

DEVANGNI

In the olden days, the wedding of a Pathohar maiden used to be an interesting function, full of color and charm. The wedding did not begin nor end in a day as in these civilized days it does. It was the chief event which colored the whole Pathohar life with its sweet memories. The bridegroom would rejuvenate himself by going back memory to the wedding night and the bride would delight her soul in the daily humdrum her labour by peeping once again through the chinks, at her gay bridegroom entering for the first time into her bridal chamber to have a look at her when she was alt new to him and herself, Usually this fire of youth was not allowed to blaze up; it was kept covered down by all kinds of incurnbustible ashes of life thrown on it. No Pathohar maiden's hair were ever woven into broad plaited braids before her wedding night, nor was she allowed to decorate herself with flowers, she could never use collyrium to enhance the charm of her eyes with that amorous blackness. She was to live, like a laboring girl in the dust and dirt of the house without addicting herself to the feminine poses of vanity, coquetry or conceit. Her raiment's were of the thick coarse home-spun. Her veil cloth just covered her hair only and not her face which in its abandon of innocence always reminded one of an unportrayed madonna.

The mother took care that her daughter did not come to know of her youth and she provided the wildness of the forest life to her in her father's count yard. Till late in their youth, the boys and girls used to play together in the open fields in the moonlight, making the common villages great cities by the delight of their sports There is no doubt that seeing the premature sex-consciousness of the boys and girls of Pathohar of today and the vain coquetish airs of girls, one fee's that, after all, the commercial knowledge, come from the contact of such innocent people when aliens and their institutional, is not an unmixed blessing. The ever-expanding curiosity of the former, Spreading its hands to gather the sensations of the new and the alien does spontaneously affect man as he is unhinged from his inner centre and the old self consciousness that are, somehow, kept propped up on old traditions and customs

'A month before the day fixed for the marriage the old and young women of the whole village used to assemble at the bride's house at night and sing the love lyrics of Pathohar. They used to so arrange that two weddings never came off within the period of two months in the same village or town, so that the joy might not be divided. The under lying feeling was that whatever may be the differences about the marriage of a son, all differences must he sunk on the occasion of wedding of a daughter. The latter was the child of the village, and the whole village had to put together their prayers. their feeling, their joys and their tears to celebrate 'her wedding inn, to give her away to love an event as pathetic as to give her away to death. They took it that life is an ocean in whose depths lie the pearls of love, hut are held there in the hands of the death, it is after all an enterprise on which the bride goes, she may win it or lose and there is no other way for her but to be given away like that.

Alas! that concentration of solemnity unit' of feeling for the neighbor's daughter has well nigh disappeared, and to-day there are about half a dozen of weddings taking making place in one little town during a single night with the semi-comic tom-tom of the rejected military drums and out music of' the cast out bag-pipes from the stores of a British Regiment of the Highlanders. Now-a-days S religion too in consonance with the general degeneration of these people is in an extreme hurry to complete the ceremony which is more a vulgar formality than a holy passage to love.

On Devangni's wedding, the old ways of love were quite bright and no one then dared to break customs. The Railway line was just laid from Rawalpindi to Lahore and many people had not yet had a ride in the train. Her father, Delawar Singh, was pathetically busy in making arrangements for wedding of his only daughter, and while going Out or coming in, he would hurriedly go to Devangni to embrace her and shed a tear which fell upon her hair and dried there.

For full one month at Delawar Singh's house and in the village of Takhtpari (throne of the fairy),-there was the bustle of joyous celebra-tions. Sardar Delawar Singh had seen better days. Lie was not then very rich, but, as they say in Pathohar, the o oil pots remain full of Oil ness for ever. No one of his kins-folk ever doubted of his being quite well off, for in those days, the noble old men never talked of their financial condition, and even when starving they treated their guests with sweet hospitality Sardar Delawar Singh and his wife. Attro had but one child, Devangni, who was the soul of both; they lavished all their feelings on her. She was brought up like a princess in the full pride of her parents Devangni, even as a little girl was so pretty that all their kins-folk came to see her. No one missed to bring one trinket or and colored cloth-dolls of Sialkot for the pleasure of this little, cherub. She was, so to say, a spoilt child and the usual constraint under which the girls were usually brought up then, was wanting in her case. She was a willful girl who did what she liked, played what she chooses. Unlike other, if she wanted flowers, her father garlanded her with wreaths of jasmine. She had had silk wear and in all such respects she was treated like a son. Devangni. when grown up had invented sonic night games of her own which were played in the broad fallow fields of the village and she 'was having a full measure of all sports including the ordinary sports of 'hide and seek' and Kikli or spin-dance. The girls and boys all acted under her commands, and she whole have from them the respect Shown to a queen; And when she sang the epigr-ammatic verses composed by herself, the enthusiasm of her playmates knew no bounds. The flying arms extended to the very stars.

