

Soul of Truth

by

BEE SEAVERS

A STORY ABOUT BOLLYWOOD; TABOOS; LIES; INTRIGUES;

SOCIAL RULES; DESTINY AND LOVE.

A TALE ABOUT LIFE

(Novel by Bee Seavers)

Prologue

Plot! Plot! Plot! Plot!

A shorter synopsis of a novel or film script couldn't be possible. A book as a film in a film in a film. A new and old dimension of the imagination, a story in a story in a story. A three dimensional Firework of fiction and reality from the Bollywood World and a transforming India after independence.

The magical and rich visual language of this novel is akin to a volcanic eruption. The author places the reader onto the high chair of the film director and sends him with a pair of literary cyberspace glasses on a three dimensional journey through the cinematic world.

Through the dynamic renaissance of the aesthetics of words, their meanings, the possibility of their inflections and modulations runs the red thread of the novel, meandering through the editing table of human dramaturgy. Mysterious human relationships, the narrowness of tradition, deceit, intrigues, taboos and double standards, all lead to a breathtaking finish and comprise the surprising mosaic of a story within a story within a story.

INDIA in the 1950s

The destiny of Shea, a young Indian woman, coming from a small village on the west coast near Mahabaleshwar is set to the background of the historical transformation taking place in India in the 1950s. After successfully passing out from convent school, Shea accompanies her aunt on invitation to Bombay. There she meets her childhood love Amir Ray, the son of a famous film director Rabindra Ray. The impervious relationship between her aunt and Amir's father helps her get the star role in a film directed by Guru Dutt, one of the most popular directors of India.

During the shooting they fall in love. But Shea soon realizes that her heart still belongs to her childhood sweetheart Amir. Destiny has led them together again. However, a mysterious and moralistic wall stands between them. It stops the sweet love from unfolding. In Julandar, as they both stand behind the camera, a mysterious attack takes place and they narrowly escape death.

A day before Shea's premier in Bombay, a showdown takes place in Mehboob Studio. This unmasks the real faces of her friends. Meanwhile, Shea's aunt lies on her death-bed and the great mystery is revealed. This leads Shea back to her natal village and reveals to her, her real talent – writing. She becomes one of the most successful writers of India.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Bee Seavers, born in 1948 in Hamburg is the child of a multi-cultural family. Having a German mother, an American music conductor as a father and a Pathan immigrant from Kashmir as a fore father. He did his doctorate in ethnomusicology and linguistics. Trained initially as a classical musician, then as a jazz musician he came into contact with Indian classical music only in the late seventies. The inherited genes of his ancestral grandfather were then activated and he learnt classical Indian music for the Santoor, an instrument with hundred strings. Due to his musical talent and experience he soon became a Santoor virtuoso. A prominent student of the Santoor Maestro, Pandit Shivkumar Sharma. Since then he is considered as one of the most talented western Santoor players of Indian classical music. He has brought out several CDs and received several prizes for his musical performances. In 1996 he composed the title music for a film trilogy for the TV Network Arte.

The Novel SOUL OF TRUTH conceived originally as a screenplay for the famous Indian film director Deepa Mehta, is his first literary work.

Amir sat at his writing table and tried to bring his thoughts onto paper. Actually his real name was Amir Kumar Ray but his friends found it too cumbersome so he was simply called Amir which he preferred anyway. This name was rare for a Brahmin but his father was an admirer of the poet Amir Khusrau who had lived in Delhi during the 14th century. Amir Khusrau was profoundly influenced by Sufism. In addition to being a Sufi he was a talented musician. He had researched and analyzed ancient jatis and ragas of Indian music and developed new tonal forms from both Indian and Persian musical elements. The singing of these new Ragas was known as Qawaali. Kumar Ray received this epithet as his father was a great lover of the modern Khayal style whose creator was seen as Amir Khusrau. Further, his father was a cultured man with great respect for the classical traditions. As a writer Kumar Amir Ray had made his name through folk tales. Subsequently children's stories, plays and later film scripts helped him to fame and affluence. Everything else was outside his domain. He knew that he belonged to a privileged class, a class that could afford the best things in life. He originated from a rich artistic family.

His father was a renowned film director, liberal yet retaining traditional values. He was a respected personality both in India and internationally. His parents had lived earlier in Delhi but had moved to Bombay as it was professionally more lucrative for his father. This period witnessed the high culture of Indian films. Later it was spoken of as the 'golden age of Indian cinema' and Bombay became India's Hollywood. As the first films were made in English, modeled on American films, it was necessary to subtitle them. The majority of the population did not know English. Besides which they were glad to have dispatched off colonial culture. The plurality of Indian languages led to new professions such as subtitling, scriptwriting and composing of film music. Other artistic professions that earned their money through cinema also emerged. It was the birth of the great cinema stars with whom Indian fans identified themselves. The masses streamed into the cinemas to see their film idols such as Rajesh Khanna, Sharmila Tagore, Hargis, Raj Kapoor, Nutan or Meena Kumari. Many of these stars lived in Bombay, either in the vicinity of Juhu Beach or Bandra. Amir's parents also lived in a huge bungalow here. The bungalow was surrounded by a splendid flower garden modeled on English lines. Many other artists had settled in this neighborhood. Many famous musicians, film stars, writers were regular visitors at the house of Amir's parents. Later after Amir was married his parents left him the house. They retired to Delhi so as to bring the rest of their evenings there. Amir was thus well provided for. Yet he was unhappy or rather unhappily married. His wife was Brahmin and came from a musical family. The marriage came about in a traditional way. His parents had decided early on an 'arranged marriage'. Amir was only ten years old as his mother took a decision for the rest of his life. The girl was no older than him self but her family was richer than his could ever have been. Still they were Brahmins and the appropriate family for a suitable match. Amir was the only son, thereby the main hope to continue the artistic heritage of his father. As almost everywhere in the world his youthful upbringing took a planned course. Then he did the direct opposite of what his parents expected from him. But this was normal for a young self-willed person who was trying to find his own personality. He was 21 years old

as his school career in Mahabaleshwar ended with a catastrophe. He had failed to get the requisite marks required to pass in the science subjects. Admittedly, he got the best marks in the arts. Subjects but much to the disappointment of his parents he finished his school with mediocre marks. He had great success in applied biology which he extensively studied and practiced in the neighboring convent school for girls. Even those envious of him endorsed unlimitedly his great talent in this matter. Unfortunately this exercise got him no extra marks for his final school examination. His famous father attended to his destiny. Being a modern, cultivated man liberal in his educational attitude, he led his son on his creative leash for a few months. As a director and scriptwriter he traveled throughout India with Amir. But he found no time to attend to the wishes of his son. On many evenings, after the film shoot they sat together with other actors in some bar or restaurant and discussed the previous day's shoot or that of the next day. Amir made himself useful wherever he went. He served those present with cold drinks or snacks and earned from time to time a pat on the shoulder. The fact that he was the director's son seemed to interest nobody. Only the actresses enjoyed the presence of the good looking man and courted his private service. His experience at the girl's convent helped him rapidly to become popular with the women film staff. These assets led to his being in competition with his father who ordered him suddenly to return home to his mother. Infected by the creative virus, he plunged into the study of theatre. He was financially supported by his father who even let him study a few semesters in an art Academy in London. His hidden artistic talent rapidly took form and his first success as a writer did not take long to follow like wise the promised wife too followed and he~ swallowed without great resistance the day of his engagement. It was a magnificent celebration as is appropriate for rich Brahmin families. The celebration should have originally taken place in the house of the bride's family but because both families lived in the same city tradition was bypassed and in a secret conversation it was agreed upon to have the marriage in the garden of Amir's parent's house. The most important male guests came on the backs of decorated elephants. They wore traditional male attire with huge turbans on their heads. They were accompanied by their entourage of servants who partly rode on horses and came across as proud Rajput warriors thus awakening to life the old splendor of the past dynasties of maharajas.

The women and girls wore beautiful saris with brocade embroidery and other valuable embellishments. Some drove by in English limousines, other in their own or rented horse carriages. ~n army of cooks and servants attended to the well being of the guests. Next to the tent in which the marriage ceremony was to take place, the most popular singers played known folk music. Elsewhere jugglers performed their best tricks to an astonished public. Meanwhile chicken and kababs slowly turned brown from the burning coal in the tandoor. The air was filled with the aroma of spices that was used for the different dishes. A huge heap of fruit was piled up as a pyramid. Hundreds of empty glasses were waiting to be filled up with lassies and fruit juices. It was like an ant heap in movement. Loud orders from the service personnel, the maze of voices of the guests, the musical tones mixed with each other to create a tapestry of sounds. Sweating in their red parade uniforms English officers stood next to white jasmine blossoms. They appeared like withered roses as they twirled the tips of their beards which thanks to pipe smoking had taken on the brown tint of nicotine. A drunk German diplomat was discussing with his Burmese colleague the best strategy for inconspicuously approaching the alcohol coast of the champagne table yet avoiding 'customs'. Unacquainted, people introduced themselves to each other, others that had seemingly not seen each other for a long time joyfully celebrated their reunion with shoulder pats and champagne which was poured into their glasses by an attentive steward. Children romped around, playing Hide and Seek under the legs of the guests and every now and then got an admonishment to behave themselves. The chowkidars shooed away the curious guests clambering on the fences. When they still persisted the help of long bamboo sticks was effectively used. Meanwhile the priests were preparing the floor of the tent for the marriage ceremony. Flowers, blossoms, leaves and even yellow and red lentil were used to form sacred symbols whose meaning was known only to them. Somewhere in the crowd of guests, the nervous bride's mother was giving her clan final instructions whilst Amir's parents were still busy greeting guests. Everything was prepared in advance. Nothing was left to chance. Both families had in earlier conversations planned everything with military

precision; the dowry, the guest list, the place of celebration— in short everything what needed to be organized. They agreed to bypass the traditional segregation of guests that was typical of such celebrations. Amir's father insisted on a liberal and mixed milieu and his wishes were fulfilled.

Amir wondered about the quantity of relatives and friends whom he had previously never seen. Only some women that had been invited by his father seemed familiar. As there was still time before the ceremony, he used the occasion to dedicate these moments to some of these women. He overcame the last remaining doubt relating to past acquaintances on his marriage bed. There he experienced them again, the liver spots, the moles that were concealed under the saris. He could remember again the missing underwear of many women as well as the taste of love as the little rivulet lusciously sweetened the inner sides of the thighs. So he swiveled between the people that he did not know and those that were old acquaintances. Once there occurred a strange unease in the crowd. It seemed that some important person had arrived. Men and women, both, stared for a few minutes in the same direction. Even Amir tried to gratify his curiosity. His gaze went over those present as if in a search, as if in expectation. However, there were too many people that blocked his sight. Some that had been observing him thought that he was looking for a glimpse of his bride. But as he had never seen her, he did not expend his thoughts there. So it happened as it had to happen. Similar to his final school examination, he almost failed his most important life exam. The ceremony was to soon take place and only thanks to the silent indignation of his new step mother was a scandal avoided. The bride's mother underwent a drastic transformation as she went about looking for her son-in-law. Her daughter whilst waiting for the marriage had complained so much about her bridegroom's indifference that a search seemed imperative although socially inapt. Impatience and feminine instinct led the mother-in-law to the end of the house corridor, directly through the room door behind which the son-in-law was concentrating all his efforts to consummate his wedding night duties, albeit in his own way.

