

**Study of the works of
Saratchandra Chattopadhyay**

why it is still relevant

Provash Ghosh

Socialist Unity Centre of India (Communist)

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Publisher's Note

On the occasion of the 138th Birth Anniversary celebration of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, a meeting was held on 17th September, 2013 at Mahajati Sadan, Kolkata, under the joint auspices of Pathikrit, AIDSO, AIDYO, AIMSS and Komsomol. Comrade Provash Ghosh, General Secretary of SUCI(C) spoke on the relevance of Sarat literature today. The full speech was published in Bengali on 20 May, 2014 with some additions and alterations by Comrade Provash Ghosh. The books were soon exhausted and it was reprinted with some more relevant and necessary additions by Comrade Provash Ghosh, Again the book was reprinted on October 1, 2015. This translated version is from the third edition of the book in bengali.

Comrade Provash Ghosh while speaking has extensively quoted from Saratchandra's literature, especially the beautiful dialogues of the portrayed characters in novels and stories. It is difficult to render into English Saratchandra's literary style and languages. We could not find any satisfactory translation of Saratchandra's works. Hence we have ourselves translated the excerpts. For any errors, inadequacies and inaccuracies in translation, the responsibility is ours.

October, 2024
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Study of the works of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay : why it is still relevant

I am not a man of literature, nor am I a literary critic. For a long period, I have been associated with political movements and it is about 25 years ago that I had discussed something on literature in such an assembly or meeting. Rather, the two persons sitting beside me, Comrade Ranjit Dhar and Comrade Manik Mukherjee, are far more adept than me in this respect. Unaccustomed as I am to discussions of this nature, I was not sure about how smoothly and lucidly I would be able to express myself. However, I have been observing for quite some time that when I ask students of colleges and universities or educated young men and women whether they have read the works of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, sadly the majority of them invariably reply in the negative and perhaps they do not feel particularly attracted to his works. It is deeply painful to me that a section among them is involved in political movements too.

The political parties in our country, who have run the affairs of the state for long years have managed to bring about such an 'advancement' in the political economic spheres that its utterly miserable effect is felt by the people in their very bones in their daily lives. In the cultural field too, they have brought to pass similar ruinous 'advancement'! Not only Saratchandra, but the name of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore is oft quoted, but actually, how much connection do they have with the thoughts and ideas of Rabindranath? What little is cultivated is mainly the songs of Rabindranath. Again, among these, only the songs

related to spiritualism, nature and love are selected by most exponents for rendition. Even though, during a large part in Rabindranath's life, nature, religion and love were the principal themes of his literature, later in the years poems like *Prithivi* (The Earth), *Aikatan* (Symphony) and *Africa* came out of his pen. This is a completely different Rabindranath. How many of us are acquainted with this Rabindranath? What a cry of agony was expressed in his speech *The Crisis of Civilization* on his last birthday. Even though an ardent believer of 'non-violence' and 'peaceful means' in the freedom movement, what did he observe and from what concern did he write just before his death—

The serpents are spreading their venomous breath all around
 Today the sweet sermons on peace will sound like a futile
 joke

So before I leave this world I sound a call for those

*Who are getting prepared in every abode to fight with the
 demon.*

In the last stage of his life, why did he feel attracted to Soviet socialism and why did he count Soviet Union under the leadership of Great Stalin as the only dependable force against fascist Germany and Italy in the Second World War? How many of the innumerable Rabindra-worshippers are acquainted with these facts? As a result Rammohan, Vidyasagar, Jyotiba Rao Phule, Bankim Chandra, Premchand, Bharati — all these giants have sunk into oblivion. In the realm of culture, the attack is far more terrible.

Saratchandra too is almost forgotten today. So, even though I had some hesitations in the beginning, I finally agreed to speak a few words in this assembly, being driven by this pain and agony and also largely due to my emotions. I have decided that I shall speak a little about the works of Saratchandra, but in the main, I shall read out some passages from Saratchandra and I shall explain some of them. I am not sure whether your patience will hold till the end. This is not a literary meet in the true sense and some connoisseurs of literature may be disappointed, but I have thought in this manner for a particular reason and so taking permission from you all, I would like to speak in this manner only.

Comrade Shibdas Ghosh's unique evaluation of Saratchandra

I became first acquainted with the literature of Saratchandra when I had crossed my childhood and had just entered my early youth. At that time, in the majority of middle class families like ours, for the generation of grandparents the literature to read was *Ramayana-Mahabharata*. The generation of our fathers had gone on to India's first novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, noted historian and novelist Ramesh Dutta and of course Rabindranath and our elder brothers and sisters used to read Saratchandra, however in a furtive way hiding it from the parents. In the beginning, I was attracted to Saratchandra due to this hide and seek. What little I had read before this were detective novels, some comic books and other usual children's stories. Suddenly, one day, I had the opportunity to read *Mahesh*, one of Saratchandra's short stories. For the first time I realized that there is pathos in literature and a story can make you weep, can make you think deeply. Even though not acquainted with the happenings like those described in the story, the characters depicted in *Mahesh* were very much known and familiar to us within the milieu of our village life, but the ruthless oppression and injustice perpetrated on them, their heart rending agony, the depth of misery and pain of these people familiar to us had remained unknown to us till then. It was in this manner that I was first introduced to Saratchandra. After this, as I grew up I came to read some of his books. Not that I understood everything, nor was I old enough to understand, but I used to feel an intense attraction to read these books over and over again. It was at this time that I joined the left movement and going along this road, somewhat accidentally, I came in contact with the great Marxist philosopher Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, and got to know him. It was only after coming into close association with him that I was introduced to Saratchandra for the second time and this time it was a proper acquaintance. What a rare genius Saratchandra was with his arduous search for knowledge in literature, with his incomparable artistic style and craftsmanship, with a materialist and secular humanist philosophical standpoint,

as the forceful representative of the uncompromising trend in the Renaissance and freedom movement of our country, and finally as a bold revolutionary thinker. I came to realize this only from the invaluable discussions by Comrade Shibdas Ghosh. In the light of that unforgettable evaluation based on Marxist methodology and as his student, I would like to speak a few words in this assembly.

Rabindranath had deep regard for Saratchandra's literary works

In the world of literature, Saratchandra is genuinely an amazing genius. Not only in Bengal, not even in India only, he is an astounding genius in world literature. These are not merely our words. These words were uttered by one of the giants of the twentieth century, Romain Rolland and also by the world renowned poet Rabindranath. After reading only the first part of *Srikanta*, Romain Rolland, the renowned philosopher, thinker and litterateur of the twentieth century had said that in the field of literature Saratchandra was one of the foremost in the world and he definitely deserved the Nobel Prize. Those of you who have read the books and stories by Saratchandra know that he has many other creations much more astonishing than the first part of *Srikanta*, but Romain Rolland came to this realization after reading just one novel. When the novel *Nishkriti* (Deliverance) was translated to English, Rabindranath in its introduction wrote that Saratchandra had taken Bengali literature to the front rank of world literature. Whose words were these? Of Rabindranath himself! In a conversation with Romain Rolland, he further stated that Saratchandra is the best artist in Bengali literature. Saratchandra had many differences with Rabindranath in philosophical outlook, literary thoughts and political views. They had many debates and arguments, but Rabindranath was a great man and he recognized a genius. In spite of differences in opinion, he had this greatness to acknowledge excellence. It is Rabindranath who said, "Saratchandra's insight has plunged deep into the mysteries of the hearts of the Bengali people. He has been able to introduce his diverse creations distilled out of happiness and sorrow, through the joy of union and the pangs of

separation in such a manner that the Bengali people could perceive themselves directly. We get the proof of this by their unbounded joy and happiness. No other writing by any other author has evoked such happiness from the depth of their hearts. Other authors have got appreciation but none except him has received such universal and heartfelt hospitality. This is not like being dazed by wonder, this is warmth of love. This huge success that he got so effortlessly has made him enviable to us.”¹

Rabindranath has said that in his early life, Bengali literature was in its first era. At that time, Bankim Chandra was reigning supreme and he was the youngest. Subsequently, from him, that is Rabindranath himself, started the second era of Bengali literature. Again Rabindranath has said that in his lifetime itself the third era began with the advent of Saratchandra. These may be unknown to many Rabindra-loving scholars of recent times, or may be, in spite of knowing these, they are unwilling to speak about them. But Rabindranath himself has said, “The inception of the third era began with Sarat. The close proximity that he had with the modern was not shared by any of his predecessors. He belongs completely to his time and to his country. This is not an easy matter”.² Subsequently, all the renowned Bengali litterateurs, like Subodh Ghosh, Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, Manik Bandyopadhyay, Premendra Mitra, Santosh Ghosh and others have in the same tune expressed that they had created their own literature following the path shown by Saratchandra. Incidentally all of them had deep respect for Rabindranath. The great Hindi writer Premchand considered Saratchandra as his *guru* in literature, and at a young age desperately tried to meet him. However, a section of so called scholars and literary critics who claim to be Rabindra-lovers and along with them some literary critics influenced by the politics of the so-called communists of the undivided CPI and its descendants CPI(M) and Naxalites have raised some questions, spread some erroneous theories and wrong information in a mala fide attempt to create confusions among the people about Saratchandra. For example, they have said that the works of Saratchandra deal with emotions but are bereft of intellectual content; he was a creator of *Rasa* but failed to portray an insight

on life; he had raised questions but did not provide answers; he had shown the problems but did not show any solution. The so called Marxists went one step further and said that Saratchandra was a petty-bourgeois litterateur and so he suffered from vacillations, as a result of which he had a compromising outlook. Standing firm against these confusions, it was Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, who first presented Saratchandra before the country in a correct and befitting manner. He was the first who showed that Saratchandra was the finest representative of the secular humanist and uncompromising revolutionary trend in our country. He also showed that in artistic style, craftsmanship, and aesthetics (creation of *Rasa*) in the field of novels, Saratchandra was unparalleled in world literature and the best. He further said that in his philosophical outlook, Saratchandra was mainly materialistic.

Knew poverty through his own life

The emergence of Saratchandra in the field of literature is an astonishing event. In his childhood, Saratchandra used to indulge in some literary activity while staying in his maternal uncle's home at Bhagalpur. There he did things like looking after a children's literary group, publishing a hand-written magazine and such other activities. He had to spend his days in grinding poverty. In the meeting called by the students of Rajendra College to felicitate him, Saratchandra said, "one day I began my life as a student with the same aspiration for higher education like you. At that time, what rosy dreams I had about the future! However, as big as was my dream, so strong was the denial of any support from my surroundings. I paid my respect to my school from afar and became a vagrant". In a letter to Leelarani Gangopadhyay, he wrote – "I was miserably poor – for want of twenty rupees I could not sit for the examinations. There were days when desperately I appealed to God – O' God, please let me have fever for some days so that I can fast and will not have to think of having two meals a day." He had to spend his childhood, adolescence and youth in the midst of misery, pain and impoverishment. After the death of his parents, he had to send his brothers and sisters to his relatives and went out to Burma in

search of a job. He said, “I forgot that I had ever cultivated literature”.

Saratchandra’s entry was sudden and popularity unparalleled

It was by sheer accident that *Bardidi* (Eldest Sister), one of his long stories, written in his younger age was published by one of his friends in *Jamuna* magazine. Saratchandra did not even know about this, but this single composition created a storm in the literary world. The editors of reputed literary magazines pleaded with Rabindranath, why he had published in another magazine under a pseudonym instead of giving them an opportunity. The more Rabindranath tried to convince them that it was not his writing, the more they disbelieved him. By and by Saratchandra’s friends took initiative to publish his stories and novels like *Mandir* (The Temple), *Kashinath*, *Debdas*, one after another - all these were written by Saratchandra at an early age only. Saratchandra was completely oblivious to the fact that his literature had created such a storm in Bengal. Thereafter, some more time was to elapse before he appeared in the arena of Bengali literature. By that time, he had stepped into an elderly age. His extraordinary literary creations, those which we are familiar with have been written within a short period of ten to twelve years. Leaving aside the initial period in Bhagalpur, this short period is his whole literary life. The well known writer Ramapada Chowdhury has said that the entire works of Saratchandra can be held within the cupped palm of a hand, only a few books, whereas the number of books we are writing need a trolley to be carried home. However, the influence of his few works will continue year after year; era after era; there are no limits and bounds to this. Many of you may know that at that period of freedom movement, the works of Saratchandra had been translated into almost all the languages in India and newer editions had to be brought out repeatedly. An idea evolved about him such that the people of Andhra used to think that Saratchandra belonged to their state; the people of Gujarat felt that he was one of them; the Marathas conceived that Saratchandra belonged to their state; the Hindi speaking people had an

impression that Saratchandra belonged to their region. The famous Hindi literary critic Vishnu Prabhakar has described this experience in one of his works. When I myself visit other states, I observe that many of the people of our age who are old or of an elderly age group carry an impression that Saratchandra belongs to their state only. In spite of language difference, to what an extent, one's heartstrings have to be touched for this to take place! This has never happened before or after to any litterateur in this country or in any other country. Look at what Rabindranath said, "No one had ever won their hearts like this!" This crossed the boundary of Bengal and spread over the length and breadth of the country. I have already mentioned the reactions of Romain Rolland, overcome with amazement over one or two books of Saratchandra that happened to reach the international literary world.

Indian Renaissance and Saratchandra

Saratchandra belonged to the era of anti-imperialist freedom struggle of our country. The anti-feudal cultural movement, also designated as the Renaissance movement, was continuing in our country at that period. Just as in the political movement there were two trends, the Indian Renaissance too had two distinct trends. All of you know that the Renaissance in this country was initiated by Raja Rammohan Roy. Renaissance was a movement whose object was to generate a democratic outlook and democratic values free from religious influences, and this movement began in Europe as a fight against feudal ideas and thoughts, backward mental frame of the middle ages, spiritualism, superstition and obscurantism. The idea of Renaissance is that the identity of man is based on human values, irrespective of his race and religion. Freedom of the individual, freedom of women, rights of men, rights of women – all these were enshrined in the Renaissance movement, as a culmination of which came the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution in England. It was through these that Parliamentary democracy was established.

Renaissance is the cultural movement which prepares the ground for the mental frame prior to and conducive to the

bourgeois democratic revolution. Before any political revolution, a cultural movement is necessary for spreading its conception and ideology among the people. Renaissance is precisely this. Since its beginning in Europe, Renaissance movement had fought uncompromisingly against religious thinking. Basing on mechanical materialism, agnosticism, secular humanism, philosophers like Bacon, Spinoza, Kant, Feuerbach fought against the domination of the church and Christianity, in order to establish scientific thinking and scientific bent of mind. Philosophers and thinkers like Rousseau, Voltaire and others had evinced secular humanist trend of thinking. In the field of literature Victor Hugo, Pushkin, Turgenyev, Dostoyevsky, Emil Zola, Chekov, Maupassant – all these well-known litterateurs did likewise. Even though he had a compromising outlook on religion, the influence of humanism was strong in Tolstoy. All of them had carried the ideas and philosophy of the Renaissance. In our country it was Rammohan, who first brought the thoughts of the Renaissance. His role is mostly like that of Martin Luther. The inception of Renaissance in Europe took place through Martin Luther, but he took the road of religious reformism.

Similarly, in our country too, the democratic thoughts and ideas of Renaissance were brought in by Rammohan, but these were not free from religious influences. Vidyasagar emerged on the scene after Rammohan. Vidyasagar was the first in this country to raise the banner of secular humanism, free from religious influences. This role of Vidyasagar is largely unknown in this country even today. He declared boldly that truth is not to be sought in the *Vedas*, *Vedanta*, *Sankhya* and *Upanishads*. To seek for the truth, it is necessary to have a scientific bent of mind, a rational and logical mental frame which has to be acquired from Europe. When the British government made an effort to include in the curriculum on philosophy the book *Inquiry* authored by the European idealist philosopher Bishop Berkeley, he protested saying that this does not reflect truth. In a letter to F. J. Mouat, Secretary, Education Council, he wrote, “The Vedantas and Sankhya are false systems of philosophy..... Whilst teaching these in the Sanskrit course, we should oppose these by sound philosophy in the English course to counteract

these influences.”^{2A} He held that “wherever the light of knowledge of modern Europe was reaching to whatever extent, there is proportionate erosion in the influence of education of the ancient *shastras* of this country. So this education of modern Europe should be spread more.”^{2B} He further said “We want teachers who know both the Bengali and the English languages and at the same time are free from religious prejudices.”^{2B} The British Government of those days did not agree to that. Many do not know that Vidyasagar did not believe in God and never visited any temple. There was no discourse on God in the text books written by him. This invited severe criticism from many, and Bishop Murdoch, the British Government appointed observer said that what Vidyasagar’s books taught was “rank Materialism”.^{2A} Driven by these very thoughts and ideas, Vidyasagar had a feeling for the downtrodden, and had struggled to implement widow-remarriage and women’s education, along with the attempt to abolish child-marriage and polygamy. All these he did, driven by the thoughts and ideas of the Renaissance only. Vidyasagar represents a particular trend but this trend has never been able to become dominant in the socio-political life of our country. He, himself also never formulated these thoughts and ideas as a philosophic outlook. It is only through his deeds that this outlook can be perceived. He wanted to include science, scientific philosophy and logic within the curriculum, because he was of the opinion that if the boys and girls of this country read these, through these they would become free from the influence of the Vedas and the Vedanta just as he himself, though a pundit well versed in religious scriptures, had succeeded in becoming free from religious thoughts and ideas, being influenced by the European scientific rationalist philosophies. However, his contemplation did not materialize in this country; the British did not implement his proposed curriculum. Ramakrishna Paramahansa arrived at the time of Vidyasagar and Vivekananda appeared after a few years, signaling the rise of the spiritualist trend. Vivekananda’s ideas encompassed spiritualism based on the *Vedanta* on the one hand and bold nationalism on the other. He went on to become a powerful proponent of *Vedantic* traditionalism on one side, and patriotism and national pride on

the other. In this period, in the political arena, Gandhiji represented the political leadership with compromising and spiritualist trend. Rabindranath, with his influence over a vast domain in the literary field was well known for his spiritualism.

It was in this environment, that the emergence of Saratchandra took place. In this milieu, Saratchandra boldly stood against spiritualism and traditionalism in all aspects. Saratchandra had to fight against the spiritualistic thoughts and ideas of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda, Gandhiji and Rabindranath, and against traditionalism. Saratchandra emerged to liberate the minds and thoughts of the people from all these.

***Patherdabi* became a must read for the then revolutionaries**

Saratchandra wrote the novel *Pather Dabi* (The Demand of the Path) to represent the then revolutionary movement of our country in the correct perspective. The reformist, compromising political forces led by Gandhiji were at that time striking out at the revolutionary philosophy and revolutionary movement by maligning it. The revolutionaries were being repeatedly criticized and attacked by them at that time. But Saratchandra did not write *Pather Dabi* merely just to voice support for the revolutionary philosophy boldly. Through *Pather Dabi* he provided such valuable education to the revolutionaries about some thoughts and ideas which were neither cultivated nor practiced by the revolutionaries of that era. Most of the revolutionaries of that era were devotees of Vivekananda. Touching the religious scripture *Geeta*, they used to take the oath at the time of initiation and indoctrination by the leaders of the revolutionary organizations like *Jugantar* and *Anushilan*, as a result of which, the religious influence was very strong even among the revolutionaries. Through the words of Sabyasachi, the leading revolutionary character in the novel, Saratchandra conveyed in *Pather Dabi*, “All religions are false – they are superstitions of the primitive era and there is no bigger enemy of world humanity than this.” He wanted that the revolutionaries of that era also realize this. The revolutionary movement of that

era was not completely free from religious influences, and as a result there was controversy regarding the role of women in it. Most of the revolutionaries, with the single exception of Surya Sen, also known as *Masterda*, did not accept that women could be revolutionaries; at best they could act as ally of revolution, not more than that. Still, on this issue, there was much controversy in *Masterda's* group and even splits. In *Pather Dabi*, for the first time, Saratchandra showed what should be the character of a revolutionary woman through the creation of a character called Sumitra. This was the character which influenced Surya Sen and others. Again, for the first time in *Pather Dabi*, Saratchandra presented the idea of working class revolution when no such idea had not almost appeared in the revolutionary movement, particularly in literature of that era. It had struck his mind that the inadequacies in the revolutionary movement of that era should be pointed out. In a meeting he said, "I did not create Sabyasachi in anyone's image. His qualities have been assembled from many real characters". To the students and youth, he once said, "It is my desire, longing and imagination that you become like Sabyasachi." It is from this desire that the book was written. It is also educative to us, to the revolutionaries of today. One very important teaching of this book is this, from the last chapter of *Pather Dabi*: when the best cadre of the party have been shot dead by the police, many are imprisoned, some have turned traitors, some are suffering from frustration, and as a result, the party has nearly fallen apart; some have even cast aspersions on his relation with Bharati, whom he loved as his younger sister — in such a situation, Sabyasachi, fiercely courageous, resolute in the struggle for the country's freedom, and as an invincible is marching forward in a raging stormy night, in the deepest darkness with repeated flashes of lightning showing the way. He has to go through a thorny forest because he cannot move on open roads, as the vigilant eye of the police is searching for him. Not far is the seething and turbulent river which he has to cross in a small boat. The name of this novel is befittingly *Pather Dabi* (The Demand of the Path). The road to revolution demands this — will you, the revolutionaries dare to travel it — this is the question that Saratchandra raised in that

era and this is the question before the revolutionaries in this era too.

