

manager of all his estates, and his pay *per annum* was to be Rs. 6000, and a daily allowance for his out-of-pocket expenses besides. He was to have horses to ride, and his authority was to be unlimited. In tremulous tones he said, "Well, Pandit, I cannot find words to express my thanks to you for looking on me as a fit person on whom to bestow these boundless favours. But, to tell you the truth, I am not worthy of such a high position."

"Don't praise yourself," replied Alopi Din, laughingly.

225 "Anyhow, I am your slave," said Bansī Dhar gravely, "and I am only too proud to serve such a Divine as you; but I am neither learned nor clever, nor have I any experience which would make up for these deficiencies<sup>1</sup>. Moreover," he added, "for such a high post a great business man<sup>2</sup> and an experienced superintendent<sup>3</sup> is necessary."

Alopi Din took out the pen from the pen case and after putting it into Bansī Dhar's hand said, "I need neither learning, nor sagacity, nor experience, nor knowledge of business, for I have already tested the virtues of these gems. Now fortunately I have found such a priceless pearl, that the beauty of learning and sagacity will prove nothing in comparison to its lustre. Here is the pen, hurry up and sign this legibly and be done with it. I pray to God only that He may ever keep you the same unkind, harsh and rude, but dutiful inspector who met me on the river bank!"

1. Note the Urdu expression.
2. Literally, one understanding affairs.
3. Note the Urdu expression.

Bansī Dhar's eyes overflowed<sup>1</sup> with tears. So much gratitude could not be contained in a small thing like a heart. Once again he glanced at the Pandit with a look of reverence and admiration and signed the document with a trembling hand. Alopi Din jumped up in an ecstasy of joy and embraced him.

#### A DISINTERESTED BENEFACTOR.

##### 1

It was the month of Sawan,<sup>2</sup> and Reoti Rani, having stained her feet with *mihndi*<sup>3</sup> and dressed her hair<sup>4</sup> went to see her mother-in-law.

"Mummy darling," she said, "I, too, am going to the fair<sup>5</sup> to-day."

Reoti was the wife of Pandit Chintaman.

1. For *jhalk* read *chhalak*, from *chhalakad*, to overflow; to be spilt.
  2. *Sawan*: the fourth Hindi month corresponding to July-August.
  3. *Mihndi* or *hind*: is a kind of myrtle, which is used to redder the hands and feet as a cosmetic.
  4. *Māng choti*: *māng* is the middle line where the hair is parted, and *choti* is the hair at the back of the head.
  5. This is a story of an accident at the "dolls' fair". This fair is still held at many places in the United Provinces and elsewhere. Girls pretend that their dolls have been married and that they are sending them off to the house of their in-laws.
- Boys and girls collect near a river or a pond, and they both beat the dolls with their sticks before the girls put their dolls into the water to send them off to their new homes. The ceremony has no religious significance. The custom probably originated in the days when girls were looked on as a curse in the family, not only because of the expense they caused, but more especially because of the fighting that ensued when they were kidnapped, which cost many lives. See also page 78 lines 18 etc.

The Pandit had not got much benefit out of the worship of Saraswati<sup>1</sup> and so had transferred his attentions to the goddess Lakshmi<sup>2</sup>.

He ran a money-lending business, but, contrary to the usual run of money-lenders, never deemed it right to charge more than twenty-five per cent. interest.

Reoti's mother-in-law was sitting on a small charpoy with a child in her arms, and in answer to her daughter-in-law, said, "If you get wet the child will catch cold!"

"No mother," replied Reoti, "it won't take long, and I shall soon be back."

227 Reoti had two children, a boy, Hiranman, who was in his seventh year, and a girl, an infant in arms.

She dressed him up in his best clothes and, to protect him from the evil eye, marked his forehead and cheeks with *kajal*<sup>3</sup>.

She gave him a beautiful stick with which to beat the dolls, and took him off with her girl friends to see the fair.

On the bank of the river Kiral, there was a dense crowd of women.

Dark clouds hung overhead, and gaily dressed women were enjoying the gentle rain in the beautiful plain by the river.

Swings were hung up on the branches (of the trees), and some of the women were swinging, others

1. *Saraswati* : the goddess of learning.
2. *Lakshmi* : the goddess of wealth.
3. *Kajal* : lamp black.
4. *Solahn singar* : the sixteen cosmetics and articles of

singing the *malur*<sup>1</sup>, and some were sitting by the side of the stream, playing with the ripples.