There, she found him under the sari of a film beauty where he was supposedly studying the role of a feminine manuscript. This doubtful happening, an emergency worthy of explanation almost brought the marriage script to a collapse.

The end of the matrimonial beginning was prevented only to avoid the otherwise inevitable mockery and scorn. Amir now had to fulfill his duty as a husband. The to-be-married pair stood under the tent roof, their hands symbolically bound together, the look directed on the sacred gesture of the priest. Patiently they had to undergo the liturgical songs and formulas. Only then was the cloth untied. The groom held in his right hand a piece of mithai. He brought this to the mouth of his bride and let her bite into its sweetness. This symbolized Amir's future responsibility towards his wife. Other incantations by the head priest followed finally the ceremony was completed. The musicians began to play to the tune of Raga Bhoopali. The Sarangi player accentuated the melodic and romantic notes with particularly great feeling and sensitivity. Finally the awaited moment arrived. The husband was to see, for the first time his freshly married bride's countenance. Upon lifting the bride's veil and seeing the face under it, Amir had a moment of complete shock. With theatrical talent he professionally concealed his disappointment and with an apparent indifference he consummated his matrimonial duties in the already warmed marriage-bed during this 'auspicious night' (shubh ratri). Months later, it was crystal clear to him that his marriage was an unhappy alliance and that it would remain so.

His unconditional love was meant only for the result of the wedding night. His wife gifted him a beautiful girl. The name of his daughter should always remind him of his destiny, hence he named her Meena after the famous film star Meena Kumari. She continually carried her film work into her private life. As she dominantly played tragic scenes, her life too became one long tragic role, particularly in relationship to her fans and her behavior with the media. Amir found himself in this destiny. Further this film star also corresponded to his image of women. He thus created a historically twisted metamorphosis in which Meena Kumari, the woman got shrunk to Meena Ray, the little girl. Amir could explain the beauty and talent of the child only partially through genetics. Everything else was outside the capacity of his imagination.

He was now a husband and a father. He had to struggle through his life without his parents, or better said, as a husband without a wife for his

arranged girl' were matters of complete indifference. It was not particularly difficult for him to live with this. His published works were popular as ever. The charm he exercised on woman in his social circle was unimpaired. One of them was able to enter his life in such a way that she had more privileges as his lover than his legal wife could ever have. She was his constant companion, accompanying him on his lecture tours. As his concubine she played the role of the conspicuous secretary without it disturbing Amir. Why not, then everyone should know that his arranged marriage was a disaster.

He took it to be a message 'to the conservative spirits in Indian society. This stood in contradiction to his novels and stories that permeated by traditional Indian Thought and therefore were so popular. However his unsuccessful marriage served as a warning finger with which in all frustration he pointed to the tradition of 'arranged marriage '. It did not cross his mind that he was putting himself in question. Everyone should take part of his misfortune but not his fortune which consisted of his secretary and daughter Meena. With her eight years she stood on the revolving chair next to Amir. While he was trying to put his thoughts onto paper she with many pains was setting the chair in motion.

"Little darling can you keep still for a moment. I'm trying to concentrate. You know. I have a wonderful idea for a story."

Meena was already in momentum and accelerating with spiraling speed towards the ceiling.

"A story, great" she shouted as she turned around the floor.

"Can I read it later?" Without waiting for an answer, she jumped down, landing straight on her feet.

"Daddy what kind of a story is it?" She asked afresh, looking curiously over the papers while standing on tip toes.

"Ah, you know" Amir said. " It's no story for little girls. It's only for grown ups."

"How so" she snapped. "Jam a big girl now. I'm already eight years old. I can read, I can write and I can even cook a little now. Mummy taught me."

"Mummy taught you cooking?" asked Amir apparently pleased. "Since when can Mummy cook?"

Meena heaved her shoulders.

"I don't know" she answered absently, inwardly already preparing for the new riposte to the next question as she wanted to know more about the story that was being born on the writing table. She knew her father only too well. He could refuse her nothing. She only had to find the right strategy. But however much she tried she couldn't get the right spark.

Amir spend a lot of time with his daughter. Through many conversations and recitations of his stories, Meena had already developed a high amount of understanding of human and social situations. She was well informed even about historical factors. Through the radio she had already heard about history of independence and that the last English were to finally leave India. This demand did not please her as she found the uniforms of the English soldiers particularly amusing. Even her dolls were similarly dressed. Amir encouraged his daughter's talents wherever he could. Logical thinking, writing and reading were exceptional at her ages of which he was very proud. Meena made another attempt, putting her arm around him just the way he liked and giving him a kiss on the cheek.

"Oh daddy, please tell me a little about your story."

This had effect. Amir straightened himself, turned to the side and looked at his daughter with love eyes. There he saw what he so loved. Her milky innocent face, her beautiful dark brown eyes, the long dark hair that hung way below her shoulders. All in all it created the impression of a beautiful painting. He sighed and inhaled a long breath.

"Little one" he said while he hugged her tightly.

"At this point, I can't read you anything. Its still all up here " where upon he pointed to his forehead with his finger.

"You know, I have to first order my thoughts. Try to imagine that its like finding the famous needle in the haystack. That's what its like up here in me, now."

Meena knew her lather's excuses only too well, particularly when he wanted to hide something, then he played the card of intellectual chaos. Later she always managed to find out what she had wanted to know.

"One day I'll read you aloud the story "he said
"I promise you, ya?"

The firmness in his voice made further attempts redundant. Meena left his study. Her mother had called her to dinner.

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Shea's gaze melted away into the end of the horizon where the shallow blue water of the Arabian Sea merged into the cloudless sky, thus becoming an endless thin line. A light wind played around with her long grey hair which in her youth had had the color of black ebony.

Now it was tied up into an elaborate bun. Her neck was uncovered and the fresh breeze cooled her skin from the heat which had obstinately settled itself in the rocks. Even in her old age, she had kept her exceptional beauty. It had become finer through the wrinkles of wisdom and experience making her appearance almost divine.

"How often from here have my thoughts strayed to traveling. "She thought. With a deep sigh, she tried to bring some order into the chaos of her memories. She looked down on the blue stone on which she sat. As a child she had painted it over with blue color and in her childhood fantasy it had become a heavenly cloud, Each time when she came here to look at the sea, she carried the stone in the form of a cloud in the land of her childhood dreams which was accompanied by blue ants, angry and wild, running decidedly from one side to the other so as to with one bite take revenge on her for the blue cover of paint.

Simultaneously, this place had a sacred and mysterious meaning for her, whose existence she had entrusted to no one. Her youth was affected by privations and the early painful loss of her father whom she had loved above all. It was he who had brought her to this trove one day. Together they had looked onto the sea and he had narrated to her marvelous stories specially invented exclusively for her stories that only a father can invent for his daughter. Once she had asked him how he had found this place since was hard to access and lay hidden in the rock.

"One day I'll tell you" he had repeatedly answered.

Once, it was a cool day hardly inviting one to stay. It was then that he narrated the story of a great hidden love - known to no one. It was a secret that had throughout his life and which he now took to his grave. That time she had not understood what he meant. She was sure that he dreamed of crossing over the ocean, into its beyond, experiencing wonderful adventures in faraway lands, getting to know their inhabitants and returning home as a rich man with diamonds and jewelries.

"How naive I was then. ", she thought and at that moment of reminiscence, a drop from the ocean of her feelings fell as a tear on her cheek. She lost her balance and fell in the abyss of infinity down onto the surface of a faded blue fairy-world. Now as

she sat here again, a feeling of sadness overcame her. Though she did not know why. She was not sad. On the contrary, she associated this place with the most beautiful memories of her tumultuous life which like a hurricane had swept through the years with all its ups and downs.

Her path was a particularly stony one, ridden by envy and resentment, false friends and the social shackles of her society. Her pride, her intelligence, her grace and her wild freedom were the real friends in her life. These attributes had shown her the path that had been destined for her. Her heart was permeated by the love of life and despite her years she felt herself at the zenith of wellbeing. She lived in a wonderful inner harmony and today she felt, here in her trove with its blue stone that something extraordinary will happen. Something which closed the circle of life, simultaneously letting another start - from the very beginning. She did not know what it was but she had the feeling of trust as if she had been accompanied by this expectation since years. She leaned back and relaxed. With her gaze set upon the shallow waves of the expansive ocean, with her mouth closed, she started to hum an old childhood song.

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Shea was practically brought up as an orphan. She never knew her mother. Her father had told her that she had left him one day and never returned. Over the question why was never a word spoken. She lived alone with her father in a small village in the state of Mahabaleshwar, direct on the Indian Ocean and very near her treasured trove. Her father worked in a small museum in the capital city of the state of Mahabaleshwar. He earned just enough to support his daughter and him self. His profession gave him enough free time to spend with his daughter. He was both a father and teacher to her and he tried as much as possible to inculcate in her the important things of life. Shea was only eight years old as her father died. She had no other relative to whom she could go/be sent to. An orphanage seemed to be in the offing. But a middle aged woman approached the authorities and declared herself as her aunt. She wanted to take care of her niece and look after her till she was capable of standing on her own feet. So it was that Shea came to Panaji, the capital of Mahabaleshwar. Here, she lived with her aunt, Priya in a tiny apartment. A mutually pleasant relationship arose in the coming years. The aunt arranged for her niece to go to school. In exchange Shea did the shopping and housework. The years passed by and Shea developed into a beautiful young girl. She was only thirteen but already radiated an attractiveness and a quality of wondrousness that made men notice her. This did not escape her cautious and alert aunt and as Shea's attractiveness grew, particularly in relationship to men, she decided that it was time to send Shea to a catholic boarding school near her old natal village.

Shea was hardly upset about this decision. Her aunt was very religious and a practicing Hindi. Twice a week she visited the huge neighboring temple, offered prayers and listened to the bhajans (religious songs) there. They were many wonderful of flowers which the pilgrims had brought and placed on the bedecked table. The walls and ceilings were filled with religious pictures and in which the holy bells resonated their majestic tones.

