we had to buy two more kodals. We had to appeal again to the brother-in-law of Ali Akbar to fix them with handles.

Within eight or ten days two thirds of the digging were finished. We didn't even know the names of the people who dug for us. We only knew that we had initiated a game of peasanthood. Without any formal call or urging, students from the hostels were paying homage to their forefathers by helping us to hoe.

The hoe work came to an end. It was time to plant seedlings. Both Shahana and Habib made the same suggestion: "Now you should find a person knowledgeable in soil science or people in the Botany Department who can advise you. They are the best judges to decide the proper crop for the soil." I discussed this with Ninu and Koel. We rejected the proposal outright. We were novice agriculturists. If we accepted a botanist or soil expert as our advisor, all our pleasure would be snuffed out. We decided to go to Ansar Ali, the nursery-gentleman near Dhaka College from whom we had bought our seedlings.

I invited Ansar Ali to have lunch with me. At first he seemed reluctant. His peak "Business" hour was at noon. If he came to our lunch, he would lose the revenue of one day's business. But a close friendship between Ansar Ali and ourselves had already developed. Mainly because of this, Ansar Ali came to us accepting his loss of business. After lunch we showed Ansar Ali our field. He was amazed. "You have done a really good job! You have dug such a big piece of land with only kodals! Incredible!"

Ansar Ali began to walk all over the field in which we had been digging. Poking at clods of earth with a stick he examined them to see whether the soil was of proper quality or not. Then he picked up clods of earth and tested them in his hands. He put another paan leaf in his mouth and gave his expert opinion. "The soil is excellent. It is fit for any crops: potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, eggplant, chilis... Whatever you plant will grow well. But one problem still remains: the soil is wet. Wait until it has dried a bit. If you wait for about a week or so, the sunlight will change the texture of the soil and it will become powdery. Then you should apply dried cow dung mixed with phosphate. Leave the field in this state for a few days. And I have another suggestion. You have a craze for eggplant. Since you have a liking for eggplants, plant eggplants in one part of the field. In the other part plant cauliflower, tomatoes, chilis, and so on. When a variety of crops start growing, you will be delighted. I shall give you yet another practical suggestion. The land on the western side where you have not yet started digging, you need not dig there right now. Just make some holes of considerable depth. Plant seedlings of the "White" and "Sweet" varieties of squash. You do not have to worry about the cost of seedlings. I will supply whatever seedlings you need."

How to obtain dried cow dung became our next main concern. Again we had to approach the great Ali Akbar as to whether his brother-in-law in Jurain could help to supply us three sacks of dried cow dung. We would have to pay takas seventy in advance merely for the information. But it was impossible on the part of Ali Akbar to give us information then and there. We would have to wait until the coming Thursday when the weekend days begin. Until then he had his job to attend to in an office.

On Thursday Ali Akbar went to his brother-in-law's house. We waited anxiously for his return. He did not return on Friday. On Saturday he turned up casually chewing paan. I was very angry. I asked him, "Ali Akbar, why did you delay a whole day?" He replied without hesitation, "Sir, from a close relative's place, can one return within only one day? My eldest sister-in-law came from her village. If I did not have office duty, I would not have come even today." I reminded him of the dried cow dung and asked, "What did your brother-in-law say?" Ali Akbar replied that his brother-in-law once had two piles of cow dung. Unexpectedly he was in need of some money, so he had to sell it all. But there was a bit of good news for me. If I were ready to pay takas eighty-five per sack of cow dung, his brother-in-law had agreed to procure it from another person in Jurain. I was trapped. I had to agree to pay takas eighty-five for the sake of obtaining the cow dung.

I then asked Ali Akbar how cow dung could be brought from such a distance: "Is it possible by rickshaw?" I asked. Ali Akbar responded, "How many sacks of cow dung will you need?" I answered, "Three sacks." Ali Akbar said, "Sir, a rickshaw will not do. For carrying such a load, a pushcart is necessary." I asked, "How much money is needed for a pushcart?" Ali Akbar answered, "From Jurain to Nilkhet is quite a long distance. I think a hauler will demand two-hundred-fifty takas." I quietly calculated an approximate sum total. For three sacks I would have to spend two-hundred-fifty-five

takas, and, in addition, two-hundred-fifty for the pushcart; in all, five-hundred and five takas. I said, "Well, Ali Akbar, I shall pay you five-hundred-five takas. Please get me three sacks of cow dung."

Ali Akbar replied, "Sir, I cannot." I had to keep my voice in control. I said, "Little Father, why can't you?". He replied, "This five-hundred-five takas will be used for your cow dung and the pushcart. Where in this sum do you reckon in my expenses? Getting there and back, and the loss of a day's work -- don't these have a price?" I saw the full meaning of Ali Akbar's account. I said, "Please tell me how much should I give you." Staring at the ground he said, "You will have to give me one-hundred-fifty takas, Sir. If you don't give me this, it will not balance out my travel expenses." I calculated that five-hundred-five plus one-hundred-fifty made a sum of -- Oh, my God! -- over six-hundred-fifty!

Now I began to understand the fun of cultivating eggplants. I had to plead with Ali Akbar which felt like swallowing bitter medicine. "All right, Ali Akbar. I will pay you six-hundred-fifty-five takas. Please bring me three sacks of cow dung tomorrow." I took out the money from a box and put it into his hand. He readily accepted it. From his behavior I had the impression that in accepting the money he felt that he was doing me a favor. I said, "Ali Akbar, all of your claims are mad. For God's sake, please bring me three bags of cow dung tomorrow."

He rubbed his mouth with an old finger and said, "I cannot bring the cow dung tomorrow, Sir. Don't I have office work tomorrow?" I felt like giving him a good kick. I could do it, but if I did it, the Association of University Fourth Class Employees would make a fine outcry in the hostel. So I had to swallow all my rage. I learned a lesson: It is necessary for the farmer who loves eggplants to swallow a lot of things.

Hiding my discontent I said, "Ali Akbar, please tell me on what day you will bring the cow dung." He replied, "Sir, not before Saturday. Thursday after work I shall go to the house of my brother-in-law. I have told you, Sir, my eldest sister-in-law and my mother-in-law have come from their village. I shall have to spend Friday in my brother-in-law's house. With Allah's will, I shall start from Jurain in the morning on Saturday bringing the cow dung by pushcart by about eleven. If there is a traffic jam or political party demonstration, the sun may go a few steps higher. I will tell Mr. Kalam ahead of time that I may be a little late for work on Saturday." My present position was like that of a man whose testicles have been caught in the crack of a split piece of bamboo. I confess that I had to yield most unwillingly to all his demands.

On time from Jurain a pushcart actually reached the hostel with three sacks of cow dung. We marked the day as an occasion for celebration. As soon as the cart reached us, we unloaded the sacks and dragged them into the middle of the field. Then we started breaking up the lumps of cow dung with our hands. While we were engaged in this, we came across hundreds of dung larvae. These creatures were white in color and resembled somewhat small shrimps. Ninu said, "Your whole farming business is experimental. So let us do one more experiment. Let us fry these larvae and see how

they taste. The creatures have not a bad appearance. If they were a little longer, they would look like galda-shrimp." His mother, Shahana, was observing our work. When she heard her son's yen for dung larvae, she gave Ninu a slap on his face and said to me, "Today I shall not open the door to you. Brother Sofa, you are instructing too many crazy things to the children."

That same evening we mixed urea with phosphate and scattered it all over the field. Then we went to Dhaka College gate to find Ansar Ali. Ansar Ali was there. Ninu said to him, "As you told us to do, we have thrown urea and phosphate mixed with cow dung on the field. The field has dried up like powder. The good season is passing by. Let's have no more delays." Ansar Ali gave a chew on the stem of a lime-covered paan leaf and said detachedly, "You have spread dung and phosphate. That's fine and good. But you must allow time so that the manure can blend with the soil. Go there again. Stir the soil. Then wait another two days. Today is Wednesday. On Friday, after juma--prayers, you can begin the planting of the seedlings. When you plant seedlings after the juma-prayers, there will be a few attacks from pests. Do you understand, Little Brother? Friday is Allah's day."

Koel said, "Ansar-Saheb, all you are doing is delaying us. If we had not sought your advice, perhaps long ago we could have finished the planting and by now all these eggplant bushes would be full of flowers." Ansar Ali tapped Koel's chin saying, "Little Brother, you have no patience at all. Can one become a farmer without patience? Farming and praying are the same thing. You can be the malik-man -- the officer -- for planting the seedlings, but as to producing the fruit, the malik is Allah, our benefactor and merciful creator."

On Friday the occasion for planting became a day of spontaneous festivities. Many people joined us. We did not know most of them. There is a special joy in planting seedlings. Even if you do not feel it consciously, at a subconscious level the desire is always there. The joy that comes with planting is probably closely related to the longing for immortality.

We knew that real peasants provide entertainment for those who volunteer their help during the planting season. We felt we should do something similar. We had to serve all our auxiliaries with muri and mowah sweet-balls and with freshly scraped coconut meat. We were inaugurating a noble mission on this University land. When the news of our endeavors spread, many people came as onlookers and helpers. How could we send them away without hospitality? Before we had turned into full-fledged farmers, peasant culture was already developing within us. We knew that if any of our helpers left without being given something to eat, some mishap might happen to our crops.

We dug about four kathas (approximately 320 square yards) of land without the help of plow, ox or tractor. Digging such a large tract of land with bare hands was a

newsworthy event. For tools we used merely our kodals. We knew only two or three people personally of those who helped to dig the land for us. People came in groups to dig the land without need of invitation. No one claimed the fruit of any crop from our field. All toiled without wishing for any reward or profit. Beyond doubt the land was ours, but, in our hearts, we felt that many people deserved a share in it.

Of our four kathas of land we used two for planting eggplant seedlings. In Ansar Ali's opinion this was too much. We also planted tomatoes, cauliflower, cabbage and chilis, but we allotted two kathas just for eggplants. Naturally the eggplants were entitled to priority. What else could I do but show favor to eggplants? After all, a trampled seedling of an eggplant had started me on this whole agricultural enterprise.

We divided the other two kathas of land into four parts. In one portion we planted cauliflower, tomatoes and cabbage. In the second one, chilis. And in the remaining piece of land we planted onions. The first phase of our agricultural program ended here.

## VI. THE INVADERS

Ninu and Koel were forever eager to do more work. Thus far we had followed all the advice of Ansar Ali. He had suggested to us to dig big holes for planting "Sweet" and "White" varieties of squash. I was a little reluctant to do this. The size of the field beyond our first planting was quite large -- almost four kathas more. Could we manage such a big farm of eight kathas? The boys were stubborn. Together they shared only one line of thought. Since we had started farming, why should any of the land remain barren. I thought about it. The boys had said nothing unreasonable. Barren land suggests to me a barren woman.

We started digging holes in the field. By now the soil was very dry. Digging was easy. Within two days we dug holes throughout the whole field. When we finished the work, I asked Ninu and Koel to fetch the seeds of "Sweet" and "White" squash from Ansar Ali. Ninu frowned and said, "Seeds are no good. We want to plant seedlings." I pointed out that the seeds would germinate into seedlings, but Ninu answered, "This will take quite a long time. If we plant seedlings instead, there will be no such delay." I cautioned: "Ansar Ali does not sell "White" and "Sweet" squash seedlings. I saw only seeds." Koel remarked, "Let Ansar-saheb bring us seedlings from wherever he can. Otherwise he must resign his job as our Agricultural Consultant." Within two days, Koel and Ninu forced Ansar Ali to collect the seedlings.

Now the job of planting was really over. However, a new problem developed. Cows and goats were accustomed to roam freely on the land belonging to the University. We had not anticipated them. We never envisioned that the seedlings we had planted would provide an attractive lure for grazing animals. There were many gaps in the barbed wire fence. They were big enough to permit cows and goats to enter the garden with ease. How could I blame them for entering when such enticing green crops were growing there. Why should they trouble their teeth with the roots of dried grass?

One day a brick-colored cow entered the garden and smuggled almost twenty to twenty-five eggplant seedlings down her gullet. This was truly a shameless cow. We beat her for the devastation she caused, but even then the greedy cow could not forget the taste of our plants. We could see that this cow-lady certainly relished them. We drove her away as far as the Shahbag intersection, but after half an hour she had no trouble in running back. Since we were at a loss to find a way to stop this greedy cow from menacing our garden, we arrested her and tied her to a lichee tree. That evening her owner came from a neighboring slum and pleaded for her with many entreaties. We warned him sternly that if his cow showed herself again, she could be sent to the Gaptoli cow market. Never in his life would her owner see her again.

That ruddy cow was not the only beast straying into our garden. There were other loose cows. They were heftier and possessed longer horns. They surpassed other cows in rascality. If we tried to drive them away they would jab at us with their long

horns. We had to think how to fill up the gaps in the fence. There was a plum tree near the boundary wall. We chopped off some top branches and placed them with their small thorns sticking out across the gaps in the fence. We showed yet further practical sense. We reserved the long branches that grew near the bottom of the tree. When their leaves would wither, these branches could be used as supports for the climbing vines of the "White" and "Sweet" squashes. Finally we were able to curtail the cow menace and to secure our garden.

There were yet other beings on this planet who presented us an even greater menace than the cows. We had not foreseen the possibility of goats. They could get through the smallest holes in the fence to enter the garden. We could never find any clues as to how these creatures brought death to our seedlings, sneaking in and out of our garden, escaping our notice like foxes. There was no sure way to know when they would pass through a hole, intending to enjoy our seedlings. In the case of the cows who roamed like vagrants through the University grounds, their number was limited. But the goats were innumerable. You could not count them. In order to cope with the constant threat from goats, we engaged a little boy as caretaker and put him on a monthly salary. A problem was involved in this solution. The boy was very young. He did not enjoy sitting in the field. When he saw the other children of his age playing, he felt tempted to join them. The clever goats took advantage of this opportunity.

One day a khashi-goat belonging to Professor Lutfor Rahman entered our garden by jumping over the fence. He started rambling around the garden with the carefree airs of a Pathan soldier. The boy tried his best to drive him out, but the goat was a true Pathan. He ignored the boy completely. He did not even turn against him. We complained many times to the son of Rahman-sahab telling him that his goat was a threat to our garden and that he should keep the goat tied up. The son heard our complaints through one ear and let them out by the other.

This goat kept invading our garden. One day we caught him and tied him up. That evening, when the son of Lutfor Rahman came to fetch him back, we threatened that if the goat showed himself any more, we would slaughter it and hold a feast. The son then gave us a counter threat. He reminded us that his father was a "Full Professor" at the University and that, therefore, their goat had the full right to wander wherever it pleased in the University grounds. Furthermore, he pointed out, I had done an illegal act by farming University land without the permission of the authorities. Therefore, he said, the goat had legitimate claims on our garden.

After much effort we finally learned to stop the intrusion of cows and goats. But oh, my God! I had not the slightest idea that there could be a deadlier enemy to our plants than cows and goats. One morning, as I entered the field, I saw a painful sight. The tops of ten eggplant bushes and four tomato plants had been amputated, as if someone had sawed these plants in two. I could hardly check my tears. I had tried everything possible to keep the plants alive. With much effort I could keep out the cows

and goats. Yes, I could stop cattle. But my luck seemed to be such that I could not help the plants to survive this attack.

I sent someone to purchase new seedlings from the shop of Ansar Ali. With these I replaced the destroyed plants. I was determined that somehow I would save all the plants, but every morning when I visited the garden, I saw that the same tragedy had been repeated. With anguish I observed that during each night eight or ten plants were decapitated. It seemed to me that the rest of the plants were receiving the message that death awaited them at night. For how long could I endure this sight each day? Garden of our sweet dreams, did I create you only to be a prey to insects?

Finding no way out of this problem on my own, I surrendered myself once more to Ansar Ali. Spitting out his paan juice, Ansar Ali rendered onto us his usual expert opinion. "The time has now come when you are confronting your real enemy. You must buy pesticide and dissolve it in water and spray it on the leaves and stems of your plants. But mind you. Don't spray too much. It will harm the plants. Mix pesticide and water proportionately. If the proportion of the water exceeds the limit, your pesticide will be ineffective. On the other hand, too much pesticide can harm the plants." So now I had to set about learning the technique of applying pesticides.



## VII. A FLOURISHING GARDEN

Before the month of Kartik was over, the plants of my field were performing remarkable feats. They all became so green and were growing so rapidly that they easily caught people's attention. Most people who passed by our garden could not resist glancing at it. The eggplant bushes had become corpulent. The tomatoes were developing fast. We had to tie their stems to sticks so that the fruit did not burden them. The thin chili plants were growing upward while their branches were stretching outward. Morning dew on the cauliflower leaves glittered like liquid silver. In the holes which we had dug, the sprouts of the "White" and "Sweet" squashes became full-fledged creepers. We placed the dried plum tree branches among the squash creepers. Within a couple of days, visible shoots were growing out from their stalks and were climbing around the plum tree branches.

The cabbage plants gave us the greatest surprise. When the seedlings had grown rather tall, they started to spread their leaves outward. One day Maulvi Kuddus, who was cleaning his teeth with a stick, came to our field. He spat saliva and paste from the holes between his teeth and muttered, "It's time for you to wrap the leaves of the cabbages." I stared at Kuddus and said, "Is that so? I didn't know it." There was sarcasm in the voice of Kuddus: "Since you do not know anything about it, why have you entered this line of work? For every workman there should be a serious mission." Maulvi was in the habit of spouting large quantities of wise sayings. We did not bother to heed them.

He then threw his tooth-stick on the ground. He raised his lungi up to his knees and walked into our garden. He began to wrap the cabbage leaves together in a masterful way. His hands were those of a true artist. He performed the work so smoothly that he left not a single mark on the leaves. He put medium size clumps of earth on top of the wrapped cabbages. They began to grow with these caps on top. Within a few days they looked like the top-knotted heads of Sikh children.

With each passing day I began to see new developments in the plants. When a new stem sprouted, it did not escape my notice. When a new leaf presented itself to view, a romantic desire rose within me. In the tender body of these plants a green juice of life was coursing, like the fluctuating waves of melody in Indian classical music as it wells to the surface from a source deep within the nether world. Inside my heart I felt a resonance echoing the green life around me. My whole consciousness began to be dyed with the verdant hues of my plants.

The hostel boarders set out each morning with their attache cases in hand -- some to teach, some to the library. Freshly showered housewives went to attend jobs or to the kindergarten with their children. Now I, too, had a vocation. In the morning after breakfast I entered the field with my khurpi. Sometimes I loosened the soil with it. I pulled out weeds and helped the climbing shoots of the "White" squash to grow around

the plum tree branches. I cut away the leaves on the cauliflower plants that had been attacked by insects... So many field chores! If you entered my garden, you wouldn't believe how the plants could keep a person busy for half a day. I lost track of time. At noon, gentlemen came back from teaching their classes or from studying in the library. School boys would play mischievous pranks on their way home. Some of them would halt abruptly in front of my garden. They ignored why they did so, but I knew the reason: the plant-children of my garden were conversing with the human children for a while.

Whenever I came from the garden, dirt was on my feet, on my hands, on my clothes. You could see dirt all over me. Gentlemen wearing pants, shirts and neck-ties mockingly smiled at me. I did not take it seriously. No amount of ridicule could bother me. Let people say what they liked. I had a job to do. I knew well the value of the intense labor that I was exerting every day. I knew that at the end of a month, no one was going to pay me even a cowrie shell. But I had no worries and no complaints. Now I had received a task with which I could pay off the trust-endowment of my existence. Although I received no monthly salary for my labor, I was not worthless. I began to feel that in this world I, too, possessed a value. If I did not exist, who would take care of my plant-children!

I have mentioned tie-wearing gentlemen. I would like to introduce you to one of them -- Dr. Khairul Millat. I had been living in the hostel for twelve years. Perhaps this gentleman had lived there from the time of my birth. I used to meet him at least three times a week. In the whole of my life at the hostel I had never seen this gentleman without a neck-tie, not even on rainy days. Every day, on returning from the office, he would stop awhile and chat with me. This became a tradition with him. Most often he would say to me: "I have the intention to get you treated by a psychiatrist. Why should you be doing the work that can be done for fifty taka by a paid laborer?" In truth I had no answer.

He used to chatter on about wages, labor, profits, surpluses, currency, -- all the complicated jargon of economics. I was so fed up with his cant that one day I unarmed him with a cutting remark. I said to him, "Well, Millat-saheb, I have a question for you. When you were a child, how long was your neck-tie?" He could not follow my train of thought. He stared at me with wide eyes. Then I said to him, "I've been living in this place for the last twelve years. I have not seen you without a tie on your neck for even one day. So I formed this idea that you were born wearing a tie." My explanation angered the gentleman so much that he transferred his attache case from his right hand to his left one and strode off. Since then I have been spared his lectures on economics.

### VIII. SULTAN SCHOOL

At about this time I was introduced to "Mostan." "Mostan" was how we called Nazimuddin Mostan, the senior reporter of the *Ittefaq* daily news. Let me tell you about the occasion on which I was introduced to him. Professor Abdus Salam, an eminent Pakistani scientist, gave a lecture at the University about a theory that he had devised. I did not attend the lecture. When I read the report of it in the *Ittefaq*, I felt that I grasped well what Professor Salam had said. It was quite surprising. I was proud to think that in our country there was at least one such journalist capable of explaining Salam's intricate theory in a way simple enough for a child's school book. I thought if I did not honor this gentleman, I would lose my self respect. I decided that some day I would go to the *Ittefaq* office to find the journalist.

I went to the *Ittefaq* office. At the "News" desk I asked, "Is Mr. Nazimuddin Mostan here?" The reporters on duty called my attention to a colleague. He was bent over a table busy with some writing. I could see only the top of his head. What a small man! His clothing was half clean, half dirty. And such a shabby man! I would not hire him even to care for my plants. In spite of that impression I approached his table and tendered my salam. The gentleman raised his head and looked at me. There was something distinguished in his look. I sat down in a chair across from his table. This was my introduction to Nazimuddin Mostan.

One day Mostan came to my residence. He looked at my farming enterprise. For a long time he caressed my seedlings. Through the embassy of my seedlings a close friendship developed between Mostan and myself. A few days later Mostan left a notebook full of poems that he had written. At that time I was reading a book entitled *Road to Life* by a Russian pedagogue, Anton Makarenko. He had invented an ingenious method for instructing slum children, children without guardians, and young delinquents in post-Revolutionary Russia. He wrote his book on the basis of this experience. After reading the book, I felt a current of excitement throbbing through my whole body. As I saw the face of my life from a new perspective, my blood began to flow backwards. Among the children of shattered human beings lie the seeds of great men. I had never before felt such a happy feeling; the child of any human being is a child of *amrita*, of heaven.

I also saw the opposite side of this perception. Everywhere I saw children around me. They passed their days in dire negligence, in much filth, and without care from anyone. All this time I had felt nothing in particular for them. A guilty feeling now weighed upon me like a heavy stone. I had not taken time for these children. My human existence was fruitless. What could I do for such children? I became so absorbed in these thoughts that I even forgot to take care of my plants.

