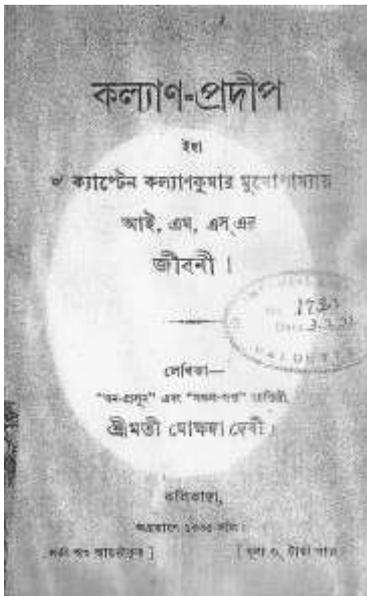


At 'Home and the World' in Iraq 1915-17

1.

Mokkhoda (Mokshada) Debi's *Kalyan Pradeep*, (published 1928)[i] is, in essence, the author's tribute, as a grandmother, to her daughter's son, Kalyan, who was a casualty of the Mesopotamian campaign of 1915-16.

Mokkhoda Debi was a minor literary figure in Bengal at the turn of the 19th century. Like Rabindranath Tagore she was born into the Brahmo Samaj, and like many Brahmo women she was well educated and widely read. She married a lawyer and spent many years in Bhagalpur in Bihar. Kalyan Mukherji was her daughter Binodini's son. Born in 1883, he lost his father at the age of eleven and was brought up in straitened circumstances. While still quite young he seems to have conceived the ambition of becoming a doctor and joining the Indian Medical Service. This was the British Indian army's medical corps and many distinguished doctors served in it,



including Ronald Ross, who won the Nobel Prize in medicine in 1902 (he figures prominently in my **Calcutta Chromosome**).

For an Indian, joining the I.M.S. was no easy matter. As with the Indian Civil Service, the examinations were held in England. Kalyan studied medicine in Calcutta and then managed to work his way to England as a ship's doctor. In England he was taken in by a relative who had married an Englishman: they supported him and sent him to Liverpool for further studies in medicine (Mokkhoda Debi's account of Kalyan's life in England is one of the most interesting parts of the book).

Kalyan passed the medical service examination on his first try and returned to India. After serving for a while on the North-West frontier, he married, had a daughter and moved back to Bengal. In March 1915 he was ordered to join the Expeditionary Force

that was being assembled to invade Mesopotamia. He left Calcutta on March 13, 1915, with another Indian member of the I.M.S., a Dr. Puri who was a close friend of his (Dr. Puri figures in both *Kalyan-Pradeep* and *Abhi Le Baghdad*; he was evidently an admirable man, courageous, loyal and a fine doctor).

Kalyan died of a fever two years later in a Turkish prisoner of war camp in Ras el-Ain. He was 34. For his role in the campaign he was awarded a Military Cross.

While in Mesopotamia Kalyan wrote several letters to his family. The letters are reproduced in full in the book, but they account for only a small portion of the text (which is 429 pages long). The rest of the book is devoted to family history, reflections on the Indian past, and, most significantly, to a detailed account of the disastrous British-Indian campaign in Mesopotamia in 1915 and 1916.

Mokkhoda Debi was clearly a woman of great gifts. Although some of her ideas are undoubtedly odd and even objectionable, her account of the Mesopotamian campaign is painstakingly researched and carefully narrated.

But what makes the book truly extraordinary is its curious juxtaposition of domestic life and war – ‘the home and the world’ in other words. Tagore’s great novel of that name (*Ghare-baire*; ‘The Home and the World’) was of course published in 1916 and Mokkhoda may well have read it. Yet the manner in which she creates her own connection between her home and the world is completely different from that imagined by Tagore.

This is perhaps the most compelling thing about *Kalyan-Pradeep* - its extraordinarily intellectual and imaginative ambition. Mokkhoda-debi was clearly no rebel, socially speaking. Yet the book is itself an act of rebellion, for it is an assertion of her right to narrate the story of the world, as a woman. She lays claim to this right through grief and bereavement, as a grandmother’s privilege.

The voice of the book is profoundly maternal, at times nurturing and at times riven with grief. Yet the story is one of soldiering, imprisonment and war. It is as if the very act of describing masculine violence, in a woman’s voice, were a way of restoring a primal balance.

