



the sky. Her eyes were more bewitching than the gazelle's; her teeth were whiter than a set of the whitest pearl, her cheeks ruddier than the rosiest apple, and her stature more graceful than the fairies of his dream. His imagination could not paint a picture so sweet as the vision of loveliness that opened before his enchanted gaze. The fragrance of her breath filled the chamber and Alauddin, transported into a wonderland of poesy and romance, forgot that *she* prized her honour greater than *he* thought of her beauty.

Forgetting that he was alone and unguarded, forgetting that as a guest he was in a holy temple that afforded him protection against all his impertinence, forgetting, lastly, that he was promise-bound to behave like a brother under that hospitable roof, Alauddin made for the mirror and stretched his right hand towards the angelic form that was reflected in the glass.

Before Rānā Bhim Singha had time to warn the infatuated Emperor of the impropriety of such disgraceful conduct, the raised sword in the hand of the young Rājput lad Bādal was about to descend on the head of its victim. But Rānā Bhim Singha intervened with lightning speed between Bādal and Alauddin who stepped back with a shriek of terror and fainted away.





## XI

After the unpleasant episode narrated above, Alauddin strolled through the various compartments of the reception chamber in moody silence. Baffled, humiliated, but not vanquished, his evil nature now began to assert itself. The war that was raging in his heart between the man and the brute now ended in a dishonourable victory for the latter. 'Philip Sober' appealed to 'Philip Drunk' and the result was inevitable. Alauddin determined once more to carry off the prize even at the risk of setting Chitor ablaze with fury. The game was worth the candle. He chuckled within himself as the dark design flashed across his brain.

Courtesy led Rānā Bhīm Singha to accompany his guest outside the fort to see him off. The simple-hearted Rājput came unguarded, as the Pathan, he thought, could not be ungrateful to the saviour of his life. The party was proceeding slowly on horseback, and nothing disturbed the silence that prevailed except the clatter of the horses' hoofs against the stony pathway leading from the hillfort to the plains below. The Emperor broke the silence,





Turning abruptly towards Bhim Singha, he said, "Rānā Bhim Singha, I cannot go back to Delhi without Padmini. For the good of your family and for the good of Mewār, make over Padmini to me."

"Unreasonable and ungrateful man," said the brave Rājput shaking with indignation, "you should know that the shield of hospitality has not made you invulnerable at all places and—"

Before he could finish, a signal from the Emperor to his attendants made the Rānā painfully understand that he was a prisoner of Alauddin.

He submitted, as he could not do otherwise. Between personal liberty and the respect of his wife he preferred to lose what could be recovered.

## XII

Over this unparalleled treachery of a royal guest the sun set that evening behind the hills of Chitor. Before the next sun shone over the battlements of the citadel the news had spread from home to home in wide Mewār that the generous Rānā Bhim Singha was a captive at the hands of the wily Turk and that he could not be released without the heaviest ransom,—the surrender of 'the Lotus of Mewār.'





Rānee Padmini heard the news, though she was not at first inclined to believe that the world was so wicked as to stoop so low. But it was a stern reality. Her husband was a prisoner in the Pathan camp. He had to be rescued, or Chitor could not stand another siege from Delhi. Padmini shuddered to think of the fate of Mewār. But how could her husband be possibly rescued without the ransom? Her life she could easily give, but not her honour. It was more precious than life.

But something must be done. She sent for General Gorā, her uncle, Commander of the Mewār Forces in the absence of Rānā Bhīm Singha. The brave lad Bādal, her young nephew, was impatient of strategy. He proposed to cut his way through the Pathan army, sword in hand, and bring back the Rānā. With five hundred men at his beck and call and a good sword by his side he wanted nothing more. The veteran old general restrained him with difficulty.

They decided upon taking a prompt measure, every thing depending upon speed and caution now. By evening Chitor knew that Rānee Padmini would surrender herself to rescue Rānā Bhīm Singha, without whom Chitor could not stand any future Mahomedan attack.





So Padmini communicated her decision of surrendering to the Khilji Emperor, and wanted permission to be attended by her maids-of-honour before proceeding to her future home with His Imperial Majesty.

Alauddin was glad beyond measure that his long-cherished dream was approaching realization. He knew that Padmini would surrender; no woman could do otherwise under the circumstances. What womanly heart, he thought, was proof against the charm of power, wealth, beauty and enjoyment? According to all human calculation,—according to Alauddin's calculation at least—Padmini was but an ordinary woman, and she was bound to yield. The conqueror readily agreed to the terms of her capitulation.

### XIII

Punctually at sunrise on the morning of the appointed day when the Pathan camp was looking festive against the arrival of Rānee Padmini, and the soldiers were making themselves merry at the prospect of a speedy return to a life of comparative ease in the Imperial Capital, a solemn procession of seven hundred palanquins, each carried by four stout bearers,





was found to issue out of the fort of Chitor and slowly wind its way down the steep hill-side towards the camp of the Khilji Emperor. The procession headed by the litter of Rānee Padmini herself consisted of the maids-of-honour waiting upon Her Highness and permitted by Alauddin to accompany his new love to her future home. In deference to eastern notions of female modesty each palanquin was closely veiled in a thick red screen to shield its inmate from unholy gaze. The sentry saluted this rather unwieldy escort of the Rānee and fell back at a respectful distance. The procession halted when the only page riding by the side of the Rānee's litter went up to the Emperor, and giving him greetings on behalf of his royal mistress prayed that she might be allowed to have a last look at her husband before he would be finally released from captivity and sent back to Chitor.

#### XIV

Alauddin could not be so unchivalrous as to refuse such a reasonable prayer of such a lovely woman. So, the litter of Rānee Padmini was separated from the main body and taken to where Rānā Bhim Singha was anxiously watching the turn of events. This last interview





between the husband and the wife was permitted to be a private one, and the sentry were out of hearing distance. The screen of the litter parted, and the Rānā, to his great astonishment, found the young hero Bādal inside, instead of his queen. A glance explained the situation, and quick as lightning the Rānā sprang upon the back of the horse that the page had ridden, and leaving the thing to be managed by Bādal shot away towards Chitor to defend it against any immediate attack.

## XV

The action of the Rānā in galloping full speed towards Chitor without caring either to say good-bye to the Emperor or to wait for an escort roused the suspicion of the sentry. But before he could sound the alarm, the whole Mahomedan camp had been thrown into confusion. For, about four thousand Rājput soldiers in two batches under Gorā and Bādal were advancing upon the Pathan positions from different directions. The duped Khilji found no Padmini, no maids-of-honour,—nothing of the kind. Each palanquin had two rough-looking, grey-bearded Rājput warriors instead, carried by four





comrades-in-arms. Treachery was paid back in its own coin !

## XVI

Hopelessly disconcerted, Alauddin swore a mighty oath that shook the fort of Chitor to its foundation. Caught in the meshes of a woman's snare he trembled with rage from head to foot, and ordered Kafur to fight the infidels to death or victory. Loud and long the battle raged from point to point, and the Hindus now and the Pathans next seemed to gain the mastery of the field. The forces of destruction were let loose all at once on the plains before Chitor that day, and the red-eyed Demon of Slaughter, sleeping for some months past the sleep of inaction, now awoke to have his fill of unrestrained carnage. Gorā fought as no Rājput had ever fought before ; he was more than the proverbial host in himself. The clang of his sword was the knell of doom ; the Pathan troops quelled in his presence as a flock of sheep would shake in the jaws of the wolf.

But the Rājput "Forlorn Hope" was outnumbered—as Gorā knew they would be,—and there was only a quarter of the gallant four thousand left, still fighting heroically in a ring





found their beloved Commander. When the Hindus stood on the brink of annihilation, the Pathan General charged this knot of brave fighters with five hundred lances. Gorā made a desperate dash against the Mahomedan lancers, and killing as many of them as he could, fell, pierced through the heart like a hero in defending the arms and honour of a people.

## XVII

Now came the turn of the lad Bādal whose heroic exploits will enrich Rājput minstrelsy so long as it will last. He had five hundred men yet left to follow him to death: these determined to leave an imperishable mark in the annals of Rājput India before they would join the congress of departed heroes.

So, the combat deepened again, and the warrior-spirit of the whole Rājput race became concentrated in the young leader of this heroic band. This unequal combat was continued by Bādal against immense odds till the darkness of evening was about to close round the Pathan camp, now almost sure of victory,—when succour came to that brave Rājput lad from an unexpected quarter and decided the fate of the day. A large body of the neighbouring friendly hillmen





swooped down from behind the field and fell upon the Pathan camp in a dashing charge, throwing everything into disorder. The troops of Alauddin fled pell-mell in a sudden fright, and before the evening stars went out of sight, the siege of Chitor had been raised and a solitary camel found galloping across the sands of Ajmere. The disappointed Khilji Emperor was on his way home to Imperial Delhi.

## XVIII

Twelve long years passed over the plains and hills of Mewār, and the story of the wooing of Alauddin Khilji and his hasty retreat was sung in minstrel verse from house to house in Rājasthān. Though the Guzerāt rebellion was checked and large additions made to the empire of the Khilji Emperor, his humiliation at the hands of the Rājputs was rankling sore in his heart. That the great Emperor of Delhi was outwitted by a lady was what preyed so heavily on his mind. He passed all these years in restlessness and brooded over revenge. Accordingly when he was comparatively free from the worry of restoring order in the kingdom, he turned his attention to solve the Mewār question once for all. Now Padmini loomed large in his mind's eye, and he





made preparations this time on a vast scale to invade Mewār from as many directions at a time as the strength of the Imperial army would allow. There was no mistake, no half-heartedness. They would win or die on the sands of Rājputānā, for the prestige of an Empire was at stake. So, one morning when the spring was yet a few weeks old, Mewār heard the Mahomedan war-cry, and Chitor was besieged simultaneously from north and south, and east and west.

## XIX

Mewār was not unprepared for this tremendous blow from Delhi; so she met her enemy half-way. There was a vigorous offensive from the Imperial troops; the Rājputs put up a stout resistance. It was a long-protracted campaign, and Rājput history has characterised it as a crisis in the life-story of a brave nation. The savage ferocity of the attacks was only equalled by the obstinacy of the defence. The whole of Mewār was up in arms against the enemy to expel him from the sacred domains he had invaded. Each of the twelve sons of Rānā Lakshman Singha took the field and, after rendering a very good account of himself in that memorable struggle





between might and right died the glorious death of a hero in the defence of the Motherland.

But though so much precious blood was lost and Chitor became stripped of her heroes, the result of the campaign was plain to anticipate. Mewār could not hold out for more than two weeks.

Rānee Padmini shuddered to think of the consequence of Alauddin's revenge. She cursed the day on which she was born ; she cursed her ill-fated beauty that brought ruin upon Chitor. As a type of Rājput womanhood she did not care to face death, but she feared to face the terrors of a living death, an ignoble life of dishonour, when all that was honourable was passing away. She saw the fate of Chitor with her mind's eye, and large drops of tear ran down her care-worn cheeks, not that she became faint-hearted before death, but that the enemy would enter Chitor and "talk lightly" of the heroes that would be dead by that time and would not care to take up the challenge.

## XX

The situation did not improve, and the fall of Chitor now became a question of hours. Provisions, fodder and water had already become exhausted, and three-fourths of the garrison killed. It was not, however, in the nature of





the Rājputs to yield. They did not grieve that they were going to their death; they had the satisfaction that they would not surrender. They died with satisfaction that no polluted hand could touch the 'Lotus of Mewār.' Heroic Mewār cared neither for land, nor palaces, nor wealth. The brave men and women of Rājputāna did not set much store by a few years more of life on this earth. They valued only one thing, and that was *honour* which they defended to the last. Padmini valued her honour more than her life, and her honour she defended while there was life in her. The glare of the Imperial harem was trash in her eyes to the vow of true love she had taken to the lord of her heart. When the last ray of the hope to save Chitor except by an unconditional surrender to the Mahomedan was gone, Rānee Padmini with her ladies consulted the tutelary Oracle of the royal family, and was told that the time was come when she should make the supreme sacrifice to save her honour. So Padmini requested the family priest to arrange for the terrible rite of *Johur*\* when night would fall.

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\* This refers to a very tragic custom that prevailed among the Rājputs in Medieval India. When there was no chance of saving the women and children from falling into the hands of the





## XXI

The news ran through Chitor like wild fire and electrified her whole frame. It was a great day in her history, for, though this supreme act of devotion would give her immortality through ages unborn, it requires the strongest nerve to face the situation. Not one or two, but *all* must play out their part in this great self-imposed tragedy of the nation. No wavering,—no shrinking back,—no dishonouring the Rājput name. That was not their training. Not a single soul faltered. Padmini and her women were taking only a few hours' start to wait for their beloved at the portals of heaven.

Long before the first streaks of the dawn appeared on the eastern horizon, a huge funeral pyre of sandal-wood had been erected in a dark cavern by the foot of the hill below the fortress of Chitor, and basinfuls of clarified butter thrown into it to feed the flames. The priests chanted the sacred texts, worshipped the pile with due ceremony, threw into it the jewelleries worn by

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Mahomedan conquerors, a huge funeral pyre was made, and the women, old and young, with their children, flung themselves readily into it and made an end of themselves. Then men rushed out and charged the overwhelming numbers of the enemy to victory or death.





the ladies, and the flames leapt up with ten thousand tongues. The next moment Chitor saw a memorable sight, painful to record for the tragic element it involved. Far surpassing in loveliness the "rosy-fingered Eos" conceived by the poet's imagination, Rānee Padmini, the far-famed 'Lotus of Mewar', leading all the women of Chitor in a huge procession, attired in the sacred saffron of hermit-women, singing a doleful song that would have no ending, came on with steady steps towards the pile and halted by the brink of the yawning abyss. They looked once at the infinite sky above their heads; they cast a last longing glance at dear Chitor and all that it contained, and with the blessings of the priests sanctifying their march into an unknown land, sprang headlong into the flames beneath.

A few thuds and a crash, and it was all over. Not a single Rājput woman was left alive in Chitor that morning. Then the main gate of the fort was flung wide open, and the brave men of Mewār headed by Mahārānā Lakshman Singha, Rānā Bhim Singha, and young Bādal rushed out in a solid mass against the besieging troops of Imperial Delhi, and fought with the courage of despair. It was an unequal combat, and though the two thousand Rājput heroes did prodigies of





valour, they were like drops in the ocean of the vast Moslem army, and like bubbles they disappeared in that boundless ocean.

## XXII

The Khilzi Emperor entered Chitor with all the pride of a conquering hero. In the exultation of the moment that he had at last attained the cherished desire of his heart, he led his men through the deserted streets of the fallen city towards the palace of Rānee Padmini. But to his utter dismay the palace wore an abandoned look. He made his way into the interior of the building, and shouted by the name of his lovely bride,—but nobody answered, and the echoes died away. The Imperial guards searched every nook and corner of the city, but they met no living soul, not to speak of the beautiful Rānee. At last they came upon that terrible abyss of destruction and discovered the charred remains of the women of Chitor who had preferred death to dishonour. Alāuddin hurried to the spot and understood the thing at a glance. - Dismissing his soldiers the humbled monarch sat down by the brink to ponder.

Baffled again by a woman's wit! It was destiny, and even the Emperor of Delhi could not rise above it.





CSL

IV.—THE HISTORIC CYCLE.

C.—MODERN.





CSL

## CHĀND SULTĀNĀ.

(PATRIOTISM).

### I

The life-story of this Mahomedan lady is of immense interest to students of Indian history. Her valour, patriotism and statesmanship profoundly influenced the politics of Southern India in the sixteenth century, and formed the subjects of many fabulous stories. Fable or no fable, it goes without saying that hers was a towering personality; and, in the words of a great Scotchman, Chānd Sultānā "still lives in Deccan story, and Deccan song, a heroine unrivalled."\*

### II

In the early forties of the sixteenth century, Sultān Hussain Nizām Shāh was reigning with all the pomp of an independent Oriental Chief in the kingdom of Ahmadnagar. Three of his

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\* Captain James Grant-Duff in his "History of the Marhattas" Vol I. P. 73.





children, Prince Murtezā, Prince Burhān and Princess Chānd Bibi have come in for a good share of the historian's notice, and have occupied many pages of contemporary Deccan history ; and the greatest share has been allotted to the daughter Chānd Bibi, better known as Chānd Sultānā. She was born in 1548, and though she was bred in the luxuries of an Oriental Court, her old nurse Fatimā did not neglect to bring her up in the ways of piety and truth. The influence of this early training in religion and piety was noticeable throughout her life. Her imagination was profusely fed on the rich traditions of Islam, and of the kings, her ancestors, the illustrious founders of the Nizām Shāhi dynasty in the Deccan. The constant company of her brothers and of her father's ministers gave her a clear insight into the business of the State. It is no wonder, therefore, that with this sort of practical training from a very early age, she was eminently fitted for the position of trust and responsibility, which she held so successfully in after years, when the Deccan was seething with court-intrigue and political unrest. Thus we find why the historian Ferishtā has taken the trouble to record the glowing testimony to her patriotic fervour so ungrudgingly paid by her greatest





antagonist, Prince Murād, who was sent to reduce her by Akbar the Great of Delhi.

## III

Sultān Hussain Nizām Shāh was watching the growth of his playful daughter with a laudable amount of paternal solicitude. Retiring from the cares of an onerous duty in the evening, the Sultān would find greater solace in the sweet prattle of his darling child than in the voluptuous strain of music from the beautiful dancing girls of the Court. In the delicately formed features of his daughter the father discovered a striking resemblance to those of her mother, the departed Sultānā, whose loss weighed heavily on the old king's mind. The girl was the Sultānā's only solace in a cheerless home, his balm of Gilead to heal a rankling sore.

Her beauty and accomplishments were an attraction to the highest aristocratic circles in the land. Guess after guess was hazarded among the nobles of the Court as to who would win the lovely maiden of Ahmadnagar. The knights far and near were ready to fight over the wagers they laid. But Hussain Nizām Shāh set idle tongues at rest by proclaiming his royal wish that the princess was to marry Ali Adil Shāh,





the young king of Bijāpur. People said it was a political marriage; for an alliance had recently been formed between the two States against the Rājā of the Carnatic; and the union between Chānd Bibi and Ali Adil Shāh cemented that alliance.

## IV

Whatever might be the motives, political or otherwise, that induced Hussain Nizām Shāh to bestow the hand of his beloved daughter upon the young king of Bijāpur, the marriage proved a very happy one. Ali Adil Shāh was devotedly attached to his lovely bride, whose rare beauty and rarer accomplishments justified her claim to be reckoned the finest pearl among contemporary Indian women. Day after day a fine trait was discovered in her character, and her influence became a powerful silent factor in shaping the policy of the young Sultān in the affairs of the State. The turbulent nobles of the Court ceased for the time to fight among themselves; the money hitherto squandered by the Court in hunting, gambling and other frivolous pursuits was diverted to useful channels; regular prayers were offered in the mosques of the city, and alms distributed to the poor; learned Maulānās held





religious discourses at stated periods of the day; Kāzis dealt out equal justice to the rich and the poor alike; and the all-round prosperity of Bijāpur during the reign of Ali Adil Shāh recalled the days of the great Haroun-ul-Raschid of an almost forgotten age. "All this," says the historian Ferishtā,\* "was due to the sobering influence of Chānd Sultānā over the reckless youth who wielded the destinies of the kingdom of Bijāpur, while Akbar the Great was consolidating his empire in the north."

## V

But Providence ordained otherwise, and Bijāpur fell on evil days. The sudden death of Ali Adil Shāh in 1580 left Chānd Bibi a childless widow at thirty-two. Anarchy and confusion returned to the woe-begone kingdom. The unruly nobles now freed from superior control, each led a faction to seize the Sovereign authority. In the internecine strife that followed, blood flowed freely in the streets of Bijāpur, now a scene of violence and lawlessness. The tact and courage of Chānd Sultānā saved the situation for some time yet; a regency was set up on behalf of Ibrāhim, a minor nephew of

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\* Quoted by Elphinstone in his History of India.



the late Sultān, and the wisdom of the lady poured oil on the agitated waters of Bijāpur politics. But it was only a lull preceding a storm. Dark clouds were lowering over the political horizon of Bijāpur. The nobles were hopelessly divided against one another, and their spirit rebelled against the authority of a woman. Taking advantage of this intestine disorder in the State, the sister kingdoms of Golkondā, Bidar and Ahmadnagar combined against it, and the walls of Bijāpur felt the charge of the battering tuskers of her unfriendly neighbours.

## VI

Then followed a scene of tumult in the Bijāpur capital. While the Regent was busy devising measures for the safety of the minor prince, and for standing a sustained siege in case of need, the generals were wrangling over their clashing interests. Chānd Bibi saw that no efforts could possibly save the doomed city unless the nobles of the Court and the army stood faithfully by the Royal House. So, the first endeavour of the lady was directed towards conciliating the army ; her next, to rally the refractory nobles by pointing out to them where their real interest lay. She made a passionate appeal to





the better mind of the classes and the masses in a final attempt to eliminate the poison of disunion that was eating into the vitals of the State: her tactics were as equally effective here as when, in the dark days of the Armada in England, the Virgin Queen threw herself unreservedly upon the good sense of the English people.

