

1. Strange! I find myself turned into A cart. A bullock cart. Am I moving? But, to where? May be, to my father's house or to my childhood. Or, to tell the truth, I am ignorant of where it may be moving to. But, all the same, I have turned into cart. A bullock cart. A bullock cart in a plain without a vestige of any crop or with all crops harvested away, leaving behind no trace of stubbles. In fact, a plain with no end in any direction. A bullock cart moving forward or backward along a pair of innumerable possible ruts that cross and recross to form a vast maze. Ruts that lap and overlap. So I am not sure whether the cart that is me is moving forward or falling back. In front of me there goes down the sun or there comes up the moon. Here I can't tell a sun down from a moonrise. Because the orb glows immobile on the horizon facing me. A round full solid orb turned crimson. Were it the sun its lower rim would have worn off by and by against the grind-stone of the horizon and the sky in front would have turned murky in time. And if it were the moon its redhot saucer would have turned silver in time followed by a soundless touch less torrent of moonlight.

2. No, it is neither the sun nor the moon. Moreover, there is nothing anywhere to mark direction in this

plain without the vestige of any crop or with all crops gathered away with no trace even of stubbles.

3. The bullock cart is on the move or poised to move in this wilderness of a plain. Or it stands still and stark with all motion wound round its wheels. Or, may be, the cart makes imperceptible moves towards movement. But, sure, this cart has no driver. A ghostly cart. Nor does it have any passenger. A bullock cart without a driver and of course without any passenger is advancing or retreating towards or away from a burning hole of the sky which is neither the sun nor the moon.

Time was when I thought the cart would be reaching some destination. I never knew the destination before nor do I know it now. Time was when I thought it would be reaching somewhere. But I knew it never before nor do I know now where this somewhere might lie. Doubt has now arisen as to whether what I presumed to be travelling was really travelling or not. For I find myself a lonely cart without a driver or passenger in a wilderness facing what is neither the sun nor the moon.

4. A gap in consciousness. Then it whistled faintly from far within me.

5. And a toy engine with tiny bogies trailing behind comes chug chug out of a tunnel. Ah, I am myself the train. But where am I racing to? To my father's house or to my childhood? I don't know. I am not even sure as to whether the tunnel runs from inside out or from outside in. But anyhow I carry the delighted feeling of having seen the wonder at the far end of this tunnel. A wonder that might have spread its fans wide with spangles of delight glowing on its feathers. But I can't name the wonder. For I can't name anything whatsoever. Whatever catches my eye or mind takes flight with outspread wings before I can name it. But where is the train racing to? It may not be moving at all. For I feel the pistons yielding thrust to the wheels playing frantically and the glistening wheels are moving so fast that they have become transparent, even evanescent. But may be I have not moved at all.

6. For doubt has now arisen as to whether what I presumed to be travelling was really travelling or not. May be I have had my wheels turning at fantastic speeds at the same spot as ever. But then what of the

tunnel? What of the wonder looming at its end? What of the faint whistle from within?

7. The faint whistle that came from far within me woke me up and I found in front of me at a height the measure of a man a small four-cornered window the sort of a void eye, the only eye of this my only room.

8. The window was barred with straight rods vertically set. Outside a green twig of a small tree hesitated to grow through it. It was a twig of a small stunted ficus indica that spread its roots along the invisible side of the sill. Some of these roots snaked over the frame to sneak into a crevice this side of the wall. And in the frame there hang the moon a round slice of cheese melting away at the rim. Against this slice of light the bars looked all the bleaker like ribs of a shadow. Suddenly the scene framed by the window appeared to be a blue green iridescent spangle in the peacock's fan spread out at the far end of the tunnel of my dream. It seemed now as if the peacock curved its fan forward to embrace me.

Have I been dreaming? I don't really know if I was awake or asleep when I saw the vision. May be I

ever hesitate at the threshold between dream and the waking state.

The old woman or my land lady who sells me upkeep commonly says that I never fall asleep but sit up all night. Nights the old hag stand outside the door and softly rattle the door rings. Asked why should she ring at dead of night she says it is to find out if I was asleep or sitting up. To return to what I was thinking I don't sleep, for all night visions flit by before my eyes, shut or unshut, asleep or awake. But why should I ever remain on the look out for them?

If God were on the lookout He would surely have found a pair of eyes with wide open lids down there in the deep darkness below Him. But these my eyes open or closed do not find him though they remain set on Him. God the mother rocks the sun and the stars, the men and the beasts to fall lull them into sleep patiently waiting to put out light once they drop into sleep. But the beasts and the men, and among them I myself, keep our bleared eyes fixed on what might be the mother's face, lest she switches off all light and leave us. It is this fear that forces my eyes to remain

wide-open outward as well as inward. My eyes- a pair of wide open unlinking eyes-eyes to which the whole of me has shrunk, remain watching anxious lest the universe turns dark and life subsides. Lest darkness explodes and engulfs everything. Yes, I am on my guard with eyes open against this fearful end.

It is quite a time I have been keeping my eyes open. For the moon that shone like a topaz iris in the square eye of the window has since disappeared. And the quadrangle has turned deep blue, a square hole into the distance where in their wisps of milky white mists tell a sky. My eyes slip below the window where the plaster has peeled off the wall. I doubt if the wall ever had any plaster here. The old woman, I remember, once told me that it had plaster when I moved in and had since peeled off owing to stalinization that started with my living here. I am not sure if I am not the cause of this salinization, for it is long since I identified this small room with walls peeling off and mildewed at places with what might be my own shell. In fact this room acts as a sheath for me, a second sheath besides the sheath of a body. Not a sheath like a shirt or

mackintosh. It seems to be a part of skin, a second ectoderm.