2.

The tension between the voices of the grandmother and the military historian runs through the length of Mokkhoda-debi's *Kalyan-Pradeep*. It is reflected even in the form of the book: the sections are numbered in the manner of a military dispatch. [ii]

8. On October 7, 1914, A.D., the Government of India appointed Brigadier-General Delamain[i] the commander of the expeditionary force for the invasion of Iraq and sent him these instructions: 'When 'A' Force departs for Europe from Bombay on 16th October, 'D' Force must leave with them. Your orders are to part company with 'A' Force while at sea and to sail on to the Persian Gulf. When you reach the British-controlled islands and territories of the Gulf you and your forces are to make inquiries about the Turkish forces and their readiness. You must use your own judgement. Another force will soon be dispatched to reinforce you. Your orders are to safeguard British rights and interests in the Persian Gulf; the Shaikh of Muhammara is our ally, you must support him. When the fighting starts, you must take every measure for the protection of Basra.' (p. 227)

9. On 10th October a special messenger carried these orders from the Military Department in Simla to General D in Bombay. On 16th October twelve large troopships departed from Bombay as ordered, carrying 'A Force' and 'B' Force; D Force was secretly mixed in with them. The forces were escorted by British warships.

Three days out to sea another British warship was sighted. Now at General Delamain's command, the troops and equipment of D Force were separated from the others and moved to four ships. The next day it was announced that their destination was the Persian Gulf island of Bahrain. Upon their arrival two days later it was learnt that a transport ship and a warship had been sent from Karachi carrying the rest of their equipment. (p.228)

And here is Mokkhoda-debi the grandmother describing Kalyan's departure:

7. In March (1915) it was more or less decided that Kalyan and Dr. Puri would go to the port of Karachi with their regiments – he was to leave Kolkata by train as soon as the date of his ship's departure was wired to him. So he decided to await his orders in Kolkata.

8. One by one Kalyan visited all his friends and relatives, taking his leave and seeking their blessings. At this time he stayed mainly with his mother and did his

best to console her. One day he said to her: 'Ma, aren't I your loving son? Look, if God brings me safely back from the theatre of war then the womenfolk of Bengal will regard you as the mother of a hero. Just think how proud you will be. Don't make yourself sick by crying and falling into despair. In your mind you must hold on to hope.'⁹ Dr. Puri came to Kolkata from Kohat on March 10 and after that he and Kalyan spent most of their time in Fort William. They would come home late in the afternoon.

A wire came ordering them to leave on March 13. I went to see Kalyan the day before his departure, in the late afternoon. Binota [Kalyan's daughter] was then as cute as an English doll. Her hair was all curly-curly and there was always a smile on her face. But when she saw me she became quite sombre. Kalyan tried to make her smile by playing with a handkerchief and some orange peel but this had no effect on Binota. Then Kalyan said: 'You see Grandma, she's going to grow into a grim-faced woman – was I like that when I was her age?' I understood then how much he loved his daughter.

10. I spent a long time with Kalyan that evening, with his daughter on my lap. Then I blessed him and went home. That was my last meeting with him. I didn't see him on the day when his yatra began, but I prayed constantly for his good. I did not think that I wouldn't see him again. (p. 209-11)

3.

Kalyan Mukherji's letters from Mesopotamia are for the most part short, hurried and matter of fact. But some of them, as Santanu Das has remarked, are among 'the finest in the grand pantheon of First World War letters.'

His first letter from Mesopotamia was written on April 13, 1915, soon after he reached Basra.

Ma, we've arrived safely. We had a good time on the ship. Dr. Puri and I were on the same ship. All the trained troops from Kohat have arrived. About 40 thousand of them.

Let that be: arré Ram! Can this be the Basra of Caliph Haroun al-Rashid? Chhi, chhi! There's not the faintest sign of the famous roses of Basra; instead there are shallow little creeks filled with knee- or waist-deep water from the Tigris. Every one of these

khuds is home to hundreds of thousands of frogs. They come in all sizes, but most are big bullfrogs. What a fearsome roar they have! It's enough to deafen your ears. Men can't hear each other talk.... (p. 250).