In the meantime Mostan came by one day. I gave him the book to read. Early the next day, quite before it was properly morning, I heard someone knocking on my

door. When I opened it, I saw it was Mostan. His hair was disheveled. I could sense that he had rushed straight from home without his morning wash. While taking a seat on a chair, he said, "I stayed up all night. I finished the book and ran straight to you." His voice was thick with emotion and his eyelids were quivering. I gave thanks to our good Allah. I had found a man who shared my inner concerns. This was a precious gift. That morning at the breakfast table we decided that the two of us would set up a school for children in the Katabon slum and try out some of Anton Makarenko's ideas.

When we set to work to start the school, we felt that our school-dream was as superbly beautiful as a flower. But the reality involved quite a difficult task. First the parents of the children questioned us as to the intentions we had at the back of our minds. Why did we wish to educate their children? They said that their children were managing their lives without learning to read and write. People from the Intelligence Department started following us. They suspected we had some connection with an underground political group. My friends started spreading the rumor that Ahmed Sofa would be looking to hire a caretaker for his garden now that he had shifted his attention from gardening to slums.

As for the children for whose education we were taking a considerable risk, when we first met with them, we had the odd feeling that we were trying to cut through pillars of steel with a kitchen knife. The boys could not understand why they needed to learn to read and write. They had been passing profitable days sorting out scrap metal and waste paper, working as boy porters in New Market, or serving the students of the dormitories. By doing these jobs they were earning money, although it was not much. At the day's end, the children could at least hand over eight to ten takas to their parents. Why should they be bothered with studying like the children of middle-class gentlemen? They spent their leisure hours in kite flying, quarreling, or playing guli-danda or ha-dudu, games that had been transmitted from generation to generation by their elders in the villages of Bangladesh. During city-wide strikes their presence was felt on all the streets. They let out the air from rickshaw tires and participated in throwing bricks at the police. Why should they abandon such exciting, eventful lives for the sake of reading and writing?

During the second day, when we started giving lessons to the children, we were obliged to put our fingers in our ears whenever we heard them speak. With what ease these children could talk about the cruel realities of life! For example, I asked one boy, "What is your name?" "Selim" he replied. Then I asked, "What does your father do?" Before Selim could open his mouth to answer, the next boy replied on his behalf, "Elder Brother, his father is a petty thief." I asked a girl, "What is your name?" She put a small finger in her mouth and remained silent. The girl next to her said, "Elder Brother, she is called Mariam and her mother invites lovers at night." In time we became used to this kind of vocabulary.

We had to face some real trouble in dealing with one small boy. His name was Babul. He was hardly seven years old. He had a mother who was a fierce feminist. She changed husbands at least once every three months. She was well built and quite glamorous. Her lips were dyed red with paan juice. Her love for her son was so intense that, like the needle of a compass, her attention was always drawn towards him.

When we started giving lessons, some of the boys would pinch Babul and the rest of the boys and girls would act up like little imps. Whenever Babul was pinched or hit, he would jump to his feet and start crying. Once his tongue was loosened, it could not be restrained before half an hour had passed. Babul would start to shout foul things with all his might in regard to the offender's mother, aunts, grandmother on the mother's side, grandmother on the father's side, sisters -- all the seven generations of the women in the family of his aggressor. It would take a half hour before he ceased. When Babul said foul things so fluently, why should his attacker sit idle? In his turn the other boy would start committing the same crime, orally harping on the seven generations of the women of Babul's family.

Babul was a warrior who would not accept defeat. At this point a fighting session would begin. Babul would hit and scratch the other boy with all his strength and within a couple of minutes the two boys would be locked in a fierce duel like fighting cocks. Most people in the world shower delightful names on children, such as "piece of the sky," "flower of the earth," "angel of heaven," etc., but as to these children, you can not imagine to what extent they could become devils, unless you had experienced them.

Babul was thin and weak and so he was always overpowered. How Babul's cry could reach his mother used to surprise us. Out of the blue she would come running to take revenge. Meanwhile the other boy possessed his own parents. They would come to defend their son. When trouble of this nature began, we had to close down the school. We had to act cautiously so that the battle would not spread further.

Mostan found a way to cool Babul down. Before the class started, Mostan would take Babul near to a plum tree and say, "Babul, this plum tree is a real bodmash-man, a real villain. Beat up this tree and scold it as much as you can." For twenty minutes Babul would orally heap sins on the seven generations of its women folk. We used to enjoy this to our heart's content. When Babul had exhausted his plum-tree oration, Mostan would start his teaching.

It seems that Babul was actually a fun-loving child. At his still tender age he had acquired a beautiful technique for earning money. First you must recall the speech that Sheikh Mujibur delivered in Suhrawardy Garden: "We shall kill you with food, with water..." In exchange for twenty takas Babul could reproduce the same speech with the Sheikh's own intonations. For fifteen takas he could speak in faltering Bangla imitating General Ziaur Rahman. He would accept ten takas for imitating the speech of Sheikh

Hasina. And for only five takas he would speak like Manna-bhai and Akhtar-bhai. The last two personages held high positions in the University's Student Government.

Alamgir was another such boy. When he was asked "What is your address?" He would flatly answer: "Hospital". He would say the same thing when he was asked the name of his father or mother. There was a reason for why he identified his whereabouts with "Hospital." Alamgir was born in a hospital. His mother died when he was born and he never saw his father with his own eyes. He never knew who his father was or what he looked like. How Alamgir grew so tall and who had brought him up, Alamgir did not disclose to anyone. The boy used to live in the Nilkhet slum. At noon he would carry food to the police from the police canteen and would have his lunch with them. He worked as a porter for collecting and bringing produce from New Market for people's afternoon and dinner meals, or he served hostel students with their orders.

Alamgir was the most daring of the children. Home and parents were totally unknown concepts to the boy. He never seemed to value why anyone should have a father or mother or a home. My experience in teaching him to read could be compared to milking a buffalo's horn. When other boys returned to their parents at home, Alamgir would stare at the scene silently.

I have never seen a human child so totally alienated from the world. Alamgir used to walk alone, muttering something. If anyone asked him what he was saying, he would become dumb and stare ahead helplessly. If he was asked anything concerning his parents, brothers, sisters and home, without replying he would simply run on his nimble feet and disappear down the street like a bird. It was as if the street were everything to him -- his mother and father, his brothers and sisters, his home and village. Although this boy moved about among other boys, to me he seemed like a child cast out by creatures from another planet.

I developed a tenderness for the child and decided to keep him with me. When I expressed this desire to him, he did not say yes or no and remained silent. But the other boys started pestering me. They said, "Elder Brother, take me. I shall keep your house." Another proposed, "I shall wash your clothes." A third one offered to look after my garden. These things had little effect on Alamgir. He didn't even put a stop to all this talk. Baring his teeth, he smiled. I announced at once that I would take him on. There was nothing in the world like this boy!

I bought a cot for Alamgir and bought him new clothes and sandals. While Alamgir began living with me, eating and sleeping, I could detect no noticeable change in him. He paid no attention to what I said. Most often he would run to the streets. I tried my best to replace his homeless upbringing with some new habits, but with no results. He remained unchanged. I lost my enthusiasm. I wanted to keep him within walls so that he would not be spoiled by evil company, but I was reaping the opposite result. Then I tried to punish him a little. I asked myself why I was putting so much

work and care into a stray child, but I had started the project and I should see it through to the end.

I used to take Alamgir wherever I went. When other boys would see Alamgir in my company, they would clap their hands, shout and begin to giggle. Alamgir joined them in this. I was taken aback. I enquired, "Why are you giggling?" At one point I had a feeling that certainly the boys detected some fault in me and that this was why they giggled. They refused to tell me anything.

One day I had Babul with me in the street. I bought him an orange and a balloon and Babul was very pleased. Then I asked, "Well, Babul can you tell me, when all the other boys see me with Alamgir, why do they giggle?" Babul was surprised. "Elder Brother, don't you know why?" I said, "If you don't tell me, how can I know?" Then he said, "Elder Brother, you are still inside your mother's womb! You don't understand a thing! Alamgir tells us that some day you are going to *"fucker"* him. That's why you are giving him all these many things." I asked, "What is this *fuckering*?" He said, "Elder Brother, you are a fool like a goat. Alamgir says that you will do shameful things with him."

Thus far we had been teaching the boys and girls in an open field. We began to feel keenly the need for a school building. The monsoon was approaching. Moreover a sense of what school children should have had developed among them. These were children who roamed everywhere. They had a keen sense of smell for social differences and they were aware of their slot in society. Every day they saw other boys and girls going off to school. Those children had school buildings and play-grounds. So our boys and girls also began to claim a building for their school. They felt that they too had an identity and they wished to show it. Then and there we gave them a soccer ball.

To construct a school, however, caused us to face a difficult problem. Even a simple building with walls of bamboo matting and a roof of polythene sheeting between bamboo mats would cost us at least ten thousand takas. How could we get so much money? The Sacrifice Festival was approaching. We started visiting the homes of teachers to entreat them to donate to us the money they would get from selling the hides of the animals which each person sacrifices. We said, "We are going to construct a school for underprivileged children in their slum." The gentlemen all praised us with flowing language. They said that we were enkindling the light of knowledge in neglected children, a very praise-worthy task. But we had to remain pleased with only their words. Nobody agreed to donate the money of a single hide. Every year the huzur-teachers of the madrasas came around for hide money. It was no use to deprive them of it. There is no point in arguing with them on this matter. We could not press our request for a school for our slum children in place of gifts to a madrasa. We were not imparting religious instruction. None of us wore this round cap on his head. If anyone endowed our children's school, there was no likelihood that the individual would acquire credit toward his after-life.

Then a chance came along for help. The Islamic Foundation requested me to deliver a lecture under the heading: "Bangladesh from an Islamic Point of View," on the occasion of "March the Seventh." I said, "I shall speak on this topic. But you must help to construct my school. It is a shame that all the money of the Islamic Foundation is to be spent on madrasas and mosques. These helpless children also have rights." The top men were hesitant. They said, "The Foundation has no tradition for granting money for schools." I replied, "Very well, then start a tradition. No worthwhile writer ever accepted an invitation from your Foundation, but I have accepted this one. I have broken a tradition by coming to you." Now the worthy gentlemen began to mumble among themselves. The Director, Yahiya-saheb, found a way out. He said, "Yes, it may be possible to disburse ten thousand takas toward your project. Submit an application and make sure you write in it that you are going to found a maktab-elementary school to teach the Koran. Then we will have no problem in giving you the amount." I gave my answer: "I need a building. Whatever you ask me to write, I shall write."

When I disclosed to my friends that I was going to deliver a speech there, everyone started condemning me. If I had been invited by the Rockefeller or Ford Foundations, the same friends would have praised me. I delivered a lecture for one and a half hours at the Islamic Foundation. I don't know what I said. Fortunately Bangladesh was not cast to the bottom of the sea because of my speech.

On receiving the money from the Foundation we approached the guardians of the children. They were pleased with our plan. A school-house was going to be constructed in their slum! This was indeed a novelty. They began to bring soil for the foundation of the school. We erected bamboo posts and covered the roof with polythene sheeting. Thus our school was built and a school should have a name. There were many suggestions. Finally we named the school Artist Sultan School after the famous artist, S. M. Sultan. Sultan grew up in a similar environment. Although it was not exactly like this one, still there were resemblances. Who knows, some day one of our students might acquire greatness like Sultan. There was no point in curbing one's ambitions.

In reality I was attached to this school only in name. Mostan bore the actual brunt of it. He decided the syllabus, the curriculum, and gave the lessons. At about this time a young man joined us. His name was Reza, an idealistic youth fresh from the University. Today Reza is no more alive. He was a young man with a beautiful soul. He died prematurely. I have very little talent for teaching. Mostan gave the lessons. I was an onlooker.

There was no topic in the world that Mostan did not discuss with the children. Whether this was a good or bad thing, I cannot say. All the lofty ideas that Mostan had accumulated in his mind up until then, he would pour out on the children like a



waterfall. It mattered little that the children were slow in learning the letters of the alphabet as long as he could tell them stories from the history of the world. After finishing his lectures, Mostan would ask the children, "Boys and girls, tell me together, did you catch what I told you?" The children in chorus would state, "Yes, Elder Brother. We have understood everything."

I became quite jealous of Mostan. How could he devote himself so completely to teaching the children? Except for his hours at the office, he spent all his spare time with the children. He used to bring along his two daughters. He would make them sit with the children. I tried to caution him: "Mostan, aren't you going a little too far?" Mostan had a single answer: "If a child does not know how to sit beside slum children, he will never grow up to be a proper human being. In our prestigious schools for the elite the children acquire more vanity than knowledge." Sometimes Mostan would engage his wife in teaching the children. How is it possible for a human being to dedicate his every possession to our project! At times I used to fancy that Mostan was the original teacher of the world, and that, perhaps I, too, in my way, was the first man on earth to introduce the cultivation of crops.

## IX. HARVEST FEAST

During this time the eggplant seedlings grew to be so tall and bushy that a tiger could easily shelter himself beneath them. The tomato plants began to flower. The turnips were already mature. The cauliflower heads began to swell like cakes in an oven. The tendrils of the "White" squashes reached to the ends of the plum-tree branches. If these tendrils were not supported with additional branches and with longer ones, they would be forced down to earth. The creepers of "Sweet" squash had spread themselves out so widely in the field that you could barely find a gap in which to step. The chili plants were adorned with small white flowers. Among the people who rambled in my field for their morning exercise, a good number used to glance toward all this bright greenery. Why they looked at it, even they themselves did not know. It was the plants that arrested their attention.

When I look at my crops during the day, joy flows like the stream of the milky way through my heart. Only green plants can arouse such pleasure. These verdant beings are breathing and their breath touches my heart. Words fail me. Here amidst God's bounty, one feels like sitting quietly and keeping still. Now, little by little, I began to understand why the poet Jibanananda Das used the expression *abbhibhut chasha*: "possessed peasant." Just as God gazes in rapture, possessed by the universe he has created, in the same way the farmer cannot fail but be "possessed" when he looks at the field of his own toil.

The superstitions of peasants began to take root in my thoughts. Many kinds of people used to halt before my garden. I could not tell by seeing their faces who among them was kindly disposed to the plants of my field. But the plants of my garden could easily discern the true nature of a person. If anyone harbored any ill intentions, this affected the seedlings of my garden. Their life was so fragile and so sensitive that they could not resist the impact of an evil eye. Waves emanating from ill wishes adversely affected their bodies and stultified their growth. I developed a sixth sense about this through my love and co-existence with the seedlings. When a good person entered my garden, the plants danced with joy. If an evil man approached and touched the body of a plant, it shrieked with exceeding pain. I did not understand the language of plants, but I could feel their reactions. In order to capture the evil looks of malicious people, I obtained a black clay pot which I dotted with lime and placed on a stump in the garden.

Riyad, Shahana's infant son, first noticed a marvelous thing. There were at least a dozen small, brownish flowers on an eggplant bush near the cornice. They peeped through the plant's thicket of leaves. The suddenness of their coming forth made them feel a bit shy, but they also showed pride in the fine manner of their appearance. Such a little boy! How could he spot the flowers hiding within that jungle of leaves? I had been spending whole days in the garden. Why couldn't I see the flowers that were blooming within the eggplant bushes?

To see the eggplant bushes bursting with flowers was a marvelous sight. I felt keenly that such an extraordinary event should be told to each and every person. I walked for awhile in the hostel corridors. People were coming and going. All of them were busy people. As I looked at their faces, I felt I could not communicate with them the news about the eggplant flowers. But it was too difficult to contain such intense joy within myself. So I had to fetch pen and paper and set to writing a few couplets. They started somewhat like this:

It is not easy to cause things to bloom.  
To produce form from nothingness is the wonder of                  creation.  
The man who can bloom within himself can cause things      to bloom.  
Barren vanity is the lot of the uncreative man.

Within a week startling things began to happen one after another. The whole garden became flooded with eggplant flowers. The tomatoes began to appear. The chili plants did not sit idle. They blossomed abundantly with white flowers. Yellow flowers came out along the tendrils of the "Sweet" squashes. On the plum-tree trellises, snow white flowers of the "White" squashes began to peep through their ceiling of leaves. All the plants were engaged in flowering competitively. When I saw this scene with my own eyes, I could hardly speak. Within me, feelings stirred like the limbs of a new born child. So many amazing things were happening in God's world! What a pity that nobody was noticing them! My feelings of anger and anguish, and my complaints, all disappeared. A message throbbed through my veins. It was the message of success: "I can make flowers bloom! I can cause plants to bear fruit and my life is not meaningless!"

Green tomatoes grew plump. The burden of the green chili pods forced their stems to bend over. The squash-children lying on the ground were dreaming of how to grow fat. Tender "White" squashes were hanging on the supporting plum-tree branches.

I have mentioned the eggplants last of all. I have a reason for this. It was the trampled seedling of an eggplant that instigated my garden. It is impossible for me to speak about eggplants without some partiality. Four species of eggplants grew in my garden. First let me begin with the round, black ones of the Gofargaon kind. Within a short time they quickly took on their characteristic shape. They could easily be compared to full grown breasts. Only the nipples were missing. It was truly a delight to caress the smooth, oily surface of an eggplant, as if touching the breast of a woman.

All the eggplants that I planted beneath the cornice belong to the "twelve months" species. The growth of this variety was the most remarkable of all. These plants were heading ever upwards. At first glance you could not tell that they were eggplants. I had spread sand and brick dust from an old building on the garden. People said that this was the reason for the unusually successful growth of this species.

"Twelve months" eggplants are rather long and black in color. On the stem there is a kind of soft thorn. When these eggplants mature, they become curved like a bull's horn.

Apart from the "twelve-months" and Gofargaon varieties, I had another species of eggplant in my garden. The shape of it was like a cricket ball. In the eggplant seller's terminology it is called "egg eggplant". Why it is so named, I cannot explain. I had yet another species of eggplants in my garden. The color of these eggplants was white. The upper part was somewhat black. On this part you could notice a pattern like the skin of a chandrabora snake.

The time came for picking the heads of cauliflower. Tomatoes began to take on color. You could not taste the chilis; they were so hot that they could make you forget your father's name. Ladies and gentlemen carrying shopping bags would pass by my garden on their way to New Market. They looked at my garden with greedy eyes. At this time the supply of vegetables in the market was scanty. Few shoppers could touch the meager supply of vegetables that reached the market; their hands burned because the price was so high. When they returned home with half-rotten, emaciated vegetables, they looked at my garden enviously.

The tomatoes were ripening. Within the border of their leaves, the eggplants were showing their shape. Green squashes were hanging on their vines and their tendrils were announcing to the world: "See how delicious we are!" People said, "Look at all the vegetables in this garden! Why should we take the trouble to go to the market to buy rotten stuff at a high price?" Meanwhile I sat there in my vegetable kingdom, guarding it carefully so that nobody could come near it.

Tauhidul Anwar's wife was the first to complain. She said to me one day, "Brother Sofa, have you no pity in your heart for our suffering? Every day our husbands clamor for fresh vegetables in New Market while you sit on a mountain of them here. The eggplants of your garden are passing their edible period and the tomatoes are about to fall. The "White" squashes are getting firm. What are you going to do with all this? You don't have a wife or family. You are only a single person. Why don't you distribute these vegetables among us? If you don't feel like doing this, please, at least, sell them to us for money." I answered, "I shall neither sell nor give away the product of my garden. Let the tomatoes and eggplants ripen. I shall extract seeds from them and in the coming season I shall start a seed store with my friend Ansar Ali."

Then Tauhid's wife replied, "If you are not willing to offer us anything, we can steal." I told her straight out, "If you are in the habit of stealing, then you will do it. I have made a vow. Before fulfilling it, I am not going to let anyone touch the produce of my garden." The enraged wife of Tamozuddin said, "You have made this garden on University land. Legally the University can claim half of your produce. Our husbands are the employees of the University. Therefore they can claim half of your vegetables." She persisted some more, but I did not budge an inch from my position. I said to Mrs.

Tamoz, "Ask all of your husbands to send me a legal notice. I shall reply in court. Don't ask me for vegetables from my garden." All the ladies joined together and in a kind of chorus they started calling me a miser, a Shylock, etc. Shohel's wife made a biting remark: "Now we understand why this man could not find a wife even at such an age!"

This was my vow. I had decided by myself that I would arrange a feast for the students of the Sultan School with the vegetables of my garden. First I divulged my secret to Mostan. Sparks of delight shone in his eyes. He said that the children would eat the very first crop of our garden. The children would have at least one meal from the garden. What could be better!

Accordingly we informed the children that on the coming Saturday at noon there would be a great cooking session near the school. They would have to cook themselves -- procure firewood and collect the utensils. The boys danced with enthusiasm. They began to gather dried leaves, branches, discarded wood and many other such things. Within two days there was a real mountain of firewood. We dug four earth stoves a bit far from the school. On Thursday we let the boys go inside the garden to pick eggplants, tomatoes, cauliflower, and onions. They gathered four full grown "White" squashes and five "Sweet" ones. Each one weighed at least three kilograms. We chopped up many tendrils of the "White" squashes. A hundred people could be entertained in one meal with this large amount of vegetables. The number of our children was only fifty-five.

Mostan remarked: "Well, we cannot make a meal with only vegetables. There should be rice as well." I said, "We shall buy half a maund (forty pounds) of rice." When we went to the food store in the slum, the shopkeeper surprised us by saying that he would contribute half a maund of rice without payment. Mostan said, "Since you are contributing rice free of cost, allow us to buy the daal-lentils." The shopkeeper gentleman answered that he would not allow this. We would have to accept daal, oil and spices without paying for any of it. During this time the news had spread throughout the whole slum that a magnificent feast was going to be arranged for the children at their school.

When we had gathered everything, I went to Shohel's wife. She was pressing one of her saris spread out on a quilt. I felt she was annoyed to see me, but I unarmed her by speaking to her without preamble: "I have just booked you for tomorrow morning from eight to one." She flung her hair from the front to the back of her head and said in a pinched tone, "Tomorrow I am going to see a French film." I became firm with her and said, "You have to cancel it." She remarked, "Since you are so obstinate, you must tell me what you are going to do tomorrow." I answered: "Tomorrow I am going to get married. It is your business to drag along Mrs. Tauhid, Mrs. Tomizuddin, and the rest of the wives." Her eyes widened with surprise. "Now I see, Sofa-saheb, that you are indeed quite presumptuous." I answered, "Yes, I may be. But it is your business to manage all the ladies."

On Friday morning I guided this herd of women -- Shahana, the wives of Tauhid and Tomizuddin, and other ladies -- to the Sultan School in the Katabon slum. I said to the ladies, "Start working and my nuptials will take place. The children will have a picnic with the vegetables from my garden. Also their parents will come. Help them with the cooking." Tauhid's wife commented: "Everything that Sofa-bhai does is outlandish! He plans to make a feast for slum children and he brings us to be the kitchen maids!" Tomizuddin's wife was a lady conscious of her social standing. If she could have had the chance, she would have severed my head with a stroke of her largest kitchen knife for insulting her by bringing her to this ungodly place.