## VII

“My brethren,” ran her eloquent appeal, “Bijāpur is passing through a grave crisis that threatens her very existence. After the death of my husband, the late Sultān, the government of the kingdom passed into the hands of an infant boy. Finding a weak woman at the helm of affairs, the nobles are fighting among themselves to seize the Sovereign power. The army is disaffected, and the kingdom is showing all the symptoms of decay and collapse. This has offered a golden opportunity to our hostile neighbours. The result is that we hear the war-bugle of the enemy beyond our gates.

“But rest assured, friends, that with the fall of Bijāpur you lose the freedom you have enjoyed for generations under the paternal care of a benign Government. Your honour will be desecrated; your women and children given up





to the swords of the conquerors. You will bow down to the spears of a superior enemy force, and be the hewers of wood and drawers of water of an unkind enemy Government.

“Is this the time, my friends, to wrangle over your personal grievances? Is this the time to betray your country by standing aloof from the struggle? Ask your conscience, and you will get the reply. I appeal to the army to fight for the honour of the nation. I appeal to the nobles on behalf of the minor Sultān to sink all their differences at this hour of the country's trial; I appeal to the masses to decide the question and choose between the alternatives, Freedom or Slavery. It is the voice of the woman, but it is the prudence of the man that speaks through it. The free man fights the enemy of his country first, and settles his personal disputes next. Am I right or am I wrong?”

### VIII

The appeal of Chānd Bibi was miraculous in its effect. The nobles forgot their jealousies and shook hands with one another. The army rose to the full height of its strength. The leaders vied with one another in devising measures for the defence of the city. The troops





worked day and night under the personal supervision of the Regent. Her tact and courage inspired everybody. Without minding her personal comfort or safety she exposed herself to the greatest risks, and the valiant troops of Bijāpur, emboldened by the example of the lady, rushed out of the city, fell upon the besiegers and inflicted on them a crushing defeat. The name of Chānd Sultānā became a terror to the invading troops who fled pell-mell in all directions. Orleans was repeated in India, and the siege of Bijāpur was raised (1583).

## IX

But it did not fall to the lot of the lady to enjoy domestic peace for any length of time. The patched-up truce with the nobles did not last long, and before the year was out and the city could recover from the shock of the recent outrage, faction had reared its head and the country had been thrown into the vortex of a civil war. To add to her miseries, her charge, the young Sultān, was now grown to man's stature and hankered after man's privileges. He hated the prospect of his perpetual tutelage; he grew, moreover, to dislike the authority of a woman, forgetting entirely the extent of his in-





debtedness to his benefactress. So, to the intense joy of his friends and the boundless surprise of the Regent, young Ibrāhim Shāh announced one day in open Durbār that he had taken the reins of Government into his own hands. Chānd Sultānā felt greatly mortified at the conduct of her ward. She could ill brook the humiliation, but she left Bijāpur for shelter under the paternal roof at Ahmadnagar with tears at the helplessness of the young Sultān.

## X

So, Chānd Sultānā came back to Ahmadnagar where her brother Murtezā Nizām Shāh was reigning in his father's stead. She came to rest in the peaceful shelter of the paternal roof, but she was disappointed. She found Ahmadnagar a prey to greater internal disorder than what she had left behind at Bijāpur. In fact, each Decan monarchy was, at the close of the sixteenth century, in a state of intestine paralysis which tempted its subversion by the ambitious Emperor of Delhi. Murtezā Nizām Shāh was killed by his own son Meerun. But this unlucky prince did not live long to enjoy his eminence. Patricide was paid back in its own coin, and in a few months' time Meerun fell pierced by the





regicide dagger of a refractory noble. Anarchy reigned supreme in Ahmadnagar.

While these events were happening in Ahmadnagar, and the roll of murders swelling from day to day, Prince Burhān, another brother of Chānd Bibi, hitherto living under Akbar's protection, welcomed the opportunity and wrested possession of his hereditary kingdom. Chānd Bibi heaved a great sigh of relief at the success of her brother. But Ahmadnagar seemed to be under a divine curse and troubles were not to cease there so easily. The hapless new Sultān died after a short reign, and though the vacant throne was occupied by his infant son Ibrāhim, the distractions increased, and in 1595 "there were no less than four parties in the field, each supporting a separate claimant."\* Ibrāhim was killed in an action with the Bijāpur troops; and Ahmadnagar, left without a central government at this crisis, drifted on to a complete political collapse.

## XI

But Chānd Sultānā could no longer look upon this state of things with the eye of an indifferent spectator. She understood that her

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\* Eiphinstone's History of India, IX. 2, P. 511.





active participation in this internal dispute would disturb her rest. But this prospect of eternal bloodshed involving a perpetual threat to the security of the subjects was revolting to her nature, and utterly disgusted at the state of the anarchy prevailing she resolved to improvise some sort of a government, popular and efficient in its character. Led by the best of patriotic motives she raised the minor son of Ibrāhim to the throne, and called him Bāhādur Nizām Shāh. She acted as the Regent, and her vigorous supervision soon created order out of the existing chaos. The capital was now in her hands; the army obeyed her commands, and the administration felt the stamp of her strong hands. But the leader\* of the Hindu faction, whom the lady failed to conciliate, invited the interference of Delhi. It only added fuel to the fire of Akbar's ambition, and the plains and fields of Ahmadnagar immediately rang with the clang of Moghul swords (1596).

## XII

Two Moghul armies led respectively by Prince Murād and Khān Khānān Mirzā Khān entered the Deccan, one by the way of Guzerāt

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\* Of this Hindu called Mean Rajoo by Ferishta Captain Grant-Duff has had no satisfactory account.





from the west and the other by the way of Mālwā from the north and effected a junction a few miles from Ahmadnagar. No sooner did Chānd Sultānā smell danger ahead than she, with all the wisdom of a clever statesman, made vigorous preparations for the defence of the city. She appealed to the leaders of the Abyssinian faction, Ikhlas Khān and Nehāng Khān, who put off their private animosities and promised their loyal support; and though the old Vizir, Miān Majlis, chief of the Deccani faction, who had long been suspected of complicity in the Moghul conspiracy, could not be brought over, the whole of the Ahmadnagar army stood faithfully by the infant Sultān whose salt they were eating. Then Chānd Sultānā sent a fervent appeal to the reigning Sultān of Bijāpur who was her relation, and whose regard for the Dowager Sultānā bordered on veneration. "The Moghul danger to Ahmadnagar," she wrote to her nephew of Bijāpur, "is no less a danger to her Adil Shāhi neighbour. The fall of one will spell the doom of the other; for the crafty Moghul acts on the principle "one stick at a time, and the bundle will break." The king of Bijāpur understood the hint, and forgetting old differences, made common cause with Ahmad-



nagar against the projected Moghul expedition. He sent 30,000 of his picked troops under the command of Hāmīd Khān, the most skilful general that Bijāpur could boast of. Thus setting her home in order, the patriotic lady held herself ready to try her strength against Imperial Delhi.

### XIII

Ahmadnagar lay besieged by the trained troops of Delhi. Two mines were run under its walls, and the Moghuls expected every moment to effect a breach wide enough to admit them into the fort. But the wakeful sentry on the ramparts somehow discovered the mines and sounded the bugle of alarm. In the twinkling of an eye the unwearied Sultānā, clad in full armour and with a veil on her face, appeared on the spot. She came to superintend her own workmen. Encouraged by her presence they ran to their task with a resolute will, and rendered the mines useless by countermining according to the directions of Chānd Sultānā. The baffled Mirzā Khān was furious. The best of Akbar's generals had yet to learn a lesson from a woman !

Chānd Sultānā now became the mark of the enemy's gun. Matchlock balls and arrows whiz-





zed past her ears; and though her comrades were dropping dead around her, heap upon heap, she did not shrink from her post. She directed her men like the best of captains, making it very difficult for the Moghul troops to gain their object. But there was a third mine run by Prince Murād whose troops fired it before the Sultānā's men could do anything to make it ineffectual. The counterminers were blown up to a man, and, with all that the lady could do a wide breach was made in the wall.

## XIV

Behold! a panic seizes the defenders. They desert their posts. They show no resistance, and leave the road open to the storming party. The Nizām Shāhi troops are falling back. But instantly they hear the encouraging voice of Chānd Sultānā, more effective than the terrible boom of the Moghul gun. "Friends," the voice rings clearly in their ears, "valiant troops of Ahmad-nagar, brave men of Bijāpur, is life so worth living after showing your backs to your enemies? Are these days so different from those of Hussain Nizām Shāh and Ali Adil Shāh when honour was dearer than the life of a coward? If you cannot live to defend your country, know at least





to live by dying in the attempt. Who among you wants eternal life in death? Who wants to cover, for eternal ages, his name, fame and life in the holy dust of the motherland? If there be any such among you, soldiers of the Deccan,—come, this is the golden opportunity of doing and dying for the motherland.”—So saying, Chānd Sultānā rushes headlong into the thickest of the fight, with a naked sword in her hand. The retreating soldiers of Ahmadnagar turn back and follow the Queen into the jaws of death. They raise a tremendous shout in the name of their Queen, and rush to the charge. They kill the advancing guards of the enemy, and fill up the ditches with rockets, gunpowder, match-lock balls and every sort of combustible ready to be fired. The Moghul troops fight desperately till it is dark, and retire to renew the assault in the morning.

## XV

The contest was long and bloody, and the enemy drew off, disputing every inch of ground and leaving a large number of their comrades slain before the ramparts of Ahmadnagar. The casualties of the besieged rose to a pretty round number, and thin as their ranks grew, they knew that the turn of those yet living was coming





next morning to follow those who had gone to their eternal rest. They knew well that Prince Murād and the Khān Khānān had granted them only a temporary cessation of hostilities; the life-and-death combat was still to follow. But the troops were not demoralised. The presence of the Sultānā was an inspiration to them. The spirit of the army was raised to the highest pitch, and enthusiasm in the city was boundless. Chānd Sultānā now directed all her energies to repair the breach; for, very soon, the issue of the battle would be decided on that fatal spot. The work proceeded rapidly, as everything now depended on speed; and before the great gong in the clock tower boomed the hour of midnight, the breach had been thoroughly repaired to a height not accessible to any scaling party without the aid of a fresh mine. When morning dawned and the Moghul troops hurried to deliver their postponed assault, what was their surprise to find the breach built up! To add to this, they found the veiled figure of Chānd Sultānā standing sentry on the walls close to the repairs that had been newly done.

## XVI

The troops of Mirzā Khān were painfully aware of the sharpness of the Queen's sword.





Her very name was disheartening to them. The inevitable result of the panic was shrewdly guessed by Shāhzādā Murād who agreed with Mirzā Khān that it was prudent to avoid the risk of an immediate engagement. They therefore opened negotiations.

To Chānd Sultānā this sudden climb-down of the Moghuls was quite unexpected. However, she embraced the opportunity of making up with the formidable superior force of an obstinate enemy without any further sacrifice of heroic blood. She knew, moreover, that the combination among the Ahmadnagar nobles could not last long. They would fly at one another's throat at the earliest opportunity, and Ahmadnagar politics would drift on to chaos again. So; from the best of motives Chānd Sultānā came to terms with the enemy by surrendering the claim of Bahādur Nizām Shāh on the recently conquered province of Berār (1596). The clang of hostile swords in the Ahmadnagar territory ceased for some time.

## XVII

But domestic trouble was brewing again in the land, and the nobles, with their eyes open, were digging their own graves. They did not allow





a year to lapse ; and while the Shāhzādā was yet engaged in settling the boundary disputes of his recent acquisition, messengers rode post-haste to the Moghul headquarters with a letter from Muhāmmad Khān, a refractory baron instigated by the Vizir. The treasonable correspondence showed the nature of the plot that was made : the capital was to be betrayed into the hands of the enemy as soon as the royal army would arrive. Khāndesh joined the Moghuls ; Bijāpur, Golcondā and Ahmadnagar formed the Deccan combination. Mirzā Khān did not forget his recent humiliation at the hands of Chānd Sultānā ; so the Moghul commander gladly entered into the conspiracy, and hostilities were at once resumed. The Delhi and Deccani troops met again in a trial of strength on the banks of the Godāvāri. For a couple of days the battle raged with equal fury on both sides. The Deccani troops accepted the lead of Chānd Sultānā and obeyed her to death : there was division in the Moghul camp, and Shāhzādā fell out with the Khān Khānān on material points. The result was indecisive,—and the royal troops, instead of pushing on the victory which they claimed, fell back behind the dense forests on the Godāvāri.





## XVIII

The news of the ill success against the Deccan confederacy reached the ears of the Great Akbar. A shrewd statesman that he was, Akbar sent his minister Abul Fazl to investigate into the affair. His report revealed a state of hopeless disagreement between Prince Murād and Mirzā Khān. Akbar removed both of them from the command and himself took the field to measure his strength against the Deccan combination.\* Prince Dāniyāl accompanied his father in charge of the artillery ; the army was re-inforced by the addition of large contingents of infantry and horse. The presence of the Emperor revived the drooping spirits of the Moghul army. The troops fought with greater confidence than before, and fort after fort fell before the conquering sword of Akbar. With forced marches the royal army reached the borders of the Ahmadnagar territory and halted on the banks of the Tāpti. From there a considerable force was sent in advance under Prince Dāniyāl to lay siege to Ahmadnagar, and the Emperor followed with all despatch.

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\* Elphinstone, IX. 2. P. 513.





## XIX

The Deccan confederacy was paralysed. But harm was done to the strength of the allied opposition by internal feuds rather than by any external factors. Bijāpur stood faithfully by Ahmadnagar in these dark days. But treason was at work,—and no kingdom can stand where treachery does its worst. Nehāng Khān, the Abyssinian noble, deserted Chānd Sultānā at the approach of the Imperial troops. Muhāmmad Khān was ready to feed fat his ancient grudge. The Vizir was relentless. Fate was going against Chānd Sultānā, and no human power could avert the course of a setting star.

The Regent understood her precarious position. She understood that love of country was a meaningless phrase with the nobles of Ahmadnagar whose hearts were impervious to any emotion higher than the love of self. She found it a hopeless task to reconcile the Abyssinian faction whose soul was dead to any sentiment of patriotism. Yet she kept her ideal well within sight. With tears in her eyes she implored the Vizir to save the country in the greatest crisis of her existence ; not even a savage beast, she said, would betray its lair to the enemy. But the





appeal fell flat on the unsympathetic heart. There was nothing for her now but to die for the country she loved so well.

## XX

But she must make a final attempt to save her motherland. If she has to die, she will die like a soldier at his post. So, while the Moghul cannon are booming round the city, and shot and shell are falling fast and thick on the streets of Ahmadnagar, the heroic Sultānā leads the handful of her loyal adherents to where Akbar himself is directing the sally against the walls of the fortress. She is glad that she faces an adversary like the Great Akbar : she is only sorry that she has to meet enemy in front and treason behind, that she is numerically inferior, and that her shot is expended. She encourages her men who cheer her name and follow her with greater confidence than ever. The sword in her hand inflicts death on all who attempt a passage through the walls. But her guns are silenced for want of shot : she fires copper balls into the Moghul camp. Then she loads her guns with silver and gold coins by turns, and ends by firing away the jewels in the royal treasury.\*

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\* Mentioned by Khāfi Khān—Vide F. N. II. Chap. IX. 2. Elphinstone.





Akbar Shāh is struck dumb in mute admiration. In his whole campaigning life this is perhaps the first instance when he meets an opposition of this nature. Stern as he is as a leader of men, the great soldier king of Moghul India is too magnanimous to pass heroism unnoticed. While his men are eager to push on and make an end of the lady who bears a charmed life, the sword in Akbar's right hand rises automatically to his broad forehead in a military salute, and he cries 'halt' to his followers. In the twinkling of an eye the battle ceases, and the Emperor himself shows a small white flag—the flag of truce.

The Sultānā kneels and returns the salute. She leads back her men and retires to her apartments to think of a future course of action.

## XXI

It was a fatal step that she took. The troops could not restrain their enthusiasm, and were furious that they had been called back at what seemed to them to be the moment of victory. The Vizir's party anticipating that their object would be lost if the Sultānā were allowed to come to terms with Akbar, made capital out of the incident narrated above. They





convinced the army that the Regent had betrayed the motherland and should get the traitor's due. The illiterate soldiery, excited beyond measure at the appeal, throwing all reason and moderation to the winds, burst into the Sultānā's apartments, and before she could open her lips to explain the situation, the Arch-fiend Muḥāmad Khān had plunged his murderous knife up to the hilt into her bosom (1600). Thus expired Chānd Sultānā, as the Great Cæsar did of old, at the moment when the most favourable terms for the safety of Ahmadnagar could be secured from the generous Akbar. But who could save a country under the curse of God ?

The great Bādshāh shuddered at the news, and, for once, his stern soldier's heart seemed to break. Without waiting for a minute his troops broke into the capital, and when treason had been duly rewarded, they sought out the lifeless corpse of Chānd Sultānā and gave her the honours of a military burial befitting the rank of the greatest General in the land.





CSL

## DURGĀBATI.

(LOVE OF COUNTRY).

## I

In a narrow defile in the Central Provinces, about twenty miles below Jubbulpore and on the right bank of the Narmadā, there is a lonely spot not much noticed in these days; yet the inquisitive student of history will still feel in that neglected region the aroma of a thrilling romance to interest him deeply in a bygone age of chivalry. The solitary wayfarer rests in his journey between two large slabs of rock. The simple-minded peasant boy brings him a refreshing draught from a hospitable spring close by. He then unfolds with evident pride and satisfaction the locally current tradition that this is the hallowed spot where the heroic Rājput Queen Durgābati laid down her life in the vindication of her self-respect and for the honour of her people. The rocks, says





the tradition, are the battle drum of Queen Durgābati (a strange metamorphosis!) standing still to bear eternal testimony to an Indian woman's valour and patriotism.

## II

Who was this Durgābati? Let me tell you. Here is a tale of an Indian lady's fortitude and self-sacrifice in the cause of the freedom of her country.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, Akbar the Great was engaged in his campaign of conquests and annexations with a view to rebuild the history of Hindusthān. When kingdom after kingdom in Northern India was bowing in quick succession before the fluttering Crescent of Imperial Delhi, and singing the praises of the greatest Moghul Bādshāh India has ever known, a small settlement of a hardy Rājput clan, nestled in the bosom of the Deccan mountains, enjoyed its freedom unmolested. Rānee Durgābati was administering her little property of Gondwānā on behalf of her minor son Beernārāin, and her ability challenged the exultant war drum of the conquering Moghul hero beating perilously near the gates of her small kingdom. The flourishing city of Garh-





mandal came in for its due share of attention from Akbar.

## III

Asaf Khān, the newly appointed Military Viceroy of the Emperor's possessions on the Narmadā, was a hot-headed Moslem general who had triumphantly led the banner of Islam against many a Hindu chief. The report of the prosperity of the neighbouring Hindu State reached his ears. He could not bear the idea that a petty Hindu principality under the protection of a weak and defenceless woman should so long defy the authority of Delhi while the Khān was eating the salt of Akbar the Great. Accordingly he set his heart upon the subjugation of idolatrous Gondwānā, and the pious wish received the assent of his Imperial Master. But Asaf Khān soon found to his bitter experience that he had a very hard nut to crack.

The report of the projected invasion reached the city of Garh in due course and alarmed the in-offensive, peace-loving inhabitants, unaccustomed to war for a very long period of time. But Rānee Durgābati would not submit tamely without striking a blow for freedom. Daughter of a brave Kshattriya chief, and mated to a still





more valorous Rājput prince, Durgābati had all the advantages of a soldier born and made. Her proud spirit rebelled against the thought of political extinction. She did not consider her sex, her age or her limited resources in men and money. Her self-respect and the honour of her people were at stake, and she would not throw these away at the behest of the haughty Moghul. She would fight the enemy of her people, the thief that wanted to rob her child of his birth-right, or perish in the attempt.

## IV

Durgābati took counsel with her faithful minister and her boy Beernārāin, now grown up a fine young prince of eighteen. They agreed to give battle and orders were sent to raise an army. The "celestial fire" of the Rānee's exhortations and her own fearless conduct acted like a miracle at this juncture. In a very short time a fully equipped army was ready to take the field against the invading hordes of Asaf Khān. Every heart was filled with enthusiasm, every face bore the mark of determination to win or die. Theirs was the cause of justice and righteousness, and the holy cause could not lack support. The young prince





joined the army as a subordinate officer and the Queen herself offered to lead her men to battle. The army hailed this gladsome news with shouts of joy.

Asaf Khān soon realised that he had reckoned without the host. He did not anticipate the latest change in the position of affairs in the city of Garh. That his army would encounter opposition was beyond his calculation. He had given his Royal Master distinctly to understand that the capitulation of the city was merely a question of demand, and that no Mahomedan blood would be shed in reducing the infidel Rānee. He wanted, moreover, a large part of his available forces in maintaining order in the newly acquired territories and had not, therefore, many hands to spare at present. So he sent for a draft of men, and resorted, in the meanwhile, to diplomacy.