The delightful cool breeze, the gentle drizzle, the rain-swept verdure of the hills, and the delicious rippling stream, all combined to make conditions perfect<sup>2</sup>.

To-day, begins the honeymoon<sup>3</sup> of the dolls, when they go to their mother-in-law's house.

The unmarried girls, adorned with *mihadi* and wearing beautiful clothes, have dressed the dolls up with jewelry and fine clothes and have come to see them off.

They push them off down stream<sup>4</sup> and with shrill voices sing the songs of Sawan.

But the dolls, which had been brought up in luxury, are subjected to a sound<sup>5</sup> thrashing from all sides as soon as they leave their comfortable homes.

Reoti was enjoying the show, and Hiranman, on the steps (of the *ghat* built on the bank) of the stream was thrashing the dolls with the girls. The steps

adornment for women. They are:—*adantan* the toothbrush, *mangan* the tooth powder, *ubjan* cosmetic (a kind of skin food) *sendar* red lead, *kesar* minium and saffron (for the forehead), *angan* antimony for the eyes, *bindi* span-gles, *tel* hair oil, *argaya* scent, *kanghi* the comb, *pin* betel nut (to reddden the lips), *nuss* black paint for the lips and teeth, *nil* indigo (for tattooing), *mihadi* see note 3 page 185, *phul* flowers (for the hair etc.), *atni* a red dye for paint.

1. *Malur* : a song sung by Hindus during the rains.
2. *Tanba-shikan* : literally, repentance breaking.
3. *Bidai* : from the Hindi *bidai karwa* to bid farewell.
4. Literally, they make them float on the water : hence down-stream.
5. *Bauchhar* : a heavy shower of rain ; driving rain.

were covered with slime. Suddenly he slipped and fell into the water.

Reoti, with a shriek ran to the spot beating her head.

In a moment a crowd collected, but no one was sufficiently chivalrous<sup>1</sup> to make any attempt to get the boy out of the water or try to save his life.

Some were afraid that their dressed hair would be ruffled, or that their clean *dhoties* would get wet. Ten minutes went by but no one felt called upon to do anything<sup>2</sup>, and poor Reoti was distracted. It happened that a man came past on a horse. When he saw the crowd he dismounted, and asked a bystander what they were all doing.

"A boy has been drowned," replied the man.

"Where?"

"Over there, where that woman is standing; crying."

The traveller at once took off his jacket of *garha* cloth<sup>3</sup>, pulled up his dhoti, and plunged into the water. In a tense silence everyone wondered who the man was.

The first time he dived, he found the boy's cap; the second, his stick; and when he came up the third time, there was the boy in his arms. Thereupon the spectators raised shouts of applause.

The mother rushed up and embraced the boy, while a number of Chintaman's relatives came up and tried to bring the boy round.

In half an hour's time the boy opened his eyes, and the people breathed again. The doctor *sahib*

1. Literally, nobody's humanity demanded.
2. Note the expression in Urdu.
3. *Gāṛhā*: coarse Indian cloth.

said that had the boy been two minutes longer in the water, he could not have lived.

Then people began to look for the unknown benefactor but there was no trace of him. They sent people in all directions and searched high and low<sup>1</sup> throughout the fair, but he was not to be found.

## 2

Twenty years have passed, during which Pandit Chintaman's business has increased day by day. His mother made all the seven pilgrimages<sup>2</sup> and when

1. Literally, sifted out the whole fair.

2. *Sāṭon jātrien*: the seven most important pilgrimages for Hindus, which are:—*Kāśhī* (Benares); *Pray Rāj* (Allahabad); *Badrī Nāth* (in Garhwal); *Set Banāth Rameshwaram* (in Madras); *Gayā* (in Bihar); *Jagan Nāth* (Puri); *Dewārd Nāth* (on the north-west coast).

*Kāśhī*: on which stands the modern city of Benares, is to the Hindus what Mecca is to the Muhammadans, and Jerusalem is to the Christians. In the *Shāstras* it is written that *Kāśhī* is outside this world and rests on the trident of Shiva the Destroyer. It is said that the world, which is impure because of the sins of mankind, will be destroyed, but that *Kāśhī*, owing to its supernatural location, is very holy, and alone will be saved. Many Hindus are of opinion that *Kāśhī* means splendid, but other interpretations are given of this word. Benares is said to be a corruption of *Varanasi* from the *Varana* and *Asī* rivers which flow into the Ganges to the north and south of the town. Others say that it is named after a mythical king *Banar*, and that the surrounding country was called *Kāśhī*.