A materialist and secular humanist

Now, I would like to read out some aspects of the philosophical outlook of Saratchandra from his compositions. I have mentioned earlier that I will discuss from time to time but, in the main, I want to read out from Saratchandra, since many of us do not go through his works nowadays. Even those who have gone through his works have not done so meticulously and critically. In the first part of *Srikanta*, his reputed novel, a philosophical truth has been mentioned, – “On keen observation, there is no existence of any untruth in this universe.” In other words, the whole of this natural world is true and real. Here, there is no place for untruth or falsehood. He said, “Falsehood may come only as the result of man’s own wrong understanding and his attempt to make others understand wrongly.” In other words, man, due to his ignorance or limitation of knowledge, may come to a wrong understanding about the real and natural world, and may convey this wrong understanding to others. Even though his idea may be completely untrue, he carries to others his wrong idea and tries to convince them. However, in the universe there is no inherent untruth. That there is a supernatural power beyond this natural world; that this power or God has created the universe; his desire only causes action (*karma*); this world is false, only *Brahma* is true – these false perceptions have been continuing for a long period. Saratchandra has dealt a blow against these false beliefs. These words of Saratchandra, his philosophic thoughts and ideas speak of a deep understanding of the correct scientific outlook. However, without going into serious and grave and complex discussions, he expresses it through simple, lucid and everyday words. In Saratchandra’s literature, there are such deliberations, even in the kitchen, that leave us speechless. Everything is expressed through story-telling, anecdotes and dialogues. Nowhere is there any superfluous scholasticism, no high-flown expression or weighty theoretical discourse or any dazzling discussion. On the contrary, we find that through simple and lucid language, he has

succeeded in conveying many difficult and complex truths of the theory of knowledge into the inner recess of the peoples' mind. In *Pather Dabi* he has discussed, – “you say ‘ultimate truth’, ‘absolute truth’ - and these meaningless and fruitless words are very precious for you. There are no more powerful magic words than these to deceive the ignorant. You think that truth is eternal, immortal, divine and only untruth is worldly and manmade. This is a lie. Just like untruth, mankind goes on creating truth day in and day out. Neither immortal, nor eternal, truth too has its origin and its demise.” In other words; there is no eternal truth. What is true in one era becomes false in the next. And from the necessity of the new era new truth is born, to be falsified in the perspective of a newer era and supplanted by a newer truth. This is Saratchandra's position. In one of his novels *Charitraheen* (The Fallen Character), he said that, “Always try to accept whatever is the truth, in every situation and at any point of time, even though, if by this the Vedas and other religious scriptures turn out to be false. None of them are bigger than truth; they have no value in comparison to truth. There is not an iota of manliness in believing something false as truth, may it be due to obstinacy, emotional attachment or long standing superstition.” In this book, in another context, he has said, “No religious scripture can represent unalloyed truth. The *Vedas* are also religious scriptures and therefore there is no scarcity of falsehood in them.” He has ridiculed, “On one hand you are saying that *Brahma* is formless, incomprehensible, having no qualities of created beings, while at the same time you are talking about ‘Him’ in such a manner as if you have just seen ‘Him’.” Discussing in this vein he said, “Whatever is beyond our understanding, is to be discarded just because it is outside our intelligence and perception. We go on saying that something is indescribable, incomprehensible, unknowable; while at the same time, we continuously go on trying to explain it, to comprehend it. This we should never do.” This is his opinion about those who discuss and deliberate about *Brahma*. In a meeting with students and youth, he said, “I know not any immutable definition of truth. Truth is judged in relation to time, space and person, and true knowledge on co-relation of these with each other is the real

face of truth. Change of one leads inevitably to the change of the other. To accept this change with intelligence and understanding signifies knowing the truth.”²³ These words sound as if they are based on advanced thoughts of the theory of relativity. In the third part of *Srikanta* he wrote satirically, “Whatever there was to contemplate about the world, the omniscient sages have long back thought over and determined everything regarding the past, present and future. There is nothing left to think about anything new in this world. Had they desisted with kind consideration from thinking about our British period, they would have been spared the burden of much difficult contemplation and we too would perhaps been able to live safely”. In other words had the omniscient sages not gone forward to think for us, and left our time to ourselves, they also would have been spared many misgivings and we too would have at least been able to contemplate and live in our own time.

In an address to a literary gathering he said, “This millions of years old ancient world is moving ahead with the same speed today as before. Man and woman have set out on a journey, the frontiers of which are as far off as before and its final outcome similarly uncertain and unknown. Is it only that his duties, his thoughts and ideas have reached a limit for all eternity? Day in and day out, he has to go through diverse and newer experiences; his so many variations of happiness, so many shades of hopes and desires — but there is no stopping; he has to go on and on — is it only that he would not have any mastery over his journey? In some remote past, he has been denied this right forever! Those who have passed away, those who are beyond joy and sorrow, those who are in a different realm after settling their dues and debts in this world — their desires, their ideas and thoughts, the road they have indicated and defined — are these so lofty? And, those who are living, those who are suffering from heartrending pain and agony, do their hopes and desires amount to nothing? Will the desires of the dead obstruct the way of the living for all times to come?”²⁴ This opinion is so transparent and so much against the theory of eternal values and traditionalism that no further explanation is necessary. Again, in a small composition he has written, — “The endeavour to bring freedom

to one's country is neither narrow nationalism, nor chauvinism; it is to bring welfare for world humanity. Whenever, we talk of ideology, we must have in mind only higher ideology, noble ideology or ideology for welfare. We must accept only the ideology of world humanity and never ever consider in terms of Indian ideology, Asian ideology, Hindu ideology, because that in itself is a sectarian and base ideology born out of a narrow mind and in no way can be a universal ideology free from bondage.”⁵ He criticized Rabindranath's habit of making a plea to 'God's Will' in political discussions and said, “It appears that in this world there is no one who believes in God more than Rabindranath. A thousand political arguments and deliberations of this poet, supremely devoted to 'God', crashes on “His” closed doors to be dashed to the ground, just as in the ancient era the powerful and lofty philosophical arguments and deliberations used to lose their way after reaching the portals of the *Vedas* and were compelled to surrender. Rabindranath's earnest belief is that it is 'God's benevolent hand which is doing everything. We do not know what His wish is and I do not feel that for any reason whatsoever it is right to make a plea to God's will in matters of politics.”⁵ This is real secularism, the appeal to free politics from religious influences. For the same reason, he criticized Gandhiji and said, “Till now, it is the eminent disciples of 'God' who are delving in national politics. Those who should have been hermits have turned into politicians and it is because of this that India is so impoverished in politics.”⁵ Note, what apprehension Saratchandra expressed even in that era about religion-based politics. He opposed those who used to say that only the traditional ideologies of our country have to be followed, and no foreign ideology even if it is correct is to be accepted, and said, “It hardly matters whether an idea belongs to the West or North, or is even of this country or from outside, but the main point is whether it can bring welfare to the nation and to the country.”⁶

In the same manner, in the fourth part of *Srikanta* he showed that the *Vaishnavite* teaching 'Man is above all and nothing is above Man' or Vivekananda's words, – “Only he who loves the living truly worships God” — these religious teachings have become empty words and lifeless. Dwarika Das Babaji

was the head of the *Vaishnava ashram* in Muraripukur, where a number of men and women of the *Vaishnava* sect lived. Kamallata held the main responsibility there and she was virtually the centre of life of the *ashram* through her selfless service, caring and all-round efficiency in work; she was loved by all. Gahar was an honest, religious minded Muslim, a poet who wrote poems based on *Ramayana*, and donated his property for *ashrams* and mosques. When Gahar fell very sick and was practically on his deathbed, Kamallata rushed to nurse him back to health. For this ‘crime’, the *Gurus* of Dwarika Das instructed him to throw Kamallata out of the monastery, because her character had been tarnished. Srikanta being completely taken aback asked Dwarika Das, – ‘Do you yourself believe this?’ Dwarika Das replied, – ‘No’. Then Srikanta asked him, since Dwarika Das himself was the head of the monastery, why Kamallata had to leave. Helpless, Dwarika Das could only utter *Guru, Guru, Guru!* In other words, he was incapable of disobeying the orders of his *Gurus*, even though the allegations were false. Then Dwarika Das said, “After inflicting punishment on the innocent, I myself will not remain in the *ashram*.” When Kamallata was leaving the *ashram* taking nothing with her, the daily ritual worship of God was going on uninterrupted with songs accompanied by the usual musical instruments and the worshipping of God proclaiming loudly the love for all living beings. This is the final outcome of religion – there are rituals, but without any life. That religion has become merely a dead stinking corpse even in the villages — Saratchandra demonstrated this by raising a question through Ramesh in *Palli Samaj* (The Village Society), – “where shall I find that living religion in our ancient, solitary villages? If the very life of religion has been taken away, what is the purpose of leaving behind the dead body? The hapless rural society has embraced this discoloured and distorted stinking corpse as the genuine religion with all its zeal as a result of which it is being degraded day in and day out by its wet and slippery putrefaction.” Today this is many thousands of time more true than in the time of Saratchandra and you will definitely agree with me on this matter.

Again, he struck a blow at religious thoughts and ideas through wit and humour. Rajlakshmi asked Srikanta, – “Shall we be together in the next life also?” Because according to the Hindu religion the relation between husband and wife transcends an infinite number of lives. Srikanta replied, – “How is that possible? I may be born as a cow in the next life due to my deeds in this world, while for the same, you may be a Brahmin’s daughter.” In another conversation Rajlakshmi stated that the tie of marriage between Hindus lasted eternally by the strength of *Vedic mantras* (sacred words). Srikanta countered that the tie lasted not because of the strength of the *mantras* but because of the blind faith in them. While they were arguing, some fracas broke out between the bride’s party and that of the groom during a marriage in the adjacent Dom (so-called outcast community) locality. The people pleaded and virtually dragged Rajlakshmi and Srikanta there to settle the dispute. The priest representing the groom alleged that the priest on the other side, who is representing the bride is uttering wrong incantations because he was chanting, — “*Madhu Domaya Kanyaya namoh, Bhagabati Domaya Putraya namoh*” (Salutation (Pranam) to daughter of Madhu Dom, Salutation (Pranam) to the son of Bhagabati Dom). The priest representing the groom announced in a resounding voice that the marriage stood annulled as wrong *mantras* had been chanted. Thereafter, all acknowledged his objections and requested him to utter the real *mantras*. He declared that nobody in the whole locality except him knew the real *mantras* and then he chanted the real *mantra*, – “*Madhu Domaya Kanyaya Bhujyapatraya namoh, Bhagabati Domaya Putra samprasdanang namoh*” (Salutation (Pranam) to daughter of Madhu Dom with birch-leaf, Salutation (Pranam) to the son of Bhagabati Dom with bestowal). By this ‘authentic’ *mantra*, the marriage was finally solemnized. Srikanta and Rajlakshmi suppressed their smiles with an effort and observed all this. On their return, Srikanta told Rajlakshmi that the priest’s *mantras* did not appear to have been what had been uttered by the sages but even then, none of these had failed. It was in this manner that their mothers and grandmothers had been married. Their marriage ties are still very firm — not by the force of the

mantras but by the force of blind faith.

Again, on a different aspect, he did not believe that literature and art would remain absolute and eternal. In this matter too, he differed from the great poet Rabindranath. While Rabindranath wrote in a poem, “A hundred years hence, who is it that is reading my poems with such interest?”! Saratchandra on the other hand said, “In the era which has not yet arrived, in that unborn future, whether my writings would retain their value is beyond my perceptions. If my present realization of truth does not match with that of the future, it has to stand aside. If its lifetime ends, it will be because its skeleton will be necessary to create more noble, more beautiful and more comprehensive literature. Without being aggrieved, I would rather pray that such lofty literature be born in my land and in my language which could make my creation insignificant”.⁷

There is a novel by Saratchandra by the name *Grihadaha* (The House on Fire). I will speak on it and in doing so, I will also mention about a philosophical outlook in the novel. I shall not go into the details of the novel. This novel deals with the problems of the lives of modern women. Saratchandra was for modernity, he had lent his support to women’s liberation and women’s education, but at the same time he had observed that in the name of ultra-modernity, an extremist trait was appearing. He had sounded a note of caution about it too. Saratchandra had realized that since Renaissance was incomplete in this country, the words democracy, individual freedom, women’s liberation had appeared merely as words and were not accompanied by a genuine democratic frame of mind and democratic values. Rather, compared to the so called ‘modernism’ devoid of any values, the old religious values had at least some life still left in them. The principal character in *Grihadaha*, Achala, was a woman belonging to an educated Brahmo family in Calcutta* and she had fallen in love with Mahim, who came from a poor family. Mahim’s close friend

* Brahmo religion was founded by Raja Rammohan Roy in a bid to reform Hinduism. Education was more common among the Brahmo women than in the traditional Hindu society.

Suresh was also attracted to Achala. I shall not go into the details of the action-reactions and contradictions in the novel. Achala finally chose Mahim and married him. However, Achala was aware of the attraction Suresh had for her. Saratchandra shows that after her marriage to Mahim, logically Achala did not approve Suresh's attraction for her, rather hated it, but in spite of that when she observed that Suresh was trying to free himself from this weakness and remain away from her, she felt a pang and was sad. In other words, she had accepted her husband; another man was attracted to her; rationally she did not support it but when the latter tried to free himself from this attraction, she felt pain and she suffered. On the one hand, a part of the mind did not support, while on the other, another part enjoyed this attraction. This is a peculiar psychological contradiction. In *Grihadaha* Saratchandra has demonstrated what problems are created when the free relation between man and woman in today's life is not subject to restraints of taste and culture. This is an important problem of present times.

Saratchandra, himself however supported free and unfettered exchanges between man and woman though within the limits and bounds of good taste and culture.

Suresh, on observing Achala's contradiction formed the idea that Achala desired him but was unable to come forward because of Mahim. Suresh loved Mahim also. He thought himself as being weak and Mahim to be strong and courageous. In this way, he reasoned that Mahim would be able to tolerate the blow resulting from Achala's loss, but he could not. Achala was then taking a sick and debilitated Mahim, out of Bengal to restore his health. Seeing Suresh in a faded and withered appearance, she suddenly told him to accompany them and the peril stemmed from this. Subsequently, where they were to change trains, Suresh misdirected Achala and left the train with her, leaving behind Mahim, fast asleep in the train. At first, Achala did not comprehend that Mahim had been left behind, but when she realized this, she became furious. This she had not wanted, nor had she thought about it in this manner. In the beginning, she thought that Suresh might have murdered Mahim and so she became more infuriated. Suresh too became furious

and raised a counter-allegation that it was Achala who was responsible for this as she had tempted him. This is the incident, in the main.

Then began another life – where would they go? Where would they live? They finally found shelter in the home of a large-hearted Brahmin, Rambabu. Suresh and Achala had to resort to falsehood calling themselves husband and wife. An affectionate Rambabu wanted to taste Achala's cooking but she tried to evade the issue because one day when things would become public, this old religious Brahmin would be dealt a severe blow. However, after being requested repeatedly, she finally had to cook for him. Thus Achala began staying in Rambabu's house, where she tried to save herself from Suresh by avoiding to live in the same room with Suresh. Rambabu thought that there was some misunderstanding between them, may be they had married without the approval of their respective families. Rambabu had come to love Achala as his own daughter and he thought that if they had a separate home the misunderstanding between them would come to an end and so he arranged a separate house for them. Rambabu thought that they would live happily separately but Achala was very reluctant to go, though she was unable to tell the reason for this. Finally, she had to go due to Rambabu's insistence. Rambabu had observed that when she departed, Achala's countenance had become pale and so becoming apprehensive, he visited their house on the very first day. Achala wanted to spend the whole night with Rambabu chatting and talking with him, but Rambabu, seeing that it was quite late practically forced her to go to Suresh's room. In the early hours of dawn, Rambabu observed Achala, sitting in front of him like a lifeless black statue shedding a flood of tears. Ultimately she had been unable to save herself. Through this, Saratchandra showed that even though Achala and others like her had obtained modern education, being brought up within the liberal *Brahmo* religion, they had missed the main essence of education; it was not the inner essence of morality, but merely its outer shall that they prized. In her own mind Achala too accepted chastity as a virtue, but even though she was brought up in a so called modern way, ultimately she failed to preserve

it. Saratchandra wrote in *Grihadaha*, “Their lifelong teachings and beliefs belittled the inner ethics and values as trivial; thinking of these as a prison they have always put the external world above everything..... That unspoken inner religion of the mind had never become living to her. Thus, in an effort to conform to the external mores, she could only cling to the outer cloak of modesty of a genteel woman; she could not shed this false sense of propriety, and could not tell, revealing her true self, ‘*Jyathamashai* (revered uncle), after the Himalayan falsehood I have committed, nobody would believe in me anymore. I know that from tomorrow, out of hatred, you will not look at my face again ...Even all these I can bear, what I am unable to bear is your terrifying affection of today’.” So, out of shyness, she could only cling to the outer cloak of genteel modesty and when Rambabu insisted that she goes to Suresh’s bedroom, she could not tell him that they were not husband and wife. Had she revealed this to Rambabu, he would have forsaken her out of hate, but she would have been able to preserve her chastity which she considered as precious. This problem as posed by Saratchandra does not belong to that period only, but is relevant in the present times also. When free mixing between men and women is bereft of a high standard of taste and culture and when formal sense of dignity assumes more importance than genuine dignity, many such accidents tend to occur in life centering around unintended incidents or unwanted persons. Saratchandra also showed that the danger came in the guise of a friend, in the form of Rambabu’s love and affection, which she could not disregard. If the truth was admitted, what would Rambabu think — this thought became so paramount that she chose to take this dangerous step, though very unwillingly. Another valuable education by Saratchandra is through Suresh, who said, ‘Till now, I used to think that possession of the body will lead to love, but now I see that a loveless bodily possession is an unbearable burden.’ In other words, he showed how wrong are those who think that mere physical relation would result in love; this very loveless physical relation one day turns into an insufferable burden. Saratchandra presented another theme in respect to Achala’s beauty, which once attracted Suresh and

which is there no more - because it is like the beauty of a morning dew drop on a leaf glittering in the sunshine, a beauty which is immediately lost when somebody out of greed tries to take it into his hands. Likewise, the beauty that had blossomed in Achala was due to the love between Mahim and her, and was destroyed by Suresh when, out of greed, he deluded Achala and misled her.

Finally Suresh died while nursing plague-stricken patients, and before his death, with deep repentance, he told his friend Mahim – ‘I did not realize that Achala loved you so much. Neither did I get her love, nor did I let you have it. All I did was to destroy such a beautiful thing out of greed.’ Achala went to the place where Suresh was on his deathbed, and Rambabu too went there to comfort her and he naturally thought that Achala as wife would perform the last rites. Achala, overcoming her hesitations, finally said, ‘I am not his wife.’ Rambabu got a severe shock on hearing this unthinkable confession. Somehow he waited till Suresh’s cremation was over and then leaving Achala behind at the cremation ground, he madly rushed to Kashi (Varanasi) for penance; because he had lost his religion due to this extremely sinful woman. It is here that Saratchandra wrote, – “What kind of religion is this which can neither save itself, nor others from oppression, rather every strength has to be constantly poised to save it from death? What is its necessity in human life? What kind of religion is this which does not honour love and affection, which does not hesitate for once to leave behind a helpless woman in the jaws of death, which, from an injury, turns such an affectionate old man into such a cruel one out of blind vengeance? He, who has accepted such religion, what truth is he carrying?’ This is the question which Saratchandra has raised in the background of this incident. In this manner, Saratchandra dealt a blow to the old religious ideas, beliefs and traditions. Again, he showed that in our country, where even democratic movements have not yet been conducted in the right manner, the old religious values were surviving to an extent till then. He showed that Mahim who had modern education, even though he came to know of Achala’s deep love for him from Suresh, could not accept her as his old values stood in the way of his accepting

Achala's going away with Suresh and their living together; as a result he finally went away, leaving behind Achala in a helpless state. In the end, it was Mrinal with her religious values who came forward to arrange real shelter for Achala.

Selfishness and consumerism in the name of modern outlook

In the so called modern and educated society, an excess of consumerism, addiction to sensual pleasures and luxury, and external pomp and splendour have appeared, but not a sense of responsibility and duty, which is still existing in the rural society, among the uneducated mythology-believing rural people. In a short story *Anuradha*, Saratchandra treated this subject in a different manner. The story is like this. The estate of the landlord in a village had been auctioned off and it had been purchased by one of his ryots who had his own business in Calcutta. The son of the previous landlord, Gagan, had become the administrator of the estate, but he had fled with all the collected rent instead of paying it to the new landlord. Anuradha, his unmarried elderly sister, lived in the Zaminder's old palace in a shabby small room, trying to bring up the young son of her sister. Vijay, the youngest son of the present owner had come from Calcutta along with his young son who had lost his mother; the purpose was to search for Gagan, and to evict Anuradha and take full possession of the house. Without going into the details of the main story, suffice to say that Anuradha started looking after this orphaned adolescent boy from Calcutta with deep love and affection just like her own sister's son. When the time came for Vijay to return to Calcutta, his son was reluctant to go, clinging to Anuradha. When a surprised Anuradha queried why the child was reluctant to return to his home in Calcutta, Vijay replied that perhaps because he would not get in Calcutta what he got here - the love and affection. Being very young in age, the child was unable to express in articulate form, but he had realized this with the whole of his being. Anuradha said that she had heard that he would soon get a step-mother who was a graduate with a B.A. degree. Vijay replied that her aunt too was a graduate with B.A. but unfortunately within the B.A. syllabus there was no

subject dealing with the care of a step-son or of someone else's son. Anuradha asked, – 'What about caring for the old father-in-law and mother-in-law?' Vijay answered that it was even more unthinkable. Anuradha became apprehensive and said, 'Then you don't allow your son to go into the hands of such a heartless mother.' Vijay replied, – 'There is no cause for worry because even if I want to put him in such hands, he will automatically slip down into the ground.but for this do not consider her to be heartless too; taking the side of my future wife, I strongly protest your words. In their refined, tasteful, indifferent neglect, there is no trace of clinging kinship. Do not fault her on that account.' Here, Saratchandra wanted to show that the interpersonal relation in the wealthy and educated families in the city is just like a tree without roots; the leaves, barely after turning green, becomes yellow. Such is their life and so he says satirically that within the B.A. curriculum, there is no subject of caring for a step-son. In other words, so-called modern education has come, but without real democratic culture and genuine modern outlook. The same topic he has raised in a different manner in *Grihadaha*. The democratic revolution and modern education which frees humans from selfishness and makes them benevolent and magnanimous, teaches ethical motherhood and fatherhood and awakens a sense of social obligation and dutifulness, that has not taken place in this country; true enlightenment and democratic values have not come. Though Saratchandra stood for women's education and women's emancipation, he showed that, the manner in which a village woman with very little education, but steeped in old values can warmly embrace someone else's son with motherly love and affection, is beyond the capability of a city-bred step-mother with a B.A. degree. In the so called modern life of the cities, there is formal etiquette, outward show of ostentation but without genuine compassion, parental affection and sense of duty and responsibility. The crisis portrayed by Saratchandra in that time has become more terrifying now. Today, under the influence of rotten bourgeois culture, the educated and earning sons are amassing wealth, constructing palacial houses, purchasing luxury cars, enjoying foreign tours, indulging in various pleasures in

costly hotels, but are throwing out their old and helpless parents from their homes or at the most, sending them to old age homes to avoid the responsibility. There are even cases where some mothers in wealthy families are not even taking care of their own child, not to speak of a step-child. They are leaving the children under the care of professional attendants, while they are going out to have a taste of modern enjoyments of life.