II

The arrival-night of the bridegroom's party was drawing near. It had to come from Kallar and great were the wailings all along the un-metalled road from Kallar to Takhtpari. The house of Delawar Singh was full of kins-men and women, and they had gathered there in gay attires with happy faces. The mingling of their feeling was like the meeting of little

streams and the confusion of their speeches as joy giving. At last, the sacred night came. The bridegroom's procession entered Takhtpari like a conqueror's triumphant entry into a conquered city. The torches on either side of the procession lighted the path. The bridegroom rode on a fine white mare in the middle of the procession, and over his head was held an umbrella of honors. And there was an atmosphere of joy, no one was in hurry. The whole night they had before them, for the ceremony generally takes place towards the break of the dawn. For the ceremony, they have to wait for the coming up of the sun his standing Over the head of the couple, giving his blessings like an old golden-locked seer.

And the two parties met in bride's love-street. The old men of the bride's side came forward to meet in loving embraces the guests, the grand old men of the bridegroom, side. Then came the father of the bride to meet the father of the bridegroom. Sealing with their embrace there by lifelong kinships, and forgetting any clannish hostilities Or feuds that might have existed between the two families.

And after this meeting the bridegroom's kinsmen made a great show of their joy, letting fire-works play on the gate of the bride's house, on the roofs of her neighbors and in the street.

After a while, the young bridegroom, Jassa Singh, was taken to a retiring room and left to the Young maidens of the town, n, the sisters-in-law, the bride's maids. And it was their duty to welcome him with lyrics for the ceremony late at night. It was their duty to castanets of all kinds around him a captive of the charms of feminine life. They made the hours flit by in light-hearted talk and laughter. For example, they would keep his dinner before him and when he would lift a morsel, a dozen of girls would laugh together and non-plus him. The young Jassa Singh, still not very familiar with their way's would naturally feel he had not taken the right thing to eat or what. And they will all say "Ho! Ho! Such a fine young man, bending low for a mere morsel"

"Ah! The mother has not licked this calf, he does not know how to eat", would say another.

"Hush ye naughty girls! you are vexing my sweet young boy. Eat my boy! Eat. Poor hungry fellow! They are fond of your race, and they wish to gaze at your eyes and your lofty forehead, And when you bend low for a morsel, you drop their visions, that is why they shout like birds and cry." "Mind them not. Go on! Sweet young boy" Go On", would say another.

"Oh ! Why did you not bring your mother along? We here she is a lady with enough power to match herself with a hundred men" says another. "Don't be silly. You will offend this man. Mothers are very dear to the babies. He is just a baby, a bearded baby that is all". "But have I said wrong?. His mother is a great woman, she would save him front these awkward situations only if she had come".

"Look here boy. The matter in fact is that you cannot eat this charmed dinner till you answer

our questions. ('An you thread these little pearls in this string for us

Jassa Singh then attempted to thread the pearls, a work usually meant for ladies. Ah! The poor lamp, light, amid the small pearls and the thread string so untwisted and swollen, and his sorry plight! He tried but he failed miserably. Another great burst of laughter. Another girl store behind him and whispered

“My friend! You take me into confidence; otherwise it would be really difficult for you. You know, you need give us each a ring. Did your mother give any chhalas (rings) or did she forget about it. Hear, she forgets everything but her own mirror. Is it not? “

Jassa Singh searched his pockets and found a bunch of thin rings which might weigh a thousand to halt' an ounce, and he opened the knot and he was about to distribute, As he actually put the hunch in his upspread palm, bang came from another girl an upward hand blow, and all the rings were scattered.

“O silly girl !! The boy is shivering with hunger. See, his mother never fed him well. Let him eat'. A naughty girl would pour salt on the very articles he would try to pick up from the huge metallic dish.

“Practical jokes apart,” said another elderly lady who just then came in and placed the silver plate with the sumptuous dinner arranged in it, and all the delicacies that his mother-in-law had cooked for him with her own hands.

As Jassa Singh took his midnight rest, the girls sang lyrics to him. Amid late at night, they welcomed him to the holy place especially made for the purpose.

The holy place is a' temporary four-pillared structure, light and frail to last only for a night, it is made, with four plantain-stems waving their long broad leaves auspiciously, in the traditional form of a temple, with stars as if set in its high sky-roof and a holy fire blazing in the centre . In this temple is celebrated the wedding ceremony.

Jassa Singh was taken there and united with Devangni, and the star witnessed the ceremony. Devangni was then taken away to her chamber and Jassa Singh to his. And after a good rest, Devangni was bathed and attired. She was done up into a be jewelled bride during the whole of the next day.

III

Devangni had bathed, and her braids were plaited and woven, and fully attired, she rose in full splendor like the dawn coming out of the east in the figure of a young women. A tall, slender maiden, when stand-ing erect she had the idyllic face of a Greek goddess, a living Minerva in io sooth. The mingled charms of the holiness of her maidenly inno-cence, the budding ripeness of her new youth, the symmetry of the faultless sculpture of her limbs and

bashfulness of the knowledge of her awakening womanhood, and all these pervaded by the gushing love for him whom, till then, she had not seen, made a thousand fascinations dance round her shaking ear-rings and in the sounds of her bracelets of gold. Her red-lacquered ivory bangles filled both her forearms up to the elbows which charmed the very air around her into a reeling dance— measure when she tressed her with utmost devotion. Everyone loved her. She was exceedingly charming. She was a veritable queen of beauty, a bride conic from the fairy world