Shohel's wife is a fun-loving, beautiful, educated woman, and her father has both money and a good name. She found the work delightful. She tied the end of her sari around her waist and fell to work. Mostan's wife and daughters were engaged in doing heavy work. Shohel's wife was so engrossed in the work that she seemed to be playing an amusing game. As she took the leading role, other ladies had to stifle their petty complaints. Everyone began to work. The mothers and sisters of some children also joined in. Some took charge of cooking rice. Some prepared the daal. The squashes, cauliflowers, eggplants and tomatoes were mixed together and put on a huge pan.

We sent Reza to the Mohshin and Shurja Sen Halls to invite the people who had helped us in the beginning. Everything took on a festive look. Babul charmed the ladies with his impersonations of Mujib and Ziaur Rahman. The ladies were amazed. Such a young boy! How cleverly he could do the imitations! First we fed the children, then the mothers and sisters. After that we served our agricultural extension friends from Mohshin and Shurja Sen Halls. The ladies were served after them.

Even while they were eating, some of the ladies did not hesitate to find fault with me. Tomizuddin's wife taunted me: "You have cheated us all in the name of a wedding. Now you must tell us the exact date when your marriage will take place." I said, "Don't worry. It will take place. I've only just fallen in love. Let it mature." Shohel's wife intervened: "You are always falling in love, but none of your loves has ever ended in marriage." I said, "The current case is a special affair. The lady with whom I am in love has a gem of a husband, quite alive and kicking. This is what makes things difficult." Tauhid's wife scoffed, "You do nothing but create scandal. There is no wife for you written on your forehead."

After the feast the ladies moistened their lips with paan juice and resumed their sharp-tongued attacks on me. I wanted to be nice to the ladies. This is why I told them, "From now on, inform me ahead of time about which vegetables you need. Your orders will reach your home. But, in return, you must provide my lunch." Tomizuddin's wife gave me a final penetrating bite: "If I cook for an *atkura*, a sperm-blocked man, some misfortune may come to my family."

Never in my life have I done a great act worth remembering. I have never led a political party, nor have I ever become a General on the field of literature. In all my student days I never became a *cum laude*. I have not experienced a love life which was productive enough to make me stand on a fixed point. The whole of my life seems empty and meaningless. In this life of mine I have never done anything which could offer me the cooling ointment of consolation for the barren moments of my arid life. Yet, whenever I remember my garden with its fruits and flowers, the garden is reborn in my memory. The image of it takes on shape in my mind. I can identify each plant, each seedling, each creeper. This garden lives in my heart like a forest that is always green. Just as a mother and father remember the first time that their child could sit up, the first time he crawled, the first time that he walked, his first words, in the same way I remember my plants -- which ones blossomed first, which first bore flowers, and from the heart of which flowers the first fruits came forth.

I can remember everything. With the vegetables of the garden I had arranged a feast for the children. The happy faces of those children manifesting a wonderful spirit of joy is fresh in my mind. I can remember it the way I can remember my first time making love to a woman. In the same way I can remember the bright smiling faces of the children and hear their tender voices. Very slowly and silently a thought took shape in my mind: Perhaps not all the moments of my life have been useless.

## X. GARDEN PREDATORS

The plants of my garden kept me confined for a whole three and a half months. Now I understood why a farmer cannot leave his fields to go elsewhere. I have a little piece of land in the country. I suppose it is not much. It is on the verge of disappearing. If you do not own land, you have only a few problems with which to concern yourself. But when you own a piece of land it will invite seventy-one problems: litigation, dispossession, murder. All these things are associated with land. When land summons its owner by name, the owner cannot fail to attend to it, even if he were in the grave.

One day I had to rush to my home in the countryside for a land problem. I was to stay there only two days, but I could not settle the problem within seven. While I was there, I seemed to hear within me that my plants were calling me. One day I was sleeping. I do not know what time it was. My watch was out of order. In the country, nine in the evening seems to be quite a late hour. I was sleeping on the bed where my father once slept, then my older brother. Suddenly I heard a heart-rending, piercing sound in my dream. My eggplant bushes were stretching their roots out from the soil and they were groaning with pain. I could not sleep the whole night. I had a feeling that someone was harming my plants.

At dawn, I rushed to Chittagong by the first bus. I arrived there at nine. If I telephoned Mostan at that early hour, he would not be available at the *Ittefak* office. Usually Mostan did not come to the office before eleven. I could hardly hold my breath until eleven. I could not stop the trembling of my heart. Everybody was laughing at me because of this. When the hand of the clock finally touched eleven, I tried to reach Dhaka. After much effort I was able to contact the *Ittefak* Office, but with a sweet voice the receptionist informed me that Mostan would come after nine that evening, so I should try again around then. I refrained somehow from telling her all my worries.

Signs of my disturbed spirit were so perceptible that the relatives in whose house I was staying were contemplating taking me to a psychiatrist. Realizing that I had become the cause of anxiety in others, I was deeply ashamed. In order to relieve the family from worry, I left their home. Leaving my luggage behind I said, "I have a small matter to take care of. Let me attend to it."

I got onto a rickshaw and asked the driver to take me to Shadarghat jetty. When the rickshaw reached there, I got down and walked along the jetty. The jetty is a place where petty thieves and pick-pockets spend their time off. The jetty was in the same condition as I had seen it in my boyhood. Nut sellers were hawking in the same way and the boys who used to do massages were still looking for customers on the jetty while calling out: "*Ma-leesh! Ma-leesh!* (Massage! Massage!)."

Boats were passing back and forth from both sides of the harbor. They made their crossings almost without pausing. Boats loaded with vegetables were anchoring.



Launches were speeding by, drawing deep furrows in the water. Two gadha-barges were moored. As I gazed at the hills beyond, I could see villages sketched out in a blue-gray line. This whole kaleidoscopic spectacle made me forget my garden. After spending my time on the jetty until one thirty in the afternoon, I felt exceedingly hungry. My restlessness had died down. I returned to my relatives' house where I ate and took a nap.

I woke up after five in the afternoon. There was still ample time. I went to the lawyer's office to have a clear idea about the litigated land. I discussed the plot number, the *khatian*-record number, the "R.S."-Survey, the "C.S."-Survey and the will. I discussed matters with all the proper legal terminology and returned to pay the fee of three-hundred takas.

This time I was cautious; I took care not to cause anxiety in others. I had my dinner with the rest of the family, then made my telephone call to Dhaka. The line was clear and I succeeded in catching Mostan. My first words to him were: "Why did I dream that my plants were leaping out with loud, painful cries?" Mostan replied, "Someone removed the plum tree branches from the gaps in the barbed wire fence and pushed a cow inside your garden." He said that I was lucky: Mrs. Shohel noticed it. Otherwise the whole garden would have been devoured by the beast. I inquired, whether serious harm had been done to my garden. Mostan answered, "When you come to Dhaka, you shall judge for yourself."

I returned to Dhaka after two days. I was almost speechless when I saw the ruin of my garden. At least ten eggplant bushes had been pulled out. Only their stems and roots were lying in the garden; the rest had gone into the belly of the intruding animal. My plants had been so big that they could hide a few tigers beneath them. When I saw the ravaged part of the garden, I felt like a desert was expanding within me.

I was dumbfounded. I sat down on the boundary wall. Who could have performed this cruel deed? I had many suspicions and conjectures. I let them be. In the countryside one often hears of instances when someone's cow is let into a neighbor's field. Rural folk are endowed with many noble virtues, but, at the same time, the amount of cruelty they possess is unparalleled. For one square foot of land a brother may behead a brother with a single blow of his kodai. A neighbor's cow may be happily grazing in a field. The very sight of it excites jealousy in the minds of others. This is enough reason to kill the animal with poison.

Dhaka, however, is not a village. In this high citadel of learning, who was it who could have taken resort to such rustic barbarism? I sat like a mother who sits weeping by the side of her dead child. I collected the stumps of the plants and tried to feel how much pain my plant children had suffered. While I was away, they had sent their death pangs to my inner ear. Even today the sound of their piercing cries echoes in my heart.

## **XI. SARADA-BABU**

Some ways in which plants feel and think have passed on to me, but this does not happen from all plants. When the plants and trees which I helped to grow with the care of my own hands face any trouble, I seem to receive a message from them. Either I dream about them, or, if I'm awake, their image passes through my mind. As to the tender plants of my garden, if a particular one is stricken, I become sure that some kind of trouble is threatening this voiceless being. Only those plants which have grown as individual beings in my consciousness can send a signal to me.

I acknowledge that plants have a spiritual as well as biological life, that in this life they feel griefs and joys in varied ways like humans, and that their pains and suffering can penetrate our human consciousness. But prior to this there should exist an equation of wave lengths between the consciousness of a plant and the consciousness of a human being. This sounds easy, but in practice it is very difficult to achieve. Plants and trees do not reveal their secrets to a person who can not be trusted.

One of my friends told me about a story in a newspaper report. It concerned an event in the recent past and the place of the event reported was not very far away. A gentleman of Tangail was suffering from an incurable disease. Doctors almost gave up hope, but humans are creatures with the propensity for hoping against hope. One man suggested to the gentleman a way to get cured. "Every morning, after bathing, you should embrace a tree which you have planted with your own hands and recite these words with a pure heart to the tree god: 'Tree god, please accept my disease into your body and infuse your health into me.' " The gentleman recited this prayer every morning while embracing his favorite amra tree as he faced towards the sun. After one month it was found that the man was cured and the tree died.

I have felt the presence of the little god who lives in trees -- the god with whom Wordsworth conversed -- but I have never witnessed him with my own eyes. I sincerely believe that my school teacher, Sarada-babu, could make direct contact with plants and trees. The full name of that gentleman was Sarada Shankar Talukdar. He used to instruct us in Grammar, "Translation," and Math in the lower classes and in Geography in the upper classes. One strange characteristic of his was that when he talked it seemed he was talking from within a dream. In all his life he never punished students by caning them. Even the boys who were disobedient ruffians were attentive to his lectures. There was something in his voice. Every word, every sentence he uttered affected our minds like drops of honey.

This gentleman spent minimal time on textbooks. Sometimes he would talk about atma (soul) and param-atma (transcendental-soul). Plants and agriculture were his favorite topics. He loved to talk about which farmers had produced exceptional crops and where they had done it. He had a shiny, bald head. In the center there was only a few countable hairs. He did not allow them to grow long. Although he talked a lot

about atma and param-atma, he had no faith in conventional religion. Our pundit Moshai Ramni-babu used to call Sarada-babu a "vegeto-phile atheist." Hindu students of our school could never induce him to come to the altar of the goddess Saraswati on the occasion of her puja celebrations. He never performed any religious rituals, but in his way of living, he was leading a religious life.

Once a year our teacher, Sarada-babu, used to go mad. When the madness caught him, it would continue for a period of three months. This mad period would start in the winter season. One day he would be found muttering words to the trees. At first he would perform all his regular chores as before. He even came to teach classes. Suppose he were teaching us Geography. Suddenly he would get up. Closing his book he would say, "Boys, you know the old banyan tree near the pond of Ali-boatman? That tree is calling me. I have many things to discuss with it. I must go to it." Making strange grunting sounds he would leave the class. He would go to the banyan tree and start a conversation with it, sometimes in a whisper, sometimes loudly. Sometimes he would clap his hands and dance. Often raucous laughter could be heard issuing from his throat.

When news of this reached his family, someone would come and carry him home. It was almost impossible to keep him at home. The moment that he had the slightest chance, he would escape outside. He would talk loudly to his beloved trees, as if he were meeting old friends from long ago. Just as a friend expresses pleasure or anger, he would do the same with the trees.

During this time naughty boys from the village followed Sarada-babu wherever he went. They would throw dirt on him and tear his clothes. He remained indifferent. When their torturing reached a limit, he would run to the hills. There he would continue his dialogue with trees. He had no sense of when it was day or night. His family members were always in a panic because wild animals could attack him. Whenever his family members would come to know of his whereabouts from the woodcutters, or from the bamboo or cane cutters, they would fetch him and bind him in a chair which was tied to a wooden post. If he remained thus bound for more than three days, he would begin to bite his own limbs, causing them to bleed. It was almost impossible to feed him at this stage.

When the weather turned bitterly cold, his madness would reach its climax. His relatives had no way to handle him except to set him free in the hills. When he finished the course of his laughter and quarrels, they would again take him and tie him down. With the passing of winter he would become sane again. Then he would begin to take care of his fields and look after his cattle, even resume teaching his classes, walking the long two miles. I don't know how he could hold on to his job.

I became very fond of Sarada-babu. I loved to hear him speak. On holidays I would visit his house. His wife used to entertain me with warm, frothy milk served to

me in a brass bowl. Sometimes she would give me popped rice mixed with puffed rice; sometimes puffed-rice with milk. I would accompany Sarada-babu to his fields, pull out weeds and carry baskets of manure to his fields along with the laborers.

In the initial stage of his madness Sarada-babu often told me he could understand the language of plants. But there was a problem for him. Human language and plant language were not the same. When he started talking with the plants in their language, he could not suppress the memory of his human language. Then he would muddle the two. He could not hold together the thread of his thoughts. By then this would drive him mad.

When I was alone with him, he would frequently tell me that he would teach me how to converse with plants. Plants do not respond to the call of all humans, and, likewise, not all humans can understand the language of plants. Unless you have a chaste heart, you will not catch the language of plants. Sarada-babu felt that I had the power to talk to plants, but for some reason my power had not developed. He used to suggest that I should accompany him when he was talking with plants. Then a time would come when I would acquire the art of talking with them. I did not dare try this fearing I might become mad. What insights I have acquired about the language of plants, I inherited them from Sarada-babu.

The last time that I met with Sarada-babu was in February of 1972. I had returned to Dhaka after the surrender of the Pakistan army on the 16th of December, 1971. My mother had asked me many times to come home, but I was not able to do so at the time. I went home at the beginning of February. Sarada-babu lived five miles away. I did not know from whom he got the news that I was home. One day, early in the morning, he came to my house and woke me up. I wiped the dust from his feet. When I looked at his countenance, I did not dare to ask anything. I wondered whether he had spent almost nine months talking to trees or with people from other villages.

Sarada-babu did not give me a chance to ask questions. He began by saying, "I have made such a long walk only to tell you a few words." I said, "Sir, first please take a seat. Then you may tell me whatever you like." He said, "I have no need of a chair. I have come to say one thing. Having said it, I will leave." There was no point in arguing with a person like that. I said to him, "Please tell me what you want to say." Then he became quite confidential. He asked me, "Do you meet with Sheikh Mujib?" The logic of Sarada-babu's thought was very clear. To his way of thinking, since I lived in Dhaka and since Sheikh Mujib lived in Dhaka, I must therefore be meeting with the Freedom Fighters and with their leader, Sheikh Mujib. He believed that we two met each other very often. I was somewhat troubled. If I told him that Sheikh Mujib could have no business with an insignificant person like myself, so that there was no reason for him to see me -- if I told him this, Sarada-babu would be disappointed. In order to keep his spirits up I said, "Not always. It happens that I see him occasionally." Then Sarada-babu inquired how was his health. I answered, "Now he is well, but he has been very busy."

At this point Sarada-babu sat down on a chair. Then he put his mouth close to my ear and said, "Give Mujib my name. Give him the following message. Tell him that the term "Mujib-bad" (Mujib-ism) now being used by most people is incorrect. The fact is that it should be "Mau-jib-bad" (Bee-life-ism). I said, "Please explain this to me." Sarada-babu said, "Mujib is the name of a person. The name of a person is sacred. It is wrong to add extraneous connotations to a person's name. Many people through ignorance are using Mujib's name as a chant. Think about how the mau-mashis (bee-insects) collect honey from all over and accumulate it in one container. Then according to need they all of them together eat it in shares. If you think about this life-system of the bees, the philosophy in it is "mau-jib-bad (bee-life-ism)." When you return to Dhaka, you shall first see Sheikh Mujib and tell him that the chant should be "Mau-jib-bad," not "Mujib-bad." I consented. I said that on reaching Dhaka I would contact Sheikh Mujib and I would pass on the message.

I received a postcard from Sarada-babu after Sheikh Mujib and his whole family were brutally murdered during the night of August 14, 1975. The card was addressed to me thus: "Ahmad Sofa, May God Give you Long Life," and the content of it was as follows: "In the month of February, 1975, I entrusted you to tell Sheikh Mujibur Rahman-saheb that the term "Mau-jib-bad" should be used instead of "Mujib-bad." Now it is evident that you have not performed the responsibility with which you were entrusted. If Mujib would have shunned "Mujib-bad" and used "Mau-jib-bad," certainly this tragedy would not have taken place. For everything that has occurred, I hold you responsible..."

Sarada-babu died in a train accident in 1975. By that time he had lost his job in the school. He had no land. He worked no longer on his farm. His sons were away from home. He persisted in his madness until the last day of his life. He has bequeathed to me a streak of madness.

## XII. THE TAGORE TREE

Let me tell you a story from my childhood. When I was a student in the third form of primary school, there was a giant mango tree next to our kitchen shed. It was quite an old tree. How old it was, nobody was sure. My father used to say that at the time of my grandmother's wedding the tree was still young. Apart from its history lost in oblivion, that tree enjoyed a position of respect for its exceptional height and breadth. The aged Khanta-moni, the mother of the two washermen, Shri Hari and Pran Hari, used to prostrate herself before the tree and through the gaps between her remaining teeth she would enunciate "BI-RI-KKHI!" (Sanskrit *brikkha*, Arboreal Being). She had a premonition that if such a venerable tree were addressed merely as "Tree," it would enrage the tree-god. He might send a curse which would invite misfortune for the householders.

In spite of the dire warnings from old Khanta, all the people of our neighborhood used to call this venerable tree simply "tree." Also, long before my father was born, there was an epithet attached to the tree. Everyone used to call it "Ashare am gach" (month-of-Ashar mango-tree). This was because the fruit of the tree began to ripen at the end of the month of Ashar. Some mangoes would still hang visibly from the top branches even during Shravan, the next month.

The mangoes of this tree were unusually big. Ripe mangoes used to hang from many branches, but at such an unapproachable height that no one could reach them. When the mangoes took on a vermilion color, birds used to come and start to peck at them. Then the mangoes would fall down. When a strong wind would blow, the ripe mangoes would fall. The mangoes did not fall to the ground directly. First they would hit the corrugated metal roof of our house. Then they would drop down on the roof of our kitchen shed. When the mangoes hit the ground, they were no longer recognizable. A kind of jelly-like substance lay plastered on the ground. We children ate with relish the parts of this jelly that were free from dirt. These mangoes were very sweet; they belonged to the late-season variety of mangoes.

Sometimes we were fortunate. Small branches which bore mangoes would break off when touched by a gust of wind. Then we enjoyed the chance to eat undeformed mangoes. This branch-breaking wind did not come very often. We had to be satisfied with the mere sight of ripe mangoes at a height almost touching the clouds. The tree was so tall that even missiles thrown by strong men could not reach those upper branches. Some branches grew toward our kitchen roof and then veered abruptly skyward. On these branches the shindu-colored mangoes used to grow. They were incomparable in taste and scent. No climber dared to scale so high. So the mangoes ripening on the "Ashar tree" had to wait for the birds to come.

Many kinds of birds used to flock to the tree's branches. The harsh sound of crows deafened our ears. At night, bats would come in throngs to visit the tree. The

tree was ours, but the birds had the right to its fruit. Some kind-hearted birds, out of compassion for children like ourselves, threw down unpecked mangoes. We dearly loved those birds.

I had an older sister whose complexion was dark. She used to recite a nursery rhyme in dialectal language:

*Oh, crows, you are black, and I, too, am black.  
So drop down your mangoes by batches.*

An eagle family built a nest on the top of the highest branch. At noon when the eagle circled the sky, its golden wings would glitter in the sunlight.

I developed a relationship with this grandfather tree. It ascended to the sky, it sheltered an eagle family, and its fruit ripened in the month of Ashar. All this in combination enchanted me. I used to look at the world of the tree with wonder in my eyes. The more I used to look at the world of the tree, the more I began to feel that I could find a place for myself within its universe where birds of the sky dwelt freely. I had the feeling that the tree also felt what I felt. Between a grandfather and a grandson lies a secret sense of freedom and an unspoken affection. I developed a similar relation with the tree. I used to think that this huge tree was mine. Its whole domain was mine. The mangoes that hung in its branches, the birds that came to build nests -- everything was mine. I tried to embrace the trunk with my small arms, but the trunk was so big that my arms could not encircle it. All my thoughts centered around the tree. I wanted to make it my own. From the depths of my heart I wanted to possess the tree.

One day when I was returning from school, an idea came to me. If I could give a new name to the tree, then it would become my own tree and nobody would claim it any more. I was then learning a nursery rhyme by Rabindranath Tagore:

*Rain drops [fall] with a soothing sound,  
And the river is swollen in flood.*

*Our small stream runs in a zigzag course.  
Palm trees standing on one leg, surpassing all  
other trees, peep at the sky.*

When I read Tagore's verse I felt a kind of sweet vibration within me. Tagore's poetry was sweet and the mangoes of the "Ashar" tree were also sweet. With his long hair and voluminous robe Tagore himself resembled a human tree. Tagore had a close similarity with the mango tree. I thought it would be quite appropriate if I named the tree after Tagore.

I tore a page from my exercise book and wrote on it by dipping the broad side of a wooden pen in some ink: "From today this "Ashar" mango tree will be known as "Tagore Tree." Everyone should address it as "Tagore Tree." If anyone fails, he will be punished." Below this I inscribed: "BY ORDER OF A-H-M-A-D-S-O-F-A." I borrowed the expression "by order of" from elsewhere. Once, while passing near the pond of our police precinct, I saw a billboard where this text was written: "NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO BATHE IN THIS POND. IF ANYONE VIOLATES THIS RULE, HE WILL BE PUNISHED. BY ORDER OF THE PRECINCT AUTHORITY." I attached my page to the tree with the gum of a zigor tree. Then I concentrated on influencing public opinion in favor of "Tagore Tree".

I told my younger sister, "From today all of you will address the 'Ashar' tree as 'Tagore Tree'." She asked me why. I answered, "This is my order." She screwed up her face and demanded, "Who are you to order me!" She began to shout, "Ashar Tree! Ashar Tree!" A sister who was so disrespectful of her older brother, was she not due for a punishment? When I gave a slap to her face, she started crying with such vigor that both mother and father rushed to her. On being asked why she was crying, her wailing gained momentum. Pointing her finger towards me she said, "He hit me!" My mother asked, "Why did he hit you?" She answered, "Do you know, Mother, what he said? He wants me to address the 'Ashar tree' with a silly name." So the first attempt at making the mango tree my own failed due to the treachery of a sister.