*Pray Rāj*: Allahabad: see note 3 page 202.

*Badrī Nāth* or *Badrī Nāthyāna* is situated in Garhwal, not far from the Alakananda river, in a valley between the peaks of *Nar* and *Nāthyāna* and consists of a group of seven temples dedicated to *Nāthyāna*.

Connected with this place is the following legend:—

In the *Mahābhārata* it is stated that, Arjuna and Krishna in some former incarnation were *Nar* and *Narāyana*, two Rishis, who lived in Badri in the Himalayas. They were the greatest of all men, and invincible even to Indra. At that time one, *Dambodbhava*, was riling with universal power, and jealous of the power and reputation of the two Rishis, challenged them to fight. This they refused to do, but *Narāyana* threw a handful of grass at him and rendered him powerless. *Narāyana* admonished him for his pride, and the Rishis then preached the doctrine of universal peace and love, with as much success, apparently, as their modern prototypes.

Some say that *Badri Nāth* or *Badri Saik* is rocky eminence at the source of the Ganges.

There are various opinions as to the source of the Ganges. *Valmiki* in his *Rāmāyana* describes her origin as from the tangled hair of Shiva (which perhaps represents Mount Kailās—the residence of the god Shiva). In the Vishnu Purāna. Book II chapter 2, it is written, "The Ganges, descending from the heavens, divides itself into four mighty rivers, flowing in four different directions". Modern opinion is that the river has its origin in the glacier of Gangotri, where it issues from the ice-cave—"the cow's mouth" of the sacred books of the Hindus. This is not the source of the river that issues from the mountains at Haridwar, but is the source of one of the feeders of the main river. The real sources are on the southern slopes of the watershed near the Nīti and Mana, passes in Thibet.

The main pilgrim route to *Badri* is via Haridwar, along the Alakananda river, and *via* Srinagar in Garhwal. The pilgrimage season is from June to November.

*Seti Bandh Eamashwaram*: Setu-bandha, Sanskrit, the forming of a causeway or bridge; the ridge of rocks extending from the south of the Coromandel coast towards Ceylon (supposed to have been built by Hanuman's orders as a bridge for the passage of Rama's forces against Ravana)—See also note I page 181.

*Gagd*: in Bihar is said to have been the place where the great Rishi *Gagd Mum* used to carry out his devotions.

she died a temple<sup>1</sup> was built in her name.

Now Reoti was no longer a daughter-in-law, but had herself become a mother-in-law, and all the accounts and registers were kept by Hiramān.

The god *Viṣṇu* found his devotions so acceptable that he caused the place to become a great and holy city. Others say that it was sanctified by the benediction of *Viṣṇu* as a tribute to *Gagd* the *Asur* who was overwhelmed by the gods with rocks at that place.

The shrines are now in the hands of Brahmanism, and are largely resorted to by pilgrims for *Sarvādh* or funeral ceremonies, in consequence of the belief that the souls of the departed are thence transmigrated direct to *Vaikuntha*, the heaven of *Viṣṇu*. Preparatory to their devotions at *Gagd*, pilgrims bathe in the waters at Pūnpun which are supposed to have the property of washing away sins. *Pindās*, or offerings to the dead are thrown into the stream in the belief that they will thus be conveyed to the spirits of departed relations.

*Jagam Nāth*: see note I page 181.

*Dudhā Nāth*: *Sri Krishna Ji* was the most famous incarnation of *Viṣṇu*. His uncle *Rājā Kansā* of Mathra had imprisoned *Krishna Ji*'s parents, and so *Krishna Ji* was born in gaol. In his boyhood he murdered the *Rājā Kansā* and the latter's father *Rājā Agarsen* was made king. *Rājā Kansā*'s father-in-law, the *Rājā* of *Magadh*, to avenge the murder, attacked Mathra. Although the attack was repulsed, *Krishna Ji* felt that Mathra was no longer a safe place to live in, and so founded a new city in some rugged mountains near the sea, where he, the *Rājā* of Mathra, and all his subjects took up their abode.