***Palli Samaj* is a testament for widow marriage**

A question I have faced is though Vidyasagar had implemented widow marriages, why Saratchandra in his works did not go for it? First, permit me to read out from one of Saratchandra's speech and then I will discuss about it. "That widow marriage is immoral is ingrained as a blind prejudice into the very marrow of a Hindu. It is not possible for any writer, to create beauty in the eyes of a devoted Hindu by portraying marriage of a widowed heroine. Immediately, on reading this, his entire being would recoil with distaste and aversion. All other virtues of the book would pale into insignificance for him. When Late noble Vidyasagar, with the help of the Government succeeded in enacting the Widow Marriage Act, he had considered in terms of the religious scriptures, but did not judge the Hindu psychology. As a result, the legislation was passed, yet the Hindu society was unable to accept it. Such a noble and great effort by Vidyasagar became fruitless. He had to bear with a lot of slander, vilification and persecution, but on that day no contemporary litterateur had stood by him".⁴ Please note this. Implicitly this is his criticism of Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath too. Then he goes on saying – "May be they had no true sympathy with this novel idea. May be they were afraid of being ostracized by the society. Whatever be the reason, this idea of that period was halted in its track; it could not percolate in all the strata of the society and reach the inner sanctums of the households. Had they not been so indifferent, undeniably they would have had to go through all the slander, vilification and persecution but today, perhaps we would have been able to witness a different picture of the Hindu social system. On that day, in the eyes of the Hindu, the beauty created would have

appeared as ugly, cruel and false, but half a century later, today, maybe our eyes and heart would have been enchanted. This is what usually happens. This is the best solace of a young writer in his arduous literary struggle. He knows that today's insult is not the one and only thing in his life. He will also have his place in the future, may be this will happen a century later, when on some day eager and agonized men and women would stretch out a million hands to remove all the stigma of today."⁴ Since his predecessors did not do it, the main aim of Saratchandra's literary practice was to create a mental framework so that Vidyasagar's ideas and dreams attained social acceptance. How difficult it is has been shown by Saratchandra in his novel *Grihadaha* (The House on Fire) through the character of Mrinal who is a widow. There Mrinal tells Achala, –"Marriage to you is only a social ruling....but to us it is religion. We cannot change it any more....Those who brought the legislation on widow marriage did not think of taking our consent. They thought that the moment it becomes a law, we would line up to get married." Saratchandra showed that the old traditions have become an inextricable part of flesh and blood, so deeply entrenched that a change in the mental frame is necessary. Saratchandra wrote the novel *Palli Samaj* (The Village Society) to hit out at this point. Here, the love between Rama and Ramesh has been portrayed with subtle artistry and craftsmanship. Rama had never expressed her unsaid emotions for Ramesh which she had suppressed. She had approached Ramesh twice, only to talk about some other matters. It was Ramesh, who after being terribly hurt expressed his emotions to Rama. On that day, Ramesh, being injured by Rama's behavior, reproachfully said, 'In my childhood, I heard that we were to be married, then when this did not take place, I felt sorry for myself. After spending so much time outside, when I returned to my village, I thought that, working under your shelter, I would be able to do some welfare activities for the village, and I was doing some reform work when of all persons you finally joined hands with my enemies.'" Rama heard him and it wrenched at her heart but she controlled herself, and did not tell Ramesh anything. The two did not talk any more anywhere else. In this novel, Saratchandra has

described a scenario at the pond at Tarakeshwar (a place of pilgrimage) in such a manner that it wrings our heart with pain. Rama, coming out after bathing in the holy pond, observed Ramesh standing at the *ghat*. Ramesh had gone there to meet his relatives and at first he failed to recognize her since he had seen her in his childhood and later in the village he always saw her veiled. Moreover, he did not expect her to be there. In reply to Rama's query, Ramesh replied – "My cousins were supposed to meet me here but they have not come". Rama then asked – 'where will you put up then?': Ramesh answered 'I have no place here to stay.' Rama told Ramesh to wait and went to the temple to offer her prayers, then came out and said, 'please come to my home'. Seeing Ramesh hesitate as he had failed to recognize her, Rama understood his dilemma and introduced herself. After lunch Ramesh was taking rest in an adjacent room, Rama came to enquire about his well being. Ramesh told Rama, 'Sitting alone, I was just thinking – in this short space of half a day, you have changed my entire life completely. Nobody has invited me for a meal in this manner before and nobody else has ever fed me with such care and warmth. Further, for the first time, I have come to learn from you that there can be so much joy in such a simple thing as having a meal.' Here Saratchandra writes in *Palli Samaj*, – "On hearing this Rama was stirred and her entire body began to tremble but she controlled herself immediately and said, 'It will not take much time for you to forget it and even if all this come to your mind some day, it will appear to you as a very insignificant matter. It is my good luck that at least you will not speak ill of me on your return to the village.' Ramesh sighed deeply yet again and responded slowly – 'No Rama, neither shall I speak ill of you, nor shall I sing your praise. To me, this day is beyond all reproach and praise.' Rama did not answer. She remained silent for a while and then getting up, quietly went to her room. There, in the solitude, large tears coursed down ceaselessly from her eyes." What a poignant portrayal of a woman's unfulfilled choked love! In this way Saratchandra has been able to create much pain in the minds of discerning readers. He raised this question in the readers' mind – why they are not being able to

come together? He conveys, ‘try to fathom, why I am unable to unite them’. Those who have read this book are aware that using Rama as the scapegoat, the fiendishly shrewd landlord Beni struck out at Ramesh again and again. Threatening Rama with calumny and social boycott, he forced her to make false deposition as witness against Ramesh, as a result of which he faced a prison term. Rama knew very well that Ramesh was not carrying a knife and nor did he intend to or attempt to use it but nevertheless she testified in court that she did not know whether he was carrying a knife and she was also not aware whether he had used it. She had to say this under duress, otherwise Beni Ghoshal and the other heads of the community would make her a social outcast; nobody would attend her social functions, like her brother’s sacred thread ceremony. This is what happens in every village where the Zaminders and landowners wield power. In the court, an anguished and astonished Ramesh could only keep on staring at Rama’s face. He did not even allow his lawyer to cross-examine her, nor did he permit an appeal to be filed in a higher court out of hurt sentiment. In those days, the Zaminders had the power to exert such pressure, and today, this role is being played by the rich village landowners and the leaders of the parties in power. They are the influential persons in the villages who corner people, harass them and implicate them in false cases. The most pious character in *Palli Samaj* is Beni’s mother, whom both Rama and Ramesh used to address as *Jathaima* (eldest aunt). A devout character with integrity, representing religious values, always immersed in *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Geeta*, she represents the religious values. Looking at the mortally ill Rama, her face tormented with repentance, she realized where lies the real pain of Rama. She was going away to Kashi, as she did not want a son like Beni to perform her last rites. She was taking Rama with her, realizing Rama’s pain for which there is no remedy in this society. Saratchandra raised the question regarding Rama through the words of this deeply religious *Jathaima*, – “Why did god send her to this world with so much beauty, virtue and goodness, why only burden her with such a heavy load of sorrow and why cast her out of society in spite of

being innocent,? Is this a divine plan to some end or is it merely the whims of the human society? O Ramesh, today perhaps there is no one more pitiable than her on this earth.” Through whom did this meaningful question was raised? It came to the mind of *Jathaima* who is always engaged in reading religious scriptures like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Geeta*. In this manner, he succeeded in awakening the deeply religious mind of such a person, to raise this question, so that this question arises in the minds of the readers in every home, and the empathic readers begin to desire the union of Rama and Ramesh. Otherwise what was his difficulty in writing two more chapters? What was the problem in depicting marriage between Ramesh and Rama? Thereafter either Rama or Ramesh, after their marriage could have easily said, “Let us go and live in Calcutta as there is no place for us here.” They could have left for Calcutta to live in a rented house, but Saratchandra had no intention of doing this. Why he did not want this – the answer is provided in *Charitraheen* (The Fallen Character) where Sabitri tells Satish, her lover — “A love, which the society does not view with respect, cannot by any means be made honourable and dignified by any husband”. Saratchandra desired that the society should acknowledge this type of love; he wanted the outlook of the society to be changed. However, the so called communists voiced the criticism that he showed problems only without suggesting solutions. Saratchandra answers that the solution is in your hands only, change the society, change its outlook – and instead of discharging this responsibility they accuse him to be suffering from petty bourgeoisie vacillations and as a result of which he hesitated to depict union in this type of love. They are such communists! That is why the left movement is in such a miserable state. They did not for a moment think that Saratchandra, who depicted the union of Rohini and Abhaya in *Srikanta*, who created an extraordinary and bold female character like Kamal in *Shesh Prashna* (The Final Question); who in *Srikanta* had made Rajlakshmi to finally accept Srikanta as husband after going through various hesitations and inner conflicts — why did he not allow Rama and Ramesh or Satish and Sabitri to come together? He did so deliberately, as he

wanted questions to arise and yearning to be created in the society for such a union. It is for this reason that he, with superb skill, raised this question through the deeply religious *Jathaima*.

Women are not born to worship their husbands as god

Those who have gone through *Srikanta* are aware that Annadadidi is an extra-ordinary character. The husband is like God to a faithful wife, his religion is her religion – this is the ruling in Hindu religion. Annadadidi’s father married her off to someone who had settled in his father-in-law’s house. He got involved in some illicit affair and fled after murdering Annadadidi’s sister. Many years later, Annadadidi found him, disguised as a snake-charmer in front of her house, playing with a snake. Nobody else recognized him, but Annadadidi did not fail to recognize him as her husband. Sahuji was at that time a snake-charmer but even so he was her husband and according to Hindu religion whatever be a husband he is like God to a faithful wife. So Annadadidi left her home and went away with the snake-charmer – this incident is described in the first part of *Srikanta*. I am not entering into the relation between *Srikanta* and *Indranath*, the remarkable picture of which *Saratchandra* has etched into the composition of this novel. About Annadadidi, *Saratchandra* says, in deep respect and awe – “like a fire smouldering under ash.” What deep respect and love the two boys *Indranath* and *Srikanta* had for Annadadidi? Again, I will not go into a detailed description of her deep love and affection for these two and which *Saratchandra*’s pen has so vividly portrayed. Annadadidi, in a helpless and wretched state after her husband’s death, left behind a letter addressing *Srikanta*, describing the story of her life and went missing. *Indranath* sometimes used to catch fish by stealing and sold them in order to help Annadadidi financially. Annadadidi did not want to entangle them any further with her misery and so she went away, leaving behind the letter, and also the money given to her by *Srikanta*. In the first part of the novel *Saratchandra* raised a question regarding Annadadidi through the words of young *Srikanta* uttered in deep anguish, – “O! God, what judgement is this of yours? In this country of ours, the land of *Sati* and *Sabitri*,

where you have ordained infinite misery of a wife for the sake of her husband in order to glorify the nobility of Sati-Sabitri before the society; then why is my *didi* made to suffer such shame and humiliation? Why is such a chaste woman, pure and shining, tarnished with false allegation of infidelity and is permanently exiled from the society? What have you not taken from her? You have robbed her of her faith, her religion, her family, her society, her honour and dignity; you took from her everything. She should be on the same pedestal as Sita, Sabitri, Sati; but how do her father, mother, relatives, friends and foes look upon her? As a fallen woman, as a prostitute! What do you gain from this and what benefit does society derive?" Thus Saratchandra forcefully lashed out at the feudal concept of the middle ages that the husband is the god of a chaste woman and his religion is her religion. Again, in *Shesh Prashna* (The Final Question), he raised a question through Kamal – "On the outside, the flame of 'Satidaha' (immolation of widow) has been quenched by the British Raj, but inside, its fire is still blazing as before and turning things to ashes. How shall this be extinguished?" Saratchandra showed that in the existing bourgeoisie society even the feudal outlook in respect to women was dominant and women too were victims of this mental make-up – that is, chastity is the only ideal in a woman's life, it is her ultimate fulfillment and nothing else matters. However, in respect to men, there is no such measuring index.

Abhaya — the rebellious bold woman

Again, in the novel *Srikanta*, Saratchandra created a bold character Abhaya. She was left back in her village, while her husband went off to Burma for employment, but he neither made any inquiries about her for a long period nor sent her any money as a result of which, she became helpless and a destitute. A decent man in the village, Rohini babu, loved her, but at first she did not accept this love. However, it was with Rohini babu that she went to Burma in search of her husband. With the help of Srikanta, she found out her husband's address and then came to know that he lost his job at Srikanta's office itself on charges of corruption. On condition that he would take back Abhaya,

Srikanta reinstated him in his job as a result of which Abhaya went off with her husband, and Rohini babu was left alone. Later, when Srikanta went in search of Rohini babu in his house, he was surprised to find that Abhaya had come back. He had not expected Abhaya to be there at that time and she, on seeing him all of a sudden, abruptly fled to her room and closed the door shut, but then again came out almost immediately. Here Saratchandra wrote, – “Suddenly Abhaya opened the door, stood before me and said, ‘Forgive me Srikanta babu, I ran away at first because I could not get over the centuries-old blind beliefs, but do not make the mistake of thinking that it reflects my true feelings or there is any feeling of disgrace or shame in me. You must be curious to know what happened.’.... She then uncovered her right arm and pointed to where the lash of a whip had cut deep into the flesh. She said, ‘There are many more like this which I cannot show you... Being a mere wife, without seeking my husband’s permission, I dared to come to this far away place and disturb his peace – no man can tolerate such audacity in a woman, and this is the punishment for that.....May my husband live in happiness with his Burmese wife, I do not grudge that; but I would like to know from you if a husband who denies every right of a wife only by the power of the whip and drives her out of the home alone in a dark night, stripping her of all rights, do the wife’s duties and obligations still remain valid only by the force of Vedic mantras.It is a simple fact Srikanta babu that without rights, there can be no moral obligation of duty and he had taken the same marriage vows along with me and uttered the same mantras, but like meaningless ravings they could not put the slightest resistance to his base instincts and desires. These meaningless words, immediately after being uttered vanished and turned into falsehood – but do the same vows bind me in fetters and put the entire onus on me only because I am a woman?..... A wife whose husband has committed such a grave crime – is it the ultimate fulfilment in such a woman’s life to atone for her husband’s crime throughout her life and be condemned as living dead? One day, I was made to utter the vows of marriage — are these utterances the only truth in my life, and everything else is false? These terrible injustice, cruelty

and oppression – are they of no consequence to me? Do I not have rights as a wife?...just because a husband who is cruel, a liar, a man with abominable habits drives away his wife for no fault of hers, would her womanhood be a failure and become crippled?” At that time, Saratchandra, through Abhaya posed these questions to the society as an accusation on behalf of the humiliated wives, cast out by their debauched and tyrant husbands. Again, he made Abhaya to boldly declare, – “You have seen Rohini babu and you are not unaware of his love for me. I cannot destroy the entire life of such a man and earn for myself the label of a virtuous wife. ...You may think what you like of me. You may call our children by any name you please. But I can tell you one thing certainly – that our children born out of pure and blameless love would not be inferior as human beings to anyone in the world. They would not consider it a misfortune to have been born of my womb. Their parents probably would have no worldly goods to bequeath to them but their mother would surely instil this belief in them that they were born in truth and they have no other wealth greater than truth.... Whether real humanity among men is greater or the judgement of his origin of birth – this I have to verify.” Those who accuse Saratchandra of being afraid of showing consummation of love, – what would they tell about this portrayal of Abhaya’s character? Again, through Abhaya’s character, he has depicted that when genuine love is consummated; it does not make a person self-centered and selfish, rather it makes him/her noble, benevolent, serving others even at great personal risk. When plague struck as an epidemic in Burma and many began to flee leaving behind their afflicted friends and relatives, Srikanta, suffering from some symptoms felt that he had contracted plague. Before going to hospital Srikanta went to Abhaya’s house to meet her. Saratchandra wrote that at the sight of Srikanta she did not allow him to go to hospital and could only say, – “Who else but me would care for you? Who else has more responsibility than me here?” Srikanta did not agree and said, “Look, I am already on my way to death, but before my death, I cannot anyhow, bear the thought of placing you and your new home in such a danger....Just allow yourself to harden your mind for a moment

and firmly tell me – ‘All right, go’. Abhaya, instead of replying immediately in these words, held Srikanta’s hand and led him to lie down on the bed and dried her tears. Then gently moving hands over his hot forehead she said, “Had I been able to tell you to leave, I would not have set up a new family. From this day my new home has truly turned into a genuine home”. Did Saratchandra bring this up for the sake of a story only, or did he show how sense of duty is born out of genuine love? You will have to ponder over this. Again I reiterate that after listening to the words of Abhaya, do you still think that Saratbabu has raised issues without finding any solutions for them or that he has failed to depict the consummation of love due to his petty bourgeois weakness?

In the novel Srikanta, Saratchandra presented a female character, Sunanda through a small episode, where this woman for the sake of upholding justice leaves her home, forsakes all comfort and sacrifices all wealth to find shelter practically under the open sky with her husband and infant son. Sunanda’s childless elder brother-in-law and his wife had reared her husband as a son; their family also was quite prosperous and well to do in the village. Sunanda’s father was an impoverished Sanskrit pundit and her husband used to study as his student before marriage. On observing that the boy was honest, Sunanda’s father gave her in marriage to him and went on pilgrimage. Before leaving, he advised her to always pursue the path of truth. Incidentally, he had taught Sunanda various religious scriptures. Sunanda’s elder brother-in-law and his wife used to love her as their daughter and after her son was born, they used to care for him with great affection and fondness. It was a happy family, when suddenly one day, like a bolt of lightning, an incident took place. The wife of an impoverished family in the village came and informed that just before his death, her husband had requested Sunanda’s elder brother-in-law to take care of his family and his landed property, but her elder brother-in-law had taken possession of the land and was enjoying the fruits. On hearing this, Sunanda declared unless this land was returned, she would not live in this house anymore. Her brother-in-law having deep affection for Sunanda did not expect this

from her, became furious and told that she could do whatever she desired. Sunanda, taking her husband and infant son went out of the house, leaving everything behind and finally took shelter in a nearby dilapidated hut almost like cow-shed belonging to her father-in-law. Her family thought that after her anger was dissipated, she would come back within a few days but she did not return. Her family began sending her food but she returned them. Saratchandra, through the words of Srikanta, in respect to Sunanda's character says –"That which I had come to observe on numerous occasions, but even forgotten repeatedly came to my mind now — that in the society, nothing can be ascertained about it by viewing only its exterior. Who would not point to that dilapidated hut as the lair of stray animals only? Who would guess that inside those shabby rooms, such classics like Kumar-Raghu-Shakuntala-Meghdoot* are taught and cultivated! ...who would comprehend that inside that hut a young woman of this country, in an effort to uphold the dignity of justice and truth is voluntarily going on accepting penury and sufferings....In fact, how meaningless in this society is poverty unless one acknowledges it. This is an ordinary woman belonging to an ordinary family in Bengal who is without any distinction; she is neither beautiful, nor has ornaments or expensive clothes. Take a look at the shabby, broken down hut and you will only find the shadow of poverty and penury — but that it is only a mere shadow and nothing more immediately becomes apparent to the eye. It is as if, by the hint of a glance, this woman has forbidden the entry of and removed afar the misery of poverty – it can not dare to force its way in. Yet, a few months earlier, she had everything – a house, servants, relatives, a well-to-do family; there was no want of anything; but in order to lodge a stronger protest, than the intensity of the injustice perpetrated she had left everything like leaving behind a worn out clothing; it did not take her even a day to make up her mind; yet, looking at her, there is no sign of any hardness or severity in her." Through this character of an ordinary rural woman, Saratchandra succeeded

* These refer to the Sanskrit *Mahakavyas* of great Kalidasa, *Kumarasambhavam*, *Raguvansham*, *Avijnana Shakuntalam* and *Meghadutam*.

in establishing a bold example of how justice and self-respect can be upheld. Sunanda is an extraordinary exemplary character to those who realising injustice concede to it, closing their eyes on the plea of this or that difficulties.