Our area was prone to cyclones. From the month of Chaitra to Baishak and from the month of Ashwin to Kartik, when the wind would gain in speed, my father and older brother would panic. If the "Ashar" mango tree fell down, our house and the kitchen might surely be smashed. Not only our house, but the house of our senior uncle was in danger. Many people advised my father to cut down the tree. Because my father kept procrastinating, this was not accomplished. Whenever the question of cutting the tree arose, I used to cry and this would put everyone into a predicament. My mother would never say anything contrary to the decisions taken by the men of the family, but when I would cry so desperately, without a word she would resort to fasting. In the face of joint resistance from both mother and son, my father had to send away the tree cutter.

My mother had no living relatives at her parents' house. So she used to go to her brother's house as a substitute. My mother never claimed her share of inherited property from her brother lest this might lead to his neglect of us when we visited him. On the occasion of a cousin's marriage, my mother went to her maternal uncle's house. She took my sister and myself with her. We stayed there for about a week. On our way home, when we were about half a mile away, I saw that our home looked somewhat empty, as if something were absent. At first I could not tell what it was. When I came closer, I then discovered that my "Rabi" tree had been severed and cut into pieces. I could not speak. I sat down without a word. The hollowness which came into my heart can never be filled, even if you encapsulated the whole world inside it. In these days many people are afraid of the hole in the ozone layer. Do they know that the ozone layer of my heart acquired a hole a long time ago?



### **XIII. MY SHALIK-CHILD AND OTHER BIRDS**

One afternoon Shushil bought a young crested shalik from the bird vendor in Nilkhet. He carried it inside a paper bag. Of course there were some holes in the bag, but I was angry. Who carries a bird in this way!

On seeing the bird I felt both sad and happy at the same time. The reason for my happiness was that I had tended a shalik when I was a child. The bird became tame. A cage was unnecessary. I used to set it free and the bird would fly to places of its own choice. In the evening it would return and enter the cage. My mother used to take small doses of opium. She would put a little of it inside a banana and she would feed it regularly to the bird. The bird became addicted. It was difficult to know whether the bird returned to the cage in the evening due to addiction or because it had been tamed. When the bird died, I could not sleep for a whole week. I wrapped its body in a thin, white piece of cloth as is done with a human corpse and I placed it inside a grave. I passed many days alone by the side of its grave.

The death of the bird was the first sorrow of my childhood. The shalik's demise left such a deep impression on my mind, that whenever I come across a shalik, a feeling of kinship stirs within me. When Shushil spontaneously brought this bird to me, I felt that the shalik which had died long ago had regained its life and returned to me. This was why I was filled with joy, as when the lost Joseph came back to Caanan.

Now I shall say why I felt disturbed. When I was living at the International Hostel, I purchased a parrot from a bird hawker. There was no way to tell whether the bird was young or old. Hawkers are very wily; most often they hand over an old bird calling it a young one. I brought the bird to the hostel. I found that both of its wings had been clipped. If I had seen this earlier, I would not have bought the bird. Instead I would have beaten the hawker. A man who crops the wings of birds should be severely punished.

The bird that I purchased could fly for only ten or fifteen yards at a stretch. At least I was certain that this crippled bird could not fly away. Yes, I got him a cage, but it was merely for show. In fact, I kept the bird free. I heard from many people that parrots cannot be tamed, but my bird was quite different. Within a short time it became tame and fully dependent on me. That was the "Baul" (Bohemian-like) stage of my life. I wore long, curly hair. When I left my room to go somewhere, I tried to put the bird inside the cage. The parrot would not agree to enter the cage and protested loudly in the language of parrots. I would have to take the bird with me. So then I would drape my body with a large shawl. I would extend one end of it to the floor so that the parrot could use it as a ramp to reach my shoulder.

When I went to visit anyone's home, I would ask for dry chilis for the parrot. If there were no dry chilis, I would ask for fresh ones. Sometimes I put my finger inside

the bird's mouth as a substitute for chilis. At times he gave such a bite that blood would flow from my finger. I became an object of curiosity in Dhaka. When I passed through back lanes of the city, children would follow me and exchange all kinds of comments. They would call me "pakhi-wala fakir" (Bird-man holy-man). With my flowing hair, a parrot on my shoulder and my long shawl, the title suited me well. The bird gave me a new identity and I didn't mind it.

During the night he would dig his claws into my hair and would cling to it. After waking up in the morning my whole body would smell of bird. I would call the bird "Babu!" (Sweet Master). He used to hide himself in remote corners of the room. When I called "Deh! Deh! Deh!" in his language, he used to appear and answer my call.

With the passing of time the bird became a part of my existence. I could go nowhere without him. Once, at noon time, I was tired and went to sleep after lunch. When I woke up in the evening, I could not find the bird anywhere. Many times I called to him, "Babu! Babu!," but there was no trace of the bird. I searched everywhere, including in all the trees in the neighborhood. Nowhere could I find him.

I began to suspect many people. A Malaysian lady used to have her eye on my bird. I inquired from a Malaysian student where she might be. He replied that it was about two months since she left for Kuala Lumpur. I was seized with panic. Had my bird entered the stomach of some cat? Many tom-cats roamed around the International Hostel with their drooping tails. The piercing mating cry of these cats used to disturb the quiet of the night.

Crying "Pakhi! Pakhi!" (Bird! Bird!), I stirred up the whole hostel. I could not find the bird anywhere. The ladies of the hostel and especially their little ones were fond of my parrot. A group of children joined me in my search.

Two rooms down from mine was the room of Dr. Kalipad Sen. There was a rubbish heap in front of his door with many things in it such as an old broom, a hole-infested kettle, torn shoes, and children's discarded toys. It would be hard to say what was not there. Out of curiosity I focused my flashlight near the rubbish heap of Dr. Kalipad Sen's door. It seemed that something was stirring there.

When I looked closely, I saw my bird. It was trembling terribly. As I examined the bird, I saw that its green feathers were drenched with blood. Certainly some cat had struck it with its paws. I rushed with the bird to the Fulbaria Veterinary Hospital. The guard told me the doctor did not stay there at night. I wrote down the doctor's address and went to Sobahanbag. There the family members of the doctor told me that he had left to attend a dinner at his elder sister-in-law's house.

Such being the case, I returned to the Hostel with the bird. There was nothing much I could do. I took the bird in my hand and started calling to it, "Babu! Dear Babu!". He was still trembling. I did not notice when midnight passed. There came a moment when the bird gave a jerk throughout his whole body and shook his extended right leg. A feeble sound issued from his throat. Then his heart stopped beating. His feathers made a rustling sound in my hand. I sat as rigid as stone.

Since then I have been disillusioned about keeping birds. Now, when I saw the bird which Shushil brought me, the old crack in my heart began to bleed again. This was why I felt disturbed. Someone who keeps a bird knows at the back of his mind that the bird will disappoint him. It will die or fly away.

In my room I had an old plastic crate which looked like a cage. We put the shalik in it temporarily. The bird struggled to move within this tight prison. At midnight I saw that the bird hid his beak inside his wing and that he looked uncomfortable. It seemed to me that the bird was crying. I told Shushil, "Go to market and buy a large cage." But Shushil bought a middle-sized one. It was larger than the crate, but I could see that the bird was restricted in his accustomed movements. I said, "Shushil, even this cage will not do."

Shushil then bought such a huge cage that one man could easily sleep in it. When the bird was transferred to the new cage, he began to show his full personality. He began to dance and to move back and forth. He sat on the perching stick and stared at the wide sky through the bars of the cage. When he observed the flight of other birds, his heart began to pound. He attempted to fly within the cage, but his desire was thwarted when his wings hit the metal bars.

When disappointment and fatigue would overpower him, the bird would settle on the perch and ponder: "To what place have I come?" It did not suit him to sit there for long. He would come down and begin to peck at the moistened maize powder in a little pot. Then he would move to the cup of water. When he lowered his beak into the water pot, he would turn his head upwards in order to swallow the water. Dear God, what a charming scene! During his eating time, he at least forgot for a few moments his dreams of flying in the sky like other birds. He then took his seat on the perch like a happy bird. He fluffed his wings which made him look bigger than his actual size.

The lower part of his throat would swell out and he would begin to call. His initial sounds resembled simultaneously the rasping of metal pieces rubbed together and the hissing of a snake. This uncanny sound penetrated my ears like an arrow. Later a piercing, broken and tender music began to flow. It was so soft and sweet that it could make one's heart beat faster. When he finished his song of sorrow, he would begin to peck at his wings and to pull out small insects -- ants, and such.

I knew nothing of the early life of the bird. The bird seller did not tell me from where he had collected the bird and how long it had lived in his shop. I imagined without much trouble that my shalik must have lived with the other birds in some tight corner of the shop. Nevertheless, he may have found some consolation there. He was at least living in the company of other birds. They could share their suffering in conversation together. In the small shop where hundreds of captive birds passed their time, the shalik assumed that his fate was the fate of all birds and that the confined space of the shop was the whole world.

We placed the cage at one corner of my terrace. Every morning the bird watched the sun coming up over the distant horizon like a golden lotus. With the spreading of light the sky would come rushing forward and would strike the cage. The call of heaven would resound in the shalik's soul. His quiet time was then over. Through the bars of the cage he would see all the other birds circling the sky on their wings with tremendous speed. Then a longing for emancipation would stir within him. He would set all his feathers in motion in his desire for flight. But the metal cage obstructed his wings. In anguish and hatred he would emit harsh, piercing sounds -- the metallic scrapings, the hissing of a snake. When the edge of his complaints had been dulled by the mute bars of the cage obstructing him, the bird would begin the song of his suffering. The melancholy song of his captivity would flood the terrace.

There are three species of shalik. One is the gang- shalik. The feathers of its wings are tinged with black and white. These shaliks always move in flocks. They shout continuously like men in battle and they eat almost anything under the sun, including human excrement for which they have a special attraction. This kind of shalik lives not only in rural areas, but even in cities wherever trees abound. Gang-shaliks do not seem to mind city life.

The poet Jibananda Das describes in his poems shaliks whose feathers have fallen. This kind of shalik is called the bhat-shalik. It always lives near humans, whether in the countryside or in cities. It is also true that this kind of shalik is happy living in forests. When these shaliks take off in flight, the fluttering of their wings gives out a gentle sound -- a short, staccato sound. It recalls the grace notes in Indian classical music, in their very subtle yet clear changes of tones. This species of shalik is slightly bigger than the others. Its feathers are brownish red.

The shalik that Shushil bought was a jhuti-shalik, a crested shalik. Both male and female have a crest on their head. In some places this species is also called chandon-shalik.

There are many beautiful animals in the world. Everyone will agree that the horse is beautiful. Its legs, head, neck, back, and tail -- in all its parts the horse has such symmetry, its limbs are so harmoniously placed, that it cannot be compared to any other animal. When a horse moves extending its neck and when the wind stirs its mane,

the rhythmic lines which emanate from the animal constitute the magnificence of the horse. For this reason artists have enjoyed painting horses. You will hardly find an artist worth mentioning who has not painted at least one horse in his life.

I don't dare call the jhuti-shalik the most beautiful bird of all. Moreover I do not wish to displease ornithologists. Yet, I would like to propose that it is an exceptionally beautiful bird. Its whole shape is so well proportioned that once you gaze at the bird, you are charmed. Its tail and belly -- each has its own attraction. The neck tapers gradually and the head appears a little larger. Its feet are pale yellow and its beak is as yellow as a fresh turmeric. The beak, the head and two eyes are set on the head with such fine spacing that a kind of transcendental beauty emanates from it. The shalik's eyes are like black rosary beads, but in addition they have a tinge of whiteness; a flickering luster radiates from them. The most beautiful thing about the crested shalik is its color. On first sight it strikes the heart. If you mix charcoal powder with ash you have the color of this bird. The color of this shalik is just about like that. Should I call it "mixed-black?" When the bird moves about, a whitish glow radiates from this color, and this is the real secret of its beauty.

My shalik used to move about within its cage without stopping. Sometimes he would settle on his perch, sometimes he went below. Sometimes he sang songs with a melancholy tune. Sometimes he parted his feathers and put his beak under his wing. At times he would look through the bars of his cage. Pointing his yellow beak upwards, he would try to get a taste of the sky. These expressions of sorrow appeared to my eyes to be exceedingly beautiful. That is why I purchased the bird and imprisoned it in a cage. While trying to make a close relationship with the bird forcibly, I began to be aware of the fluttering wings of a bird of unknown name which was caged within me. I had been oblivious to the importance of this as if I hadn't noticed it.

"Don't you know it? Oh, my mind, can't you understand it?  
There dwells a bird in the cage of your ribs to whom you have not been  
introduced."

These lines from a Baul song developed in the soil of my mind. Again and again the human soul has been compared to a bird. In the ceaseless coming and going of my own bird, I sensed the shadow of a love tryst in the depths of my soul. I remain astounded with wonder.

The bird kept moving about in the cage. He did not rest for even a moment. I used to call him by all my favorite names: "shalik-pakhi" (shalik-bird), "manik-pakhi" (jewel-bird), "kalo-pakhi" (black-bird), "jhuti-pakhi" (crested-bird), "bhalo pakhi" (fine-bird). At times he would stare at me. Could the creature understand that a bird dwells within me? The poet Alaol used to think that on hearing human sounds the mind of a bird becomes infused with human knowledge. In his poem-novel "Padmabati" he tells us:

"Hiramon was his favorite bird.

It generated an eye in its heart on hearing human sounds."

Was it possible that my bird, too, had generated an eye in his heart?

One day Shushil bathed the bird with turmeric paste. When the ash-black of his coat mingled with the fresh yellow of turmeric, it took such a pleasant hue that it was hard to detach one's gaze from it. The more I saw the bird, the more I felt that I wanted to look at it. Mrs. Nawshad came to visit my place with her two children. The children were charmed by the bird. They begged their mother not to leave my house without taking the bird. In order to pacify the children the lady told them that on their way home she would buy a bird from the hawker.

But the children requested stubbornly that she should have to buy a bird exactly like mine; no other kind would do. Only then did Mrs. Nawshad have a close look at my bird. She was amazed. She saw that it was not a bird for children's play. This bird possessed something special. She asked me, "Where did you get this bird and what is its name?" I said I had brought it from the isle of Bali in Indonesia. Its name was Shubandrun. The lady said, "Doesn't this name sound a little Sanskritic?" I answered, "There is nothing to surprise you in this. At one time Indonesia was colonized by Indians."

From that day on, Shushil and I were caught in the fun of this game. Every day we would put a particular dye in a bowl and we dyed the bird. Some days he was blue, some days green. On another day he was brown. The dye changed hue when it was mingled with the bird's regular color. People would ask what kind of bird he was. Nobody could figure out that my bird was a shalik. Each day I would give a new name to him. Sometimes I would say that he was a bird which lived in the jungles of Venezuela and that I got him through a girl friend. People would feel jealous about my luck with girl friends. On days when I was in an especially playful mood, I would say, "This species of bird lives in the Kilimanjaro mountains of the African continent."

The bird became such a part of my life that it filled my days, it filled my nights, and I became unaware of the approach of night and the appearance of dawn. Even in my dreams I would call out, "Babu! Babu!." I would talk with enthusiasm to visitors about my strange bird. They were so annoyed, most of them stopped coming to me. One day, while Shushil was engaged in bathing the bird with a new dye in the bowl, in an unguarded moment the bird somehow slipped away from his grasp. It took flight over the five-storied building, passed above the electric poles, then over the tall eucalyptus trees. It disappeared somewhere into the blue sky.

I started to feel that a part of my breast was suddenly paralyzed. A void was created in my soul, as if air from my diaphragm had been forced out. When I looked at

the empty cage, I felt an intense longing for the bird. The pot of maize powder was still there. A cup full of water was still lying within the cage. My mind revolted. Why had the bird flown away leaving such a sure guaranty of food and lodging? How could this be? Had the bird gone forever?

I would try to pretend that the bird had not left for good. When its whim had been satisfied, it would come back and it would peck at the maize powder and lower its beak to the cup of water. Then it would begin to sing its songs of sorrow and melancholy. The creature to whom I gave so much love, so much care, how could it fly away, disregarding everything? When I woke from sleep and saw the cage open, a violent commotion stirred within me. The bird within my soul became restless. I could hear the flutter of its wings.

One morning I saw my bird sitting on a rod of the five-storied building. There was a gloomy look about him. I tried to convince myself that perhaps the bird could not completely forget me. I started calling him: "Babu! Babu!" When he heard my voice he took to his wings and flew away. He flew over the five-storied building and past the eucalyptus trees as he mounted towards the sky. I did not know where he went. Since that day I began to see the bird in different places -- sometimes on a rod of the five-storied house, sometimes on the top of the coconut trees, and sometimes on their branches. One day I saw him sitting on a remote branch of the mango tree adjacent to my window. Often I saw him wandering around in many places like a truant school boy. Only when he heard my voice would he disappear from my sight.

The bird was alone when he roamed near my house. Until now he could not associate with any other bird friends. The dye on his coat was still there. I think this strange color hindered the bird from being accepted within his own species. This was why he roamed alone. I had another idea. Since his birth, the bird had been living a captive life, so he did not have to worry about gathering his food. Now, in an emancipated life, he was unable to procure food, for he did not have the training for doing it. When his hunger became intense, his first memories induced him to move back to my place.

I started a course of action. When I saw the bird merely roaming about, I began to throw out small balls of maize powder on different parts of my roof-terrace. I also threw rice. The bird could take his choice. If he preferred maize powder, well, it was there. If rice, it was already provided. One day at about nine in the morning I observed that the bird was sitting on a wall of my terrace. If he wished, he could eat the food laid out for him only two yards below. There was no one at home. I was watching the bird through holes in a ventilator. I could see him looking in different directions to see whether there was any sign of danger. When he saw the cage lying wide open, he instinctively flew away. That evening I informed Dikr to come with his son, Roti. For quite a long time Roti had been asking his father to give him my bird along with the

cage. Now that the bird was gone, Roti could have the cage. That evening both father and son came and took the cage away with them.

I said to myself as if addressing the bird: "At last I hope you will not mind taking this food which I provide you now that the cage is no more." The next morning a gray-colored gerobaj-pigeon from somewhere flew down and began to peck the food like a war horse. I told myself, "Look at this! Let my shalik-child see this! If he does not eat, it matters little. There are many other birds who can do justice to my food." Since then, every morning, the gerobaj-pigeon continued to come. My nephew, Anwar, set a trap and caught the bird. At another time I would not have let this rare species of pigeon go, but after my shalik-bird flew away, I lost the desire to keep anything in confinement. So I fed the pigeon, but it did not come again. Instead, two domesticated common pigeons began to appear. I thought: "How foolish I am! I am throwing food to my shalik and the pigeons are devouring it." I thought the shalik was more foolish than I was. I told him, "If you don't have any appetite for my food, why do you roam around here? Why don't you go to a far away place so that I can not see you and I can be free?"

One morning I found two raj-gugu-doves pecking food on my terrace. Doves are cautious birds. Although they live near humans, they avoid them. Yet they get caught in traps. This is the destiny of doves because of their beauty. They have a peacock colored garland around their neck. When this dove hoots by swelling its neck, it seems that something is stirring in the depths of its memory. Now I could teach a lesson to my shalik-son: "Do I lack for birds? This time doves are coming. Next there will be others. I'm not bothered if you do not eat. The sky abounds with birds. They have come to know the taste of my food."

I pleaded in this way with my shalik-child for almost fifteen days. One day I noticed something remarkable. Very early in the morning I saw something moving under the tulsi plant. On looking cautiously there, I discovered a shalik, my own shalik! After such a long time my human life had become successful. My bird was able to understand my heart. This was exactly what I wanted. I would throw the food on the roof and my shalik-son would come and eat it. Accordingly I scattered some food. In the early morning the bird could come at its own sweet will. Some days I saw him, some days I did not.

Two rascal crows somehow passed the news around that I had made a secret agreement with my shalik. They thought that my shalik was getting food on pension because he had passed time confined in my cage. The crows were not at all ready to put up with this. When I scattered food, three or four crows would suddenly appear almost out of the blue and would shamelessly begin to devour the food allotted for my shalik. When my shalik approached the food, the crows chased after him.

I was caught in a serious dilemma. I could not chase the band of crows away. If I chased three, five arrived. If I chased five, ten would appear. Every day at dawn I had to



begin a battle with the crows. When I started driving the crows away, this affected my shalik-son as well. He still had his habit of being afraid of me. If I played no role, the crows would have chased the shalik to the other end of Dhaka city. You will rarely see any other birds as sleazy as crows. They made my life hellish with the harsh sound of their cawing. I could not decide what I should do with the crows. Had I owned a gun, I could teach them a good lesson. Since I did not have one, I was obliged to endure their disturbance.

One afternoon I saw that a crow was sitting on the wall of my terrace. One of its legs was bent. This was why it limped. I felt sorry for the creature and threw some rice for him. He came down. My God! All the crows of the world descended on my terrace. They made such a noise that they raised the roof upside down. Crows are a strange species of bird. They easily cheat their fellow birds, but at the same time they have an active sense of fraternity. When one crow is caught in a trap or on an electric wire, all the crows of the world flock there to express their sympathy for the caught one.

These crows now came to know about a weakness of mine. I had a special affection for the lame crow. That's why the crow people sent this lame one as their representative to me. The lame crow would come and sit on my wall. He would call out to me for a long time. Then, when I could no longer stand this annoyance, I would be compelled to throw some food for it. When I threw down some food, wives, sons, cousins, brothers, sisters, mothers -- all his relatives began to flock to my terrace.

While this was going on for some time, the lame crow mastered many tricks to get food from me. First he would cry out to inform me that hunger had invaded his stomach. If I did not heed him, then he would knock at the glass in my window. From the behavior of the lame crow, I came to understand why blind and crippled people in rural villages are considered to be enemies of our Prophet. When any guests were in my house, the lame bird would keep rubbing his beak on the terrace wall. He did this deliberately in order to embarrass me in front of my guests. The bird was telling me that he was very hungry and that I was doing a great wrong by not giving him anything to eat. He applied this technique to prove to my visitors that I was stingy. When I threw him some food -- whether to save face or because I was getting irritated by his impudence, he would begin to call his kith and kin in his crow language. I must mention here one good feature of the lame crow. He used to wait for me sitting on the wall until I returned in the evening. Whether he did this act out of affection for me, I could not tell for sure.

The crows blackmailed me many times. So I decided to close my account with them by any means. Today, rifles, pipe-guns, revolvers -- all these instruments of death are available on every street corner. If I spent some money, I could at least rent one of these weapons. I would not have to kill with it; merely firing one would do the trick. If the crows heard the sound, they would not dare to approach my terrace. If I could have stopped the arrival of the crows with the sound of a rifle, then the other birds would

also stop coming. The solution was clear: if I desired that my shalik should come every morning to my terrace, I would have to make up my mind to entertain all the birds of the sky. There might be disagreement and conflict among the different species of birds, but in one respect they would share the same notion: Where one species of bird is not safe, that place must be uncomfortable for other birds as well.