This is the city called *Dudhā* (the city of many gates), which was the capital of *Sri Krishna Ji*. The actual site is said to have been submerged by the sea.

*Thakur dādera*: an idol temple, from *thakur*, an idol; deity; feudal lord of Rajputana etc., and *dādera*, a door; threshold.

Hiraman was young man of imposing appearance and had grown very stout and corpulent. He had good manners and was good natured.

On occasion he even lent money to the poor tenants free of interest. Chintaman had often expressed his displeasure<sup>1</sup> with his son for this offence, and had even threatened to turn him out.

Once Hiraman subscribed fifty rupees to a Sanscrit *Pathshala*<sup>2</sup>. The Pandit was so annoyed at this that he did not touch a morsel of food for two days. Such disagreeable incidents occurred every day and for this reason Hiraman became rather estranged from his father, but all his 'evil deeds' were committed with the connivance of Reeti. When the poor widows<sup>3</sup> of the town, or wives of the tenants who were oppressed by the landlords, went to see her and blessed Hiraman spreading out the border of their head cloths<sup>4</sup>, she thought that there was no woman more generous than herself, and no man so angel-natured as her son.

Then invariably came the recollection of that day when Hiraman fell into the Kinat stream, and she called to mind the man who had saved her darling from drowning, and blessings and praise welled up from the bottom of her heart, and she longed to see him and prostrate herself at his feet.

She was absolutely certain now that he was no human being but some kind of God. Then, sitting

1. Note the expression in Urdu.
2. *Pathshālā*: a Hindu primary school.
3. *Bidhāt*: Hindi—*Bend*; Urdu, a widow.
4. *Anchal phaidānd*: to stretch out the hem of the cloth or sheet which is used as a head cover, by way of a blessing or curse. This is looked on as more efficacious than a blessing or curse.

on the same small *charpoy* on which her mother-in-law used to sit, she would pick up her two grandsons and feed them.

Hiraman's twenty-seventh birthday came round. For Reeti his birthday was always the most auspicious day of the year. She used to indulge in superlative generosity, and this was the only extravagance in which Pandit Chintaman took part. She was very happy on this day, and wept (tears of joy), and prayed for her unknown benefactor very sincerely and earnestly<sup>1</sup> for (she realised) that it was through him she was fortunate enough to witness this day and experience such happiness.

## 3

One day Hiraman came to Reeti and said, "Mother, Siripur is up for sale, shall I bid for it?"

"The whole<sup>2</sup> (or part of it)?"

"The whole of it," replied Hiraman. "It is a good village, not too big or too small and is only about twenty miles from here. "It has been bid up to four thousand so far, and it will be knocked down for another hundred or two."

"Well, you had better ask the old man's<sup>3</sup> opinion first," said Reeti.

"I can't waste two hours discussing<sup>4</sup> the matter with him," replied Hiraman.

Hiraman was now the head of the family, and Chintaman took no part in the family business. The

1. *Jazbat*: Arabic, feelings, sing. *jazba*.
2. *Solah ana* is often used to express the whole of a thing; in the same way *dhī ana* is used for the half, and *chār ana* for a quarter etc.
3. *Dādā*: a paternal grandfather, is sometimes used by Hindus for father.
4. *Sar māghzan karnā*: literally, to worry one's head.

poor old man, with a pair of spectacles on his nose, used to sit on a cushion and spend his time coughing.

Next day Siripur was knocked down to the name of Hiranman, and thus the erstwhile money-lender became a landowner. Taking his clerk<sup>1</sup> and two peons, he went out to see the village.

When the villagers of Siripur heard of his intention, every family in the place began to prepare presents for him, it being their new *Zamindar's* first visit.

On the fifth evening (after his departure) Hiranman entered the village. On his forehead was a caste mark made with rice dissolved in curds.

Three hundred tenants<sup>2</sup> with folded hands, stood awaiting his bidding till the first watch of the night. Next morning the general manager introduced the tenants to him, and each one, as he came before him, laid a rupee or two, according to his means, at his feet; and by noon there was a pile of five hundred rupees.

This was the first time that Hiranman realised what could be obtained out of owning land, and for the first time he was intoxicated with wealth and power—wealth, which is the most potent of all intoxicants, and the most deadly.

When all the tenants had been introduced, he asked his manager if there was anyone else.

"Yes my lord," replied the manager, "there is one more called Takht Singh."