Deep pains for the child widows

In Saratchandra's literature, Annadadidi, Rajlakshmi, Kamallata, Sabitri, Kiranmayee – all these characters had committed lapses, being battered by many oppressions of the male dominated society. Saratchandra here posed a question – who is responsible for this? In his last days, when he went to Dhaka, Mohitlal Mazumdar came to visit him and asked about his well being. Saratchandra told him, "I do not want to live any longer" – Mohitlal was taken aback and replied, – "Saratda, I did not expect this from you". Saratchandra said, "Mohit, you are young and so you cannot understand me. There may come a time for any man when he wants to be relieved from life itself". Then he said, "Many do not understand me; they think that I bear an animosity to Bankim (Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay – famous litterateur) and that I have dishonoured him. I have no intention of doing so, rather, I only wanted to say that the prejudice regarding women, which is deep-rooted in our society, is not true but very much a lie. You may be a great litterateur, but you have no right to call a tragedy in a woman's life as a stigma!" Then he related an incident in his own life. He said, "In my childhood, there was a woman in my village, like my elder sister (*didi*), who was Brahmin by birth and a child-widow. She was only twenty seven but she used to rush to help people of the whole village in their time of distress and crisis or when anyone fell sick. There was not a single family in the village who had not got service and care from her. She bore a spotless character but all of a sudden something happened (note how respectfully and with what decency he puts it). How this pure and innocent *didi's* heart was pierced by the station master became evident when *didi* lay on her deathbed and the coward fled out of fear. Once *didi* had nursed everyone in the village but during her death nobody came forward to offer her a glass of water. The whole society had abandoned her, nobody even

touched her dead body and so the *doms* (so-called lower caste undertakers) had to dispose of it.”⁸

True love can transform a degraded person even

There was much pain within Saratbabu about incidents like this. Again, in the novel *Dena Paona* (Debt and Repayment), Saratchandra demonstrated how the boldness and qualities of character of the person whom you love changes your whole life even if you have gone astray. Now the difficulty is that, you will not be able to follow me if you have not gone through the novel and it would take too much time if I go into details of the story. Let me briefly relate the tale. Jeebananda was a tyrannical landlord, cruel in nature, who used to terribly oppress his subjects and at the same time was a debauchee. He had a craving for money and lust for new women every day. Saratbabu has shown that for twenty years, this horrifying state of affairs was continuing. So many women were violated, their modesty outraged, their honour and grace trodden under his animal lust, but these did not leave any mark in the heart of this wicked and ruthless man. How cruel he was is evident when he could tell Shoroshi, the priestess of the temple – ‘Why are you crying? You are a mendicant (*sannyasini*). Those who cried before in my room had husbands and sons. Since, you have nobody, why do you cry?’ Such is the character of Jeebananda Chowdhury. At a very young age, the girl named Alaka, today’s Shoroshi, was compelled to marry Jeebananda under dire circumstances, but on that very night, Jeebananda being chased by the police fled. They had not met again and now she, Alaka of the early days, is the head priestess (*bhairabi*) of the *Chandi* temple, famous and known to all as Shoroshi. In the beginning neither could recognize the other because they had met only once, long back in the night of their marriage. Later on, Shoroshi came to know that Jeebananda was her husband, but when Jeebananda was tyrannizing his subjects, Shoroshi tried to organize them to fight boldly against the landlord. Jeebananda and his accomplices succeeded in evicting Shoroshi from the temple by spreading slanders against her in order to grab the temple property. However, when Shoroshi decided to leave, Jeebananda began to

suffer from an internal contradiction and told Shoroshi, – ‘Till now, I have always thought of how I will get rid of you, but now I am thinking how I will hold you here.’ This is because Shoroshi’s firmness and determination, her courage, honesty and unblemished character, her boldness and self-restraint had awakened within Jeebananda for the first time respect for a woman, which slowly turned to love. The influence of this love brought a radical change in Jeebananda’s life. Here Saratchandra demonstrated what love is capable of. He who used to drink like water became a total abstainer and as a result fell ill. The doctor told him – ‘Sir, you have to take some alcohol, otherwise you may have a heart-failure.’ Previously Jeebananda had resolved to stop drinking, but had failed, and resumed his drinking habits. Now he replied, – ‘Doctor, every time I have failed, but my heart did not. If today my heart fails, let it do so, but I will not fail. I will not consume alcohol anymore.’ Jeebananda began to return back all the land which he grabbed from his subjects. He told his subjects to fight against himself in court. See, how love and respect for a noble character changes a man. All this was due to Shoroshi’s boldness of character and her intense devotion to truth and it was for this reason that she had won a place for herself in Jeebananda’s heart. The change that took place in Jeebananda was only due to love and respect for her. As the subjects of Jeebananda were preparing for legal redress in court in order to recover their lost lands, Jeebananda himself became ready to accept any punishment. His former accomplices, the wealthy landholders, his stewards, administrators and cashiers become panicky, but could not restrain him; ultimately they rushed to Shoroshi and took refuge under her to save themselves from this danger. On hearing everything, Shoroshi rushed to Jeebananda to take him away. Jeebananda did not agree and said, ‘If I go away now, how will the problems of my subjects be solved? How shall I repay the debt of my ancestors?’ Shoroshi placed her head on Jeebananda’s bosom and said, ‘That is my liability. The debt will be repaid by generation after generation.’ What is the significance of these words? In the field of literature, those who cannot think of love between a man and a woman without a

bedroom scene will fail to comprehend this.

Again, read the novel *Devdas* written by Saratchandra at the mere age of twenty-one. As far as my knowledge goes, the only character of a prostitute in Saratchandra's literature is Chandramukhi, not Rajlakshmi, not Sabitri and not the many other characters. When Devdas, stricken with grief took to drinking, his friend took him to Chandramukhi's place. When Chandramukhi tried to hold him, he said, 'Don't touch me. I am not yet drunk; I hate the likes of you.' This spiritedness of Devdas, his aversion to her way of life brought a change in Chandramukhi's life and she began to love Devdas and her love was extraordinary. Even though, this story was created by Saratchandra at a very early age, it does not appear to be artificial in anyway. Chandramukhi being attracted to Devdas finally abandoned her profession, stopped wearing cosmetics, expensive dresses and ornaments became absolutely impoverished but did not return to her old profession and underwent a complete transformation. The transformation became so complete that to a dying Devdas, the faces of Parbati and Chandramukhi appeared to merge together. In this way, at that early age, Saratchandra succeeded in creating a character with extraordinary skill. You will get many such instances in Saratchandra's literature about what real love is capable of and how it can transform a person.

Again, why Shoroshi left the honourable seat of the chief priestess of Devi Chandi of Chandigarh and went away to finally accept her previously married husband; why did a priestess, a *bhairabi*, profoundly devout, accepts family life — to elaborate the reason behind this, Saratchandra showed that behind the strict and austered life of a priestess filled with religious rituals, unknowingly to Shoroshi, the natural and normal desires of a woman's life was hidden. To tell in Saratchandra's own language — "Till now, she had accepted her life, as she had lived it. That she is the priestess of 'Chandi Devi' carrying with it the responsibility, authority, wealth and also its share of danger....Twenty years of Shoroshi's life had flown along the familiar track, determined by fate, and she had accepted it without doubt as the life of a priestess. Not for a single day had

she thought of her own life as the life of an woman. She had been a mute and indifferent witness to so many shades of happiness and sorrow; of so many varieties of hope and assurance; so many failures and so many beautiful day-dreams from so many women, some of them younger than her, some older and many of the same age as her. In order to gain the grace of the goddess, they have expressed to her secretly and in whispers, so many words over so many years.all these, she had observed, but she had only failed to realize from what depths of a woman's heart have emerged these mournful expressions of want and reproach which have entered her ears for so many years. The structure and character of these were such that they had appeared to belong to a different world that she had till now no reason or necessity to know or to be acquainted with. But here and now, in this dark, abandoned house, it was for the first time that the necessity struck her mind." How it happened was also shown by Saratchandra very skillfully. He has aptly demonstrated that a devout religious life full of religious practices is no natural achievement. When Jeebananda Chowdhary, the Zaminder on the one hand and Janardan Roy, a wealthy landowner on the other were trying to forcibly remove Shoroshi from the temple, Haima, the daughter of that very Janardan Roy and her husband Nirmal, who was a barrister had stood by her during that hard time. Haima had loved and respected Shoroshi from childhood and she used to ardently believe that she had got a son by the grace of Shoroshi. Haima had taken leave of Shoroshi to accompany her husband to Lucknow, where he used to work. In Saratchandra's language, Shoroshi is now thinking about Haima – "Her sleeping son has woken up and is now sitting up on the bed and crying. She has to quieten him and put him to sleep again, but would there be any respite for her even after this? So much of work is still left undone. Keeping away from his sight she will want to look after her husband's dinner, so that there is nothing amiss; she will awaken her sleeping son and feed him milk so that he does not go hungry; then she will have her own dinner and after spending the night somehow she has to prepare for the journey at dawn; there are so many necessities, so much to organize and pack; her husband, her son,

her servants and others accompanying her will embark on the journey depending on her; because in this long journey she will have to provide for all the necessities of the others and so she has to think about everything and take *those necessary things* with her. Shoroshi had never compared her life with others, nor had she felt any necessity for discussions on this but even then somebody, someday with skillful hands had completely organized in her mind, the thoughts about all the responsibilities of a wife, all the liabilities of a family and all the duties of a mother. That is why, though she actually does not know anything, she virtually knows everything; without ever having to learn anything, she knows that she can discharge all the duties of Haima as perfectly as her; all these were in her thoughts....then suddenly, like a flash, it reminded her that she is the head priestess of Chandigarh. There was no other woman, more honoured and respected than her in this region. She felt that she would die of shame when it came in mind that she herself deeply engrossed for a moment so the trivial thoughts of the family life of an ordinary woman.” Though she was ashamed at that time, the thoughts that worked within Shoroshi’s mind were in essence the hidden desires of a woman’s mind through the ages. Thus, when finally Shoroshi gave her signature voluntarily in order to remove herself from the position of head priestess, Haima’s husband Nirmal, was very surprised and asked her, – “you have not even given me an inkling that you have resigned from the position of head priestess and have signed the necessary papers.” Then he asked whether she had acted on the advice of her ‘Fakir Saheb’ whom she respected as her father. Shoroshi replied, ‘No, he knew nothing till this morning and these papers that you are mentioning were framed by me last night. Only the name of the person who encouraged me to do this, I shall keep it a secret.’ The name that Shoroshi wanted to keep secret was of Haima whose ordinary family life as a housewife had made Shoroshi’s life as a honoured head priestess insignificant in comparison. Again, Haima’s husband Nirmal was becoming infatuated and attracted to Shoroshi because of her strong personality after coming in close association with her in course of work; Shoroshi sensed it and considering it improper and unbecoming, she did

not encourage it, even to the smallest extent and out of love and gratitude for Haima, she helped to free Nirmal from his infatuation through mild reproof mixed with wit and humour.

Again, even though continuously involved in arduous and ascetic religious practices, a woman scorched with remorse is unable to get any solace – Saratchandra exposed this truth through the character of Kamallata in the fourth part of ‘*Srikanta*’. The story of Kamallata’s life is also very tragic. Kamallata used to live with her businessman father in Calcutta. She became a widow at seventeen and at the age of twenty-one, she had an affair with one of her father’s employees as a result of which, she conceived. Jatin, younger to Kamallata in age, was the nephew of that employee and used to live in Kamallata’s house; he had great respect and love for her as his elder sister. Kamallata having no other recourse requested Jatin to bring her poison so that she could commit suicide. Jatin, in tears refused and said that suicide was sinful. On hearing this news, Kamallata’s father, a devout *Vaishnab* broke down in sorrow, but finally on the advice of his *gurudev*, he decided to take Kamallata elsewhere and marry her off with that employee, Manmatha through the exchange of garlands, according to their religious practice. Kamallata thought that Manmatha loved her and had voluntarily decided to marry her, but after the exchange of garlands, she came to know from her maidservant that Manmatha had only agreed to the marriage after taking twenty-thousand rupees from her father, alleging that he was in no way responsible for Kamallata’s condition, and it was Jatin, who was responsible. Manmatha had called Jatin and had informed him that Kamallata had alleged this. Jatin had so long firmly believed that his elder sister, Kamallata could not utter any falsehood, and on the face of this unexpected false allegation, he committed suicide in anguish. On seeing this ugly, cruel character of Manmatha, full of falsehood, Kamallata in utter repugnance abandoned him and to free herself from intense remorse took to the life of a *Vaishnabi*, wandering hither and thither, and finally finding shelter in the monastery at Muraripukur. Regarding her, Saratchandra’s, in the language of Srikanta, who was highly impressed by her, wrote, – “Look at that *vaishnabi* Kamallata!

Her life is like the tearful song of the ancient *vaishnaba* poets. There is no rhyme in the verse, the grammar is wrong, the language has many defects, but the song is not to be judged by this. She is like the tune of their own *Kirtan* songs. He whose heartstrings are resonated can alone understand it. She is like a painting composed of different colours of the twilight sky. She defies any naming, any branding; it is futile to try to define her according to any formula of art.” What Saratchandra said about the style of functioning of Kamallata who was devoted to the monastery is educative to all those who are in charge of any organization. Srikanta says (in Saratchandra’s words) – “In these two days that I stayed here, I began to observe that Kamallata took the entire load of the monastery on her own shoulders, but from behind. Her authority extended to all matters and over everybody but this authority flowed through such easy discipline and was based on such courtesy, affection and above all skill tempered by modesty, that there was no room for any envy or malice.” In fact, Kamallata had become the centre of life of the monastery winning everyone’s affection and confidence and the respect of her juniors. Even then, she wants to go away from here. One of the reasons is Gahar, a calm, simple, philanthropic and kindhearted poet, who loves Kamallata, but he has never expressed it nor he expects anything. Regarding Gahar, Saratchandra therefore wrote, – “Kamallata knows that even if he loves her, he will not utter a single word anywhere fearing that some guilt may touch. Kamallata probably wants to go away so as to spare this calm and composed man completely unconcerned about himself from the futile heart anguishment of his eternally thwarted love due to insuperable obstruction.” Though, an important factor, this is not the main cause and it is to highlight the main cause that I have raised the subject of Kamallata. In this regard, Saratchandra has himself written, – “Even though fully absorbed in the worship of the divine love (*rasa*), probably her own womanhood has not yet tasted the fragrance of divine love and this helpless and unsatisfied desire in its uninterrupted quest for the imaginary materials is today exhausted and stricken by dilemma. At some point of time having gone astray her confused mind is today

unknowingly searching for support whose whereabouts the *vaishnabi* knows not. So, today in a dazed state, she is earnestly praying for the redemption of her past offences in front of the closed doors of her early life.” Srikanta was the name of Kamallata’s first husband and so Saratchandra wrote, in Srikanta’s own words, – “From her words I can understand that today, she wants to sail her boat for the unknown by using my name Srikanta as capital” Saratchandra, here demonstrated that, even though involved deeply in arduous religious practices, the *vaishnabi* is unable to free herself from the sense of guilt on the one hand, while her own natural womanhood is also not satisfied on the other.

Old religious values become ineffective with change in time and society

The revolutionary Bhupendra Kishore Rakshit Roy requested Saratchandra, – ‘You have depicted all the Zaminder characters in your novels as tyrants but there are good Zaminders too, who are religious minded and benevolent to their subjects. So, please write a novel with such a character’. Saratchandra wrote the novel *Bipradas*. This was a period when there was influence of Hindu revivalism in the country and this novel has some latent influence of that. In the early part of the novel, Saratchandra attempted to create a model character of a religions minded Zaminder, deeply respectful of his mother, but in the end, Saratchandra’s secular humanist mind came to dominate. Dayamayee is Bipradas’s step-mother, but she loves and trusts him more than her own son Dwijadas. At every step, she depends on Bipradas and he too respects her deeply; her instructions are obeyed with reverence by him at all times. However, a new problem arises which endangers this relation. Bipradas had given his sister in marriage to his wealthy friend Shashadhar. His sister and her husband came there to take part in the religious ceremony held by Dayamayee in respect to the consecration of a pond. Bipradas in course of conversation came to know that his sister’s husband had usurped his property by fraudulent means and so, naturally an irate Bipradas asked Shashadhar to leave. Shashadhar, a shrewd man told his wife –

‘Either return with me to my own house or make up your mind to remain here forever, as you will be debarred from entering our house.’ In tears Bipradas’s sister rushes to her mother Dayamayee and complains that *Dada (elder brother)* has banished her husband and herself from the house. Dayamayee knew nothing about this; all of a sudden the festive house was as if thunderstruck. In the beginning, Dayamayee could not even imagine that Bipradas could act in such a manner. But when she asked him, he answered in the affirmative and said that he had indeed driven Shashadhar out of the house. This unexpected reply infuriated Dayamayee and she said, ‘Let the issue of just and unjust remain for now. But my own daughter and my son-in-law would become forever strangers— this I cannot bear. Bipin, you have to apologize to Shashadhar’. Bipradas replied, ‘Mother, that is impossible for me’. His mother retorted, ‘I do not know what is possible or impossible, but this I know that you have to apologize’. Bipradas remained silent. Becoming angrier she said, ‘Bipin, this house does not belong to you alone; your father has not bestowed on you this right to drive anybody out from this house. They will remain here’. Saratchandra wrote –

”On one side, her daughter and son-in-law while on the other side her own Bipin, whom she had nursed and reared to adulthood; a son closer to her than any other relative, a solace to her in times of sorrow; a shelter to her in times of peril; a son who was dearer to her than her own life. He would not waver from his resolve, but would rather die from this dishonour. She realized that a bottomless chasm was yawning at her feet; there was no redress to this mistake, no way of returning back; the outcome of this was infallible as fate, remorseless and inexorable. Though she realized all these, she could not control herself. She went ahead, driven by the storm of uncontrollable anger and vanity and harshly said, ‘This is unfair obstinacy on your part Bipin. I cannot allow my daughter and son-in-law to become perpetual strangers for your sake. You can do whatever you wish. Come with me, Shashadhar, you do not need to pay any attention to him’.”

After this, Bipradas left his house with his wife and infant son. Dayamayee never imagined that her son, always so obedient, would defy her instructions in such a manner.

Hence, being blinded with anger; she forced her son, dearer to herself than her own life, to leave the house. That a son has publicly defied her caused such anger that it dulled her senses to differentiate between just and unjust; it also did not allow her to act as a truly religious, affectionate mother who can differentiate between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong. On the other hand, Bipradas was habituated to obey the instructions of his mother, but his sense of justice and self-respect led him to disobey her order and finally to leave his home. In this way, Saratchandra showed that ancient values based on religion can no longer safeguard family unity or the close relation between mother and son. Justice, rationality, dignity and honour are higher than obeying the instruction of the parents. On the other hand, blind anger can render inactive, at least for some time, rationality, self-restraint, love, affection, compassion and cause great disaster.

Saratchandra, in this novel also depicted that even the relation between husband and wife based on old religious values is marked by a deficiency. Bipradas and his wife Sati are very much dutiful and responsible to each other and there is not an inkling of misunderstanding and bitterness between them. Bandana, modern in outlook and educated, is the younger sister of Sati and she is very much respectful to Bipradas. Unexpectedly, one day Bandana asks Bipradas, 'Do you really love my elder sister? You have been married in your childhood, so many years ago; have you never thought otherwise?' Bipradas in reply asks a question, – 'Do you suspect me Bandana?' Bandana replies – 'I do. You are a great man; but even then only human. I feel that somewhere, you are very much lonely and there you have no companion with whom you can share. Is this not true?' Bipradas does not give a clear reply to this question, but instead says – 'Bandana, my religion is to love my wife'. Bandana asks, – 'You are honest up to the limits of your religion, but is there nothing greater than that in the society?' Bipradas answers – 'I do not see any'. Bandana says, 'I know and I can see that *Mukhujjemashai* (Bipradas). Shall I tell you about this?' Saratchandra wrote, – "Suddenly Bipradas's countenance turns pale; his fair and bold face turns completely

bloodless and he extends both his arms towards her and says – ‘No, not a single word more, Bandana’.” In this way, Bipradas avoided facing the truth, but later in some other conversation, he admits to Bandana his sense of want. When Bandana expresses her love for Bipradas, and he asks Bandana to channelize this feeling in a different way, then she wipes her tears and requests him – ‘I beg you, *Mukhujjemashai*, do not tell anyone else about my feelings’. Bipradas replied – “No, I will not tell this to anyone and you, yourself have come to know that there is no one whom I can tell”. Then Bipradas asks:– “But, Bandana, how did you come to realize that in this vast society, I am completely alone?” Here, Saratchandra showed that Bipradas and Sati’s marital life is based on religious values, dutifulness, and responsibility – all these are there but there is an absence of intense and close companionship and the sweetness of love between husband and wife. As a result according to the mental make-up of the modern times Bipradas is very much lonely.

In this novel Saratchandra has succeeded in establishing another educative example. Bipradas’s personality, his boldness and strength of character; his integrity and dutifulness have overwhelmed Bandana and awakened a love for him in her which she reveals to him with some diffidence. Bandana is a beautiful woman, highly educated, intelligent, a woman full of self respect and with a cultured mind. According to the convention and practice of that time, had Bipradas so desired, he could have easily married Bandana and keeping her in Calcutta, he could have comfortably lived with two wives. As you all know, now-a-days, there is a section of people who do not opt for marriage, rather they are content in living together. Bipradas however, though acknowledging Bandana’s love for him refuses to walk along this degraded path. When Bandana, in an agitated voice asks –“Had this been a false, how could I have succeeded in gaining at least a small amount of your love? Have I not gained this at least”? Bipradas replies –“Of course, you have gained my love, Bandana. You have gained a lot of it too. Otherwise, how could I take food prepared by you? Again, on what right, could I accept you nursing me day and night? But, should I step down into disgrace and degradation and drag you down with me?

Shall I break the trust of those who have always held high their heads, looking towards me in complete trust and allow them to bow down their heads in shame? Is this what you are telling me to do?" In agitation, Bandana asks – "Is this never going to change?" Bipradas replied – "But is there really any need for change? I have loved you, so let this love for you remain in my mind. From now on, it will give me solace in sorrow, strength during my weakness; when I am unable to carry the burden, I will definitely seek your help; let this be also reserved for you." Bandana is not satisfied and cannot accept this appeal and so Bipradas, in order to persuade her tells her again — "I wonder, why you can see only one road to consummate your love while all other roads remain invisible to you. That is why you failed to comprehend my words on that day. Go and take a look once at my younger brother Dwija and his *boudidi* (wife of Bipradas). If your sight is not gone, you can easily observe how respect has merged into love. In wit and humour, in affection and indulgence, in close intimacy, she is not only his *boudi* (sister-in-law), but she has become his friend and also his mother. We are related in a similar way, but why could you not accept me in this way, Bandana?" Sometimes similar problems appear in the lives of some people, but Saratchandra demonstrated how to tackle these problems without showing weakness in love. This is also a contemporary problem.