To return to what I had been talking of a moment ago, of course to myself. Sure, I am ever dissatisfied with a little talk. For talking to myself is the scaffolding on which my being stands. I find in front of me a piece of bare wall at a height the measure of my hand from the floor and find the bricks there swollen (as my joints) into flocculent masses of reddish powder. By sight alone I can judge the fineness of the grains of the brick powder that, I am sure, must have the feel of pollens. Yes, pollens of flowers I might have known but have forgotten now. May be they would feel like velvet of some colour. Velvets of different colours are different to the feel.

While I was caressing with this particular feel, my surroundings slowly underwent a transformation. The tiny bulb of zero watt above the door way inside turned into a chandelier of thousand scintillating prisms and the walls on all sides slowly trend into wavy curtains of orimson hanging from the ceiling to the floor which had turned marble to glisten in this

light. Others would certainly shake their heads as the old woman would have surely done if they or she knew of this my vision. I know that my vision is and it is more than me. My mind or whatever it is dwells in me like the bumble bee of the fairy tale I heard in boyhood, the bee lying still because of full satiation in the golden casket at the bottom of the lake in the fairy land. And this my room becomes such a casket all unawares. When it becomes so I live here without anxiety and it can be exchanged for any other room. For at that time all rooms become replicas of this casket. And I build in all space round me in its image. That is, the real abode where I live lies within me. And I can carry it out at will and place it wherever I like. I can place it either in dream or in the waking state. Because I am free, absolutely free. As there is hardly any fruit without a rind so there should hardly be any man without such a casket of abode in his fairy land. Everybody must have his own fairy land. As a rind accompanies a fruit from its birth to death so this shell of a room, I presume, is constant for a man once born till his death. A rind around flesh with one or more embedded seed. Such is fruit. A bark, some flesh and one or more of Kernels



that I don't know is a man. This room, with me within  
and my kernel is just a fruit.

This room illuminated with thousand lamps with walls covered with red velvet hangings and floor turned marble has been fashioned, I believe, out of my by the kernel within. And this kernel can fashion it out wherever in place or time I may be.

Well, there's somebody there outside pecking at this my rind. It is night and may be it is a bat pecking at a fruit and the hard rind answers with a hollow wooden sound. And the beak of the bird gets no access to the meat within. I may be mistaken. The sound is not that of hard pecking but of a rattle of high frequency. Yes, it is a ring on the other side of the door that is a stir. But would that rattling make the door open? No, I refuse to open it. I have myself had rung at numerous doors but they all had remained shut. Take for instance, the door at the far end of a dream of mine. A flight of three steps led to that door. The lowest step was of black marble, the next of lapis lazuli and the next higher the last was shining silver, in fact, made of some metal or so brighter than silver, in fact, made of some metal or so brighten than silver. A flight of three steps only? Or of several steps? The number is irrelevant and since there is no arithmetic in dream I

took the number to be three and no more. This narrow door leads further away to a colossal hartal with an arch perhaps made of stone the colour of ripe pomegranate seeds. A hartal so high that I couldn't reach it out to its arch though I stood up on my own head seventy times in succession. The two leaves of the gate door were made of steel-coloured stone or of stone-coloured steel. And the gate door was shut. At the height the measure of myself there were two huge rings of brass or bellmetal or gold and I shook the rings with all my force. Am I still shaking them? For there is a thunderous sound. But it is like and echo. May be, it is the echo of the sound I actually produce on the door rings, multiplied thousand fold (I am reminded though that a dream has no arithmetic) through reflection from huge unseen objects on the far side of this colossal gate. As if the sound hits against numerous blocks of granite of manifold colours and then turns back replete with all the forces of granite and the ring of all colours. Still the gate door remains shut. It doesn't open.

Again there is a rattling ring. No, I wouldn't open my door. Why should I open it upon any nondescript knock? In the world within and without

knocks beat on innumerable doors night and day, round the clock. Some knocks produce sound and some silence. Once upon a time I saw sun light knock on the yellow-green leaves on the furthest branch of an evergreen deodar on a hillock I knew so well and heard the sound of the knock reverberate in me.

My heart knows this hillock is a permanent landmark in the landscape in the image of which space organizes itself around me. And the fine counts of my life's yarn have been spun in eight of this hillock. I wind and unwind this on my spool though I weave nothing in the end.

Once again I am face to face with the first rays of a day break the rays that knock on the yellow green leaves on the furthest twig of the only deodar on the hillock the indispensable promontory in my own landscape. Once again I hear the drip of rain drops knocking on the soil below and the swishing of passionate wind knocking the sea into waves. Yes I see them I hear them and also smell them the deodar, the rain, the sea and even the light. There they come the sight, the sound, and the smell, as if on foot, enter into

me and a stand there inside me inviolable forever. At times the light eternalized in me knocks at the leaves of deodar equally eternalized within, and these knocks produce flashes on the golden wristlets on her forearms. And the ever present rain drops drip on the soil below and the wind imprisoned within soughs and soughs and soughs increasingly. And sometimes shakes the rings on the door closing in upon the dream.

And here's a rattle on the door rings. No, I am not going to open the door. It rattles again. I wont open the door. No, never. The metal goes on clanging Louder and Louder. But, I am not going to open, for I myself have rung no less clangorously the rings on innumerable doors but they had all kept shut. My fingers have grown warty through such useless effort. But, startled at this sound the velvet curtains feel and melted, the chandelier of thousand prisms fled and the marble at my feet yielded place to blotchy cement. And the dream peacock who closed about me with outspread fan took fright, folded its fan and stalked away.

No, somebody on the other side stalks upto the door. The old woman is not to be deterred. She goes on rattling the door rings. I shout from inside, “look here, I am right awake”. But she does not hear, for the clang continues. I shout again at the top of my voice, “Stop it, I aint asleep”. She must have heard. For a few moments, silence drips as water from a hole. Suddenly I hear the old women a stalk away from the other side of the closed door laughing a jackal’s laugh-yap, yap, yap!