## V

One morning a trusted messenger on a black charger attended by an escort of only two Moghul troopers, crossed to the other bank of the Narmadā and galloped post-haste up to the gates of the city of Garh. "We come from the Moghul camp," said the leader of the party,





"and crave the honour of an audience with the Rānee. Ours is an important mission that brooks no delay." The leader was disarmed and led into the audience chamber of the palace. Seated behind a screen, the Queen desired the Moslem officer to say what motive had induced him to seek that interview. "If there be anything," said the heroic lady, "that can be done to allay the unquenchable Moghul thirst for dominion, rest assured, my honoured friend, that the weak arms of a helpless woman will not be found wanting in their duty to send a soothing drink to the head-quarters."

"I come, O Rānee, with the olive branch of peace, and I am instructed to offer my terms. If you think fit to acknowledge the supremacy of the Moghuls, the first condition is that the Prince, your son, should be made over to the fatherly protection of the Emperor Akbar to be retained as a hostage in his Court. The next condition is, that you should be guided by the wise counsels of the Viceroy in....."

Before he had time to finish, the Queen stood erect, white with indignation.

"Our condition, bold Mahomedan," she replied in a voice tremulous with emotion, "is that your master, whoever he may be, should





come here in person to demand of us the terms on which we are asked to sell the birth-right of a free people. Messenger, you are granted a safe conduct out of the fort, so that you may tell him that Rānee Durgābati values her self-respect and the honour of her people more than her personal safety. Our greetings to your General with whom we long for the honour of a meeting on the plains yonder."

The meeting came to an abrupt close and the message of the Rānee was duly communicated to His Excellency the Moghul Governor.

## VI

In the Spring of 1564, two armies stood facing each other on the plains of Singhal Garh, a few miles from the city. Asaf Khān himself led the right wing of the Moghul army and came face to face with the heroic widow of Rājā Dalpat Shāh of Gondwana, herself leading the Rājput left. The battle commenced. The sword in the hand of Durgābati dealt destruction right and left among the enemy. Her stalwart frame, clad in a complete suit of mail, managing a white charger with the ease and grace of a born rider, struck terror into the hearts of the veterans of the Moghul army. The Rājput





infantry fought like demons. All the time the heroic Rānee was in the thick of the fight and though bleeding from several wounds she received from the shafts of the Moghul archers, her words were, "Forward, my brave boys, forward in the name of your country's honour." The Hindu cavalry that brought up the rear of the Rānee's forces now charged the Moghul centre and completed the rout.

## VII

The Imperial army vanished like chaff before the wind. The men fled pell-mell leaving their dead and dying, and it was a difficult task for their Commander to rally them again to his standard. But Asaf Khān had set his heart upon the conquest of Garhmandal at any cost, and his recent reverse acted only as a spur to further exertions. Before the Hindu army could get a month's time to recover from the strain of the last encounter, the Mahomedan war-bugle sounded for the second time before the gates of the fortress of Durgābati. The Rānee was prepared for such an emergency, and with the alacrity of a veteran of many fields she gathered the men and came out to fight the foe on the open plain. Soon Rājputs and Turks closed in a deadly





combat, and with the neighing of horses, the trumpet of elephants, the war cries of men and the clang of clashing swords, with the groans of the dying and the corpses of the dead, the battle-field presented a gruesome aspect. It was a life-and-death struggle to the Khān; it was no less to the Rājput lady. But the Moghul had only might on his side, while the Rājput had might backed up by right. So Turks and Rājputs fought, each to win or die, the one obstinately to maintain his prestige before the world and the other resolutely to defend his right as a free-born man. So the battle raged loud and long for the whole day, and the sun set over the fortunes of Islam that fell for the second time in this unequal match between a weak woman and a mighty king. The pride of the Mahomedan General again kissed the dust before the gates of the city of Garh. His army retreated in reduced strength and a weak *morale*.

### VIII

The Rājput soldiers fought and covered themselves with glory. The small army, however, badly needed some rest and the Rānee gave her men the holiday they deserved so well. There were great rejoicings in the city. The



streets were illuminated and the houses on both sides presented a gala look with flags, festoons and floral wreaths. The *Nahabat* played the livelong day and sang the praises of Rānee Durgābati and her heroic band of warriors who had stoutly upheld the honour of Gondwana. The Rānee held a State Durbār and honoured the men who had rendered themselves conspicuous by their gallantry. Prince Beernārāin was, with one accord, singled out for the Captaincy of the Garhmandal army.

But this step proved fatal. Jealousy rankled sore in the hearts of some that were disappointed. Treason followed in its wake and worked the mischief that made Garhmandal fall never to rise again.

## IX

It was a dark and stormy night. The Rānee retired to her chamber after saying her evening prayers, and taking her frugal supper of a cup of milk. The Prince was not yet in his bed. He was busy looking over some state accounts submitted late by the cashier of the Rāj. The sentry that mounted guard at the palace gate walked with a heavy and measured tread.

Suddenly the man espied a blazing torch by a breach in the southern wall of the city. There





was another and yet another. He raised the alarm. But before the inmates of the palace could half realize what had happened, a swarm of Moghul troopers forced their way into the courtyard and made short work with the half-awake guards at their posts. The Moghul van was led by a Hindu deserter who thought he was deprived of his legitimate honour of commanding the Rājput army.

The confusion in the palace grew worse every minute. The Rānee, however, did not lose the calm composure of her mind. Clad in her suit of armour, sword in hand, she hurried downstairs. She met the Prince on the steps and divided the command of the remaining fragment of her army between herself and her son.

In the *mélec*, Beernārāin met the treacherous deserter and dealt him the traitor's death. The fall of this villain created a panic among the Moghul soldiers, most of whom rushed to safety out of the fort. The Rānee and the Prince followed them outside the city and made a stand on the famous plains before Singhal Garh.

## X

Meanwhile, a few of the Rānee's adherents gathered round her person and tried to dissuade





her from continuing this struggle against immense odds. With scorn she rejected their advice to seek safety in flight. She fought her way through the serried ranks of the Moghuls, led by Asaf Khān himself who was engaged by the Prince in another part of the field.

But the fortunes of the battle were going decidedly against the Rājputs. The Prince received a mortal wound from a Moghul lancer and fell on the field. At this heart-rending sight the Queen rushed on to where the Khān was directing his men and confronted him. The Mahomedan General cowered before her as before a lioness whose cub he had snatched away.

"Villain," thundered forth the Queen, "valour I can fight single-handed, but not treason. Let not posterity say that the Queen of Gondwana could not die for her country while she had yet her sword to raise. Settle accounts with your conscience, coward, and prepare yourself for the traitor's doom." So saying, she dealt a heavy blow on the turbaned head of the Khān who had no time to parry it. He fell senseless in his saddle and his charger left the field with the prostrate body on his back. Just at this moment a shaft from an invisible hand struck the eye of Durgābati. While she was trying to take it out,





the spear of a Mahomedan pierced her through the heart and brought her to the ground. The flower of Rājput chivalry closed for ever.

## XI

Thus perished Durgābati, the heroic Queen of Garhmandal in her attempt to save the honour of her people, to uphold the liberty of her country, against the sweeping onrush of a vastly superior enemy force. History tells us of the heroic peasant-maid of Domremy who raised the famous siege of Orleans. The English poet has sung in immortal verse of "the British warrior queen" who taught a lesson to the legions of Imperial Rome. But history does not tell us of this Indian Boadicea before whom quelled the mighty hosts of the great Moghul, flushed with the pride of recent victory in a very successful campaign in the North.

Durgābati is dead. Though history has accorded her a shabby treatment, she has richly deserved a place of honour in the Valhalla of nations' heroes.

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## MIRĀ BĀI.

(RELIGIOUS DEVOTION).

## I

A very fine and well attended bridal procession halted before the palace gates of Merta in Rājputānā. The gay cavalcade sent its respectful obeisances to the Chief and was about to pass on.

“Who is that going, papa, seated on a throne?” enquired a pretty little child of six summers, who was carried outside in the arms of her nurse. Rājā Ratturbatia Rānā, for such was the name of the blessed father, the Chief of the palace, said in reply to the enquiring voice, “It is a bridegroom, my darling.” “Oh, I will have a bridegroom,” insisted the girl; and the fond father, bringing out a newly made statuette of Krishna, the god of the Vaishnavas, presented it to his girl Mirā, saying that it was the bridegroom she wanted. “Dress it well, feed it well and worship





it. Then your bridegroom will be happy." With these words the girl was dismissed. Thenceforth she looked after the image as she was asked to do. She dressed it in the richest velvet and adorned it with the most precious jewels that her royal parents could give her. It was her bridegroom.

## II

Thus, it is said, was sown the seed of piety in the tender heart of Mirā Bāi, when she was scarcely out of her cradle. The seed of Vaishnavism thus planted and fostered by her Vaishnava parents, afterwards grew into a large tree with spreading branches, that sheltered many a weary soul under its cool shade. It gave us an anchorite princess whose renunciation was not lighter than that of a Buddha or a Gaurāṅga.

Mirā grew up a beautiful princess, rich in the graces of her person and unrivalled in the charms of her mind. She had a sweet rich voice and it was like the music of the heavenly choir when she sang the Vaishnava hymns to the tune of her lute, and held her audience spell-bound. It was a little paradise on earth she created for herself and her parents. Years went on, and the fame of her beauty and accomplishments having reach-





the ears of Mukuldeo, Rānā of Mewar, she was claimed at fifteen as the bride of Kumbha, heir-apparent to the *guddee* of Mewar. The wedding was celebrated with right royal pomp in the midst of great popular rejoicings.

## III

"What is it that you have brought with you from your father's roof?" was the peremptory demand of Kumbha's mother, when Mirā alighted from her closed palanquin at the entrance to the Rānā's harem and took the dust of her mother-in-law's feet.

"Why, it is my god Krishna, the lord of my heart," replied the bride in the simplicity of her heart. "Then I may as well tell you at once that I will have none of your Vaishnava worship under my roof," was the curt rejoinder of the Rānee, a devoted worshipper of Sakti, and without any more ceremony the two parted at the threshold.

This was the reception Mirā got at the hands of her husband's people. It cut her to the quick. She was subsequently denied admittance into the Rānā's Zenānā, and separate lodgings were allotted to that heathen girl whose touch was pollution. Her husband, the Rānee's son, was forbidden





to visit her. She was treated like an outcaste in what was her own home.

This strange and inhuman conduct of her husband's people, however, could not damp her spirits. It did not matter to the innocent girl that she was deprived of the company of her earthly husband. She was wedded in spirit to the Lord Krishna in whom she had found all that her soul was hankering after. Her spirit found a haven of peace in her *Ranchhorjee*, the image of the god she worshipped from her babyhood. So, in the face of the taunts and jeers that were levelled against her, she continued to worship the idol of her heart. The outside world was like a blank that had lost all its charms for this young girl of sixteen.

#### IV

One fine moonlit night Rānā Kumbha was watching at the gate of Mirā's sleeping chamber. Unclean rumours had reached the ears of the new Rānā of Mewar, impeaching the fidelity of his Vaishnava wife. So, he was himself mounting guard at dead of night. Mirā was talking to somebody. It was joyous company. The shouts of her hilarity aroused the jealous suspicions of the Rānā, and, sword in hand, he





forced open the door and indignantly demanded of Mirā with whom she was making merry at that hour of the night. Kumbha found none in the room except his wife though he made a laborious search. Not a mouse stirred. To the jealous questions of the Rānā innocent Mirā replied that she was enjoying the company of her "bridegroom." Kumbha was in great wrath. "Who can be your bridegroom, faithless woman, but myself who brought you to Mewar?" "He is not my lord, O lord of Mewar, who has treated me thus cruelly. It is Krishna, the Holder of mountains, the Slayer of Kansa. I have found His love and with tears have I planted its seed in my heart and tended the seedling till it has grown into a spreading tree. I am now enjoying its cool shade. This body of flesh and blood is at the disposal of the King of Mewar, but my soul is held in 'fee simple' to Lord Shree Krishna, the King of kings. I am His servant for ever and a day."

The boldness and sincerity of her words struck deep into the mind of the Rānā. For a time he understood the folly of his ways and was persuaded to make a liberal grant for the maintenance of Mirā's establishment. The Rānā let her alone.





## V

For some time it went well with Mirā. Absorbed in her worship she gave herself up entirely to her devotional exercises. But she did not shave her head; she did not wear the bark of trees, nor did she go through any religious austerities. On the other hand, a born princess and wife of a prince, she decorated herself richly as she would adorn the image she worshipped. Was this her renunciation? She was earthly: she liked the things of the earth. Mark the reply she made to the ladies of the royal harem who came one day to scoff. On being charged that her habits were inconsistent with the time-honoured Vaishnava practices she said, "If only baths would bring you any, the nearer to God then certainly the shark and the crocodile have got their salvation; if a dietary of pure fruits and roots would make a saint of you, then monkeys and bats would swell the list of saints; if, again, a dish of herbage and water would give you beatitude, then the goats and deer of the forest have surely been blest. It is love, it is charity, it is the sincere outpouring of the faithful heart that can get you on the road to the Lord of your heart, no matter if you worship





him in rich and costly raiments or the rags of the mendicant."

The ladies who "came to scoff remained to pray."

But the jealous heart of the Rānā could not be purged clean of his suspicious thoughts.

## VI

Mirā was singing her soul-enthhralling hymns in her hall of worship. Her rich voice, melodious and rhythmic to a degree was wafted on the wings of the breeze to the feet of her Lord Shree Krishna. Her divine music enchanted the audience. After she had finished her prayers, a Vaishnavite mendicant came forward and offered a rich necklace of pearls as a present to the god. "Years ago I was a merchant of substance," said the devotee, "but I have renounced the world and its pleasures. What better use can I make of this garland than by offering it as a homage to the Lord?" The poor pilgrim was importunate and would not leave unless the desire of his heart was fulfilled. Mirā accepted the gift so humbly offered, threw the necklace round the head of Shree Krishna and dismissed the man. But poor Mirā did not know what trouble it would bring her in its train. The man was none other





than the great Moghul Emperor Akbar who was attracted by the fame of Mirā's music, and, disguised as a mendicant, made his pilgrimage to the shrine. Akbar, satisfied that Mirā was matchless as an artist, made the costly present in recognition of her merit. But Dame Rumour put a very different complexion on this simple incident. The story, exaggerated or underrated to suit the ends of designing men, reached the ears of Rānā Kumbha in a distorted form. He made up his mind to set evil tongues at rest by doing away with this constant source of irritation.



It was a trying situation. Sore in heart and prejudiced in mind, the Rānā visited his innocent wife in her room for the second time. The scowl on his forehead indicated the coming storm. But Mirā did not lose her self-possession. She knew that the visit of the Rānā was ominous, but she did not shrink in his presence. She faced the situation heroically. What possible fears could divert her from the path she had chalked out for herself? What earthly injuries could make her turn back from the enjoyment





of heavenly bliss ? To her, the earth was only a temporary abode, and the physical frame was nothing but a prison-cell for her soul that was eager to burst through its bars and fly to the Eternal Spirit. She was ready for the worst, if the worst would come. A terrible oath escaped the lips of the Rānā of Mewār. He demanded where Mirā had got that necklace from. "The Lord hath got it for Himself," was the fearless reply of Mirā. "He took a fancy for it and wears it round His neck." The Rānā lost his patience. Holding a cup of poison before his wife, he ordered her to drink it off. Like a meek and faithful Indian wife, with a face beaming with radiant joy that the time was near when her soul would fly to her Heavenly Lord, Mirā took the cup with unshaken hands. Offering it as a libation to Shree Krishna, she quaffed off the contents. It was the work of a moment to decide and to do. It was done,—but lo ! the poison was even as nectar to Mirā Bāi. She assimilated the venom and did not die. Next day at Durbār time the baffled Rānā passed the doom of banishment on the witch that bore a charmed life. Mirā was turned out of doors. The gates of Mewār were shut against the lawfully wedded wife of Rānā Kumbha.





## VIII

To holy Brindāban, where the Lord Krishna passed the early days of His incarnated existence, Mirā Bāi turned her weary footsteps now. A large following kept her company. Though abandoned by her husband, she yet commanded the veneration of a large section of the people of her own creed. Her religious discourses attracted many Vaishnava saints who were proud to cultivate her acquaintance. Passing a few years in this way at Brindāban, and visiting the sacred shrines where the Lord was pleased to reveal His youthful activities, this persecuted lady visited Dwārakā in Kāthiāwād, the scene of the later-day activities of Lord Krishna. There she founded and endowed a monastery wherein she enshrined her idol *Ranchhorjee*. Her followers flocked to the temple in large numbers from the remotest corners of Vaishnava India.

## IX

It is *Janmāshtami* in the month of Bhādra, the anniversary of the birth of the Lord. The newly founded temple of *Ranchhorjee* in Dwārakā to-day appears gay as on a festive occasion. Mirā in celebrating her worship at the temple has invited all her friends to partake of the blessings





of Krishna. People, attracted by the reports of Mirā's devotion, have come from distant parts of India to witness the celebration of the anniversary, of the Lord at the sea-side monastery, and the hostess is looking to the comforts of all the pilgrims. Suddenly the men find a fine palanquin, carried on the shoulders of stalwart Rājput bearers, making for Mirā Bāi's temple. Richly caparisoned elephants, gaily decked horses and liveried footmen follow the conveyance at a respectful distance. Mewār banners are floating high above the procession. Rānā Kumbha is come to take back his queen. The Rānā has understood that Mirā is a chaste woman ; her fidelity, her sincerity cannot be questioned. Repenting of his past misdeeds the Rānā comes personally to take his wife back to the palace of Mewār. And Mirā ! She is ready to go. She looks as if in glad anticipation of this *Home-coming*. Richly attired in costly velvet and precious jewels, the beautiful Mirā takes the dust of her husband's feet and enters the temple of *Ranchhorjee* to have, as every body thinks, a last look at her idol. With her own hands she bars the door of the temple from inside. The Chief waits outside with his men ; but the slandered, abandoned and persecuted lady never comes out





again. The Rājputs force open the door, but Mirā is missing. The Lord Shree Krishna is smiling in the robes and jewels that decked the earthly tenement of the soul of this saintly lady. She has become *one* with the bridegroom of her choice.

## X

Wait, Rānā Kumbha, for many a day to come, even as King Rām Chandra did under almost similar circumstances thousands of years before you. Wait, watch and be wise only to repent that you got and lost. Many get but few retain, and 'wisdom lingers' at a forbidding distance from the world.





CSL

## KSHAMĀVATI.

(SACRIFICE).

## I

Every Hindu, literate or illiterate, who claims any intimacy with the common usages prevailing in his country knows Khanā,\* the lady astrologer of India. In the every day concerns of his

\* For a part of the materials of this history of Khanā's life, I am indebted to an admirable book called "Varāhamihira" written by Pandit K. P. Vidyaratna and published by the Basumati Press, Calcutta. My thanks are also due to Sreeman Prafulla Kumar Ghosh of the Bogra Zilla School for an illuminating article on the subject published in the Rangpur Bikās, 1918. The current traditions regarding the life of Kshamāvatī (Khanā in popular parlance) are worse than a myth. There is evidence to prove that she could never have set her foot on the soil of Ceylon, or graced the court of King Vikramāditya, Prince Arthur of Indian legendary lore. The supposition would be a monstrous anachronism. Yet the stuff circulated by a Bengali novelist of great repute has been gulped with great relish by an unthinking section of the reading public, and accepted as gospel-truth. Fiction has killed history, and the pity of it is that the story told in a very charming Bengali style has been allowed to find currency, and has yet remained unchallenged by any serious student of history. On this point the reader is referred to critics like Rai Bahadur Jogesh Chandra Roy, Professor, Cuttack College; Babu Dinesh Chandra Sen, Professor, Calcutta University; and to the *Viswakosha*, the Encyclopedia of the Bengali language.





life the Hindu has occasions to allude to the sayings of Khanā times without number. A Hindu of the orthodox school whose mind still retains a lingering trace of old-world opinions must not set about a particular work, if any prophecy of Khanā condemns the wisdom of such a step. The simple-minded husbandman, be he a Hindu or a Mahomedan, is sure to wait for the propitious moment for sowing or harvesting: Khanā has laid it down. The Hindu woman will look for an omen revealed by Khanā before setting her hand to anything of domestic urgency. But to the educated Hindu Khanā is something more. He knows her better for her amazing self-sacrifice than for the numerous restrictions she has imposed on the freedom of his movements in everyday life.

## II

In a charming little valley in modern Kāffīristān, walled by the Hindu-Kush on the west, and the mountains of Cāshmere on the east, there was a small village, Srinagar by name. About two hundred years ago, when Delhi was thrown into the vortex of a political revolution on the eve of the dissolution of the Moghul





Empire, the Cāshmere Brāhman Atanāchāryya was taking his observations with the *Ursa Major* and *Ursa Minor* in his ancestral seat at Srinagar. Free from the excitement of all revolutionary politics, free from the snare of court preferment and popular applause this learned Doctor of Astronomy was following his delightful pursuit in a rural retreat. Considerably advanced on the shady slope of fifty, the widower Atanāchāryya was somehow passing his time between watching a brilliant star in the midnight sky and gazing at another by his side on the earth—his pretty little daughter Kshamāvati, a jolly, bright child of six years or so.

### III

The professor lost his wife when Kshamā was a suckling baby, and the difficult charge of bringing up the child naturally devolved on him. Father and mother in one, the solitary recluse did his work with a creditable zeal. He nursed, fed and clothed the baby with his own hands, and his neighbours did not know that the daughter of Atanāchāryya lacked the tender nursing of a delicate maternal hand. The child was the constant companion of her father in his rambles through his native woods and glades.