The tone of the letters changes when Captain Mukherji reaches the front line. On July 26, 1915, he writes from Nasiriya:

Ma, You must have read in the papers that there's been a lot of fighting in Mesopotamia. The English [iii] have had a great victory. And there can be no doubt of it this time. It happened before my eyes, from beginning to end.

On July 16 I was about to go out for a ride in Basra – and just then we received orders to pack up our things, load them on steamers and set off, in a couple of hours.

We left our patients in the hospital and set off as soon as we could... Leaving on the 16th we arrived here on the 19th. .. On landing we knew at once that we'd reached the enemy lines. The sound of their cannon was loud and clear.

...

We heard that our Generals' tents were a mile and a half from the firing line; and the Turkish trenches and nullahs were two or three hundred yards away. As for us, let alone tents – we weren't even allowed to have cots. One set of clothes, one blanket and a raincoat and 5 doolie-loads was all we were permitted.

Why should I give up a chance like this? I'm senior, I said, so I'll go. Leaving the junior doctor in charge I set off at 5 in the morning. Yes, and by that time two shells had hit our camp.

Around sunset, when we reached the pre-arranged spot, I let the others off and set up our dressing station. I heard that our trenches were 300 yards from there, and the enemy trenches were another 200/300 yards farther.

We were sheltered by a 4 foot wall; people warned us – when the bullets start to fly its best not to leave the shelter of the wall. There was not a breath of wind behind the wall; fiercely hot. It was swarming with mosquitoes, insects, frogs.

At ten p.m. a storm of bullets began. Just like a hailstorm. Exactly. I'm not exaggerating. Sheltering behind a wall in a date garden. Boom boom! Hiss hiss! Bullets flew – for half an hour.

Every night the enemy soldiers would waste fifty or sixty thousand rounds; but without wounding anyone. Why they would fire like that – wasting lakhs of bullets – only they know. We stopped paying attention.

As soon as the firing began everyone would go to their places behind the wall and then we would spend some time chatting. Our troops didn't fire in reply. Every night they would fire 4/5 times, for 10/15 minutes and after that they would probably fall asleep. In the 4 days that I was there no more than 7/8 were wounded.

Anyway on the night of the 23rd we received orders telling us that the next day at dawn the fighting would start in earnest. We would attack. By 5 a.m. we had to be ready to treat the wounded, with bandages, medicines, iodine, milk, brandy etc all prepared. At 5 our artillery barrage began.

'Boom-boom' some 20-25 cannon firing together. After 15/20 minutes our troops moved up and began to advance, firing over our heads.

We were out of the line of fire all along. Once or twice some bullets flew over our heads but didn't hit any of us.

After two or three hours the enemy was driven back by the storm of bullets.

And after that of course there was the suffering of the wounded to deal with.

At about three a band of enemy prisoners and wounded arrived. From six-thirty in the morning till 1 pm I didn't have a chance to breathe. A river of blood, red – all around – I myself, soaked in blood, to the skin. Who – who should I treat first?... Why this bloodshed!! What can I say? In my life I won't forget that sight.

Yesterday evening we came to the town of Bijit [iv]. On the way I saw the battlefield. What I saw – I couldn't ever describe it. Today the English have hoisted their flag here.

I left behind my bedding and all my baggage and clothing. We've advanced 7/8 miles. I'm still wearing the blood-soaked shirt of the day before yesterday. I've wired them to send on my things – can't wait for them to arrive.

I hope you're all well.

Your Kalyan [289-294.]

4.

Within a few months of arriving in Iraq, Captain Kalyan Mukherji had arrived at a devastatingly clear summation of the war. On October 20, 1915, in al-Aziziya, he wrote a letter that is, in my view, one of the most remarkable of the 20th century.

As for the war, what is there to discuss? Unless something surprising happens suddenly – I don't see why a war of this kind should not go on for 20 years. So long as Germany can keep itself supplied with provisions and weaponry I don't think this side [v] will be able to advance. Nor does it seem possible for Germany to advance any further into France.

England is the teacher. The love of country that England has always taught, that same love of country whose virtues are sung by all civilized nations – that is what all this bloodshed is for. Grabbing someone else's country – that's 'Patriotism'. Patriotism – that's what builds kingdoms and empires. To display the love of country, love of race, by seizing a piece of territory, at the cost of thousands and thousands of lives, this is what the English have taught.