Yap, yap, yap! I recall I heard this howl the other day in a cremation ground by night when a company of jackals ran past me almost brushing against my shins. They did not flee with their bodies brushing against my ice-cold shins. They must have in fact been running to rally round a pyre at the water’s edge. It was night by a river. The night hugging the river was puzzled by the moon in the sky. Till that instant it had plagued and puzzled me in which quarters of the sky the moon had stood at the time of my birth. In a flash I knew that the moon must have occupied at the time of my birth the very quarters of the sky it did on that night when the jackals raced howling around

that pyre. Yes, somehow I vaguely recall as if on my release from the womb (release from the womb is a mere fiction to me) I looked around to find a moon returning my very first gaze through the chinks of a mudhut's thatch. Below which I might have laid just born, as they say. It must have been this same moon at this same quarter of the sky, because whenever I set my eyes on this moon in this quarter like swimming up the sky. I feel something glowing and globe-like swim out of what may be my own depth. And that moon must have been seen through chinks in a mud-hut, because some such thing as light or moonlight seems to seep sometimes through what must be chinks in my own shell which otherwise feels dumb and opaque like mud.

Be that as it may. The truth is that there was moon in the sky. And I was there like painted in the scene standing on my feet or, may be, leaning on something erect or may be seated or lying prone. Anyhow, I was there. I was there on a sand mound by the bank of a river. Yes, I recall the vision distinctly or the vision itself recalls me in all its luridness. The sandy bank rolls abruptly down to the water's edge. And I see the moon in the sky that looms in the river.

The river's water with its body smeared with the moon very finely ground prowls forward, ha, towards me, may towards a smoldering pyre, developing while advancing numerous pseudopodia like a huge amoeba or a glassy jelly fish. The moon has been crushed into innumerable fragments in the body of this jelly fish, but it appears incapable of digesting the moon. Does the water twist and turn to digest the moon inside? Or it just wants to lick the pyre? Or me?

The distance between me and the pyre is actually far from short. It might require quite a time if I began measuring this distance laying myself prostrate as a log a number of times in succession. What would be the numbers of such prostrations, I wonder. Nor do I know what time this measurement would take. Time? I don't really care reckoning time. I measure time by my burnings with bungers. When after a period of numbness fresh hunger flares up and my body begins burning I feel behind me a stretch of what I feel be time.

On a stretch of the river's bank a company of jackals races howling yap, yap, yap, past a pyre lying a



little removed from the tip of a tongue of the jelly fish water that has swallowed the moon. The jackals must be running quite a distance away from me, but it seems they brush against my shins, the slender ice columns.

The night must be highly viscous so much so that it doesn't pale even though it is diluted with a watery moon. But all the same the jackals on the run cast flying shadows across the pyre. Now the jackals stop with time running back to a stop. The jackals stop and sniff round the pyre which still glows. The eerie moment stalks upto me. I freeze and the jackals freeze around the pyre. A moment. On a sudden everything starts thawing. The sand bank below my feet starts moving as if it is a snake slipping slowly on its belly into the river down below. I howl and flee back. The jackals howl and flee. I hear their howl yap, yap, yap, mingling with mine.

The pyre consumes the corpse of my father. I had to travel long to reach his pyre. In fact, I feel having travelled three nights. And finally arrive at this night which flourishes the moon just in that unique quarter of the sky where I ever read the moon of my

birth. I feel standing in the cave of the night of a piece with this void. And ha, it is not my father but myself who is lying there in the pyre. The sand bank beneath my feet beings to stir and I flee back in terror.

I have fled my village home long ago. My father is no more, since his disappearance I never been in that home. It has retreated away (with time?) beyond the reach of my senses. Between this village home and myself there looms an impassable beach of time. Well, old woman, between that home and me there burns a pyre strangely unquenchable. Yet that home became as a shelter. In fact, I have different shelters to live in a la the seasons of my experience. This shelter that I had hung with chandelier and velvets and floored with marble the colour of pomegranate seeds is but one residence for me.

There is another, I confide, for a different season of experience. The fragrance of bursting rice pods means its walls, the tremendous cooing of wild doves come wafted on by breezes from distant village groves shreds a thatch over it. And it is furnished with the sole furniture of a carpet made of grain like yellow

tamarind flowers drizzling from the shock of massive green above and accumulating to the height of her ankles.

The sunbeams sparkle on her anklets. One of the sunbeams has entered into my room through the single square window at a height the measure of me from the floor. I follow its course. It spears the calendar hung on a wall at a figure bleeding red. I would insist, careless of what others may say, that this red figure marks the date which for me is forever. The date that bleeds on the calendar under this sunbeam marks my only date of my only year. I read it to be nineteenth August. The black scars of figures at the head of the calendar read nineteen hundred and sixty eight. Seven and one make eight, nine and seven sixteen, and so on. I mentally compute my age to be seventy-one, for I have been told I don't remember when that I was born on nineteenth August eighteen ninety-seven. But can I swear that I was really born in eighteen ninety-seven? It might be hearsay pure and simple. I heard they heard my parents say so. But that I ever had a father and a mother sounds fictitious to me. I can convince myself neither of its truth nor of its falsehood.

Even if it be true it has the ring of fiction and even if it be a fiction it has the ring of truth. Whatever it be, the fact that I was born on a particular point of time and that I was simply not here nor there before that point in time is for me a matter of mere mental mathematics, is beyond my grasp. It seems the whole of time is permeated by me and that I have been or will ever be here. Or, this king in the reverse, I was never here or anywhere.

