

Debo Na Titun

(We Refuse Titun)

A Play by
Kamal Raychaudhuri

Edited & Translated
Somdev Banik



**Tribal Research and Cultural Institute,
Govt. of Tripura, Agartala.**

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Preface

The Royal history of Tripura is more than seven hundred years old, and one of the oldest in India. The royal subjects in the kingdom had been historically very loyal and reverential to the King, whom they reckoned as the representative of God. The Indian nationalist movement coupled with the subterranean Communist campaigns of the early decades of 20th century awakened the tribal people from centuries of slumber to an era of self-consciousness. Years of exploitation, apathy and poverty fomented mass disaffection against the royalty which was consolidated into a resistance movement by Jana Shiksha Samity. Jana Shiksha Samity, established on 26th December 1944, spearheaded the fight for education and self-rule of the hilly tribes of Tripura under the stewardship of Sudhanya Debbarma, Dasaratha Debbarma and Hemanta Debbarma, the President, Vice-President and Secretary respectively. In the next few years these young leaders resisted the King-Thakurs-Karta combine and dispersed the fire of rebellion and self-assertion across the hills of Khowai, Kamalpur and Sadar sub-divisions of Tripura. The leaders of Jana Shiksha Andolan were inspired and assisted by the leaders of the Communist Movement of undivided Bengal, like Biren Datta, Banshi Thakur etc. Communist ideology reinforced the mass literacy movement and situated it within a class conflict paradigm. Such a propaganda gained momentum, when after the accession, the Indian government led by Congress party decided to suppress the spontaneous mass uprising with military and force. Villages were burnt and evacuated, poor villagers were incarcerated and maimed, women raped and beaten up. Driven to the wall, the Jana Shiksha Samity decided to launch Tripura Rajya Ganamukti Parishad (Tripura State People's Liberation Council) in 1948 to

defend unarmed villagers against the atrocities of the military. The Jana Shiksha Andolan didn't confine itself to building of hundreds of schools throughout Tripura, but also persuading the people for rejecting superstitions, blind faiths and exploitative social practices like *Jamai Utha* and *Titun* practice. *Jamai Utha* was a folk practice where the future father-in-law could appropriate the labour of the prospective son-in-law for five six years in lure of giving his daughter in marriage. But over the years it evolved into a tool of exploitation of young men in the name of marriage and denying at the end. Rendering *titun* was another system where poor villagers were obligated to carry the burden of royal staffs free of charge. Jana Shiksha Andolan resisted both these practices forcing their annulment.

Debo Na Titun, written by Kamal Raychaudhuri, teacher and cultural activist, from Khowai, belongs to a similar time frame, i.e. the last years of dynastic rule in Tripura. It is about the resistance movement initiated by Jana Shiksha Samity to eliminate evil social practices like *titun* and *jamai utha* and how three brave women sacrificed their lives resisting the military. Their sacrifice has become legendary in the folk history of Tripura. The play is based on historical facts and characters.

The history of drama in Tripura has traversed a long path since then. But the legacy of Jan Shiksha Andolan and the sacrifices of Kumari, Madhuti, and Rupashri cease to inspire those who want to carry forward the fight against exploitation, injustice and discrimination on the soil of Tripura. On the completion of seventy years of formation of Jan Shiksha Samity, this translation of an iconic play from Tripura is an attempt to restore and revive the legacy of which we are rightful inheritors.

Agartala,

5.5.2016

Dr. Somdev Banik

FOREWORD

Debo Na Titun is based on the tragic story of sacrifice of three heroic women of Padmabil Village, Kumari Debbarma, Madhuti Debbarma, and Rupashri Debbarma in 1949, while resisting the atrocities of the military and police on the unarmed people of Khowai in Tripura. Their martyrdom is a reminder of the bravery of common people of Tripura to protect their freedom and the right to self-rule. 67 years had passed since that incident, yet the memory of that sacrifice is etched in the minds of the people of this state even today. Many writers had immortalized this story in their literary works over the years. Kamal Ray Chaudhuri was the first of them. Writing on the backdrop of widespread political agitation and rebellion against the Dynastic rule in Tripura during the decade of Forties, *Debo Na Titun* attempts to capture the intensity and emotional fervor of the agitation. One needs to read the play to understand how Janashiksha Samity, the organization formed in 1945, for setting up of schools and spreading of education among the downtrodden hill people of Tripura, transforms the urge for education into a full scale political movement for freedom and self-determination. It's our belief that this translation will take the history of Tripura beyond its borders, and substantiate *Debo Na Titun* as a valuable historical and literary document.



(S. Debbarma)

Director,

Tribal Research & Cultural Institute,
Govt. of Tripura, Agartala

Characters:

[Male]

Ramkumar	:	Organiser/leader of Jan Siksha Andolan(Mass Literacy Movement)
Lakshmicharan (Padmamohan)	:	Old tribal peasant
Chaudhuri	:	Village Chief
Paniwalla	:	Water supplier to King's Palace
Mungkurai	:	Husband-to-be of Lakshmicharan's daughter
Raja	:	The King of Tripura
Mantri	:	Minister to the King of Tripura
Senapati	:	General of Army of the King of Tripura
Purohit	:	King's Priest
Nagurai	:	Mungkurai's friend
Narendra	:	Mungkurai's friend
Mahendra	:	Chaudhuri's grandson
Daroga	:	Police Officer
Habildar	:	Police constable
Tehsildar	:	Revenue collector
Servant	:	King's servant
Boba	:	Dumb son of Lakshmicharan

Guard 1	:	Guard of Palace
Guard-2	:	” ” ”
Sepahi 1	:	subordinate staff of Habildar
Sepahi 2	:	” ” ”
Person 1	:	K.B.R.B's literacy activist
Person 2	:	” ” ”
Villager 1		
Villager 2		

[Female]

Rupashri	:	Peasant Woman (Martyr)
Kumari	:	” ” ”
Madhuti	:	” ” ”
Hiramoti	:	Lakshmicharan's daughter
Hirar Ma	:	Hiramoti's mother

Debo Na Titun

(We Refuse Titun)

Debo Na Titun was first performed on July 11, 1982 at Khowai Town Hall, by Khowai based theatre group 'Cultural Campaign', and later published by National Book Agency, Kolkata, in 1987.

The first performance was

Directed by : Sanjoy Kar

The Cast was as follows :

Padmamohan /

Lakshmicharan : Haripada Sinha

Chaudhuri/Purohit : Sukhendu Dey

Leader : Arun Pal

Ramkumar : Tamal Majumdar

Maharaj : Pulak Bhattacharjee

Mantri : Ranjit Chakraborty

Senapati : Bishwajit Datta

Narendra : Manik Pal

Nagurai : Prantosh Saha

Mungkurai : Sanjoy Kar

Daroga : Pulak Bhattacharjee

Habildar : Prantosh Saha

Police 1 : Amal Nath Sharma

Police 2 : Samir Ray

Guard 1 : Ashim Ray

Guard 2 : Dulal Banik

Paniwaala : Bishwajit Datta

Boba : Nanigopal Das

K.B.R.B. Agent : Ashim Ray

K.B.R.B. Agent : Dulal Banik

Tehsildar : Ranjit Chakraborty

Mahendra : Subir Debsarkar

Hiramoti : Banani Das

Hira's mother : Sunita Datta

Rupashri : Alpana Chakraborty

Kumari : Pramila Debbarma

Madhuti : Gita Sinha

[Opening Scene]

There is a martyr's stand on the front of the stage, almost edging the proscenium. One political activist is giving a speech in front of it.

Leader : Friends, you are well aware of the story of sacrifice of three peasant women of Padmabil in Khowai, namely Kumari, Madhuti and Rupashri, to resist the practice of *titun* during the erstwhile princely rule in Tripura. We are going to remember their valour and sacrifice today. Now, we will stand up and mourn in silence for one minute and offer our heartiest respect to the revolutionary sacrifice of those three brave ladies.