Now the youth of our country have started to emulate these vile ways of loving one's nation. As a result all kinds of horrifying things have started to happen, people are dead and bombs have been thrown at a blameless Viceroy. I spit in the face of patriotism [vi]. As long as this narrow-mindedness is not wiped off the face of this earth there will be no end to bloodshed in the name of patriotism. Whether one man throws a bomb from a rooftop or 50 men hurl shells from a cannon – all this bloodshed, this madness springs from the same cause.

In this one year of war a crore [vii] of people (English, German, Russian, French, Indian, African together) have been killed or wounded. Another one crore families are heart-broken because of "Selfish nationalism: a most inhuman sentiment". In other words this war is proof that this brutal and selfish love of country – that this awful, malign, sentiment is an obstacle for all humankind.

There's nothing much to report from here. I am well.

Your Kalyan [viii]

It is profoundly humbling to read this letter, written almost a century ago, in the context of the many wars and conflicts that have riven the Indian subcontinent in the

decades since Independence. Extreme circumstances often produce extraordinary perceptions. It is as if the battlegrounds of Iraq had granted Capt. Mukherji a Cassandra-like gift of prophecy.

Few indeed were the statesmen, intellectuals and politicians who had an equivalent depth of perception. One of those who did was Rabindranath Tagore. Like Capt. Mukherji, Tagore was both opposed to imperialism and wary of nationalism. In Tagore's 1916 novel **Ghare-Baire** ('The Home and the World') the character Nikhilesh expresses views on nationalist terror that are similar to Capt. Mukherji's; and in his 1916-17 lectures on the subject, Tagore is similarly impassioned in his critique of nationalism.

'Does not the voice come to us, through the din of war, the shrieks of hatred, the wailings of despair, through the churning up of the unspeakable filth which has been accumulating for ages in the bottom of this nationalism – the voice which cries to our soul, that the tower of national selfishness, which goes by the name of patriotism, which has raised its banner of treason against heaven, must totter and fall with a crash, weighed down by its own bulk, its flag kissing the dust, its light extinguished?' [ix]

Considered in the context of the early days of the Indian freedom struggle, Tagore's critiques of nationalism have often been regarded as anomalous. But Tagore was always closely attuned to the international situation and he would certainly have tracked the progress of the war, in Europe and in Mesopotamia, with great care. What is more, he may even have known – at least at second hand – about the reports that Capt. Mukherji and others were sending home from the battlefield. This is not unlikely for Capt. Mukherji, like Tagore, was from a family that belonged to the Brahma Samaj which is, after all, a small community; and nor was Capt. Mukherji the only Brahma to serve in Mesopotamia at that time, there were several others.

Capt. Mukherji and Rabindranath Tagore followed two different routes to arrive at the same conclusion: neither of them wanted to see Europe's history of national conflict re-enacted on the Indian subcontinent. What that trajectory represented, for Tagore, was not freedom but a different kind of enslavement: 'Those of us in India who have come under the delusion that mere political freedom will make us free have accepted their lessons from the West as the gospel truth and lost their faith in humanity.' [x]

5.

The British campaign in Mesopotamia proceeded at a brisk pace through most of 1915. British and Indian troops swept northwards, brushing aside Turkish resistance and advancing confidently towards their ultimate objective: Baghdad. But the Turkish forces were waiting for them in a carefully prepared defensive position, at the ancient town of Ctesiphon, 26 km south of the city. [xi]

The British commander, General Townshend, decided to attack early on the morning of November 22.

The night before the battle, Capt. Kalyan Mukherji wrote a letter to his family:

21-11-15

Ma

Since I last wrote to you we have advanced another 12/13 miles towards Baghdad. The battle will start tomorrow. I'm doing well. I don't know when you'll get this letter. We don't know when the ships will take the next post to the south. I'm writing in the hope that the steamer will take our letters when it carries the wounded down. The post office is on the ship.

Let's hope the battle will last just a day and that we will reach our destination without difficulty.