She would sit by his side when her father kept gazing at the midnight sky to solve an intricate astronomical situation. The childish curiosity of Kshamāvati very often prompted a series of random queries, and she would not give her father rest unless she could be satisfied. Thus was fostered in the child a thirst for knowledge which in later years made such a valuable contribution to Indian astronomic lore. Thus breathed Kshamāvati in the intellectual atmosphere of her father's study in a hillside Bactrian village, and her early associations fitted her eminently for the unique position she afterwards occupied in Hindu astronomy.

## IV

Thus, when Kshamā was almost out of her cradle, she imbibed from her father an irrepressible zeal for mathematical studies. Her intelligent enquiries about the heavenly bodies did not escape the watchful eye of her father. He fed her growing curiosity and devoted all his spare half-hours to initiate her into the mysteries of the science of stars. Under his very careful and sympathetic guidance, Kshamāvati, by the time she was eleven, had a peep into the theories of Vāskarāchāryya and Varāha-





mihira,\* famous scholars of ancient India. But her intense longing for a greater participation in the rich legacies left by the Indian astronomers of old raised a new difficulty. Srinagar and its seclusion could not afford an adequate field for the intellectual activities of this inquisitive girl. For days together Atanāchāryya tried to come to a solution, and the more did he think, the stronger did the desire grow in him to move to a more bracing atmosphere which could satisfy the intellectual cravings of Kshamāvati. Benares in those days was the most important centre of Hindu learning. Science and literature flourished there side by side. So, the astronomer of Srinagar shed many a parting tear before leaving his paternal seat for good, and came to settle in the famous city of Vārānasi (Benares).

## V

Father and daughter passed some days in their new home in making acquaintances. Vārānasi could not present any new feature of

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\* Through a sad perversion of truth this name has been split up into Varāha and Mihira by the novelist already mentioned. Two separate individuals are conceived as father and son. But Varāhamihira is one name as Haricharan. In the famous Sanskrit verse about the Nine Jewels of King Vikramāditya, the compound Varāhamihira is in the *singular* number and not in the *dual*.





attraction to the old man who had seen much of the world, and had no other earthly concern save and except the education of his daughter, the only delight of his heart. But to Kshamā it was a period of excitement. She was in a whirlpool of novel sensations, one chasing the other in rapid succession in a kaleidoscopic show, as it were. Benares has ever been the magnificent dream-land of ancient Hindu civilisation, a favourite resort of the Goddess of Learning and her votaries. The ancient schools of Sanskrit learning, each under a Professor of recognised ability, the number of earnest students hailing from the remotest parts of India, the temples with their priests chanting the Vedic hymns at morning and evening worship,—in short, this University atmosphere of the city, most favourable to the growth of a *Brahmachārī's* mind captured the imagination of Kshamāvati and made an indelible impression on her mind. With a singleness of purpose she gave herself up to her favourite study, and made the most of the literary opportunities Vārānasi could afford. In a short time the fame of her father spread through the city, and before the year was fairly out, the Professor found himself surrounded by a number of inquisitive learners who flocked





to his house for instruction. Though not included in the old man's original programme, the school greatly advanced the object which brought him to Benares. Thrown into the company of learned scholars, Kshamā easily mastered the whole system of Indian astronomy, which so profoundly influenced her scholastic career in after years.

It must, however, be borne in mind that, with this extraordinary expansion of her intellect, Kshamā was rapidly growing into a beautiful maiden. The time was coming when, as a Hindu maiden, she was sure to be called away to a sphere of life more congenial to her age and sex.

## VI

Of the numerous pupils that sat for instruction at the feet of the Achāryya in Benares there was a Brahmin youth, Mihira by name, hailing from a sea-side district of Bengal. He was born at Chandrapura,\* a pretty little town skirted by a fringe of cocoa-nut palms and betel-nut trees, and surrounded by an old fashioned moat on all sides. Chandrapura was the seat

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\* Dewli, a small village near the Sub-Divisional town of Baraset in the 24-Parganahs still marks the site of ancient Chandrapura, where the name of Kshamāvati (Khanā) coupled with that of Mihira is still extant. The ruins of a Rājā's palace are still visible there, and old-folk gossip yet recalls with a glow of pride the deeds of Rājā Chandraketu who held his court there with all the pomp of a feudal chief of pre-British India.





of a feudal lord of Moghul India, who punctually paid his revenues into the royal treasury at the provincial capital, and was left in the unmolested enjoyment of his rights as an independent chief. The family of Mihira, holding service under Rājā Chandraketu and boasting of a matrimonial alliance with the Rāj, was of considerable influence in that part of Bengal. Mihira received the benefit of a culture becoming his high status in society. He studied Grammar, Rhetoric, Mathematics and Astronomy under the paternal supervision of the Rājā, but an intense longing to complete his education summoned him away from his ancestral home, and this is how we find him among the students of Atanāchāryya in Benares.

## VII

A very clever pupil of his preceptor, Mihira had his place secure in a warm corner of the old man's heart. He became the fellow-student of Kshamāvati with whom he discussed the puzzles of their study, and the conclusions they arrived at were tested by the Professor, and commended highly for their accuracy. Kshamāvati kept pace with her friend in all his intellectual pursuits. Now and then she would set her





father wondering by clearing up intricacies that would bewilder the whole school,—Mihira included. Over and above, Kshamā evinced a keen interest in Astrology, a branch of learning which, owing to its mysterious nature baffled many an ardent spirit. Kshamā taught its mysteries to Mihira, but the seed did not take kindly to the soil, and Mihira dropped the programme by mutual agreement.

While things were thus progressing the invisible Fates were trying to bind them together in a stronger bond than mere school friendship. Constant association and similarity of age, station and occupation promoted the growth of a very tender feeling between the two. No wonder, therefore, that these youthful hearts were drawn to each other by a stronger and closer tie than mere companionship. The father shrewdly guessed at the feelings of both, but unless he could satisfy himself that Mihira was a desirable party, he could not look upon the prospect with an eye of approval. At this juncture an incident occurred which set all his doubts at rest.

## VIII

Rājā Chandraketu was on his way to a pilgrimage to Benares. In these days of safe





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and cheap travelling in British India our readers can possibly have no idea of the trouble a journey meant here two centuries ago. Traveling was so very costly and unsafe that it was reckoned a remarkable achievement if the pilgrim could ever come back to his family : the adventures of Stanley and Livingstone were nothing to the feat of the Bengali in making the distance between Dacca and Murshidabad, in and out. But to a Rājā the case, of course, was somewhat different. Thus, the lord of Chandrapura and his entourage found themselves, without any great ado, seated comfortably in half-a-dozen country boats on the breast of the Ganges, decidedly the most convenient conveyance in pre-British India. The Rājā must have thanked his stars that, like ordinary folk, he had not to dispose of his property by a will before leaving Chandrapura.

Amidst the good wishes of the Rājā's people, the small flotilla sailed up the Ganges majestically, vying with the proverbial slowness of the snail and the tortoise. By short stages it left behind a town here and a village there on either bank of the river. The distant hamlet reposing in the midst of bamboo clumps and tamarind groves, the shy village maiden with





an earthen pitcher balanced on her head, the light-hearted peasant-boy singing and binding his sheaves in the yellow fields yonder, the supple cow-boy running after his drove of cattle or twisting the tail of a truant that had happened to stray into a neighbouring hay-store,—all these old familiar scenes seemed to revive the interest of the party in rural life and its homely joys. After an otherwise uneventful career of a month or so the boats sighted the domes of Benares, and it must have been a very agreeable sigh of relief that the Rājā breathed when his journey came to a close.

## IX

On landing, this Bengali nobleman found himself besieged by a troop of hungry priests and professional guides who offered, for a fee, to take all possible care, temporal and spiritual, of the Rājā's concerns. But the first care of the Rājā was to trace the whereabouts of his adopted son Mihira. As soon as the guides heard of the Bengali student, they took the Rājā's men to the various Sanskrit *Chatuspāthis*, and the fame of Atanāchāryya naturally drew them thither and led to the discovery of Mihira. What an agreeable surprise to the young





man! He made all possible haste to meet his benefactor.

Mihira was now grown to man's stature. His robust physique, his stately bearing, and the stamp of culture on his noble countenance created a very favourable impression on the Rājā's mind. He was glad that the time of Mihira was so usefully spent in the acquisition of the ancient astronomic lore of India. Chandraketu seized on the very happy idea of removing a long-felt want of sea-side Bengal by making him come back home to grace his court with his scholarship. So, he lost no time in making the proposal and gave Mihira a week's time to consider.

## X

It was really a trying time for Mihira. The situation offered opened for him his way to worldly fame: moreover, it was among his own kith and kin that he was going back. But he remembered Kshamāvati. He had learnt to take a very delicate interest in his agreeable companion. How could he leave her who was the spring of his actions? Separation now might mean separation for ever. He would take her with him, if possible. He hit upon a very clever plan.





## IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

CSL

He appeared before Chandraketu on the appointed day and talked the matter over.

"I thank you," said Mihira, "I thank you most heartily, Sir, for the very welcome proposal, and your word is my law. But I am afraid I am too insignificant for the great honour you have reserved for me. I am yet a student, and until such time I can worthily fill the chair of Astronomy in your Court it had better go to a Professor of ripe experience and admitted scholarship. There is no dearth of erudition in Benares."

"Quite true," said the Rājā, "but I do not know of any one in this famous University, who would willingly change it for a dark corner in an out-of-the-way locality."

"My mind," replied Mihira, "naturally turns to my own preceptor who is at this moment the wonder of the city. In Astronomy he does not yield the palm to a rival."

"The greater reason," objected Chandraketu, "why he can never agree to leave Benares."

"To explain matters more clearly," replied Mihira, and his eyes sparkled with the fire of an eloquent advocacy, "I must say that my preceptor is almost a new arrival in the city, and has not formed any permanent ties. Not being





saddled with a family, his only concern is to find a safe home for his only child, a daughter whom he has been giving the education the sharpest scholar in the country would envy. Where can such a home be found, if it be not in the gift of Rājā Chandraketu, the well-known patron of learning in Bengal?"

These words of Mihira set the Rājā thinking. Did he shrewdly guess the meaning of the last speech of his adopted son? Mihira was dismissed with instructions to arrange an interview with the famous Astronomer of Benares.

## XI

Remote from the din and bustle of the world's business, the heat and dust of the crowd, far away from the "ignoble strife" of clashing interests stood the modest academy in which Atanāchāryya taught his admiring school. The cottage commanded the view of the broad expanse of Gangā's waters, and was just rimmed by an arcade of shady trees, past which sighed the gentle breeze to relax the strain on the intellect of the teacher and his pupils. Altogether, this charming little place had about it an air of sanctity, good-will and peace.





One morning, the old Professor, seated on a raised platform round the foot of a leafy tree, was listening intently to his daughter's exposition of a newly formulated theory about the partial eclipse of the moon when Mihira came in and announced a visitor. Rājā Chandraketu, for it was none other than that august personage, was received by Atanāchāryya with a befitting dignity. The exchange of civilities over, the Rājā explained how his beloved ward happened to be in Benares, and how the fame of the Professor had attracted Chandraketu to that temple of learning and occasioned the interview.

"And because Benares has reaped the fruit of your erudition for a sufficiently long time, is it not just and fair that distant Bengal should now come in for her share of the glory of receiving a scholar of your attainments?"

With this the Rājā unfolded the plan he had in his mind, discussed between themselves every phase of the question, and in the end, gained his point.

"As you promise, O kind-hearted Rājā," concluded the Pandit, "a safe asylum for my daughter who is more to me than even the starry firmament above, I welcome your proposal and agree to make Bengal the land of my adoption."





For once young Mihira had read the human heart aright.

## XII

Years have passed since Atanāchāryya left Benares and came to settle in Bengal. All these years have been an uninterrupted round of happiness for Kshamāvati. Steadily did she rise in the estimation of the Rājā who found in her ample evidence of a very high order of learning,—mastery in the intricacies of Astronomy and the puzzles of Astrology hitherto unknown in Bengal. Chandraketu heaped favours on her father, and gave her a home and a husband; and Mihira, too, in getting her as his wife, had the fondest hopes of his heart realized. Kshamāvati was now a Bengali woman ministering to the comforts of her father and her husband's people. Though a woman of a distant land she was in womanly virtues no way inferior to her Bengali sisters. Bred in science and ripe in scholarship, she was yet a dutiful wife and an ideal woman. Though most of her time was taken up in satisfying inquisitive learners and solving the hardest riddles of Astrology proposed by the Court, yet at home she was the delight of her old father and the best beloved of





her husband. She cooked and served, and was "a ministering angel" in hours of need. Great as a scholar, she was still greater as an Indian *woman* whom entire self-abnegation has rendered conspicuous in the eyes of the world.

## XIII

Kshamāvati was at the height of human happiness. Delusion! We imagine ourselves at the height when there is really one step between ourselves and the yawning abyss. The Fates work beyond the gaze of man. They worked silently to give a very tragic end to Kshamā's life. At Chandrapura her life was a chapter of success. Each day added a fresh page to the solution of a hitherto unsolved problem of the science. Each day brought a fresh discovery in the domain of Astrology. Her predictions and their fulfilment were looked upon with a vague sense of awe by the people far and near, by the literate and the illiterate alike. Every new triumph of truth, every laurel added to her crown of glory helped to endear her to the Rājā, but removed her one step farther from the sympathy of the old school of Pandits that fattened at the Rājā's Court. The palmy days of the Pandits were gone. Their





influence at Court was sadly at a discount. The fame of Kshamāvatī eclipsed that of all, and there was no man in the length and breadth of the country, who could even make the pretence of an approach to the scholarship of this lady from a foreign land. But this was too much for jealousy to bear. Intrigue was already rearing its head. The old Professor was dead, and Mihira could not cope single-handed with the rising tide of popular feeling against his wife.

## XIV

A terrible earthquake shook the plains of Bengal in the winter of 1742. The general damage was serious, but the area bordering on the Bay of Bengal suffered most. It caused a wail of distress among the tenants of Chandrapura, and the number of homeless families swelled from day to day. The pitiable sight moved the Rājā who hastened to request his Pandits to intercede for divine protection. Those "lords spiritual" of the Rāj suggested the holding of a great sacrifice in the palace grounds with a view to propitiate the Earth Goddess, so that no more earthquakes could visit the land. As a Bengali Brahmin of the orthodox type, Mihira could not help signing the requisition of





the Pandits on the old Rājā, advising an expenditure of a good round sum in the propitiatory rites.

## XV

To Kshamāvati the requisition came as a surprise when Rājā Chandraketu communicated to her the decision of the Pandits. She was pained to find the name of her husband associated with such a hoax. She protested that the goddess in question had nothing to do with an earthquake, which she explained as a simple phenomenon of Nature beyond the control of religious offerings and propitiatory rites. She explained the matter rationally before the whole Court and challenged the synod of priests to disprove her exposition.

But the attitude of Kshamāvati only evoked a storm of indignant protest from the priests. Versed in the mysteries of an occult lore, these hoary sages "though vanquished would argue still". They made angry speeches in the hall and set up a violent agitation against the up-country wench, whose heterodox views and juggleries and witchcraft were bringing devastation on a smiling land. They dragged her name in the mire, and various scandals were manufac-





tured and circulated by some unprincipled men in their pay. They breathed forth venom into the ears of Mihira against his wife, vented their pent-up spleen against the innocent lady in a furious anathema and passed on her the doom of banishment from the land.

## XVI

We are now approaching the final act in the great tragedy of Kshamā's life. We find her here the great woman who lives to us in death. Truth is indeed stranger than Fiction, and where else will you find such an example, if not in India, where the woman has held her life as less than nothing, if she could by its sacrifice render others happy? From pre-historic times the story has been repeated over and over again on the plains of the Ganges and the Indus that the mother lives for her child, the wife for her husband, the woman for the man. The Indian woman knows of no separate existence. Indian womanhood is rich in this tradition of selflessness, and the Indian heart is proud of it.

To resume our story. The mandate of the synod has been duly communicated to Kshamā-vati by her husband. She sees through the plot, but bows to the decree of fate. She does





not care for her own happiness, but feels most for her innocent husband who has been made a victim to the tyranny of priestcraft. She resolves to do her part. To extricate her husband from this difficult position she will play the selfless woman.

## XVII

Early next morning, Mihira is offering his prayers in the temple of the tutelary goddess of his family. He is absorbed in his meditations. With eyes closed and palms joined he sits before the goddess, as if praying to her for a way out of this ordeal. He sits motionless like a statue before a statue. His fervent prayers over, he opens his eyes slowly, and finds before him the head of his beloved wife sundered from the lifeless body, rolling in a pool of blood,—a voluntary offering to the goddess. Kshamā has noiselessly crept into the room, unnoticed by her husband. Snatching the sword from the hand of the goddess she has severed her own head and made a present of it to him whom she loves best. "I am going, husband, but I die with the satisfaction that I have saved your country from humiliation and your family from ignominy. You are great, and I am small."

Kshamāvati is dead, but she lives in every Indian heart. She made a sacrifice.





CSL

## AHALYĀ BĀI.

(THE IDEAL QUEEN).

### I

The pilgrim to the sacred shrine at Gaya offers his worship, first of all, to the great god Vishnu of the Hindu pantheon. But he makes it a point to render his homage to the marble statue of a noble-hearted Marhatta lady who spent a part of her royal treasure in erecting the holy Vishnupada nearly two centuries ago. Indeed Ahalyā Bāi is one of those ideal Hindu women whose piety has rendered them famous in history. Between the Himalayas on the north, and Cape Comorin to the south, between the Bay of Bengal to the east and the Arabian Sea to the west, there is not a single Hindu household but cherishes the memory of this Marhatta lady for some act of charity or other : in fact, so abiding is the influence of Ahalyā's benefactions on Hindu India that the oriental imagination has



ranked her with her namesake the lady saint, one of the five great characters\* of Hindu Mythology, of whom every pious Hindu asks a blessing in the morning before beginning the day's work. The life of Ahalyā abundantly proves that at least some aspects of the mythical lore of pre-historic India have been realized in modern history.]

## II

At Pathardih, a small Marhatta military station in the district of Ahmednagar (Malwa), lived a gentleman farmer named Anand Rāo Scinde, distantly connected with the family of the well-known Scindia Chief of the Marhatta Confederacy. Anand Rāo Scinde was a pious and inoffensive man, rather inclined to be useful to his fellowmen, and had an equally gentle wife to help him in his journey through life. There was nothing to strike a note of discord in the sweet tenor of their lives except one that made the couple unhappy at times,—and that was the want of a pretty sweet smile from a baby's lips to cheer their cottage home. The farmer and his wife waited for many a long year and spent their little all in numerous propitiatory

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\* Ahalyā, Draupadi, Kunti, Tārā and Mandodari.





rites. But the desired blessing was withheld, and the couple felt miserable in their loneliness ; when, tradition says, the goddess Bhagavati, pleased beyond measure at their pious devotion, appeared to Anand Rāo in a dream, and told him that she herself would shortly come down to call him her father\*. The revelation might, or might not be a dreamer's hallucination ; but this is history, pure and unalloyed, that in 1735, when the couple were far advanced in years, a daughter was born to them to solace the days of their life that remained. They took the gift with grateful hearts and called the baby Ahalyā.

### III

The girl could not boast of any prepossessing looks ; on the other hand, her features were homely, her complexion was of a dark olive,† and her education of the most rudimentary type. Yet she was affectionate, gentle and good. The lessons of charity and devotion she gathered from the everyday life of her parents laid in her tender heart the foundations of her future benefactions to the various religious and charitable endowments of the country. When the girl was nine

\* Recorded by Mr. J. N. Basu in his authentic biography of Ahalyā Bāi in Bengali.

† Sir John Malcolm—Central India—Vol. I. p. 192.





years old and her parents were on the look-out for a suitable match for their daughter, the famous Marhatta Chief, Malhār Rāo Holkar happened to halt with his regiment for a day's rest at the military barracks at Pathardih. The girl Ahalyā, led by childish curiosity, went to have a look at the fine Marhatta troopers from Indore, and fell in the way of the great Chief himself. He caught up the brave little creature in his arms, hugged and caressed her with a father's pride, and was so very impressed with the frankness of her speech and suavity of her manners, the irresistible charms of simplicity and tenderness marking her countenance, that he made enquiries about the girl and came to know from the village schoolmaster that the object of his attentions could claim her relationship with one of the highest families in the Marhatta land. This was precisely what he wanted, for he had set his heart upon making the girl his daughter-in-law, the wife of his only son, Kundee Rāo, heir to the *guddee* of Indore. The impossible came to pass, and the pious farmer couple, taking it for a god-send, welcomed the proposal with gratified hearts. The marriage was celebrated (1744), and Anand Rāo and his pious wife returned thanks to the





Almighty for the realization of what seemed to be beyond their wildest dream. Verily, the ways of Providence are inscrutable.