And towards nightfall when the flower-laden bridegroom was led into her room, both were pelted by the bride's maids with jasmines and the poor mud-walled room of Takhtpari gave the vision of some palace built by titans. The bridegroom, the young Jassa Singh could not see the bride, he only saw flower wreaths, her shining raimenis, and was overpowered by the divine influences of love pervaded the room. He almost fainted with joy and did not know now to greet his bride. He simply laid his head down on her knees. It was complete surrender to beauty Jassa Singh was a hit shorter in size and was an extremely emotional Sort of man, and there too, his emotion for her over-powered him. There was a little earthen lamp burning the bride welcomed him by unveiling the: face. And she lifted his head up to her bosom as if she was the mother and he was her little baby. The bridegroom was still weeping; the tears fell on her shirt of gold brocade. She was deeply agitated. "O Lord my life What is this? This is time of auspicious! why tears?, said Devnngni in visible perturbation. "I feel I am not worthy of such beauty as you, To have such a luck of a sudden! I am too insignificant for such a great gift from God! I weep with too much joy, not in any other sadness."

Devangni : – "Tears at this time are inauspicious! But you seem to be lonely in your soul, But now be no more sad, I am wholly yours, for the whole life yours. A death too, yours. Make me yours from this moment. Have no doubts. If I am beauty, you are lose. What is beauty if there is no loving eye to gaze on it? As long as you think I am to great for you, so tong you ref-use me love which is mine, wholly mine by right. When you make yours, I become a young girl meant for your joy pleasure and for your service. I am yours wife".

The bridegroom gazing at her majestic face fell to weak to possess and said:-"You are a queen, I only a street beggar. I feel so much below you, to touch your hands with my hands will be defilement "But how can you see yourself"? As you see me, allow me, O blessed husband; to see you. You are the most beautiful man ever born on earth. I see no other so beautiful, You are my God, I ch-ose you I now have you. You are mine. To admire you more than this in words, mere empty words, would be tearing the silence of my worship for you into pieces. I cannot speak any more." And she began weeping. Jassa Siugh rose up and lifted her to his lips.

IV

Jassa Singh was yet in a college at Lahore reading for his B.A. And After a few days of a hurried honeymoon, he had to go away, leaving Devnangni at his village.

Comparatively speaking, Jassa Singh's father was very rich and many vanities and coquetries of such a society clung to the speech of everyone of his family. Jassa Singh had two brothers, one elder than himself, Mehar Singh, and one younger, Lilan Singh. His younger brother was in the Intermediate College classes, His elder brother with his father was looking after the agricultural business of the house.

The eldest, Mahan Singh, owing to his dynamic influence in the family considered himself a demi-god and looked after his brothers and their Wives in a liberal manner, but in a patronising spirit. There was apparent condescension in his speech to everybody. His manners were free of all restraints. But it must be said to his credit that he did not love money as his old father did. He had what they call charitable instincts and the princely habits of giving gifts though. In return, he did expect everybody to give him the credit for his princeliness, And accordingly he spent money freely to please the women of his family and there was no end of good silk dresses and ornaments of gold and silver for them. All the house wives at first began talking to the eldest from under the veil, but Mahan Singh soon after introduced a little more freedom into his family and ordered that his brothers' wives should lift their veils. They should not be shy with him. As he was a constant visitor to their apartments, Devangni was, of course, the most majestic and the most beautiful of all, and her splendid beauty dazzled the whole family. The wife of the eldest, this Mahan Singh, soon got jealous of her, as she thought, however wrongly, that her husband had begun to love Devangni more than herself.

For Jassa Singh to be separated from his young wife was extremely painful, yet being a minor and helpless boy, he had to endure the pangs of separation. He could not read his books but kept meditating on his wife all hours of day and night. He would imagine her lying in his room at the village of Kallar and thinking of her ! He would recall the first night of his meetings with her and those tears. And enraptured by dreams so conjured up, he would cheat space and time with his sweet thoughts about her.

He appeared in the tenth examination and failed in all the subjects. His teachers wondered why such an intelligent student had done so badly. They, in spite of his failure, sent up his name to the University for being allowed to sit in the exam examination. As soon as the University Examinations were over, he left for his village by the first train And he reached home at nightfall. He met his father and brother formally and embraced the mother hastily in his deep agitation. His heart thumped and all who embraced him saw his anxiety to go and meet his wife.

The mother said : – "Laiji"

You go in your room and rest. Your meals will all be sent into your room. You seem quite tired by the journey and your examinations a hard work, you must rest. Don't wake up early, I will see to your comforts and bath in the morning, Have good sound

This was a god-send to him,, and he congratulated himself on the freedom given to him by his good mother, though he thought he had successfully concealed his impatience to see his wife from everybody else. He made directly for her room. A little earthen lamp was burning quietly, the door was wide open for him to enter. But she was not there, it seemed. He looked around and saw her not. In order to surprise him, she hid herself behind the door, and as he looked disappointed and turned his back towards the door, she softly put both her palms on his eyes and blind-folded him from behind, asking him at the same time "Guess who is it ?." With her bangles on her wrists, and her rustling silks and her voice, she could not be mistaken, but it was really a nice welcome she gave him, and they met each other in an embrace made sweeter by this surprise. The door was quickly shut by young Jassa Singh, and they met again under the lamplight as they did meet on the first night of their acquaintance on this earth. It was still the first night for them.