Senseless anger or fury can be catastrophic in one's life

Again observe that when life is afflicted with problems, when unreasonable anger agitates the mind, man becomes bereft of his senses, loses rationality. That which never appeared in normal times in his mind, which he never wanted to express, in the height of anger, he expresses that very thing, which results in disaster. This phenomenon is shown in Saratchandra's novel-*Bindur Chhele* (Bindu's Son). Bindu had a very sweet relation with her elder sister-in-law and she had cared for her sister-in-law's son as her own. Amulya was the boy's name and Saratchandra showed that in trying to bring him up Bindu had contradictions with others. Amulya's mother had given her son some money in secret so that he could pay his fines at school.

In the meantime, a boy distantly related to Bindu's husband, a cousin had come to visit them. This boy belonging to the town had already fallen victim to a number of vices, starting from smoking and Bindu was apprehensive that Amulya would be spoilt by his association. Due to that agony Bindu became furious and hit out at her much beloved sister-in-law, "Why did you give (Amulya) him the money?" Her sister-in-law replied, "Do I not have the right to give him money, you too do it sometime". Bindu retorted, "What money I give, belongs to my husband, but whose money are you paying?" At that time, the family was running on the earnings of Bindu's husband who had a legal practice. Bindu went on, – "Are you not aware, on whose earnings the family runs?". Bindu's sister-in-law became infuriated and said, "Where were you, when your husband was a child? His elder brother, at that time did not own more than one piece of clothing, but even then, with what care and concern he had brought up your husband and today you make this biting insinuation. I will not touch the food of this house anymore and if I touch it, let me then look upon the countenance of my dead son". On hearing this, Bindu fainted. Saratchandra showed that when anger is not controlled, what she had never thought of, never even dreamed of expressing, her tongue uttered those very words at the height of anger. See, what happens when we cannot control our anger. What we have no intention of telling, what we have not even thought of, such words are uttered by us frequently. Even though temporarily, the family split up. Here Saratchandra had focused on a very valuable aspect. Bindu's husband's elder brother, in other words, her sister-in-law's husband was trying to persuade his wife, "If you do not learn how to forgive, why then do you claim to be elder?" This is valuable ethics; ethical expressions like this are found scattered in page after page of Saratchandra's literature. How finely he has brought out a valuable ethical expression through a small dialogue, "If you do not learn to forgive, why are you senior?" Who is really senior, only he knows how to forgive.

How a severe injury, particularly a sudden and unexpected injury from near and dear ones, suspicion and unreasonable anger generated by distrust can make a person bereft of his

senses, unable to differentiate between good and bad and finally pushes him/her to the brink of catastrophe is elaborated by Saratchandra through Kiranmayee's life in his novel *Charitraheen (The Fallen Character)*. Kiranmayee was extremely intelligent and she had succeeded in mastering a knowledge of philosophy from her husband and was well versed. However, between husband and wife, there was not a trace of love and affection in their marital relation, but instead it had been as teacher and student all along. Her mother-in-law was of deceitful character and very selfish. Kiranmayee got nothing from her except insults and physical assault. Denied on all sides, this injured and deprived woman came to love her husband's friend Upendra who was honest, noble, philanthropic, free from greed and affectionate, even though she knew that he was married. Kiranmayee also knew that she would get no reciprocation from Upendra as he used to love his wife Surabala with his whole being. Though Kiranmayee's love for him was embarrassing to Upendra, he used to respect and trust her as a result of which he had entrusted Kiranmayee with the responsibility of rearing up his younger brother to adulthood, a brother whom he looked upon as his own son though he was a distant relative. Kiranmayee too had taken up this responsibility happily and began discharging it, and thereby Dibakar became a support in her lonely life. Dibakar too looked upon his *boudi* (wife of elder brother, that is Kiranmayee) as his own mother. Finding Dibakar ready to learn from her as a student, Kiranmayee began to pour out her knowledge in philosophy, her opinions about literature amidst conversations, dialogues mixed with wit and humour. Days went by and it did not strike Dibakar that the day of his college admission had gone by and that college had started some days back. Suddenly, one day, Upendra came by and after coming to know of this became very displeased. When he asked Kiranmayee's mother-in-law, the reason of Dibakar's lapse she maliciously replied that these two grown up man and woman, Kiranmayee and Dibakar were continuously spending their time behind closed doors, being constantly engaged in conversation, intimate talks and whispers and it was only natural that Dibakar had forgotten the day of his college

admission. Upendra believed this and became very angry. When Kiranmayee gave him food like any other day, an angry Upendra told her, “Today, I am having a feeling of revulsion in taking the food, which you have touched”. An injured Kiranmayee became incensed and hit back with the retort, “Be it anger or be it hate, but aren’t all your feelings in relation to Dibakar? But to a widow, both of you and Dibakar are in the same position. You are merely guessing how far his relation with me has progressed. However, on the other day, when I, myself expressed my love for you, you did not push away your plate with such abhorrence as today. When it is your own turn, do the sweets handed out by an immoral woman become more tasty with the sweetness of love?” Upendra controlled an irresistible anger and replied, “*Bauthan* (wife of brother), let me remind you that my Surabala is still alive. She says that whoever has loved me is incapable of loving anyone else. Depending on the assurance of her only, I gave Dibakar in your hands. I thought that in these matters, Surabala never makes any mistake.” Before, he could finish, Kiranmayee raised her two hands and intervened – “Please stop *Thakurpo* (brother of husband), how can you so unhesitatingly believe that it is her mistake and not yours?” Upendra suddenly stood up and said, “It is getting late at night and I do not have any more time to argue with you. I know you. But certainly you should know that you will not be able to love anybody ever – you lack the capacity for that. You can only cause disaster. Shame on you, in the end you enticed Dibakar”. On hearing this, Kiranmayee’s face turned pale, as if somebody had shot her in the heart. As an infuriated Upendra was rushing out of the main gate, there was a tug on his *chadar* (wrapper) from behind, in the darkness. He turned his face and Kiranmayee, in the blink of an eye, bent down, clutched at his feet with her hands and frantically said, “My heart is being rent apart *Thakurpo* (brother of husband) – lies, lies – all these lies! Shame for me, how could you think of me as so vile!” “Be silent. You have given quite a dramatic performance. No more”. — Upendra said and in furious hatred, he forcefully pushed away Kiranmayee’s head with his feet. She let go of his feet and fell down in an awkward position. Not even looking at her and shouting abuses like

“godless, impure, viper”, Upendra rushed out. Kiranmayee sat up in a speed of current. She tried to shout something, but no sound came from her throat; she looked out of the open door in the darkness and her eyes flashed as if spreading fire. After this, an insulted and humiliated Kiranmayee, fired by the flames of revenge became almost mad, confused Dibakar by acting out a play of love and in the next morning, almost forcefully took him aboard a ship to Arakan (Burma) with the help of her maid servant. When the ship was about to sink in a storm, Kiranmayee suddenly pulled Dibakar to her, embraced him tightly to her breast and said, “If this ship sinks, let us die like this. We will float together to the shore, people will see us, newspapers will print our pictures, your Upindada will see them, what a fun that will be *Thakurpo*”. Kiranmayee’s only thought in this was how much injury she could inflict on Upendra. Out of a revengeful attitude, and in an effort to lower Upendra’s upright head, Kiranmayee was play-acting a scenario of love with Dibakar, but she never thought of him as a lover, rather as her younger brother. In the beginning, Dibakar too was hesitant and uncomfortable, but slowly he began to be attracted to Kiranmayee. At this unexpected turn of events Kiranmayee was taken aback and in order to save herself from the newly awakened lust of Dibakar, she went through repeated psychological trauma and finally unable to bear it any longer told Dibakar to go away. An aggrieved Dibakar asked –“So, was it only to bring disaster on me, that you dragged me in this danger? Have you never loved me?” Kiranmayee replied, – “No. It was to bring disaster on somebody else and not you, that I brought this harm to you. And me? Leave aside my fate. I have committed a mistake all the way from the beginning and for this mistake, allow me today to bow down at your feet and seek an apology.” Afterwards, Satish, another character in the novel, courageous and simple, on the one hand trusted and loved by Upendra, on the other looked upon and loved as a younger brother by Kiranmayee, came to forcefully take back Dibakar and an unwilling Kiranmayee, who was repentant, self-reproachful and bruised all over, because Upendra was on death bed and wanted to see them for the last time. All of them

returned. However, on seeing Upendra's condition, Kiranmayee turned insane. Saratchandra showed that had Upendra not believed the words of the conspiratorial and evil mother-in-law blindly and had he not become infuriated and insulted and injured Kiranmayee in such a manner and even after that, had an incensed Kiranmayee not lost her senses and not turned revengeful, this tragic consequence would not have taken place.

Like everything love too undergoes changes

The novel *Shesh Prashna* (The Final Question) was authored by Saratchandra in the last part of his life. At that time, a group of young authors had started to indulge in vulgarism in the name of modern literature. He wrote this book as a guideline of what should modern literature be like.

This type of novel, dealing with complex philosophical theories on the one hand, while at the same time, retaining the literary beauty is perhaps absent in world literature. The pivot of the novel are two central characters, namely, Ashubabu, an old man on one side and Kamal, a young woman on the other. Ashubabu, a highly educated man is liberal in outlook, decent and free from superstitions; he has traveled widely in this country and abroad and is a tolerant and affectionate man; but he is a strong believer in eternal Indian traditional heritage. Kamal, on the other hand, though deprived of conventional education is nevertheless quite educated, rationalist, materialist and a believer in scientific process of thinking; she has a deep sense of self respect and is a non-believer of traditionalism and absolute truth. The entire novel consists of contradictions and debates between the opposing thoughts of these two characters. But Ashubabu loves Kamal like his own daughter and Kamal too respects Ashubabu like her own father.

To propound that love too is not eternal, that it is capable of undergoing change, Kamal at the beginning of the novel said, "Since one day I have loved somebody, it cannot change due to any reason or circumstances, — such fixed, static and insensate nature of mind is neither healthy, nor beautiful." Ashubabu had lost his wife in his youth and his enduring love for his dead wife

drew the respect of everyone. However Kamal did not share their views. Kamal said, “Once upon a time, Ashubabu used to love his wife but she is no longer alive. He can give her nothing, nor can he get anything from her. He can neither make her happy, nor can he cause any suffering on her. She is no more. The object of love is completely absent only memory that he once loved her remains. I am unable to understand, what noble ideology is upheld by continuously nursing this memory, and spending your life thinking that the past is only unchangeable truth than present.” These words hurt Ashubabu and he said, “But Kamal, the widows in our country have only this as the ultimate consolation. The husband dies, but the chastity in a widow’s life remains uninterrupted only by clinging to his memories. Don’t you recognize this?” Kamal replied, – “No. A phenomenon does not become noble by only giving it a lofty name; rather say that it is in this way that widows in this country are compelled to live their lives; say that a false has been stamped with the nobility of truth and they are being deceived in this way; with this, I will not disagree.”

Again, in another place in the novel, Ashubabu said, ‘Now Kamal, I am not comparing with anyone else but the distinction of our Indian heritage is not mere words. To lose this is an immeasurable loss. So many religions, so many ideologies, mythologies, so much of history, literature, fables and art – all these invaluable wealth are alive today only because they find a place within this distinction.’ Kamal replied, – ‘An ideology, even if it lasts for many years does not mean that it will be permanent eternally and when it changes, there is no shame in this....Hospitality is a noble ideology for us. How many literatures, anecdotes and stories have been written about it! To make his guest happy, Karna even killed his own son. Innumerable people have shed their tears over this anecdote, but today, this story is not only ugly, but loathsome too. The picture of the faithful wife carrying her leprous husband on her shoulders to take him to a prostitute* was an incomparable ideal once in the past but today this stimulates nothing but deep abhorrence in people’s mind.’ About Kamal, Ashubabu told

* A story extolling woman’s chastity in *Markandeya Purana*

Harendra – “You know her well. She has a deep aversion for anything ancient and her passion is to shake them to break up. My mind does not want to agree, age old prejudice is stricken with fear, yet words cannot be found and defeat has to be conceded. I remember that on the other day, I mentioned to Kamal the subject of self sacrifice by women, but she did not agree. She said, ‘I know the life of women better than you. Instinct is not born out of fullness but from the lack of it; it arises and empties the heart; it is not one’s nature but only one’s want. Let me remind you of self-immolation after the death of one’s husband. Those who were burnt to death and those who incited it; the vanity of both the parties reached up to the sky, thinking that nowhere on earth there existed such an example of such a noble ideology concerning the life of a widow. This word, self-sacrifice, has within it a measure of all-encompassing and ancient spiritual illusion, it causes intoxication; the seemingly extraordinary extra-material entity of the after-world completely overshadows the apparently insignificant material entity of the real world; it does not even allow one to contemplate whether there is anything that is good in it for the welfare for man and woman”. The Indian heritage, the age old traditions, the purity of widow-hood — all these still remain with a tremendous force in the form of arguments and as prejudices and superstitions, but observe how, even in that period Saratchandra was fighting against these old, obscurantist ideas. In that period, he has observed how ideas of chastity and practice of *Satidaha* (self-immolation of widows) for women created a fanaticism in the social mind and in women too; this phenomenon is real even today. In that novel, in the words of Kamal, he wrote, “The outward form of self-immolation of widows (*satidaha*) has been stopped by government orders, but inside the flames are still burning, scorching everything to ashes as before. How shall this be extinguished?” The cultural revolution which was necessary to free the social mind from the religious superstitions and injunctions of the male dominated society, and to liberate the society from the blind attraction to these conventions and practices was not waged then and is not being done even now.

The result is that though these practices have outwardly stopped, inside the minds of the people, and even that of women as well, in their very marrow and blood, a deep rooted belief in these persists.

Let the world rise up as one man with a single idea and purpose

In the novel *Shesh Prashna* Kamal said, “People are not to merely serve the distinctive features of a country, rather these distinctive features are honoured for the interest of the people. The main point is whether these distinctive features, in the present times are beneficial to the people or not. Barring this, all else is blind illusion. The distinction of a man is not larger than the essence of a man and when we forget this, we lose both the distinction and the man.” In other words, in a particular country, in a particular era, a set of distinctive features arise to fulfill the requirements of that era and these too undergo change with the change of that era. If we do not admit this, the distinctive features fail to retain any value and man too is harmed. Through Kamal, he has voiced another extraordinary statement – “Do I have to cling to the customs and practices of a particular country only because I was born in that country? Let its distinctive features vanish; why so much emotion? What harm is there if all the people in the world carry the banner of the same thoughts, same ideas, same rules and regulations? Is it the fear of losing one’s identity as an Indian? Let it be so. Nobody can obstruct one from introducing himself as a member of world humanity. Is that glory is less!” These are astounding words. This is very close to the idea of proletarian internationalism which we are fighting to achieve. I do not know if any other litterateur in the world before him has expressed so developed an idea.

Even in that era, Saratchandra in the novel *Shesh Prashna* fought the blind emotion to *ashram* (hermitage) and the abstinence Bramhachari life and through Kamal said, “I do not understand the philosophy of the *ashram*, but this I know that through the ridiculousness of enjoying deprivation, a lofty ideal can never be attained, instead some vanity and egotism are the

only consequences.” In another place, when Satish, defending the *ashram* life and the arduous practice of sacrifice said, “Do you intend to say that in the liberation struggle of our country, the arduous practice of religion and the practice of sacrifice are not necessary?” Kamal replied, – “Let the meaning of the term ‘liberation struggle’ be made clear.” When Satish began to fumble, Kamal smiled and said, “By liberation struggle of the country, you are probably indicating freedom from the chains of the foreign imperialist domination. If that be so, Satishbabu, let me give you my word that though I have not practised religion, nor have I been indoctrinated for this type of sacrifice, yet you will find me in the front rank, but shall I find you there too?” She further said, “Our motto is not abandon the society or practice renunciation. Our struggle is to live life to the full, appreciating all the splendour of the world. But where is such education in these boys? Barefoot, not even a decent shirt, only worn out clothing with unkempt and dirty hair, half rations in the day time; they are growing up only through renunciation. How can a motherland send the keys to her treasure house through those in whom the joy of attaining anything is eliminated?” Ashubabu, in one place in the novel, regarding attack of the six vices (*ripu*) said, “These are but the six vices (*ripu*); mankind must conquer them.” Kamal replied, “Merely by vilifying these as vices their powers will not diminish. Empowered by nature’s enduring covenant they are the possessors. Who has ever succeeded to blow away their existence by revolting against them? To commit suicide from the agony of misery is not the same as gaining victory over misery.” In this context, Saratchandra imparts an important education. Through forcible repression of sex, practice of piety is also hampered and various undesirable tendencies may appear – hinting to these Kamal said, “Like all restraints, there is truth in restraining sex, but it is secondary. Trumpeting it as the principal truth in life results in another type of lack of restraint. This makes one conceited. In the fanatic vanity of self repression, religiousness decays”. On this issue, Kamal, in another place said, “Restraint means submitting to one’s limits. Audacity of strength makes it possible to overcome these limits and then the restraint cannot be honoured. Indulging in excessive restraint is another form of lack of restraintment.” In reply,

Ashubabu said, ‘All this is your jugglery of words, the same pleading for sensual pleasures. This does not satisfy the hunger for pleasure and results increasing dissatisfaction continuously. That is why our religious preachers have enunciated that along that path, there lies no peace, no satisfaction and no emancipation.’ On hearing this, Kamal laughed and said, “Is it so written in the religious scriptures? Inevitably so. They very well knew that desire for knowledge enhances more through its more cultivation.” Ashubabu retorted, “No, this was not their intention. They had merely indicated that in the enjoyment of earthly pleasures, there is no satisfaction and the flames of desires are not quenched.” Kamal paused a while and said, “I have no idea, why they have made such a superfluous indication. Is it sitting in a village market and listening to an open theatre or is it listening to gramophone music, playing in the neighbourhood home, that in the midst of it, you suddenly feel that you have had enough satisfaction and want no more? Its true essence is not contained in the outward sensuous pleasures. It takes its origins from life itself and from there it provides the hope, joy and aesthetic pleasures of life all the time. Condemnation by religious scriptures fails to even enter the door, cannot even touch it.” Think for once, which litterateur or thinker at that time has expressed such modern scientific ideas?

The enemy of ‘good’ is ‘better’, not ‘bad’

In *Shesh Prashna* through Kamal he has placed another valuable education - “The enemy of ‘good’ is ‘better’, not ‘bad’.” Through this, he wanted to convey that in social life, everything, that is, politics, economy, ethics, ideology, culture and even principles of justice, is constantly changing, and in a particular era, that which is progressive and beneficial, in course of the process of motion and change becomes harmful and injurious, and is replaced by something which is better and more developed than before. As a result, that which brought good in a particular era has to go out of being yielding its place to that which is better and more progressive. It is in this sense that the enemy of ‘good’ is ‘better’. ‘Bad’ can cause damage only for some time, but in the end ‘good’ prevails and become victorious.

In this sense 'bad' is not the enemy of 'good'.

He has given another valuable education in *Shesh Prashna*, "Had misery been the final word in the chapter of a person's being miserable, it would not have been worth a farthing. It fully compensates the loss on one side by huge gain on the other and thus brings fulfilment." Burdened by misery and agony, many become depressed and break down, thinking that everything is finished. Saratchandra however said that the experience, the wisdom and the strength to withstand sorrow that a person gains through the experience of suffering and misery is a 'huge gain' and in the end the person is greatly benefited.

**There is no final question,
new problems bring new questions**

That there is no final question in life, that we must not think that nothing will take place after this – this was demonstrated by Saratchandra in the novel *Shesh Prashna*. Ashubabu was a believer in eternal love and though he had lost his wife in his youth, his love for her was still bright in his memories, as a result of which he could not think of anyone else in her place. However, in a most unexpected and unimaginable manner, love of a young woman appeared in Ashubabu's life at an old age. Nilima, the sister-in-law of Abinash was a decent woman with a clean mind, full of self dignity and having a caring nature. She had come to look after Ashubabu when he was sick and disabled and she was nursing him with great care. No one had thought anything outside this ambit, but all of a sudden her feelings became evident. Ashubabu had decided to go abroad again and before going, he was reading aloud a letter to Nilima, the letter being addressed to his manager in Calcutta. Nilima was sewing and getting no response from her, he looked at her and found her unconscious on the floor. When she regained consciousness after water was sprinkled on her face, she hurriedly sat up, her whole body trembled and then bending forward she put her face in Ashubabu's lap and started weeping miserably as if her heart was breaking. A few moments later, Nilima stood up like an arrow, did not look back and went out of the room and never met Ashubabu again. Describing this incident, a surprised Ashubabu told Kamal, "If it

was anybody else, I would have only suspected deception or self-interest, but even to think these things about her would be an offence. What an astounding frame of mind women have!” Then he said about himself, “Is there anything more surprising in this world than that of a young woman’s heart being attracted to this disease-ridden worn out body, this weak and exhausted mind, at the evening of one’s life which is not worth a penny even. However, this is the truth, and not an iota is false....But, I know for sure that this intelligent woman does not expect anything from me. She wants only to take care of me. She desires only to serve me, to nurse me so that the remaining years of my lonely life do not end in misery.....Kamal, in these two days, I have covered two hundred years in thought. I got my wife’s love and I know its taste, its nature and character, but that is only one aspect of a woman’s love, — this new idea has overwhelmed me. What obstruction it faces, what pain it undergoes, with what unknown preparations it readies itself for self renouncement. I could not accept it with open arms, but I do not know how to salute it, Kamal’. In this way, Saratchandra, by bringing in a new problem in Ashubabu’s life showed how erroneous were his previous thoughts. There is no final question in life. New questions arise, new problems are born and new solutions have to be sought. This is the law of the ever-changing world.

The central character in this novel is Kamal who firmly announces that there is no eternal love; love for a person at a particular time may later die and then it has to be cast aside, but if genuine love again appears anew in life, it should be welcomed happily. It is this Kamal, who can tell Ajit with firmness and conviction, “I do not belong to that category of women, who are the object of enjoyment of men”. In a male dominated society, men usually view women with this outlook, but Kamal being a bold and honourable woman deals a blow to this prevailing outlook.