## IV

In her new home Ahalyā made the best wife and the most obliging daughter-in-law. The Holkar Chief was rather short-tempered, and everybody around was afraid of his occasional outbursts. The private life of Malhār Rāo teemed with stories of blazing indiscretion and wanton folly. There was none in the royal household who could put an effective check upon his reckless doings. But Ahalyā tamed his fiery spirit, and curbed the unrestrained rollics which, but for her timely intervention, might have led to most unpleasant consequences. It was only Ahalyā who managed to be in the good books of the haughty Chief.

Ahalyā cheerfully took part in the domestic work of the household, though there could possibly be no want of servants and menials. She regulated her life strictly according to the standard of a woman from the ordinary ranks of society, and was never proud of the vast wealth she became mistress of. She did not indulge in





luxury of any kind, and though her marriage raised her to the rank of a mighty princess they could not know from the affability of her manners, from her simplicity and humility, that Ahalyā was affected in the least by her elevation.

Unfortunately she was not destined to enjoy for long the blessings of her married life, for, in 1753, when she was barely out of her teens, Kundee Rāo was killed at the seige of Kumbhare, half-way between Deig and Bhartpur. The news of the premature end of his only son gave a great shock to the old Chief; it was certainly a greater shock to the young widow who thought of immolating herself on the funeral pyre of her deceased lord. But the old man would not let her go. He tried hard to dissuade her from her resolve, and when reasoning failed he wept like a child at the prospect of losing both son and daughter at the same time. The wailings of the hero of a hundred fights moved the naturally tender heart of Ahalyā who agreed to live, if only to console her father-in-law in his great bereavement. So she lived on, and it must be said that the decision was lucky for the people among whom she moved, and the country in which she lived.





## V

Ahalyā was now initiated into the mysteries of government. She was a great help to the old Holkar who was so very confident of her abilities, that he entrusted, in a way, the management of the vast territories to his daughter-in-law. Ahalyā justified his expectations; for when Malhār Rāo went to fight the Durani Chief on the memorable field of Panipat in 1761, he formally installed Ahalyā Bāi as Vicerene to the exclusion of the Chief Minister, Gangādhār Jasant. And the story is current that when Malhār Rāo returned home after Panipat had been lost by the Marhattas, he found the Holkar territories in a more flourishing condition than he could possibly have expected from his own administration.

Malhār Rāo Holkar died in 1769 at the age of seven<sup>x</sup>-six\*, and the reigning Peshwā immediately sent a robe of honour to Malle Rāo, son of Ahalyā Bāi, recognising him thereby as the lawful successor to the rank, power and territories of his late grandfather. This dissipated young man had probably a tinge of insanity in him. That he was cruel, vicious and capricious

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\* Sir John Malcolm—Family of Holkar—P. 155.





was abundantly clear from the acts of recklessness he committed during his short reign. He flouted his mother's advice at every step, insulted the elders of the kingdom simply to make his authority felt, and oppressed the *raiya*ts in various ingenious ways. The young chieftain was mad and perfidious, no less whimsical than the notorious Junā Khān who caused the ruin of a great empire. In the reckless folly of youth and power Malle Rāo out-heroded Herod himself. He was so much dreaded by the people, and so much hated by his own relations that his premature death after less than a year's mad career was hailed as a relief by all classes of his people. The pious mother lamented her hard fate in being cursed with this perfect brute of a son; and, to quote a famous authority,\* when Malle Rāo died, Ahalyā Bāi was led by horror at his cruel acts of insanity "to look upon his death as a fortunate event for him, herself and the country."

## VI

It now devolved upon Ahalyā Bāi to assume the reins of government. She knew that with

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\*Sir John Malcolm--Memoir of Central India, vol. I. P. 158.





the death of her son there was no male heir to succeed to the vast Holkar estates. She was convinced at the same time that the beautiful edifice raised by her late father-in-law should not be allowed to crumble. She was perfectly sure that her principal supporters and the Marhatta military chiefs would remain staunch to her cause. So, in the interests of the family she represented, in the interests of the thousands committed to her charge, she must not mind her age and sex, but do her duty as the protectress of her people. Therefore she herself chose to sit at the helm of affairs. The young Peshwā Madhu Rāo recognised that her right to administer the affairs of her late father-in-law's estates was beyond question. But the wicked Rāghobā Dādā, uncle and adviser-in-chief to the Peshwā, led by interested motives, withheld sanction, and even led an expedition against the lady to compel her to abdicate in favour of an adopted son of his nomination. But this she would not do : and every reader of Marhatta history knows how the helpless widow of Kunder Rāo rose to her task and expelled the projected invasion of Rāghobā Dādā, which no canons of equity dictated, no motives of expediency supported, and no sane counsel ever sanctioned.





Free from the fear of an enemy inroad and recognised by the head of the Marhatta confederacy as the rightful administratrix of Malhār Rāo's estates, Ahalyā Bāi now devoted all her time and energy to the uplifting of her people. How far and how well she succeeded in her task is a matter of history. Her thirty years' reign formed the proudest epoch in the history of the native administration of Indore. It is not intended in these few pages to review her wise statesmanship at any length. That will make a volume too big for a snapshot like this. Let the story be told by that renowned historian\* who was placed by the Governor-General in 1818 in the military and political charge of Central India. According to his estimate, Ahalyā Bāi "exhibited in the person of a female that combined talent, virtue and energy which made her, while she lived, a blessing to the country over which she ruled, and has associated her memory with every plan of improvement and just government in the province of Mālwa".

## VII

The name of Ahalyā Bāi is held in the deep-

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\* Sir John Malcolm,—“Memoir of Central India”, Vol. I. P. 160.





est veneration through the length and breadth of Hindu India, not so much for her tactful statesmanship, as for her piety and munificence, and for her uniformly considerate treatment of her subjects. The mistress of untold treasures, she lived the life of an austere recluse, having no hankering after fame, authority and enjoyment. She was so proof against the charms of wealth that when she came into the possession of the fabulous riches of Malhār Rāo Holkar, she consecrated the hoarded gold to objects of charity by sprinkling a solution of holy water and *Toolasi* leaves (basil), after due ceremony, over what she might easily have squandered away in luxury.\* She regarded herself as a trustee of the estate, and for thirty years she administered the sacred trust as faithfully as the Good Nasiruddin did in Pathan India, centuries before her.

It must, however, be said to the credit of the lady that though she had the tender heart of a woman, she was free from its weaknesses. She proved her mettle when she matched her strength against the numerous hordes of Rāghobā Dādā. She got the situation completely under her

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\* Malcolm's 'Memoir'—Vol. I. P. 186.





control when she had to deal with the intriguing old Dewan Gangādhār Jaswant. She congratulated her people when she heard the news of the untimely death of her profligate son, Malle Rāo, whose life she considered an unmitigated evil for Mālwa. She *governed* when she was called upon to govern; yet she did not like to exercise her royal authority a moment more than necessary. Her enemies attempted to wrest from her the authority she lawfully inherited from the founder of the House of Holkar. She put in all her strength to defend it; and, as soon as she vindicated her right inspite of enemy machinations, her aversion to power came back, and she transferred at once the power she enjoyed to Tukājee Rāo whom she nominated as the future head of the Holkar family.

## VIII

Numerous are the instances\* of this lady's maternal regard for her subjects, only a few of which are related here. Once a rich merchant of Indore, Devi Chānd by name, died leaving no heir but a king's fortune behind. According to the common practice prevailing in the native

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\* Most of these are recorded in greater details by Malcolm.





governments of those days, Tukājee Holkar claimed a large share of the wealth for the State. The wife of the dead banker implored redress of Ahalyā Bāi. She gave a patient hearing to her case, and recognising the helpless widow as the sole mistress of the property left by her husband, dismissed her with a rich dress as a mark of her royal condescension. Tookāji understood the hint, and readily complied with her orders "not to molest the city with unjust exactions."

Ahalyā rejoiced when she found her subjects rise to prosperity. Diligent industry in a *raiyat* was a sure passport to her protection and patronage. A rich banker, named Subha Kshuna Das, died at Seronji without any heir. When the widow desired to adopt a son, the manager of Ahalyā Bāi refused to allow the adoption unless a fine of three *lacs* of rupees was paid down. The widow hastened to unfold her tale of distress to the protectress of her people. Ahalyā heard the story, and removing the manager at once from his place confirmed the adoption. She then took the adopted child in her arms, bestowed caresses and rich presents upon him, and sent him back with assurances of her good will and protection.

A notable instance of her unselfishness has





yet to be mentioned. Two brothers, Tuppee and Bārānashi, rich bankers of Kergong, died without heirs, leaving to their widows a large estate of accumulated wealth. The women offered to make over the treasure to the Government; but Ahalyā declined the offer, and at her advice the whole money was spent by the widows in works of public utility.

How considerate she was in her demands from her people may be gathered from her instructions to a certain revenue officer, Kundee Rāo, who was a bit overzealous in collecting the revenues of the State. When reports reached her ears that the poor cultivators did not like the rather oppressive methods pursued by the collector, Ahalyā herself wrote to her officer in the following terms, "Remember, my dear Sir, you will have given me greater satisfaction in the discharge of your duty by making my people contented than by being overstrict in your methods of collection."

For a Sovereign there can be no surer way than this to the peoples' heart. This course was invariably pursued by the lady for thirty long years; and lasting memorials of this kind to her goodness and justice abound in the pages of Marhatta history. It is no wonder, therefore,





that her name is not only revered but adored in this country, where justice tempered with a grain of kindness appeals so forcibly to the popular mind.

## IX

A spirit of charity no less than a sense of justice and toleration marked the entire course of her life, and in works of public utility Ahalyā Bāi stands unrivalled. The road leading to the fort of Janru over the Vindhya Ranges where the mountain is steep and inaccessible is an admirable construction costing her great labour and much money.

A European traveller \* visiting Kedārnāth among the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas found, in 1818, a rest house for weary pilgrims built at the expense of Ahalyā Bāi. Go to holy Jagannāth in the East or to sacred Dwārāvati at the western extremity of India, visit Rāmeswaram near Adam's Bridge in the south, you will find holy temples built or religious establishments endowed at the expense of Ahalyā Bāi. The Vishnupada shrine at Gaya, the Visveswar temple and the Ahalyā Ghāt (a flight of stone steps)

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\* Captain T. D. Steuart, a political assistant to Sir John Malcolm.





leading to the river Ganges in Benares cost her a good round sum that could only be spent by the pious lady of Indore. All these and many more pious gifts, too numerous to be exhaustive in a notice like this, proceeded, one might say, from a purely religious motive—a purely sectarian charity, to say the least of it.

It may be said in reply that even her so-called sectarian charity was based on utilitarian grounds. She propitiated the gods of her religion to promote the welfare of her country. But over and above these religious benefactions a large number of charities stand to Ahalyā's credit, that you may call benevolent. She fed the poor every day : even the lowest classes were not forgotten. Her servants supplied thirsty travellers in the summer with cooling drinks on roads for miles around ; in the winter the poor got warm clothing for protection against the cold. Her sympathy was so universal that like the great Buddhist Emperor of Ancient India she thought compassionately of the beasts of the meadow, of the birds of the mid-air, and of the fish of the river. Was this foolish waste of wise humanity in the land, where to give doles to paupers has never been penalised on the statute-book of the country ?





## X

Such was the public life of this great Marhatta woman who could spend so much in deeds of charity because she had to waste so little on a standing army. In those days of the dismemberment of a mighty empire, when smaller kingdoms were struggling hard for existence or supremacy, when kings were flying at one another's throat to kill or be killed, the widowed queen of Kundee Rāo reduced her army to a ludicrously small bodyguard of honour. Yet there was profound peace in her territories; her subjects were happy and her name was blest. In speaking of her political relations with the contemporary Indian princes, Sir John Malcolm quotes the precise words \* of a principal Brahmin officer of Ahalyā Bāi in reply to an observation of the Political Agent: "Among the princes of her own nation it would have been looked upon as sacrilege to have become her enemy, or indeed, not to have defended her against any hostile attempt. She was considered by all in the same light. The Nizām of the Deccan and Tippoo Sultan granted her the same respect as the Peshwā: and Mahomedans joined

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\* Family of Holkar, P. 189.





with Hindus in prayers for her long life and prosperity." It should be noted that when Ahalyā ruled, considerations of honour and chivalry did not count for much with the Knights-militant of the Mogul Dissolution.

## XI

A peep into the daily occupations of this woman will immensely interest the curious student: at least the temptation to make a short allusion thereto is too strong to be resisted. Bara-mul Dādā who happened to be in constant attendance upon Ahalyā Bāi as being "an adopted domestic" in the royal household, has given a detailed picture of the daily life of his royal mistress; and we acknowledge our indebtedness to Sir John Malcolm for drawing again upon his inestimable wealth of information.\* We learn from it that Ahalyā Bāi was a very early riser. When the world was yet asleep, she would leave her bed to hold communion with her Maker, to ask pardon for her lapses in all humility and to gain strength for the coming day's work from prayer and meditation. She then gave her daily doles to the poor and fed the hungry with her own

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\* Memoir of Central India—Vol. I. P. 178.





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hands. Next she broke her fast upon a simple meal of herbs and fruits, totally abstaining from animal food of any kind, though not required to do so by the rules of her own caste. Prayers again followed by a short repose found her ready for the Durbar by two o'clock. Patient, just and accessible, she heard every cause in person, for she had done away with the *Purdah*. Durbar continued for at least four hours every day. At six she retired to her religious exercises, and a very frugal repast followed. Business was resumed when she issued urgent instructions to her ministers till late in the evening. The routine never changed except when she observed her religious fasts. She came to work for her people, and history bears ample testimony how far she succeeded in her self-imposed task.

## XII

A brief estimate of her character will bring this short sketch to a close. Though misfortune dogged her steps, Ahalyā Bāi ever retained the geniality of her temper. Anger she knew not; indignation darkened her brow at times when she had to punish evildoers. Flattery made





## IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

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little impression upon her mind ; \* and temptations fought shy of her exemplary character. She had a cultivated mind and cultured tastes, an everlasting fund of maternal solicitude for her people and a deep sense of duty, piety and equity. She was more loved than dreaded for the moderation with which she wielded her authority ; for she “deemed herself answerable to God for every exercise of power.” She thought thrice before she resorted to measures of extreme severity. “Let us mortals”, she used to say, “beware how we destroy the works of the Almighty.”

We wind up this holy theme with the most reliable testimony to her greatness from authentic history. It is a European gentleman that speaks—a military dictator of an alien race, not certainly in love with the methods of native administration or the prejudices of our country. ✓ “The facts that have been stated of Ahalyā Bāi rest on grounds that admit of no scepticism. It is, however, an extraordinary picture ;—a female without vanity, a bigot without intolerance ; a mind imbued with the deepest superstition, yet

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\* An anecdote runs that a Brahmin wrote a complimentary volume in her praise. She heard it read, and then caused it to be thrown into the Narmadā. She was a weak and sinful woman, she said, and did not deserve to be so flattered. This was all the recognition she vouchsafed upon the author for his pains.





receiving no impressions except what promoted the happiness of those under its influence; a being exercising.....despotic power, not merely with sincere humility, but under the sincerest moral restraint that a strict conscience could impose on human action; and all this combined with the greatest indulgence for the weakness and faults of others. Such, at least, is the account which the natives of Mālwa give of Ahalyā Bāi: with them her name is sainted, and she is styled an Avatār, or Incarnation of the Divinity. In the most sober view that can be taken of her character, she certainly appears, within her limited sphere, to have been one of the purest and most exemplary rulers that ever existed; and she affords a striking example of the practical benefit a mind may receive from performing her worldly duties under a deep sense of responsibility to its Creator." ✓

Sir John Malcolm is not certainly indulging in hyperbole which finds so much favour with the Oriental imagination.





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V

THE CYCLE OF TRANSITION.





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## DEVI SĀRADĀ SUNDARĪ.

(SAINTLINESS).

*“ Verily, I tell you, mother, a day will come when the world will dance a rapturous dance over your bowels and intestines—for a son like this (pointing to the great Keshab Chandra) has come to the world through your womb.”*

The Great Paramahansa Rāmkrishna.\*

## I

They founded new empires on the ruins of old kingdoms, carrying everything before their conquering swords, inflicting misery and devastation upon the world they inhabited. The world called them great heroes, and the nations interested themselves greatly about their genealogies. So, the world has applauded the motley group from different nationalities, from the famous Macedonian to the Imperial Corsican, and has paused to ask who their mothers could be. But

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\* *Vide* Autobiography of Devī Sāradā Sundarī, P. 97.





the world has never cared much to know of the genealogies of a different set of heroes who established the sovereign sway of Truth and Righteousness over the mind of a nation by removing the miseries of suffering humanity. It has never cared to know much of the mothers of Sankara, Buddha, Chaitanya, Rāmkrishna, Keshab Chandra or Vivekānanda, whose conquests were admittedly superior to those of Cæsar, Cromwell or Napoleon,—nay, of all of them put together. Yet, the fact is undisputed that the saintly ladies whom those great souls chose to call their mothers were an unfailing source of inspiration to their religious life, to a portion at least, if not the whole, of the spiritual triumph they achieved here and hereafter.

We are concerned here about the mother of the great Keshab Chandra Sen. About thirty years ago the Rev. P. C. Mazumdār of American fame wrote in the *Christian Register* about this saintly lady, "when Keshab finds the recognition of his greatness by a grateful posterity the claims and virtues of his good, noble-hearted mother will not go unrecognised." Keshab Chandra's place in the hearts of his countrymen is now assured; it is time that we knew something of his mother. *Dēvi Sārādā Sundarī* whose long life of





love and service, of piety, self-forgetfulness and uncomplaining toil has extorted the admiration of that great Christian Missionary, the Rev. J. T. Sunderland, M. A., of distant America.\* Devi Sāradā Sundarī brought together round her all the divergent elements which gathered round her illustrious son to constitute his great Church not confined to any locality but extending over many parts of India and Europe. From the Indian Paramahansa and the European Max Müller to the common clerk at the desk and the merchant at the counter, all who felt honoured by the friendship of Keshab looked upon her with all the feeling of filial reverence, and felt blessed by the benediction of her motherly heart. It flowed out to all and delighted in treating them to meals cooked by herself. Not to speak of the members of the Indian Theistic Church only, not to speak of the Hindus among whom she was born, not to speak of the Christians of distant lands,—such a great soul as the mother of Keshab Chandra deserves the homage of all classes of people, irrespective of colour, creed or denomination.

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\* "Some thoughts concerning Keshab Chandra Sen"—Modern Review, June 1913, p. 118.





## II.

Devi Sārādā Sundari whose revered name stands at the head of the present sketch was born in 1819 at her maternal uncle's place at Tribeni in the district of Hugli. Her father, the late Gourhari Das of Garifa, was a Vaidya by caste and a physician by profession. Sārādā Sundari was one of a family of four sisters and one brother, and was brought up by her father whose piety was the talk of the village. Education in the ordinary application of the word she had none, though she could read a letter and write a line or two. But she could recite texts from the Hindu Scriptures, and was versed in the mythical lore of her country. Thus she grew up in her maidenhood, trained in the seclusion of a Hindu home, without, in short, any opportunity of making her mark on society. Yet, she had to be married, and Babu Gourhari was greatly relieved when his wealthy co-villager, Dewan Rāmkamal Sen of the Bank of Bengal, accepted her as the prospective bride of his son Peary Mohan. Sārādā Sundari was then nine years old.

At ten she came over to her husband's family. In her Autobiography, published by Mr. Khāsta-





girl, her grandson-in-law, she has given a detailed account of her married life. We gather that she had a well formed figure with features of classic regularity, covered in a skin of the fairest Indian tint; and, as the Rev. P. C. Mazumdar writes, "wearing over all her handsomeness the sacred veil of classical Hindu modesty, the daughter-in-law of the great Rām Kamal Sen was the cynosure of all eyes in the little village, and the envy of many a girlish heart."\* But she did not know what conceit was like. Brought up in a Hindu household where the joint patriarchal family system has prevailed from time out of mind, the girl wife, perhaps the youngest member of the family, had to be under the superior guardianship of the sole mistress of the family, the queenly mother-in-law. Next came the minor control of her sisters-in-law, the widowed daughters of the family, and a number of old aunties. But there was a valuable training in this beneficial juniority in her position. Devi Sāradā Sundarī trained herself to the virtues of patience, humility and self-sacrifice at this early age which stood her in good stead when the appalling helplessness of widowhood came upon her before she was barely thirty years old.

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\* Life of Keshab Chandra Sen. P. 45.