Yes, Shea loved the days when she could visit these places with her aunt. However it was more the change from the monotony of the daily life in the small apartment that enchanted her than a religious calling. During the time with her father, Shea had learnt a lot about the caste system, religion and the societal prescribed male and female roles. Much of what he explained her was then not so clear. She was too small, too young, too contained in her fairytale world. Only later in her life with her aunt and in school did she confront this. The memories of her father's stories and her growing understanding synthesized into a full consciousness. She kept an intuitive distance to all extremes and kept to her own rational path. Her aunt's insistence on religious values soon created internal contradictions in her. She could find no gratification in her aunt's conviction of the traditional role of women in Indian society. Her inner voice propelling her towards freedom and independence was growing louder and could no longer be ignored. She wanted to be a young woman who could independently make her own decisions. She wanted to pursue her curiosity of life with

any moral or prior restrictions. Initially the boarding school promised her a freedom from the mental and spatial confinement of her aunt. She was fourteen years old as she first entered the catholic convent. She was received warmly in a dark room by a nun. Her aunt gave her a few papers and answered a few formalities. A little later, She had to bid farewell to her aunt while promising her a visit during the school holidays. Naturally the parting was very painful. She hated separations from those close to her. But she came to terms with it better than she had expected. The nun left her no time to muse about the parting. She was rapidly explained the rules, prohibitions and punishments of the convent. Only later did she get to meet the girl with whom she was to share a room.

Later as she ate together with the other students, she formed her first friendship with a girl of her own age. Soon they found common themes to converse and giggle about.

She was sought after even on the first day. Her experiences and life in the state capital were themes that invited curious desire. Good willingly, she tried to appease the curiosity in her new friends. In the process, time and time again, she made up small inventions to bring unimportant things in a new light. Naturally were boys also a theme of curiosity but she did not have much to offer here except that she was averse to being whistled at and to being aggressively approached so as to come into conversation.

The first months went by for Shea as if in a dream. The many new things that she had to come to terms with made her forget the strict rules of the convent. One of the main new events in her life was the discovery of her feminine body through the collective showering with other girls. Revealing ones nudity to others was not habitual in India. Here, in the convent, there were practical and economic considerations. As everything was done collectively, showering was no exception. There was much giggling and laughter, jokes were cracked as the girls discovered each others bodies and the collective pleasure of bathing found its climax in the war of soaps. The day was filled with classes and duties. There was hardly any free time. Homework was to be done after dinner after which the girl's retired to their room to sleep. Sometimes a few met together at the library to exchange their news. Some girls giggling narrated their secret love affairs with the boys in the nearby school. They described with great fantasy the content of their desire. Some even described with no shame whatsoever -details of the bodily caresses and the anatomic size of the supposed lover. These kinds of stories could usually be heard after the ending of the final term of the higher classes. The girls were soon to leave the convent. A day earlier was an open day of festivities in which anyone was welcome to participate. Shea was fascinated by these stories but could not distinguish between the fantasy and the truth. She took it simply as a fact of puberty and of growing up.

Shea was a curious student and learning was a pleasure to her. Soon she scored the best marks in most of the subjects. She got excellent marks in her first final examination. It was holiday time now and most of the girls had gone home to their parents and relatives. She visited her aunt in the city but could hardly survive two weeks there. Soon she was back in the convent. It had an abandoned empty feeling about it. They were only a few girls left, those that had no families. Free time was plentiful and Shea spent a lot of it with them. During the day it was possible to leave the convent. Thus she decided to visit her natal village. After an hour's journey in a broken **down** rattling bus, she stood in the middle of the village surrounded by playing children looking curiously and somewhat in surprise at her. She recognized her surroundings again. It was as if it was exactly as it had been when she had left six years ago. There she stood amidst the pitiful looking, dilapidated huts. There were the streets that in different directions led out of the village. Exactly as in her childhood stood the half starved cows belonging to the peasants between the huts. They were searching for something to eat in the garbage pile. Stray dogs, barking aimlessly fought with each other. Even the children around her seemed to be the same. Dirty, partly without any clothes, they seemed to play the same games that she herself had played at that age then. She walked further past the men sitting outside their huts who in turn stared curiously at her. Soon she reached her old home. Now there were other people living here. Her aunt had sold ~ the house then for a good price. Still it seemed to have remained unchanged. Shea had tears in her eyes and her heart ached painfully. Suddenly she was overwhelmed by memories of her father with whom she had had such a

happy childhood. An invisible power seemed to draw her into her old home as if to be able to see her room again and perhaps by some old furniture to be reminded again of that time. However she refused to follow her feelings. She neither wanted to nor could she bear the pain of the memories. In the same moment she felt that it had been a mistake to have returned here. The children that had followed her to the house had gradually lost interest in her. Screaming raucously they returned back to their games. Shea had a lot of time before the next bus came. She decided to go to the rocks to which she had gone so often with her father. Time had changed the surroundings so much that she was not sure if she was on the right track. Earlier there had been the landmark of the tool-shed belonging to the oldest man of the village. It had stood outside the village settlement. The shed had contained a lot of agricultural tools and a variety of knick knack. After a short search she relocated it. The old hut stood in its place. Just as she wanted to go past it she heard someone speak. She could see none so she went around the hut to find who it was who had spoken. There she saw him, an old grey man sitting in the shade of the hut. She recognized him immediately as the village eldest. In his hand he still held his walking stick with its pointed top ornamented with the silver ram head. His hair hung down in white strands. He looked like a swami or a holy guru which had kept his wisdom intact. She tried to make herself noticeable as she entered in his field of vision. The old man did not react. Only after another try did she realize why. The man in front of her had lost his sight. He was blind and even his ears seemed not to be at their best. Then he did not answer her questions. She left him alone and continued further. The salty odor of the approaching sea embraced her as an old friend. The refreshing wind streamed through her hair. Suddenly she began to run, faster and faster with a dreamlike certitude through the high grass, past the gnarled trees and a small rocky cliff up to the hilltop. Her face broke out in a smile full of expectation and with a loud scream she stood in front of the huge thorny bush. Breathless, she looked around and tried to orient herself. Then she remembered. Carefully she pushed her way past the thorny bush and after a few meters she arrived at a small clearing. It appeared to be like a platform from which one could view the sea in all its expanse. A feeling of inner happiness flooded through her. She had rediscovered the most beautiful place of her childhood which she had almost forgotten in her convent. There it still laid, the blue stone that had been painted by her as she was still a child. Even the ants still wandered from one side to the other. She was overjoyed, her heart dancing with joy. She put down her bag and caressed her hair with her hand. She gazed onto the sea and on to the clouds that slowly floated above. It was just the way it had always been. With an archaic power she started to scream loudly. She could always return to her Daddy over and over again. She danced and whirled away as a dervish and suddenly childhood songs came back to her. She started to sing loudly almost as if screaming. If someone had observed her, the belief in witches would surely have been aroused. Only as the last bit of energy had drained out of her body did she sit down on the blue stone and relax. She was exhausted. Slowly she let go and the exhilaration retreated into a deep nothingness that suddenly seized her. Without warning she started to sob uncontrollably. The loss of her father then had also meant the loss of her childhood and this pain grasped her now.

Her tears fell down on the faded color of the blue past. She felt small and lost. She wished that her father was with her now and telling her a story while she flew on a blue cloud into the fairytale world of her fantasies.

The next two years past by in the convent as the first year had ended. She passed all her exams with distinction and during her vacations visited her aunt. Each time at the end of her vacation she went to her old village to search out her hidden desired place with its blue stone and to give herself up to its memories. She needed to be here. It was a pleasant necessity through which she could overcome the tragic memories of her life, letting only the positive remain. During the third year at the convent, the school was plagued by strange rumors which caused great anxiety in the staff. Strange things were happening in India. Millions of pilgrims followed a charismatic man to Delhi where he was supported by his friend Jawaharlal Nehru. Important decisions on questions of decolonization were being discussed by him and the National Indian Congress. India aspired towards independence and all English institutions were to be disbanded and their staff asked to leave the country. This naturally concerned the convent and its English and Irish staff which represented a small island in Indian society. Everything seemed to be in flux and

only with great effort could the head mother of Shea's convent keep the waves of anxiety away and thus maintain the functioning of the convent. As the nothing further happened, the moods settled down soon and **life returned to** its normal daily rhythm. Moreover there was to be again a party for the students in the highest class. Everyone was looking forward to the festivities in the large to-be-decorated assembly hall where music and dancing was expected. The other classes would be allowed to participate but only for a certain time. All the students were completely captivated by the coming event. The rooms were decorated collectively by hand made paper garlands. Hastily the girls sewed away till late in the night at the clothes that they were to wear on the party. Endlessly, time and time again they turned in front of the mirror in the hope that he might compliment their appearance as was described in the fairy tales. Hair styles were experimented with great fantasy before retiring for the night. Hair bracelets, golden bands and flowers artistic decorations were laid out as their creators went to sleep. Most of the creations did not survive till the next morning and the ensuing mournfulness escaped out of the open bathroom windows as sighing disappointment.

Brilliant sunshine greeted the morning that was still young. It freshened the moods of the disappointed amateur hairdressers. The great day had arrived. The first guests made their appearance shortly after the midday meal. Soon the inner courtyard resembled a quicksand. Its mass slowly made its way towards the festivities hall. Many parents and acquaintances of the departing students had traveled a long way to experience their daughters' entry into the adult world. Furthermore there were guests from the neighboring villages. A top level school official had arrived from (Mahabaleshwar-Delhi) A teacher from a boy's school had come with his students and the convent staff was constantly greeting their relatives who had traveled from the neighboring peripheries and even from their beyond in the expectation of a sumptuous free meal. The excited girls from the lower classes mixed through this crowd and only the threatening school bell which announced the beginning of the party could bring some order in the general chaos. The hall was ready too burst, so full was it. Although all the doors and windows were open the air was stifling and stale. There was a traditional and clean division between the girls and women who sat on the left side and the male visitors on the right side. The first row was filled with the departing students and invited guests. The Head Mother climbed onto the stage and without any hesitation began her welcoming speech. Its content comprised of praise for the past school year, the good work of the staff and the high moral spirit of catholic values. The rest of her speech was taken up by the lack of donations and the financial difficulties. As she finally brought her god into the act, the embarrassed and somewhat ashamed visitors fervently hoped that he might be listening. With their gaze looking down they hoped that the madam at the rostrum would finally finish her prayer. Luckily enough the Head Mother remembered the real reason for the occasion and she asked her assistant to hand her the heap of report cards. The man was as large as a mountain and as he climbed up to the stage and handed over the papers it was as if it recalled the biblical scene of the rocky mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments. The Head Mother now called out the roll numbers and names of the girls who had passed with distinction. Each girl had to come on stage to receive her certificate. Shy with red cheeks they accepted the hymns of praise and the eventual applause. Then the girls came who had got slightly less marks. They received a somewhat restrained applause. Finally the loafers came under the stage light. They had just managed to get through their exams. The audience meanwhile was concentrating on the opening of the buffet that was spread out in the courtyard. After the handing over of the last certificate and without waiting for the closing speech of the Head Mother a shy thin ugly girl accosted the crowd outside. Duty was done and pleasure could now be enjoyed. While the cook in despair observed the flight of the crowds to the buffet tables, the musicians rushed on the stage to set up their instruments. The happy and proud parents embraced their daughters and dreamt of a rich promising future for their children. The most popular dream was that of a compatible marriage partner with status and possibly a lot of money. Other wishes were more modest and reduced to an honest hope of a successful future for the daughter even if the majority did not know how they would finance it.