Again, it is this Kamal, who under a special circumstance gives a proposal to hermit Harendra, that on hearing it he starts to tremble in fear. Harendra had gone to visit Kamal at her house and being absorbed in conversation, neither was aware that it had become late and at that hour at night, no conveyance

was available. Kamal proposed, "Harenbabu, since it is quite late at night and it is no longer feasible for you to return to your home, shall I make a bed for you in this room?" Harendra was taken aback and asked, "In this room? But what about you?" Kamal replied, "I too shall sleep here as there is no other room." Harendra blushed; Kamal laughed and said, "But you are a hermit; is there any reason for you to be afraid?" Harendra stared at Kamal with unblinking eyes. How can a woman utter these words? His absolute bewilderment came as a blow to Kamal. For a few moments, she remained silent and then she said, "It was my mistake, Harenbabu, go back to your home. That is why Nilima too, the object of your reverence, could not find a place to stay in your *ashram* and finally had to find a shelter in Ashubabu's house. You are only aware of one kind of relation between an unrelated man and woman in an empty house. That to a man, a woman is merely a woman, you know nothing more than this idea, even though you are a hermit." Through this incident, on the one hand Saratchandra showed what a bold, extremely courageous and spirited woman Kamal was, while on the other he established how pointless a hermit's life is. He showed that staying in a solitary house with a woman makes it difficult for a hermit to maintain his abstinence and so he tries to escape from the association of a woman.

Saratchandra also showed how this bold character too got a jolt from Rajen, a character occupying a small space in the novel. Kamal told Rajen, "People say that you are a revolutionary. If it is true, your friendship with me will be everlasting." In reply, Rajen put a question, "Of what use would this everlasting friendship be to me?" At this reply Kamal was surprised and hurt. She could clearly perceive a tone of doubt and negligence, and replied, "Friendship in this world is rare and friendship with me is rarer still. Do not undermine yourself by disrespecting someone whom you do not know." Rajen smiled and said easily, "I did not mean any disrespect. I only informed you that I do not understand the necessity of such friendship. I will not disregard this if you feel that it is necessary for me." Saratchandra described that at this reply "Kamal's face turned red as if somebody had insulted her by lashing her with a whip.

She was very much educated, extremely beautiful and highly intelligent, an object of desire for all men – this was her perception; her blazing spirit was invincible – this was her unwavering belief. In this world, women had hated her, men in fear had tried to scorch her with fire, even pretended to be indifferent to her, but this was different. Today, in front of this man, as if she fell down to the ground being injured....A suspicion arose strongly in Kamal and she asked – “Did you come to hear many things about me?” Rajen replied, – “They frequently talk about these”. Kamal queried, – “What do they say?” Rajen tried to smile and replied – “In these matters, my memory is really bad. I can hardly remember anything.” Kamal asked, – “Is it true?” Rajen replied, – “Yes it is true”. Kamal believed him and did not question further. She realized that till now, there was no curiosity in this man regarding the lifestyle of a woman. Whatever he heard, he had forgotten. She also realized another thing that though she had given him the right to address her in the familiar form as ‘*tumi*’, he had not accepted it and continued to call her by the more formal ‘*apni*’. In this man’s unblemished mind, a woman had yet to cast her shadow and so the covetousness to become intimate by calling ‘*tumi*’ was unknown to him.” However he was not a hermit following the practice of abstinence, nor did he believe in the *ashram*’s idea of ‘god’. On the contrary, the police searched for him in the *ashram* and so the authorities had asked him to leave. Kamal asked him to stay in her house, but she could not hold him there. Expressing her sorrow to Harendra regarding this Kamal said, ‘I cannot forget Rajen and this haunts me most when you come to visit me. The *ashram* had no place for him, but he would have been equally happy to live under a tree. I myself did not allow this and so I brought him to my home affectionately. He came to stay, but his mind did not settle and he left like the wind and the light, leaving every side empty. It was for the first time that I came to look upon a man in a new light.”

In the novel *Shesh Prashna*, though the scope of the character of Rajen, a revolutionary, is limited, it is nonetheless an astonishing creation. In that period, most of the petty-bourgeois or middle class revolutionaries, thinking a life of abstinence from

sexual and other worldly pleasures to be ideal, did not want to bring women into the revolutionary movement and even went to the extent of trying to keep them at some distance from it. Rajen does not belong to this category; no woman has the ability to bind him; but he does not stay away from women; nor does he live a life of abstinence. If his ideology or work dictates that a friendship or any other relation with a woman is necessary, he will accept it. Apart from this, unlike any other young man, he has no necessity for women either for other reasons or for purely physical needs. There is no desire in him to become intimate with any woman, nor does he have any curiosity about women. He does not even have any other personal needs. It is an impersonal approach on man-woman relation very nearer to a communist character, though, since Saratchandra was not a Marxist, his ideology and the main content of his character have remained hazy. It is unknown to me at least whether there is any such character in world literature.

It is in this novel that Saratchandra showed that Bela is highly educated in the conventional sense and though she is separated from her husband since he does not bear a good moral character, her self-respect however is not dented when she takes money from him to buy articles of luxury. The wives of highly placed officials like Malini, Bela and others pretend to disregard Kamal because these so called highly educated and modern women cannot stand before her, so they are fearful that they will become insignificant in comparison to her and thus this pretense of disregard.

Love is often absent in formal marriage

Kamal goes up to the extent that without love, no marriage can be called meaningful on the strength of merely a ceremony; the foundation of married life is mutual love, respect and empathy. Where these are absent, by dint of ceremony only, marriage does not succeed. This is not the same thing as the idea of 'living together'. In 'living together' love and respect is not there; neither the man nor the woman is ready to take up the responsibility of married life; they stay together only for enjoyment of physical pleasures. Kamal, on the other hand, is

ready to take up all the responsibilities of married life. Here, even in respect to physical relation, the main attraction is mutual love, respect and empathy. Kamal has only wanted to focus on the fact that a married life without love and respect is like a lifeless body. Not the mere ceremony, but mutual love and respect are the living essence of married life. Saratchandra wrote *Shesh Prashna* in the last part of his life for a special reason. He was worried by the cult of vulgarity in the name of ultra-modernism and he succeeded in creating a brilliant example of what should be the true modern outlook in literature. He showed that the attempt to develop scientific, rational, democratic and humanist outlook by shattering ancient traditionalism is true modernism in literature.

Saratchandra against vulgarity in literature

Saratchandra became very disturbed on observing the infiltration of vulgarity in literature. In a speech addressed to the so-called modern writers he said, “I can perceive that they very much lack the sense of what I feel as aesthetics (rasa)...The world of human feelings of the heart has many aspects but they continually harp on only one aspect; they are unable to stop. You feel pain in respect of only one aspect, but do you not feel agony for any other matter? ...The whole of human life, the entirety of human society, such a large nation in subjugation – all these are there, but do you not feel any agony over these? Does not your soul weep over any of this? What you are thinking as courageous is in my opinion lack of courage.”⁹ “This truth should always be remembered, in creation of literature, whatever is in there, if decency, elegance, good taste and cultured mind are repeatedly injured with unpurposive arrogance, the authors harm themselves even more than whatever harm is inflicted on Bengali literature. This is virtually another name for committing suicide.”¹⁰ “Art is not a replica of nature, but is created by man. Certainly not everything that takes place in the society can serve as the ingredient of literature. Accurately and precisely imitating nature or the characteristics of a human being may be called photography but shall it be a painting? In the daily newspapers narrations of many thrilling and terrible incidents are printed, —

would they be called literature.”¹¹ “The physical relation between man and woman is the foundation of all great romantic literature...like all foundations, let it remain in the hidden depths of literature. More deeper is the foundation and the more hidden it is, the stronger is the edifice; and the more the artist can weave artistry according to his fancy. The root of a tree, no matter how essential it is for its flowers, fruits and even its life, if it is dug up and exposed, the tree loses its beauty and its life dries up.”⁶ Saratchandra, in a letter addressed to the eminent singer Dilip Kumar Roy wrote, – “In *Shesh Prashna*, I have only tried to give some indication of what should be the form of very modern literature. ‘I shall go the extremes, I shall thunder out vulgar words’ — this frame of mind is not the central pivot of very modern literature — I have tried to provide a sample of that.”

Saratchandra on emancipation of women

Now, I shall read out some important statements of Saratchandra, so that you are able to understand his outlook regarding women’s emancipation. In one place, he has criticized the ruling by religion saying, – “The religion which has built its foundation on the sin of primordial mother Eve; which has held only women to be responsible for degeneration of the society — anyone who has come to believe in this religion from the core of his heart is incapable of looking at women with respect.”¹² At another place, he says, – “When a particular rule is established in a country, it does not hold sway overnight but it happens slowly. Those who implement it enjoy the rights of men. At that time, they are only men, not fathers, brothers or husbands.... They start inventing ways of how much can be extracted from women in what manner; then come Manu and Parashar, Moses and Paul; they write hymns and they formulate scriptures; then vested interest turns into religion and gains the right to rule with a firm hand.”¹² With respect to the women who have abandoned their families to run away with a lover, he has discussed the reasons in a letter, – “Once, I myself collected the histories of six to seven hundred such women who had left their families to elope with a lover. It is true that I earned a bad name throughout

the country, but I came to know with certainty that nearly eighty percent of these women were married and the number of widows were very few...It is with a much pain that a woman decides to defile herself. She does this neither being enchanted by the handsomeness of a other man, nor being driven by loathsome instincts. When they themselves spoil such a valuable life, they do not do this out of craving for some astounding thing outside.” In reply to a letter from Ilachandra Joshi, Saratchandra wrote, —“I know of many women, who never had any physical or spiritual relation with any other men except their husbands, but even then meanness, narrowness, malice and a thieving mentality can be observed in their character. Again, on the opposite side of the coin, I know of women who are prostitutes but whose hearts are full of selfless love of a mother and from whom compassion flows like a fountain”. It is for this reason only that Saratchandra in a bold voice declared, — “Fullness of humanity is greater than chastity”.⁴ He further said, “I consider humanism to be greater than the ideal of chastity. Chastity and womanhood are also conceptually not one and the same”.¹³ On the question of what is worth of womanhood in a male dominated society, Saratchandra lashed out with a strong criticism against the then society and wrote in *Narir Mulya* (Worth of Women) — “What is the worth of a woman? In other words, how much and to what extent is she affectionate, caring and serving, or faithful and silent in her misery? That is, to what extent would she be convenient for a man so that he would be happy to have her? And how beautiful she is? That is, to what extent can she satiate the lust of a man and keep him satisfied? There is no other method but this to fix the worth of a woman and this I can prove by going through the history of the world.”¹²

From ancient times the women are taught to believe that marriage and married life is the mainstay in life and without it there is nothing else in life. However, this is not so in case of men, though married life exists for both men and women, it cannot mean everything in life for either. Another idea has been injected into the blood and marrow of women, that motherhood is the crowning glory in life and that too becoming the mother of a male child according to the injunctions of a male dominated

society. Whatever profession a woman has – be it doctor, lawyer, teacher, scientist, philosopher or politician — marriage is her ultimate destiny and motherhood is her ultimate glory. However, this idea is not applicable to men. So in order to free women from this falsehood which has been preached for hundreds of years, Saratchandra wrote in *Shesh Prashna* through Kamal, – “In life marriage is but one event among many others, nothing more than that. When women started considering it as everything in life, from that day onwards began women’s greatest tragedy in life....Those who preached that motherhood is the ultimate glory in a woman’s life and adorned with ornate language and rhetoric, they deceived the whole womankind... those who preached that the only necessity for a wife is to beget a son, they not only stopped at humiliating women, but went a step further and closed the road to their own development.” I do not know of anyone else in world literature, who proclaimed so boldly and in such a manner against the extreme denial and insult to women. Direct involvement of women in politics was not supported by many in that period. Saratchandra did not subscribe to this view and in opposition wrote, – “Women have to participate in the political struggle. In order to wrest freedom for the country, a united struggle by men and women is essential; for nothing will come without it. I know that if men and women work together, a section of the people in our country will spread scandals, but let them do so. Scandal mongers will do what they have to do, but shall we stop our work for that? Where is one’s sacrifice, if he cannot face scandals and sacrifice his reputation for his country?”¹⁴ In another place, he says the same thing in another form, – “The preparation and the struggle with which the women in our country have no link, no sympathies and to those to whom we have not imparted any knowledge, any education and any courage to realize this truth, just by allowing them to sit idle in the confines of their home and compelling them to use a spinning wheel (*charka*), such a lofty ideal cannot be attained. As we have compelled the female gender to be merely women and not human beings, our country has to atone for this before attaining freedom.”

The ethics of Saratchandra

I would like to mention before you a bright example which reflects what a high standard of ethics Saratchandra used to cultivate. Generally, if somebody makes a harsh criticism of us or speaks ill of us, we become infuriated, but if anyone speaks in our support, even if his mode of talking is incorrect, we indulge them. However, Saratchandra's behavior was completely opposite. After the novel *Shesh Prashna* was published, a storm of criticism arose and a section attacked Saratchandra in very abrasive language. In this situation, a woman wrote a letter to him and his reply to her letter is an education to us. Some others had also previously written him letters of this nature and at first criticizing them sharply but with humour he wrote in this reply, – “Yes that the wave of movement on *Shesh Prashna* has reached me. My ardent well-wishers have maintained an eagle's eye so that the criticisms, particularly those which are very abrasive and sharp do not even inadvertently escape my notice. They have collected these writings with care, marked these with red, blue, green and purple pencils and sent them to me meticulously, even paying the postal expenses from their own pockets. Later, they have even written to me in order to know whether these have reached me. Their eagerness, fury and sympathy touch my heart!” Then he continued, – “Although you have not sent me any documents but nevertheless expressed your anger is no less. You have made insinuations about the character, taste and even the family life of my critics. You have not for once considered that in the society it is not at all difficult task to speak in harsh and abrasive words. But by insulting others, it is your honour which is injured more. Whoever forgets this, ultimately forgets a lofty idea in life. Apart from this, it may be that these critics have truly felt bad about *Shesh Prashna*.....A decent person, even with valid reasons of agitation and grievance in his mind should not use unrestrained language, and this ability has to be acquired over a long period and through many sufferings. In your letter, you have committed this error much more than them. There is no more dishonor to oneself than this.....You desired to know why I have not

responded to these. My answer is – I have no desire to do so because that is not my job.” Then he wrote, –”It is not in my habit to insult people even on the pretext of self-defense.”¹⁶ Just consider for once, what a high standard of ethics he reflects and how educative it is to us too. In *Narir Mulya* (Worth of Women), he has provided another valuable education on ethics, — “The fundamentals of the English word ‘ethics’ is this — I can enjoy my freedom only so far that it in no way hurts the same freedom of others.”¹²

: On True love

It is Saratchandra who defined the yardstick with which love should be judged. Our boys and girls in today’s society should understand this thoroughly. Observe what he wrote in a letter to Radharani Devi. Saratchandra stood in support of the marriage between Radharani Devi and Naren Deb. There was some problem in the marriage, as in that period, inter-caste and widow marriages often ran into problems. In very few words, what Saratchandra conveyed is very near to what we have learnt from Comrade Shibdas Ghosh. Saratchandra wrote, “The test of genuine love is in its desire to sacrifice. A love in which there is more and more sense of doing good, where the inclination of self-renunciation and sacrifice deepens spontaneously and becomes stronger, consider that love to be pure and genuine. Genuine love wants to see its partners, both the man and the woman happy and healthy, desires to see them successful and free from disgrace and disrepute...A union which leaves a loved one with head bowed down in dishonour; a love which leaves the smallest of fissures through which shame, sorrow, regret and repentance can disgrace life; this union can never be beneficial and so it is not preferable. But it is also true that those who are afraid to embrace love in their lives, because of lacking boldness, lacking steadfast faith in love, lacking self confidence, they are cowards and they also suffer the same catastrophe in love.”¹⁷ He meant that, in matters of love, sometimes union is desirable and at other times separation. He further wrote, — “In the light of mutual welfare genuine love sometimes finds its consummation through stable separation and at other times through stable union. In

those circumstances, where separation brings welfare in love, there, if, due to the lack of self-restraint, union is brought in, the result is catastrophic. Again, where in union lies the welfare in love, separation due to lack of courage equally brings about disaster. The essential ingredient most necessary for a deep and all encompassing love is boldness and determination of mind. In both the circumstances of union and separation, strong self-restraint of mind along with firmness and boldness is necessary. In love, one has to choose, with whom union is to be accepted and with whom separation desirable. In this lies the real test of love. The real success in love does not lie only in acceptance, but also in self-restraint.”¹⁷ What a deep and lofty point of view. This outlook is so close to that of Marxists like us. True love is not from a mere attraction to physical beauty, but choice in love should come from recognition of the real worth of a man or a woman. Elaborating on this, in *Charitraheen* he said through Kiranmayee, “If the attraction for youth and physical beauty would have taken up the whole of love, there would have been no agony, but it is not so. Respect, honour, affection and trust cannot be won by vying for them. After much travail and much later in time they appear. When they appear, then youth and beauty go so much to the background that it is difficult to find them even after searching. On the day, when you come to realize that physical beauty is merely the shadow, not the real person, only then you will find genuine love.” I have already shown previously, how in *Charitraheen*, through Sabitri, Saratchandra brought out that if society refuses a place of honour for the wife, the husband with his best efforts cannot wrest that honour for her. If one does not have a place of honour and dignity in the society, he or she cannot be made happy by husband’s or wife’s love only. In respect of love between man and woman, Saratchandra’s secular outlook is very close to that of Marxism. Again in *Pather Dabi*, we find that Sabyasachi loves Bharati as his younger sister. Bharati loves Apurba but now she is suffering as Apurba being a weakling and a coward is leaving Rangoon for his country out of fear. Bharati is also losing confidence in herself. Seeing her condition Sabyasachi sadly remarked, “The wretched fellow has not only

fled after spoiling your happiness, but he has also destroyed your courage”. Bharati replied, “You, yourself have repeatedly urged me to return to a family life.” Sabyasachi answered, ‘But I have not told you to do so with your head hung in shame.’ Bharati replied, “But *dada* (elder brother), not everybody likes to see a woman with her head held high”. Sabyasachi answered, “Then don’t go.” Saratchandra provided this answer not only for Bharati, but for all women, so that they refuse to accept love or marriage without honour or with their heads bowed.

: Ruthless exploitation of capitalism

I will now read out some more excerpts unless the audience has lost its patience. I have already mentioned that the main object of my discussion is to generate an interest in Saratchandra’s literature in those who do not go through the works of Saratchandra. How the lobbies of vested interest convince the people of the nobility of sacrifice and austerity and taking the opportunity of the people’s religious zeal confuse and deceive them has been touchingly depicted by Saratchandra in a speech, – “Many eminent persons in our country hold the opinion that the basis of the necessities of living should be put on a lower rung. Sense of want gives rise to a feeling of misery. Therefore drape yourself with a 5 feet long cloth instead of 10 feet long cloth or better still use a loin cloth instead of 5 feet long cloth. Again, since luxury is a sin, therefore all measures of austerity are the best ways to develop humanity. Furthermore, this holy land is saturated with the nobility of sacrifice. I have no idea what is set down in the highest philosophies, but with my common sense, it appears that this motto of sacrifice has over time brought down the common people from the level of human beings to the category of animals. How can they aspire for something higher? Even their sense of deprivation has dried up. The lower castes are untouchables – so what? God has ordained it and therefore we must be satisfied with it. Those who are slightly more knowledgeable look up indifferently and say – ‘Society and this world are *maya* (unreal), only a play lasting for a few days. If we are able to tolerate the misery in this life with a happy heart, God will reward us in the next life.’ They have no

complaints against anybody but fate. They do not know how to demand; they are afraid to demand. They have no food to eat, no clothing to wear, no strength, no health – as scarcity after scarcity always presses them down, more they pray for strength to bear it and when even this does not succeed, then they silently look up at the sky, close their eyes and die.”¹⁸

Consider, even today does not the influence of religious thoughts work deep in the minds of the people of our entire country and intoxicate them? Even in that age, what he said in deep agony, on observing the rural children, half-naked without even a warm rag in bitter winter, impoverished, sickly and perpetually hungry — I have not come across anything like that in whatever I have read of world literature. In the novel *Srikanta* through the character Srikanta he said, “When a dog, which is born in the streets and anyhow lives the few years of its life, and dies, nobody keeps a record of how and why it died. These unfortunate people do not demand anything more than this from their country. Their misery, their impoverishment, their all encompassing distress have become so normal and natural to themselves and to others that nobody anywhere even suffers a bit of shame on observing such a grievous insult to man by man.” Perceiving the agony afflicting Srikanta’s heart, Ananda, the *Sannyasi* (ascetic mendicant) said, “You think that this must cause them perpetual misery, but that is not so. Tell me, *dada* (*elder brother*), who actually feels the misery? What else but the mind; but have we at all let them retain it? By pressing on them ceaselessly for a long time, we have succeeded in wringing out their minds completely. Now, they themselves feel that demanding more than what they have would be unjustified audacity.” In other words, this capitalist society is not only ruthlessly exploiting the poor but at the same time it has destroyed the sense of misery, sense of agony of deprivation and even the perceptive mind by completely wringing it out. I do not know if anybody else in world literature has placed this matter in such a way. In a similar touching language, he has described through the words of Srikanta the lives of workers in the same novel, – “In these two days, how the greed for wealth by the rich, under the pretence of civilization, can turn common men into

mindless beasts has accumulated in my mind as a lifetime experience. ...Away from the society, uprooted from their families, detached from all normal relations, these people have been brought together and deposited in the wagons only for the purpose of excavating earth and here they have also lost their human values completely. All that is left is excavation of earth in exchange for payment of wage. Civilized men have probably realized this well that unless men are turned into beasts the work of a beast cannot be obtained from them.” Then comes his poignant statement, — “Death of human beings does not hurt me much, it is the death of humane values that hurts most” How capitalism is killing all human values, Saratchandra had realized in that period and he had expressed this in such an appealing language in the novel *Srikanta* that it touches the core of our heart even today. He showed how capitalism causes gross degeneration in the lives of workers, “In the evening, all the men and even the women returned in groups completely drunk. Rice cooked in the afternoon was stored under water in a pot, so the women were spared the trouble of cooking in the evening. Then began a chaos. From the wagon belonging to the foreman, loud singing accompanied by the clash of the cymbals and the drumming of the tom-toms went on and I had no idea when it would stop, and nobody bothered. In the wagon next to mine, some woman had probably attracted two lovers and their unrestrained love making continued throughout the night. In another wagon, a man had more than his share of country liquor, as a result of which he was begging to make love to his wife in such a loud voice that my embarrassment and shame knew no bounds. There was no modesty, no shame, no privacy – everything was open and uncovered. Life was moving with irresistible force with its loathsome manifestations, moving with inexorable speed, only I am detached from the group. I was sitting there alone in the deep darkness of night with a dying mother and her son. The boy asked for water and I leaned over him and tried to comfort him – ‘There is no water now, I will get some in the morning’. The boy nodded, then closed his eyes and lay there silently. Though there was no water to quench his thirst, tears sprang from my eyes. Alas! What an infinite

indifference not only the lack of tender sensibilities of human values, but also to his own unbearable agony! This is not the strength of tolerance but an insensate state, this tolerance is something which belongs to much below the stage of humanity. Suffering from an agony, grievance and futile regret, I began to curse again and again.” Saratchandra focuses on this intolerable and heartrending experience and calls out to the workers to uproot capitalism, – “You are the carriers of the modern civilization. Die, but never forgive this cruel civilization which has turned you into this. If you have to carry it, then carry it rapidly to its destruction.” In his short story *Jagaran* (The Awakening), through the female character Alekhya, he utters words to the same effect. Alekhya said, “A civilization which snatches away the food from the plate of the poor, which brings the lives of the miserable in the grip of the rich in such a manner so as to render them completely helpless, such a civilization cannot be saved by anybody. What form of civilization is this? And if this is civilization, I have no need for this. I want to be free from this cruel farce.” This is Saratchandra. How he calls out for revolution against capitalism! Incidentally, in this story, he has shown that the rural rich are afraid of the Bolshevik revolution.