I have heard many infamous things said about crows, but from close contact with them I realize that people know very little about the actual life of crows. They condemn crows either on the basis of hearsay or from reading books. The sound of the crow's voice is a little harsh. This is true. But once you listen attentively you can hear sweet notes in it. The crow has many civilized qualities. After eating he promptly wipes his beak. Wherever water is available, he does not hesitate to bathe. Crows are very serious about bathing. They take a bath regularly in winter and summer, without any hesitation. The way a male crow offers its own share of food to its female partner is not only a sight worth seeing, but a matter worth pondering as well.

Crows comprise the majority community of the sky. There is no doubt that if you wish to maintain close ties with the smaller communities of birds, you must include the crows. Nevertheless I took a firm stand. Only my shalik was entitled to be the first to eat on my terrace. During this time no other bird would be allowed there. Even if he were the king of the birds, I still would chastise him. I used pebbles and sticks. Now the time came when I should make other birds understand that they were receiving food on my terrace because my shalik-son was there. They would have to abide by one main rule: My shalik must be the first to dine. Is it possible to apply human rules to birds? I was determined to try. For two mornings I drove the crows completely away. When my shalik saw my rudeness to the crows, he too flew away. Then, after a while, he returned. What else could he do? After all, didn't he feel hungry?

In the morning my friend Idris serves me for breakfast an omelet and four rutis. I eat two of them myself. The remaining two I tear into small pieces and distribute them among the crows. When I have the rutis in hand I go out on the terrace and call out: "Crow Association!" After calling this, I begin to scatter the pieces of ruti. Seeing the food, the crows begin to gather -- from embryos to old folk. When the distribution is over, I ring a little brass bell. Within a few days of trying this, a Pavlovian reflex began to take effect among the crows. So it was settled: When I call the crows, addressing them as "Crow Association," only then they may come in throngs. When the bell is sounded, they must leave.

#### **XIV. MORE ABOUT MY SHALIK AND OTHER BIRDS**

I have not finished with my stories about the crows, but first I have some interesting information about my beloved shalik. By this time his feathers had regained their natural hue. It was not difficult for other shaliks to accept him as one of them. An immediate benefit from losing this last trace of his life among human beings was that he was able to find a female companion. Each morning, with the disappearance of the last member of the "Crow Association," my shalik came accompanied by a lady friend. When I saw that my bird-son had found a bride, my heart was full of joy. Luckily his bride was a bird bride, thus saving me lots of money. If the case had been otherwise, only God knows how much money would have slipped from my pocket to provide for saris and ornaments.

Now, every morning with the light of dawn, my shalik visits my terrace with his bride. He does not come directly. First he moves through the world of branches and leaves like flowing air. Then, with his metallic sounds in a sharp key, he announces his arrival along with his bride. A melody in a tender mode begins to emerge from his throat. I start to throw some rice, keeping myself at a visible distance. I pamper him with sweet words: "My Babu! My Jewel-son!" Even after that my shalik does not feel at ease. I must move off. He flies smoothly down and takes his seat on the wall. He calls to his wife in the mother tongue of shaliks. When the other birds arrive, he cautiously gets down to the terrace floor. His wife also looks cautiously around before coming down. Then the two of them begin to peck at the rice and maize powder. It is not in the nature of these birds to finish all the food at one go. At intervals, perching on a branch of the mango tree, my shalik begins to converse with his wife. I have tried to copy the tone of shaliks with the best of my ability in order to have a conversational duet. The human vocal apparatus is a crude thing. How can it produce such delicate, refined and sweet sounds?

On the days when my shalik and his wife were in a good mood, they would come down to my terrace as a couple and eat. On the days when they had some conjugal quarrel between them, my shalik-son would fly to an almond tree and start producing hissing sounds. I felt that the couple was berating me. When it was noon with the sun straight overhead, the couple would appear again on the terrace. Again, at about three in the afternoon, they would return. I had to throw food three times a day. Sometimes a whole flock of shalik birds would descend on the terrace clamoring loudly. When they had finished eating they flew off.

Now I could become a little free from my burden of responsibility. I presumed that my bird-son had been accepted in the society of shaliks. I do not know whether any bribing system is current in the bird kingdom. However, I have an idea that my shalik-son bought his membership in the society by bribing it with the food of his human father.

Sometimes my shalik came all alone to my terrace, not even accompanied by his wife. He would sit on the wall and begin to sing. My heart would leap with utmost joy. I had the idea that my bird-son had come alone to pay a filial call. He had not forgotten me. What more could I expect?

One day at eleven in the morning two bulbuli birds were sitting on the wall of my terrace. I was astonished. Before that time, I don't think that I ever saw a bulbuli in the city. Even if I did, the appearance left no impression on my memory. The color of these birds is mainly chocolate brown. This color predominates, but among the majority of these birds, their coat of feathers contains a mixture of rough and smooth threads of color. I have called the earthy color of bulbuls chocolate-brown. Other people may differ about it. It doesn't matter. The female is slightly shorter than the male. All bulbuls have a crest on their head. On the back of the bulbuli, just below where the tail begins, there is a red ring. Here lies the real beauty of bulbuli-birds. I cannot ascertain at the moment what kind of red it is. This red color on the bulbuli's back contains such a soothing radiance that it impresses itself immediately on the mind.

Books tell us that bulbuls are song birds. If someone's voice is sweet and resonant, people say he has the voice of a bulbuli. I have also heard it said that Iran is the land of songs, roses and bulbuls. A poet, or a singer, whether man or woman, even a maulana whose task is to recite Koranic verses on the Prophet's birth date -- all these people are honored with a "bulbuli" epithet. But what a bulbuli's song sounds like exactly -- how to describe the song of these birds -- I cannot begin to tell you.

In my childhood I stole young bulbuls from their nest, but I never had the chance to hear their voice. I asked many people, "What does a bulbuli sound like?" No one could tell me. All were of the same opinion: bulbuls are song birds, but how their song sounds, here lies the difference between a real thing and bookish ideas about it.

Now, for the first time in my life I have heard the song of a bulbuli. He does not sing for long at one time. While he pecks at food, bits of song warble out from his beak. This song can be compared to the soft, gurgling sound produced by a mountain stream running over a bed of pebbles. The voice of the bulbuli perhaps contains some tones similar to "rishav" (like lowered *Re*) and "ghandar" (like lowered *Mi*) of the notes of Indian music. However, this is my own assumption. A bulbuli's song is a bulbuli's song. It has no equal.

I am indebted to my shalik-bird in many ways. He opened my eyes and sharpened my sensibilities. When I listen to the variety of melodies in the songs of birds, I realize how much human language is limited. I used to know so little! I was not aware that about ten or twelve bulbuls were living in the mango tree close to my window. But now, when I open my eyes, I find bulbuls flying from tree walls of houses, on the floors of terraces, on branches. How could I have had my eyes shut for so long?

walls of houses, on the floors of terraces, on branches. How could I have had my eyes shut for so long?

One afternoon, when the heat of the sun had diminished a little, a doel-bird came flying from the north in a visibly carefree mood. His black and white wings were glittering in the sun's rays. The bird began to peck at the strewn rice. While pretending to be pecking, he began to make a hopping survey of the whole terrace. Later he leapt onto the terrace wall and began to whistle. In the ensuing darkness his tender melody created such a magical charm that it turned the air to honey.

Perhaps it is this bird who sits on a rod on the next building and who awakens the dawn from its sleep with his tender whistling. On the other side there is another doel who sings a duet from an olive tree. Perhaps this is his mate. Many doels from all sides start singing before the crowing of the cocks, before the muezzin's call for prayer. It is impossible to distinguish, who is whose mate. Whoever listens carefully to the whistling of the late night doels -- whoever becomes engrossed in their song -- will have the impression that it is the alchemy of the doel's voice which gradually causes the frozen darkness to melt into light.

The whistling of the doels at late night is not the same in the morning. At daybreak a change in the contour of their melody can be heard. It becomes full of rapid undulations. In the afternoon yet another kind of whistling is heard. Before twilight the doel's song opens fountains of amrita, heavenly nectar.

Gang-shaliks fly about outside my house in throngs. They change their location from tree to tree. Sometimes they go down to the street in search of food. I have never felt kindly disposed to this species because it eats human excrement. In my childhood I stole a baby gang-shalik from its nest. I was duly beaten by my mother. My crime was that I had laid my hand on a dirty child of a gang-shalik. The beating was not sufficient punishment. She forced me to wash myself in our pond. An inhibition about this kind of shalik took such deep root in my mind that I could never feel comfortable with this bird. There is something ominous about it. I think the gang-shaliks are aware of this prejudice of mine. This is the reason why they fly around my house, but never set foot on my terrace.

So many marvelous things happen on my terrace in the morning, afternoon and evening! So many birds gather there and so many sumptuous feasts are consumed! Being themselves birds, how can the gang-shaliks resist all this? One day a flock of gang-shaliks arranged a musical session in their manner on the branches of the neighboring mango tree. I became adept at following the changes in pitch and timbre of their songs. Had I been fifteen years younger I would have engaged myself in creating a new musical art imitating the voice of birds. I regretted the fact that for so long I had harbored the idea that these birds are sinister. For instance, hens eat excrement, yet I relish eating chicken. Why are people so prejudiced against gang-shaliks? My heart was heavy with a

guilty feeling. I felt like begging for pardon from the shaliks. Would the birds understand? So I had to beg forgiveness from myself. I believe the gang-shaliks could somehow guess this change of heart within me.

However, one afternoon a stray gang-shalik flew to my terrace and perched on my wall. His body was clothed in black and white feathers. In comparison to his throat, the shape of his head was a bit larger. But, oh, his eyes! They were so liquid, so lustrous, so beautiful that it is impossible for me to describe them. The two lips of his beak were a trifle flatter than the beaks of other kinds of shalik. His beak, his eyes, his head -- all composed together created such an atmosphere that it calls to mind a beautiful woman with divine eyes when she has slightly moved the end of her sari back from her head. The bird stared at me with fixed eyes, then, swelling out his throat, he began to sing. At that moment my shalik-son rushed down with his wife. Instantly the gang-shalik flew far away. Perhaps I was not entirely to be blamed for this. There may be some quarrel between my bird-son and gang-shaliks.

One evening at sunset, when sky and earth become deserted, when twilight hues begin to emerge, at about that time, a yellow bird came flying down and sat on the highest branch of the mango tree next to my window. This kind of bird is also called a "kin-inviting" bird. The bird arrived so smoothly and perched on a high branch in such an easy way that his pose quite charmed me. In this solitary and soothing pre-twilight moment of the evening, the bird's essence -- his birdness -- became so manifest that I could not take my eyes away from him. The color of his body was of such a yellow that it cannot be compared to any other type of yellow in the world. Two feathers below his wings were jet black. The luster of his yellow color was especially prominent in contrast to this black background. The upper part of his beak was also black. The bird radiated a kind of beauty which was by its very nature so holy that if any sinner should gaze at him for a while, he could not help but remember his past misdeeds and weep.

This yellow bird had come suddenly. He took his seat on a top branch of the tree. With the same suddenness he uttered a sound. Then, tracing a yellow line in the sky, he disappeared into the darkness, who knows where, leaving the remnants of his sound within my mind. Cool waves came rolling through my chest. Sirajul Islam has written a song. Its first lines came to my mind:

*"The yellow bird of golden complexion,  
Oh, who has set it free? Who set it free?"*

An echo rose within me: "Who has set it free? Oh, who has set it free? Who? Who?..."

## **XV. THE SPARROWS**

Sparrows came at the beginning of last year. They came attracted by the tulsi seeds. And they stayed on. In size sparrows are not more than one and half inches long. They are such rascals and so discourteous that I cannot tell you all their misdeeds.

My first complaint against the sparrows was that they had violated the rules of humans and birds. They should have departed when the season for tulsi seeds was over. Instead, they chose to stay. Soon they became so audacious that they began to intrude into my living room. Near the place where I sit and write, there is a window and a shelf. On the shelf there is a picture of Rabindranath Tagore leaning against the wall. With a gust of wind the picture falls to the floor. The life of the picture is like the actual life of Tagore. Thus far it has survived many gusts and storms. Tagore is such a stubborn man, he will not leave, even if you would wish him to.

One day I found that the sparrows had started bringing straw from all over the world and they were storing it up behind the picture of Tagore. When I saw the mischievous talent of the two sparrows, I became furious. These rascal birds thought that once they built their nest behind Tagore's picture, I would not say anything to them for the sake of Bengali literature and that I would continue to watch this scene in silence. Just as charlatan Tagore worshippers have been able to perpetrate their crimes without notice, so likewise these sparrows were trying to fool me.

Finally I summoned Idris and asked him, "Can you see the bunch of straw behind the picture of the old man? Please throw it all away." Idris said, "I have a question that has been pressing my mind." "Tell it," I said. He said, "That old face is covered in a jungle of beard and mustache. How does the man find a hole where to put his food?" I said, "How he eats can be explained later. First throw away the straw." Twisting his body back and forth Idris said, "I cannot do that, for there's a baby in my wife's womb." So I decided the picture of Rabi Thakur would have to save itself for the time being.

One day I was startled to see a male and female sparrow copulating where they had positioned themselves right on the picture of Tagore. I decided I would not take any steps further. Tagore is considered a guru-dev -- a god among gurus. In due time he would punish both of them. Leaving the responsibility of justice to Tagore, I went off to Rajshahi.

I spent about ten days there. On the day that I returned, I met with a violent rain storm. From the airport I came home by car. I climbed up my building's steep and wet staircase to the fourth floor. I found my front door locked. My blood boiled from toe to head. I had returned from so far away and through such a storm only to find that no one was at home! No Idris, no Shushil, no Anwar! I went inside. I found everything in a mess. The rugs were drenched with water. Papers were flying out from the table to meet a liquid grave on the floor. I found the picture of Tagore floating in the water. The

nest of the sparrows was lying near it. Both the male and female sparrow were gazing at me with a helpless look.

I made up my mind. That day I would throw away the picture of Tagore and the nest of the sparrows. I hated to touch the filthy nest. Let Idris come. I began to change my clothes. Meanwhile Idris returned home followed by Shushil and Anwar. It was not right to display raw anger before young adults, but I shouted at Idris, "Where have you been?" Idris answered, "Downstairs." I asked, "What were you doing?" Idris glanced at Shushil and Anwar, then said, "We went to see a VCR 'book-film.'" I said, "Look at the destruction from the rain! You didn't think what could happen?" Idris answered, "It was a film with fighting. When the rain came, we did not hear it at all." I asked, "Why didn't you shut the windows?" He answered, "We left at about three thirty this afternoon. At that time the sun was shining brightly." I could never win an argument with Idris.

I pointed to the nest and said to him, "Please throw it away." He replied to my face, "Ask me to do anything else. My wife's belly is big with child, so I cannot throw out the nest. Inside it there are eggs with babies." Leaning down, I picked up the nest. I found that a living piece of flesh was stirring inside it. I said, "Shushil, now it is your turn. Throw it away." Shushil pleaded, "Spare me for now. When the birdlings fly away, I myself shall dispose of the nest."

Since then how many pairs of eggs have been laid, how many pairs of birds have flown away! Still the nest is lying at the back of Tagore's picture. By now the number of baby birds has exceeded twelve. Tagore has not punished them for desecrating the frame of his picture. The sparrows have now come to feel that they are allowed to fornicate anywhere. They do not care what I think at all. When I am busy writing, they sometimes sit on my shoulder. I keep rice in a cup on my table. They peck at it. When my meal is served, they do not hesitate to demand their share.

There is a black ring like a necklace on the neck of the male sparrows. They prove to be really scoundrels. From dawn to dusk they have nothing else to do but to continue their mating. If I seriously wished it, I could drive them away. I could certainly do so, but I restrain myself for one reason. These rascal sparrows comprise a sub-community in the bird society. If I take action against a particular species, the larger society will not accept it. I would earn a bad name. Because of my crime, my bird-son would not be able to show his face in society and he would have to stop coming to me.



## XVI. MORE CROWS AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

As I mentioned, I have more to tell about the crows. I never invited them. Moreover, those crows did not look on my bird-child with favor. In spite of this, the crows share two of my four breakfast rutis. The reason for this lies in their claims. There is a Sanskrit verse which says: "*kak chestay; bak dhyanang...*" "Persist like a crow; contemplate like a stork." In addition the saying goes: Eat little, sleep little and leave home; these are the five tokens of a student.

Don't you know the following story which we used to read as children?

*"There was once a crow who became thirsty. He searched in many places, but could find no sign of water. At last he came across a jug of water. The sight of the jug made the crow extremely happy, for he thought that he would quench his thirst by drinking water from it. But on coming closer, when he looked into the jug, he was greatly disappointed. There was water only at the bottom of the jug. There was no way for him to drink it. The crow did not accept his bad luck. He closed his eyes to think of a way out. He found a solution. He began to collect pebbles and to throw them into the bottom of the jug. Gradually a time came when the water at the bottom rose to the top and was within the reach of the crow. The crow drank the water to his heart's content.*

*The moral of the story is this: If you come across a difficult task and feel discouraged, don't sit by with your hand on your heart. With a cool mind, try to find a way out. Mankind is the best animal because he learns from other animals as a matter of course. So, when problems arise, don't feel ashamed to take a lesson even from a lower animal."*

Just as the crow in this fable from our children's book used his brain to raise water from the bottom of the jug by dropping pebbles in it, so the crows on my terrace exert equal cunning to acquire their share of my rutis. When I come out on my terrace with the rutis in hand and when I call, "Crow Association!," this works like a charm. Crows rush from all directions. They perch on the wall and on the slanting branches of the coconut tree. When I throw my pieces of ruti, the crows jump to catch them in mid air.

Everyone in the neighborhood watches this crow feast with eyes full of post-sleep wonder. For me this is a routine business, but people observe the ruti feast with keen interest. I offer only two rutis. The crows are numerous; naturally a good number of them are deprived. Those who do not get anything show their discontent by rubbing their beaks on the terrace wall. If there is any cooked rice from the previous night, I scatter it as well. When there is nothing left, I ring the bell. It is a last warning for the crows to leave.

The lame crow was a regular visitor. The poor bird could not catch food by jumping. In order for him to get his share of food I had to make a separate arrangement for him. The social bond and mutual sympathy among crows is well known. Nevertheless, they have no match for depriving their fellow crows. However, I found a few signs of greatness in the character of crows. The male crow without hesitation puts his own food in the beak of his female companion. At times I saw a mother crow sacrifice her own food to her young ones.

At this time I had a curious experience. One morning I found that my lame crow was not in sight. I asked the other crows, "Where is the lame one?" As I uttered "lame one," all the crows flew away together. But why? The next day, when I asked the crows the same question, they again took off. Is there some kind of linguistic jugglery between the word "lame" and the flight of the crows? I have an ambition to get this clear from a linguist friend of mine. So far this hasn't happened. My friend is an irritable person. He might think I was making fun of him.

One day I came out with my rutis in hand and I called out "Crow Association!" The crows rushed in mobs from all sides. When I glanced at my roof, I saw a raven-crow sitting there. Oh, what a delight! I don't think that I have ever seen a raven in the city. The raven sat in a corner looking awkward -- like a village person when he comes to the city. I threw pieces of ruti in his direction. The city crows hastened to grab the pieces from his mouth. I was distressed. In the same way city people snatch away the scanty food of village people. The next day I found two ravens instead of one.

Since then I began to see ravens here and there around my place. I asked myself: Could there be a food shortage in the countryside? When rivers flood their banks, wretched people flock to the city to save their lives from the grasp of famine. Was this why the ravens were flocking to the city?

The other day, when I gave the crow call, the crows came to have their meal. I finished throwing out the first of the two rutis. Then I saw that all the crows began to fly away with loud cries. The sky ahead became a sea of crows. I picked a quarrel with Idris, blaming him for an evil wish which influenced the crows to fly away without eating the rutis. Idris stared vacantly at me, "I don't understand what you mean by an 'evil wish.' I have prepared the rutis as I do on any other day. How can I tell why the crows do not eat?"

The next day I called the crows again. There was no response from them. Only three or four of them came with trepidation. They did not stay. Moving from terrace wall to terrace floor and from floor to wall, they took only a few pieces of ruti and flew away. The same thing was repeated on the following morning. I became furious with Idris. Surely he was mixing something with the rutis which was causing the crows not to come and eat.

I attended a lecture by a bird specialist, Salim Ali. In his lecture he told how crows do not eat food from a man who has earned his income in a dishonest way. He cited an example. After the death of a Hindu gentleman, his sons noticed with astonishment that crows were not coming forward to accept the pinti, the ritual funeral food. The sons were seriously worried and they feared that their departed father's soul would not rest in peace. The man's children didn't know what to say. The family status and honor were affected if the crows did not accept the pinti. An old man advised the sons, "Try to find out whether your father died without repaying his debt to someone." After much searching they found one man to whom a debt had not been repaid. The money was duly returned. After this, when the pinti was offered, the crows came in throngs and ate it. This is only a story, but it leaves an impression on the mind. I wondered: "Have I taken someone's money so that the crows don't wish to eat the food I offer?"

The next day Shushil came and cleared up my mistake. He asked, "Do you know why the crows are not coming?" I said, "It is because of that rascal Idris. He prepares the bread with an evil wish in his heart. That's why the crows are not coming." Shushil said, "No! Not at all! You are mistaken. Please look about you. Do you see how the jungle-crows are driving the crows away and hitting them?" When I looked, I saw eight or nine jungle-crows forming a group and jointly chasing away the crows wherever they were found. From that day onwards I began to observe how jungle-crows were circling in a group with the speed of war planes. Whenever they found crows, they would drive them away.

Now violence and terrorism had entered even the world of crows. A time might come when the jungle-crows would drive out all the crows from the city. Now the question is do others see the signs of destruction which I can see? Do others have premonitions in the same way that I do?

On seeing the aggressiveness and mutual destructivism in the world of humans, I had taken refuge in the world of the birds of the sky. Now even there I could see aggression and furious enmity between nations. So, what choice do I have but to return among humans to carry out what I have to do as a human. My existence is not a tree, not a bird. I am a human. For good or for evil, with pleasures or with disappointments, I must spend my life like a human in human society. I must come down to act on the dark stage of our human theater.

Still, I don't think that my life is totally worthless. Flowers have spread their scent in my heart. The rhythmic sounds and silences of plant life have played their music deeply within me. The fluttering motion of bird life over and over again has propelled my rational and emotional intelligence towards eternity. Flowers, trees, plants, creepers, birds -- all these have filled my life so completely that I have no feelings of isolation, no sign of loneliness within me. Everything resides inside of me. I reside in everything.

In a special way I am the child of my bird-son. What my bird-child has taught me no great book, no philosophical instruction, no guru's care could give me. Only by emancipating another being can a man emancipate himself. My bird-son is emancipated; I am emancipated. From our relationship amrita, heavenly nectar, comes flowing every day. The relationship created between my life and this sky-life, is it not like bathing in the amrita sumadra -- the ocean of immortal divinity?

**ENDNOTES**  
(INCOMPLETE DRAFT)

**I. A NEW HOME**

**[7] August.** Ahmed Sofa gives here the English name of the month. The Bengali months follow a different calendar from the Western one. This is explained in the note under Chapter xxxxxxxx.