Nevertheless, this late afternoon was the moment for joyful tears, happiness and intense emotions. Soon the stiff division between the genders dissolved itself and everyone spoke with everyone. None paid attention to the catholic or the traditional Indian social laws of behavior. Time stretched on and the band opened the dance floor with their music.

With the best of intentions, the Indian artists tried to imitate on their instruments the English musical spirit of the times. The result was disastrous. Many guests preferred to listen to the music playing on the gramophone which was placed in another room. Italian opera arias echoed through its funneled speaker as American songs crackled in the open space. The current of the river of guests swept Shea from the main Hall to the courtyard. From time to time she saw her classmates disappearing in the crowd. They resurfaced somewhere else in tow with a schoolboy. Suddenly her roommate stood before her. She took Shea's hand and pulled her outside to a table in the courtyard around which other girls from her class sat with some boys whom she had never seen earlier. She was greeted friendly and the girls answered all the curious questions of the boys that concerned her. A short fat boy took a shine to her and promptly sat next to her. Shea felt extremely uncomfortable. She had on her arrival instinctively realized that pairs had been matched around the table. She too should take part in this game. The mountain of flesh next to her interrogated her with penetrating questions.

The smell of sweat had taken its toll on his shirt, pervading it as a cloud of stench that got on Shea's smell nerves. The young man was so fascinated by Shea's aura and beauty so that he confused and exchanged the relationships between inequality and equality. He was completely convinced that she suited him in every regard. Shea looked around in search of help but her friends were busy with themselves and their suitors. They were oblivious to their surroundings. Shea's suitor talked incessantly like a waterfall and before the sunset had ended the day he had already told her all the earth cycles of his still young life. The spit in his mouth was dry just as his provision to impress had dried up. Suddenly silence loomed and a shadow of uncertainty fell on his sweaty round face. The question of cause and result arose in the room. Shea let not a glimmer of hope arise through her behavior as to whether he had had any success through his self glorification. The silence was so loud between the two that Shea was acoustically aware of the conversations between her friend. The background of festive sounds again reached her ear and for the first time she found its racket extremely pleasant. Defeated and humiliated, the fatty returned to the earlier table before his conquest expedition. His vacant look collapsed in the empty juice glass. Yet full of hope thinking that at least none had observed him~ It was already dark. The lights in the courtyard had been switched on and as Shea was preparing to leave her friends a good looking young man sat down at the table. He was greeted loudly and friendly by the others but Shea could not understand his name in the turmoil. Hence she answered his question of whether her name was Shea with a shy Hello. It was the first word that had escaped her mouth since her arrival at the table. She sized up the young man and found him extremely pleasant. He was well and his black hair was rigorously combed back which emphasized his prominent forehead. An audacious straight nose, the corners of his mouth amiable disposed and his deep black eyes lent his face a charismatic expression which suited his voice and mannerisms. After they had exchanged a few words, she admitted to herself that this young man was very well behaved. She would have gladly asked his name but she did not want to signal him a whiff of interest. Her conversation remained distant but thoroughly interesting. Somehow they came to discuss literature and poetry. Shea found it extremely agreeable how he formulated his words. Her curiosity was all the more aroused as she decided to ask him a harmless question.

Can I ask you what you do. You seem to read a lot and your knowledge of literature is really good. ?

Oh Yes?

Oh really "He replied, the corners of his mouth bending into a satisfied smile.

Thanks for the compliment. "And it seemed to him embarrassing to receive this kind of an affirmation from such a beautiful girl.

Oh you know I go to a school not far from here. My parents live quite a distance away and so I often stay here in the holidays and pass my time reading and writing.

What fun. "Shea replied. " It`s almost the same for me~ When I am not away visiting my aunt in Mahabaleshwar then I either stay here in the convent or go the village where I spent my childhood. There I visit my"

She swallowed the next words. She had almost narrated the story of her secret trove and blue stone. She was shocked at her thoughtlessness in almost having betrayed her secret willingly to a complete stranger. Her opposite ignored the incomplete sentence and excitedly they spoke about the collection of books in their schools.

Time flew by as they exchanged thoughts on their favorite past times. Shea was unaware that her friends had all left the table. Suddenly it struck her that she sat completely alone with the young man at the table.

She could not explain it but somehow she felt pleasantly touched by his presence and as he politely invited her for a walk, she immediately agreed without hesitation.

It seemed to her as if she was steered by an invisible power which took away her shyness and fears. In wonder she registered the fact that for the first time in her life she was spending time with a young man alone whom she unexplainably trusted. Together they traversed the courtyard, carving a snakelike path through the guests standing all over, engrossed in some conversation or the other and refusing to budge. As they passed the buffet tables, they hastily nibbled at the sweet dishes and immediately after continued their walk. The feeling of sympathy that they mutually felt brought them slowly out of the turmoil of the festivity. They left the school grounds and went below to the embankment of the small river whose still waters leisurely moved forward on the path to the faraway sea. She sat down on a patch of grass near the water and without realizing it she answered his questions regarding her origins and the past stations of her life. Thus she narrated him her childhood stories, her wonderful relationship to her father, his sudden death, her aunt, the time in Mahabaleshwar as well as the first years in the convent. She described the spatial and emotional return to her natal village without however revealing her secret. She was impressed by the capacity and the way in which her companion listened to her.

Again and again she observed him watchfully as and when he turned his gaze away from her. His sense of stillness lent her a feeling of security and rootedness. She tried to estimate his age and somewhere she landed by twenty one. She found him a bit too old for school students or better said too mature, particularly in his contact with women. The thought was also self-referential and unconsciously she had turned herself too into a woman although she was only seventeen years old. She had not worn anything special for the party. She still had two years to go before she finished her school. And she had not had any great desire to dress up for others. As always she wore her knee long blue-green school skirt and its accompanying white linen blouse.

Nevertheless her beauty was not to be overlooked, even unsurpassable in comparison to her school friends all dressed up. Her femininity was almost perfect in its development. The combination of the black hair, the clear face, the deep brown eyes, the black eyebrows and the sensuous mouth transformed her into a divine being that wandered on earth. The only ornament that she had was a small white jasmine flower that she wore on the side of her hair. But this small modest decoration only completed the perfection of her grace. Her hair were long and well formed and her gait was like a gazelle. Shea had reached the end of her detailed description and uninhibitedly she started setting him question after question.

Something must have touched a funny spot for he suddenly started to laugh loudly. This laughter was so hearty that she could no longer contain herself. His laughter had infected her and each time as she looked at him and tried to ask him in all earnestness the reason for his amusement, she could only laugh herself harder than ever. This went on for five minutes and the laughter released the embarrassment and shyness out of their souls that had been previously between them. Tears of laughter ran down like streams on their cheeks and as they noticed it they showed with their fingers the fragility of the other while with the free hand they held in their stomachs that were painful with the laughing. Each attempt to bring the situation

down to normal ended in renewed cramps of laughter. An end to this pleasure was not in sight. At some point they both could not laugh any more, so great was the physical exhaustion and as soon as an opportunity came about they fell into each others arms, mutually supporting each others fragility.

"What is your name? "She asked him in a carefree way.
You still have not told me your name?

Oh really. You never asked me?" He replied amiably.

"But I am asking you now, "She insisted
"Please tell me. I could not catch it as you were being greeted by your friends."

"You were not in the least interested in me as I came to the table."

She saw through his game and didn't enter it.

"Alright what is your name?"

"In school my friends call me Easy. Ya my name is easy."

She looked amazed

"You are called Easy ? That is a figure from Rao Chatterjee's novel. The hero has this name because of his good looks through which he easily seduces women. Are you like that? "And she looked him directly in the eye. He blushed. Evidently he was surprised by her literary knowledge.

"You know this novel? Do such books exist in the Convent library?" Through this question he elegantly freed him self from the embarrassment.

Shea laughed, "No No not there but my aunt's in Mahabeleshwar.
She has an apartment filled with books and this novel is one among many."
She looked at him and regretted having embarrassed him. She excused herself.

"I'm sorry if I've compared you to the person in the novel. But your name is extremely rare. But your friends must know why they call you so. You boys have crazy ideas."

She had hardly finished the sentence when she sprang to her feet with a loud shout.

Oh no

Easy looked at her in shock.

"What's the matter, what happened "

Shea was still screaming.

"Ant`s! It`s full of ants "she cried out. At which point Easy also sprung up because he too had noticed the crawling. Both ran a little hand to get rid of the ants from her skirt but she did not immediately succeed. A few insects had cheekily crawled under her skirt and Shea could not rid herself of them without lifting her skirt. She turned away from Easy and with a swift movement pushed up her skirt and removed the last burdensome visitors. She put her clothes back in order and turned again to him.

"Its curious that I always have ant`s around. " she said.

What do you mean? " asked Easy curiously but Shea remained silent. For her the matter was settled. They continued their conversation where they had left it off. Soon their

mood was lifted by the wave of mutual sympathy and as it was already dark and getting cooler they came closer to one other so as to warm each other.

Shea felt his powerful arms clasping her shoulders. He smelt pleasantly of a tangy male perfume and his breath was warm and pleasant. Her long black hair touched his face and it was as if he was struck by lightning. The fragrance of her skin had the sweetness of the jasmine flower that was in her hair. The tenderness of her body put him in an unbelievable astonishment. He felt the soft hardness of her breasts in the inner sides of his arms which embraced her. Carefully and with a lot of respect he drew her closer to him.

Even her feelings with great speed had become independent and she reciprocated his embrace. An unknown flood of excitement streamed through her body. Her pulse accelerated the rhythm of her breathing and her senses threatened to lose balance. The unexplainable feeling of attraction and trust let her forget all principles of restraint. He too could hardly control his feelings and so as to show no weakness he drew her still tighter to him. A light sigh escaped Shea as she felt his male hardness through the cloth and before she could try to break away, he suddenly kissed her on the mouth. She was astounded at how good she felt by the feel of it and reciprocated his kisses. Soon she flew in the heat of her feelings to the heaven of love where there were no more barriers.

‘It’s really true she thought’. In this moment the bells ring in heaven and she felt happy everywhere. Suddenly she felt in tune with the body sounds and as he again let out a tone along with Easy she crashed down from the heaven to the ground of reality.

The school bells “, she cried out agitatedly.

“It’s late. I have to rush back to the Convent. Come fast.”