The whole night passed, both waking and crooning in each other's arms, and his mother's instructions as to taking complete rest were followed in spirit, and broken in letter. To be with her was complete rest. For buds to flame up into full-blown flowers to fall on the ground and die is rest. For the lovers met after a long separation, wakefulness is sweeter than sleep, excitement is as holy as religion, and repetition of each other's name and song a hundred times is as the reading of the great holy scriptures for kindling and rekindling faith in each other,

Long nights of winter are too short for them. The sun is an intruder, The calls of brothers and mother are as shrieks disturbing the great harmony of their lyric fusion into each other's being.

When the servant brought their meals at night, they had hastily taken the meal plates and drinking water and all other necessaries and a few fruits that were brought by him from Lahore a few plantains of Bombay, a few dainty boxes of Kabul grapes. As they had bidden the servant not to call again, they needed nothing more. Devangni went and shut the door, putting on the patch. And both felt quite secure, and he sat to dinner. Devangni took a morsel and put it into his mouth, and he put one into her mouth out of the same plate. And after they had finished this love-dinner in about half an hour, They began eating fruits in the same way. Once Jassa Singh hit her hand as she had just put a grape into his mouth and was withdrawing it, almost wishing that he should eat it. And she did the same when he tried it next time to put a grape in her mouth. Such was their wakefulness during the nights. During the day, they slept.

V

The University results came. Jassa Singh had failed in all the subjects. The father and the elder brother were full of wrath, they attributed it to the beauty of his wife. His mind was preoccupied with her; he had neglected his studies. Mother said nothing. She was glad her son was there with his beautiful wife. But the whole house was disturbed at this sad news.

Jassa Singh felt ashamed when all blamed his wife so openly. He felt grievously hurt and he thought the blame, if any, was entirely his. He was inwardly incensed against all of them. He would say nothing in reply. But he felt miserable. The wife saw her perturbation,

Jassa Singh "It is a curse to be a younger brother and dependent on these elders. What is life if one is not free to love? Knowledge, a mere cramming of foreign languages, and dry-as-dust events of English History or Indian History is death, while loving you is life, more than life, if this is not allowed me, as they are proposing to send you away, I better die".

Devangni You see, nothing is amiss, We can turn everything to our advantage. Suppose you pass a few bitter months and forge your attachment with me and pass your examination. If you choose, you can have the freedom you desire after that. You need not then depend upon your brothers or father. You could strike the solid earth with your own spike and get water out".

Jassa Singh But to pass a day without you is death. I cannot bear the pain of separation from you even for a day any longer. You say I should swallow bitter months like that and pass my examinations I can be a roadside pebble-breaker and be happy if you be by my side"

Devangni 'No. For my sake you bear up. And for my sake get through the examination. Don't fall out with your good father and mother. One year more and all will be right again. If you wish to see me at my parents' house where they are sending me, come and meet me there without their knowledge, and thus the separation will not be as painful after all. I will ask my father to send you the necessary money".

Jassa Singh "If you say, I will jump into fire, what is passing an examination? Very well: Go to your parents and I will be your guest. I hope you will not turn me out".

Devangni wept at these words, and he wiped her tears and soothed her, The whole of his manhood was called out and he agreed to do whatever she said. And they had another reverent night with each other.

The time came for Jassa Singh to return to the College. The whole night previous to the day of his departure was spent in tears. Jassa Singh wept and his beautiful wife kept soothing him. His father had disallowed Devangni's going to her parents. And Jassa Singh going to Lahore was like leading a lamb to the butchers house, Devangni gave him two white silk handkerchiefs on which she had embroidered the name of her husband in violet silk thread. And Jassa Singh told her when he would weep at Lahore in pang of separation, her handkerchiefs would still wipe his tears there, and he would feel her hands in his own.

Jassa Singh left for Lahore and the whole day Devangni kept within her room, refusing drink and food.

Devangni differed from all other house-wives of Kallar. She was much too majestic,

vivacious and liberty-loving to be tolerated for long in that old conservative house. The old father of Jassa Singh disliked her ways, and had begun to have a sort of hatred toward her. He succeeded in persuading his wife to agree with him, though as growing hot for her. The mother-in-law took it into her head to correct her ways. She would rebuke her for the angle of her veil cloth being not right, or her steps being much too "proud," or her laughing meaningless and out of place. Why she looked in a particular way. Why to the right or why to the left! Why she talked much too long with her servant, and why she stayed behind other girls while coming from the stream after the bath. And so on.

But Mahan Singh encouraged her to do what she liked, and to defy his wife and mother if they vexed her. In a way, he gave her full freedom and sat for hours together talking to her in her room. This set the fire of jealousy ablaze in the bosom of his wife, and she made it a hell for him and her. Fires blazed on both sides. Mahan Singh's wife made constant complaints to her mother-in-law and inflamed her against Devangni. She slowly began attacking her character, a point of honor on which still the girls in India die like the Padmani of Rajasthan. Complaints were proven to the satisfaction of the mother-in-law by a kind of circumstantial evidence. Things like these for example: – I saw her giving her ring away to a boy such and such, She went into the house of such and such when she came she was shivering with fear when I asked her where she had been, she made faces at me and treated me with contempt.