Your

Kalyan (347-8)

The British attack on Ctesiphon started the next morning. This is Mokkhoda Debi's account of the battle:

5. The Turkish soldiery was battle-hardened and brave, and their aims were, in a sense, completely clear. They had settled into the trenches of Ctesiphon and taken the opportunity to rest as they waited for the British attack. They were willing to risk everything for their country, their honour, and for the safety of Baghdad. Their

leader, Nuruddin Pasha was an extremely seasoned man, fully the equal of General Townshend in education, intelligence and strategic skill. (350-1)

...

9. At 6 a.m. (on the 22nd), the British launched their attack and it continued, like a great storm, for four hours. The Turkish troops matched their fire, bullet for bullet, and succeeded in blocking their advance. (353)

...

12. In this battle Nuruddin Pasha showed that his grasp of strategy was superior to General Townshend's. He had held many troops in reserve, under the command of General Jevad Bey, to use as a 'trump'. ... At two in the afternoon Jevad Bey's reserves began to cause great problems for the attackers. It ended with the British gathering their scattered, weary troops and retreating along the same route that they had used for their advance. (354-5)

...

4. It slowly dawned on Townshend now that he had been defeated in the battle of Ctesiphon; no hope of victory remained; there would be no 'victory-march' into Baghdad; the best he could hope for was to withdraw his troops safely to the south. (357-8)

On November 25, Kalyan wrote another letter home:

Ma

What happened during the battle of the 22nd cannot be described. I will try to write about it later. On that day I was hit by a bullet, in the elbow. I was lucky that it didn't hit me anywhere else. The wound was slight. There's a small hole where it entered. But it isn't out yet. It lodged itself just before exiting – that's where it hurts. I didn't have to go to hospital. If the pain doesn't stop then I'll have to get an 'X-ray'. I had a lucky escape. I hope you're all well.

Your

Kalyan

6.

After their defeat at Ctesiphon, on November 22, 1915, General Tonwshend's troops (consisting principally of the 6th Poona Division) were driven back to the town of Kut el-Amara, where they had established a fortified base. Here, encircled by the Turkish forces they were besieged from early December to the end of April 1916.

Towards the end of that period Kalyan wrote this letter:

Kut-el-Amara

16/4/16

Ma, It's been almost 5 months since I sat down to write to you. I've often thought of writing in these months but since nothing was known about when we would be able to send letters, I never got around to it. Since yesterday people here have come to accept that we will not be relieved. The troops have been on half-rations for the last month and even those have been steadily cut over the last 15 days, but despite these measures there's only enough food to last three more days.

After three months with very little to eat the troops are starving. The mortality rate in the hospital has soared. In the last 15 days many have died for lack of food. Of what use is medicine now? There's nothing to eat. People are coming to the hospital because starvation has made them weak. With nothing to give them, how can we help? Apart from that, there are no medicines left either.

We, meaning the officers, have all lost a lot of weight. Even then, despite eating nothing through the day, none of us have fallen sick. I haven't suffered that much. Apart from our rations of four ounces of atta and 1 pound of horsemeat, I've occasionally bought a little food from the bazar. But I've still lost a lot of weight. I won't talk about our lack of food though, for my health is fine, and I've even lost a bit of my paunch.

...

The siege started on Dec 5 and it is now the 26th of April. But it's some consolation that things will be decided one way or another in the next 3 or 4 days and we will find ourselves either on this shore or that. We'll probably end up on the other shore. There's no way we could break out of the enemy's encirclement and rejoin our own side.

...

Don't worry at all. Remember – if I am imprisoned I won't be in the midst of the fighting. I don't know when or how this letter will get to you. I'm writing it anyway. I'll send it if an opportunity arises. If they don't imprison the patients who are in the worst condition – if they send them down to 'Amara' – then this letter will go with them. (402)

Three days later Kalyan wrote another letter, in English:

29-4-16

Ma

On account of hunger, our General was obliged to surrender to-day. Turkish flag has been put up and the British flag taken down. Turkish troops entered the town this afternoon.

Now for goodness sake don't die of fright... please cheer up. I shall let you know afterwards how often you would hear from me and how to send letters to me.

Yours

Kalyan (403-4)

Soon after the surrender, Kalyan wrote home again.