Easy had still not taken stock of the crash from the seventh heaven. Completely numb, he let himself be taken by the hand and pulled to the convent. As they both entered the inner courtyard the last bit of clearing up was taking place. Almost all the guests had left the school premises and only a few lights were visible in the bedrooms of her school friends as most of the girls had gone off to sleep. Hastily she bid goodbye to the young man with whom she had spent the most wonderful night of her young life. That is to say half a night for the other half she had to spend alone in her room where the sweet memories of the past hours put her to sleep. The next day Shea felt terrible. Without interruption, her head was banging with the hammer of morality. Only by taking an aspirin was she able to relieve the pain for small intervals and continue her work. The next day she suffered from stomach and love pain and her otherwise clear mind battled with the mental confusions of a young girl who was in love for the first time in her life. Three weeks later her mind had reduced the feeling of happiness to a faded memory. And after another two weeks she was only occupied with the questions of the approaching exams. The life in the convent went back to normal, the days passed by in their usual tracks and the school year went by so rapidly as if it was in competition with time. After the exams the holidays started again and most of the girls went home to their families. Shea decided to visit her aunt in Mahabaleshwar and while the bus brought her closer to her destination, after a long time her thoughts for the first time returned to Easy and a small stab of sadness pierced through her heart.

The vacations were over and Shea began her final year in the convent. In-between she was nineteen years old and had grown into a beautiful young woman. The black of her hair was darker than ever and hung as braided plats over her shoulders. She was unusually tall and her appearance was even more impressive. Her fine face was full of grace. Her eyes sparkled like black jewels which in the context of her straight nose, her full lips, the form of her mouth expressed the quintessence of feminine sensuality. Her breasts lay well formed under her clothes. The elegance in her figure, the small hips and her endlessly long legs perfected her appearance. But the real grace emerged through the way that she moved and articulated herself. Each person who spoke to her was impressed by her courteousness and knowledge and yet accepted the distance with which she prevented an intimacy. She was often the theme

of the secret conversations of her friends who without a trace of envy marveled at her appearance. Bets were made as to when she would fall prey to the first man. Some believed that it had already happened; others felt that she would never marry as she was too beautiful, too intelligent and too proud. They despaired that she would find a man in India who was strong enough to accept her as she was. The last school year was particularly hard for the girls. The demands placed on them by the final examinations were enormously high. They prepared for the D day months in advance by working in collective study groups. The free weekends were used to work on all that they had missed in the respective subjects. Time went by without the girls really enjoying anything. The only relaxation was through sports but even there the laughter was not as loud as was usually the case. The day of the final examinations came relentlessly nearer. And it was finally there, the girls were anxiously in discussion. They reciprocally asked questions about their respectively learnt knowledge which only ended in a sea of uncertainty. Each knew an answer which was different from the other and fights started as to whom had the right answer. No psychological détente followed the argument and each of the girls grudgingly withdrew into her corner and into her thoughts with the conviction that only there would she be able to find the correct answer. Bravo girls cried out the Head Mother as the last paper was turned over to her. "I am convinced that all of you will end this school year with good results " although she held the heap of papers weighing in her hand as if she could assess their content through their weight. The girls were relieved and joyful that the examination stress was over and chattering loudly they left their classrooms. "Do not forget that in five days we have the party " She shouted out behind them. As the last one had left the room the Head Mother stood alone with the examination papers in front of her desk. The sudden stillness transposed her into a melancholy mood. Suddenly she felt all of her age of sixty five years and she was overcome by a physical feeling of deep exhaustion. Since thirty five years she had served the convent of her religious conviction. Uncountable school classes had been released from her tutelage to the adult world. She had no memory of most of the girls. Only those few that had performed brilliantly had left their traces behind in her. Two former students were now teachers in the convent of which she was particularly proud. Naturally it was painful for her **when** the time for the party came and familiar faces took their leave. She had learnt to repress her feelings and to live with this loss. Never had a parting brought tears in her out or confronted her with a feeling of sadness. Her faith in God was of primary importance. Serving him had been the guiding principle of her life. But somehow today it was different with this class. She sat at her desk and stared vacantly. She felt herself empty and without energy and in her unconsciousness she saw the faces of the girls passing by. Some waved at her as if they wanted to say goodbye, others only laughed. In their youthfulness they seemed infinitely happy. Then they held each other by their hands, making a ring and began singing cheerful children's songs. And there, there was still something that she could not quite recognize. A small tiny girl, not particularly beautiful and with a severe haircut stood lost in the middle of the circle and called out repeatedly for her mother. The Head Mother recognized herself and as she continued to call after her mother, she saw the different stations of her life going by. The loss of her parents, the orphanage, the convent, nuns and finally the boarding school of the convent. She became dizzy and tried to seek the support of the desk's edge. But she fell over its edge and onto the floor, in the process she took the heap of examination papers and buried them under her. Her look scanned the empty classroom and she tried to call for help but her voice failed. Streaming sunlight gleamed through the window pane and in the mist of the spectral play of colors she saw the cross of her faith hanging on the wall of the room. She reached her hand out as if this piece of wood could be the healing anchor of her life. Then her arm lost force and it fell to the floor. She was no longer aware of her surroundings~ An inner light had gripped her and it carried her away on her last long journey at whose end she would perhaps see her mother, the source of her birth. For Shea and the other students it was a tragic end to finishing their school. All the festivities were cancelled due to this sudden death of the head nun. The representative nun took charge and a day after the funeral the girls received their school certificates during a modest ceremony. Only a few of the relatives were there. The written invitations for this occasion had somehow been lost. The girls drank their lemonade

in a subdued mood. They had little appetite for the small buffet that had been laid out in the main hall. For the last time Shea and her friends sat around the table and saw each other with sad looks. It was a double sadness, first because of the Head Mother's death and secondly because they were parting from each other for ever. The most beautiful time of their youth was over and this was painfully clear to them through the missing festivities. The girls gave each other their hands and made a circle. Then they began to sing their favorite songs and as they couldn't think of any more, the pain of parting brought tears to their eyes. They went their separate ways and started a new chapter in their lives. * Shea was almost twenty years old as she left the convent. Even her aunt was present who full of sentimentality could not contain her tears. Unwaveringly she wiped her nose with a handkerchief and only as she mounted the overland bus with Shea did she calm down. With benevolence, her aunt had registered her development. On her request the nun had in written informed her about the educational progress of Shea. The overland bus reached the city's central station where Shea and her aunt changed to a taxi which would bring them home. Shea wondered at the direction that the driver took. They did not drive to the flat that Shea knew and that lay on the other side of the city. Her aunt noticed her unease and curiosity and held her hand. She said " I have a little surprise. Just wait a little. We are almost there. The taxi left the old city nucleus with its overfilled streets and many markets in which the peddlers were offering their wares. It climbed up a small hill in the vicinity. The city was surrounded by such a chain of hills. Trees framed the trees, isolated horse carriages stood on the edge of the roads so that the horse or the donkey could recuperate. Occasionally old men sat in the shadows under the trees. They were dressed simply, in loin cloths and turbans as head cover. Soon they reached the top and the car turned away from the main road, into a small street that led to a residential area with an astounding view of the city. "You'll see, we will feel well here." Shea could not quite understand her aunt. " What do we want here? Why haven't we gone to your flat?" she asked unbelievably. " Excuse me, my love. I didn't tell you because I wanted it to be a surprise, particularly as you did so well in school." Shea still did not understand. " What do you mean by a surprise?" mistrustfully she asked " This is our new home " her aunt replied as she waved with her hand to the house before which they stood. " I sold the flat in the city and got this cheap. It's much greener and quieter here. The air is also much better as below in the city." Shea was now fully speechless. She didn't know how she should react. Completely overblown she followed her aunt into the new house which was more spacious and more beautiful than the older one. There was running water, electricity and in the kitchen stood a four flame gas stove. A fridge was also there. " Aunty, how did you find such a house with all these modern amenities?" she curiously asked. Later during the evening as they were drinking their ginger tea together, she learned that it was the former house of an English administrator. Within three months they had to leave their houses and return to England as India had become independent. As it happened so fast a lot that was difficult to transport was left behind. Later these houses were auctioned off by the new Indian administration to interested parties. Thus were replenished the empty city treasures. And so acquired Shea's aunt this house. But that her aunt had had other reasons for this move was unforeseeable then for Shea. The days went by as in flight. Soon Shea had furnished her room according to her taste. She helped her aunt with the house work but no longer did she shopping. They were no shops nearby. Twice a week a peddler drove by. From him could be bought all the necessary daily requirements. Soon she missed the joyous life of the convent, the laughter of her friends, learning, eating, playing and the soapy fun during the collective showers in the bathrooms. The evening's in her aunt's house passed by monotonously. Even during the day she hardly went out. Where should she go? Her new surroundings were lonely and isolated from the life in the city. Slowly she had the suspicion that her aunt had deliberately brought her here so as to have more control over her and to keep the male eyes away from her. Two years went by and Shea's frustration was not to be overlooked by her aunt. So came the day when Shea decided to talk to her aunt. But just then she surprisingly invited her during the afternoon to drive into the city. A well known writer from the new generation wanted to give a reading in the 'Women's Literature Club'. Her aunt was not only a member of this club but also the chairwoman of the Board. And as the chairwoman and president she always had the last word on the events to be organized.

The new Zeitgeist was nationally oriented and the Women's Literature Club followed this trend. Indian authors were in fashion. Particularly successful were those who had a certain reflection on the past and on Indian cultural values. She wanted to avail of this occasion to introduce Shea to some of her friends. Perhaps there was a possibility that one of them would find in her son a suitable match for her. But this naturally the aunt kept for herself. Excited and in expectation about the forthcoming social event, they both drove down to the city. But before they drove to the Women's Club, her aunt insisted on Shea dressing anew. They stopped before an exclusive boutique selling the finest of saris and churidars. It was in style again in the upper and middle classes to wear saris. The new feeling of national self worth should also be made visible externally. But Shea could find no pleasure in wearing saris. For her it was an expression of traditional confinement and wearing them she felt restrained in her drive towards independence and self realization. Her aunt then convinced her to buy an evening dress in English style which stood exhibited in the neighboring shop. Naturally her aunt mentioned her reservations, particularly as the English had just left the land and she feared criticism from her friends. But as she saw Shea trying out the dress, she was bowled over. The maroon cloth lay on her like a second skin. The long evening dress lent her both a divine and earthy feminine quality. Her black hair and her figure melted into a combination of feminine beauty that took one's breath away. Her aunt, herself had never seen this before. The cut of the dress at the neck provided a look of Shea's milky brown skin and her breasts appeared as gentle hills under the velvet of her dress.