Father "Mahan Singh, my Sardar boy!

I wish you to take her to her parents and never bring her back.

Mahan Singh But father Jassa Singh loves the girl so much. And she is the most beautiful girl of Pathohar. Jassa Singh would commit suicide if we treat her with that indifference".

Father "But I have heard of the scandals. The other day your mother saw her coming out of Chatar Singh's house late at night. And when she met her, she felt very. When your mother caught her like that, she shivered with fear and wept. Your wife knows all that, it is a scandal. I would not ruin the name of my family",

Mahan "Father! girls grow nervous for nothing when they are too much watched and suspected. They break down even if they are innocent. And this girl is already being persecuted. The other two wives mine and to Lilan Singh's wife vex her, they taunt her, and I saw her weeping bitterly in her room all by herself, Father, you should not be so cruel to the girl, and she is a goddess. One thing is quite true; All others are old-fashioned girls, with their spirits quite subdued. And she is bright, humorous, excited, restless and liberty-loving. She has such a fund of wit that makes every one laugh".

Father "I was always against this marriage. She thrust upon me by that old Sardar and foolish friend of mine, the old Malan Singh. I was forced to accept her for the brightest gem of the family; my ablest boy Jassa Singh. I believe this girl would make him very unhappy by

her instinct of being free of all restraint. And I doubt not that she will desire to live apart from the family with him and thus destroy us. I value nothing more than the closed first of the harmonious unions of all the brothers in one indestructible joint family. I wish to have the proudest distinction of having only one family in the country with such a harmony between its members.

Mahan "Father, I will see that your wishes are carried out. And Singh there would be no dissension. But I assure you, there is nothing wrong with the new girl, only my wife does not understand her".

Mahan Singh had to go out to Rawalpindi and from there he brought a few presents for Devangni. She refused to accept them, saying they might as well be given to others.

Mahan Singh "Devangni ! Why are you annoyed with me? There is so much of my affection for you in them. It is dishonoring me, if you refuse to take these offerings".

Devangni "Eldest brother! I am much too wretched, so made by the mother. To be in a mood to accept them. I know there is feeling, tender feeling behind these tokens of your affection but excuse me, I am not in a mood for them,"

Mahan Singh "What is it that makes you so distressed?"

Devangni "Nothing. The usual fate of a woman in this country".

Mahan Singh "But pray, tell me what has happened so suddenly in my absence?"

Devangni "Nothing. Only the jealousy of your wife, and the women of this family. I am hounded by them like a harlot. They follow and watch and suspect me. I cannot talk to a girl or a boy safely. They already point the finger of calumny at me. And they have vexed and abused me to my face, saying things that I have never heard of in my life".

Mahan Singh "But my wife and all of them cannot understand you. The inborn sense of the liberty of movement you have is a species of immorality to them. You should understand them if they cannot, and avoid all this unnecessary rancor in the family. I will protect your honor at all costs".

Much distressed by the helpless condition of Devangni for whom he harbored a secret passion, not of the very best kind, almost a kind of lust, he went and began chastising his wife for all that nonsense. \and so bitter was his remonstrance that his wife began apologizing to him her ever averse that she loved Devangni, and was doing all for her sake. And so on she knew time art of appeasing him in a way that he may when her turn comes, obey her like a docile lamb. If she wanted a thing done, she did have it done by him, only she so manipulated the affairs that her husband fondly thought that what fact was her design and a long laid plot was his own. She suspected for long her husband's vicious design

on the beauty of Davangni and she had resolved to have her out. And she was much too clever to come in to as open clash with him in any matter whatsoever. She abided her time and always made him her cat's paw.

Mahan Singh said to his wife, "Devangni is in advance of her time. After thirty years or so, every woman of Pathohar, of any family of consequence would be more free than she is, she is the coming woman kind, free and noble. I too, love this free new woman of the future, you are all so tricky and subdued little slaves, there is no joy of life in ordering love from your hearts at the bayo-nets point. But all that does not mean that this sort of freedom necessarily means any deflection from the path of rectitude, I tell you are all wrong. Ye stupid geese of' a village pound."

His wife read much between the lines and only smiled and said "yes I know, I know all that. But we are we conservative women".

Devangni was undone for life. Her difference with her mother-in law grew space. And the gulf between the two went on widening with every conversation, because Devangni, in her innocence, kept up her proud attitude and hooked down upon all of them with contempt for their silly conjectures about her character. Devangni was a woman of extreme sensitiveness as to her self respect and with the self-consciousness of her beauty, had a powerful queerly personality, naturally dominating. Fates had Mown her lot with these prattling, low minded omen. But she stood up in her full stature refusing to be bullied by them. She glowed from head to foot with her snow white purity. She had faith in the love of her husband and she cared not for what they harked about her. The more they oppressed her, higher rose the flames of her beauty in its rare majesty But who was there to see the purity of beauty they wanted her full enslavement to them. Selves. She was however caught in thrones, and the more she tried to extricate herself, the more her garments stuck in their spikes.