"Why hasn't he come?"

"Because he is rather lazy."

"I will cure his laziness," said Hiranman, "just send someone for him.

After a while an old man came up, leaning on a stick, and after making his obeisance sat down on the ground without making him any offering.

Hiranman was very annoyed<sup>1</sup> at this impertinence.

"You haven't fallen into the clutches<sup>2</sup> of any *Zamindar* as yet," he snapped, "I will put everyone of you in his place<sup>3</sup>!"

Takht Singh gazed intently at Hiranman's face and said, "A score of landlords have come and gone in my time, but none of them ever spoke to me as harshly as you."

He then picked up his stick and went home.

The old Thakurain asked him if he had seen the landlord and what he was like.

"He is a good man," said Takht Singh, "I recognised him."

"What! You have met him before?" asked the Thakurain.

"I've known him for the last twenty years," he replied, "don't you remember the incident of the Doll's Fair?"

Takht Singh never went near Hiranman again.

## 4

Six months later, Reoti also wanted to see Siripur, so, in due course she went with her sister-in-law and all her children.

All the women of the village including the old Thakurain came out to meet them.

1. Note the expression in Urdu.

2. Note the expression in Urdu.

3. *Hekri*: force. Note the expression.

1. *Mantab*: literally, a deputy.

2. *Asdm*: Arabic, is the double plural of *asim*—a name. When used as masculine singular in Urdu it means a tenant.

Reoti was charmed with the Thakurain's conversation, manners and demeanour and as she was leaving, said to her, "Thakurain, I hope you will come and see me now and again, I am so pleased to have met you."

And that was the beginning of a sincere friendship between the two women.

Meanwhile, Hiranman who had been taken in by his manager, was thinking out some way of depriving<sup>1</sup> Takht Singh of his possessions.

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It was the *Purnamashi* of Jeth<sup>2</sup>, and preparations were being made for Hiranman's birthday.

Reoti was sifting flour when the old Thakurain came. Reoti smiled at her and said, "Thakurain, may I invite you to come here-to-morrow."

"I shall be delighted," replied the Thakurain, "which birthday is it?"

"The thirtieth" was the reply.

"May God grant that we see a hundred more such days!" said the Thakurain.

"Thakurain, may your tongue be blessed!" Reoti prayed. "It is entirely thanks to all the special incantations<sup>3</sup> that I have had read, and to the prayers of you people," she added, "that I have seen this day. When he was just seven years old, his life was in great danger. I had gone to see the Doll's Fair, and he fell into the water. Fortunately a truly chivalrous<sup>4</sup> man saved his life—indeed it was he who gave him his life. I have made all possible enquiries but have

1. *Be dakhil karand*: to dislodge; to deprive of possession.

2. *Jeth*: is the 2nd Hindi month, corresponding to May-June.

3. *Tantar mantar*: juggling; conjuring; enchanting by figures and incantations.

4. *Mahatma*: a pious man; saint; etc.

never found any trace of him. On every birthday a hundred rupees are put by in his name, and the sum has now amounted to a little over two thousand. The child intends to build a temple in his name at Siripur. Thakurain, believe me, if I could but meet him once I should feel that I had succeeded in life, and my heart's desire would be fulfilled."

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As Reoti ceased speaking, tears ran down the Thakurain's cheeks.

Next day, on the one hand Hiranman's birthday party was held, and on the other hand Takht Singh's hands were put up for auction.

"I am going to ask Reoti Rami to help us," said the Thakurain.

"Not as long as I live," replied Takht Singh.

5

The month of Asarh<sup>1</sup> drew nigh, and the rains<sup>2</sup> set in with their reanimating generosity. The farmers of Siripur went out to till their fields, while Takht Singh with sorrowful and longing looks watched them till they were hidden by the folds of the ground. Takht Singh had one cow which he used to graze every day. It was the one means of livelihood he had left. He eked out a livelihood by selling its milk and cow-dung cakes but sometimes starvation was his lot. He suffered all these miseries in silence and never once went to see Hiranman to complain of his unhappy plight.

Hiranman had wished to crush him, but only crushed himself, for what success he achieved became defeat. Do what he might, he could not bend the old iron

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1. *Asarh*: is the 3rd Hindi month corresponding to June-July.

2. *Megh Rdi*: is Indra, the God of the clouds, wind and rain, whose voice is thunder, and lightning, his whip.



with the fire of his obstinate malice.