"Oh my God!" escaped from her aunt's mouth and before she could say something the dress was bought. Only later did her aunt insist that she at least buy a dupatta with which she could cover the neck and dress cut. Shea agreed. A little later they bought matching shoes in another shop. Then they climbed into the car and drove to the 'Women's Literature Club'. Neither one could foresee that this evening would decide Shea's future. They entered the reception of the club. There the guests were drinking cold refreshments and the new social gossip was doing the rounds and enhancing the atmosphere. Shea had put on the dupatta. Its white color brought out the contrast with the maroon of the dress and in this colorful play of colors of cloth and her beauty she looked to be a royal maharani. Even more, she seemed to be the perfect synthesis of oriental tradition and western liberalness. The moment Shea, along with her aunt entered the hall a murmur went through the crowd. Then there was a sudden abrupt silence. Muffled whispering took the place of the hitherto loud conversation and Shea had the impression that all the looks were turned to her. For a moment her aunt felt uneasy as she interpreted the minutes of silence as a critical reproach to Shea's not wearing a sari. But then she saw other guests wearing European clothes and she began to relax. In between the sound volume of conversations had gone back to its highest level and Shea's aunt was inundated by guests greeting her always with the comment of how ravishing her niece was. Each wanted to be introduced to Shea. Soon this ceremony attained normalcy and again one talked with everyone about this and that, only not about the real reason for the evening. The bell rang thrice reminding the guests to go hurriedly into the reading room. The feminine guests pushed their way decently to the chairs ordered in rows. They wanted to be able to see more though it was more a question of listening. As the President of the Club, Shea's aunt had a place in the first row as she had the duty of presenting the eulogy on the guest speaker. Shea sat directly next to her. She was glad that she could thus avoid seeing the curious looks behind her. A table and chair stood on a small stage. A glass of water stood placed there and an extra reading lamp provided additional sufficient light. Modest applause greeted Shea's aunt as she came onto the stage and introduced the program of the evening. At the end of speech, a crackling loud speaker played the new Indian national anthem. Touched, the guests stood up from their places. As no one knew all the words of the song they could not completely sing along with it but as partial compensation accompanied it by a collective humming that commemorated the respectful occasion. After which there was a light applause that accompanied the president back to her seat. All the guests present were full of expectation. Whispers and murmurings were exchanged. There was an air of excited tension in the hail. The back stage door was the desired point to which the feminine looks were directed. Impatiently they awaited the entry of the writer. Shea had neither heard of him nor

read his work. She observed the event from both a relaxed and curious perspective. During the waiting compliments about the good looks of the man were whispered from all directions. Partly, they embodied obscene fantasies of physical intimacy whose awkwardness was toned down by girlish giggles. Shea felt that she was reminded of the convent. Often, during the biology class the girl's hat let out such comments. Suddenly the hail lights were put off and only the stage remained lit. Thunderous applause along with hesitant hurrahs filled up the room as the door opened and the writer came on the stage. The young writer bowed artfully before the audience and then immediately sat down on the chair before the table. He carried under his arm an edition of his new work, a novel which was set in the 16th century. The story took place in Lahore during the reign of the mogul emperor Jalal Ud Din Akbar. The heroine of the story was the unhappy daughter of the sovereign. Her forbidden love to an officer of the palace-guard was described in minutial details. The author knew how to convincingly carry forth the usual intrigues, developments, betrayal, death and happy end through a display of real fireworks of fantasy. Skillfully set pauses increased the tension in the public who with an 'oh' or 'ah' impatiently awaited the continuation of the story. An inadequate dramaturgy was by passed by the author by reaching for the glass of water. Slowly, he drank its contents which in-between had become warm. And he used this opportunity to look around in the audience. Initially, Shea was not particularly impressed by the man's appearance which had caused such a flutter in the audience. She conceded that his appearance was certainly acceptable. He was tall with thick black hair, an upright nose, a slim figure and his physical demeanor let emerge the inference that he came from a higher class, definitely Brahmin. Further, he seemed too self confident and also a bit conceited. She could or wanted to find nothing positive in him. Certainly he was a woman's hero and was equally kitschy as his novel which she found anachronistic and infinitely naive. However the more she sized the man on the stage up, the more she had the feeling that she had met him and then suddenly she knew who he was. There on the stage stood Easy, her first big love from the party in the convent. She compared again the information in the pamphlet and read the name: Kumar Amir Ray. How did he have this name? Was Easy not his real name? Had he earlier lied to her and led her into obscurity. Her heart began to pound faster. On the one hand she was pleased to see him again but on the other hand she was angry that he had lied to her and that they should so meet now. 'Can one not qualitatively better write' she said to herself as the writer again set his glass of water down. He continued with the reading and again came to a point where the glass of water had to replace the inadequate dramaturgy. While drinking the water, the author gradually looked around and mustered up the guests in the first row. Suddenly, he swallowed and broke into a coughing fit that brought the atmosphere in the hall in chaos. He had never seen such a woman before. There she sat in the first row, a feminine wonder, an angel, a painting, a seduction, a narcotic infusion of the senses. He had seen many beautiful girls but this woman was a sensation. He groped for breath and he almost forgot to continue with his story. As he continued, his look fixed on the breathtaking beauty in the first row. His pulse accelerated manifold and the tone in his voice swelled up through which his novel got an unexpected turn in its dramaturgy. He breathed faster than ever and emphasized the happening in the palace with an excitement that slowly transferred itself onto the audience. Where there was earlier no stimulation to expect in the story, now became charged with tension. He was impatient and stared hypnotically at the feminine being. He was in a hurry to come to the final part of his reading but everything needed its time. A Mogul does not allow his sovereignty to be so reduced. First the necessary wars had to happen, enemies had to be conquered and the women in the harem sufficiently spoilt. Even his daughter could not let the writing of history ad absurdum happen and thus legalize her forbidden love. The lovers first had to meet secretly in the moonlit night. Rivers of desperate tears had to be shed as the betrayed lovers came into the father's torture chamber. A conference had to be held by good and evil to decide which was more advantageous to rescue or destroy the banished pair. Then a revolt by the officers on the palace gates had to be quelled and at the end the removal of the historical ashes due to an arson and its resulting fire. Everything needed its time and the length of the chapter was equally cruel as the torture-chamber of the Mogul palace. Why had he not let the emperor die in the arms of a harem lady during the love act? And of all things why had he made the object

of forbidden love into an officer? Why not a normal relationship; i.e. a promised marriage to the progeny of royal blood. The whole affair would have been smooth and tension-free. Abridged mogul dominion and a glorious marriage in all its finery. It would have made his book considerably slimmer and he could have instead concentrated more intensely on the feminine revelation in the first row. He saw, how she shifted her crossed leg from one side to the other. Despite the long dress he could discern the striking form of her knee that lay under it. A part of her naked foot was visible between the dress and the shoe. Her ankles were slim and beautiful and while he read his fantasy started traveling. What kind of a body lay hidden behind this dress and what kind of sensuality lay concealed behind this perfect face, he asked absently and aloud into the public. For a moment he had left his text but it luckily concurred with the passage in which the officer impatiently waited for his lover in the romantic moonlight of the palace garden. Unfortunately there was betrayal in the air. His love did not appear at the appointed rendezvous but instead her father's hoodlums. As a last wish of lost freedom, they allowed him to drink up the glass of water that lay on the table in front of the torture chair on which he sat and recited from his book. The audience arose and the applause started. Bravo! Bravo! Wonderful! And the clapping of the enthusiastic ladies sounded like rain thundering down English tinned roofs which was considered by the national independence as colonial heritage. Shea had underestimated her aunt's gift of persuasion and the spirit of the two champagne glasses which she had swallowed at once after the reading in the reception hall. They pleasantly tickled her senses. A lot of people stood around discussing the author and his new book. Her empty glass was again filled with the sparkling drink and waited for her attention. Suddenly she found the people around her somehow comical. The made up faces of the women turned into Kathakali masks behind which each played her part whilst speaking in a dreadful chaos. Dancing penguins pushed through the crowds serving on silver trays tingling bubbles in glasses. A palace officer freed himself from the clutches of female desire and came inconspicuously close to her. He asked her if she would follow him to the literary palace garden. There he wanted to start a new chapter of his life. He stood so close to her that she felt her pulse going upped her neck and a shiver went through her body. Had he not recognized her? Simultaneously the thoughts directed to the antique invitation card made her burst into laughter. Her reaction was so unexpected and loud that the folk artists that were present felt compelled to participate. Everyone started to laugh heartily even if no one knew why. The situation was known to each and for that extremely amusing. The dams of restraint broke and there were no stoppers left. Each laughed over each other. Masses of tears watered the eyelids and brows, flowing as a black rivulet on red cheeks and into the white perfumed handkerchiefs of their owners. The young talented author stood paralyzed in the mass of frolic. He had never felt as humiliated as in this moment. He was used to success, in his profession as well as in conquering women's hearts. The few rejects from the courted women he counted as necessary investments for other successes. Now for the first time he felt defeat, a defeat that he did not want to accept. He was fascinated by the woman of his desire. Never before had been so hit in the heart by such a laughter. His pride was hurt and yet simultaneously he was filled with an indescribable joy. This laughter was somehow known to him and his mental computer went through all the possibilities of earlier meetings. However all his efforts were in vain. He had probably been mistaken. Still he felt embraced by the aura of joyousness that warmed her face. In fact its reddish glow was almost brighter than the color of her evening dress. In that moment he forgot his defeat. He had to suddenly laugh and as she noticed it, she laughed harder than ever. And soon they urged each other onto the mountain of frolic till they had reached its peak. At this point the bell rang announcing the closing of the club. Cramps of laughter caused them to fall together into the valley of joyful tears. Then the images struck him; the book, the river, the ants and the girl from the Convent. But as his unconscious registered the divine truth, Shea and her aunt were already on their way home. * The next day Shea had a hangover and even on the subsequent day suffered from headaches and nausea. A wondrous sunrise brought her back to life. The aroma of coffee seductively danced around her nose and the scent of freshly made chapatias aroused her enormous hunger with which she had gotten up. Her aunt was in an extraordinarily good mood. While she was setting the table for three, she asked Shea

casually about her well being and if she had enjoyed the evening at the club. She then told her how they both had found the way back home. It was a very funny story and her aunt kept breaking out in giggles. She kept changing from English into Hindi and vice versa in her description. Shea had not understood a word as the story finally ended. Normally they talked to each other only in English. First while Shea had gone to an English medium convent and secondly because over the decades speaking the colonial language inside ones own four walls was considered chic and cultured. "You're expecting a guest this morning?" she asked her aunt curiously. "Yah, you know my darling, I thought..." But before her aunt could finish her explanation they heard a metallic sound of the play of winds at their doorway. It had a pentatonic air. Rightly handled, it sounded like the basic notes of a morning raga, replacing elegantly the conventional house bell. A little later a round and important woman from the literature club took her place at the breakfast table. As she set the lovingly laid out table in chaos, the rays of the morning sun enveloped the three women in a warm orange light and the room took on the appearance of a still painting. The god of light seemed to be bowing down to her princess beauty comparable to the miniatures of Ragini Bairavi. For a moment, the two other women gazed at her speechlessly. Then they returned to the present and together they brought the lovingly laid out table in chaos.

*

The 'Woman's Literature Club' was established in the last century. Initially it was called 'woman's club and was a pendant to the English Officer's Club of her Royal Majesty. Here men had drunk their whisky and gin, discussed politics and the fair sex. Women were strictly forbidden.