The following para. may go in Preface/Translator's note.

The use of English words in Bengali dialogue is frequent. It is possible to approximate quite closely the sound of English syllables with Bengali letters because the letters of the Bengali alphabet are more numerous and more phonetically specialized than the Roman letters used for writing English. As in the case of the word August, common English words which have been absorbed into Bengali are not italicized in this translation; for example, the words *tabil* (table), *cheyar* (chair), *hal* (hall), etc. English words and expressions which represent a specialization or a social or academic affectation are italicized; for example *Agreement* (contract), *morning walk*, etc.

**[7] garret.** Ahmed Sofa uses the Bengali word *chilekotha* which the dictionary translates as garrett and attic. With the exception of a small, humble connotation, neither of these words are suitable for describing the top floor apartment where Ahmed Sofa came to live. Most buildings in Dhaka have flat roofs. Often one room or a few are added to the roof, also with a flat roof and often allowing some of the previous roof to remain bare. Ahmed Sofa's apartment consists of a few rooms on top of the roof of a three-storied building, virtually a small pent-house with a terrace along side of it. The word pent-house, however, suggests a luxurious dwelling on top of a high building. Ahmed Sofa's few rooms, sparsely decorated and filled with books, lie more in the "garret" category than in the pent-house one, according to the usual perception of a pent-house. Later in the text Sofa speaks of his apartment as a monkish cell.

**[7] people.** The Bengali word is *lok* which has a variety of meanings depending on the context. "Folks" was a good suggestion for translating *lok* in this sentence in order to convey the idea of an informal group of associates and intimates with whom a person often meets. "Folks," however, suggests a group consisting especially of family members. As is implied in this episode, Sofa's "people" are rather associates than family members.

**[7] not going to be possible.** Sofa refers to the fact that if on seeing the apartment, as his people suggest, he doesn't like it or if something goes wrong in the final negotiations so that he must go "elsewhere," this, he says, is an impossibility for him.

**[7] fear.** *ashangka*: apprehension, terror, fear, etc. Although Sofa does not wish to move, he does wish to at least see the landlord so that maybe the landlord would not accept him. In this way, the blame for a failed rental project will be up to the landlord rather than Sofa.

**[7] monkish cell.** *astanga*: resort; abode;...hermitage.

**[7] the landlord-saheb.** The title *saheb*, which in various forms is commonly used throughout north India, once had the meaning of "master," but is to be taken now as a simple expression of respect, generally addressed to a man already established in society for his wealth or education or both.

**[7] long broom.** The Bengali word is *jharu*. A *jharu* consists of a bundle of soft or stiff twigs bound together at one end. The type of *jharu* used for sweeping the floor has no handle, but to sweep walls and ceilings, the bundle of soft twigs is bound to a long, slender bamboo pole.

[7] **clothes rack.** The Bengali word is *alna*. Although many Bangladeshi people use cupboards for keeping clothes, they also use racks that are free standing on which to drape clothing, keeping it well aired, especially during the monsoon season.

[8] **paijama-pants.** *paijama*; literally, leg-shirt. The word generally refers to straight, white, loose cotton trousers with a draw-string at the waist.

[8] **panjabi-shirt.** *panjabi*. The word refers to the state of Panjab and to the people of Panjab, but it also refers to the kind of shirt worn there -- a long-sleeved, knee-length, collarless cotton shirt of any color. It buttons down in the front for a short length and has a pocket on each side near the bottom. It may have some embroidered decoration around the button opening.

[8] **prayer cap.** *kishti tupi*. A light cotton cap for men worn for attending a mosque, generally made of cotton and often embroidered. It is either round shaped with a narrow side or boat-shaped with a fold making a valley from the front to the back. In this passage Sofa speaks of the boat-shaped type. With the *paijama*, *panjabi* and *kishti tupi*, Sofa has described the stereotypical semi-formal dress worn by a well-established Bangladeshi townsman.

[8] **alms-giving festival.** *rojar id*; literally, of fasting festival; also known as Ramzan or Ramadan. The celebrant goes without food and water from sunrise to sunset of each day for forty days. The date of the festival follows the Islamic calendar which is lunar.

[8] **pan.** *pan*: betel nut leaf and the nut itself. This nut is chopped into small pieces and wrapped in a leaf of the betel nut tree. This envelope is dabbed with lime and maybe some spices. The whole envelope is chewed at one time. During chewing a red juice forms in the mouth which eventually is spit out.

[8-9] **dear landlady.** A loose translation of *bari-ali apa*, literally "house-owner-lady auntie," *Apa* is a common colloquial appellation to show informal, non-sexual affection for a woman, like calling a woman "sister" or "mother," or like calling a man "brother" or "uncle" or "father."

[9] **begam.** *begam*. A common title for women equivalent to "Mistress" or "Mrs." It is often added to a lady's name as an eponym.

[9] **From where will she die, sir? I have not married her at all.** *Mara jabe kothেকে? ekebare biye-i korini saheb*. Sofa presents this speech in dialect. The speech is one of many in the book where Sofa teases people bound to social conventions.

[9] **bachelor.** *bachelor*. The use of English terms is in this instance an affectation which Sofa enjoys reflecting. There are other such instances.

[9] **neighbors.** *paraparshi*. Sofa is commenting on the importance of reputation in Bangladeshi conventional society. See the comment under **bachelor** above.

[9] **Agreement.** *egrimint*: contract. The whole sentence in which this word is used is written in the Bengali transliteration of the English words which the landlord is here speaking. Of course, there is a difference in the sound of an English word spoken in a Bengali speech -- a difference which Sofa intends for the reader to "hear" as part of his characterization of the landlord as a government officer.

[9] **Section Officer....Ministry of Education.** *sekshan aphisar; ministri ab edukeshan. xxxxxxxx*

[9] **toilet-jug.** *badna*. This water jug is like a tea-pot without a handle or lid and is used for washing body and hand after going to the toilet. Sofa stresses here every detail of his few possessions.

[10] **butchering ground.** *baddhyabhumit*: Many activities in Bangladesh traditionally and naturally take place in the open not in a building. The word here may refer to the places for killing animals for the market and for the same places or places near homes where cattle, goats and sheep are killed for the sacrificial festival. See **Sacrificial Festival** below.

[10] **sandhya malati.**

[10] **jama-shirt.** *jama*: shirt, coat, jacket, etc.

[10] **terrace.** *chad*: literally, roof. Although the Bengali word means roof and Sofa uses this word in his own English translation, it is important for the reader to visualize the space outside Sofa's top floor apartment as a terrace to distinguish it from the roof which is above his own apartment. It has a low wall on three sides (north, east and south) with the wall of Sofa's apartment enclosing the terrace on the fourth side, the western side. Of course, the roof of the floor below and this terrace are the same thing, hence Sofa's translation as "roof."

[11] **come to earth.** *bhumishta holam*: literally, I became earthed. The process of birth is traditionally expressed as coming to earth.

## II. TERRACE GARDEN

[11] **doel.** *doyel*: xxxxxxxx (*Avatocarppus lacusha buchttam*, Syn. *Lakoochroxis Moracea*...)

[11] **bulbuli.** *bulbuli*: a red vented bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*). This bird is a song bird like a lark or nightingale.

[11] **shalik.** *shalik*: a kind of mynah bird (xxxxxx).

[11] **zhuti shalik.** *zhuti shalik*: a jungle mynah bird (*A... fuscus*).

[11] **gang shalik.** *gang shalik*: a pyed mynah bird (*Stumus centra*).

[11] **gu-gu.** *gu-gu*:

[11] **nona tree.** *nona*: xxxxxxxx

[12] **ishwar.** *ishwar*: the Hindu word for God. Although Sofa was brought up a Muslim and professes this faith, he has a profound understanding of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs and literature. Throughout the book Sofa shows his eclecticism in his use of vocabulary from different religions and his allusions to the literature of different cultures.

[12] **like an adopted son.** The Bengali simply says "my adopted son," but Sofa does not mean to say that Shushil was adopted in a formal sense of the word and that Shushil grew up in his house. Frequently a person may take special care of a younger person, like a Godfather or Godmother is not actually a father or mother, but is important in helping with the education and development of a young person -- a member of the family by association.

[12] **tulsi.** *tulsi*: a small bush when full grown with very small leaves and blossoms. The leaves are a dark green and take on a reddish tinge. The leaves are known for their medicinal value and the plant is held to be sacred by Hindus as a favorite plant of the god Krishna.

[12] **Shushil, aren't you a Christian?** *Shushil, tumi-to khristan?*: Shushil was born in \_\_\_\_\_ to Christian parents and brought up there in a Christian community. Sofa teases him about his interest in the *tulsi* seedling because the *tulsi* plant is so closely associated with Hinduism.

[12] **Syed Waliullah.** *sayed waliulla* (1922-1971): The first Bengali Muslim writer to address the issue of a modern outlook with Muslim society. Among his many works, he wrote a short story entitled, *A Tale of Tulsi Plant*.

[12-13] **noyontara.** *nayantara* (literally, eye-stars): a small bush when full grown with medium size leaves and small white or mauve flowers, depending on the variety of this plant.

[13] **lungi-skirt.** *lungi*: an ankle-length, cotton tube skirt worn by men for sleeping, for leisure time at home and for physical work. It is attached to the waist by gathering the top of the tube at the waist and tucking it into itself. *Lungis* resemble sarongs except that they usually have a plaid design of several colors. [give history of wearing *lungi*]

[13] **kodal-hoe.** *kodal*: a bladed tool for digging. It has a rectangular curved thick blade of steel with a handle that is inserted in a hole at the end and stands at a sharp right angle to the blade.

[13] **kirtans.** *kirtan*: a song in praise of someone. A multitude of South Asian, especially Bengali *kirtans* have been devoted to the god Krishna.

[13] **Chavi Bandhapadhyay.** *chabi bandhapadhyay* (xxxxxx): The best living *kirtan* singer of West Bengal, India. She was awarded the *Padma Shri*, the highest national honor in India, for her musical talent.

**Shri Krishna.** *sri krishna*: Lord Krishna is a reincarnation of the god Vishnu. He is a major god-hero in the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, and he is the center of worship of the Vaishnava cult of Hinduism. The stories of his mischievous childhood, his dalliance with cow-keeping young women, and his passionate love adventures with Radha are especially popular.

[14] **Anima.** *anima*: a popular lady singer.

[14] **Jaganath Hall.** *jagannath hal*: a hostel of Dhaka University for Hindu students. It is named after the god xxxxx

[14] **Chinmoy, Ratneswar, Pranav and Shamir.** *chinmay-ratneshwar-pranab-shamir*: Hindu students of Dhaka University. Their names are recognizably Hindu.

[14] **sparrows.** *chara*: sparrow. xxxxxx

[15] **Baishak.** *bosekh* or *baisakh*: the first month in the Bengali calendar. It spans approximately mid April to mid May.

[15] **Farzana.** xxxxxxxxx From her diction as quoted by Sofa one can tell that she has had little formal education.

[15] **roses.** Roses were introduced to Bengal by the Persian-Moghul rulers who ruled Bengal from 1207-1760. Roses and a white flower called *rajani-ganda*, which also has a delicate scent, are a favorite combination in Bangladesh for presentation bouquets. See the note below about **roses** and **tulips**.

[15] **"Black Prince," "kalo raj-kumar."** *"blyak prins," "kalo raj-kumar"*: xxxxx

[15] **shindur.** *shindur*: literally, vermillion. A red spot of color which is traditionally placed in the middle of the forehead by a Hindu woman signifying that she is married.

[15] **What is in a name?** *name ki ashe jai?*: literally, in a name what coming goes?," but a clear reference to Shakespeare. English classic literature is almost as much a part of Bengali education as Bengali literature. Here, however, Sofa's allusion is more for humor than erudition.

[16] **tulip.** *tiulip*: Like the rose (see **rose** above) the tulip is an exotic flower. Sofa hints at the history of invaders to Bengal. The rose represents the Persians (17th c.) and the tulip the Europeans (18th c.). Tulips need a cold winter for freezing the bulb so they do not grow in Bengal, but Bengalis are well acquainted with the flower through their knowledge of European literature and contemporary media coverage.



[16] to a chance misfortune of the gods or to the jealous conspiracy of priests. *debatar durbhagya na puroter irsha*: Sofa is saying that either the gods have had bad luck as far as receiving such a beautiful flower as the rose or priests have become so self-aggrandizing that they have conspired not to allow roses to be given to the gods. Sofa is poking fun at religious rituals and customs that are taken too seriously.

### III. THE APPLE TREE

[16-17] Kamchatka *kamaskatka*: a vast peninsular region on the north eastern coast of Russia.

[17] Greek pundit Aristotle...ambulatory trees. *grik pandit aristatal...manushke chalaman*: xxxxxxxx

[17] madhdavi-vine. *madhdavilota*: literally, xxxxx- vine: xxxxxxxx

[17] Rupnagar in Mirpur. *mirpurer rupnagar*: xxxx history. See map no. x

[17] Sultan. *sultan*: famous Bangladeshi artist, S. M. Sultan (1924-). Sultan lived such a wild life and travelled so extensively that he was less noted in his own country than the painter Zainul Abedin and others. Sofa was one of the first to realize the genius of this painter and to urge the art museum to display his works. Sultan's paintings were exhibited in Europe along with paintings by such artists as Picasso and Klee. He was widely acclaimed in Pakistan. Although in the present passage Sofa claims to have been angry with Sultan, he befriended him frequently and is an admirer of his.

[18] Mr. Azizul Huq. *azizzul hak saheb*:

[18] Mrs. Tamana. *tamanna begam*:

[18] Gulshan. *gulshan*:

[18] Dhanmondi. *dhanmandi*: literally, paddy-field. In the late 1950's and during the 1960's this area northwest of central Dhaka was developed into a residential area of planned streets and bungalows with a thin lake and park curving through the middle of it.

[18] Sabir saheb. *sabir saheb*:

[18] Guavas, lichees, kamarangas, shabari bananas, pineapples, round potatoes, shalgoms, cabbage and cauliflower. *peyara, lichu, kamaranga, shabari kola, anarash, gol alu, shalgam, bandha kapi, fulkapi*. Kamarangas are xxxxx. Shabari bananas are xxxxx. Shalgams are xxxxxxxxx

[18] Baby. *bebi*. This is a popular nick-name for girls and women. Nick names are used in most situations, even quite formal ones, rather than someone's officially given name.

[18] Kashimpur. *kashimpur*: literally, castrated-goat-place.  
xxxwhere and historyxxxx.

[19] tapasya-meditation. *tapasya*: literally, pertaining to the practice of austerity or divine meditation. The practice of austerity combined with meditation to attain the release of the soul from earthly bonds comes from such an ancient and important part of south Asian culture that even a south Asian person who might find such practice irrational and old-fashioned understands and respects the practice of *tapas* by others.

[20] Calcutta. *kolkata*: the capital of the British Empire in India during the nineteenth century until the capital was moved to Delhi. Calcutta was, and still is to some extent, the cultural capital of South Asia. xxx Sofa's work there xxxx

[20] **Bangladesh Biman.** *bangladesh biman*: literally, Bangladesh Airplanes. This is the name of the international airline of Bangladesh.

[20] **Joydevpur.** *joydevpur*: literally, *joydev*-place. Joydev is a Hindu name.

#### IV. SOFA, FARMER

[20] **Ganakantha.** *ganakantha*: literally, people's voice. The name of a radical newspaper which Sofa helped to found after the War of Liberation of Bangladesh (1971). See note # p. #

[20] **At the door of how many people...** *koto manusher duyare takar janya dhanna (dhanya) dilam?*: Literally, at the door of how many people did I give the hand-holding treatment for money? When someone asks for a favor from someone else, the person often touches or holds the other person's hand. The word for thanks is *dhanya*.

[20] **happen...happen.** *ja haoyar katha chhilo ta-i hate jacche*: literally, Which word (report) of (something) becoming was, that (word) was going to become. This is a colloquial expression equivalent to "Que sera, sera."

[20] **revolutionary euphoria.** *biplab korar prathamik josh*: literally, of revolution-making the first fervor.

[20] **There was no one before or behind, nor to my right or left.** *amar shamne pechane daine banye keu kotha-o ne-i*: literally, me before, behind, to the right, to the left, no one there was. As perceived in the order of the words and in the rhymes and measured rhythm of the sentence, Sofa is alluding to Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade."

[21] **Nawabpur Road.** *naoyabpur rod*: literally, Nabobs-place Road. This is one of the main north-south avenues of the old part of Dhaka dating back to Moghul times (16th-18th centuries). *Naoyab (nawab)* means a petty ruler, a kind of prince. It connects the docks on the Buriganga River in the south of Dhaka with Dhaka's business center in the **Gulistan** area.

[21] **Gulistan.** *gulistan*. This is a downtown area of Dhaka developed after the 1947. There is a large cinema hall called **Gulistan**, offices, shops and a field containing two stadiums. The name Gulistan means rose-place. It comes from a poem by that name by the Persian poet xxxxxx.

[21] **Shahbag area.** *shah'bag*: literally, the shah's garden. This area is northwest of the Gulistan area and was once a princely domain. During the 1950's and 1960's the largest hotel in Dhaka at the time, the Shahbag Hotel, became with many large extensions a hospital. A new avenue, New Elephant Road was built in the 1970's running between this area and the New Market area to the west. Across this road from the hospital is the large Bangladesh National Museum also constructed in the 1970's. The Shahbag area flanks the Dhaka University campus area.

[21] **International Hostel.** *antarjatic chhatrabash*: literally, international student-home or hostel. By the time Sofa was living there, this hostel was used for housing university faculty and other staff as well as foreign students. Sofa was living there as a Dhaka University fellowship scholar in the Department of Political Science.

[21] **Dhaka University.** Sofa here says simply "University" without specifying the university as Dhaka University. Other government supported large universities in Bangladesh are in Chittagong and Rajshahi. Dhaka University is the oldest in Bangladesh having been granted by the British in 1906 and constructed in 1921. It was founded on the idea that the majority population of eastern Bengal was Muslim and lacked a university suitable to Muslim culture. The premier university for Bengalis had been at Calcutta and served a majority Hindu population of western Bengal.

[21] **Zia Hall, Mujib Hall...** *ziya hal, mujib hal...*: student hostels which were built after the War of Liberation, 1971, and named after the heroes of that war. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is regarded as the father of the Bangladesh nation because of his leadership in demanding a fair election under Pakistan and when this was denied, encouraging his people to

revolt. General Zia-ur Rahman was the chief Bangladeshi military leader in the War of Liberation. After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur in 1973, he took over the leadership as President.

[21] **Museum.** *jadughor*: literally, magic-house. The full name of this large museum is the Bangladesh National Museum. It was built after the War of Liberation, 1971, and houses the art and artifacts that were previously housed in a small museum and garden on the north edge of the old part of the city. The collections were greatly expanded. The museum contains a large theater and sponsors conferences, drama and music performances, lectures, publications, etc.

[21] **Katabon.** *kantaban*: literally, thorn-forest. The area lies between the National Museum and the Dhaka University campus. Once a wilderness, it was cleared for the growth of Dhaka University, then over run with the frail buildings of squatters, many being menial workers for the University.

[21] **Shurja Sen Hall.** *shurja sen hal*: This student hostel was built in xxxxx and named after a famous Hindu professor of xxxxx

[21] **eggplant.** Sofa uses the Bengali word *begun*. This vegetable which grows well in Bangladesh is also called *brinjal*.

[21] **whom I call a sister.** *amar patano bon*: literally, my established-as-a-relation sister. Calling someone by a close kinship name, such as Brother, Sister, Father, Mother, Uncle, Aunt, etc. is a traditional way to define a close friendship which does not involve a blood tie and or sexual involvement. See the note about **adopted son**, endnotes, Chapter I above.

[21-22] **Habib.** *habib*: Habib's full name is xxxxxxxx. Sofa digresses here for a moment to explain that Habib was a good friend of his. After their marriage and the birth of three boys, Habib died in a motorcycle accident. Sofa feels responsible in the game of fate in which Shahana met Habib through him.

[21-22] **Rokeya Hall.** *rokeya hal*: a hostel for female students named after a famous woman xxxxxxxxx

[22] **Dhaka College.** *dhaka kalej*: xxxxxxx

[22] **Azimpur.** *azimpur*: literally, Azim-place. This area of Dhaka is just east of New Market. It is named after xxxxx

[22] **taka.** *taka*: the unit of currency in Bangladesh which is based on the decimal system. During the mid 1990's, there were on the average of 40 *taka* to a dollar. The word *taka* in transliteration is not pluralized with an /s/.

[22] **kitchen knife.** *batī*:, a heavy steel knife with a large curve at the end. It is held at an angle by a two-pronged steel stand attached to an oblong wooden board. The knife's blade side is upward, the curve being convex on this side. The apparatus sits on the floor and the food preparer cuts vegetables, fish, etc. pressing the food against the blade. This is the common tool for cutting food.

[22-23] **morning walk.** *marningoyak*. Many Bangladeshi townspeople who are not laborers make a practice of exercising with a walk in the early morning while the air is cool and the streets are less crowded. The *morning walk*, thus called from British times, is almost a ritual.

[23] **Gafargaon.** *gafargaon*: literally, Gafur-town. This town is xxxx miles from Dhaka in xxxx district.

[23] **Abul Kasem Fazlul Haq.** *abul kasem fazlul haq*. xxxxxxx

[23] **Pakundia Village.** *pakundiya mokam*: literally, Pakundia-compound. Places in the countryside of Bangladesh are identified by a variety of types of geographic and governmental division names. Sofa is indicating here the name of the group of dwellings of relatives. The group is large enough to call a village, but this does not necessarily include a post office, shops, etc. in the western sense of a village. The village is in xxxx district.

[24] **bioscope.** *bayoskop*: an apparatus with lenses and a light for showing photographs looking as if projected on a cinema screen.

[24] **bioscope-wala.** *bayoskop-ala*: literally, bioscope-operator. The affix *wala* (here, "-*ala*") signifies the person involved in something as expressed by the main part of the word.

[24] **Ram and Ravan...Hanuman...Sita.** *ram rabaner...hanuman...sita*. These are all personages from favorite episodes in the Indian epic: the *Ramayana*. The scene depicted is the fight between the hero-prince Rama and the monster, Ravan, who has abducted Rama's wife, Sita, to his Sri Lankan abode. Hanuman is a god-hero-monkey who enabled Rama to cross the water from India to Sri Lanka by captaining a chain of monkeys.

[24] **Chhiri Krishna.** *shri krishna*. Sofa reproduces the dialect of the bioscope operator by spelling *shri* as *shiri*. See the note on **Shri Krishna** above, endnotes Chapter II.

[25] **muezzin.** *muyazzin*: the chanter who makes the call to prayer from a mosque. In many mosques of Bangladesh today the sound of the call is amplified electronically.

[25] **so many soldiers for such a long time.** *hamesha tader shabkhane dekhte hoy*: literally, often of them everywhere the sight. Since the War of Liberation and the birth of Bangladesh, armed soldiers were kept in the streets by the government to guard against the Bangladeshi fighters who had not turned in their weapons, some of whom were against the government that was set up.