Dewan Rām Kamal was a sincere Vaishnab. Rich and respectable, judged by the earthly standard of wealth and position, Dewan Rām Kamal lived the life of a strict ascetic in the midst of all his wealth. Though in the world, he was not of the world. His austere asceticism in food, drink and clothing, in his rearing up of his sons and grandsons whom he certainly loved as the steward loves his master's things but never claims them for his own, his calm resignation to God Almighty in the series of his family bereavements,—all these showed that he was a truly pious man with a heart full of other-worldliness. There are reasons to believe that he was not superstitious, and his spirit at times rose as high as the lofty heights of the simple religion of nature. Devi Sārādā Sundari was his pet, for the native sweetness of her disposition was irresistible. This saintly man trained the girl in the ways of piety and reverence. "For what do you pray to the god whom you worship?" enquired the old man one day of his daughter-in-law. "Do you pray to have the blessings of wealth, of children, of earthly advancement?" "Why, yes," replied





Sāradā Sundarī, "for we know not what else to pray for." "There is something else, the only thing to pray for," said the old man in reply,— "Pray to Him for grace to be saved. Say, save me here, Father, save me hereafter."\*

Her husband, Peary Mohan Sen, was a very charitably disposed and pure-minded man. As a fond husband he tried his best to keep Sāradā Sundarī as comfortable as the circumstances of the family would allow after the death of the illustrious Rām Kamal, which took place about 1844. But the family now fell on evil days and Peary Mohan followed his father into the other world only four years after (1848). Devī Sāradā Sundarī was now left a helpless widow with a dependent family of three sons and as many daughters, and her second son Keshab Chandra was the famous founder of the Theistic Church of the New Dispensation in India. The tale of her widowhood, the trials and privations she had to undergo, the indignities of the world she had to suffer, the long life of patience and faith in the wisdom of Providence and her final triumph over the vicissitudes of an ever change-

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\* Autobiography. pp. 8-9.





ful world form a glorious chapter in the annals of womanhood in India.

## IV

Inspite of the crosses the widow had to bear in her life,—and their names were a legion—the children of Sārādā Sundari began to grow and thrive. The maintenance and education of the fatherless children now devolved upon their uncle Hari Mohan Sen, elder brother of Peary Mohan. “I was reared,” says Keshab Chandra, “by a wealthy father and grandfather. Opulence and luxury surrounded my childhood.....”\*

It must be said to the credit of Babu Hari Mohan that he, too, loved his nephews with all the love of a father,—nay, more than his own children. He brought them up with as much care as the somewhat reduced circumstances of the family would allow, so that the boys might not feel the death of their father. They were put in the Hindu College, the aristocratic institution in the Presidency, noted at the same time for the high quality of instruction imparted. Keshab was the most clever scholar in his form, and his progress in studies was extraordinary. He was

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\* Life and Teachings of Keshab Chandra Sen (Mazumdār)  
pp. 48.





singularly intelligent, and his associates felt the influence of the remarkable purity of his moral character. A student yet, Keshab Chandra gave promise of the vigorous manhood that was to pour upon the land of his birth its richest treasures of intellectual and spiritual wealth. The report of Keshab's progress reached the ears of the mother who sent up her grateful thanks to the feet of the Almighty for the darlings of her heart, the only treasures left to console her in her widowhood.

## V

But while winning his laurels at the temple of learning, Keshab Chandra was laying the strong foundations of a pure character. He hated the immorality of the times. He looked around and found himself enveloped in the darkness of the prevailing godlessness. The recently imported English education comprising the Literature, Science and Philosophy of England had unsettled the mind of young Bengal, and left an empty void,—nay, a chaos instead. The influence of Macaulay, DeRozio, Duff and Richardson was plainly at work. It laid the axe at the root of Hindu bigotry, but there being no positive system of faith to replace it, all sense





of religion was blotted out, and the English educated youngmen of Bengal drifted away disorderly, in large numbers, year after year, into unbelief and immorality. It was not Hindu nature, but the culture of a foreign soil favouring a system of godless education through an excess of zeal and occasional indiscretion bred distempers in young Bengal, tending to denationalize the Hindus. Idolatry, caste and superstition were vanishing fast, but they were taking away the national character with them. The teachings of ancient Hindu Philosophy were shunned as "transcendental nonsense", and came to be supplanted by Scepticism, Agnosticism, Positivism or militant Atheism. It was an age of immorality generated in the boiling cauldron of an ill-digested civilisation taking away all religion, idolatrous or otherwise, in a process of rapid evaporation.

## VI

In times such as these Keshab Chandra was born and brought up. Society was evidently in the throes preceding the birth of a new spirit,—a spirit that was to bring order where chaos was reigning, and stability where wavering and vacillation held the sway. Young Keshab Chandra was an enthusiast. He knew that





coldness in religion meant death, and warmth was life. So, he kept the sacred torch of enthusiasm burning in and around him, in the society in which he lived and moved. Guided by his enthusiasm, guided by his pre-eminently intellectual and spiritual nature, guided, lastly, by his firm faith in God, Keshab Chandra wanted to develop a system of religion in perfect accord with the great religious systems of the world, with the essence of Hinduism purged of idolatry and bigotry and perfected in a synthetic union with the teachings of other religions. This he looked upon as the highest mission of his life.

We should now discuss the influence of his home on the religious life of Keshab Chandra who was born, as we have seen, in an orthodox Vaishnava family. There he could not expect to have his reformed views heard with any degree of approval. The late Babu Hari Mohan Sen, head of the family, was stern and overbearing\*; he would, on no account, tolerate the least wavering from the ancestral creed. There was the family prestige to maintain: Keshab Chandra must yield on points connected with the time-honoured faith of the family. So, a regular

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\* Biography of Keshab Chandra (Mazumdār) P. 64.





campaign of persecution was organised against that black sheep of the family, when he refused to accept the idolatrous initiation into the Vaishnava cult from the spiritual preceptor of the family. Keshab Chandra resisted heroically; he obeyed the mandate from within, and his firmness disarmed the blind orthodoxy of the Sens. The ceremony of initiation had to go without Keshab Chandra.

## VII

We are more concerned with the attitude of Devi Sārādā Sundari in this connexion; it was worthy of the mother of the great reformer. We have it on the authority of the biographer of Keshab Chandra that he had indirectly showed his unwillingness before his mother \* to receive his initiation from a man whom he did not venerate, and into idolatry which he hated with the hatred of hell. Devi Sārādā Sundari understood that young Keshab Chandra was passing through a great crisis of faith, and she saw it was illogical, tyrannical, nay immoral to force a faith upon a spirit that was soaring far above forms or ceremonials. Alluding to this revolt

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\* Life and Teachings of Keshub Chandra (Mazumdar)—P. 63.





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of Keshab Chandra against domestic authority, his mother tells us in her Autobiography, 'It had been decided that my nephews Mohin and Jogin and my son Keshab would receive their initiation on the same day from the family preceptor. The Guru came, and great preparations were made in view of the celebration. The great day dawned, but Keshab was found missing from the morning. He had fled for refuge into the arms of his friend Devendra Nath Tagore. He stayed away for the whole day. I thought he had gone to embrace Christianity. I gave up food and drink. My son returned late in the evening, and felt mortified at my distress. Softly he approached me and putting a book and a piece of paper into my hand went away as quietly as he came. I opened and read the verse :

*'Whom do you belong to—Who is yours ?*

*Whom can you call your own ?*

*'Tis the drowsiness of a dream you are  
dreaming,—*

*An illusion, to be sure.'*

When I read the verse a change came over my feelings. The fragment of the verse I yet remember. I rose up and went to the Guru





with the book and the paper. That holy man read the verse and said, 'If this be the religion of your son, then, to be sure, he will be a great man, and people will flock to him to hear his words. Don't be sorry for your son'. Hearing these words of the Preceptor, I was greatly consoled." \*

## VIII.

Devi Sārādā Sundari, though herself a staunch follower of the ancient orthodox creed of the family, though observing faithfully the details of the ascetic life of a Hindu widow, was never a narrow-minded bigot. Her views were sufficiently advanced to harmonize with, nay to encourage, when necessary, the principles of the reformed faith of her son. Alluding to the conversion of her son she says,† "I had to suffer a good deal for his conversion to Brahmoism. Abuse came in torrents upon my head from my husband's brother,—there was no end of persecution—not a single day passed but found me in an agony of tears. There were occasions when the late Babu Hari Mohan would simply

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\* Translated from the Autobiography of Devi Sārādā Sundari—Pp. 69-70.

† Translated from her Autobiography—P. 68.





lose his temper and tell me no end of unkind things, only because I did not take Keshab to task for his advanced opinions on religion. I also felt at times that Keshab was perhaps doing wrong, though I have ceased to look upon it in that light."

That the mother of Keshab Chandra did not care a straw for taunts and persecutions when she thought of supporting the cause of Truth is amply borne out by her attitude when Keshab Chandra celebrated the *Jāta Karma* or formal thanksgiving for the birth of his first child. It was a Brahmo ceremony which Keshab Chandra wanted to hold in the ancestral house in Calcutta. Keshab knew that it would offend the religious susceptibilities of his relations, most of whom professed the orthodox faith. But he determined to vindicate his rights. Thus writes\* the biographer of Keshab Chandra in his usually charming style, " \* \* \* \* The discomfited orthodox Sens found that everything went on with the most offensive success inspite of all they could do. On the morning of 11th January, 1863, when the ceremony was appointed to take place, the *tomtoms* began to beat, and

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\* Life and Teachings of Keshab Chandra Sen (Mazumdār)—  
P. 85.





the *sānāi* piped with vigour, the *nahabat* gave out its far-reaching strains, the flowers and garlands were being hung up in heaps, and the outraged relatives felt it was growing altogether too hot for them. So, this time instead of trying to exile Keshab, they exiled themselves. They entreated the irrepressible bandsmen to give a moment's truce to their clamorous instruments, for to their heart the unseasonable music was like insult added to injury; and in the temporary lull, they beat a hasty retreat, clearing out of the house with women, children, servants, bag and baggage all. *Only Keshab's mother remained with him.*"

The italics are ours. How could a dependent Hindu widow act in defiance of the wishes of the head of the family if she was not morally certain that she had right on her side? She did not desert her son, though the world forsook him,—she did not desert the side of Truth.

## IX

The mind of Devi Sāradā Sundari was singularly free from the taint of orthodoxy. Harmony and toleration marked her whole attitude towards religion. Her devout piety proceeded from her reverence for the supreme Godhead and her





real, living faith in religion. Hers was a soul illumined with the true light of faith. There was no darkness there ; no cobwebs in a hidden corner for dirt to settle in. Everything there was neat, and clean, and straight. To such a spirit Sectarianism appeals in vain and discord seems incomprehensible. To the mother of Keshab Chandra there was no Hindu, no Christian, no Brahmo, no Mahomedan—no religious system as such, differing one from the other. Every system harmonized, and revealed a unity in diversity which has always differentiated the saints of the ages throughout the world. Every religion came in for its due share of regard and esteem ; none for slight, far less for hatred. Brought up between the orthodoxy of her father's people, worshippers of *Sakti*\* and that of her husband's people who were votaries of Vishnu, Devi Sāradā Sundarī had ample opportunities of finding out the harmony that existed between the two conflicting branches of the Hindu religion, ever at loggerheads in matters great and small, concerning the forms of worship. The great principle of toleration which she imbibed when young was the key note to her religious life.

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\* This is the Female Principle in the Hindu idea of Godhead, the incarnation of Force.





## X.

It will be interesting to note in this connection how rational her views were with regard to religion. Alluding to the pilgrimage she made to Puri, when a young widow, she herself tells us—

“We also stretched ourselves across the route of the great chariot of Jagannāth, the rope of the car touching our heads. I thought that thereby I acquired great religious merit. But I have now ceased to look upon it in that light. It was a childish fancy then. Even now also I visit holy shrines, but not exactly with a view to acquire religious merit. It is good, no doubt, to visit shrines. It is, however, something like the fondness of parents for children—just as I am fond of my pets, and nothing more. Penances and pilgrimages are mere forms, to be sure,—only the crust and not the kernel; yet there is pleasure in their doing. However, I do not believe that these will save me. There can be no salvation for the soul that is unclean. The heart must be purged of all its impurity. ... From a little bride upwards I have been brought up in the religious atmosphere of this house. I have never seen an impious deed done—never found a wicked thought indulged in. Every moment of my life had something good to





engage me. Gradually the formalities of religion came in with their peculiar fascination and finally created in me a passionate longing for visiting holy shrines. Even now I do various *Pujahs*,... but I believe in the heart of my hearts that there is one Formless God, and I cannot be saved without His grace. I am not positive if image worship cannot bring salvation; but it is my settled conviction that my own depends on my worshipping Him whom no form can bound. I do not hope to be saved. I only wish to resign myself to His will—if.....If my surrender to Him is complete and sincere I do not care where I go to—Heaven or Hell it does not matter.” \*

## XI

A sweetness of disposition and a genuine motherly tenderness formed the dominant note of her domestic life. Sympathy, it has been said, is a universal solvent, and Devi Sāradā Sundarī possessed a superabundance of this heavenly quality. Her heart would melt at the sight of suffering and distress. Whenever she heard of a case of illness, she would drag herself to the bedside, even if the strength of her limbs would fail her. Her purse, slender as it grew in

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\* Autobiography—Pp. 31-32.





her widowhood, was always ready to open at the call of charity; and she gave till she had nothing more to give. Her old maid-servant Tārā was an object of her regular charity. She would even take her to the distant places of pilgrimage which she made. The biographer of Keshab Chandra thus writes of her\*—"The *Gurus* and the Brahmins looked up to her for encouragement; the old servants and decayed relatives hoped for consolation from her. .... Her wonderful piety and greatness of disposition gave her an insight into subjects which are sealed to the purblind vision of half-educated young ladies. Her unrestricted sympathies have endeared her to her orthodox relatives as well as the members of the Brahmo Samāj." Indeed, the mother of Keshab Chandra never knew an enemy, nor ever created one. During the partition of the family property she was legally advised to sue the late Hari Mohan Sen for her share of the hard cash, about Rs. 15,000/- left her by the will of her husband. But she stoutly refused. We glean the following from her Autobiography†—"I did not know what litigation was. I shuddered at the name. My share

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\* Life and Teachings of K. C. Sen (Mazumdār)—P. 46.

† Translation of an extract—P. 61.





of the money and that of Krishna Behāri never came out, for I refused to invoke the aid of the law. Was money, I argued, the one thing needful? Should I send him to jail by pressing for the money?" At the decline of her life, when she fell into distress, she never repented of the generous impulse that prompted her to the sacrifice which was indeed great for a woman to make.

## XII

The life of Devi Sāradā Sundarī was a long life of uncomplaining toil, a life of ungrudging service to those around, thankless for the most part, as is generally the lot of Hindu widows. She did not care for the buffets of fortune; trials and persecutions came thick and fast; bereavements darkened her doors in quick succession,—but did that heroic soul break down under calamity? During her lifetime she lost all her sons and daughters—sons renowned like Keshab Chandra and Krishna Behāri—and a good many grand-children besides,—but her firm faith in the wise dispensation of Providence kept her from giving way to vain regrets and useless complaining. Speaking of herself in the evening of her life, when preparing for her last





journey into the land of The Unknown, she says\*—"Joy and sorrow must visit alternately the numerous branches of my large family of relations and grand-children. They are now a daily occurrence, and I receive the reports every day. God never gives me happiness without misery, or misery without its twin-born happiness. But the fire of the ordeal has taken away all the alloy from me, and placed me beyond the reach of misery and happiness. I find one branch of the family aspiring to a Rāj and the other branch homeless and penniless. So, neither can joy elate, nor sorrow depress my spirits. Looking upon the whole thing as the wise dispensation of Providence, I have ever been waiting here, surrounded by my large family, for that great day, keeping my both eyes ready—one for the tears of joy and the other for those of sorrow."

## XIII

We cannot conclude without expressing our deliberate opinion that Devi Sārādā Sundari was constantly before Keshab Chandra as the embodiment of all the virtues of Hindu womanhood,—that she loomed larger, as years rolled

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\* Autobiography—P. 100.





on, as the great force to keep in tact his conservative instinct which worked like a ballast in his march of progress, steadied by circumspection and wisdom, which would make a correct estimate of the actual situation but never lacked the courage to face difficulties in the pursuit of the ideal,—the conservative instinct that eventually grew into sturdy nationalism. It was this nationalism that found expression in his fervid utterances, in glowing terms, of the glories of the East, the mother of Prophets and Religions. Its lofty idealism prompted him to say in the farewell *soirée*, organised in England on the eve of his departure from her shores after a half year's victorious campaign,—“Farewell, the western wing of my Father's Home. Farewell, the land of Shakespeare and Milton, Newton and Faraday! I came an Indian, I go back a *confirmed* Indian!” The writer very humbly ventures to say that it was Devi Sāradā Sundarī who was before Keshab Chandra as an inspiring presence and an enchanting personality, full of the grace and beauty of the Spirit, when he painted in glorious colours before his English audience the woman and Hindu family, with mother and wife as the presiding deities, and presented his new





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religion of Harmony in its national garb, broad-based on national character. It was certainly the influence of his mother that was the reckoning factor when Keshab Chandra introduced Hindu rituals and symbolism into the New Church, divested of all superstitious incrustations, with a new life and a new spirit breathed into it, to become the vehicle of the new thought and the physical support of the new Spiritual culture. Devi Sārādā Sundari was before Keshab Chandra, when he wrote the *Nava Samhitā* to embody the reawakened and renovated soul of India in a new form of life of the new Aryans of the Brahmo Samāj, and worked out a new scheme of education and family training for the women, as a protest against the on-rush of the unsexing spirit of "New woman" imported from the West. 'In these days of revolutionary innovation,' writes Mr. Jogendra Lal Khāstagir in his admirable foreword to his edition of the autobiography of Keshab's mother, 'at this dawn of the waking nationality, Keshab's mother stepped forward as its representative, and said, "My child Keshab, look back to your own home ; now it is not the same country and the same home as you left some years ago. The name of the Supreme





Brahma, the God of Truth and Righteousness, is extolled everywhere from corner to corner in this vast Indian continent. Come back, my child, come home, I tell you." In the voice of his mother Keshab Chandra heard the voice of his Supreme Mother. He returned home and found a hearty welcome for him and his new faith.....Thus with the help of his mother Keshab dressed the New Church in the national garb, and placed it before the new and waking nationality.....I firmly believe that a grateful posterity will one day remember the name of Sāradā Sundarī for the great service she has done to the country.' Thus, with his mother's help Keshab Chandra expounded his sublime faith to his nation, to the masses of Hindu India that came to follow his lead. It was thus that the great reformer foreshadowed the future Hindu Church of India combining in itself the essence of the religious teachings of Europe and Asia alike, making it Universal, built on the bed-rock of national life.

## XIV

Such is the short story of the great life of a Bengali widow who passed away from our midst at the ripe old age of eighty-eight (1907), retain-





ing the use of all her faculties unimpaired and enjoying a fairly good health up to the end of her life. The reader must not look for any dramatic incidents or romantic developments in this true tale of the secluded life of a Hindu widow ; for then he will be disappointed. She did not make the temporal history of her nation ; but, if man or woman has ever exerted a silent influence upon the uplifting of a nation by "instruction in action," Devi Sārādā Sundari has done her part admirably by leaving the firm impress of her saintly character on all around her.

Her tenderness, her patient resignation, her piety, her asceticism and the catholicity of her religious views produced their natural effect on the character of her great son Keshab Chandra, and it will not be a presumption to state that for the music of harmony which the genius of Keshab Chandra discovered among the various seemingly conflicting religious dispensations of the world, and the toleration he preached through the system he evolved, he was indebted to his mother more than to any body else. The biographer of the great reformer is not inclined "to flatter popular prejudice by tracing Keshab Chandra Sen's greatness to his mother". Yes, Keshab's genius was his own ; it was his indivi-





duality, the special gift of God; but, for his mental cast and make-up, his virtues and character, he was indebted more to his mother than all others. When the great reformer was writhing in agony on his bed before his final emancipation from his exile in this land of tears, Devi Sāradā Sundarī moaned in the bitterness of her heart. "The pain," she cried, "is the result of my sins; the righteous son suffers for the wretched parent's unworthiness." "Say not so, do not say so, mother dear," came the response from the dying son, "where can there be another mother like you? Have I not inherited your virtues? Your virtues God has given me. All that I call my own is yours." \* Was it simply a hollow courtesy that escaped his lips, was it a mere formal phrase that he uttered to flatter the vanity of a woman, when he knew that he was entering the presence of his Maker? An emphatic 'No' answers the question. Nay, all through life, in town-hall narrations and parlour-talk, in the company of friends and in family circle as in Durbars and formal gatherings, Keshab was 'tremendously real'; there was no sham or show.

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\* Life and Teachings of K. C. Sen (Mazumdar)—P. 47 and P. 281.





about him. There can, therefore, be no greater testimony than his own words to what the great reformer owed to his mother in the formation of his saintly character.

Devi Sārādā Sundari has gone to her eternal rest, but her life is an inspiring book of precepts, an ever-living ideal to tell us that with a handful of such mothers living at a time in a country to teach and to guide, the nation will surely and speedily reach the goal of self-realization.

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*This chapter of the book  
is most interesting and  
in the whole of the*

*R. S. Bhatnagar*





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## MAHĀRĀNĪ SWARNAMAYĪ, C. I.

(PUBLIC SPIRIT).

## I

Poor Rāmtanu Mandal, a village grocer, had a daughter born to him in 1828. \* At her birth no music regaled the ears of friends and neighbours; the news did not find its way to the columns of a newspaper; nor was the event hailed with anything like the blowing of a conch-shell or the raising of a joyous shout of *Ulu Ulu*, commonest and cheapest expression of rejoicing in favour with the womenfolk of Bengal on such occasions. On the other hand, the poor father smelt ruin ahead in anticipation of an immediate strain on his slender purse, and the prospective exactions of the money lender ten years hence; for her marriage, if the girl would

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\* Major Walsh makes it 1838. Evidently, this is a 'printer's devil'; for when the Major admits that her husband Rājā Krishna Nāth died in 1844 (History of Murshidabad, P. 207.), it is clear that he could not have married an infant to leave her a child widow at the age of six. Though differently stated by different writers as 1824, 1827 and 1837, I have reasons to assume that she was born in 1828.





live to marry at all, was sure to turn him out of his ancestral homestead.