The men wanted to remain among themselves. The women however did not want to restrict their leisure time to gossip tea parties but created their own club to which men were naturally forbidden entry. Here, wives of English officers and administrative personnel dedicated their time to good humor. Initially membership was restricted only to British Nationals. With time 'Indian' women too managed to gain a foothold. They were the adult heritage of mixed marriages or the wives of Indian officials having important positions in the colonial administration. Decades passed by. Books in great quantity were gifted to this love that women had for sensual activities such as theatre and literature. They were then read in easy going sessions. With time, the numbers of books arose infinitely and shelves were needed where they could be placed. Soon these wooden carriers of literature contributed to the aesthetics of the tea and reading rooms. Separate rooms were needed and so came about the first small library. Most of these libraries remained small and unimportant but a few attained national status and admiration. This cultural achievement of women was now to be publicly acknowledged and the name of Woman's Club was reestablished as 'Woman's literature club.' Shea's aunt was the president and chairwoman of this club which had one of the best libraries. It was more extensive than that of the state museum where her father had once worked. The shelves were adorned with all the most important works of classical and contemporary literature. In addition to these were scientific and other art books on music, theatre and dance. Books on different religions leaned against one and another without conflict and Indian poetic works stood enveloped in silky paper. They lent the room with an aura of wisdom that lay in the written silence. The only impressions that remained in Shea from the literary evening were that of seeing Easy alias Kumar Amir Ray again and the monumental library next to the entrance. It was the largest room and according to Shea's estimate they were at least hundred times - no thousand times - more books here as in the library of the convent where she had passed so many evenings reading one book or another. She had used the opportunity and for a moment escaped the ritual of greetings. Her curiosity led her to a glass door through which she entered the temple of knowledge and wisdom. Hastily she went through the gullies of books, glancing through the different centuries that stood upright, finely arranged yet somewhat dusty on the shelves. Some titles she seemed to recognize whereas others were completely new to her. The majority of the books were in English, Hindi and Urdu. But she had seen on another wall directly next

to the entrance books in other languages which she could not decode. She read the indication on the showcase : Holy writings of Buddha. As she came closer she was able to distinguish hand-written manuscripts on palm leaves containing wondrously beautiful and mysterious hieroglyphics. As she was leaving the library she bumped into the woman who was now sitting next to her at the breakfast table and engrossed in deep conversation with her aunt. Shea asked politely if she should go into her room thereby allowing them to carry on their conversation in peace.

"No, no, my child. I've come only because of you. Then your aunt and I have a suggestion to make." replied the librarian of the Woman's literature club. Shea was surprised, her curiosity awakened. "A suggestion? I'm interested."

"Now, my friend and my self have been wondering if you would not be interested in working for the library of our club. You have the intelligence and a brilliant school education, both prerequisites required for this work." her aunt continued.

Shea was overjoyed at this offer and a little later she learnt the details of the job that awaited her at the library. This offer promised a departure from the boredom that hung over the top of the hills. Daily appeared a car that took her to work and brought her back. She could take

an appropriate salary at her disposition. In retrospective, Shea had never regretting accepting the offer. During the first two months she was occupied with trying to understand the ordering of books on logic and philosophy in the magazine and newspaper racks. Soon enough she made suggestions to improve the general cataloguing and thereby to bring some order into it's hitherto chaos. It didn't take long before her suggestions took effect. The library changed so drastically that even the librarian could no longer find her orientation. More and more, she left Shea the supervision and finally also the decision of sorting and that of ordering new books. Gradually as the responsibility of her new job settled into a familiar activity, Shea was able to make time to read one book or the other. Periodically she took novels home. They were so exciting that she could not bear the wait to read the final chapter. So went by two years during which her reality was the world of the written word. Above all she swallowed the literary and theatrical works of Indian poets and writers. The first novels of women authors had just appeared. Once by rare chance a film script fell into her hands. It was written by one of the most famous film director's of Bombay. The film had been a great success. She found this coincidence particularly uncanny as two days later she found in the club post a letter to her aunt. Its sender had the same name as the author. Later her aunt told her that she had received an invitation for a wedding which was to take place in Bombay. The invitation also mentioned the pleasure anticipated in her niece's accompaniment. Shea was very excited about the long train journey.

Never before had she undertaken such a grand expedition. The participation in a marriage festivity was also new to her. But before she had to go through the boredom of the evenings on top of the hillside. These were more and more a torture for her. She would have preferred to remain in the library and pass her nights in the company of the literary giants with whom she felt so at ease. Two days before the marriage they were to catch the early morning 5 o'clock train from Mahabaleshwar's central station to Bombay. Shea's aunt had already booked the tickets in advance due to the huge demand. Although they were traveling 1st class there was no guarantee that they would get place for what they had dutifully paid for. Many places were sold twice and even three times. The pockets of the cashiers were filled with rupees and the train compartments with furious passengers. Only the early appearance at the railway platform promised the possibility of a seat. At 4 'clock in the morning stood Shea and her aunt on the empty platform from which the train was supposed to go to Bombay. It was still not there. With time the railway station started filling up with hundreds of people and a little later came the first shoving and pushing. Each person wanted to secure the best position to get into the compartment. Shea had often heard about the chaotic circumstances in the trains raveling long distances. But what she now witnessed went way beyond the capacity of her imagination. It was already a quarter to five and the train still had not come in. The platform was so crowded that it was beyond recognition. Shea clutched her aunt's arm with one hand and with the

other her luggage.

" My God! So many people.How will they all fit in?" she said to her aunt.

Her aunt laughed.

"Oh my child, don't worry they'll all come in one way or the other."

She could ask no further questions for just then the train steamed into the platform. The crowd came into action and the passengers in front had to be careful so as not to be pushed onto the train tracks. As the passengers started climbing into the compartments downright wars sprang up for seats. Luggage held high buzzed over the passengers below till finally a respectful place was made for it. Mothers screamed after their children, the men used their elbows instead of their reason to box their way through the crowd. Along with her aunt Shea fought a successful battle. From her seat she gazed out through the window. The platform was swept empty. It was as if all the people had been swallowed up by the ground. Due to exclusive reasons standing was prohibited in the passages of the first class compartments. The aisles had to be kept free so that the service personnel could spoil the passengers with food and drinks.

In the compartments there was hardly any room to breathe. Every small opportunity was used to make place. Luggage racks, sitting banks, the floor, the toilets and the steps in front of the compartment doors all served as desired seating places. Even the luggage compartment was full. Friends and relatives of the train personnel had occupied the engine room. Then in India many relatives have friends and vice versa. The worst off were those that had no tickets or could not afford them. Not having any connections to the train personnel hundreds of them sat on the roofs of the individual compartments. Even the first class was not spared. Shea could see legs here and there hanging down. She was terrified that something could happen to the people there. While the guests on the terraces were enjoying the fresh wind the service personnel was serving English breakfast in the first class. There was a choice between tea or coffee. Some of the passengers belonged to the class at eternal naggers. They complained about the tea being too hot, the coffee being too weak, the hard toast and about anything at all. They had to be careful so as not to let their ammunition run out. The train ride had just started and Bombay was still a long way off. Soon enough the monotone of the train noise created an atmosphere conducive to sleep. Shea's aunt had fallen off to sleep, her head leaning on Shea's shoulder Thus enhancing comfort ability by dreaming. Shea was much too excited to be tired. Full of curiosity she stared at the passing landscape changing with each moment. Sometimes the train passed by cultivated fields where farmers were performing their chores. Sometimes it went by irrigated rice fields where water buffaloes were pulling a heavy plough. Once they went through a long tunnel. Upon coming out they crossed over a huge bridge. Underneath, in the river were a huge group of elephants. The animals were being washed with soap and brushed by their guardians and the soap foam gave them the appearance of huge white water horses. Often the train went by village huts. They stood so close to the train tracks that Shea feared for the children who were nonchalantly playing there. Jumping up and down, screaming they waved the train by. She thought that she saw momentary joy on their faces. They crossed over a gorge. A clear blue waterfall was thundering down into its depth. There were moments when Shea thought that she could already see the first houses of Bombay. A little later it turned out to be a stony range of hills. The landscape became flatter soon after for four hours the train tracks went directly along the sea. She loved this gaze beyond into the expanse. Soon her eyes had had enough and her thoughts became melancholic. Her thoughts strayed onto her childhood, on the trove and on her father with his stories. Suddenly a thought occurred to her. She took out a few sheets of paper from her travel bag and started writing. Why had she not thought of this earlier? Why had she never written down the stories that her father had told her. She felt more motivated than ever and she started trying to recall the stories.

'Come on - please remember' she said impatiently to herself. As soon as she thought that she had recaptured a story she started to write it down. But a little later she started scratching out the lines. Three or four sheets flew out of the window as paper balls. She allowed herself a brief mental respite and looked around in the compartment. Almost all the passengers were napping. Her look went over seats, over

the luggage racks onto the window on top of which she saw an empty bird cage. Suddenly she was wide awake. The memory was again there. She concentrated on the sheet of paper in front of her and her hand seemed to move effortlessly as if on its own accord. It only paused after the final sentence was written down. None of the other passengers could imagine that this moment marked the birth of the most famous woman writer of India. Not even her aunt who still had her head on Shea's shoulder and a contented smile on her face. Many hours went by and suddenly the train vehemently braked. A shepherd was shooing his animals over the track. A jolt went through the train and brutally awakened the passengers from their sleep. Shea's aunt was not prepared for such an event. She lost balance and landed on a mountain of manuscripts. She did not know where they had come from. As she regained her upright sitting posture she observed her niece collecting the chaotic mess from the ground and pedantically putting it back in serial order. Later as the train resumed its normal rhythm, her aunt's desire to finally know what Shea had written down took hold.

What was so important that it merited being written about? But her niece was not in that train. Her thoughts had flown into the fairy world of her childhood dreams. A part of the manuscript lay next to her. She could read, Kari! Kari With her right hand she gripped the pages and began to read. Something was moving and scratching under her sari and as she raised the cloth, she saw an ant on her leg disoriented looking for a way into freedom.