So for a moment it seems that I might have been burnt into ashes in the pyre round which the jackals had gathered in splendid moonlight. And that year eighteen hundred and ninety seven is mere yoicks of jackals hunting. But what about my age? It may be seventy-one or forty-one or thirty-one or even merely one. In me I don't touch upon a bench-mark to tell me the height of the socalled time they say is an everrising flood. No, I havn't felt my age to have risen in flood. I have no measure for time except. Except the flaming up and dying down of the pyre-nay, hunger. The signs that are numbers like nineteen sixtyeight or eighteen ninetyseven appear to be signs emerging on the

backdrop of a hallucination peculiarly familiar. I have no age.

Because into whichever recess of myself I may grope/I never catch at something like age or number. What I actually fish up is a vague feeling that I have ever been. Yet there must have been a reckoning of seventyone years by them at least. In other words, seventyone different calendars had been hung on and taken afterwards off this wall or for that matter any or many walls. A ritual repeated no less than seventyone times. But, within me, within my recess I feel to have known no calendar, no number standing solitary or marshalled in a row.

Instead they stand firm in me, the moments when for the first time (I know time is a mere turn of speech) saw sunbeams knocking at leaves, raindrops entreating entry into the soil, saw wild wind wanting to force open the watery doors of the sea that opened to close and closed to open. It seems these events have occurred just now once and for all. And these events find assembled forever together in a row in framed pictures. Or they have all become palanquin bearers for my spirit. But

these palanquin bearers, they don't' move. They only stand firm some fore and some aft with the two shafts of the palanquin on their shoulders. They stand firm. But how is that I hear their rhythmic voice sounding unceasingly-himplo, himplo, himplo. I feel my spirit swaying in a palanquin which they bear on their shoulders and to my mind they stand close together the chest of one touching the back of another. There is no gap in their row. So age I don't have. I don't care either for any calendar. the number speared by the morning beam on the calendar on the wall, be it old or new, is for me the only date of my only year. The year I would like to possess. Or the year that would like to possess me. And I don't like changing calendars either. I don't know since when that calendar in front of me is hanging on the wall by the doorframe. I don't know if the year with its figured look on the calendar is really nineteen hundred and sixtyeight or not. It might as well have been nineteen hundred and eighty six and sixteen hundred and ninetyeight.

The other day I caught her, the old woman redhanded while she was replacing the socalled old calendar ostensibly by a socalled new one. I strictly

forbade her to change the calendar. Because, on being questioned why, I said that as my mind had no calendar my wall should have none. The more so because this room now happens to be the space which shields me as a rind does a fruit and should not open out to any uncertainty. I don't know when that calendar was hung up nor do I recall the calendar that preceded it in the same position. And I don't need to know. To me all calendars are identical. Only the dates change causing me pain as the sunbeam shot through the only window shifts from one to the other. The sunbeam may fall more than once on a particular figure or may hit the same figure on more than one moving are they really different?). Today it has speared to bleeding the nineteenth August May be, tomorrow-can there really be a tomorrow which differs from today?-it may harpoon the twenty second June. A la my calendar the twenty second June follows the nineteenth August. And this I feel is what should be.

The life of the sunbeam moves from the calendar to where the two leaves of the door jam. Now is the time for me to open the door. I open the door and thereby my only day makes a fresh start. Over again

Over again the old woman enters into the room my shell, and laughs, not the rough querulous laugh by night when either the moon or the stars swim into the framed square hole of a window in this shell. This is a laugh of a different timbre. A succession of scratching in the metal tube of a throat. I don't look at her face. I never do so. In me hereby a face floating up from depths as I harkens to her harsh sounds. She brusquely lets down the tray of food and tea heavily on the shaky tripod that screeches.

I hear the swish of her very, very dry dress. The swish of hay under flail. I wonder what makes her wear such hissing dress. The sound sets my nerves on edge. As if somebody grazes a razor's edge lightly over my skin. She the swish of her dress, her actions, the tripod, its screeching they are all of a piece. Price of a clockwork. Running persistent but invisible. My look grazes over the floor to find that the calendar is being carried away by her. Hi, why are you taking the calendar away? She cackles; it is last year's. Doesn't matter, leave it. No, I can't leave it. The year's gone, it must go too. What do you mean? I mean it is sixty-nine. I don't care a hang



for your sixty-nine. For me today is the nineteenth August of Nineteen hundred and sixty-eight. You insist?

The voice turns into the smell of a musty scent and the sight of a bedstead with a grille of polished wood at the head. The smell is of a cheap scent or of a garland of wilted white flowers. And the polished wood probably might have been the carcass of some tree struck suddenly dead by lightning. This wood reminds me of death by lightning. I don't know why I lie in bed. Scanning a strange face with my eyes I see only some patches of the face. A patch of the face below an earlobe a patch of the chin, and that for some fragment of a moment. Moment is a term of the speech you and I share, without sharing anything else in common. Yes, I see only fragments. Fragments like those of that moon that was broken up by the waves advancing-till now lick the pyre off that riverside. Yes the waves wanted to digest the moon by crushing it into innumerable irregular silver shards shards ever-liquefying or is it my mind (do I have one?) That has broken the moon of that face into irregular sherds not of a liquefying but of a hard glazed face in a vain effort to digest it? And the sherds are glittering. I don't possess the full face with

my senses. It appears as though I might have sometimes had a full imprint of it in me. If I could calm down the crazy waters in my mind I might perhaps have seen it wholly, but then I might have well found it irreparably worn out or eaten up by winged worms that are ever on the flight. Or it may be that I always look at female faces through a grille. The face I presume to have seen through the wooden filigree at the head of the bedstead may not be the face of a single woman but of many women merging together. Even your voice which reminds me of smell of an old scent and of an old bedstead also comes through a grille. A grille that not only screens vision but also sounds. A screen of silence.