But the baby thrived in her village home at Bhattakul in Burdwān, though she was not born with even so much as a 'brass' spoon in her mouth. For she was the special care of Providence; and poor Rāmtanu did not know that the girl Sārādā Sundari would live to become one of the greatest ladies of modern Bengal.

For who has not heard the name of Mahārāni Swarnamayī, C.I., a house-hold word in Bengal for her unbounded liberality and public spirit? It is of absorbing interest to attempt a sketch, however meagre and incomplete, of the life of this large-hearted Bengali woman,—if only to show that greatness may be born equally in a lowly hut or a princely mansion, irrespective of time and space, or caste and colour.

## II

Krishna Kānto Nandi, better known as "Kānto Baboo" in Bengal, was connected through business with the English Factory at Cossimbāzār. A very clever lad, Krishna Kānta made himself highly useful to the Company's Officers, and was very soon taken in as native assistant and interpreter at the Factory. Thus





he became acquainted with Mr. Warren Hastings, then Chief Assistant at the English Residency. The story runs that Hastings incurred the displeasure of Nawāb Sirāj-ud-Daullāh for a piece of indiscretion, and in his flight for safety had to take shelter with his friend "Kānto Baboo." Krishna Kānto gave him a night's lodging at the risk of his own life, saved him from the Nawāb's wrath by stowing him away in a lumber room and giving his hungry friend a dish of stale rice and some roasted crabs to dine off. When Hastings rose to eminence, he did not forget the saviour of his life. Kānto Baboo became his Dewān or Chief native Secretary. Fortune led him by the hand. Through the favour of Mr. Warren Hastings,\* afterwards Governor-General of the Company's possessions in this country, Kānto Baboo thrived well and became the founder of the illustrious Cossimbāzār Rāj. He took the tide in his affairs "at the flood," which led him on to fortune. It was good luck for the country that the industry of this native banian of Warren Hastings was so lavishly rewarded; for an ever-flowing stream of charity, fed at the perennial fountain of Kānto Baboo's diligent acquisi-

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\* Major Walsh, I. M. S., History of Murshidābād, P. 206.





tions, was to flood the homes of the Bengali poor through the representatives of his house, chief among whom was Mahārāni Swarnamayi, C.I., of blessed memory.

### III

The marriage of Sārādā Sundari did not cost her parents a bit of the trouble anticipated. The girl was pretty, and gave early promise of a rich womanhood combining much talent with gentleness, goodness and dignity. About this time the people of the Cossimbāzār Rāj family were thinking of a match for the young Rājā Krishna Nāth Rāi Bāhādur, fourth and last of the direct line from the founder. As Dewān Krishna Kānto had originally migrated from Burdwān,\* the family naturally looked for a suitable bride from among their own caste-people in their native district. The selection was made, and Sārādā Sundari, renamed Swarnamayi, suddenly found herself elevated to her place as the mistress of one of the richest families in Bengal.

The change in her name and social position did not affect her temperament. Her husband, the enlightened Rājā Bāhādur, was blest in his

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\* N. N. Rāy—Murshidābād Kāhini, P. 419.





little wife who proved to be a veritable ministering angel in the domestic circle. But Rājā Krishna Nāth though generous in a noble cause was extravagantly lavish with his money, and squandered away all his accumulated wealth in a very short time. He had, moreover, an extremely unruly temper which hastened his ruin.\* The Rājā was implicated in a criminal offence, and to avoid the ignominy of an open trial made an end of his life on 31st October, 1844.†

It was a very rude shock to Swarnamayī when she found herself a widow at the prime of her life. She had no son; two daughters were born to her, but one predeceased her father.‡ As a member of an orthodox Hindu family she was condemned to the horrors of perpetual widowhood. Her sun went down while the noon was yet to close.

As the last drop to the cup of her sorrow, the Hon'ble the East India Company took under attachment the whole property of the Cossimbāzār Rāj on the strength of a will purported to have been executed by the Rājā on the day

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\* Major Walsh, I. M. S., History of Murshidābād, P. 207.

† N. N. Rāy—Murshidābād Kāhini, P. 487.

‡ The other daughter died after marriage, but without issue. Walsh—*Ibid*, P. 208.





previous to his death. The cup of her misery was filled to overflowing.

## IV

The young Hindu widow did not, however, break down under the heavy load of her misfortunes that "came in battalions." She faced the situation with the courage of one who had had smooth sailing over a very rough and risky sea of trouble. But funds were sadly wanting, and in her distress she appealed to some wealthy friends for help. None came forward to advance her cause. On the contrary, several unscrupulous persons to whom she applied, bent on making a bargain out of her helplessness, demanded the lion's share of the property when recovered. Rāni Swarnamayī was more than in a fix.

But the darkest night, they say, is nearest dawn, and the tribulations of the lady were about to end. The sacrifice of a single magnanimous soul has more than once acted as the redeeming grace of the world by atoning for the lapses of the millions. A gentleman named Hara Chandra Lāhiri, connected with the liberally minded Goswāmis of Serāmpur, was moved to pity at the plight of the dispossessed





Rānī. It was a voluntary offer of sacrifice that he made. He expected no reward, and demanded no brokerage,\* and himself having had no surplus wealth to spare, raised a decent loan on the mortgage of his daughter's property. Babu Hara Chandra befriended the helpless widow in the darkest days of her trial, and the name of that large-hearted gentleman will go down to posterity so long as the benefactions of Mahārānī Swarnamayī will live in history.

The law-suit dragged on for more than two years before the Supreme Court of Judicature, and created a great sensation in the land. Very able Counsels were engaged by the Rānī. These learned men of law thoroughly established that Rājā Krishna Nāth was of unsound mind before his death. The finding of the judges, therefore, was that the last will of the Rājā could not be valid. So, the highest Court of Civil Justice in the country ordered the restoration of the property to the widow of the late Rājā (Nov. 15, 1847).\* The troubles of the lady came to an end.

## V

The Rānī found the property in a state of chaotic disorder when possession was restored to

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\*Walsh, *Ibid*—P. 208, footnote.





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her. To form an idea of the vastness of the estate and the difficulty of its management, we must remember that it lay scattered in several districts\* separated from one another by rivers and hills and forest tracts in the days of the *Company Bāhādur* when communication was difficult and travelling expensive. The Rāni being, moreover, a woman having had no sincere adviser among her own relations, the situation became far from enviable. To add to this, the heavy expenses of costly litigation, raised on loans from time to time, sat upon the estate as a nightmare. In her distress she looked about for a friend to help her in the administration, and she selected Babu Rājiblochan Rāi, a subordinate officer of the Rāj, who offered to assist at the management.

Dewān Rājiblochan justified her selection. He understood at a glance how difficult the charge was. But like his mistress he was energetic, persevering, sagacious and tactful in business affairs. The Dewān was noted for his thorough grasp of administrative questions; and

\* S. C. Mitra—Comprehensive Bengali Dictionary—article on "Swarnamayī", P. 873. Rungpur, Dinājpur, Burdwān, Nadiā, Birbhum, Pānā, Murshidābād, Farīdpur, Rājshāhi, Bogrā, 24 Parganās, and a *Jāgir* in Ghāzipur (The United Provinces) bestowed upon Kānto Baboo by Warren Hastings.





his considerate treatment of the *raiya*ts was not the least of the manifold qualities of head and heart that endeared him to the public as well as to the Rānī. With his prudent management of the estate disorder vanished, the debts were on their way to liquidation, and prosperity came back to the Cossimbāzār family in no time. Thus, when the estate was restored to its pristine prosperity, the Rānī, at the instance of her Dewān, embarked upon a scheme of useful works for which she will be remembered by posterity for ages to come.

## VI

Her charities, public and private, are too numerous to be exhausted in a sketch like this. The following sentence of Major Walsh admirably puts the whole thing in a nutshell: "To her no charity appealed in vain; she was indeed the Baroness Burdett Coutts of Bengal." With more than a prince's wealth at her absolute disposal, she did not spend a single farthing on personal luxury. Setting apart a portion of her revenues for the cost of the management, she spent what remained in works of munificence. In 1874 there was a famine in North Bengal, and the benevolent lady unloosed her purse-





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strings and made a voluntary gift of one lakh and twenty-five thousand rupees for the relief of the distressed. There was scarcity in Calcutta in 1876; distress in Murshidābād in the same year, followed by a terrible famine in Madras (1877). The wails of distress reached her ears, and she could not eat a mouthful if she could not save a fellow-brother from starvation. In relieving the distress of her famished countrymen alone her donations amounted to between four and five lakhs of rupees.

Her charity and public spirit brought her prominently to the notice of Government. The title of *Mahārāni* was conferred on her as a personal distinction in 1871. Her distinguished services to the cause of famine-stricken people brought her a fresh reward in the shape of a pledge from Government that the title of *Mahārājā* would be revived in her heir. A further mark of the recognition of her public spirit came in January, 1878, when Her Most Gracious Majesty, the late Queen Empress Victoria, admitted her to the Order of the Crown of India. In handing over to the *Mahārāni* the Insignia of the Order together with the Royal letters-patent, the Divisional Commissioner in an open Durbār at Cossimbāzār on August 14th, 1878, enumer-





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ated the great services rendered by the Mahārānī to the cause of humanity : she had already spent eleven lakhs of rupees in voluntary gifts and donations up to the year 1877.

## VII

It must not be supposed, however, that this exhausted the list of her donations, for many more lakhs were yet to follow in the years to come. The lady students of the Calcutta Medical College had no comfortable hostel accommodation. This long-felt want was removed by the Mahārānī who came forward with the magnificent donation of one lakh for the construction of a building for the purpose. The authorities of the Campbell Medical School, Calcutta, were also accommodated with a donation of ten thousand rupees towards the fund for the building of the school hostel. Over and above, she spent large sums of money in building and endowing schools and sanskrit *Tols*, in digging wells and excavating tanks and founding hospitals and charitable dispensaries all over her estate.

Her private charities comprised the annual gift of winter clothing to Brāhmins, *sannyāsīs*, *faqirs* and mendicants of every description, the distribution of palatable dishes to thousands of





the poor on the annual celebration of the *Annakuta*\* ceremony, the annual feeding of countless beggars on three consecutive days of the *Annapurnā* Poojah, the entertainment of Brāhmans on the death anniversary of Kānta Baboo, Mahārājā Lokenāth, Rājā Hari Nāth and Rājā Krishna Nāth, and annual grant of stipends to various learned Pandits of different districts all over Bengal. Besides these, there were charities in private, too numerous to mention; helpless widows belonging to the upper ranks of society, too retiring to make their petitions in person, found to their surprise that they were not forgotten by the Mahārāni when the steward came to them at the end of the month with a handsome allowance for their maintenance. Well may we repeat with the poet that in her case, too,

“Thus to relieve the wretched was her pride;  
And even *her* failings leaned to virtue’s side.”

Poor students hailing from distant parts of the province were fed, lodged and educated at the expense of the Mahārāni, and there was a regular boarding-house establishment kept up free in the Cossimbāzār palace for students who

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\* Literally, a pyramid of eatables for distribution among the poor after it has been offered to a god.





could not afford to pay for their education. Indeed, students were her special concern : and that district in Bengal must be an unfortunate exception which does not enjoy, in some shape or other, an educational charity from the hands of the Mahārānī.\* Thus the report that she spent about a lakh of rupees annually in private charities seems to rest on a solid foundation.

## VIII

The people of Berhāmpur should be particularly grateful to the memory of the late Mahārānī Swarnamayī for her liberality. Two notable instances are selected. The Government of Sir Collin Campbell, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, was for reducing the status of the Berhāmpur College, the only institution in the district of Murshidābād, where instruction was imparted up to the B. A. standard of the Calcutta University. There were loud and emphatic protests from the people of Murshidābād, but

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\* Even when this humble tribute is being paid to her blessed memory the writer has his face towards the Krishnagar College standing on its spacious compound comprising 100 *Bighās* of rent-free land, the greater part of which forms the gift of the late Mahārānī Swarnamayī. When the writer remembers that he himself is an *alumnus* of that College, his grateful heart goes up to that departed soul for the benefit which he in common with many other students of the Nadiā district, has derived from the liberality of the late Mahārānī Swarnamayī.





Government unfortunately could not find their way to accede to the popular request to maintain the College as a first grade institution : want of funds stood in the way. Mahārāni Swarnamayi saved the situation, took over the management of the College in her own hands, and agreed to defray from the revenues of her estate the entire annual cost of twenty thousand rupees.

## IX

Then comes her magnificent gift to Berhāmpur, the supply of pure drinking water to the public of Berhāmpur. The town was notoriously unhealthy some twenty years ago. Malaria, Cholera, Dysentery and Diarrhoea claimed a large toll of victims annually ; and though it is not a sanitarium to-day, the health of the town has admittedly improved with the introduction of pipe-water. The waterworks of Berhāmpur are an imperishable monument to the liberality of the Mahārāni. During the Collectorship of Mr. Kennedy in 1894, the Mahārāni agreed to remove the crying want of the Berhāmpur public by undertaking the whole cost of inaugurating the waterworks. Unfortunately, however, when the project was yet maturing she died in 1897. But her successor,





the present Mahārājā, carried out the dying wishes of his illustrious aunt, and the total cost amounting to three lakhs of rupees was met by the Cossimbāzār Rāj. His Honour Sir John Woodburn, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, in opening the waterworks on the 31st July, 1899, made a very appreciative reference to the public spirit of the late Mahārānī Swarnamayī, C. I. The opening paragraph from the address presented to His Honour by the Mahārājā Bāhādur will show how greatly appreciated by Government was the boon conferred by the Mahārānī upon the people of Berhāmpur:—

“Your Honour, ladies and gentlemen, on my own behalf as heir and successor to the late Mahārānī, as also on behalf of the Berhāmpur public to whom she made a gift of these works, I beg most respectfully to tender you my, as well as their, grateful thanks for the honour you have this day done to her memory; and I only regret that she is not alive to hear how kindly and eloquently her munificent liberality has been spoken of by the head of the local Government.”

## X

But the day was approaching when this great benefactress of humanity was to be called away





to her seat among the *Immortals*, and receive her highest reward for having done her duty among the mortals of the earth. Through the agency of a frail woman the spirit of Love and Charity revealed itself for the benefit of mankind. Mahārāni Swarnamayī had ample opportunities at her disposal to benefit mankind, and posterity will judge whether she could tell her Maker if she had made the best of these opportunities. Doing her duty by her countrymen to the last moment of her life, the Mahārāni passed away on the 25th of August, 1897, full of years and full of honours, mourned by Hindus and Mahomedans alike. Her death has created a void in the ranks of the lady workers of Bengal, which will take time to fill. Ahalyā in *Mahārāshtra*, Bhawāni in *Bārendra* and Swarnamayī in *Rārha* are striking manifestations of the same spirit—the spirit of charity working through different agencies, at different times and different places. It is the self-forgetfulness of the legendary hero Harish Chandra working at this distance of time to show that Indian Mythology has realised its end through the history of the country.

May the great Soul of the departed Mahārāni rest in peace to see from her serene altitude that her mantle has fallen upon her worthy successor,





## MAHĀRĀNI SWARNAMAYI.

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SL

the Mahārājā Sir Manindra Chandra Nund  
Bāhādur, who has kept up the glorious traditions  
of the Cossimbāzār House by emulating the  
generous impulses of his predecessor, the late  
Mahārāni Swarnamayi who was great in life,  
and greater yet in death in the grateful hearts  
of her countrymen.





## AGHORE KĀMINI.\*

(SERVICE TO FELLOWMEN).

## I

We propose to take leave of our readers by presenting a very rapid sketch of the life and activities of a saintly Bengali woman who consecrated her entire self to the service of her race. Devi Aghore Kāmini, whose selfless devotion to the cause of humanity has secured her immortality in death, stood at the transition when the orthodox order of rigidity in Bengal was yielding fast at the magic touch of the New Light. Aghore Kāmini was a living manifestation of Hindu womanhood with a vast world-culture behind it, embodied in Hindu family life and social organisation, crystallised in traditions and organised into character. She showed, beyond dispute, to what height of noble self-sacrifice at the call

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\*For the materials of the life-story of this lady I am indebted to the very valuable account left by her husband in the book "Aghore-Prakāsh" published from Bānkipur.





of humanity the Indian woman, nursed and nurtured within the walls of family life, can rise up to, only when the walls are pulled down by the on-rush of surging life.

When the great soul of the illustrious Keshab Chandra was soaring in its noble flights in a search after the highest truth, rising far above all that was dross and filth, Devi Aghorekāmīni, a humble servant of suffering humanity, by a simple impact with it, tore through the fetters of the inequality that held society in its bondage, and taking the world for her kin, showed how Indian womanhood could feel and live and die for mankind. The same spirit that animated the English lady and dispelled the gloom from the military hospital of Scutari, or which made that large-hearted Englishman visit all the prison cells of Europe and weep for their unfortunate inmates, travelled to the banks of the Ganges in distant Bengal and gave the world this nineteenth century lady saint who preferred to work in silence and lay down her life in the service of humanity in her own humble sphere of activity.

## II

In May, 1856, Devi Aghorekāmīni was born in a very respectable Kāyastha family of Sripur,





## IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

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a small village in the 24-Parganās. When India was just emerging from the heat and dust of a serious military revolution, and Bengal was yet in the throes of the birth of a new spirit to welcome the recently imported culture of the West, Babu Bipin Chandra Basu in the cool atmosphere of an unaffected village home was bringing up his little daughter Aghorekāmini in the traditions of the ancient faith of his ancestors. Aghorekāmini was yet a playful child of ten years when her father in deference to the wishes of his castemen gave her away in marriage to Sreemān Prakāsh Chandra Roy, a promising youth of eighteen belonging to another well-known Kāyastha family of the same village. Sreemān Prakāsh Chandra was at the time a brilliant undergraduate in the Berhampur College, and afterwards rose to be an ornament of the Provincial Executive Service, Bengal. We cannot definitely state whether the husband or the wife gained relatively by the marriage; but this much we can safely assert that both gained immensely by their union, Prakāsh doing yeoman's service in widening the moral and intellectual out-look of his wife, while the deeply spiritual nature of Aghorekāmini nourished and fed the hungry soul of her





husband, and made their home like a miniature hermitage of ancient India. The twin souls thrived and developed side by side ; one supplemented the other ; and the Great Spirit revealed Himself in both with His saving grace to lead them to a life of perfection through self-consecration.

### III

About this time the doctrines of Brāhmoism propounded by the great Teacher Keshab Chandra appealed forcibly to the religious consciousness of young Bengal. When the educated native community of Calcutta, deeply imbued in the culture of the West, was drifting in a current of doubt and materialism like a ship without helm or rudder, the ardent spirit of Keshab Chandra saved the vessel from foundering by founding the New Church called "Bharatbarshiya Brāhmo Samaj" (1869). It was the infant Catholic Church of Indian Theology : Keshab Chandra was the great apostle of the faith. His was a unique personality. A strict code of morals backed by his extraordinary reasoning and enlivened by sincerity, and a deep religious fervour that found its expression in a highly persuasive eloquence carried conviction into the





inmost depths of the soul. The advent of Keshab Chandra into Indian society was an epoch-making event in the history of the religious revival of India; it saved, on the one hand, many a westernised Bengalee from embracing Christianity; on the other, it rescued young Bengal from the Scylla of priest-craft and old-world fanaticism and the Charybdis of a life of drift and self-abandonment through loss of all faith. Keshab Chandra placed before his countrymen the eternal verities of life, and held up, in an intelligent and intelligible form, the creed of the ancient *Rishis*, essentially monotheistic and breathing in a spirit of toleration, nay, of harmony.

## IV

Young Prakāsh Chandra came early under the indirect influence of this great Evangel of the Transition. The books of Rajnārāin set him thinking; the life and teachings of Keshab Chandra spurred him to action. The cravings of his soul were satisfied, and he found a safe asylum in the folds of the New Faith (1871). But difficulty was brewing under the paternal roof. Devi Aghorekāmini was at that time a meek and unobtrusive girl of fifteen. The





daughter-in-law of a respectable Hindu family of an orthodox type, she had to be under the strict guardianship of her husband's people, and could not hear much of the reformed faith of her husband who came home from College only once in two or three months. Though instructed by her husband in some of the broad principles of the reformed religion she could yet touch only the outer fringe of the Great Truth, and her soul was just now groping in the darkness of ignorance. The influence that was brought to bear upon her by her husband's occasional visits was greatly neutralized by the adverse influence of the home she was in, and the liberation was a very slow and tardy process. Fortunately, however, it was the darkness preceding the dawn, and the night is darkest when the dawn is nearest.

## V

Passing through a series of vicissitudes in which Fortune did not show for him an excess of motherly solicitude, young Prakāsh Chandra found himself in the distant town of Motihāri, posted as a temporary Superintendent of Famine Relief (1875). The income was small, and the family moderately large, consisting of the husband, the wife, two daughters and two





dependent relatives. The difficulty was considerable in view of the fact that a large remittance, about half the monthly income, had to be sent home for the support of the mother of Prakāsh Chandra. But Aghorekāmini, now the mistress of the family, was never discontented ; it was not in the nature of that lady who was destined, in later years, to devote her little all to the good of her race.