Background song:

Listen all, listen to the song of the soil;
The mournful story of unfortunate mothers;
The story of the wretched women of Tripura,
Alien and homeless, in the land of their fathers'.

Slogan from Backstage:

Pay back the blood debt of martyrs,
Immortal martyrs can't be forgotten,

Madhuti, Kumari, Rupashri,
Your sacrifices won't be forgotten,
Blood of the martyrs will not go in vain.

Leader : [hints the assembled crowd to sit] Friends, let us recollect that historical incident of valour once more, in which the brave mothers, whom today we are going to pay respect, have lost their lives. The incident in which they had sacrificed their lives had been a watershed event in the history of mass movement in Tripura; why did they have to lay down their lives? Who took their innocent lives? They were murdered by the army of the national government of Independent India. It is utmost shameful that those who did this dastardly act were people of this country itself. And at the order of the national government of this country, they fired bullets at those innocent women. The British government had just withdrawn from India then. Independent Tripura had acceded to the Indian union. Maharaja Bir Bikram's successor Kirit Bikram was then just a kid. It was the reign of Maharani Kanchanprava as the Regent of Tripura state. The public of Tripura was fighting for democratic and autonomous rule under the leadership of Gana Mukti Parishad. In the hills and forests of Tripura, impatient voices were demanding: "Ministry through public voting; Repeal of Rejent rule; Abolition of Monarchy and Establishment of Democracy". The crony rule

of King, priest and lords, had stilted the social system with age old superstitions, blind practices and rituals such as witch hunting, *Jamai utha, titun practice* etc.

Padmamohan : [from the crowd] Comrade, tell us something about titun practice also.

Leader : I will tell you, Comrade.

Padmamohan : When?

Leader : Okay, let me tell you then. There was an age old tradition in Tripura which was known as tui-tun practice, which came to be known as titun practice. If a King's soldier or official happened to visit any village, then the poor villagers had to work for him- carry his luggage- free of charge. This was called titun practice, in other words *begar* system. Whatever condition you were in, you have to-

Padmamohan : Oh father! Was it that bad? Even if you were having your food, or sick then also no respite!

Leader : Yes, that was titun practice, no relief whatsoever. Along with other evil practices of the royal rule, titun system had in fact, driven the poor villagers into abject misery. As more and more villagers were raising their voices against the collective oppression of the King, his henchmen, the Chaudhuries and Talukdars; they were also refusing to provide titun any longer. Simultaneously, efforts for social reformation were also being taken up

to eradicate the practice of lynching innocent women to death as witches. The tenure for *Jamai utha* was also limited to one year. Now, what is *Jamai utha*, do you know?

Padmamohan : Before marriage every young man had to stay in the house of the prospective bride for a considerable period of time, isn't that *Jamai utha*?

Leader : Yes, that was *Jamai utha* in a nut shell.

Padmamohan : I myself had worked three years like that, do you know Comrade? Many wouldn't be able to marry even after working for so many years. The crooked father-in-laws would drive the young men away after exploiting for four-five years.

Leader : When Gana Mukti Parishad had restricted this practice to one year, the youth were very much encouraged. Young people in large groups started joining Gana Mukti Parishad then. The Jan Shiksha Andolan of course, played a crucial role in instilling in them organisational and national consciousness. The rejection of titun system was a fruit of that consciousness.

(The leader sits down)

Padmamohan : It's good that now we will have a play that is called 'Debo Na Titun'. You watch and enjoy. O Sachindra! Bring all the instruments of *palagaan*. It's already very late.

[Some people from the crowd go up with stage props. The stage is arranged according to scene. Girls from backstage continue with their background song]

Scene-I

Place: Lakshmicharan's stilt house

Padmamohan: Namaskar! You have heard the title of our play- "Debo Na Titun". What is titun, our comrade has already elaborated. Now you will watch how the custom of titun was practiced. One day Chaudhuri sent summons to this peasant's house, whose name was Lakshmicharan. Lakshmicharan was unwell at that time. Let me be Lakshmicharan.

[Padmamohan lies down on his side and starts to groan. Enters Chaudhuri's errand man]

Man : O da Lakshmi, get up, get up, Chaudhuri is calling you.

Lakshmicharan: I won't be able to go, I am besotted with inertia. My legs and whole body is aching.

Man : That won't do. You have to render titun. Tehsildar has come.

(Lakshmicharan finally gets up)

Lakshmicharan: What are you saying? Has Tehsildar come?

Man : Yes, he has come. You have to come, right now.

Lakshmicharan : But how will I pay my tithe, I don't have any reserve at home.

Man : Take that from your own stock. Otherwise you will not be spared.

Lakshmicharan : Let's go then, nothing can be done. Even if I die, who cares? (tries to stand up keeping the elbows on his knees, and clutching his head) uff! I can't, my head is turning, (groans) no one is at home even.

(Meanwhile his dumb son enters)

Everyone has gone to jhum. This dumb son can't even inform them anything, how do I go in this state?

(to his dumb son)

Oye, fill this up and bring from inside.

(hands him a basket)

Man : Let's go brother, can't wait any longer. They have already packed up the luggage. You have to accompany Tehsildar to Senkraibari. Come, come.

(The man helps Lakshmicharan to stand up)

Lakshmicharan : There is no way out, let's go. Even if I die, who cares?

(The dumb son comes out with a basket of paddy)

Listen, when they come, tell them I had gone to render titun.

(Lakshmicharan and the man depart)

Scene-II

Place: Chaudhuri's house

[Some people from the crowd go up with stage props.]

Chaudhuri : Lakshmicharan didn't come yet. Son of a pig!
When did I send for him? Even that one who
went for him is not returning.

*[At that time, Lakshmicharan and the man enter. Both of them
offer pronams]*

Why were you so late? Were you walking
like a bridegroom? Didn't you eat rice?

Lakshmicharan : Thakur, my whole body has become inert,
Thakur.

Tehsildar : (in a slurring voice) What are they saying?

Chaudhuri : He is saying that he is suffering from inertia.

Tehsildar : Inertia? Ha ha! The root cause of all suffering
is inertia, don't you know, Thakur? It's
precisely because of this indolence that your
people don't progress.

Chaudhuri : Oi, you, lift those things and accompany
Tehsilbabu to Senkraibari.

- Lakshmicharan : I can't, babu. I can't even walk, my head is splitting, and my legs-aching.
- Chaudhuri : Son of a pig, lazy bum, rascal, what did you say? You refuse me? I will slaughter you. Don't you know the punishment for refusing titun?
- Lakshmicharan : Why, can't Tehsilbabu walk on his own?
- Chaudhuri : I said you have to go. If you don't I will kill you. Don't you see Tehsilbabu is drunk? You son of a pig?
- Lakshmicharan : (breaks down) I can't Thakur, I can't. (sits down clutching his head)
- Tehsildar : Okay, if you don't come, I will report against you. I will tell, the subjects in this village are rebels, they don't even obey Chaudhuri.
- Chaudhuri : You just wait, Tehsilbabu, he will accompany you. You rascal, won't you go?
- Man : O da Lakshmi, come, come, don't speak any more, Chaudhuri is getting furious.
- Lakshmicharan : Okay, let's go, since I have to go even if I die. Let's go.
- Chaudhuri : Lift those luggage, and hurry up. Oye Mahendra, check out if he is lifting properly. I am coming from inside. Put Tehsilbabu on the litter.

[Chaudhuri goes inside. Lakshmicharan along with other villagers starts on the journey with Tehsilbabu on the litter. The other villagers carry loads of paddy. Chaudhuri sees off Tehsilbabu from his door. They sing in chorus as they proceed]

We can't bear any more, oh God!

Bear any more to carry this load,

Burdened with a fate heavier than hill,
We pay with life, to have our belly fill.

(Exit)

Inter-scene

[Lakshmicharan becomes Padmamohan]

Padmamohan : The subjects had once gone to the King with the plaint to abolish titun practice during Lakshmicharan's father's time; have you heard of Mahamuni Sardar? It was under his leadership that a few of them went to plead the king to abolish the evil practice. The King in turn casted them in a pigsty and confined them there for three days.