1-5-16

Ma

I wrote you a letter on April 26th and a postcard on the 29th. Listen to what happened on the 29th. Our commander, General Townshend laid his arms at the feet of

Turkey's Halil Bey and surrendered. Before that, the British flag had been lowered and the Turkish flag had been raised on the fort. The two commanders shook hands. Halil Bey behaved with the greatest courtesy; he returned Townshend's arms and took him off somewhere with the greatest kindness. What can I tell you Ma of how well Halil Bey treated us? How much fresh food and water he had readied for us! And he let us have it all. After consuming all of that, it is as if our lives had been renewed.

Halil Bey's orders to us were: 'Enjoy yourselves for three days – eat as much as you want and write as many letters as you like. After three days you will have to move elsewhere – and then you will be allowed to write only one letter a week, of four lines.'

[In Kut] We had consumed our rations in a couple of months. Towards the end even our water had run dry. In the fort's courtyard we dug 40 wells and found some water. It was bad, muddy water. At the end, all our mules were slaughtered and one pound of meat was distributed to us. Many died for lack of food.

...

I and my friend Puri are fine. We are quite fit as well. At times the water situation was difficult, but we used filters before drinking it. What we went through during the siege is beyond description. When we came here, after our defeat at Ctesiphon, our numbers were 10/11 thousand; now it is less than half that. It's horrifying! Even now we have hundreds of patients, many will not survive. So much water from the Tigris has entered the fort that everything has turned to mud.

...

You mustn't do yourself harm by worrying about me. I want to see you when I get home. I'm perfectly all right. I have to write four other long letters. I'll take your leave for now.

Yours

Kalyan.

(405-7)

7.

After the defeat and surrender of General Tonwshend's Indo-British forces at Kut al-Amara, Capt Kalyan Mukherji was sent to a prisoner-of-war camp at Ras al-'Ain. This town is now technically in Syria, but it lies right on the Turkish border.

In 1916, when the Indian POWs came to Ras al-'Ain, a great number of Armenians were incarcerated in concentration camps around the town. This was the most terrible phase of the Armenian genocide and the Indian POWs would certainly have known what was happening in the camps around them. Capt. Mukherji's contemporary and fellow-prisoner, Sisir Sarbadhikari, refers frequently to the mass slaughter of Armenians in his war memoir *Abhi Le Baghdad* (which I shall be writing about soon): indeed his book suggests that the lives of Indian and Armenian prisoners sometimes became quite intricately intertwined. But there are no references to Armenians in the postcards Kalyan Mukherji sent home from Ras el-'Ain. His messages were very brief and were meant principally to allay his family's anxieties; in any case they would have been written with the camp's censors and guards in mind.

Here is Mokkhoda Debi's account of the final chapters of her grandson's life.

4. After reaching Ras el-'Ain Kalyan sent his mother a few lines on a postcard, in English, on June 15th (1916). This is the Bangla translation of what he wrote: 'They give us very good, fresh food. We are eating lots of milk, almonds, rotis and fish. Our faces have regained their colour and our strength has returned. Puri and I are still together. I'll feel still better if I receive a letter from you. We are all well.'

...

6. From long before that month [Kalyan's mother] Binodini's health had been declining, because of her anxieties about her son. Then something happened that made her condition even worse. In the month of June she received news from Cooch Behar, that Kalyan's daughter had died, at his in-laws' house, of an illness of the stomach. After this terrible news, Binodini never left her bed again: her health broke down completely and she lost all her strength.



Binodini Debi

7. Kalyan came to know about his daughter's death and his mother's illness from our letters and after that he wrote to his mother every month, trying to give her hope and strength. What those short, four-line letters said in sum, was this: 'Ma you must look after yourself, you must get better. I really want to see you – I will soon be home again. Don't go away before I come. So what if my first child died? You lost yours too. When I come home again, I will have many children, don't worry about that. I am desperate to hear from you, to receive your letters. If you are unable to write yourself, then let my wife take down the words from your

lips. I'll be really happy if I hear from you... I am fine here but I worry a lot about you.'

9. On October 29 it was as if Binodini knew that her life would end that day. Her younger son Kamal's second child had been born 12 days before. From the morning onwards Binodini began to ask to see the newborn's face, so the child was brought to her from his uncle's house.

10. Many relatives went to see Binodini that day – she took her leave of all of them. She even predicted the exact time when she would take leave of this world.