One day Reoti said to him, "My son<sup>1</sup>, it is wicked of you to oppress a poor man."

Hiraman flared up and replied, "He is not poor, and I'm going to break his pride."

The landlord in the intoxication of his wealth, like a silly child who fights its own shadow, was trying to break a thing that did not exist.

## 6

Takht Singh somehow managed to live for a whole year. The rains started again, and his house had not been roofed in. For several days on end it rained in torrents, and a part of the house collapsed. The cow was tied up (to that particular part of the wall) and was crushed and killed. Takht Singh himself was severely injured<sup>2</sup> and thereafter took to his bed with a fever. He had none to look after him and had lost his one means of livelihood. A cruel and pitiless calamity had utterly ruined him. His whole house was flooded with water, and not a grain of corn was left. He lay in the dark, moaning and groaning, when Reoti came to his house. Takht Singh opened his eyes and asked who it was.

"Reoti Rani," his wife told him.

"I am indeed fortunate," said Takht, "that you are so kind to me<sup>3</sup>."

"Thakurain, God alone knows how surprised I am at my son's behaviour" said Reoti rather shamefacedly, "you must let me know whenever you are

1. Note that *beta*, although in the vocative case, is not inflected to show affection.

2. *Takht Singh ke bhí sahét chot di*: note that after '*ke*, *baam men'* is understood.

3. Note this Hindi expression:

in trouble. This dreadful calamity has come upon you, and I have never even heard of it."

Reoti then put a little pile of rupees in front of the Thakurain. Takht Singh heard the chink of the money, and sat up saying, "Rani, we are not in need of it—when I am at the point of death, please do not make me a sinner."

Next day Hiraman too passed by the place with some friends. He smiled when he saw that the house had collapsed, and thought that he had at last broken the old man's pride. He went in and asked the Thakur how he was.

"Very well, thanks to God's mercy," replied Takht Singh quietly, "it is strange that you should have found your way here<sup>1</sup>."

Hiraman was defeated again, for his desire that Takht Singh should rub his eyes on his feet<sup>2</sup> was not fulfilled even yet. That night the poor, but honest and unselfish Thakur departed this life.

## 7

Now the old Thakurain was left alone in the world, there was no one to share her sorrow or to mourn for her after her death. Her poverty and indigence added fuel to the flame of her sorrow, for although affluence cannot replace the loss of dear ones, it is a great comforter<sup>3</sup>. Anxiety as to a means of livelihood is dreadful.

The Thakurain now collected cow-dung from the fields and grazing-grounds, and made it into cakes to sell. It was very sad to see her leaning on a stick on her way to the fields and returning with a basket of cow-dung on her head, panting

1. Note the Urdu idiom.

2. Note the expression in Urdu.

3. Literally, but certainly it serves as ointment.



under its weight. Even Hiramman himself was moved at the sight. One day he sent her some (brass) dishes of flour, pulse and rice, and Reoti took them to her herself. But the old Thakurain's eyes filled with tears as she said, "Reoti, as long as these eyes of mine can see, and my limbs can serve me, do not make sinners of me and of him who has died."

240 From that day Hiramman never dared to show her any practical form of sympathy.

One day Reoti bought some dung cakes from her. In the village they were sold at thirty to the pice, but she wished to take only twenty. Thenceforth the Thakurain never took the cakes to her house.

There can be very few such goddess-like women in this world. Was she not even aware of the fact that all she had to do was to reveal her treasured secret<sup>1</sup> and so end all her troubles. But perhaps she feared that would be accepting a reward for kindness, and as the well-known proverb runs, "Do a good turn and then throw it in the river." Or perchance it never entered her head that she had even done Reoti a good turn.

This woman, who was so gracious a lady<sup>2</sup> and was ready to give even her life for her honour, lived for three years after her husband's death. The troubles with which she had to contend during that time were so dreadful as to make the hair stand on end. Sometimes she starved for days on end, sometimes she could find no cow-dung, and every now and again

1. *Rak-i-sar basta*: literally, a secret with its head sealed down.
2. *Wazai-dar*: literally, stylish; elegant; it also gives the idea of being "nice and old-fashioned"; aristocratic etc.

somebody would steal the cow-dung cakes. Such is the will of God, that some have plenty of money, with none to enjoy it, whilst others spend their life weeping and wailing (in penury).