Hey, who among you would be playing king and his minister, why don't come forward?

[Padmamohan starts a song. Others also join him. They sing and dance]

We will visit the King, we will visit the King,
No horse, no elephant, to take us to King.

The King is the lion, and General the tiger,
The Priest isn't far behind, so full of anger.

Hold your breath, steel your nerves;
Watch the King enter with his staffs,
How the King us ruled, you need to watch.

[They end their dance and come back to stand at their fixed places. Meanwhile, they prepare for a new scene, in the roles of King, Mantri etc]

Scene-III

[The King's Court. Senapati, Mantri and Purohit are in conversation. The servant is waiting for errands]

- Senapati : Mantrimashai, any tidings from our Maharaj?
- Mantri : Our Maharaj is a connoisseur of music. He is sailing on the tunes of melody currently. In a fairy world he is spending time with musicians and poets who have come from very far off places.
- Servant : (at the audience) Ravishing maids are pouring wine in dancing tunes then.
- Mantri : Shut up! How dare you open your mouth being a servant? Ill-witted rascal! You will lose your life today, for sure.
- Senapati : Get lost you dog from here. Being a dwarf, dreaming of the moon!
- Purohit : To hell with you! How dare you speak Devabhāsa in spite of being a shudra?
- Servant : I prostrate before you all, my lord, forgive my sin. I am ignorant. Staying here for long I

have learnt a bit of Deva-bhasa. I have committed a grave sin. I know, nothing but hell fire is in store for me in my next life, why torment me further in this life, my lord? Absolve my guilt one last time.

Senapati : You must do penance for your conduct. Hundred times sit up holding your ear.

[The servant follows suit and stands up]

Mantri : Never again you should talk in between when the lords are conversing, I warn you.

[The servant does one more sit up holding his ears]

Guard : Attention! Attention! Maharajadhiraj, Lord of all subjects, by whose compassion we are alive, is coming.

[Enters the King]

All : (except Purohit) We all bow before you, my lord! We are eternally committed to the dust of your feet.

[The King takes his seat]

Maharaj : My fellow council members. I have called this emergency session to deal with a crisis. My informers have reported that the subjects are getting restless. They are refusing to obey the rule of law, and want the abolition of titun practice.

Purohit : This is awfully bad news that I am hearing today. It is nothing but treason, rebellion. If I had the fury of the erstwhile Brahmins, I should have burnt them to ashes.

- Senapati : The battle cry is erupting within me. I intend to teach those ignorant junglees a lesson; wipe them out forever and burn their fields to dust.
- Mantri : No, my lord, that's not the way. Some jobs can't be done directly through force, for them we need an indirect method. We need to sow seeds of discord to quell this rebellion. Once their unity is broken, they will accept your decrees in silence. Purohit, will you take that responsibility, for the sake of our nation.
- Guard : Your Majesty, some rustics seek your leave to come in.
- Maharaj : I am terribly occupied in business.
- Senapati : Tell them the King has no time now.
- Guard : I have explained a lot already. But they are adamant. Refusing to leave they just stand like deaf and dumb.
- Purohit : Go and tell them, the King has no time for people like them.
- Guard : Your Majesty, they have brought many gifts with them. They want to offer to the King.
- Purohit : (with pleasure) Your Majesty, you should give them your permission then.
- Mantri : Your Majesty, their coming may augur well. We may use them for our ends.
- Maharaj : Very well, then, let them come, Guard!

[Exits Guard]

Mantri : Maharaj, this is a wonderful opportunity, those who are coming today must be very loyal subjects of yours. We can use them like Bibhisan, to sow seeds of discord.

Maharaj : That is a great idea, Mantri. No other way can be better and easier than that.

Senapati : They are coming, Your Majesty.

[The guard enters with the subjects]

Subjects : Victory to our King! Long live our king! Long live our Lord!

[Bows before the King]

Maharaj : My children, why have you come hither, what is your submission? Tell me what ails you. My heart is crying out to cater to your needs. I can't wait any more to listen to you, tell me.

Subjects : Our lord, we are completely ruined. If you don't save us, we will not survive, our lord.

Maharaj : Tell me, my children, what brings you here? As long as I have this sceptre in hand, I will protect you from all danger.

Purohit : In our Majesty's reign, even goat and tiger drink from the same pond. You can rest assured that Maharaj will do justice.

[The subjects can't follow the language of the court, they look at each other and grins]

Senapati : (prodding them to speak out) You fellows! Speak out. Don't waste time. (Looking at

the Courtiers) Ignorant, wild animals, don't understand anything.

Subject₁ : Maharaj, your servants are killing us, they are driving us to destitution in the name of titun.

Subject₂ : Your majesty, stop this extortion in the name of titun.

Subject₃ : Save us, Baba, save us.

Maharaj : Shut up, your infidels! How dare you suggest something like that! Uncivilised hilly brutes!

Purohit : You perfidious knaves! You want to disrupt a God sanctioned practice.

Mantri : The law of titun was enacted for sustaining royalty, and you want to abolish that. You scoundrels, you intend to unleash lawlessness. There will not be any administration then.

Senapati : Your Majesty, give me order, to chop down the heads of these fools from their torsos.

Maharaj : Yes, they deserve to be punished severely, so that others daren't speak of such atrocious things. Uncivilised primitives can't be made to understand so easily. Sentry, take them away and cast them to blind dungeons. Leave them there foodless, and waterless, till they are exhausted, speechless and their listless bodies barely able to raise their heads asking for mercy.

[The subjects fail to understand the king's decree, rather believing that something positive has been said]

Senapati : Take them in chains immediately from here.
Whip them tight, so that their frightened wails
pierce every inch of the palace days and nights
together.

*[Sentry ties them and drags them out, they still fail to
comprehend the import of the matter]*

Subjects : Baba Maharaj, what are you doing? We won't
complain again, just leave us, Baba.

[Senapati whips them into silence]

Senapati : Silence, you crooks!

Purohit : You infidels!

Mantri : You ignominious!

Maharaj : Let this brazenness be rooted out forever.

[The subjects still look at him in disbelief, light fades]

Inter-scene

[A Path, Padmamohan can be seen coming when the lights are on]

Padmamohan : Nothing could be gained out of complaining to Maharaj. The subjects had to bear everything in silence. And how could anyone fight the King, tell me? You saw Lakshmicharan almost driven to death through titun, fleeced of his last food grains as tax; I ask him, why Lakshmicharan, why don't you protest? But he won't raise his voice. And how can he? He is tied head to toe in superstitions and blind beliefs. Now you watch the next scene of our play. The time is the beginning of Jan Shiksha Andolan. One young man has come to visit their village. O comrade, you come here, you have to play the role of Ramkumar.

Leader : What are you saying? Myself?

Padmamohan : Yes, yes, you can do that. You know the story. I am helpless, the regular actor doing the role hasn't turned up.

Leader : Okay, then, let's begin.

Padmamohan : The scene is that of a meeting. Come fast, you all.

[A group enters singing and dancing]

Group Song:

O come, come, come, let's go all,
To kill the pests that's infesting our fields.
Come, come, come, let's go all,
King and his parasites squeezing our all.
To stop titun, we asked our King,
In rage, he peeled off our skin;
Whom do we tell of our woes?
To get freedom from all our throes,
Come, come, come, let's sing all,
Songs of revolt, freedom from thrall;
Come, come, come, let's sing all.

[As their song continues, the village elders enter the stage and sit. Ramkumar enters and sits on one side. Padmamohan in Lakshmicharan's role]

Lakshmicharan: Why, why have you called me; who has come?

Ramkumar : (stands) I have called you all, I thank you for taking the pain to come here.

Villagers : Instead of Chaudhuri's house, why did you call us here?

Ramkumar : Why I called you here, you will surely come to know, but before that, I would like to apprise you briefly of my intentions.