One night, she was invited by the wife of the manager of the Sardar's Estate. The manager. Tirtha, was an ugly brute whose daily business was that of a butcher, Instead of killing animals, he killed tenants, men and women and children to fill the coffers of the Sardar's house. He never combed his hair, vermin and lice ran in them. His eyes were full of gum, and his nose of wax, He was hard of hearing. And the girls of the house had to speak aloud in his ear to get things done by him for themselves, and they hated to go near him. But his wife was a very sympathetic person, and she was confident of the young wives of the Sardar's family. The wives generally went to her and the daughters of the manager came in return, So a stream of social visits in that village flowed between these two houses. And so poor and faithful was the wretched Tirtha, that Mahan Singh gave him all the keys of the safes and boxes. And he kept all their accounts. He was past middle age, and, on the whole, socially an idiotic person -a through-bred accountant and a butcher quite fit for his job of tax-exacting. The Sardars also lent money at an exorbitant interest to 'their poor tenants, and lived so proudly on the squeezed human blood in the form of high interest. And Tirtha's wife would sympathise with Devangni most, knowing how wildly the others persecuted her,

She instinctively hated the administrative talents of the eldest wife and her back-bittings and other pranks. Her sympathy attracted Devangni to herself, and more intimate grew their friendship, of which the others were jealous.

One night. Devangni was late in returning from Tiratha's house. It was moonlight and she inadvertently kept alone there talking of her difficulties to her bosom friend, Tirtha's wife. And to be there till 10 p.m. did not strike her as very late, because as a girl, she had been playing in her village sometimes till dawn in the green or harvested fields. But this was made into a new scandal by Mahan Singh's wife, and it came about like this. She had taken care to let her husband stand in ambush to watch Devangni coming out late at night in a suspicious manner from Tirtha's house. Devangni came out of the house evidently afraid and nervous because of the late hour. She truly realised that she had stayed too long, as the charged atmosphere of the whole house was against her, Mahan Singh called out : -- "Devangni ! Is it you?" And she came and fell upon his feet. "Yes brother, it is I, the wretched Devangni." It seems this wicked call at her by Mahan Singh at the instigation of his wife crushed her. Her pride that she had kept up so long against the women of the family gave way suddenly. Her nerves were much too shattered by the resistance she had shown to the all and when the sudden voice of Mahan Singh caught her unawares under the shade of a tree in the moonlight, she collapsed.

"Get away from me wretched girl, after all my wife is right," said Mahan Singh. On this, she understood the mistake had she done in collapsing at his feet. She as a woman realised that all was over for her, at least in that house of her husband. And with her head drooping, she slowly walked into her room. Her condition was of a ship wrecked mariner who was still struggling with the sea-water to -- find a rock of safety, The sky above and the sea below, all so cruel, cruel!, all Heartless brutes all "Friends," religion, society, all swayed against her. Absolutely lonely. In such a state of collapse, it was difficult for her to think of God or man. The rescue was nowhere. It was too tragic a situation to think of her young husband, because she was much too distressed to have any faith left in any one. And in her room, alone she cried a young girl of seventeen, and her pillow was drenched with her tears.

Such is the love of these refined men, put in layers of cotton wool, protected from the sun, stored away into the sandalwood almira's and perfumed with violet and rose, But on occasions like boxed these, when the boxes are actually opened, one find nothing but rottenness and dirt. Husbands! What are they ! China-toys in these tyrant hands, they can make them dance as they like, Love of such as there is sentimental jtv. cupidity, intensity of animal lust and the hunger for women lasts for a few days A base enamel O god, what hopes?

Mahan Singh too much distressed on his own account, shut himself in his room and wept and cried. "O the reputation of the family ruined thus. That scoundrel of Tirtha, I trusted him so much and he turned a snake to bite us. Ah, we are ruined, ruined', And he wept for the sake of Jassa Singh "His wife knocked late at night, and had to open the door for her.

Wife "What distresses you so much? It is no fault of men, if girls are like that. You must take her early in the morning and leave her at her parents. And from there go to Lahore and take Jassa Singh, as he would certainly commit suicide if this news reaches him all of a sudden. You know how dearly he loves her!"

Mahan Singh "But we have treated most cruelly by fate; Thai rascal Tjrtha must be dismissed. And we are all ruined! Ruined! It is all your fault, you did not look after the girl properly.

She "My Lord: I did try my best, but she is a proud girl. Her ways are quite different",

Mahan Singh burst into tears and said. "Oh: I thought Devangni would be the crown of our head. She would be the light of our house. But alas! Alas!"

V

Jassa Singh was waiting for the arrival of the down mail near the Ravi Bridge at Lahore, and about ten minutes the train was due, he had laid himself down on the track. But Mahan Singh had been searching for him the whole day and had given him up for drowned in the Ravi, when all of a sudden his accompanying search part cried and lifted Jassa Singh off the Railway line. Just then the mail train flew past at a terrific speed. A few months were enough to the for Jassa Singh into believing in the infidelity of his beautiful wife. He sailed for England, a broken-hearted young man.