The old woman endured her miserable lot without asking anyone for anything<sup>1</sup>.

## 8

It was Hiramman's thirty second<sup>2</sup> birthday, and (once again) the joyful sound of drums was heard. *Puris*<sup>3</sup> were cooked, some with *ghi* and some with oil; the former for fat respectable Brahmins, the latter for the poor hungry low-class people.

In the midst of the rejoicings a woman came up to Reoti and told her that the Thakurain seemed to be in a critical<sup>4</sup> condition and had sent for her. Reoti fearing that the old woman might be dying<sup>5</sup>, prayed to God not to let anything spoil that day, and refrained from going to see her.

When Hiramman saw that his mother did not intend going, he went himself. For some days past he had felt very sorry for the Thakurain. But Reoti followed him to the door<sup>6</sup> to stop him going, proving how merciful and kindly she was.

1. Note the expression in Urdu.
2. Note the misprint here.
3. *Puri*: a sort of thin *chapatti* which is fried.
4. Note the Urdu idiom. *Jine* is a colloquial contraction of *na jānen*.
5. Note the negative construction.
6. Note the misprint for *darwāza*. The meaning of this sentence is that as Hiramman had been the cause of the *thakur*'s death, Reoti was afraid that his visit would be a dreadful shock for the old *thakurain*, who might think that he had come to arrange for her funeral pyre as well.

When Hiranman reached the Thakurain's house silence reigned.

The old woman's face was pale and her end seemed near<sup>1</sup>.

"Thakurain," he shouted, "here is Hiranman!"

The Thakurain opened her eyes and by signs directed him to put his head close to hers. Then in faltering tones she said, "Here, at the head of the bed are the Thakur's bones and the red lead of my married life<sup>2</sup> in a little box. Please send them, after my death, to Parag Raj<sup>3</sup>." She spoke no more and closed her eyes.

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1. Note the Urdu idiom.

2. *Suhāg ka sendhūr*: *suhāg*, married life; *sendhūr*, red lead.

This is the red lead with which the Hindu bridegroom adorns the parting of his bride's hair, and this forms the culminating point of the marriage ceremony. She renews the red lead as necessary during her married life, but it is not used by widows. It is therefore the sign of married life. On the death of the husband, the widow keeps any red lead she may have left over, and as opportunity offers, sends it together with the ashes of her husband's bones to Allahābād or some such holy place, where they will be thrown into the holy waters of the Ganges.

The ashes of the bones of Hindus who live a long way away from the Ganges are kept by their nearest relatives who send them to be 'offered up' to that river as opportunity offers.

The old *Thakurain* was very poor and had no children, and so could not send the *Thakur's* ashes to *Prāg*, *Rāj* (Allahābād). Sometimes the widow will keep the ashes of her husband in a tin box by way of a memento. When her end is near she will get some friend to send them to *Prāg*, *Rāj* etc.

3. *Prāg Rāj*: more correctly *Prayāg Rāj*: from *prayāg*, a confluence. Hence the great, or royal confluence (of the two great rivers, the Jumna and the Ganges at Allahābād).

Hiranman opened the box and found both the relics carefully put away.

There was also a small bundle of ten rupees which had probably been kept for her funeral ceremony<sup>1</sup>.

That night the Thakurain's troubles came to an end for ever. The same night Reoti dreamt that it was the month of Sawan, clouds were over-shadowing the sky and she herself was standing on the bank of river Kirat. Just then Hiranman slipped into the water, and she beat her breast and began to cry. Suddenly an old man jumped into the water and brought Hiranman out. She threw herself at his feet and asked him who he was. He replied that he lived at Siripur and that his name was 'Takti Singh.

Siripur still belongs to Hiranman, but now its beauty has been doubled. If you go there you can see the golden pinnacle of a temple from a long way off. It is built on the site of Takti Singh's house and in front of it there is a well and a *dharm sala*<sup>2</sup> both of brick. Travellers stop there and sing his praises. Both the temple and the *dharm sala* are called after him.

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#### MAHESH DAS (OTHERWISE) RAJA BIRBAR

His name is always associated with that of Akbar in the same way as the name of Aristotle is with Alexander. But when the fame he acquired is

1. Literally, was the provision for the road of the departing one.
2. *Dharm-sālā*: a building used for any pious purpose; a rest house for pilgrims or travellers; as alms house.