Respected elders and my equals and my younger brothers and sisters, I have come here with a message. We had urged Maharaj for expansion of education in the state of Tripura. To set up schools in every village. But our Maharaj has refused to accede to our demands. So, we are going to launch a movement- Jan Shiksha Andolan in Tripura. Till our Maharaj realises the importance of education in the life of his subjects, we will set up schools in every village and run them ourselves.

Lakshmicharan : Where have you come from?

An Elderly Person : Why have you left your village to come here?

Ramkumar : My house is in the next village. We, the members of Jan Shiksha Samity, have come here to spread education.

Lakshmicharan : Have you married yourself?

Ramkumar : (blushes a little, smiles) No, I haven't married yet.

Lakshmicharan : Even at this age you haven't married yet? Or did your father-in-law drive you out?

[Lakshmicharan and others laugh out loudly]

Ramkumar : Listen elder brother! We can't afford to marry. We are committed to bringing light of education in the lives of people. And set up schools and colleges in villages.

Lakshmicharan : What can be achieved with schools?

Ramkumar : Children will get education.

- Lakshmicharan : Like the children of those Thakur, Karta and the Maharaja? (laughingly) What will our children do with education?
- Ramkumar : Just look around our society. Other societies in other countries have progressed so far, that we are lagging behind by ages. People have learnt to fly like birds in aeroplanes, sitting at home they can communicate with others thousands of miles apart. (The elders smile, the youth express surprise) And where are we, why are we like this still? Have any one ever asked this? Our Maharaja takes levies from us year after year, what does he give in return? Nothing. On top of that, poor subjects from the villages are forced to provide titun, *begar* labour. Even if they are dying, they are not spared.
- Lakshmicharan : This titun system is evil, it should be abolished.
- Ramkumar : Do you believe that Maharaja will abolish that on his own? Never, we have to resist to stop that.
- Lakshmicharan : You have said well, babu, but can we fight the Maharaja?
- Person₁ : Our Maharaja is our God.
- Ramkumar : This is a bluff, a lie. A tyrant can't be God. For ages we were kept in the darkness of ignorance. That is why we still believe in such deceptions. Aged women are clubbed to death taken as witches; in the name of *Jamai*

utha, young men are forced to labour for free for four five years.

Lakshmicharan : What are you saying, Babu, should we abolish even *Jamai utha*?

Ramkumar : Of course, our young men are ruining themselves working as *Jamai*. Their youth gets wasted labouring in the prospective in-law's house. When will they educate themselves?

Lakshmicharan : What will a peasant's son do with education? Probably, that's why the King hasn't set up schools in villages.

Ramkumar : Even I am the son of a peasant, and got little opportunity to study and learn about the world. I have realised with whatever education I had, that blind faiths and superstitions of all sorts have crippled our society, and all these evil practices flourish because of illiteracy.

Lakshmicharan : Forget it, I am going, I don't have time to listen to all these.

Ramkumar : Listen, don't go. The youth of this society wants to stand on their own feet, they need your help.

Lakshmicharan : With this little education, you want to abolish *Jamai Utha*, with a little more, you might refuse to even acknowledge your parents, who knows?

Person₂ : You don't believe in religion, neither in God, let's go. (Lakshmicharan and his companions leave)

- Kumari : Let them go, we will listen to what Babu has to say.
- Narendra : Tell us, Babu, you tell us.
- Ramkumar : Friends, every moment of our life is a struggle. To be successful in that struggle, we need education. Without education these days, no battles can be won.
- Nagurai : Titun practice must be abolished.
- Narendra : Maharaja's exploitation must be stopped.
- Ramkumar : To do that we have to resist our Maharaja. When we do that the British will come on Maharaj's side. The British Raj is also exploiting Indian people. As the Indians are already fighting the British to drive them out, we need to align with them to achieve our ends. Getting ourselves educated is the first step towards that goal.
- Mungskurai : Well, then we will educate ourselves.
- Rupashri : We are illiterates, but we will give our children education, tell us Babu, how do we have schools in our village?
- Ramkumar : Yes, I will tell you. But I must tell you first that it gives me immense happiness to see you coming ahead. The keenness you are expressing, especially the women, I am confident that we will surely win the battle.
- Madhuti : The elders have all left, can we achieve without them?
- Ramkumar : Of course we can. We have to bring them back through persuasion. We will visit every house. Convince everyone about what we are going to do, bring everyone together. Then

we will set up schools, where children will learn. Through education, the light of knowledge will reach this village, and lit up the whole forest of darkness. We will stand with our head upright, and invite the whole world to come and watch us:

Whose summons beckon us.

To this awakening?

O fearless let's be!

He who bestows his life to the last breath,

Imperishable is he!

[Everyone claps. Light dims]

Inter-scene

[It is a hill of jhum cultivation. Padmamohan comes and speaks as the narrator]

Padmamohan : Such a dream, for a beautiful future! But these oldies, they don't assent. Why don't they agree? Because Ramkumarda wants abolition of Jamai utha. Is this any reason why Lakshmicharan should be angry? Actually he had used Mungkurai as Jamai for his daughter Hiramoti.

[The actor who is performing Mungkurai enters]

Actor : Mungkurai belongs to Bishrai locality. His father-in-law utilised him for five years promising him his daughter's marriage. Later, he said, he won't give; do you understand? Five long years. They used to leave for the field even before dawnbreak- Mungkurai and Hiramoti, before even the first cock cawed.

Padmamohan : Why did you say Bishraipara, Mungkurai's house- was his house in Bishraipara?

Actor : Haven't you said to take any name whatsoever?

Padmamohan : Where did Madhuti, Rupashri lay down their lives? Isn't that Padmabil? You could have mentioned Padmabil, or at least Manaicherra.

Actor : Leave it! Every village is the same; any name will do, isn't it?

Padmamohan : Yes, yes, showing off in every opportunity.

Actor : That is the reason, I don't like to act in your troupe. You are always censuring. I can't play Mungkurai, I tell you.

Padmamohan : Why do you get sore, Baba? Now- let's start once more. I am giving you the lines, you catch up. (starts) Oi Jamai, hurry up, won't you go to jhum today? It's already dawn, can't you see? Have you become the son of a lord? At night you will have meetings with Ramkumar and wake up late.

Actor : Arrey, what are you saying? Those will come in the next scene. You are mixing up dialogues. I will speak alone now.

[Padmamohan as Lakshnicharan exits]

Listen you all- I will tell you the story. Every morning Mungkurai had to wake up before sunrise-and Hiramoti! She had to cook for everybody in the house before she could leave for work. After the whole day's toil, Mungkurai would come back home, call the fowls and pigs to their shelters, bring water from the cherra, axe firewood for next day and then, only then, could he get some respite. He would sleep the last and wake up first. Yet, his father-in-law wasn't satisfied, would talk to him

abrasively. Days, months, years passed by in this way, five long years elapsed, still, still, they were not married.

[The actor becomes Mungkurai : he wonders in his mind]

Mungkurai : I have spent so many years here; won't I get married? I will tell my father-in-law today itself, either you give Hiramoti's hand or I will leave. But doesn't Hiramoti love me? Why should I leave then? I will rather elope with her. We will get married and make a home, yes, we will make a home.

[Narendra and Nagurai enter]

Narendra : Oi, Jamai, when will you get married?

Mungkurai : It will happen the day it happens.

Nagurai : You are a fool to hope so! Hiramoti's marriage will be with Mahendra.

Narendra : Your father-in-law will show you the door. You will be driven out of here, take it from me!

Mungkurai : (smiles) If he drives me out, let it be, I will go away.

Nagurai : You will leave if he drives you out? What kind of a man are you?

Mungkurai : (agitated) Can he drive me out? I will elope with Hira before that.

Narendra : I know, I know, to what extent you can do that. Hira will marry Mahendra, I tell you.