11. That day, it rained through the evening and into the night. Seeing how hard it was raining, Binodini prayed: 'Dear God, please don't drench those who will have to go to perform my last rites.' Her prayers seemed to find a loving reception. At ten the rain stopped, and shortly afterwards, at midnight, Binodini eluded the sorrows of this world and made her escape.

It rained no more than night. The next day it was sunny until 5 pm and then it started to rain again. Needless to say, those who went to perform Binodini's last rites were not drenched.

[410-3]



Captain Kalyan Mukherji

1. That October we received two postcards from Kalyan. Word of his mother's death was sent to him in November, but we learnt later, from his friend Dr. Puri, that the news did not get there till March 3rd (1917).

2. We received no letters from Kalyan in December (1916). Towards the end of January 1917 two postcards arrived. They said: 'A terrible sickness has hit our camp [xii]. Many have fallen very ill. Dr. Puri fell ill too. It took me two months

to save him. I didn't have time to write.'

3. After that we received a letter written by Kalyan in February 1917 and another in March. There was no indication in them that he had heard of his mother's death. He wrote only: 'many are dying, if they don't move us from here no one may survive.' [415]

4. In April there was no news of Kalyan. Then on May 21st we read in the newspapers 'Capt. Kalyan Mukherji died of a deadly illness on 18th March.'

5. *Later, on May 25th, we received a grief-stricken letter from Dr. Puri. He wrote to say 'Kalyan saved my life with his own hands. But I was unable to save him. I tried everything. It was my fate!!! I saw to it that his last rites were performed – as far as the conditions here would permit – to my satisfaction. And I will see to it that a marble plaque, with an inscription, is placed upon his memorial.*

'On the 3rd of March Kalyan received a letter with news of his mother's death – after that he lost interest in everything. He ate much less and couldn't sleep at night. On March 9 he fell ill with a slight fever. Over three days his condition worsened. From March 12 he became delirious. But his enunciation was quite clear even in his delirium; he spoke in Bengali – words poured out of him. Even though I and the other doctors could not understand exactly what he was saying we knew he was talking to his mother. His grief was so great that there was no mistaking it. After six days, on March 18, his delirium ceased. And later that night it was all over.' (416-7)

The ending of the narrative, and the manner in which the final parts are shaped, suggests that Mokkhoda-debi believed that Capt. Mukherji's life had ended in a fashion that mirrored the death of his mother.



মুক্খোদা দেবি – (কলিকতা) ।।
Mokkhoda (Mokshada) Debi

She writes of the death of her grandson and her daughter as if both had been brought about, ultimately, by the same cause: the grief of separation – *biraha*. It is as if, in writing the coda to their lives, she were invoking an ancient lament, sung over the centuries, by women whose menfolk had left home to serve as sepoys.

[i] *Kalyan Pradeep: Captain Kalyan Kumar Mukhopadhadhaya, I.M.S.-er Jiboni*, by Mokkhoda ['Mokshada'] Debi (1928) [**Kalyan Pradeep: The Life of Captain Kalyan Kumar Mukherji, I.M.S.**].

[ii] All translations from **Kalyan-Pradeep** are my own.

[iii] **Kalyan Mukherji's choice of words when he is writing about the British-Indian force is revealing.** He usually writes of 'the English' or 'this side' – not 'our side'.

[iv] This is a literal transcription of the Bengali spelling. I haven't been able to identify the town.

[v] [*edik-kar dol* – note, not 'our side']

[vi] Capt. Mukherji's words are: '*Swadesh-premer mukhe jhata*': lit. 'a jharu in the face of loving your own country'; *Kalyan-Pradeep*, p. 334.

[vii] Ten million

[viii] *Kalyan-Pradeep*, pp. 333-335.

[ix] From *Nationalism in Japan*, in **Nationalism** (San Francisco, 1917) pp. 111-112.

[x] From *Nationalism in India*, in **Nationalism** (San Francisco, 1917) p. 147

[xi] Another battle between the dominant European and Asian powers of the day had been fought at Ctesiphon more than fifteen centuries earlier, on May 29, 363 CE. The protagonists were the Sassanid King Shapur II and the Roman Emperor Julian (who is the subject of a wonderful novel by the recently deceased and greatly lamented Gore Vidal).

[xii] He was probably referring to typhoid which also devastated the Armenian camps.