It had been an exhausting train journey as they arrived in Bombay on the same evening. Relieved passengers left their compartments. The train had stopped many times, either to get water or to let passengers off and on. At particular stations, the roof passengers had sprung down to stretch out their legs. Others who were waiting for the train joined them afresh and soon the roof was more crowded than ever. The constant stopping took up a lot of time and the journey from Mahabaleshwar to Bombay took on an average eight hours. She remembered her father's description of the city. He had compared it to a voracious giant that swallowed up everything. Now as they were going through the station hall, she had the feeling that they were his next victims. The station appeared to her as the throat of this hungry city. They had to traverse it. At its other end was the gastric acid in which they were to fall. Thousands of people seemed to have the same aim. The masses moved in the direction of the huge door which led to the outside. It was a monstrous buzzing, unstoppable, a fierce river current that drove Shea and her aunt into the direction of the abyss. Announcements droned from the loudspeakers, their echoes generating a confusion that caused people to jumble train timings and go to wrong platforms. Suddenly a tall burly man bowed before them. He was elegantly dressed and wore a formidable red turban. He seemed to be like a wave breaker and the masses circumvented him, flowing like streams to his left and right and then joining up behind his back again like a gigantic river. His huge hands gripped the luggage of the two women and his deep voice rendered a shudder in the entire hail. "Woman's Literature Club?" Although it was a question it appeared to Shea more like an order. She was certain that everyone present simply out of fear and to avoid difficulties would have answered in the affirmative. Her aunt greeted the giant friendly and casually. After a short introduction ceremony she followed him as if she were a young recruit of Columbus and landed shortly thereafter on the beach of a new unknown world. Shea was simply speechless. She had never seen so many cars, horse carriages, rickshaws and people before. Every fifty meters she stumbled over children, crippled old men and miserable looking women asking for a few rupees. Push carts selling kebabs advertised their wares by shouting loudly over the drone of the traffic. Coolies ran here and there, taxis and horse carriages drove by spilling out their clients only to have the empty places filled up again. Flower sellers were trying to find new owners for their colorful bouquets and the air was thick with their scents. A little further the florist's perfumes lost their attraction. A heap of garbage and rotten fruit lay at the feet of the film stars emitting a foul stench. Oversized paintings of these film stars in romantic postures were painted on the building facades. Content in their love nest they seemed to be indifferent to the rot that lay under them. A loud and stinking mass of tin, animals and people suffered the midday heat as they traversed the broad streets. Old people stood at the shore of this river waiting for the opportunity to arrive intact at the other side. But neither the

waiting nor the crossing over appeared to increase their life expectancy. A few who gave to their impatience were mercilessly torn apart by the stream. In despair they sank into its shallow eddies which via one of its false exits washed them back to land again and another part of the city. For Shea this world seemed to be switched off the moment the car doors opened and she fell into the lap of the cream-seated ambassador. The giant started the car followed by a crack in the gear. Seconds later they plunged into the floods of Bombay.

Ending sequence

Shea loved drinking her afternoon tea to the sight of the sea.

The story of her memories was coming to an end. The sun was already on the horizon. In an hour, the centre of the galaxy would be a glowing ball sinking in the sea and the sky would be transformed into a grandiose spectacle of color. Shea's thoughts were already in the present.

'Pitu has been working for so many years in my house but he has never been lacking for attention. Actually he is more a son to me than an employee. Sometimes I wish I had a son like him. Pitu had served more than just the usual tea this afternoon. Next to the sweats lay a note whose message was sweeter than the mithai. A telephone call from Bombay announced the visit of a young woman who Shea had not seen since the girl was eight years old. This was it, she thought contentedly. My intuition was right that something wonderful would happen today. She must have read Amir's script and made her way. Shea remembered the letters of her brother in which he had narrated the character of his daughter. Wild and individualistic with crazy ideas in her head was his description. But also articulate, intelligent and extremely beautiful. Shea had to laugh. This young woman reminded her of her youth.

They would definitely get along well with each other. She heaved a sigh and relaxed, her gaze grazing over the blue sea. Suddenly she thought of her father again. A piercing sensation between happiness and pain ran through her body. Clenching herself, she put her hand on the place where her heart was beating and cried out. "Daddy! Daddy!" The image of her father appeared for a few seconds, his face beaming and a smile lay on his lips. It seemed as if he stretched out his hand to her as if to say come to me, my dearest daughter.

"Oh no, Oh no" said Shea to herself. "I am not there yet. You'll have to have some more patience. I made a pledge many years ago to my brother that I have to fulfill now. I promised him that I would take care of his daughter and help her find her path in life. It will surely take a few years."

The image of her father again disappeared and softly Shea started humming her favorite childhood song. She heard the sound of two twigs breaking in the bush behind her. Someone was quietly approaching her, careful not to scare her. Shea continued to hum away as she stretched out her hand and said with a warm voice - "I've been waiting for you. I thought you'd come earlier. Come, sit down besides me and let us enjoy the sunset together." Then she again took up her melody. Arm in arm, they sat on the blue stone. The young woman from Bombay looked carefully all over but they were no ants to be seen, blue or otherwise.

"They've all gone."

Shea said without taking her eyes away from the sea.

"There's not a single one left."

Both women sat silently next to each other till the sun sank behind the horizon.

The color of the sky glowed into a deep red. Soon it turned into a faint violet, slowly disappearing in the rising darkness.

Meena was overwhelmed by this performance of nature. Never before in her young life had she felt so close to Nirvana. She looked at Shea for the first time in the face.

What she saw was the reflection of her life long search for the meaning of life.

"I want to so much be like you. Can you help me."

She said.

Shea had to laugh and Meena knew that her yearning had found home. It was her birthday and she was all of eighteen.

The helicopter was directly suspended over the cove and the sea. A camera was placed on the open door. With its panoramic perspective it was taking in the actors on the blue stone.

Deepa Mehta looked at the monitor which was connected to the camera. Satisfied she nodded her head. The image on the monitor corresponded to her conception. She took her wireless and gave the camera man his cue.

"Please move away slowly from the cliff towards the direction of the open sea. Attention!Action!"

The helicopter blades accelerated their revolution and the aircraft started to move. The director looked expectantly in the monitor. Shea and Meena had put their arms around each other and were gazing at the sunset. The image began to fade them away, the cliff transformed into a coastal strip and dissolved itself into the endless expanse of the sea.

Deepa Mehta stared at the sea. In her thoughts, she heard the soundtrack of her film, which would just give an impressive frame to the last scene.

"What do you think?"

She asked her friend sitting next to her who was attentively following the events.

"Wonderful, a wonderful climax." Her friend replied.

"It has a very emotional effect, the colors, the shimmering golden waters, the play of nature and human destiny. I think the audience will weep buckets."

Yes, she was satisfied with Deepa Mehta's work. She knew that only she could translate her artistic ideas into cinematic forms. She had been enthused and inspired by the content and artistic form of her earlier films. Subsequently, she had entrusted her friend her script whose last scene was now dissolving in the sunset.

"Cut!" cried Deepa Mehta in relief while the monitor showed the frame of the last sequence. The silence that had accompanied the filming now turned into a loud applause.

"Bravo, wonderful!" resounded from all sides. The light - men, the assistant director, the set designers, the camera team and all the other members of the film crew reached out to shake her hand. The actresses had arisen from their blue stone and freed themselves of their costumes.

"I think we were really good. What do you think?" said the star actress. "Don't you hear that?" laughed Deepa Mehta, passing on the applause to them. She switched on her mobile phone which started ringing immediately and incessantly. The refreshment van opened its doors and the first drinks found their lovers. Champagne corks popped open and the bubbling wine provided for an appropriate ambience. The helicopter had landed and was making terrible racket.

Deepa Mehta turned to the woman sitting beside her.

"Tell me something Meena, is the story real?"

"Because it`s you, I`ll tell you the truth."

"Ah! And the truth is?" asked Deepa Mehta.

Meena nodded and replied.

"The truth is that it probably happened the way it did." Deepa Mehta shook her head. It was so typical of her friend, this answer.

Meena arose from her chair.

"I must return to the city now. We will see each other later in the hotel Ok?"

The director saw her going towards the white Mercedes that had been awaiting her on the path behind the changing containers.

A grey and white bearded giant with a red turban stood in front of the German limousine and opened the door. For a brief moment Deepa Mehta espied the interior of the car. For a few seconds, her glance met the beautiful old woman who returned it with her divine laughter. Then Meena climbed into the car and the giant sprung it in movement. Automatically Deepa Mehta pulled herself back, expecting a crackling noise. But the car silently purred past her and she thought that she could see a mischievous grin on the lips of the chauffeur. The next moment came the explanation. She could read the sign on the back of the car.

Mercedes 230D Automatic.

While the camera follow the scenery the car leaving the camp on a small dusty road. The film camp appears in the final picture.

THE END

GLOSSARY (CASTINGS)

Amir Kumar Ray	Scriptwriter
Dipak Kumar	mayor! Producer
Easy	lover
Guru Dutt	director/regisseur
Gopi Krishna	gathak dancer
Harpal Singh	driver
Jaywanthi	Rabindra Rays wife
Jaswind	Karis father
Jaswinder Singh	alias Raj Kapoor, alias William Rao Chaudry)
Jaiwand	alias Amir, son of Kalendar Singh
Kari	figure of a fairy tale
Kalendar Singh	alias Guru Dutt alias antique dealer
Lalita	little girl from the market
Lakshmi Shaktar Ray	vocalist
Mira Singh	alias Meena Kumari
Deepa Mehta	director, regisseur
Meena Kumari	actress
Meena Kumar Ray	daughter of Amir Kumar Ray
Nargis Kapoor	actress
Priya Ramani	Sheas aunt
Pitu	cabel holder
Raj Kapoor	actor
Rabindra Ray	director/actor
Rosa de Silva	production manager, organizer
Ranjith Chattergee	publisher, editor
Rani	daughter of Jaswinder Singh
Rishani Devane	librarian
Shea	actress
Swami	old man
Shamila Gurtu	actress
Shivkumar Sharma	santoor maestro
Uma Dutt Sharma	vocalist
William Rao Chaudry	alias Jaswinder Singh

PLACES and NOTIONS

Affion	Essence of a moon flower
Amritsar	golden temple in Punjab
Bandra	area in Bombay
Baratha Natyam	south India classical dance
Bombay Film studios	Mehboop Film studios

Brown Sahib	English Indian
Bupali	morning raga
Calcutta	town in Bengal
Chowpati Beach	area in Bombay
Chapati	Indian bread
Committee Ghar Market	place in Jullundar
Chaturanga	Chess game
Chaupar	dice game
Chowkidars	police man with bamboo sticks
Chai	Indian tea
Dharwad	village on the west coast of India
Dhoti	sarong
Ferenghi	foreigner
Ghobunder road	street in Bombay
G.T. Road	road in north India
Ganges	holy river
Haat Manga	wedding ceremony
Jammu	town in Kashmir
Jullundar	town in Punjab
Convent	catholic school
Kya Baat Hai	move of hand
Kriya Karam	cremate ceremony
Khajoor	dates
Lassi	yogurt drink
Lingam	penis of mystic Shiva
Mahabaleshwar	city on the west coast of India
Madras	city of south India
Mithai	wedding sweets
Namaste	Hindu greetings (female)
Namaskar	Hindu greetings (male)
Naan	Indian bread
Nasik	holy river near Bombay
Opera House	film theater on Chowpati beach in Bombay
Pani Grahani	a ceremony for the wedding
Puja	religious ceremony
Punjab	area in north India
Rasa	aesthetic mood
Shanti	place of peace
Raga	mood and color in the music
Shudakamies	female dress
Santa Cruz Market	place in Bombay
Sarangi	string instrument
Sutra	old Hindu letters
Woman Literature Club	counterpart to the English officer clubs