- Nagurai : Mahendra is a real man. Last year he killed a tiger. He even got bakshish from the Maharaja for his courage. Moreover, he is the grandson of the Chaudhuri. He has many acres of land.
- Mungkurai : Huh! Has he killed the tiger? Maharaja killed it.
- Narendra : No, no, Mahendra killed it. Later Maharaj's people spread the rumor that the Maharaja killed it. Just for his sake.
- Nagurai : If he didn't give the credit to Maharaj, the Maharaj would have killed him.
- Narendra : That's true, the Maharaj would have killed him.
- Mungkurai : What if he is the grandson of the Chaudhuri? Can he snatch Hira from me? I will just chop him to pieces. Anyway, Hira herself won't go.
- Narendra : Wait and watch the turn of events.
- Mungkurai : Can Mahendra beat me? (in hushed voice) I am educating myself- to be able to fight better. Didn't Ramkumarda mention that educated ones can't be defeated in any form of battle.
- Nagurai : True; did you see Ramkumarda knows so much, about other countries even!
- Narendra : And we, we don't know anything.
- Mungkurai : We are uneducated, that's why.
- Narendra : Let us enlist in Ramkumarda's party.
- Nagurai : Ramkumarda told us, he will give us membership.

- Mungkurai : We will collect subscriptions to build schools.
Nagurai : [silences others] Oye! They have come!
Narendra : Who? Who have come?
Nagurai : Look! Hiramoti, Nabalakshmi, Madhuti and
Rupashree! They are here!

[The girls enter in loud roar of laughter. They look at them]

- Madhuti : Did you hear- Ramkumarda asked us to
inform all, there will be a meeting this
evening.
Kumari : You are asked to decide among yourselves
who will bring bamboos and hay?
Rupashri : To build a school house.
Nagurai : Is the meeting today?
All Girls : Yes.
Rupashri : You all must come.

[The girls leave]

*[Hiramoti intentionally takes out the flower from her hair and
leaves behind]*

- Narendra : Oye! Look! Someone has dropped a flower.

*[The boys look at them and laugh. They start a song; a little
later even the girls come and join them]*

Boys:

O Girls, o girls, will you tell us?

O Girls, o girls, kindly tell us,

Whose khopa's flower is it,

Will you tell us now?

If someone picks it for you

Will you mind now?

Girls : [Dancing]

O boys, o boys, can you tell us?

Whose khopa's flower was that,

Can you guess for us?

Who did her hair bind,

Keeping whom in mind,

For whom was this flower meant

Can you guess for us?

Boys and girls together:

Whose heart was lost today?

For whom was it lost?

If anyone knows it right,

Pick the flower up.

Dust the flower gently then,

Hide it in your heart,

In the flower will you find

The heart, who her hair bind.

[They depart, humming the tune. Mungkurai sneaks back to pick up the flower left by Hiramoti. Presses it against his bosom, releases a sigh. Narendra and Nagurai follows him silently]

Nagurai : Thief, thief, we have caught a thief.

Narendra : Oye, why are you hiding, man, tell us, who has dropped the flower, tell us?

Mungskurai : No, no, no, I didn't pick up anything. I didn't-

Narendra : Lying, you are lying, we will hit you.

[Both of them pretend to beat him in mock anger. The flower falls off Mungskurai's hand, Nagurai picks that up. They start laughing]

Nagurai : You, you are caught-

Narendra : Why are you concealing? You will get married certainly.

Nagurai : Did you talk to Hiramoti about this?

Narendra : What does she say, tell us?

Mungskurai : (in mock grief) She doesn't say anything.

Narendra : Does she like you?

Mungskurai : I can't understand. It's been already five years, yet when I look at her, she looks the other way. When I play the flute-

Nagurai : What, what happens, when you play the flute?

Narendra : Say it, come on.

Mungskurai : (blushes) She looks at me and smiles.

[Light fades]

Inter-scene

Padmamohan : Hira's father tells his wife- Oye Hira's mother, aren't you ready yet, hurry up, otherwise they may drop the scene altogether.

[Hira's mother rushes in]

Hira's mother : What a play Mama has written but; one moment you play Rupashree, next moment you are Hira's mother, can't even rest a while. Is it a play- there's no head or tail. Were Rupashri and Kumari Hira's friends? How did Hira find a place in this story?

Padmamohan : Don't you understand? See, the audience doesn't know, how the young boys and girls were at that time; how they entered the struggle and why; how Jamai utha duration was curtailed. The plot of Hira and Mungkurai will give them an idea about all these things.

Hira's mother : What about Kumari, Madhuti and Rupashri? Won't you show their sacrifices for the struggle?

Padmamohan : Listen, titun practice was always there. But one needs to know the moment from when people refused to render it anymore. It was when the Jan Shiksha Andolan began, that was the moment. Now, don't waste time, start.

Hira's mother : You start your part.

Padmamohan : Okay then.

Scene-VI

[Padmamohan re-enters as Lakshmicharan]

Lakshmicharan : I will drive Mungkurai away-

Hira's mother : Won't you give your daughter's marriage?
God! It's been so long that he had come. This
year you must decide upon.

Lakshmicharan : Yes, yes, I will give her, but to the Maharaja.

Hira's mother : What rubbish?

Lakshmicharan : Yes, Chaudhuri told me, Raja will take her
and make her a queen.

Hira's mother : No, no, no, I don't want to send her to the
palace. I will never be able to see her again.
Better, I will give her marriage with
Mungkurai.

Lakshmicharan : (puffing his hookah) Dhut! Dhut! Women
don't understand anything. Mungkurai has
joined Ramkumar's party, soon he will
educate himself, and try to abolish Jamai Utha
practice. He will not have any respect for
elders; He doesn't respect me now only, what
will he do after marriage?

Hira's mother : Who says he is bad? You made him work for five years, and now you say you will drive him out? Will that be right?

Lakshmicharan : Chaudhuri says if I send my daughter to the palace, I will get lot of respect. Maharaj will give me money and wealth.

Hira's mother : You may need all those things, I don't. Whenever I tell her that she can't marry Mungkurai, she weeps. I can't force my daughter into misery and find peace.

Lakshmicharan : Dhut! Go to hell then! I don't know anything.

[Exit]

Scene-VII

[The City Road. Lakshmicharan and Chaudhuri meet each other]

Chaudhuri : Oye Lakshmicharan! Have you made up your mind? Maharaja will send people to take your daughter next Wednesday.

Lakshmicharan : My family isn't consenting. Even my daughter is against it, she has given up on eating and sleeping and is crying since then. I can't make them understand.

Chaudhuri : Even my grandson Mahendra is willing to marry your daughter.

Lakshmicharan : What should I say?

Chaudhuri : Listen, lure in Mahendra by telling him that you will make him your son-in-law. Then, ask him to beat up Mungkurai and drive him out of your house. Once Mungkurai is away, you can deliver your daughter to Maharaja.

Lakshmicharan : I can't say all these things to him. I can't lie, Thakur. Leave it, since she wants to marry Mungkurai, let her do that.

Chaudhuri : Haven't you seen how a wild elephant is caught, you fool! You need a trained elephant to catch a wild one, don't you know. Okay, if you can't, I will do that. I will tell Mahendra to drive Mungkurai out of your house, so that he can marry Hiramoti. I will ask Mahendra to pick up a fight with Mungkurai, you understand? Then they will come to me for sorting that out, won't they? I am the Chaudhuri of this village, don't you know; do you think I have become Chaudhuri out of nothing. I will tackle the case, wait and see, how I do that. Don't you remember the other case, when two fools came to me fighting over a goat, what did I do? I kept the goat and drove both of them away. One more thing, there is another boy who is creating trouble. He talks of collecting subscriptions to build a school in the village.

Lakshmicharan : Yes, Thakur, his name is Ramkumar. Always talking nonsense. He said of setting up schools and I came away. Also wants to do away with Jamai Utha.

Chaudhuri : Listen, Lakshmicharan. We are poor peasants, born to work in fields. What will our children do with studying? There can't be a school in the village. A school will bring in all sorts of ideas from outside, and drag everything to hell. I will fix that Ramkumar, you wait and see. Listen, don't give any subscriptions, I warn you.

Lakshmicharan: No, no, there can't be any ischool-tischool. Not in this village, I am not going to give any subscription.

Chaudhuri : You should remember that.

Lakshmicharan: Yes Thakur, I will remember that.