## VI

Motihāri, then, was the seed-plot of Aghorekāmini's future greatness. It was here that she imbibed the virtues of self-conquest and self-denial which marked her out as a great woman in the next twenty years of her life. There were splendid opportunities of study, meditation and prayer ; of ministering to the comforts of her husband, her children, of the entire family, generally speaking ; of denying herself the small comforts that as a young mother she might require from time to time. Under the fostering care of her husband, whose mention we cannot dispense with if we seek to trace the vigorous growth of her soul, her spiritual advance was secure. But though life was regulated here as in a decent and quiet Brāhmo family,





Aghorekāmini was not yet a sister recognised by that religious fraternity. Prakāsh Chandra could not admit her into the folds, if he would.

But the messenger was come from the Land of Light with his message of Salvation. In an auspicious moment Saint Aghorenāth Gupta of Sāntipur, a famous itinerant preacher of the New Faith was on a visit to Motihāri at this time. His saintly life and lofty teachings were an inspiration to the couple and touched their inmost soul. Devi understood the hint and surrendered herself. Aghorekāmini was put on the way to the Temple of Truth (1876).

## VII

At Motihāri Aghorekāmini first heard the trumpet call of Duty. The glimmerings of the Great Truth dawned upon her awakening sense and they brought in their train the unavoidable struggle, privations and sacrifice,—the trial of strength between Faith and Doubt, and the joy arising from the final triumph of moral conviction over the sarcastic taunts of irréverent Doubt. Though the circumstances of her husband did not improve to any very appreciable extent, though the circle of their dependants grew wider by the addition of the first male child of the





family and the inclusion of a helpless elder brother of Babu Prakāsh Chandra, though she was not spared the darts of persecution from the brother-in-law for the openness of her religious beliefs, yet she looked back with a glow of pride upon this period of her life, for it was her period of probation ; it gave her the necessary training for her vocation in life. So, with many a parting tear Aghorekāmini left her friends at Motihāri to join her husband at Bānkipur, where he had been transferred sometime ago as Inspector of Excise.

### VIII

Bānkipur became the field of her manifold activities. The vigorous growth of her inner self made it abundantly clear to her that life was not worth living if it remained crippled within the narrow limits of the domestic circle. She understood that the sphere of the soul was an ever-widening arc, and that individual life was nothing if it could not burst through its narrow bounds to lose itself in the greater life of humanity. Henceforth we find Devi Aghorekāmini mixing in society and trying to make herself useful to suffering humanity. Her endeavour, therefore, was directed first to cur-





tail her personal comforts, that she might spare something for those in want ; next, to cultivate an inward strength of the mind, that the ordinary weaknesses of the human heart might not stand in the way of duty ; then, to replace the unnecessary shyness of a Bengali woman by an amount of courage and boldness, that she might visit the various walks of life without fear or delicacy ; lastly, to resign herself entirely to the Great Spirit, that she might do her duty, clear of any thought of consequence. In her pious resolve she was greatly aided by her friend the late Saudāmini Devi (Mrs. K. N. Roy) whose name stands for talent and culture in modern Bengal.

## IX

With this sort of practical training for whatever little she could do to alleviate human misery Devi Aghorekāmini chalked out her own path in life. She had already renounced the use of costly dresses and ornaments, things which attract the minds of young women generally. Her valuable jewelleryes were sent to procure relief for famine-stricken people ; instead of the fine cotton and silk for which she showed so much partiality as a girl she began





to wear the coarse and humble home-spun called *Mutiā* largely used by poor Bihāree women. Never was the costly *sāree* worn by her after her vow of renunciation, and when she sought an interview with the Commissioner of Patna on an errand of charity, the *Mutiā* was her dress for that private audience. That her youthful beauty might not be a block to the accomplishment of her desired end, she unhesitatingly cut off the locks of her curling hair, by no means an inconsiderable sacrifice for a young lady to make. To crown all, about this time she went through the vow of a spiritual wedding with her husband, which, in plain language, means that thenceforth and for all time to come the union between herself and her husband was to be a meeting between soul and soul, and not between flesh and flesh, a strict vow of celibacy in married life, hard to be observed when the married couple were in the prime of life, so to say (1882). The course of her training was now complete and the strength of the great soul of this ascetic, true to all relations of life, showed itself in various ways.

## X

Trials now followed in rapid succession to put her strength to the test ; and they say that





strength is best tested when you watch by the bedside of a dying relative. In August, 1883, her second daughter fell seriously ill, and with all that the best medical help could do, the life of the girl was despaired of. The crisis came at 11 in the night, and when she lay hovering between life and death, the mother sat there, with a calm composure of mind, and smoothed the ruffled pillow as if nothing serious was going to happen. The poor father was miserable beyond description, and tears trickled down his pallid cheeks. As soon as Devi Aghorekāmini noticed it, she took her husband aside and said, "This is not the moment for weakness, dear. You forget the duty towards your daughter." Then they both sat to pray and rose with perfect mastery over the self. Fortunately the crisis passed, and the departing life came back. But who can say what pang it cost the mother to retain her self-possession at that moment of struggle between weakness and strength?

Shortly after the incident narrated above the second child of Dr. Pareshnāth Chatterje got cholera. The room in which the patient lay was ill suited for a sick chamber. Devi Aghorekāmini heard of this, and in response to the inward promptings of her soul she hastened to bring the





child over to her own lodgings. She nursed the dying child with her own hands. When she heard of a fresh attack in the same family, that patient was also removed into the family of Prakāsh Babu. The lady took entire charge of watching by the bedside, and it was due to her motherly care and nursing that both the children were brought back from death's door.

The seed of philanthropy planted years ago was beginning to blossom and bear fruit.

## XI

In July, 1884, Babu Prakāsh Chandra was posted to Motihāri as Deputy Collector, and the family went back to the dear old place,—old faces, old associations and old memories revived with fresh ties of affection and love. But the five years at Bānkipur had wrought a miraculous change in the inner life of Devi Aghorekāmīni; she came back chastened, ennobled and purified. The philanthropic impulse which first touched the core of that great heart while the lady was yet at Bānkipur found full play at Motihāri. Now she forgot the individual self and began to realize the greater, wider and fuller Self outside.





“Love took up the harp of life, and smote on  
all the chords with might,  
Smote the chord of self that, trembling,  
passed in music out of sight.”  
She took in the significance of true sympathy.

In 1886, a certain respectably connected young man, Hariguru Rudra by name, visited Motihāri after a sad bereavement, the loss of his wife. The acuteness of his grief was preying heavily on his youthful mind and sent him abroad disconsolate from place to place. Rudra sought shelter in the family of Devi Aghorekāmini at Motihāri, knowing it for certain that he would be allowed to drink his fill from that perennial fountain of love and sympathy. He was received by the lady with the greatest cordiality as a mother would receive her afflicted child. Her maternal solicitude and cheering words of consolation brought lasting comfort into the distressed heart of the young man. Rudra was a guest in the family for three or four years, and when he returned home chastened and consoled he ever remembered the kindness he had received from the lady far away from his native home. Money is not the greatest gift that one can make; there is yet another and





a still greater,—it is the giving of the self in a cool and refreshing stream of sympathy with the heart that is broken. Devi Aghorekāmini gave her self to console the heart that wept.

## XII

By the end of the year 1886, Babu Prakāsh Chandra was at Bānkipur for the second time, and wherever there was Aghorekāmini there was an opportunity of doing a good turn to a neighbour. About this time, her acquaintance with the family of Mr. Ananda Chandra Chakravarty, a native Christian resident of Dināpur, gradually ripened into friendship; and when the sudden death of Mr. Chakravarty left his wife a helpless widow with a numerous family of dependent children, having no provision whatever for their maintenance, it was the sympathy of Mrs. Roy that supported the family at this bereavement. Her sympathy did not end in words; she rendered very valuable pecuniary assistance for the education of the minors.

Similar instances of unselfish endeavour to alleviate human misery are too numerous in the life of the lady to justify any selection. The limited space at our disposal will not allow us to mention any more. So we have to close this side





of her character here, namely, the doing of good to all who came in contact with her in private life. Hindu or Christian, friend or stranger, young or old, man or woman, everybody had a warm corner in her heart, and this was her mission in life.

### XIII

But the greatest work of her life was yet to come. The mandate of the Lord had reached her heart; and she felt that she was required to divert her energies into a new channel,—namely, to ameliorate the condition of the women of her country. She was herself a woman, and who but a sympathetic woman was fitted for the task of improving the condition of her less fortunate sisters? She took her resolve. She would help to spread education among the ignorant women-folk of Bihār.

The task was difficult; more difficult than you can possibly imagine. With greater ease did Hercules set about turning the course of the stream to clean the Augean stable!

Picture a Bihāri girl in the early eighties, brought up in an atmosphere of blind superstition, immured in the pale shades of the zenana, steeped in the darkness of ignorance, forbidden





by custom from time out of mind to cross the mysterious bounds of the 3 R's.! Even the domiciled Bengali girl had not then the advantage of education worth the name.

Next, came the sad dearth of teachers,—female teachers being out of the question. The lady with whom the idea originated had not herself the training necessary for a teacher.

Thirdly, there was the monetary problem to solve. No pupil, no teacher, no house to locate the school, no encouragement from the public. Yet with all these initial disadvantages Devi Aghorekāmini faced the situation quite heroically, and the splendid institution, the Bānkipur Girls' High School from which the girls of Bihār are matriculating year after year, bears ample testimony 'as to how difficulties can be overcome even by a woman, if the work be done in good faith, in sincerity, with perseverance and a singleness of purpose. The story of her success is worth recording and worth hearing. Nay, it is an object lesson to all workers.

#### XIV

Devi Aghorekāmini analysed the situation. Her strong common sense told her that the task before her was not an ordinary one. It





was not simply the heart that could do it,—the brain must come in to its aid. A teacher, she thought, was not simply *born*; a teacher was both *born* and *made*. How could she educate the children if she had not herself the qualification. She would solve the second difficulty first; the other obstacles were not so serious to cope with. The pecuniary problem could not stand in the way if she had a few years more of life to live.

So she thought of joining Miss Thoburn's Women's College in Lucknow as a pupil-teacher with a view to get the necessary training. She was now thirty-five years old; she had a dependent family of children to look after; there was no other elderly female relative in the family, who could do it during her absence. Lastly, who would meet the cost of her training in the Women's College? The obstacles seemed insuperable,—but there was God overhead and her firm resolve within. People who heard of her plan did not think very highly of her sagacity. But they did not know her well; and, somehow or other, on February 27, 1891, Devi Aghorekāmini was speeding away from the Bānkipur Station to become a boarding-scholar in the Women's College in distant Lucknow.





## XV

The Superintendent of the College, Miss I. Thoburn, a large-hearted English lady, received her new scholar with great kindness, and was rather astonished at what she saw of this strange Bengali woman. Her courage, perseverance and firm faith in God impressed her deeply. As a very humble learner, she began every thing from the very beginning, so to say, and made very rapid progress in English, Hindi and Kindergarten. Her life as a boarding-scholar at Lucknow was one of strenuous exertion,—she devoted fourteen hours to study : to prayer and meditation, four ; and the remaining six she set apart for meals and sleep. As a pupil she conformed to all the rules and regulations of the institution. She readily submitted to the discipline, and gladly sat for the periodical tests of the college, and though Miss Thoburn was willing to relax, as a special case, some of the stringent rules in her favour, she objected to have the concessions.

Once during her stay at Lucknow she got the news of the serious illness of her eldest boy Subodh.\* But instead of being the least upset

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\* Now Mr. S. C. Roy, Bar-at-Law, Calcutta High Court.





at the news, she retired to her prayer-room to hold communion with God who alone could save the situation. Even her maternal love could not make her flinch before duty. Fortunately the boy recovered and Devi Aghorekāmini offered her grateful thanks to God that her darling had been spared.

Lest her studies should be interfered with, she stopped correspondence with home for the rest of her term at College. It was not keeping term,—it was asceticism of the strictest order, and it had its reward. She took the full course of training extending over nine months, and with a very high certificate of proficiency from the Principal, she returned to Bānkipur on December 16, 1891.

## XVI

Mrs. Roy found an enthusiastic ovation waiting for her at Bānkipur. It was a magnificent display. Were they receiving a conquering Field-Marshal returning home in the midst of his own people? Not that,—yet the music, the procession, the blowing of the auspicious conch-shell, the illuminations and street decorations proved the demonstration to be nothing less. Babu Prakāsh Chandra in speaking of this demonstration years





after was overpowered with emotion when he wrote in his book : "I did not know before that man could do so much for man."

In truth, Devi Aghorekāmini richly deserved the honour. A marvellous transformation was wrought in her during her residence in the Lucknow College. She reaped the rich harvest of a perfectly developed character. The expansion of the heart followed in the wake of the expansion of her mind. The company of learned ladies, great English ladies, bold and true, gave her strength and courage. The scope of her duty loomed larger before her eyes. She realized the high place of woman in the order of God's creation, and with this conscious, gradual self-realisation dawned that sense of self-respect, greater now than ever, which gave her such a dignified idea of her mission on earth. Over and above, she learned how to teach pupils, how to become a child with the children, and work her way into their affection by the gentle rule of love instead of the ever-dreaded rod of chastisement.

Mrs. Roy came back a changed woman, infinitely raised in the estimation of her countrymen, and no wonder that the men and women





of Bānkipur mustered strong to accord her an ovation.

## XVII

On her return to Bānkipur Mrs. Roy found the already existing infant school for girls in a moribund condition. With the death of the mistress in November the school had almost ceased to work. By the middle of February, 1892, the number on the rolls had dwindled into less than a dozen infants, and the monthly subscription reached the vanishing point. At this juncture the late Hon. Mr. Guruprasād Sen requested the lady to take charge of the school with a view to improvement. But the charge involved a threefold liability. First, if there was no money, it had to be raised by an appeal to sympathetic friends, or to be met from her private purse ; secondly, if there were no pupils, Mrs. Roy would have to go on her canvassing rounds from house to house at Bānkipur, or outside, if necessary ; and thirdly, if teachers were not available she would have to make the necessary arrangements, and do the greater part of the teaching herself. In fact, the school was to be a personal concern of Mrs. Roy, especially as her own house had to be converted into a boarding-house for the girls.





## XVIII

But the disadvantages detailed above could not deter the lady from making the start. She gladly took up this "love's labour." By the end of March the number of boarders rose to 29, besides 15 Bihāri girls sent as day-scholars by way of an experiment. The movement daily gained in sympathy and strength; and, with the unceasing efforts of the lady the affairs of the school were put on a very sound basis. She was the life and soul of the institution—she was manager, teacher, superintendent, and what not? She visited the mothers of the girls in their homes, looked after the health and comforts of her pupils, and did every thing that made for the welfare of the institution. Referring to this patriotic work of the lady the *Indian Spectator* in its issue of April 2, 1893, wrote the following eulogy:—

"By far the most notable institution, however, at Bānkipur, is an unpretentious Boarding-House, managed by a Brāhmo lady and her two daughters. Mrs. Prakāsh Chandra Roy is the wife of a gentleman who holds a respectable Government appointment and who is in well-to-do circumstances. At the age of 35\* she and

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\* The statement seems to be inaccurate. The vow was taken when the wife was 26 and the husband 35.





her husband took the vow of Brahmacharyya, and both have religiously observed it up to date. With her husband's full consent Mrs. Roy went with her two daughters to Lucknow to study at Miss. Thoburn's institution there..... Mrs. Roy speaks English fluently and is well read.

"Early in the morning the children in her home offer their prayers in their own simple way..... Each of the elder boarders is in charge of one or two of the younger, and each keeps a small diary in which she notes down every day her failings and backslidings, if any. The boarders attend the female school conducted under Mrs. Roy's supervision, and are helped in their studies at home by her and her daughters. The whole cost of education and boarding amounts to Rs. 7 and odd\* per month. The children look blithe and lively, and the lessons of purity, self-help and self-sacrifice, taught to them by example and precept, are likely to have an enduring influence on their after-life. The boarding-house is not kept for profit; indeed the amount charged to the boarders is much less than the actual cost. The deficit is made up by

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\* About 10s. in current English coinage.





Mr. Roy who takes the deepest interest in the work of his wife and daughters."

## XIX

It goes without saying that if Babu Prakāsh Chandra and his wife hesitated to convert their home into a boarding-house for the school the costly affair could never have been an accomplished fact, and the status of the Bānkipur Infant Girls' School never raised to that of the Premier Girls' High School in the province. The townsmen of Bānkipur and a host of high-placed Government officials fully appreciated the unselfish work of the lady. The Hon. Mr. Bolton, Commissioner of Patna on the eve of his transfer to Calcutta as Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, visited Mrs. Roy's school and made the following very encouraging remark on leaving, "I am very glad at all that I have seen. In England these things are generally done by maids and widows. It is a new experience to me, Mrs. Roy, that a wife and mother is up to such a heavy task, and can manage it so nicely as you have done." This remark of the Commissioner brought in a substantial help to Mrs. Roy, for, immediately after, the school received a handsome subsidy from the Government.





All this, however, could not satisfy the hankering of that great soul after doing good to humanity. It had definitely broken the narrow bounds of superstition and meanness, and with greater light came greater love, wider charity and a larger capacity for doing good. The world became her home and society her kin. Whenever she heard of a helpless woman uncared for at childbed, she hastened to the spot and worked there as a nurse; whenever she heard of a life in danger, who was there but Mrs. Roy by the side of the passing soul? Summer or winter, day or night, rich or poor, she did not mind her personal inconvenience in responding to duty's call, and to her the day was lost if it was not spent in doing something noble and useful. With frequent repetition her isolated acts of charity developed into a habit; habit grew into nature; and nature became a passion. She yielded to this, her only passion in life. Sometimes she would not even wait for her husband's permission. She followed her ideal passionately, even as a boy follows the rainbow in the sky.

## XX

Thus the lady worked ceaselessly for four





years for her school, her family\* at home and her family abroad. But the strain was too much for the nerves of a Bengali woman. What with her gigantic task of regenerating the condition of her less favoured sisters in Bihār, what with bereavements now and then, and the pin-pricks of an occasional disappointment inevitable in a struggle between the good in human nature and the bad in society her health was shattered. The work was too heavy; the struggle was too great. But the work was not yet complete. She started the school with five girls; on March 31, 1896, the roll showed forty. The funds of the school were more than solvent now, though five years back she did not know where the money was to come from. So, with a sigh of relief she welcomed the proposal of making over the institution to Government and retiring herself from the management. This was easily done; and she fervently prayed to God Almighty that her pet child might thrive well under the care of its adoptive parent (April, 1896).

But now the voice from another world reached her ears to tell her of the Home of her

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\* The Boarding Institution was known as "the Aghorekāmīni Family" at Bānkipur.





Heavenly Father, and that this darling daughter was wanted no more on this land of strange faces. She had finished her pilgrimage and was wanted before the feet of her Maker. She read the summons and understood the hint. Friends called it "The Rheumatism of the heart," illness, excruciating pain and patient suffering led her by the hand, step by step, through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. The shadow had to be crossed before she could enter the garden of eternal enjoyment in the City of Rest.

We glean the following from her diary, dated May 27, 1896. "No longer wanted here. The text of the morning sermon was—Nothing of this world delights me now. I am anxious to be there. I long to be there. Teach me, O ~~guide~~, the usages of that country. Tell me, O ~~guide~~, how I can forget *this* and how I can grow to like *that*."

Her work here was done and she was ready for the voyage Home across this stormy sea of life. After a fortnight's illness, on June 15, 1896, this great woman passed peacefully into the sleep of Death.

Devi Aghorekāmini left this world at the early age of forty. But she has left behind a name that posterity will not "willingly let die."





May God preserve to us her three worthy sons\* who typify some traits of their noble mother's character.

## XXI

"Without haste, but without rest" was the guiding motto of her life; so, Devi Aghorekāmini succeeded in achieving the end she had in view. She did duty for duty's sake, clear of any thought of consequence; so she succeeded in the face of the taunts and jeers of an unsympathetic world. She firmly believed in an ideal, and that ideal she followed with a singleness of purpose that would do credit to her admiring brothers of the sterner sex. The sweetness of her temper brought on by that religious tone which marked her character so pre-eminently in the latter half of her life was an envy of friends and foes alike. Her end was rather premature, and we wish she could live a few years more of her useful life to inspire her country-men and country-women with her noble example. But that was not to be, and she was called away to work, perhaps, in a different sphere of activity;

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\* Mr. Subodh Chandra Roy, Bar-at-Law, Mr. Sādhān Chandra Roy, Mechanical Engineer, and Dr. Bihān Chandra Roy, an ornament of the Medical Profession; all of Calcutta.





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and we must conclude with what the noble verses teach us about the traits of a noble nature :—

“It is not growing like a tree  
In bulk, doth make man better be ;  
Or standing like an oak, three hundred year,  
To fall a log at last, dry, bald and sere ;  
A lily of a day  
Is fairer far in May,  
Although it fall and die that night—  
It was the plant and flower of Light.  
In small proportions we just beauties see ;  
And in short measures life may perfect be.”

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