My eyes as well as ears are fitted with sieves. Or my mind is the same as a sieve. A mind that is a strange sieve or a strange sieve that is turned mind. I heard female voices through the sieve of silence. I wonder if I live in utter vacuum surrounded by numerous invisible sheels that are sieves or various kinds of strainers-strainers for the eyes, strainers for the ears, strainers for the touch and lastly the ghastly strainer the mind itself. Shell round shell. I don't see anything whole, I don't

touch anything whole, nor do I hear wholly, feel wholly. I don't know what is like a whole feeling.

Perhaps I haven't as yet been born in full or am awaiting to be born after being burnt up in that pyre by riverside, of the river which I feel might have cut through me. No, I haven't been completely burnt out in the pyre. I am perhaps advancing towards my full birth bit by bit, one part laid lightly after another. Ah, the jackals. The day I would be born fully, all these that appear to me in fragments would emerge from behind the screens and stand immaculate whole before me.

You insist that the old calendar should be replaced by the new? The pitch of your voice has forked me. I recall a face through the strainer that be. Only patches of that face show through the meshes. But instead of joining together these disjoint patches fly apart. I try to arrange the patches into a whole but may be the hands within me are hurried and they scatter the patches. Surely you there would chuckle within in silent comment, as your shadow in me does that decrepit old man like me cannot but scatter the white pearly seeds if I wanted to deliver such into your

receptacle. Out of a sudden rush of tenderness, I begin pursuing the woman with my sight grazing lightly over the floor; for I can not raise my eyes for fear of being hurt with the splinters of that face on the verge of materializing flying again in fragments. Ha, I find the hem of the her sari, the colour pomegranate seeds lightly gazing the round. Yes, this hem of a sari is itself a fragment of the whole of her. Another fragment is the tone of her voice. These two combine into a larger one almost filling out a human frame. A human form begins to take shape. But alas it fails to do so just at the moment it seems like succeeding. Instead there looms up a calendar with the picture of a grey sea beach with dark blue rollers bursting into downy surf at a distance. But what surprise. The calendar moves away from me.

I follow the calendar moving away almost the span of a palm above the floor with my sight crawling after across the floor itself. Two disembodied eyes in me are looking at this calendar. A broken shaft of the sunbeam falls momentarily on a date of which to my surprise the date is Twenty Second June. My eyes raise from the floors. And, across the grey sea beach and the blue rollers bursting into foam my sight reaches a finger, a

hooked finger inserted into the loop of a thread meant to carry the calendar away. Yes, al hooked finger covered with skin the colour of a house-lizard. And there's a ring in this finger. And it is a golden ring. A ring with a store doesn't recall the trade name of the precious stone. But it is of a dark hue as that of dried raise in. Ha, this dried raisin of a stone is a further fragment of that form. And this fragment and the others too begin to vibrate together, all of them, at once. It appears as if they are going to fuse into a whole, three strayed honey bees to the abandoned comb. But alas they join into no form but into the sound, "my wife".

Yes, indeed there was a wife for me. But she ceased to be wife just when she was about becoming so. She stayed with me for a number of calendar changes. Calendars with grey beach and blue rollers. After that she could not be found anywhere. But them where did she come from? She have been somewhere at some point of time? But for me now she exists only in fragments flying through the void in me. Her flying fragments come wheeling along their orbits down into the filed of my feeling.

No, that old woman is not my wife. She is my landlady and I am her paying guest. I pay her money for my upkeep. And now she is there forcibly taking away. The calendar in spite of my protests. It appears she is not my wife but she might well be. It seems just the other day when every woman seemed to be my wife. Or I found all women in my wife. This wife of mine does not exist in any time or in any space nor she ever was in any space and any time or may be she never was anywhere at all. Am I am own wife?

I tremble there's her voice again. Here's the new calendar. Your seventy first year is ended. From now on you are a dotard of seventy two or trifle more. The calendar is already old by five months and twentyone days. Today is twentysecond June.

I shouted to contradict. No, today is the nineteenth August of nineteen hundred and sixtyeight.

But, strange, the twentysecond June began jingling a tambourine with tiny bells around the border in the hand of dancing gypsy girl. It was on a twentysecond June that my father was burnt to ashes in

the pyre of the night, it was on another twentysecond June that I was married the story goes. It was perhaps on a day close upon the twenty second June that a son was said to be born to me. Perhaps, because the exact date seems erased from my memory, its place being usurped by the twenty second June. Perhaps it was on a twentysecond June that my wild eyes perched in fear for the first time on the dark heaving blue of the sea. The sea on that calendar from which I myself am read off by somebody I am aware of but whom I have ever been missing. Missing as most rains miss the sea. Rains fell on many twentysecond Junes. And, I ask, was it not twentysecond June when I first set my foot within sight of the sea on a hill with a deodar. Twentysecond June nodded its head to answer yes.

See, today is twentysecond June. The old woman laughs as a belle and her laugh rings out like a water-filled bell-metal cup struck on a sudden at the rim with a steel fork. But the nineteenth August tugs at me. I protest with a voice which might have come from a hollow scooped in me. The hollow of which I am the shell. The voice protests. No, today should be nineteenth August Nineteen hundred and sixty eight. Or

in any case simply nineteenth August. An absolute nineteenth August. For me the nineteenth August knows no end. Am I born fully that the nineteenth August should cease? I first entered my world on that date or the world made its first entry into me on that date.

For on that date it seems the great tamarind tree at my village's centre or my world's centre stepped all on a sudden into me and started its strange conversation by shedding tiny yellow red-sprinkled flowers from its dark green mountain above. And it still continues that conversation. Its talk returns again and again to the theme that was born on that nineteenth August. As to the burden of a song. Of the flute that was me. And that flute it seems must have been blown by the breezes that came from the boundary of my world or the village and came cooled with wild pigeon's cries. Or lamentations. For since that absolute nineteenth August something in me goes on lamenting. And the lament flies as a pennant on a pole thrust with its sharp end straight into the heart of my childhood. For it must have been that date when I gained and lost something I prized but am not fully aware of. It sometimes weeps round about that date. It seems that date has been elected for me as the



only representative by innumerable dates conferring together. The dates then the scents of flowers, smells of grass, the aroma of her tresses waked up in me and I in them. The dates when the twinkle of the bells on her anklets, the silent knocks of morning light on the green leaves of the deodar that stands by the sea, the language of her soft nape to my touch and my utter tenderness for her were first born in me and I too in them.