Chaudhuri : And about that earlier thing, did you understand, what I told you? Drive that jamai away; ask your daughter to mix ash in his food, to sprinkle red chilli powder on his eyes.

Lakshmicharan: Okay, Thakur, as you say.

[Exits Lakshmicharan. Chaudhuri watches him leave]

Scene-VIII

[Lakshmicharan's hut, Hiramati is alone, singing a tune from jhum songs]

Hiramoti : (sings) Hues of vermillion in the sky,
Drugged winds tipping the forest high,
No blossoms in my garden though,
In vain the quails rouse me so,
Palash shimul for whom inflame,
Wish my life flushed all the same.

[Lakshmicharan enters in agitated state. Hira's mother follows him. Even she is agitated. The dumb son follows them]

Lakshmicharan : Oye listen, you have to mix ash in his food, I am not going to make him jamai for sure.

Hira's mother : Then why did you make him work for so many years? I am not going to listen to you. I will marry her with Mungkurai, I tell you.

[The dumb son also seems to say something. Lakshmicharan snubs him sharply]

Lakshmicharan : You have to go to the palace. Listen, why are you being so unreasonable? If you go

there, you can lead your life in luxury. So much of wealth, jewellery, you don't have to work even; only eat, sleep and make merry. So much of happiness you can get there, you can be the queen.

[Hiramati clings to her mother and starts crying]

Chaudhuri has assured that we will get lot of money and respect. Even I can be Chaudhuri myself, talukdar also.

[Hiramoti cries out in gasps; Ramkumar's voice in the background]

Ramkumar : (offstage) Lakshmida, o Lakshmida!

Lakshmicharan : Who is it?

Ramkumar : It's me. (enters)

Lakshmicharan : (irritated) What, why have you come again? I can't give subscription; neither can I do any work for you. There is no need for a school here, what will we do with a school?

Ramkumar : Listen, I-

Lakshmicharan : You want to spoil the children by opening a school. They don't obey us anymore now, it's because of you.

Ramkumar : Wait Lakshmida, you can scold me even later; first tell me why is your daughter weeping?

[Lakshmicharan doesn't utter anything]

Hira's mother : He wants to send her to the palace. He doesn't want Mungkurai to marry her.

Ramkumar : But he has been a jamai for so many years in your household, I don't think it will be right to turn him away now.

Lakshmicharan : What do you understand? With a little bit of education, you think you can do anything. Can you overturn Chaudhuri's wish? He wants me to give away Hira to the King, otherwise I will be put to trouble.

Ramkumar : Yes, they can forcefully snatch her away, but why will you give yourself? Do you know, what kind of life girls are forced to live in the palace? They spend the rest of their lives as servants. All those girls who go to the palace are not made queen, it's much better to spend life in austerity in your own house than be a servant in the King's palace. I have heard that they have lured you with assurances of wealth- but I can tell you if you fall in the trap, you have to rue your whole life. Rather, send away your daughter and son-in-law somewhere far off, and tell them that they have eloped and got married. That way, you can save their lives and yours as well from the wrath of the King.

Lakshmicharan : Why should I listen to you? I am not going to go against the Chaudhuri.

Ramkumar : Okay, you decide what's good for you, why should you listen to me? Let me leave now. You don't weep, Hiramoti, what's the point in crying? I understand how unbearable it is to be born in a society, which is ruled by a few blind people. We have to see more of these things. Anyway, I am leaving, Lakshmidia.

[Exits]

Scene-IX

[Hiramati, Kumari, Madhuti, Rupashri and others are working on jhum cultivation]

- Rupashri : Hira! Do you hear the flute playing?
- Kumari : No, no, how will she hear, it's playing so far.
- Madhuti : Doesn't seem to have any work, whole day playing the flute. And driving someone crazy here, so heartless!
- Kumari : Which boy is that, should be sent to jail.
- Rupashri (Holds Hiramoti) : Send this one along also.
- Hiramati (all of a sudden on the verge of tears) : Didi, I think, I can't get married.
- Kumari : Why, what happened? Is the flute player cross with you? Never mind, such things happen. Rupasidi, before marriage, even we had such frequent squabbles, isn't it?
- Rupashri and Madhuti : It will not be long before he is joyous again, just see.

- Hiramati : Not that, Rupasidi, my father is planning something else. He wants to drive him away and send me to the palace.
- Madhuti : (ironically) Don't you think, that will be better; you can be very happy too.
- Hiramati : I will die, didi; I will hang myself from a tree, than live a life without him.
- Kumari : Madhuti, do you understand, Chaudhuri is the villain here. [To Hira] Don't cry sister, it's your fate. Your looks have brought this curse on you. Chaudhuri must have noticed you, and informed the King. Now, there's no way out.
- Hiramoti : I will scorch my face, destroy my beauty. I would rather kill myself than go to the palace. If I am not able to live with him, I swear, I will hang myself.
- Rupashri : Wait, I think Ramkumarda can suggest some way out.
- Kumari : Ramkumarda said, we need to finish off these King, Chaudhuri and Talukdars and abolish this jamai utha practice.
- Madhuti : But for that we need to build schools first and educate ourselves.
- Rupashri : When we will go away to work in the fields, our children will be studying in schools.
- Kumari : Then they will grow up. Learn to fight, and put an end to this tyranny of the King and Chaudhuris.

Madhuti : Don't sadden yourself. Come. Let's work.
(starts a song, others join later)

Song : Women of Tripura have risen,
To be one with all the women,
To resist the baits of temptation,
And fight fears of excruciation,
Women of Tripura have risen.
To decimate all the robbers,
Vows have they taken,
Women of Tripura have risen.

[They continue with their song while working]

Scene-X

[Mungkurai inside the forest]

Mungkurai : (monologue)Huh! What do they think of me? They won't allow her to marry me. Will they drive me away?Will they send her off to the palace?Wait, I will show you now. Tonight itself, we will run away, and get married in front of holongmatai. Tonight itself.

[Mahendra enters]

Mahendra : Oye, son of a hog! When will you leave this village, tell me now?

Mungkurai : Why should I leave his village, I have been here for five years now. I will marry Hiramoti.

Mahendra (ready to strike him): I will break your head, sala!

Mungkurai : Arrey, why do you want to hit me? Come closer, come closer.

[Mungkurai tries to resist with his takkal, Mahendra's head breaks and he presses his head with his hands]

- Mahendra : Wait, sala, I will show you.
- Mungkurai : What will you do, try what you can, go! Go and bring your father, what if you are Chaudhuri's grandson? I don't care! Whom will you complain, go and do what you can.

Scene-XI

[Trial scene at Chaudhuri's house. Injured Mahendra with his head bandaged. The whole village is present. Mungkurai stands at one corner]

Mahendra : I was coming home, out of nothing he calls me Muchaksa Uwaksa. I didn't say anything. Then he hit me with a takkal. Even threatened to kill me.

Chaudhuri : Issh! Broke his head! How dares he to break my grandson's head? Hold on! I will see how he marries. Aye, tie him! Tie him and beat him blue! Dreaming of marrying in this village, I will show you.

Mungkurai : Listen to me, Thakur, let me speak!

Chaudhuri : You shut up, scoundrel! You broke his head, and trying to justify.

Inter-scene

Padmamohan: Lakshmicharan's family has been torn apart. On Chaudhuri's advice, he has sent Hiramoti to the palace. But, after all, he is the father, his heart wrenched in her memory whenever he was alone. There is a quarrel with his wife every time he came back home. And over there? In the King's palace, Hiramoti cried her heart out in helplessness, fretful in her desolation. She desperately wanted to escape from that palace and come back to her village home. But, could she find a way out? It's such a big building, with sentries at every gate. There is no way to escape from here. What will she do? Her days are wasted in futile tears. One day the waterman of the palace saw her.

Scene-XII

[Hiramoti is still weeping. Paniwala enters with a pot of water]

Paniwala : What has happened to you, mother, why do you cry? Which village have you come from? What is your father's name?

Hiramoti : Lakshmicharan. And we used to stay at Maglanbari.