In *Srikanta* he showed the life of common worker when he does not possess revolutionary consciousness and is not inspired by revolutionary ideology. The same picture has been depicted by Emil Zola in his famous novel *Germinal*. Saratchandra too depicted it but in a more touching manner. In his novel *Pather Dabi* he answered through the speech of Ramdas Talwarkar the slanders that the exploiters propagate against the working class, – “That you are dishonest, undisciplined and victims of base instincts – these are the slanders which you have always heard from them. So, whenever you have voiced your demands, they have held your undisciplined character to be the root of all your miseries and thereby they have obstructed your progress in every way. They have been telling you only this lie all the time, but today, I want to unhesitatingly and frankly inform you that this statement of theirs is not the complete truth. It is not only your character which is responsible for

your condition but your deprivation and degradation is actually responsible for your character too. Today, you have no other way but to fearlessly protest against this falsehood spread by them.” That in a capitalist society there is no other division except class division, and that the exploiting classes are fearful of the strength of unity, consciousness and protests of the working class have been clearly elaborated by Saratchandra, when he said through the same speech, — “In the fight for self-defense of the impoverished against the rich, there is no country, no race and no religion; there is no Hindu, Muslim, Jains or Sikhs; there is nothing but madly greedy owners with wealth on one side and the completely destitute and deprived worker on the other. They are afraid of your physical strength, they are very much suspicious of the strength coming from your education and finally their blood dries up in fear when they observe your quest for knowledge.” The British Government banned *Pather Dabi*, being afraid that it would help to propagate Bolshevik ideology.

How the Zaminders and big landowners grab the lands belonging to the peasants, is depicted in the novel *Dena Paona* (Debt and Repayment). He has further shown that not only the land belonging to the peasants, but the landlords do not hesitate to craftily grab the endowed property of a temple where the peasants worship the deity daily. In his short story *Mahesh*, he has shown how from unbearable agony, a poor peasant of the village is forced to leave his small holding for cultivation, the home of his forefathers and everything that he owns and has to go away in a wretched condition with his daughter to work in a jute factory, where he had refused to go previously as it is a place where there is no religion, no privacy, no decorum for women. In the novel *Palli Samaj* (The Village Society), he has shown that when the paddy fields of the peasants are flooded by torrential rain and the situation is such that unless the water is let out, disaster would strike, Ramesh having compassion for the poor went to his cousin Beni, a landlord and told him, “The dam can no longer be allowed to remain intact. It has to be breached immediately.” Beni, in reply said, “Do you know, that with the water, fish worth two

to three hundred rupees will escape? Who will pay for this? You or the peasants?...In this way, how long will you be able to retain your estates? Look Ramesh, these rascals were here from the morning, weeping as if they would die. I know everything there is to know. Don't you have a *darwan* (guard at the door) at your office? Does he not have *nagra* shoes (traditional slippers) on his feet? Go home and do as I say. Let the water drain out on its own." Ramesh had already reached the limit of his tolerance even then he restrained himself with effort and said politely, "Please consider, *Barda* (elder brother). At the cost of avoiding the loss of two hundred rupees of our three families, the poor peasants will lose the means of livelihood for the entire year....What will they consume throughout the year?" Beni turned on one side, then on the other; he swung his body on either side, nodded his head, smiled, spat and then sat up and said, "What will they consume! Wait and you will see that these rascals will mortgage their lands and come running to us to loan money. Cool your head, brother. Our fathers have increased their property just in this manner and have bequeathed us the bits and pieces as leftovers and it is our duty to manipulate and organize it, enjoy it in our lifetime, and then leave something for our descendants. What will they eat? They will have to take loans and run into debts, otherwise why are they called lower class people?" How ruthless landlords put the peasants in difficulty and grab their lands is depicted in this novel in such a heart-rending manner, which is absent in the works of any other litterateur in that era. Such incidents are rampant in the rural areas even today. In his short story *Mahesh*, he showed the same thing in a different way. The girl Amina, being a Muslim, is not allowed to draw water from the well of the Hindu village. The landlord, well-versed in the scriptures, deprives the sharecropper Gafur of his rightful share, deprives Mahesh, his bullock for ploughing and which is dearer to him than his own life, of its fodder. Finally after intolerable oppression and insult from the landlord, Gafur becomes infuriated, and in his helpless rage kills Mahesh, who is like a son to him. In the end he leaves his village to work in a jute factory.

In *Palli Samaj* Saratchandra showed that the local Zaminder Beni, now turned into a big landowner, along with Gobinda and others, the accomplices of his misdeeds, in a bid to increase their profits and to retain their supremacy and domination are indulging in all sorts of misdeeds in the name of religion and village society. Among others, one of the important roots of these misdeeds is money power. By implicating the poor people in false cases, putting up false witnesses, manufacturing forged deeds, they harass and finally make them paupers. Mentioning one such incident, Saratchandra wrote, — “His debt is false, the accused and complainant, both are false. Taking recourse to the all encompassing lie, the strong has endeavoured to grab almost everything of the weak, turning him out like a beggar in the streets; and in the courts of the state, the method of redress to this oppression is not an easy matter. Even though the King’s laws, the courts, the judges and the Magistrates exist as heads, the impoverished contender has no other option but to die silently...on the one hand, money power along with wily crookedness help the wrongdoers to evade the King’s retribution, while the moribund society on the other hand fails to mete out due punishment to them. That is the reason why even after committing a thousand misdeeds, they lord over the dead village society, devoid of truth and justice, and live untroubled and wantonly.” What Saratbabu observed then and wrote about, has increased manifolds today. In the rural areas, a nexus formed between big landlords, businessmen, contractors, money lenders, the ruling party, Panchayats controlled by the ruling party, Police, administration and antisocials – all these form a criminal nexus which has unleashed a reign of terrible oppression, threats, injustice and terror on the impoverished people and since an all-encompassing widespread movement to resist this has not yet appeared, they have become more desperate and reckless.

Deep feelings for the exploited

Saratchandra has himself expressed in response to the felicitations on his 57th birthday that the heart rending cry and tears of the oppressed workers, peasants and women are the

main fountainhead of his literature, — “For my insignificant literary works I have already been rewarded much and in many ways by my country — far more than what is my due. On this day, what comes to my mind most is how much of this is my rightful share and how large is my debt. Is my debt only to those revered literary giants who were my predecessors? Those in the society, who gave their all but did not get anything in return, those who are deprived, impoverished and oppressed; for whose tears the society did not bother even though they are human beings; those who in their helpless and miserable lives could never reckon why in spite of such wealth surrounding them they have no right to any of it — is my debt to them any less? It is their pain that lent me a voice. It is only they who sent me to register complaint on behalf of men to other men. I have seen so much injustice, so much perversion of justice and so much unbearable indiscriminate right justice against them. That is why my business is only with them.”¹⁹ Will you be able to find any other writer in the world who has expressed in such a manner the main inspiration behind his literary endeavours? It is for this very reason that Saratchandra’s literature opens closed door in man’s heart, generates pain in the core of our heart and pricks our conscience.

Saratchandra correctly evaluated Gandhiji

I would like to speak some more, about Saratchandra. He was a personality in the field of political movements. In conjunction with his literary activity, he used to directly participate in politics and for a certain time, he even stopped his literary exercise to fully participate in political movements. In this context, when he was asked, “Why have you stopped writing and why are you participating in politics directly?”, he used to answer that the interest of country is more prior, and that if he had not participated in the freedom movement of the country, the harm caused would be far more than what would result from his stopping to write. What a statement from a big patriot! In that era, even though he was not a Marxist, he succeeded in recognizing the class character of Gandhiji. He said, — “His (Gandhiji’s) real fear is socialist revolution. He is

always surrounded by capitalists and businessmen, so how can he accept socialists? Here we cannot deny Mahatma's weakness."²⁰ How many at that time could say such a thing about Gandhiji? Even in the era of freedom movement, the capitalist class was controlling the country's politics in the interest of exploitation – he showed this in the speech, *Taruner Bidroha* (Revolt of the Youth) –” Now, there is no king, but there remains the power of the state and it is concentrated in the hands of a few big businessmen. Either they exercise the power themselves or they use executives on their behalf. Politics is now mainly business and trade, exploitation is the main object of rule.”¹⁸ In a very few words, he has pointed out to his countrymen, the real danger of politics of capitalist class. How many at that time was able to speak like this?

Saratchandra, not only criticized the reformist movement but at the same time he felt a deficiency in the revolutionaries which he depicted in *Pather Dabi* and which he repeatedly pointed out in the gatherings of students and youth. He said, “Revolution (idea) develops in human mind, not through unpurposeful bloodshed. So a long wait with patience is necessary. A merciless society, a religion without love, racial hatred, economic inequality and heartless cruelty to women – only with the fundamental revolutionary change of all these, political revolution will be achieved.”¹⁸ What a significant statement! In that era, the reformists and the revolutionaries neglected cultural revolution, the harmful consequences of which we are still suffering today. In the novel *Pather Dabi*, Sabyasachi told the poet Shashi, “You continue singing the song of social revolution with all your heart. Anything that is traditional, anything which is ancient, worn out and old, be it religion, society or superstition – let everything be demolished”. Saratchandra is the only one who realized that political revolution is possible only on the basis of cultural revolution. However, none of the political leaders then attached any importance to this and we are today witnessing its disastrous consequences. It is for this reason that even today, our country is devastated by religious fanaticism, superstition, casteism and medieval mental frame about women; these not only exist, but they are on the rise, being fomented by the ruling parties.

Revolutionaries are not heartless

In *Pather Dabi* Saratchandra highlighted another important point. The Gandhiites and the British both used to preach that the revolutionaries were cruel, ruthless and devoid of any feelings of love and affection. Apurba, a character in *Pather Dabi* divulged to the police some secrets of the revolutionary party and almost everybody in the party voted to punish him with death penalty. Sabyasachi, however, negated this decision, though his own life was endangered by this act. He remarked that Apurba was a weakling, but not a traitor. In other words, divulging the secrets of the party driven by fear and doing it as a willful traitor are not one and the same. *Masterda* Surya Sen too followed this example of Sabyasachi. At that time, a section of people used to oppose the revolutionary movement and campaigned against the revolutionaries calling them heartless and without any compassion. They emphasized on philanthropic activity instead of freedom movement, and attempted to pose that the former was more important and not the latter. In reply to them, Sabyasachi regretfully told Bharati, “There are many small and large institutions which work for the welfare of the country. Those who nurse the helpless, provide impetus to the people for amassing piety, provide medicines in times of fever and diarrhea, and those who extend help in natural disasters like floods will show you the way Bharati. However, I am a revolutionary and I do not possess kindness, compassion and affection. Sin and piety are false mockery to me. These philanthropic activities are like child’s play to me. India’s freedom is my only objective, my only contemplation. This is what is good or bad for me. I do not have anything in life except this.”

Saratchandra urged the students to join politics

Saratchandra has repeatedly appealed to the students to participate in the freedom movement and the revolutionary movement. In a meeting with the students he said, “Till a few years ago everybody knew and agreed that politics is the preserve of old men only, and the entry of students was completely prohibited. It was considered not only to be meddling

in others' affairs, but even an offence that deserves to be condemned. The unanimous prescription for student life was that they should attend schools and colleges, their behaviour shall be that of well-mannered goody-goody boys, they ought to excel in studies and make their parents proud.. It was beyond the dreams of people that an exception to this may occur, that a question may even one day rise against this. Suddenly, a storm wind, blowing in the opposite direction dislodged the pivot of this principle and pushed it away completely outside the orbit of imagination. Just as a flash of lightning splits the stygian darkness and illuminate things, the flames of frustration and agony succeeded in bringing out our own strength. In the whole of India, there is not even a smallest bit of doubt that what people have thought for so long was wrong since there was no truth in it. That is why today in every school and college, in all the cities and villages, in every house, a call has gone to the youth."²³ He further said, "Students in schools and colleges, even during the period of their study have the right to participate in any work for the country; to think about bondage and freedom of the country; they even have the right to declare this right in a loud voice. It is necessary to pass in the exams, but this necessity is far more."²¹ In the same speech he said, "If on hearing the truth, your mind is distracted; if in your study in the school and colleges, are disturbed; and if the absolute sanctity of passing the exam suffers any blow — from this apprehension, even a lie is used to obstruct your vision and this probably remains unknown to you."²¹ With respect to what should be the criteria to become an ideal patriot, he has provided invaluable advice and said, "To serve your country does not mean merely a jugglery of words. Service to one's country is the most arduous practice for a man having no desire for name and fame; not a trace of any vested interest, not even fear for his life; on one side the patriot and on the other his country with nothing in between. He who can sacrifice everything like fame, money, happiness and sorrow, sin and piety, good and bad, only he can properly serve his country."²² This invaluable appeal of Saratchandra is applicable to the students and youth even today, because the object of freedom movement at that time was not

only the end of foreign rule but also freedom from exploitation, which is yet to be achieved today, rather, on the contrary exploitation has increased manifold.

Saratchandra on ethics and values

With respect to values and ethics, he provided valuable advice to all, particularly the students and youth, which is educative to us. There are many who are very much vocal regarding their own rights but are equally negligent regarding discharging their own responsibilities. In an essay in *Swadesh O Sahitya* (My Country and Literature) he spoke about them, “Right and duty are two complementary words and are fundamental in law....but right without duty is equivalent to negation of right.”¹⁰ If somebody talks to us or behaves with us in an insulting manner, we feel injured, but Saratbabu showed that this reaction of ours is not correct. Rather in the speech *Amar Katha* (My words) in *Swadesh O Sahitya* he wrote, – “The fool who unnecessarily insults an object of genuine honour and dignity brings shame on himself.”¹⁰ If for any reason whatsoever, sorrow appears in life, one should not break down, rather the education and experience acquired from this gives us wisdom; overcoming grief we gain peace, and in this way misery can be transformed into happiness and joy. So, in *Srikanta* he wrote, “Grief and sorrow are neither dearth nor emptiness. Sorrow which is without fear can be enjoyed like happiness.” In a moment of excitement, if one says something or acts in a particular manner, frequently we judge him according to that, but that this is not correct has been mentioned by Saratchandra in his novel *Grihadaha* (The House On Fire). He wrote, “Man is not god — he is but man. Virtues and defects are entwined in him, but even so, how he appears during his excitement and agitation in a weak moment cannot be taken to be his nature”. In respect to criticizing others, he has remarked in his birthday speech, – “Proper criticism always merits appreciation, but in the process of criticism, if personal attack is leveled against the object of criticism, then there is nothing more regrettable than this.”²³

That none should be denied their justified rights, this advice

he gave in *Charitraheen* and said, “We genuinely commit an injustice when we deprive someone from his justified rights. Therefore, before embarking on any venture, it should be meticulously studied whether anybody’s rights have been infringed upon.” That we should not make fun of anyone’s misery — reminding us of this ethical principle, he wrote in *Srikanta*, “When the heart rending misery of one becomes the object of ridicule to others, is there any tragedy bigger than this in the world.” One often feels alone while discharging his responsibilities in social movements or in any struggle, and thinks, ‘I am alone, how can I accomplish anything?’. Addressing them Saratchandra told in *Swaraj Sadhanay Nari* (Women in the Struggle for Independence) in *Swadesh O Sahitya*, “No reform in the world begins by many, one has to stand alone for it. It causes suffering, but the suffering from voluntary loneliness, one day becomes collective and brings welfare to many.”

What it means to be a real man, Saratchandra explained in *Pather Dabi* in a few words, “The sense of dignity and honour of being born a man is the criterion of a real man. Gaining free from the fear of death is becoming a real man.” A few words, but what profound significance they carry. Once, he said in a literary gathering that to be great one has to seek for great ideology, great men. In his words, – “Greatness never comes in swarms. It has to be searched for and found. When man forgets to search for greatness, he demeans himself.”²⁴ In other words, when there is no inclination to search for greatness, life becomes devoid of ideology and turns trivial. So that the students and youth do not take to hypocrisy, he warned in his speech in *Satyashrayee* (In Commitment to Truth), “To make mistake from wrong understanding amounts to an offence of ignorance, but that is much better than knowing correctly and acting wrongly which not only amounts to deviation from the truth but leads to the vice of practice of falsehood.”²⁵ These words are far more relevant today, when everywhere a current of falsehood, hypocrisy and deception is flowing, particularly at the initiative of the big parliamentary ruling parties. At the felicitation meeting held in the Senate Hall on the occasion of his 57th birthday Saratchandra said, “Never accept falsehood on any pretext —

the path of truth, the path of unpleasant truth — if it turns out to be a path of great misery, even then generate the strength within you to bear it. The future of the country and of its people depend on you and this future can never be built by weakness, cowardice and untruth. Let the people of the country look at you and remind themselves of this at all times.” You must be realizing from the core of your heart how far more relevant this invaluable advice of Saratchandra is today. Apart from this, he has bequeathed some precious education for all of us. I would like to mention at least a few of those. I have mentioned earlier, in the novel *Grihadaha* (The House on Fire), how Achala was forced to go away with Suresh. After Achala left in this manner, her father Kedarbabu broke down in agony and shame. At that time, it was Mrinal who came forward to nurse him and provided him with care and consolation. Kedarbabu had repeatedly said that, in no way can Achala be forgiven, but in reply, Mrinal remarked, “When the cause-effect of an incident is not known to us, the least we can do is not to judge her in our own minds and condemn her.” She had also said, “Does the act of forgiving benefit only the offender? He who forgives – does he not get anything in return?” On many occasions, without going into the cause-effect of an incident, we hold someone guilty for an untoward act or a mistake and this Saratchandra believed to be improper. He further showed that if any of our acquaintances or relatives commit an unjustified act or make a mistake, we become afflicted with anger, irritation, grievance and even spite as a result of which our minds become troubled. However, if we can forgive him, we become free from anger, irritation and agitation. Another invaluable education provided by Saratchandra in his novel *Pather Dabi* is, “Emotion is invaluable but if it overwhelms the conscious rational mind, there is no bigger enemy than this.” In other words, he has said that love, affection and compassion, anger, sorrow and sensitiveness — all these are expressions of emotion. No doubt that a man without emotions turns into a machine; but if these emotions overwhelm the consciousness and the ability to judge rationally, then these cause harm just like an enemy. That is why emotion has to be controlled and directed by logic and rationality.

He conveyed to all a precious concept reflecting profound knowledge, “It is given facts which, wearing the masks of truth, intrude upon the thoughts and deeds of men without any rights and cause immeasurable harm.”²⁵ In English language, ‘facts’, ‘true’ and ‘truth’ are different words with different meanings. ‘Fact’ or ‘true’ are actual happenings, or correct incidents, but truth is not merely correct, it is an invaluable ideal that is created for the benefit of mankind and for the progress of the society. In a particular era, great thinkers, the pioneers provides it. Confusing truth with facts or true facts in common parlance leads to misunderstanding. So, even if something is a fact, it may not be truth. It is for this that in *Pather Dabi*, Saratchandra, through Sabyasachi has said, ‘I never lie, but I create truth at the call of necessity.’

In *Panditmoshai* (Respected Teacher), Saratchandra, showed to a grief-stricken Kusum, a stepmother, who has just lost her child, Charan, how to control her anguish through her husband Brindaban, “He is neither dead, nor is he lost, he is only in hiding; if you can only learn to acquire the sight to see clearly, you will be able to observe that wherever there are children, our Charan is with them.”