Devangni was welcome at her father's house. The old man, Jassa Singh's father, thrust all the calumny into the teeth of her father. And much bitterness ensued.

Delawar Singh "Sir I cannot believe you. I have known from various sources how your women folk combined to ruin my daughter's reputation. She is the love-nourished child of mine. She is straight, free, at time, naughty but never what you wish to change her with, And even if it he true what you say, she is my child, My arms are open for her. My house be burnt if she can not come into it again, as she went and as she came to me from Heaven. I cannot shut my doors against her. As long as I alive, if I have one bread, I will give half to her. She is no good to you. She is the very piece of' my soul".

Jassa Singh's father I know you have no honor; no ethics, a wretched family."

Delawar Singh "Sir, You may say anything. It is goddess-fire,when another's house is burning. It is fires wretched fire, when your own house catches." One thing I tell you, my daughter is innocent before man and God. Arid if this is so, you will be ruined; such will be the curse of a helpless girl. And the plan you have given my girl would come to you too and all keep in your household.

Goodbye. Go. Leave my house. It is all over"

Devangni was distressed, but she put it to the jealousy of women.

Her husband had been sent away. When he comes, she will tell him everything and he would believe her, so she thought, She told all what had happened to – her old father and mother. And she said she could not understand where was the wrong, and in what she was wrong. And she wept bitterly. The poor old father! His long grey venerable head shone in tense sympathy. His whole figure was cast in gloom & habits childlike with distress. He took his child in his arms and cried bitterly with tears flowing in a stream over her hair.

Devangni wrote many letters to her husband in England, but none came there. Jassa Singh remained unresponsive for his brother had given – him all the circumstantial evidence to prove her guilt. And he threatened him too if he corresponded with her, He had made much of his witnessing of her nervous collapse. This was enough for him, and he thrust it into Jassa Singh. For he thought, such are the usual signs of a confessed guilt; He was too dense to suppose that there could be many other cause of such collapse. An extremely sensitive person can feel lie has committed murder. hearing that some one else had done it and behave exactly as a murderer under some insolent and stupid questions.

Mahan Singh had pictured to Jassa Singh the future life of Jassa Singh. If he showed love to Devangni any more, it might lead to his murder, to her murder, and to the utter ruin of the family. And he had wept before Jassa Singh. He had also considered it with Jassa Singh from an ethical and religious point of view, and from the view point of society. Mahan Singh had succeeded in making Jassa Singh suppress his pangs and his keen disappointment against his parents and brothers, but not without great suffering.

He had tried to defend her. Jassa Singh had said to his brother: – “It may be all wrong.

Can't you forgive her”.

And Mahan Singh had replied: “You know how much I love your happiness. I cannot imagine a beauty greater than hers. But beauty is a curse, if the heart within is so black. It is the curse of gods fallen upon us.”

Jassa Singh had again defended her thus: “But suppose she was your own daughter, what would you have done”.

And Mahan Singh had kept up his pretence. To me the mortal life of a woman is everything. I would refuse to own her”.

Jassa Singh had again rejoined Brother: I feel it is cruel of public morality and religions to be so wooden. After all, God is not so relentless, If He were, what will be our due? Don't we look so basely on other people's wives and daughters every day”?

Mahan Sleigh "you modern boys love liberty more than even virtue

We cannot understand you. One old father already is feeling keenly the loss of the family's reputation. And if we forgive her, our name will be mud. Father would disinherit us all. For fear of him, for respect to his feelings you cannot nor can I, take any independent course, even if we like".

And though Jassa Singh still was unconvinced, he had yielded. Jassa Singh was afraid to write lest his letters were intercepted and his brother and father come to know about his secret correspondence with her, if it all came to be known it would be a big scandal, and it might divide the family up, which even Jassa Singh felt extremely unwilling to do at any cost, so instinctive was his fear of family partition.

VI

Three years passed. Jassa Singh came back and settled at Rawalpindi for his practice. Devangni still entertained hopes. She thought he was hers, and he would give her hearing and after the hearing, feel convinced of her innocence.

She could not realize why her best beloved man did not see her as she herself could see her inside. But his brothers would live with Jassa Singh, his father would come and make prolonged stays and they did give no opportunity to him to go and see his wife at Takhpari he thought of many a time.

Late at night, at times, when all would lie asleep, he would take out her portrait that he had managed to have made in secret from a photographer in the early days of his marriage, and looking at it, he would weep silently for an hour or so. But Jassa Singh had no dash in him, he was a soft-soapy sort of ratty peen by and he was afraid of strenuous protest. That bugbear of his childhood, the honor of the joint-family still was a bugbear and it stood in his way. And he hated his father and brothers and the wives of his brothers for their shameful acts.

Over a long time, slowly and gradually, the truth also came out, and it was proved that there had been no guilt in her "collapse". Her "collapse" was due to the bursting up of her suppressed feelings of oppression and her struggles to bear the repression like a brave proud girl. But she having been sent out was an accomplished fact some knew the truth and others did not. And they had declared it from their own mouths and condemned an innocent girl. How for the sake of their position and rank and reputation, they withdrew it later? Three years had passed since Jassa Singh's return from England, and nothing had been done to make amends for the hatched up conspiracy against Devangni.