All these events have accreted to this absolute nineteenth August, which might well be a fictitious date. All dates are fictitious. So also the date nineteenth August eighteen ninetyseven said to be recorded in my horoscope made out by my father himself. I have been irrevocably stamped by this date and this date by me.

On hearing this, though, unsaid, the Twenty second June on the calendar, moving away from me, beams into a broad smile. That smile. Would it extinguish me? No, I have come round again, unextinguished. And the twentysecond June has turned a girl over there She lifts up the hem of her print-flowered skirt and begins a strange whirling dance.

She of the twentysecond June or the twentysecond June herself stood ghostly in the dark among the jackals beside the glowing pyre consuming my father slowly. She appeared once again the first night of my marriage in darkness paled by heaps of white flowers strewn on the bed, but on this latter occasion she had on her feet not the banded bells of a danseuse but thin anklets frilled with very light and loose bells.

I harken to the jingle of tiny bells. And slowly wake up in a strange light, for which the light that flowed through the window acts as shutter and of which the light that oozes night and day from the zero watt bulb blinking above my door frame but an abatjour It is a light I never saw mantling any mountain or sea. In this strange light or state of visibility I am aware of a row of dancers hewn out of some black rock undulating their bodies while flanking on two sides a rock hewn chariot with stone-made tamtams slung from their smooth round necks. Below the tamtams their deep navels are exposed and below the navels a single fold in brown skin. The chariot begins to move. Its wheels dig into the sands. It moves down to the sea. The ochre-

coloured stone horses yoked to the chariot start ambling and the dancers make a way for the chariot move to the sea and beat their small drums with their supple stone, fingers. And what wonder, the banded bells at their feet jingle, the muscles on their nude bodies appear lithe, the muscles that are the colour of stone. Or stone has become muscle, and there is no difference between muscle and stone. Their arms, thick and long undulate with a powerful rythm. I try to measure the girth of the arm of a dancer with my palms and wonder. For upon my touch the rythm of her body passes into mine in a shock of waves. Like those of a sea. My hands has now reached her waist thin. The jewelled waist hand has slipped down across her abdomen below the navel in front and across her buttocks behind. And strange, her body is visible to me, front and back, simultaneously.

The masses below her lithe back are as heavy and as light as I could imagine and are also undulating in shock waves. I want to clasp these masses with my arms but they are so large that my embrace misses theme. Where upon I give up the effort and look on. These two mounds of stone brown flesh stand upon two little pillars of legs. Through the ongoing rhythm these

two pillars of legs appear so light that seems I may well lift her body with perfect ease on my two palms laid side by side with ten fingers spread wide. I can lift up this form of absolute happiness, and fulfillment. Fulfillment through her. But I can't. I touch her feet and the rhythm of her body invades my whole frame and throws me away on the gray beach beyond which I find blue rollers bursting into foam. And the hidden centre of this vision bursts. And the chariot moves into the sea and is lost under the blue rollers. The rollers that go on rumbling. And it seems I go into a black out.

It rumbles again. And with the rumbling in my ear I wake up from the black out. In my own mind. And I catch myself looking through the square hole of the room at a glistening warp of transparent threads. And a noise-like rumbling outside somewhere above this my shell of a room. I rub my eyes and look around to take my bearings. Yes the zero watt lamp is still there. But its light appears moist. For I smell moisture, yes, it is raining and the invisible clouds out there rumble. I quickly conceive the bricks on the other side of this wall without the cover of plaster must be quietly getting drenched. And I am sorry they can't put out hands to

wipe the rain off their faces. As I do. For the rains have entered dancing into my room. I wipe my face a number of times and discover some form standing on the door sill. Ah, a gigantic grasshopper stands there no its hind legs filling the whole door-frame. It has a tiny head with two round drop like eyes bulging out. The nose and the upper lip have merged into a high ridge jutting between the eyes. The neck is this as a wire. The body greyish . Front legs or hands wiry. It is just as it should be, for how can a grasshopper have thick legs? Yes, somewhere in my world a green meadow has become wet with rains and the giant grass hopper has leapt out of that meadow to my door sill.

The rains hum in my ears and the grasshoppers chirrup keeping time with the jingle of the bells on her anklets. For she is on tryst to me through the afternoon glow over the washed grasses. She crosses the carpet of the tamarind flowers and at last steps into my eyes and for a moment becomes colossal. And then vanishes. With my eyes following her. Leaving specters in their place. And through these specters, that are massproduced I believe, I look at a world of husks, masks, crusts and

surfaces-a strange impoverished world of empty forms.  
A dream turned inside out.

How do you do? Sounds an utterly hollow husky query .Well, these specters disclose the hull of a person in half dark space. A lean hull of a man with bulbous balls of what might have been eyes bulging out of a mask that might have been a face. The lean hull of a person helps itself to a chair that creaks with empty sounds. Can't you recognize me, old man? I never could nor can't now, for my look through these specters merely glides on your surface and never reaches your inside. In fact, for me looking through these specters you have no inside at all. You are a mere sign, at best an arrow indicating direction on a road sign, or a sign like 'not exit' or 'wayout' etc. A simple etcetera.

Are you out of your wits?  
Well, I find through these specters that you yourself are the signal 'wayout' from my own world.

Empty words rush out of the mask before me.