Compassion to the poor without respect is no virtue

On the other hand, in this novel, Saratchandra has provided an education to those educated youth belonging to the middle class who open free schools for the welfare of the poor, but are not themselves free from middle class mental complex and thus ultimately fail in their endeavour. Brindaban, belonging to the so called lower caste has acquired some education and has opened a school in his village which is attended by a large number of students, who with great respect and emotion address him as *Panditmoshai* (Respected Teacher). On the other hand, his childhood friend Keshab, belonging to the upper caste is highly educated, and remaining unmarried he has also opened a free school for the poor. However, as he has no students, he laments and says, “Just like your village, our village too does not bother for education, so, first I opened a primary school and then I thought of a secondary school, but even my primary school did

not run as there were no students. The lower class people of our village are such rascals that in no way would they allow their children to study.” On hearing this, Brindaban’s face turned red, but he replied with composure, “The lower class people are lucky that they did not send their children to the school of a gentleman, but, brother, you also did not do right to move from house to house of the lower class ignorant people and lose your honour and dignity.” Then he said, “I have become popular by staying with the people only, not away from them and that is why they could come to me unhesitatingly, while they did not feel confident enough to approach you. We are uneducated, poor and we are unable to express our sentiments in words; you call us lower class people and we silently acknowledge it; but our inner self does not accept it. Even your well meaning words do not evoke a response..... Among us, quack doctors and quack teachers gain fame and influence, just like me but reputed doctors and professors like you are not heeded. The god who lives within our hearts feels insulted by this compassion coming out of disrespect, and the alms which you throw down from above hurts him and he turns his face away. ... Only pious wishes and a compassionate heart are not sufficient to do welfare for others and to work for the country..... First prove by your behaviour that, highly educated gentlemen like you are not an isolated group, that even after acquiring an education, you do not consider the uneducated peasants in our country as ignorant lower class people, on the contrary, you respect them. Then only, we will no longer be afraid.” This is a valuable education meant not only for persons engaged in social work, but we too have to realize that it is also meant for the educated people belonging to the middle class, who have become cadres in the revolutionary movement.

Forgetting Saratchandra has caused harm to the society

In those days, hundreds of students and youth responded whole-heartedly to Saratchandra’s call and selflessly plunged into the freedom movement. Many of them proclaimed the victory of life on the gallows. Today the Congress, CPI(M), BJP, TMC and other ruling parties, are portraying such an image of a ‘patriot’

that it terrified people. They are involved in everything like money laundering, extortion, bombings, murders, drunkenness, kidnappings; torture on women, terrorization. Nothing is beyond them. Why did such a thing happen?

Even in that period, Saratchandra has provided an invaluable education to the students and youth by saying, “Incorrect knowledge and wrong impressions are at least better than mismatch between inner realization and outer behavior. In other words, if I know something, and say something else and do some other thing – there is no greater failure, no greater cowardice in life than this. No second thing exists which is more demeaning to the spirit of youth. By understanding something wrongly and acting wrongly is an offence of ignorance. However, this is much better than understanding something correctly but acting wrongly — this is not only departing from truth but indulging in the practice of the vice of falsehood. I know that impurity is not caused by the touch of an untouchable, that this is a meaningless practice; but I still indulge in it; I know that casteism is most harmful, but my behavior does not show it; I fully realize and even say aloud that widow marriage is proper, yet I reject it in my own life — these are what I call indulging in falsehood.”³ Needless to mention that leaders of today’s ruling parliamentary parties are placing a completely opposite ideology in front of the students and youth of the country, inevitably this has glaring harmful consequences.

The road to genuine freedom can never be the method of begging by the Gandhiites, or through compromises and petitions; rather for this, the youth of the country have to shed their blood – in *Taruner Bidroha* (Revolt of the Youth) he called out to this effect, – “Freedom is not merely a name in itself. It cannot be obtained by begging from the right hand of benevolent charity from a donor. You have to pay a price for it. But where is the price? Who can pay for this? It is there only in the blood of the youth.”¹⁸ Outlining the main cause of the First World War, he said, “The world war which took place ten-fifteen years back had its root cause in the same phenomenon, namely, the competition between shop owners to avail markets and clients.”¹⁸ He meant that the imperialists were shopkeepers and

the clients in the market were the colonies. In a few words, what a profound truth he made us aware of.

About those who were preaching non-violence and peaceful movement as against armed revolution, exposing their real character, he said in *Pather Dabi*, “Peace, peace and peace! My ears have turned almost deaf with this clamour, but do you know who have preached this falsehood for all this time? These who rob the peace of others, those who block the path of others by building huge palaces, it is these persons who are the apostles of this falsehood. They have chanted about peace so much to the deprived, miserable and threatened people that they recoil at the word ‘unrest’. They immediately begin to think that it is a sin, or may be an evil! Have you ever seen a tethered cow dying of hunger but standing still on its feet? It will rather die on its feet, but will not tear asunder the worn-out rope so as not to disturb the owner’s peace.” Those who prattle about peaceful strike and talk about the economic losses in a strike, protesting against them, Saratbabu in the same novel said, “There is something known as strike but strike without any unrest does not exist anywhere. In our society no strike is successful unless it is backed by strength. The financial loss of the rich is not at par with the starvation of the impoverished”. In the novel *Pather Dabi* he has criticized workers’ strike on mere economic demands and without any revolutionary objective by saying, “Nowhere in any country can revolution be initiated for revolution’s sake only, it must necessarily have some support. And that is my prop too. The fool who does not know it and tries to call a strike only on the issue of more or less wages brings harm to the workers and to the country too”. Consider for once, how relevant these statements are in today’s politics also.

He has sounded another valuable caution in *Pather Dabi*, though it was with reference to British ruled India. However, wherever there is class division in society, wherever there is the ruling class and the ruled, it is applicable. In the voice of Sabyasachi he said, “There are no more misfortunes in a country than when the ethical considerations of the ruler and the ruled become one and the same.” The slave society, the feudal society, capitalism, imperialism – in all these systems, in order to rule, the

ruling class does not only depend on the coercion by the armed state power, rather it is the last resort. A much more powerful force, which acts on their behalf is the mental frame of the subjugated and exploited people along with the ethical principles conducive to the rulers which the latter develops so that the oppressed and exploited masses learn to bear this exploitation and oppression without any protest as if it is a natural phenomenon. That is why when revolutionaries like Kshudiram kindled the spark of revolution, many people did not support them and many even did not want to give them shelter. That is why, in deep sorrow, Sabyasachi said about these countrymen, “They do not want us to follow this path, rather, we are the obstacles to their peace of mind, an hindrance to their comfort; they do not look upon us with favour...if you ever hear that your *Dada* has been sent to the gallows, know this for certain that the noose has been tied around his neck by his countrymen at the behest of the foreign rulers.” This was the heart rending experience of the revolutionaries in the first phase of the freedom movement of our country. This misery and agony was much more painful to them than all the tortures inflicted by the British. Nevertheless, the revolutionaries did not falter, but went forward caring nothing for life or death. Not only in the freedom movement of this country, but in the liberation movements of all countries in all ages, in all the great movements against injustice and oppression, all the pioneers and the great men, all the uncompromising fighters have gone through the same painful experience. Those for whose freedom and welfare the great men fought, they, at the initial stages, let alone support the fighters, frequently put up opposition and obstacles. That is why in *Palli Samaj* (The Village Society), when Ramesh, who was engaged in various welfare activities for the villagers became dejected by the conspiracies hatched by the same villagers and by the obstacles put up by them, *Jathaima* (elder aunt) consoled him and said, “They who have taken up the task to work for the welfare of humanity throughout the ages got increasing number of their enemies.” In the initial stages, it is applicable to all. In respect of the anti-capitalist revolutionary fighters of today also this is true. In the beginning, nobody wants to hear them out,

nor trust them, let alone helping them, everybody opposes them. Due to the mind-set, fostered by the capitalist class, the exploited masses think that the rich and the poor existed eternally and will continue to do so, that this is the ruling of God, the writing of fate and his lot is a consequence of his deeds in the previous life. Those who are educated to an extent reason that every person is inevitably endowed with selfishness, greed, a motive for profit and a sense of ownership and that if there is no profit, how can an industry run? Today's revolutionaries have to fight on the one hand, against such appalling trend of thinking, and on the other against the practice of working for the exploiting class and their subservient political parties from fear or greed – for them this education is very valuable.

Saratchandra possessed high intellectual faculty

Those who argue that the works of Saratchandra are devoid of intellectual content, what will they say now after listening what I have read out? If this is not intellect, what is that? Only those so-called intellectuals, who criticize in this manner can furnish an answer to this. With respect to intellect and higher mental faculty, not only in this country but even in world literature, Saratchandra is exceptional. What an expression of intellectual application of mind is there in the works of Saratchandra! Once, Rabindranath, with respect to the literature of Saratchandra and some of his contemporaries, remarked, "The novels also share the same fate. The beauty of human life has been suppressed under a pile of philosophical thoughts". In other words, under the pressure of intellectualism, the expression of the beauty of human life has been subdued. Saratchandra has replied, "The novels do not share the same fate. On the contrary, instead of being suppressed by intellectualism, human life and its beauty have been brightened by the light of thought." Saratchandra differed with Rabindranath on the question of whether there will be scientific process of thinking in literature. Rabindranath opposed scientific process of thinking in literature. In his article *Sahityadharmā* (The Ethos of Literature), he wrote, "When science becomes strong, it refuses to accept any limit. It increases its influence by sending its own bailiff to all

compartments of human mind. Wearing the uniform of new-found strength, it does not hesitate to enter anywhere, even without rights. This inquisitiveness is gradually enclosing the present litterateurs within a net and surrounding them.” In reply, Saratchandra in his *Sahityer Riti O Niti* (The Mode and Method of Literature) wrote, — “May be the poet by nature turns his face away from science but I am unable to understand what is meant by ‘fields of science’ in this context. If by science, it only meant Sex-psychology, Anatomy or Gynaecology, I too would have obstructed its unrestricted entry within literature. Not because it is undesirable, but because it is unreasonable and irrelevant. The world revolves round the sun – this may be a weighty utterance, but its relevance in the temple of literature is minor, nevertheless it is a product of a systematic and disciplined process of thinking, and without such process of thinking the realm of poetry may survive, but not the art of novel writing. Science is not just unbiased curiosity, but a true analysis of cause-and-effect relationship”.⁶

Wherefrom did Saratchandra acquire this scientific bent of mind? In a society dominated by Hindu religion, where the influence of the likes of Bankim Chandra, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Rabindranath and Gandhiji was reigning supreme, in that environment, such a scientific outlook and a secular humanist outlook, free from religious influences was very difficult to acquire. On the one hand, the anguish of the oppressed and persecuted people, their tears, their humiliation and dishonour of women — the presence of all these in the society struck a chord in Saratchandra’s mind, leading him to search again and again for a solution. On the other, in an effort to find a way out, he had accepted scientific process of thinking and secular humanism as his guiding philosophy. In that period, there was a strong current of anti-imperialist freedom movement in the country while in the international arena, a working class Soviet socialist state had just been born. Both of these have influenced his thinking. That his secular humanist thinking was even stronger and bolder than that of the early stage of European renaissance was due to the influence of Soviet socialism on him. I have already mentioned that even though he supported the

revolutionary movement, he pointed out its defects and weaknesses. In the arduous practice to seek truth, he has dissected the society minutely to understand it. By applying a scientific process of reasoning, he tried to understand every phenomenon meticulously and thoroughly. He loved to go through books on science and philosophy and so we find books by Marx, Engels, Lenin in his library. These too, he had tried to grasp to an extent, though in his outlook, he was not a Marxist; rather he was mainly a materialist and secular humanist. In course of his journey he came very close to socialist thinking and that is why he turned out to be such a great and amazing genius.

The great men of that era had profound respect for Saratchandra

All of Saratchandra's multifaceted creations centred around the aspiration, agony, pain and wants of the society. Within a very short period he had not only won the hearts of common people, but also the deep respect of the most eminent personalities of that era. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray respected him deeply and counted him as a friend. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose too respected him very much and used to take him to many meetings. Satyen Bose and Meghnad Saha, both reputed scientists, Premchand, the famous litterateur and the famous linguist Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay used to view him with great respect. Saratchandra lived in the hearts of the revolutionaries of Bengal and India. They used to consider *Pather Dabi* as their *Bhagavat Geeta*. The revolutionary fighters of Chattogram, Kalpana Dutta and Pritilata used to discuss among themselves whether their *Masterda* (Surya Sen) was greater than Sabyasachi or equal to him.

Uncompromising on ideology

Again, on question of ideology, he never compromised with anyone. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das once requested Saratchandra to appeal to the armed revolutionaries so that they would abstain from violence for sometime but Saratchandra refused to do it. Once, in the house of Deshbandhu, Gandhiji

called the revolutionaries as traitors, In protest Saratchandra in a bold voice said, “If you call them traitors because of a difference in opinion, for the same reason, I too can call you a traitor.” Once, on observing Saratchandra using the spinning wheel (*charka*) Gandhiji asked, “Sarat, you do not believe in the spinning wheel, then, how are you using it so nicely?” Saratchandra said in reply, “I am using the spinning wheel as a disciplined member of the Congress, but I strongly believe that attainment of *swaraj* can only be done by soldiers not by spiders.”²⁶ In 1922 the Non-Cooperation Movement was in full swing. At Gorakhpur-Chaurichaura police fired on a demonstrating mass and killed a number of people. As a result the agitated mass from their fury torched the police station. When Gandhiji observed that the movement was turning violent he withdrew the movement. Saratchandra became extremely angry at this and said, “To stop the movement in this situation practically means strangling it and causing its untimely death. In the freedom struggle of such a huge country, will there be no bloodshed? Of course it has to be! A river of blood shall flow and in that current of blood shall blossom the blood red lotus of freedom.”²⁶ On many questions, he had differences with Rabindranath, which he has expressed in bold language. But he respected Rabindranath very much. In Dhaka, some students, comparing his writing with that of Rabindranath, once said, “We understand your writings, we like them, but we are unable to understand Rabindranath.” Saratchandra did not like this comparison and replied – “Rabindranath writes for us and I write for you.”

Comrade Shibdas Ghosh has made us aware of this Saratchandra, but at the same time, he has expressed in deep agony that Saratchandra’s literature is not cultivated in today’s society as it had been done earlier. At that time, who appreciated the real worth of Saratchandra? Earlier I have mentioned the names of the memorable and eminent personalities. That was the time of mighty freedom movement, an era of self-sacrifice, of giving all of oneself. It is in that era that the people in numerous homes who aspired for change, and the revolutionaries too used to cultivate Saratchandra’s literature. Again those who

failed to understand revolutionary aspect of Saratchandra's literature have been enchanted by reading novels like *Bindur Chhele* (Bindu's Son), *Nishkriti* (The Deliverance), *Mejdidi* (The Second Elder Sister) and others. These works show a love which extends beyond one's own flesh and blood, which impels one to cherish and accept an orphaned, helpless and impoverished child. They gave expression of more filial love and affection for another's child than one's own. Some of his characters have even fought against their mothers and husbands for this. Reading about such depiction of ethical motherhood, common men have been attracted to it in many ways. Desire to acquire characters like Bindu, Narayani, Mejdidi, Girish, Ramesh and Jadav have been awakened in numerous homes.

An era which began with Rammohan and Vidyasagar and culminated in Saratchandra and Nazrul, an era in which almost every family admired characters like Deshbandhu, Subhash Bose, Bipin Pal, Lala Lajpat, Tilak, Bhagat Singh, Surya Sen, and Kshudiram, in that period, students and youth of the country tried to model themselves on these characters with reverence. Our link of continuity with that era has been cut off. We are now in an era of all-out crisis. I am not focusing on economic crisis, though it is true that the scenario of misery and anguish which Saratchandra had depicted in *Srikanta* and also in *Pather Dabi* has become more terrifying today. Saratchandra did not witness this terrible situation. Saratchandra did not have to see parents selling their own children, or a man deceiving a woman in the name of marriage, living with her for a few days as husband-and-wife and then selling her off. Saratchandra was spared the sight of smuggling of women which has become widespread. Saratchandra did not see wives, leading family lives, coming out on the streets to sell themselves in order to provide food for their starving children and sick husbands. Today women are afraid of going out in the streets for fear of vulgar abuses, rape and murder; even infant girls and old women are being raped — such a situation Rabindranath and Saratchandra did not have to see. Today, the situation in our country has come to such a pass. Today the son is throwing out his parents from the house, murdering them in order to grab the property. Saratchandra and

his contemporaries did not have to see motherhood and fatherhood being insulted and trampled underfoot in a way that we are having to witness today. Some are raising the question whether Saratchandra bears any relevance today and some are of the opinion that today there is not much necessity to cultivate Saratchandra. However, we feel that reading Saratchandra is more relevant today than ever before. With progressive ideas and literary style Saratchandra fought religious ideas and traditionalism, persuaded us to perceive and recognize the essence of capitalist exploitation and feudal superstitions, made us aware of the misery and anguish of the rural poor in our country, made us feel the agony of the workers, the pain and anguish of women, made us think and brought tears to our eyes, awakened within us the desire for change, and introduced us to a secular humanist outlook. These are even more relevant today. Saratchandra had fought against feudalism, capitalism and imperialism. Though, in our country imperialist rule has ended, in the world, imperialist exploitation and aggression, including attacking other countries, are still continuing. In this country too, capitalist exploitation, plunder and oppression have become more remorseless and it has fomented rise of the feudal religious ideas and superstitions to a much greater extent. That is why cultivating Saratchandra is more relevant today. Saratchandra may one day become irrelevant only when a litterateur, greater than Saratchandra in ideas and literary style will appear, guided by the outlook of Marxism and proletarian revolution.

Our Task Today

The conspiracies of the present-day ruling class have detached us from that era of uncompromising struggle and revolutionary ideas; and from the era of Saratchandra. That is why in a historic discussion Comrade Shibdas Ghosh has said, “Since we have forgotten Saratchandra, the high moral, ethical, cultural and aesthetic standard of political and literary-cultural movement that was once attained in our country, has fallen down. As a result, we have become rootless. So, we talk big, but do not cultivate noble emotions and delicate feelings. No movement is a mere intellectual exercise or a matter of intellect

only, it demands both intellect and emotion.”²⁷ He has appealed to all to link up with that era again and then advancing further beyond that stage and reach a higher stage of proletarian culture. That is why reading Saratchandra is very necessary today. Not merely for the sake of reading a story but to cultivate and acquire higher ideology, ethics, taste and culture. Saratchandra has portrayed the character of Sabyasachi, the greatest revolutionary character of that era. Today, we have found a greater revolutionary character than Sabyasachi in Comrade Shibdas Ghosh and we have to advance guided by his teachings. In order to advance, just as he used to collect ingredients of ideas, appreciating the aesthetics of Saratchandra, we have to do the same. Those who desire to change the society, those who are revolutionaries, those who want to understand the pain and misery of the impoverished, those who are searching for higher values and ethics, have to cultivate Saratchandra. Today on September 17th on the birth anniversary of Saratchandra, observe the display of the wave of vulgar culture everywhere on the occasion of Viswakarma Puja. Drinking, gambling, vulgar abuses and rape of women, kidnapping, strangling and murder of parents, self-centeredness, selfishness, a complete lack of culture – all making up the darkness enveloping the society which are creations of capitalism alone. All the ruling parliamentary parties like Congress, BJP, CPI(M), TMC are encouraging these in their narrow sectarian political interest. All these parties are depending on the anti-socials to retain their power. This is a politics which, in that era, could not have been imagined even in the worst nightmare. In that era, everybody used to bow their heads in respect to a *swadeshi* (freedom fighter). Our mothers, donning veils, used to look with reverence at a *swadeshi* on the street, as if they were saints, because they had sacrificed everything for their country and they were able to embrace death with a smile on their faces. Today, on the contrary, a politics devoid of ethics, culture and ideology is going on with revolver and bombs in one hand and a bottle of drink and moneybag in the other hand. Naturally, they want that Vidyasagar, Saratchandra, Rabindranath and Nazrul along with Deshbandhu, Subhash Bose, Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad and

Kshudiram sink into oblivion. Today's students and youth in the main are devoid of depth in their thinking, they are unable to judge a phenomenon with patience, calmness and composure, a light attitude and flippancy prevail and they become easily attracted to vulgarity and loathsome things. This mental frame is being created in them by the ruling class and obviously this crisis is more terrifying than the economic crisis. This is a crisis of human civilization. Those who commit rapes or go about with the intent of rape are worse than animals as there is no rape in the animal world. They are the products of a rotten, decomposed capitalist society spreading a foul stench, they are neither men nor animals. This is like a new species created by the capitalist class and their political parties, which has the shape of a human being but is devoid of any human values. This is what the capitalist class wants, this is what it needs. In these beings there are no questions, no arguments, no judgments, no honour and dignity, no protest against any injustice; they can be satisfied and made happy by the ingredients of filthy enjoyment, alcohol, money and women. This is a terrible attack, which pushes youth in this direction.

It is for this reason that cultivation of Saratchandra is necessary. Numerous discussions and debates are necessary on the various works of Saratchandra. Not only Saratchandra, I am talking about that era in its entirety. A correct evaluation of the great men of that era, about the revolutionaries should be made and this should take the form of a movement. This exercise should not be in a ceremonial manner. I feel great agony when I observe that there is no attraction to Saratchandra's literature and as a result there is no cultivation of it. Where would this trend of thinking lead to? My earnest appeal to you is :- Read Saratchandra thoroughly, cultivate it, realize its significance and take his literature to all the homes. Let the real youth awaken, let the genuine movement of the youth awaken. Then only will the country find a direction, find ethics and values and from that there will be cultivation of proletarian revolution. If we are able to successfully acquire the higher standard and ethics created by Saratchandra, then we will advance towards the next step, that of attaining proletarian revolutionary character, where the

individual will become totally free from self-interest, from everything related to individual interest and the individual interest will completely merge with the social interest. Social interest and interest of revolution will then be identified with individual interest. The individual will have no separate interest of his own.. Such a Communist character, free from individual interest on all questions including love, affection and compassion etc. will then materialize. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh has guided us to this ideology, but before this the characters created by Saratchandra should be perceived and realized along with acquiring and applying them in our own lives in order to reach this standard. I have already taken much of your time and so I am finishing here with this appeal to all. I have already mentioned that it was my desire to read from Saratchandra more than giving a speech, because I want to show you what invaluable treasure, Saratchandra contains. However, I have been able to show you only a small part of that treasure. There is so much more of it. Therefore, I appeal to you to read, to think, to give due consideration and give birth to a new movement. With this, I thank you for your patience and end my speech here.

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