[25] **yogurt.** *doi*: milk curd.

[25] **doels.** *doyel*: ---- (*Avolocarpus lacucha buch-han* (Syn. *Lakooch roxis Moraceae*)

[25] **Provost.** *pravost*. The chief assistant officer under the **Vice-Chancellor** of a university.

[25] **Mohshin Hall.** *mushin hal*. This hostel was named after xxxxx philanthropist xxxxx

[25] **Suhrawardy Garden.** *shuharaoyardi udyan*. Suhrawardy was a leader of the Muslim party that became the Awami League in the fight for a Muslim nation independent of India as well as Britain. He was the first governor of East Pakistan when Pakistan was created from the independence and partition of India in 1947. The garden named after him is in the British area of Dhaka developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Where this garden now stands was once a meadow with a race track around it.

[25] **Raman Park.** *ramana park*. This park with its lake in the middle was developed under British rule in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It has many large trees and pleasant walks.

[25] **the mosque on Kakrail Road.** *kakarail masjid er gorai*: literally, Kakrail mosque's foundation. This mosque was built for a Bengali Muslim cult. It is a place of pilgrimage in constant frequentation. The devotees wear white pants, long white shirts and a white prayer cap. They arrive from all over Bangladesh carrying a bundle of belongings often on their heads.

[25] **chapatis.** *chapati*: a round, pan-roasted flat bread made from wheat.

[25] **dal.** *dal*: a kind of pulse which is boiled to form a thin or thick soup. It is eaten regularly with rice or, as in this case, soaked up with a **chapati**.

[26] **Asma Begum, wife of Professor Nahid.** *nahider bou asma begam*: literally, of Nahid the wife Asma Begun. Women retain their own name as a calling name.

[27] **kodal-hoe.** *kodal*: a hoe for breaking up the earth. It has a heavy, flat, curved metal blade set transversely to a round wooden handle and the tool is wielded somewhat like an ax. Compare to a "grub hoe." This tool has other uses as well as for digging; e.g., it is used by masons for mixing cement.

[27] **khurpi-spade.** *khurpi*: xxxxxx

[27] **New Market.** *niu market*: the name of a large shopping center or bazaar built in the 1950's when the **Dhanmondi** residential area was being developed. Small, one-storied shops are lined along two streets that follow a large triangular route, one street with its shops inside an outer street with its shops. Traditionally in Dhaka one kind of ware occupies a street or area. Selling different wares in the same place in permanent buildings as opposed to open air markets is a relatively modern development. Calcutta's New Market is a famous example of a large bazaar under one roof. These "Markets" cater to a relatively affluent clientele. Most of the goods sold in Dhaka's New Market can be found in the streets of the old part of the city at less cost, but New Market is central to residents in the newer parts of the city and is kept clean with prices are somewhat regulated.

[27] **Ali Akbar, our hostel peon.** *hasteler piyon ali akbar*. A peon's job is to carry messages and do other small office taska.

[27] **brother-in-law.** *bhairabhai*.

[27] **Jurain district.** *jurain*. xxxxx

[27] **Akkadus Ali-saheb, the hostel warden.** *hasteler oyarden akkadus ali saheb*.

[27] **volley ball court.** *bhalibal khelar math*: literally, volleyball playing field.

[27] **Vice-Chancellor saheb.** *bhais chyanselar saheb*: the head of Dhaka University. Vice-Chancellor is the highest position in a university.

[28] **restaurant.** *hotel*. Because so many hotels include a restaurant as well as sleeping accommodations, the term for restaurant is *hotel*. Dhaka's old city and commercial centers of the newer parts of the city have many small "hotels," many without sleeping accommodations, where office workers can get a meal if they haven't carried one cooked at home.

[28] **Maulvi (Reverend) Kuddus.** *maulavi kuddus*. *Maulavi* is an informal title for a Muslim religious leader or simply for a Muslim man known for his piety and erudition. The word is related to *mulla'*, the Arabic word for a school-master, doctor, learned man.

[29] **madrasa.** *madrasa*: a Muslim school or college.

[29] **he could skip all those years.** *ei e-to-gulo bachar pushiye nite paren*: literally, this so many years wiping away he could obtain it. If Kuddus could be an assistant professor, he would automatically be considered as having a doctorate.

[29] **waiting time in the grave.** *kabar ajab*: literally, of the grave the torture there. It is a popular belief that after death the soul spends time in the grave being beaten for any misdeeds by the Angel of Death while waiting to arise on the Day of Judgment.

[29] **the existence of the Day of Judgment.** *hashar nashar*: literally, Day-of-judgment-hudgment. *Nashar* is an echo word magnifying Judgement Day to a generality as if to say "the Judgment Day and such matters."

## V. PLANTING BEGINS

[30] **at-one-time farmers.** Sofa writes in his own translationa "heretofore peasants" although "heretofore" is not expressed in his Bengali text. However, the addition explains that the region of Bangladesh has been a primarily agricultural one. Urbanization and the migration of young members of farming families to the city for education and office jobs is relatively a modern phenomenon.

[30] **elegant shoes, pants and shirt, juto-maja-patalun-shirt.** These items of clothing are unsuitable for field work. Farmers are generally barefooted and wear a *lungi*. They may be bare-chested or wear a guernsey or shirt, depending on the weather.

[31] **sister-in-law.** *shvashuri*.

[32] **rickshaw.** *riksha*: a large pedal-driven tricycle generally used as a taxi, but often used to transport goods. The word comes from the Japanese expression: *jin riki sha*, literally "man-powered vehicle." People or goods are placed on the section of the rickshaw over the two parallel wheels while the cyclist pedals behind the single front wheel. The rickshaws in Bangladesh are made from Indian bicycles and are capable of carrying surprisingly heavy weights. (See Rob Gallagher, *The Rickshaws of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1992.)

[32] **pushcart.** *tela*: a vehicle like a **rickshaw**, but instead of a seating accommodation, the back part consists of an open platform.

[32] **Nilkhet.** See note in Chapter xxxxx.

[32] **Saturday.** *bishyudbar*: literally, xxxxxx. Since Friday is the Muslim holy day, work resumes on Saturday.

[33] **galda-shrimp.** *galda chhingri*: Galda shrimp, an expensive kind of shrimp.

[33] **juma prayers.** *juma*: xxxxxx

[33] **Friday is Allah's day.** *shukrubar Allar din*: literally, Friday (is) Allah's day. Ansar Ali is saying that this day is an auspicious day to begin planting.

[33] **farming and praying are equal.** *chash kora ar ebadat kora shaman*: literally, farming doing and praying doing (are) equal (one and the same).

[33] **malik-man.** *malik*: overseer, authority, manager, landlord, etc. This word comes from the Perso-Arabic root *mul*, meaning base, root, foundation, etc. The title *mulk* signifies chief minister.

[33] **our merciful creator and benefactor.** *allah gafurur rahim*: literally, Allah (is) xxxxxx.

[34] **puffed rice...mowa...scraped coconut meat...** *muri...moa...narakol kuriye*:

[34] **kathas.** *katha*: a measure of land, approximately 80 square yards.

## VI. THE INVADERS

[35] **Shahbag intersection.** *shah-bag*. See **Shahbag...**, Chapter xxx, p.

[35] **bustee.** *basti*: slum dwelling.

[35] **Gaptoli cow market.**

[35] **plum tree.** *boroi gach*:

[36] **kh<sup>u</sup>ashi-goat.** *kh<sup>u</sup>ashi*: castrated goat. This kind of goat is especially large. The meat is considered to be especially tasty.

[36] **Professor Lutfor Rahman.** *prop<sup>h</sup>eshar lutfor rahaman*: a long time professor in the Bengali Department of Dhaka University (b. 19xx- ). xxxxxxxx

[36] **Pathan soldier.** *path<sup>a</sup>ner moto*: literally, Pathan (soldier) like. Pathans come from Pakistan and are famous for their fighting spirit and ability. During the years when Bangladesh was the eastern province of Pakistan (1947-1971), Pathan men could be seen in the streets of Dhaka.

## VII. FLOURISHING GARDEN

[37] **month of Kartik.** *k<sup>a</sup>rtik m<sup>a</sup>sh*: literally Kartik month. This is the seventh month of the Bengali calendar. It spans the approximate time from mid October to mid November. By this time the rainy season is over and the dry season which lasts about six months has begun.

[37] **cleaning his teeth with a stick.** *d<sup>a</sup>nte meshoyak ghashte ghashte*: literally, on teeth ?stick rubbing. A good way to clean teeth is to break off a twig from a neem tree and use it for poking and rubbing the teeth clean.

[37-38] **like the knobbed heads of Sikh children.** *b<sup>a</sup>chcha shikher jhuti bandha mastaker moto*: literally, children of Shikhs knob bound on head like. The Shikhs are people who live mostly in northwest India and southeast Pakistan. They have their own religion based on the teachings of guru Nanak (dates). They grow their hair long. On children, the hair is made into a bun on the top of the head. The bun is tightly covered with a piece of cotton cloth. Adult men wrap their hair in the long cloth of a turban.

[38] **neck-ties.** *nektai*. Like the shoes, pants and shirt which Sofa mentions as the dress of men who not laborers, so a neck-tie is a symbol of this status.

[38] **cowrie shell.** *kanakari*. Cowrie shells were once used as money. In Sofa's English translation he says "penny" instead of cowrie.

[38] **the trust of my existence.** *ashtitver bhar laghab korar*: of (my) existence the trust diminution making. Sofa refers here to the idea that a person is born with the trust of his life to carry out, an idea which is similar to the Hindu idea of *dharma*. By working in his field and producing food, Sofa is working off -- i.e., diminishing -- some of the burden, the *bhar*, of his existence.

[38] **Dr. Khairul Millat.** *dh khairul millat*. xxxxxx

## VIII. SULTAN SCHOOL

[39] **Nazimuddin Mostan.** *nazimuddin mostan*. "Mostan" is best known as a journalist. xxxx bio and present work.

[39] **The Ittefaq daily news.** *ittefaq patrik*: literally, xxxx

[39] **Professor Abdus Salam.** *prapheshar abdul salam*:

[39] **salam.** *salam*: a short form of the greeting "*assalam mualaikum*" meaning xxxxxxxxx

[39-40] **farming enterprise.** *chashbash*: agriculture, cultivation, farming. *Chash* means farming and *bash* is an echo syllable. Many Bengali words are constructed this way to signify a generality, an abstraction.

[40] **Road to Life...**Anton Makarenko. *antan myakarenko 'rod tu laif'*.

[40] **amrita**. *amrita*: nectar, nectar of the gods, divine nectar. The word comes from Sanskrit and figures in the Hindu hymns and epics. Sofa uses the several times throughout the book, each time with a slightly different meaning.

[40] **Allah-tayala**. *allah-tayala*: Allah. The repeated sound in "*tayala*" magnifies the sense of glory in the word Allah.

[40] **Intelligence Department**. *sharkarer goyenda shangshar*: literally, of the government spy institution.

[40] **boti**. *bati*: a common kitchen tool. See **boti** in notes for Chapter xxx.

[41] **porters**. *minti*: one who works as a porter for carrying someone's shopping for them.

[41] **guli-danda**. *guli-danda* (or *danda-guli*) : a short stick used in a game. xxxx

[41] **ha-dudu**. *ha-dudu*: a game in which someone tries to catch someone within the time he can hold his breath.

[41] **city-wide strikes**. *hartaler din*: literally of a general strike the day(s). Political groups sometimes express their needs by encouraging an all day shut-down throughout the city. In recent times they are required to give notice ahead of time. Between the strike makers and opposing parties there can be riots. Otherwise the city is quiet for a half or whole day. Only rickshaws dare to move on the streets because cars and other motor vehicles are subject to being vandalized if seen in motion.

[41] **throwing bricks at the police**. *it patkel chhore*: literally, brick brickbats throwing. Bricks are a main building material in the city. As a rapidly developing city, Dhaka's streets often contain piles of bricks which come in handy as missiles during a **hartal**.

[41] **feminist**. *naribadi mohila*: literally, woman-professing woman.

[41] **seven generations**. *shat prajanma*: seven generations. Seven, of course, is a magical-mythical number.

[41] **"piece of the sky," "flower of the earth," "angel of heaven."** *asman ka tukra, jamin ka ful, shvarger debadut*: literally as translated. Sofa uses the Hindi particle "-ka" in these expressions for the genitive ending rather than the Bengali particle "-r" or "-er."

[42] **bodmash**. *badamash*: bad man, villain. This is a common word for all kinds of villains. It comes from the Persian word xxxx

[42] **Sheikh Mujibur**. *shekh mujib*. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is regarded as the father of Bangladesh. He led the party that opposed the way Pakistan was ruling its Bengali province. As elections were drawing near, he convinced the people of the future nation of Bangladesh to resist the pressure from the Pakistani central government to make the elections turn in favor of a Pakistani president although the majority of people were in the Bengali province. Sheikh Mujibur made a famous speech in **Shurhawardy Garden** in which he stirred up so much revolutionary spirit that the Pakistani army went into action, massacring thousands of intellectuals, students and other citizens and precipitating the Bangladeshi War of Liberation.

[42] **Shurhawardy Garden**. *shuharaoyardi udyan*. This garden already existed in British and post-British times as xxxxxx It was later named after xxxx Shuhawardy (dates), a famous Bengali leader during the independence movement from the British. More history.

[42] **General Ziaur Rahman**. *jiaur rahamani*:



[42] Sheikh Hasina. *shekh hasina*:

[42] Manna-*bhai* and Akhtar-*bhai*. *manng-bhai akhtar-bhai*: two officers of the Dhaka University Student Government.xxx current positions.xxxx

[42] Nilkhet. See Chapter xxx, p.xxx.

[42] porter. *minti*. See *minti*, Chapter xxx, p. xxx. Give Persian word in previous mention.

[42] afternoon and evening meals. *bikaler nasta ebong rater khabar-ta*: literally, of the afternoon meal and of the night dinner. The main meals occur around two or three in the afternoon and ten or later at night. A snack called *tiffin* may be taken in late afternoon.

[42] his mother and father, brothers and sisters, home and village. *jeno rasta tar ma, rasta tar baba, rasta-i bhaibon ghor bari desh geram shab kichhu*: literally, (It was as if) street (were) his mother, street his father, street his brothers-sisters, house home, country village. The coupling of two different words meaning the same thing occurs frequently in colloquial Bengali as a form of emphasis.

[44] polythene sheeting. *palithin*. Beginning around --date- polythene fabric could be bought by the yard in Bangladesh. It serves as a tent for squatters homes. A sturdy, water-proof roof can be made by sandwiching a sheet of polythene between two large mats made of tightly woven bamboo strips.

[44] the Sacrifice Festival. *korbanir id*: literally, of sacrifice the festival. This Muslim festival commemorates the Biblical-Koranic story of the prophet Ibrahim's sacrifice of Ishmael. During the preceding days, cattle, goats and sheep are brought into markets. They are decorated with colored ribbons, tinsel, and dyes. xxxxx

[44] *madrasas*. *madrasa*. See Chapter xxx, p.xxxxx

[44] *huzurs*. *hujurera*: literally, Your/Their Honors, meaning here the teachers in the *madrasas*. The word comes from the Persian honorific pronoun *huzur*, (your) presence.

[44] None of us wore this round cap. *nijera-o keu goltupiala hujur noy*: literally, no one of ourselves was a round-cap-wearer (worthy of a ) *huzur*. See *prayer cap*, Chapter xxx, p. xxx.

[44] Islamic Foundation. *islamik phaundeshan*. xxxxxxxx

[44] "March the Seventh." *shat-i marchh*. xxxxxxxx

[44] The Director, Yahiya-saheb. *direktar iyahiya saheb*: xxxx

[44] *maktab*-elementary school. *maktab*. xxxxx

[44-45] the Ford or Rockefeller Foundations. *phord kingba rakphelar phoundeshan*. These American Foundations were among the most prestigious foreign organizations assisting with the development of Bangladesh during the xxxxxx.

[45] Artist Sultan School. *shilpi sultan shikshalay*: literally, artist Sultan learning-place. See *Sultan*, Chapter xx, page xx

[45] Reza. *reja*. xxxxx

## IX. THE HARVEST FEAST

[46] **Jibananda Das.** *jibananda das*: a famous Bengali poet (dates) history.

[46] **"possessed peasant."** *abhibhut chashā*: literally, ghost-surrounded peasant. Sofa finds that this phrase of Jibananda Das expresses the mystery as well as intense joy of a creator's feeling when satisfied with his work.

[47-48] **Gofargaon.** *gaphargaon*. See Chapter xx, page xx

[48] **chandrabora snake.** *chandrabora shap*: literally, moon-viper or boa constrictor snake. xxxxxxxx

[48] **tendrils.** *daga*. See **tendrils**, Chapter xxxx, page xxxxx.

[48-49] **Tauhidul Anwar.** *tauhidul anayar*. xxxxxxx

[49] **Tamijuddin.** *tamijuddin*. xxxxxxx

[49] **earth stoves.** *chula*: stoves, consisting in this case of holes dug in the ground in which the firewood is placed ???  
xxxxxx

[49] **maund.** *maund*: a measure of weight, approximately 80 pounds or 40 kilos.

[49] **dal-lentils.** *dal*: a pulse like a lentil. Bangladeshis make a kind of thin soup from boiled *dal* which they pour over cooked rice.

[50] **Shohel.** *shohel*: zxxxxx

[50] **boti-knife.** *boti*: See **kitchen knife**, Chapter xxx, p. xxx

[50] **Mohshin and Surja Sen Halls.** *muhasin hal ebong shurjasen hal*. See Chapter xx, p. xxx

[50] **Mujib.** *mujib*. See Chapter xxx, page xxx.

[50] **Ziaur Rahman.** *jiaur rahaman*. See Chapter xxx, pages xx.

[51] **no wife for you written on your forehead.** *biye apnar kopale ne-i*: literally, marriage on forehead your is not. There is a Muslim belief that a person's destiny is written on his forehead at birth.

[51] **an atkura, a blocked-barren man.** *atkura*: childless, impotent, infertile, etc.

[51] **a General of literature.** *shahityer shenapatitva*: literally, of literature the army-lordship.

## X. GARDEN PREDATORS

[52] **...associated with the land.** Sofa is not only stating the hardships of landownership in general in the rural world of Bangladesh, but he is implying the need to aid impoverished farmers to keep what land they own in their hands.

[52] **Chittagong.** The local name of this city and district is Chatragram meaning xxxxx-village. It is the second largest and most important city in Bangladesh. Being a port city, Chittagong has a long and colorful history dating far back to merchant explorers from both East and West. Many people in this area were converted to Buddhism before the arrival of Islam. The Chittagong area has its own dialect.

[52-53] **Shadarghat jetty.** Shadarghat literally means main-landing. These *ghats* or landings are some of the busiest places in Bangladesh. They are the stations for the widespread river transportation and travel systems of the country.

[53] *gadha*:- a kind of barge.

[53] ... the record number...and wills. The record number is called the *khatian*. "R. S." stands for Revenue Survey and "C. S." stands for xxxx Survey.

## XI. SARADA-BABU

[54] *Tangail*: a town xxx miles ?N of Dhaka.

[54] *amra*: [give Latin name of this tree.] This is a fragile tree. An expression for a useless man is *amra kather dhele* meaning literally a ??branch of the *amra* tree.

[54-55] ...the god with whom Wordsworth conversed:

[54-55] ...*Translation*: This is the name of lessons in learning English.

[55] *atma*: literally self; soul; spirit.

[55] *param-atma*: literally beyond-soul/spirit.

[55] *Moshai Ramni-babu*:

[55] *Saraswati*: the goddess of learning, music, xxxxx. Her festival takes place in the month of xxxxx. She is represented as a beautiful young woman riding a swan and holding a *vina* (large lute of South India for classical music). During the celebrations, students place books at the feet of statues of Saraswati.

[55] *puja*: worship activity; a celebration time; festival.

[55] ...used to go mad. For an interesting study of madness in rural Bengal, read xxxxxxx.

[55] ...pond. The Bengali word here is *pukur*. This generally signifies a rectangular pond which is created when earth is dug out of a field to create the mound on which a settlement is built.

[56] *khoi*: This is a light food made from rice seed with the husk. It is put into hot sand where it splits and the shaf separates itself out. It is similar to "popcorn."

[56] *puffed rice*: The Bengali word is *muri*. This is husked rice which has been xxxxxx. It is similar to "puffed rice."

[56-57] ...the 16th of December, 1971. This is the day on which Bangladesh became an independent nation, having been previously called East Pakistan as the eastern Province of Pakistan.

[56-57] I wiped the dust from his feet: This is a ritual action of respect.

[57] *Sheikh Mujib*. This Bangladeshi hero's full name is Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He led the independence movement fro Pakistan and was the first President of Bangladesh from 1971 to 1975 when he was assassinated by xxxxxxx who felt that xxxxxx

[57] *Freedom Fighters*. The Bengali word is *mukti bahini*. literally freedom-army. xxxxxx

[57] ..."*Mujib-bad*" ..."*Mau-jib-bad*": The play on the syllables "*mu*-" and "*jib*" needs some contextual amplification. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman supported a kind of socialism which ordinary people nicknamed after him and used his name as

a slogan for his type of socialism. Sarada-*babu* objects to a name being used as a slogan. This may cause some bad luck to the man. He suggests that the "*mu*-" syllable in "Mujibur" be changed to "*mau*" which means bee. He explains that bees practice socialism by pooling their gathering of honey and sharing it according to each one's need. The syllable "*jib*-" in the name Mujibur can be used as a pun because the word *jib* means a living being or simply animal.

[57-58] **August 14, 1975.** The exact date of Sheikh Mujibur's assassination depends on whether the Bengali or the Western method of determining a day is used. Since he was assassinated after ???midnight, then, according to the Bengali system, he died on August 15, 1972. xxxxx

## XII. THE TAGORE TREE

[58] **...tree.** Sofa uses the Sanskrit word for tree when he wishes to give his thoughts about trees special honor. The Sanskrit word for trees and plants which is in the title of the book is *brikṣa* as spelled in vernacular Bengali ??? coming from the Sanskrit root: *brih/brinh* meaning to grow strong.

[58] **old Kantamoni.** The spelling of this name is actually *Ksyantamani*, but it is pronounced as written in this translation. The literal meaning of the name is xxxxxx, the "-mani" suffix being an expression of affection.

[58] **"Bi-ri-khi".** When the old woman in this anecdote addresses the mango tree in this way, she is trying to pronounce the Sanskrit word for tree (see note on **tree** above) to honor it properly, as explained in the text.

[58] **Ashar.** This month runs from mid June to mid July by the Western calendar. Its actual spelling is *ashar*, but it is pronounced approximately as written.

[58] **Shravan.** This month runs from mid-July to mid-August by the Western calendar. Its actual spelling is *shraban*.