Paniwala : Do you know me? Even my village is close to your home.

Hiramoti : Who are you?

Paniwala : I am Akhirai-the paniwala of this palace. I have been working here for the last twenty years. Don't cry. If you cry, you will not be cared for, I tell you.

Hiramoti : I don't want to stay here.

Paniwala : Don't say like that. Your life will be in danger.

Hiramoti : Mama, can you take me out of this palace? I want to get back home.

- Paniwala : Keep quiet, girl. You will push me into trouble. You will endanger yourself and also get me killed. Why did I talk to you?
- Hiramoti : Mama, rescue me, Mama! I will die here.
- Paniwala : Keep quiet, you foolish girl! Any girl who comes here can never get out. No man is allowed into this quarter of the palace.
- Hiramoti : Aren't you a man yourself, Mama.
- Paniwala : I am paniwala. I don't have any caste or creed. Here only two persons are allowed, Sikla and the paniwala.
- Hiramoti : Take me out, Mama.
- Paniwala : How will I take you outside?
- Hiramoti : I will dress as Paniwala, you can take me out as Paniwala.
- Paniwala : Dhur! girl! Is it possible? If they find it out, they will chop down my neck.
- Hiramoti : If you don't take me out, I will tell everyone that you intend to elope with me. Then, you see, Maharaja will bring down your head. Mama, take me out of here, I beg you.
- Paniwala : You have thrown me in a big mess. Let me see. (Looks around and after seeing none starts to speak) Listen, tomorrow I will come and give you some clothes. You be ready in them. I will come and take you out day after. Someone is coming this way, I must leave now.

[Paniwala exits, Hiramoti looks after him]

Scene-XIII

[Mungkurai is walking alone in a flustered condition. Meets Nagurai on the way]

- Nagurai : Brother Mungkurai, where are you going?
- Mungkurai : I don't know.
- Nagurai : Won't you go back home?
- Mungkurai : Where is my home? My life is over. I am not going anywhere again.
- Nagurai : Arrey brother, what if you couldn't marry? Don't feel so down. Did you have food?
- Mungkurai : No, I haven't had, I don't want to have also.
- Nagurai : Let's go to my house. We will have food together and go to work.
- Mungkurai : What work?
- Nagurai : Building schools. In a meeting today, Ramkumarda told us that the project of building schools will start today.

- Mungkurai : No, I don't feel like Nagurai. Give me chuwak, Nagurai, I want to drink.
- Nagurai : No, no, let's go. Don't do like this. Listen, we will form a party, train ourselves to fight the King and bring back Hiramoti one day, I tell you. Then, you two can get married.
- Mungkurai : When Mahendra was beating me, where were you? During the trial, why didn't you speak anything?
- Nagurai : What could we say? We were not aware of anything. And, what could we have done? That Chaudhuri wouldn't have listened to anything, for sure. We have decided we are not going to obey this Chaudhuri anymore. He doesn't want us have any school here.
- Mungkurai : He can't dictate us, can he? We will definitely build schools.
- Nagurai : Yes, friend, that's why we need you, we must start on our work from today itself. First we should have food in my house, and then start our work.

[Exit]

Scene-XIV

[Mahendra, drunk, staggers through the road]

Mahendra : Sala, bura! If I get you, I will treat you right. Sala! I drove Mungkurai away, yet you didn't let me marry Hiramoti! Bura sent her to the palace in lure of wealth. Cheater bura! Okay, I am going off to military. Let me come back and show you. Scoundrel bura!

[Narendra, Nagurai and Mungkurai enter]

Narendra : Oi Mahendra, wait, wait.

Mahendra : What happened?

Nagurai : Won't you marry Hiramoti?

Mahendra : I would have married her, but for that Lakshmicharan. Bura sala. Scoundrel. Dadu had asked him to marry his daughter to me, but he sent him away to the palace-

[Narendra and others laugh out]

Why do you laugh? Why do you laugh? I will join military. Then I will show you all.

- Narendra : When will you leave?
- Mahendra : Very soon. I am not going to sit idle like Mungkurai. I am my father's son, and he is a ram.
- Nagurai : Don't say like that.
- Mungkurai : He is an ox; kills a tiger himself, but gives the credit to the King.
- Mahendra : You rascal, I will kill you.
- Mungkurai : Get lost! Don't show off with me.
- Narendra : Once he has broken your head, next time he may not spare you.
- Mungkurai : Come, come, let's work for the school.
- Narendra : Aye, Mahendra, will you come with us?
- Mahendra : You go, such things won't suit me, wastage of time. Talking of school, what will you do with a school? I will join military, why should I go with you?
- Nagurai : Then remain as you are, and go on drinking. What else can you do?
- [Narendra, Nagurai and Mungkurai exit]*
- Mahendra : Every one is a scoundrel, let me be a soldier, then I will show each of them.

[Exit]

Scene-XV

[Inside the palace, Paniwala is waiting for Hiramoti]

Paniwala : (coughs) Yesterday I told her hundred times, to remain ready, that I will come when the bell strikes four. No sign of her till now, dhut! (gets irritated) Can we escape, once they wake up? While coming I saw the guards asleep, this was an opportunity.

[Hiramoti in the dress of a man enters]

Arrey! ishh! ishh! If I had a nephew like this, I would have made him a king. Let's go, don't open your mouth at any cost, just follow me.

[They look around once more and start walking]

Guard : Aye, paniwala, who is this?

Paniwala : This is my nephew.

Guard : Nephew! I have never seen your nephew in my life.

Paniwala : This boy has come today for the first time.

[They keep walking]

- Guard : Aye, you wait, I have to check.
- Paniwala : What will you check?
- Guard : Why did you bring him here?
- Paniwala : Today I had to carry lot of water, that's why I brought him along.
- Guard : Brought him along? I don't remember seeing him with you while coming.
- Paniwala : How would you see? You were asleep that time.
- Guard : Don't lie, I wasn't asleep. I will kill you.
- Paniwala : Don't talk big, I will complain to the king. If you were not asleep how could I take him in?
- Guard : (perplexed) How did he go inside? How did he? Anyway, go away, Paniwala and don't bring him again.
- Paniwala : No, no, he won't come again. All these fellows!

[Exits]

Scene-XVI

[The King's Council; Maharaj, Mantri, Purohit and Senapati sitting in their places]

- Mantri : Maharaj, Why do you look so sad? Every bit of dust, every tree, every being within this kingdom of Tripura is at the thrall of your sceptre, still why are so morose?
- Maharaj : I had never imagined my subjects to be so unruly, where did they get so much courage from? Temptation, imprisonment, thrashing, I have tried everything, yet they don't obey my rule. This is sedition.
- Mantri : Your Majesty, the subjects are agitating for education. May be we can permit few schools and see if that pacifies them.
- Purohit : That is not a wise idea, Mantri. With education they will reinvent themselves, raising their heads for new demands.
- Senapati : They will no longer have faith in God, neither trust in the King. Human beings are so weak,

yet ruling them is so difficult. Prison, army, nothing is enough to frighten them.

Purohit : Use politics of segregation, temptation, and religion, Maharaj. Festivals and religious rituals may divert their attention from this education issue. I don't think a school inside the forest is a right step.

Mantri : Maharaj, even if a child gets the sceptre, what will he do? He will only play with that but not know how to use that. To beguile the foolish subjects, I think a few schools may not be that harmful.

Maharaj : Do you think like that, Mantri? If the crown rolls on the ground, it signifies execution of the king, don't you know? There will not be any school for those baseborn.

Senapati : Your Majesty, your loyal servant is ready, if you order, your hapless subjects will be forced to cringe in fear.

Maharaj : I will not pardon them anymore, that's my decision. Get the army ready, and crush this rebellion so fiercely that only laments and wails can be heard from villages far far off.

Purohit : Aha! The enraged Maharaja resembles the awakening of Lord Narayana from his eternal slumber, ready to wreak havoc on this universe like Nataraja himself.