You must go through these galley proofs once again.  
For the last time I tell you. We no longer require your

services. You don't read proofs any longer. You play spoofs with the manuscripts. We don't want you. Hear! Yes I hear, but my hearing is empty. The hull of hearing. And he throws a roll of papers the colour of rice husks onto my lap where my hands cross. The hands appear alien to me through these specs. Well, good, I was not meant to serve this world of husks. I would like to munch kernels. Hey, why don't you speak. What cud are you chewing? Well, I am munching some kernels. But they taste like wood. Here are your dues! Swish, swish, swish, he counted three oblong pieces of paper stamped with sings of money and threw them onto my lap. Three dry leaves from some tree struck dead with lightening fall swishing down. And for a moment, through discomfort, I slightly raised my specs.

One piece of note is lying with its reverse up. I am surprised to find on it a boat, a galley with a count of sails fully unfurled, floating down the mouth of a river where it debouches into the sea. The water's farthest expanse is calm and unrumpled but the waves never have been suddenly immobilized before their first break on the shore. I see that shore on the right and on the left

a string of mountains, which I feel might include that hillock of mine with the deodor of yellow green leaves that once sparkled at the knock of the first sunbeams of a day break. Perhaps this is the same chain of hills I saw standing breast deep at the far margin of water. Some of them looked like fine like solitary breasts. I must have seen these very hills when I was travelling to the first time to that port of mine in a train that skirted this side of the water's margin. It was raining then and this expanse of water, in fact a breakthrough of the sea into land or into myself, turned intensely blue. It was the same rain that broke into drizzle just before day broke upon that hillock of mine on the sea. And I still hear raindrops tap at the door of the red brown soil screamingly freed by the sea. Yes, a pale green beryl sea and at to margin I saw a large fish or desire suddenly leap up silvery into the air with its spine strongly arched and an instant later disappear into the beryl water with a lightning splash. It must have darted through the waters down below to that port of mine or Vizagapatnam where that hillock of mine still stands as a heave of my desire turned stone. Yes, Twentysecond June was awkly crouching under the rains, while that tree deodar was washing itself all the greener. The tree



my desire didn't crouch, it stood straight to be freshened. I also saw numerous dark hulls on the after the vain in the first light of that day bursting into twentysecond June. This boat also seems to be on the move like them to the port.

Look what you have done! The specs slip down over where the eyes should be.

Well, what have I done? The voice mimicked me. What have I done?

I want to throw away the specs to see correctly. Meseems in a flash I saw a grasshopper standing uncannily erect on its hind legs.

A screeching sound comes out of his throat. What have I done? What have I done? I ask myself. But the I does not care to reply. It is preening after the refreshing rains. I feel it's warm eider-down. Didn't you see that the galley was if a history text? The question goes on cackling before jumping into water.

Some force seals my mouth from inside and my retort "So what"? is clothed with silence. Jalaluddin Khalji ascended the throne of Delhi on thirteenth June twelve hundred and ninety and Firuz Tughlak became Sultan at Delhi on someday in March thirteen hundred

and fiftyone. I hear the chirrup of the grasshopper. But you have deleted all the correct dates and put twentysecond June instead. Correct dates, you say? Don't you know dates moult? It is certainly moulting time for the grasshopper for it goes on zooming. Whenever you came across an ascent to the throne or a victory in battle you deleted the true date and put twenty second June instead. Some events over seven hundred years occur only on date that quaint twenty second June. A retort leaps up in me clothed in silence. So what? This may be true over million years not to speak of your seven hundred. For the twentysecond June moves dancing across countries and centuries upon her stone brown lithe legs. With her green blue skirt flying and bells banded upon her ankles jingling wildly. And I am all attention to this will humming sound. But this sound moults into the zooming of a grasshopper.

Alauddin died in thirteen sixteen and Ghiasuddin in thirteen twentyfive but you have deleted the true dates of their death and put eighteen hundred and ninetyseven instead. You must be off your head. Within me a reply shapes itself, also clothed in white

silence. But where is the head? Where is your head? The grasshopper's head pulverizes itself into a zoom. Powder of acrid smell. The manuscripts may be breaking wind. You deleted not only all the years of death but also all the years of birth over seven hundred years replacing them all by that cursed eighteen hundred and ninetyseven. And to make matters more horrid you have affixed the date the nineteenth of August.

I find the boat on the reverse of the promissory note start moving. I feel as I felt when the sand dune by the riverside with the pyre started moving beneath my feet. To my puzzlement I find the boat carrying instead of merchandize only the figure eighteen ninetyseven. The year eighteen ninetyseven. The boat is about to leave the bay and move into the sea. A sea roiling away from me into the fearful.

Ha, ha, ha someone breaks into a wild laugh. Has this room become a mouth? And has this wild laugh come out of this mouth? I have the feel of goose flesh to hear the sound of rushing about, to have seen jackals suddenly rush away yelling from their vigil of the pyre. This rush, this yell strike down everything

about me. Has it put out the lamp keeping a dull watch over the grey darkness of this room? Looking at the door I again find the grasshopper standing on his wiry hind legs but this time shaking violently. Its wings are vibrating. The blast of that catastrophic laughter has uprooted everything. Both eyeballs of the hopper are out of the sockets and dangle. The tiny mug of a face is contorted out of its shape. The grasshopper's eyes dart fear. It leaps back and vanishes. May be wounded by the shrill cry which might have shot him. The cry rises and falls like the whistle of a seagoing steamer.

And with that strange whistle I hear blowing within. I wake up. I don't know where and look hard before to regain my bearing. Ah, there is another face frozen with the cry there in the doorframe, very familiar like a piece of earth besides an accustomed path or like a whiff of scent remembered all on a sudden. I frantically grope within for an address of this cent. But as soon as I turn inside I clearly find a galley with the Nineteenth August eighteen ninetyseven sitting on board float down a very strong current whose contours I am losing very very rapidly. It shoots over a quickly darkening sea chasing after light which recedes and recedes. Even

the coast of sound is also receding. For I seem to hear a faint echo of a calmour. Take care, the man is mad. Mad, mad, mad, the boat hurries onwards.