[58] **corrugated roof.** In the twentieth century, the use of imported corrugated metal sheets ("C.I. sheets") for roofs increasingly replaced thatching for home owners who could afford buying them. The sheeting lasts longer, but rust holes develop if it is not cared for and the metal material radiates heat uncomfortably in the interior of rooms during the hot seasons.

[59] **"Dear crows....batches".** Sofa writes these lines in the dialect of Chittagong, his native area.

[59] **"Rain drops...at the sky".** The first couplet in this poem comes probably from a folk song which the poet Tagore has amplified into his own poem. xxxxxx give name of poem, date, etc. xxxxxx

[60] **police precinct.** The Bengali term is *thana*. During the xxxxx years the name of the *thana* coincided with name of the district ????. It was an important part of an address. Now xxxxxxx

[60] **TANK.** The Bengali word is *pukur* which means pond, but especially the man-made rectangular pond which is created when the earth is dug from a field to make a mound on which a homestead is built. The water table is so close to the surface of the land in Bangladesh that the hole fills with water.

[60] **zigor tree.** This is the xxxxx tree. xxxgive Lating name. describe.

[60] **Chaitra.** This month runs from mid March to mid April in the Western calendar.

[60] **Baishak.** This month runs from mid April to mid May in the Western calendar.

[60] **Kartik.** This month runs from mid October to mid November in the Western calendar.

[60] **...the decisions taken by the men...** Rural women in Bangladesh still follow this traditional behavior, although since the developmental efforts of foreign missions as well as local projects, women have started to be more independent.

[60] **fasting.** This is a common way in which a Bangladeshi can express anger effectively without actually using angry words or behavior.

[60-61] **inherited property.** Inheritance goes to the male members of a family first, but xxxxxx explain inheritance customsxxxx

### XIII. MY SHALIK-CHILD AND OTHER BIRDS

[61] **...Joseph...Caanan.** Stories from the Old Testament are part of Islamic as well as Judeo-Christian lore.

[61-62] **Baul.** This designation meaning literally "windy" or "mad" is applied to a non-institutionalized sect of Hinduism among mostly rural people who roam around singing about their beliefs in a characteristic style. The poetry of their songs is highly mystical and the style of their tunes is highly melodious including long held notes which fade off at the end. Their long hair and way of dressing in a long shirt, often yellow color, over a lungi or pyjamas identifies them visually. Sofa is comparing his youthful anti-establishment way of life to that of the Bauls.

[662] **large shawl.** The Bengali word is *chador*. *Chadors* are worn by men and women in winter time. Winters in Bengal are not so cold as to require heavy overcoats, but chilly enough to require covering the body with some protection. The *chador* is easy to drape and comfortable to wear.

[62] **fakir.** A *fakir* may be a mendicant holy man or simply a mendicant man. xxx///??? *Fakirs* are generally honored for their hard life and wisdom.

[62] **babu.** This word literally means master, but is frequently used as it is here as a term of endearment.

[63] **Kalipada Sen.** ??????is he alive, etc.

[63] **Fulbaria.**

[65] **gang-shalik.** /// see mfd's library book notes.

[65] **Jibananda Das.** Sofa recently wrote an long article about this famous ??????

[65] **bhat shalik.** see mfd's library book notes.

[65] **Indian classical music.** The music of South Asia is fundamentally extemporaneous monophony, allowing the soloist freedom to improvise as intricately as desired.

[65] **jhuti shalik.** see mfd's library book notes.

[65] **chandon shalik.** ditto

[65-66] **Baul song.** See **Baul** above.

[66] **Alaol.**

[66] **Padmabati.**

[66] **Hiramon.** This name literally means diamond-heart. Hiramson is the hero of the above poem-story.

[66] **Mrs. Nawshad.** ??? is she still alive

[66] **Shubandran.** This name literally means ////////// give history.

[66] **Sanskritic.** Sofa is deliberately using a name from Hindu lore as a slight shock to a middle-class, establishment good Muslim housewife.

[66]...**colonized by Indians.** Sofa is not merely stating a little history. He is reminding the housewife that there is a great deal to know about the world outside of Bangladesh.

[66-67] **girl friend.** Sofa continues to tease this lady with shocking references. Having a "girl friend" is a relatively modern, and as yet unsuitable poractice.

[67] **eucalyptus trees.** The Bengali word is///////// Giv the Lating name and histo. of these trees in Bangladesh.

[67] **rod.** Houses for affluent dwellers in Dhaka are built with brick walls and columns and beams strengthened with reinforcing rods. Often a builder will leave a house with the column rods protruding upwards in expectation of building another storey in the future. Thus house in Dhaka often have rods sticking above the their flat roofs. Some of these are bent or hooked at the end and a bird can perch on them.

[67] **Dikr...Roti.**

[68-69] **gerobaj-pigeon.** see mfd's library book notes.

[69] **raj-gugu.** see mfd's library book notes.

[69] **roguish crows.** ???ravens

[70] **...enemies of our Prophet.** This custom refers to a story in the Koran in which //////////

[70-71] **...rifles, pipe-guns, revolvers.** Sofa is not only listing the names of violent weapons, but he is alluding to the fact that after Bangladesh War of Liberation, gansters and opposition parties had acquired such weapons and were holding on to them, causing unprecedented kinds of violence in the country.

[71] **Idris.** Idris still cooks for Sofa and his guests.

[71] **rutis.** These are flat, round cakes made from unleavened wheat. They are a common breakfast food.

[71] **"Crow Association".** Sofa is, of course, making fun of the big titles which modern society creates for its institutions and clubs.

## XV. THE SPARROWS

[75-76] **sparrows.** See mfd's library book notes.

[75-76] **Rabindranath Tagore.** This is the Anglicized form of Rabindranath Thakur, often simply called Tagore. He was a faous poet, song writer, novelist, dramatist, philosopher and even painter during the British period in India. He is best known for having won a Nobel Prize in xxxxxx for his poetry written in English as well as in Bengali. Born into a high caste, highly educated and creative Hindu family, Tagore's world view is eclectic, but nevertheless shows the influence of Hinduism more than any other faith.

[76] **Tagore worshippers.** A Bengali Muslim poet of Tagore's time, Nazrul Islam, was equally talented as a poet and song writer but is less known abroad and even among Muslims often takes second place to Tagore. In this chapter Sofa alludes to the narrow, uncritical attitude of "Tagore worshippers" who overlook some of the narrow thinking of Tagore and neglect the fact that Nazrul is of equal stature, though less known internationally.

[76]...**old face.** The reader should realize here that Idris has had no formal education and that he knows little about great literary figures. He does not know that the "old face" is that of the world famous poet Tagore. (See the above note on **Rabindranath Tagore**.)

[76]...**a baby in my wife's womb.** Sofa quotes Idris's very words as he states a common superstition.

[76] **Rajshahi.** This is one of the large cities of Bangladesh from which the district takes its name. It has extensive university campus. The best mangoes are said to come from this district. etc.////

[76] **VCP (?R) book film.** Sofa lives simply and does not have a VCR which many middle class families in Bangladesh have had since the 1980s. Therefore Sofa's household in search of entertainment while he was absent went to a neighbor downstairs to watch a video film, sometimes called a "book film."

## XVI. MORE CROWS

[77-78] **kak chestay; bak dhyangang:** literally, crow in effort; stork in concentration.

[77-78] **...our childhood books.** The following passage is quoted directly from a children's book using the simple, but in literary (non-dialectal) language of a school book. The story probably comes from the *Pancha-tantra*, the Sanskrit collection of fables which are said to be the origin of Aesop's fables.

[78-79] **raven-crow.** See mfd's library book notes.

[79] **When rivers...the clutches of famine.** It is a common occurrence in the Bengali delta area for rivers to flood and change the contour of their banks. Consequently the fields belonging to a farmer may be eroded so that he loses land while across the river a farmer may gain in land. Often floods are so devastating that everyone in an area loses land and so must send family members to seek work in the cities.

[79]...**evil wish.** Sofa is admitting to his own superstitions, at the same time making fun of them. There is an implied action of revenge on Idris whose superstitions about childbirth kept him from throwing the sparrows' nest away.

[79] **pinti.** It is customary to offer food at a funeral, to ??? animals as well as humans. The story about the dead man who had a debt is typical of Sofa's store of rural stories.

[80] **...mutual destructivism.** The Bengali word is *hana-hani*, /// ??? from the Sanskrit root *han-* meaning to strike. The root is repeated twice to give amplification to the concept.

[80] **amrita.** See the note on this word in Chapter ???. Here the word is especially rich with connotations of divine super-life and transcendental pleasure.

[80] **amrita sumadra:** literally divine nectar ocean. See the above note on **amrita**.

## PUSHPA GLOSSARY

B:7	<i>nona</i> fruit tree
my people ( <i>lok</i> )	B:12
<i>asthana</i>	broom ( <i>jaru</i> )
mosque	seedling
gentleman ( <i>badrolok</i> )	<i>tulsi</i>
<i>nasta</i>	Sheyad Waliullah (Shaiyad Waliullah)
<i>jaru</i>	
B:7-8	B:12-13
clothes rack	<i>tulsi</i>
B:8	<i>noyontara</i>
<i>panjabi</i>	B:13
<i>kisti tupi</i>	<i>lungi</i>
<i>Id-ul-Fitre</i> (Ramzan)	<i>tulsi</i>
<i>pan</i>	<i>noyontara</i>
B:8-9	<i>kodal</i>
<i>apa</i>	B:13-14
roof, roof-terrace ( <i>chad</i> )	<i>tulsi</i>
B:9	<i>noyontara</i>
custom/tradition/rules ( <i>niyom</i> )	<i>kirtan</i>
<i>Agreement</i> (contract)	B:14
<i>bodana</i>	<i>tulsi</i>
B:10	<i>noyontara</i>
<i>beli</i> bush	B:15-16
apple sapling	<i>noyontara</i>
grape vine	B:15
<i>sandhya-malati</i>	<i>Baishak</i>
trousers	roses
<i>jama</i>	<i>tulsi</i>
verandah/terrace	<i>noyontara</i>
B:11	<i>halud</i>
coconut tree	B:15-16
<i>doel</i>	<i>noyontara</i>
<i>bulbul</i>	
<i>zuti-shalik</i>	B:16
<i>gang-shalik</i>	
<i>raj-gugu</i>	



*noyontara*  
*puja*

B:16-17

*chiriyawala*  
Nilkhet  
*shalik*  
Kilimanjaro  
Uruguay

B:17

Aristotle  
Mirpur  
Sultan, S.M.

B:18

Azizul Haq  
Tamana Begun  
Gulshan  
Dhanmondi  
Sahbir Saheb  
*taka*  
*kamranga*  
*martaman banana*

B:19

*mora*  
*tapasya*

B:20

Calcutta  
*Biman*  
Joydevpur

B:20

Ganakantha  
Tipu Sultan Road  
*Voice of the People*

B:21

Nawabpur Road  
Shahbag  
Elephant Road  
International Hostel  
Dhaka University

Zia Hall  
Mujib Hall  
Katabon area  
Katabon mosque  
CI sheet (corrugated iron sheet)  
Shurja Sen Hall

B:21

*begun/brinjal/egg-plant*  
Shahana  
Habib  
*Ganakantha*

B:22

Dhaka College  
*begun/brinjal/egg-plant*  
*taka*  
Shahana  
*boti*

B:23

*begun/brinjal/egg=plant*  
Gafargaon  
Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq  
Pakundia

B:23-24

Shahana  
Habib  
*taka*

B:24

Ninu  
Koel  
*chacha*  
*begun/brinjal/egg-plant*  
Revolution  
Krishna  
Germany  
Taj Mahal  
Ram  
Ravan  
Hanuman  
Sita  
*Sri*

B:24-25

*muezzin*  
*azan*  
*Saheb*  
*baba*

B:25

*doel*  
Provost  
Mohshin Hall  
Surhwardy Garden  
Ramna Park  
Kakrail Road  
*japati*  
*dal*

B:25

*begun*

B:26

Mrs. Asma Begun  
Professor Nahid

B:26-27

Koel  
Ninu  
*mama*  
*kodal*  
*khurpi*

B:27

*kodal*  
*khurpi*  
Ali Akbar  
*bearer*  
Zuraine district  
*taka*

B:27-28

*kodal*  
Akkadus Ali  
Vice=Chancellor Saheb

B:28

*kodal*  
Koel  
Ninu

*chacha*  
Maulvi Kuddus

B:29

Maulvi Kuddus  
*kodal*  
*paijama*  
*madrassa*  
*paijama-punjabi*  
*maulvi*  
*kabarar ajab*  
*lungi*  
*gumcha*

B:29-30

*kodal*  
*gumcha*  
Koel  
Kuddus  
*chacha*  
*paijama-punjabi*

B:30

*kodal*  
Ali Akbar  
Shahana  
Habib  
soil science  
Botany Department  
Ansar Ali

B:30-31

Ansar Ali  
*pan*  
potatoes  
turnips  
cauliflower  
*begun*  
*chili*  
cow dung  
phosphate  
white pumpkin  
sweet pumpkin

B:31

cow dung  
J/Zurain  
Ali Akbar

*taka*  
*pan*  
*taka*

B:32

Ali Akbar  
rickshaw  
*tela gari*  
Jurain  
Nilkhet

B:32-33

Ali Akbar  
Association of Fourth Class Workers  
Juraine  
street demonstrations  
*begun*

B:33

*tela-gari*  
dung larvae  
Ninu  
chingri  
*galda chingri*  
Shahana  
Sofa, Ahmed  
urea  
phosphate  
Dhaka College  
Ansar Ali  
Ninu  
*pan*  
dung  
manure  
*juma* prayers  
Koel

B:34

*muri*  
*muri moa*  
(Dhaka) University  
*katha*  
*kodal*  
Ansar Ali  
tomatoes  
cauliflower  
chili  
*begun*  
turnip

onion  
Ansar Ali  
Ninu  
Koel  
sweet pumpkin  
white pumpkin

B:34-35

Ansar Ali  
sweet Pumpkin  
white pumpkin  
Koel  
Ninu

B:35

*begun*  
University  
Shahbag  
lichee tree  
Gaptoli cow market  
*boroi* tree

B:36

University  
*khashi*  
Professor Lutfor Rahman  
Pathan soldier  
*begun*  
tomato  
B:36-37

Ansar Ali

B:37

Ansar Ali  
*pan*  
pesticide

B:37

*Kartik*, month of  
*begun*  
*chili*  
cauliflower  
sweet pumpkin  
white pumpkin  
*boroi*

B:37-38

turnip  
Maulvi Kuddus  
*neem* tree  
*lungi*  
Sikh

B:38

classical music  
*khurpi*  
*juli* pumpkin (?white pumpkin)  
*boroi*  
cauliflower

B:38-39

Dr. Khairul Millat  
International Hostel  
*taka*

B:39

University  
economics  
Millat Saheb  
Nazimuddin Mastan  
The Daily Ittefaq  
Professor Abdus Salam  
*salam*

B:39-40

Nazimuddin Mastan

B:40

*Road to Life*  
Anton Makarenko  
*amrita*  
Mastan (Nazimuddin Mastan)  
Katabon slum  
Anton Makarenko  
Intelligence Department  
Ahmed Sofa

B:40-41

*mintee*  
New Market  
*taka*  
*guli-danda*  
*ha-dudu*

Bangladesh  
*hartal*  
rickshaw  
Selim  
Mariam

B:41

Babul  
*pan*

B:42

Mastan (Nazimuddin Mastan)  
*jam* tree  
Sheik Mujib  
Surhwardy Garden  
*taka*  
Zia Rahman, General  
Sheik Hasina  
Students' Union, Dhaka University  
(Manna and Akhtar. See footnote about  
how the two leaders have joined the Awami  
League. One is an M.P. See Selim Ullah.)

Alamgir  
Nilkhet slum  
*tiffin*  
*mintee*

B:43

*toshok*  
Alamgir  
Babul

B:43-44

monsoon

B:44

polythene sheeting  
*taka*  
*Id-ul-Aza*  
hide money  
*huzur*  
madrasa  
Islamic Foundation  
March 7th  
*haq*  
Yahiya  
*taka*  
mosque

*maktab*  
Koran

B:44-45

Islamic Foundation  
Rockefeller Foundation  
Ford Foundation  
Bangladesh

B:45

polythene sheeting  
S. M. Sultan  
Nazimuddin Mastan

B:45-46

Nazimuddin Mastan

B:46

*begun*  
tomato  
turnip  
cauliflower  
*doga*  
white pumpkin  
*boroi*  
sweet pumpkin  
chili  
*atma*  
Jibananda Das

B:47

Riyad  
Shahana  
*begun*  
chili  
*doga*  
sweet pumpkin  
white pumpkin  
tomatoes  
*boroi* branches

B:47-48

Gofargaon *begun*

B:48

*begun*

*anda-begun*  
*chandrabura* snake  
New Market

B:48-49

Touhidul Anwar  
New Market  
*begun*  
tomatoes  
white pumpkins  
Ansar Ali

B:49

Tuhil  
Tamajuddin  
the University  
Begum Tomiz (?= Tamajuddin's wife)  
Shylock  
Sohel  
Sultan School  
Mastan  
*chula*  
*begun*  
tomatoes  
cauliflower  
onion  
pumpkins (*lau*)  
tendrils (*doga*)  
white pumpkin

B:49-50

Mastan  
*maund*  
*dal*

B:50

Sohel  
sari  
Tahid  
Tamizuddin  
Sofa  
Shahana  
Sultan School  
Katabon slum  
*bhai*  
*boti*  
Mastan  
pumpkins (*lau*)  
cauliflower

tomatoes

B:50-51

Reza  
Mohshin Hostel  
Surja Sen Hostel  
Babul  
Sheik Mujibur Rahman  
Zia Rahman

B:51

Tamajuddin  
Sohel  
Tauhid  
*pan*  
*atkura*

B:52

*begun*  
Chittagong  
*lttefak*  
Mastan  
Dhaka

B:52-53

rickshaw  
Shadarghat jetty  
*maleesh*  
*gadaboats*  
*jackal*  
"R.A." (?)  
"C.S." (?)  
*taka*  
*boroi* branches  
Sohel  
*begun*

B:53-54

*kodal*

B:54

Dhaka  
Tangail  
*umra tree*

B:54-55

Wordsworth

Sarada Shankar Talukdar/Sarada-*babu*

B:55

Sarada-ibabu  
*param-soul*  
Ramni-*babu*  
Saraswati  
*puja*  
banyan  
*pukur*  
Ali-*majhi*

B:55-56

Sarada-*babu*

B:56

Sarada-*babu*  
*khoi*  
*muri*

B:56-57

Sarada-*babu*  
Dhaka  
Pakistan army, surrender of

B:57

Sarada-*babu*  
Sheik Mujib

B:57

Sarada-*babu*  
Mujib  
"Mujib-bad" (Mujibism)  
"Mau-jib-bad" (Bee-life-ism)  
Dhaka  
Sheik Mujib

B:57-58

Sarada-*babu*  
Sheik Mujibur Rahman  
Ahmed Sofa  
*Maujib-bad*  
*Mujib-bad*

B:58

	Internatonal Hostel
mango tree	
Khanta- <i>moni</i>	B:61-62
<i>Shri</i> Hari	
Pran Hari	parrot
" <i>Bi-ri-khi</i> "	Baul
" <i>Ashore am gach</i> "	<i>chador</i>
Shravan	
mango	B:62
B:58-59	chili
mango	parrot
" <i>Ashore</i> " tree	Dhaka
crows	<i>fakir</i>
bats	" <i>pakhi-wala fakir</i> "
eagle	<i>Babu</i>
B:59	B:62-63
Ashar	Malaysia
mango	Kuala Lumpur
B:59	B:63
Rabindranath Tagore	Babu
<i>Ashare</i> tree	Dr. Kalidas Sen
mango tree	<i>jaru</i>
B:60	Fulbaria
<i>Ashare</i> mango tree	Sobhan Bagh
Tagore tree	Shushil
Ahmed Sofa	B:63-64
<i>thana</i>	<i>shalik</i>
<i>zigori</i> tree	bazaar
Chaitra month	B:64
Bhaishak month	<i>chiriawala</i>
Ashwin month	<i>shalik</i>
Kartik month	
B:60-61	B:65
B:61	<i>shalik</i>
Dhaka	<i>gang-shalik</i>
Shushil	excrement
<i>shalik</i>	Jibanda Das
<i>chiriawala</i>	<i>bhat-shalik</i>
Nilkhet	<i>pakar</i>
opium	Shushil
Joseph	crested <i>shalik</i>
Caanan	<i>chandon shalik</i>
	ornithologists

turmeric	Anwar
B:65-66	B:69
Shushil	<i>raj-gugu</i>
Baul	dove
	<i>shalik</i>
B:66	<i>tulsi</i>
	crow
<i>shalik pakhi</i>	Dhaka
<i>manik pakhi</i>	
<i>kalo pakhi</i>	B:69-70
<i>halud pakhi</i>	
<i>malud pakhi</i>	crow
<i>bhalo pakhi</i>	
Alaol	B:70
"Padmabati"	
Hiramon	crow
turmeric paste	the Prophet
Mrs. Nawshad	
Bali	B:70-71
Indonesia	
Shubandran	crow
Sanskritic	rifle
Indians	
B:66-67	B:71
	crow
Shushil	<i>shalik</i>
<i>shalik</i>	Idris
Venezuela	<i>japati</i>
Kilimanjaro	"Crow Association"
African continent	Pavlovian reflex
B:67	B:71-72
<i>Babu</i>	<i>shalik</i>
Shushil	"Crow Association"
<i>shalik</i>	<i>Babu</i>
eucalyptus trees	almond tree
<i>Babu</i>	
coconut tree	B:72
mango tree	
B:68	<i>shalik</i>
	B:72-73
Dilar (/?Dilus)	
Roti	<i>bulbul</i>
B:68-69	B:73
<i>gerobaj</i> (pigeon)	<i>bulbul</i>
<i>shalik</i>	Iran



rose  
*ghazal*  
*maulana*  
*milad*  
*rishav*  
*ghandar*  
Indian music  
*shalik*  
mango tree

B:73-74

*doel*

B:74

*doel*  
olive tree  
cock  
*muezzin*  
*gang-shalik*  
excrement  
*pukur*  
mango tree  
hen  
chicken

B:74-75

*gang-shalik*

B:75

mango tree

B:75-76

sparrows  
*tulsi*  
Rabindranath Tagore

B:76

sparrow  
Tagore  
Bangla literature  
Idris  
*gurudev*  
Shushil  
Anwar  
"VCP"

B:77

Shushil  
sparrow eggs  
Tagore  
sparrow  
*shalik*

B:77-78

crow  
*chapati*  
Sanskrit couplet  
stork

B:78

*chapati*  
"Crow Association"  
linguist  
King cobra

B:78-79

*chapati*  
"Crow Association"  
raven

B:79

"Crow Association"  
*chapati*  
Idris  
ornithologist  
Salim Ali  
*shraddho*  
*pindo*

B:78-79

Shushil  
crow  
Idris  
terrorism

B:80

*amrita*  
*amrita samudra*  
nectar