It was after six years of long waiting, still dreaming of the first nights of love and hoping against hope that he might have gathered strength by his visit to England to rise true to his own feeling and love, her faith in him was completely broken. Her heart was as shattered

into pieces. Her tears were dried up. Her sadness, on seeing this aspect of the world which stood before her as such a cruel illusion, flamed high up. After many years, she was red again in the face, her eyes burnt with sweet, sad calm and she looked on the life and love of this earth from her sad sublime spiritual isolation. She had risen above all men who are so blind of soul, It was the reaction after her innocent faith that had stood and waited so long. And now she rose up with a woman's resolution. Devangni was transformed into a new woman. And she began reading the holy hymns of the Ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur. So noble was her realization of their meaning that all those who came and heard her singing, did shed tears for hours and went back convinced, for the time being, that both life and love of this earth are an illusion,

And the image of God of forgiveness was her father to her, who welcomed her when everybody doubted her, and who wept for her all those years for distress which he was helpless to cure. True love burnt in his heart like a divine flame. His forgiveness knew her innocence, If not omniscient knowledge of her inside as much as she herself had of it. Infinite forgiveness sparkling in that noble face made her believe that there is God whose justice is forgiveness even for the sinners. If the world misunderstood her, here was a man who by the pain and pathos and love for his child could never misunderstand her, His tears rolled every now and then over his grey beard, and Devangni would curse herself in despair "I the cursed Devangni have caused my poor father so much distress ! why does not death overtake me. But all those violent feelings had then gradually mellowed down into one feeling of childlike dependence on God and whenever the feeling of seeing such a God in Person vibrated her being, she went and lay in the arms of her old father.

But Jassa Singh Barrister-at-Law, was still kept away by his parents and brothers, and was not allowed to see Devangni. However, his sojourn in England had put some kind of strength into him. At last, he could bear no longer. He was convinced; they had treated her most cruelly. His heart broke when he heard of the death of his father-in-law and of Devangni's mother too. And that Devangni had turned a Sikh saint.

He wrote to his father and brother a joint letter.

"You have made what I am. You have trained me as a barrister. You have given me a palace, a couch, but it is all as death to me. Am grown up now, I understand, I have a soul, and I see that after death neither you father, nor you brothers would answer for my sins, nor I yours. You may misunderstand me if you like. But I decided to go away from you. I leave tonight for nowhere. Don't search for me. Forget me. Consider me dead. I thank you what you did for me. But I must go to expiate for my faithlessness to my wife-she is an angel. I hear, she has left Takhatpuri for an unknown destination. I should have stood up like a man against you all, when I heard of your accusation against her there and then at Lahore. I should have gone breaking pebbles on roadside. I shall remain sad till my death that I thought you were speaking the truth and that I was so afraid of breaking the decorum's of society, especially after your accusations with all her faults, I loved her still. I am ashamed to have accepted your money after what he has done to me. You have made me wretched. He on these social

decorums and names and fames that fetter-the very soul of man in a hundred shames and cries.

And Jassa Singh left for an unknown place. Devangni sad of the world had also left her father's house. The old man had died before her eyes, her mother followed him. Both had died broken hearted, and had no one but God to leave their daughter to. Both had said:—O daughter! We leave you to the Guru” And the Guru had come to her in person of a lady of great renunciation who took her to her Dharamsala in Jammu. And Devangni lived in extreme sadness with lady guide friend philosopher, but red with the knowledge that this world was all an illusion. And she composed songs in praise of the Guru, and sang with streaming tears! Devangni thus became a whole temple in her and women, widows and the distressed wives came to her for, solace. And the luster divine of her face was such as suggested that life of ours was not all and there is a great love, peace, and joy beyond! Beyond!

Devangni was religious leader of the miserable destitute widows of almost the whole of the Punjab. She had started homes all over the Punjab interconnected with the “School of Righteousness” Dharamsala at Jammu where lived her great guide.

Jassa Singh roamed for years as an ascetic, but neither the reading scriptures, nor his mixing with the wandering Sadhus of India had made him respect any religious system, and he was sad that what goes by the name of divine knowledge in India is such a gross ignorance. He was tired of all systems of thought, for he saw no one could cure the grief of his heart and pour strength into him with which he might forget the past. He could not forget Devangni. He thought of Devangni till, if not in person, at least, her direct image came to him. He saw her every now and then in trance, and he stood speechless gazing into her eyes.

One day roaming as a naked ascetic with his hair thrown in wild pale, haggard and penance-shrunk, to a street of Amritsar, he saw Devangni in spotless white dress going past him in a two-wheeled open tonga., with another frail bodies old lady sitting by her. Her eyes and forehead sparkled with the luster of that eternal youth of soul. To his starved eyes Devangni shone like a meteor shooting past him. He ran after the tonga in a pathetic haste. And Devandni recognised him.

After many years of separation they met in the Hall Bazar Street, when Devangni stopped the tonga, got down and stood before him like an immaculate virgin-disciple of the Guru. Radiant and speechless, shining in her new splendor of the inner self-realization, there she stood, and there was he before her an ashy, dust-besmeared self-cursed, self-tortured man.