The dark whirling waters shoal. And coasts start emerging. And dark bumps on the coasts. And these bumps assume the shape of upturned black boats on sands so familiar to me. I feel to be inside such a boat with its keel up. I feel like a bump of flesh on the move with its house grown hard upon it. And I feel warm within it.

Ah, here am I. Inclosed. Saved a catastrophe. A catastrophe that has left its trace in a faint rumbling of sounds in me or outside me. A violent word floating about in shreds of a sound. These shreds combine again within me and the sound as a whole is echoed by the wall in front. So it is the wall I know so well, of the room transformed into my own room secreted out by myself? As the flesh secrets its own coat.

Ah, this feel of the snail parading its antennae out there in the sun. Ah this safety from the black whirl which terrifies not only in its motion out also in its

horrific sound, mad, mad, mad. I am happy to have returned to this my own shell far from the fur one of what madam calls madness. I carefully cleanse my specs with a loose sleeve of the shirt I have on. Ah, the feel of this second skin that never itches. I would now wash and eat. Eat from a plate with peacock feathers painted round the rim. The plate placed on that table over there with an edge turned golden by the morning beam that comes unhesitatingly into my room. While I am eating, the beam would move across the food and make it doubly appetizing, bringing out the colours that reside so unobtrusively in food, in the liquid tea the colour of a mynah, and in the piece of loaf the colour of a horis mane. And there's my pet that common mynah who once upon a time built its nest under the cornice of my father's house. A wonderful body that mynah, a small narrow-mouthed vase standing aslant on two light yellow legs. It just drops, as silently as a feather, straight from the window sill onto that table. It stalks on that table from one end to the other and then just as lightly as before drops onto the floor. On the floor itself it begins strolling about with its tiny tilted vase like body seesawing upon slender legs. Pouring out cool gurgling sounds.

It walks a few rounds about the feet of the table, stops short, then pecks a number of times at a crack on one of the table's feet. This done, it turns sound and walks upto my own feet with its body seesawing on us tiny legs. Reaching the neighbourhood of my feet, it turns its head asks to look up at me. And gurgles out some message I am. I believe, in need of. Then leaving the message as an invisible lump with me, it flies away through the window to be received by the sunlight that is till patiently lingering on the small twigs and leaves outside. And strange, the mynah carried whatever was left of the sunlight out there away on its wings. Leaving my sight in dusk. So that my sight gives up the chase and returns to the windowsill. From the windowsill it drops lightly onto the vacant table, moves across if from one end to the other. Then, as the mynah has done, it drops onto the floor, strolls across it seesawing. Then it stops short while some flaming beak begins to peck very hard inside me. It darkens before my spect as well as before the eyes that lie behind the spect. And I am seized with dizziness. I feel falling from a very great height into a chasm. While dropping through the chasm I strain to clutch at any possible

root that might be dangling free from its inner walls, but there is nothing to fasten on. I go on sinking in the void and the mouth of the pit sucking me down is framed by the window-the window of familiarity which recedes from me at a tremendous speed like a meteor.

....Trrr.....Tr....I startle out of my pit with a leap. To find a lamp that burns inside me night and day. It seems like I can read the figure on a calendar hung on some dark interior wall. And something in the shape of a butterfly sits on number and is gently winnowing light on its wings. Wings with eyes as spangles on peacock feathers. Ha, the butterfly may be breathing. Or what I see there may be my two lungs that have flown out of my body and alighted there on the unseen calendar to breathe more freely. I am not sure what is actually happening. But I feel choked.

The kerosene lamp spews smoke. I can read though, indistinctly the trademark of Feurehand on the lantern. The lantern placed close by a wall goes on smoking. And a butterfly appears pasted on the wall with its body close to the yellow glass bulb of the lantern, perhaps weeping. With its wings rising and



falling rhythmically. Or with its wings winnowing out light from the chaff of smoke. And I am weeping. The door of the room is closed from outside with a chain slipped over a hook on the doorframe. My mother had slipped this chain over the hook outside after sundown. Till sundown I had not returned home, for I had been standing rooted in wonder at the sight of things being turned out by a potter's wheel which gleamed in the afternoon sun as it rotated in a wayside hut on my way home from school. This wheel I feel whirling in my depth.

Somebody rattles the pair of round rings on the door leaves, for I have barred the door from inside. I am afraid lest mother's rage comes suddenly rushing into the room and ravages me. The rings outside rattle very softly.

Ah, it is the father. In the dead of nights it is my father who comes to me stealthily fetching food for me. He whispers, quick, finish up the meals. Mother will just turn up and see. For the rattling might have wakened her. I hurriedly gulp down the food with sobs without looking at the face my father who stands, I feel

close by almost touching my arched spine as I bend to eat. As close as closeness goes.

Yes, I feel my father warm behind me. He has walked up to me all the way from his pyre. Trr...Trr...I rush to the door but while rushing I feel dizzy swaying sideways. My father should not be kept standing outside for long. I remove the bolt and open the door with my head bowed. My father is very tall and I feel myself puny beside him. I would have to throw my head back if I wanted to answer his look with mine. But I can't raise my head. It is heavy as lead. Moreover, something like an iron ball has been rising up all this time from my entrails and has now got stuck in my throat. I would have preferred to spit this ball out of me by vigorous sobbing. But all I do is to open the door silently with bowed head and then walk staggering back swaying in and out of a somewhere. A street bathed in the light of white night. A night cooled in ice and the colour of ice with no sun in sight. May be with the sun dissolved in space.

There is a sound of something being let down heavily on a shaky table and dry rustle of clothes. Hey, how