Scene-XVII

[Narendra, Nagurai, Mungkurai, Kumari, Madhuti and Rupashri talking to each other at the end of their work]

- Narendra : We need two more days of work to finish it.
- Mungkurai : Could Chaudhuri ever prevent us? We have built our school.
- Kumari : When will the teacher come?
- Madhuti : Comrade will bring our teacher.
- Nagurai : What does the teacher do?
- Narendra : Didn't Ramkumarda say, the teacher teaches.
- Rupashri : How does he teach?
- Nagurai : Who knows how he teaches?
- Narendra : I went to town once, there I saw a teacher teaching in a class. One one's one, two one's two, three one's three. I couldn't watch more than that.
- Madhuti : Babus in the town become intelligent through reading books.
- Kumari : We couldn't study anything, our children will do atleast.

- Rupashri : None can cheat them any longer then.
- Madhuti : Even we will study- and learn A, B, C, D.
- Mungkurai : Ishh! If we could learn all these things few years back.
- Rupashri : Comrade told us, it's very easy to learn, he will teach us how to learn.
- Narendra : Let's go then, there's still more work left, we can't sit and relax yet.

Scene-XVIII

[Forest path, Hiramoti, disguised as man, tired of walking all the way comes and sits near a tree stump]

Hiramoti : How far do I have to walk, who knows? Which place is this? Is there a village nearby? I haven't eaten for the last three four days. Paniwala had given me some chida while leaving. Ishh! Without this paniwala I couldn't have escaped. God bless this paniwala and bring him more happiness. (She lays down her tired body) Mungkurai! How are you, Mungkurai! I don't know, whether I will ever meet you again?

[She becomes unconscious. Mungkurai was coming that way and comes across Hiramoti]

Mungkurai : Arrey, who is this? Where has he come from? Where's his home? O brother, why are you sleeping? Looks like he is unconscious. O! o! Narendra! Come here!

[Narendra replies from offstage]

- Narendra : What happened?
- Mungskurai : Look here, somebody is lying on the ground.
May be he has lost consciousness.
- Nagurai : Bring some water, we need to drench his
head.

[Mungskurai exits to get water, while the girls enter]

- Kumari : Arrey, who has come?
- Rupashri : Where is he from?
- Madhuti : Why did he come here?
- Kumari : Who knows? (Mungskurai brings water in a
cone of bamboo)
- Narendra : O Nagurai, hold him, lift his head, I will pour
water.

[As they take off her head turban, they are shocked]

- Nagurai : Arrey, this is a woman.
- Rupashri : Isn't she Hiramoti? oye Hira!

*[With water sprinkled on her face, Hiramoti comes to
consciousness]*

- Hiramoti : Leave me alone, I want to go back to my
village.
- Madhuti : Oye Hira, you have already reached your
village.
- Hiramoti : Aya, Who are you? O o Rupasidi! That means
I have reached home, I have reached home.
(in glee) Kumaridi, how are you?
- Kumari : How did you come here?

- Hiramoti : I will tell you everything.
- Rupasi : Even if you have fled, Raja will send his soldiers to find you.
- Hiramoti : Once I have come out, they will not be able to take me again.
- Rupasi : Listen, you should stay in hiding. You can't go back home.
- Hiramoti : No, I will go back home. I want to see my parents.
- Narendra : Let's take her home.
- Madhuti : Oyi listen, I got an idea, let her meet them and stay in disguise. We will tell everyone that she is the teacher brought by Ramkumarda.
- Nagurai : Only her parents will know within the village, we will tell everyone else that a new friend has come with Ramkumarda.
- Rupasi : Yes, that will be fine. Let's go then.

[Exits]

Inter-scene

[Enters Mungkurai, he is narrator in the present scene]

Mungkurai : Hira has come back. Meeting her after so many days, her father was glad, her mother was happy. Isn't that a brave thing to escape from the King's palace? Lakshmicharan realised his mistake, thought of calling back Mungkurai and giving his daughter in marriage to him. Hiramoti joined Ramkumarda's party. There was a council on the day of inauguration of the school, where Lakshmicharan was made the President of the meeting. Even the elders are eager now to learn in the school along with the children. To stop all these things Chaudhuri has sent police to the village, to enquire who are involved with this school meeting and punish them.

[Enters Padmamohan]

Padmamohan : Oi, tell something about Hira as well.

Mungkurai : That I have already talked about.

Padmamohan : No; what happened when the King came to know about Hira's escape.

Mungskurai : Oh yes; police came in search of Hira, to find out if she had come back to her native village. The audience will understand all these even if I don't mention them. You better start with your part.

Padmamohan : Where is Chaudhuri? The inspector should also accompany him.

[Chaudhuri and Inspector enter]

Inspector : Why are you in such a hurry? Let me finish my tea at least.

Chaudhuri : Take the cup away. Even we are ready. Oye, can't you see?

[Hands over the cup to Mungskurai to take it away]

Scene-XIX

[Lakshmicharan's house]

Chaudhuri : Lakshmicharan! O Lakshmicharan!

Lakshmicharan : What is it, thakur?

Inspector : (screwing his face)What is it, don't you know? You were the president of that school meeting.

Chaudhuri : Where is your daughter, tell me?

Lakshmicharan : You have taken my daughter away, and sent her to the palace.

Chaudhuri : Information has come from the palace that she has run away.

Inspector : Has she come home?

Chaudhuri : It won't be good, I tell you, Lakshmi; you will be finished with your whole family. Send her back immediately if you want to live.

Lakshmicharan : My daughter hasn't come here. What have you done with my daughter, tell me. You must have killed her, must have killed her.

Chaudhuri : What did you say? Don't you dare say something like that. I will bury you right here. I will bring elephant to demolish your house, King's soldiers will soon come to arrest all of you, remember. (comes closer) Listen, Lakshmi, don't talk with that Ramkumar, if he comes, drive him away. Even that Mungkurai has joined that group. They don't accept the king. They have started a school in the village, they don't even trust God. If they come again, chase them out.

Lakshmicharan: What's wrong with a school, how can the king's prospects be affected with a school? Why do you object to a school? Ramkumar wishes our good.

Inspector : Listen to him! Such lunatic remarks make me crazy.

Chaudhuri : You pig, don't talk rubbish. Being an old man you have also joined them.

Lakshmicharan: I will surely join them. We can't live like this, without any roads, any development.

Inspector : Oh I see! You want a town here within the forest.

Lakshmicharan: Our children die helplessly without any medication, we will make roads, hospitals. We will build a bigger school. I am not going to listen to your futile words.

[Hira's mother and the dumb son wait nearby anxiously]

Chaudhuri : What did you say? You will not obey me? Being so arrogant? Aren't you a praja who is

expected to obey the ruler? How can you talk looking straight into my eyes?

Inspector : Oye, I warn you, I will hit you with the ruler.

Lakshmicharan : I will say it hundred times, let me see what you can do?

Chaudhuri : Haramzada! Scoundrel! Aye Inspector, beat him.

Inspector : (hits him with a ruler) Say it once more! I will break your bones.

Hira's mother : O inspector, don't beat the bura, our daughter hasn't come here.

Inspector : I will not spare you too, trying to support him!

[the dumb son attempts to hit the Inspector, Inspector and police catch hold of him and hit him]

Chaudhuri : Knock them down, Inspector, don't spare the woman. A good thrashing will bring the truth out. Dare to disregard the King, now they will know. Want to start a school, get educated, how dare! Oye, where is your leader, Ramkumar? Call him.

Inspector : Haramzada, I will make you give up your dream for this school. Doesn't know a letter, and going to be the President of the school!

Chaudhuri : Find out the leader and take him in custody, Inspector. Only then this village will be peaceful.

[Lakshmicharan, his wife and his dumb son are beaten by the Inspector and the police]

Scene-XX

[Lakshmicharan's house. Lakshmicharan, his wife and his dumb son are lying injured. Ramkumar and others are nursing and assuring them]

Lakshmicharan : Bhai Ramkumar, I think you should leave, if they find you they will surely arrest you.

Hira's mother : If they take you away, whom can we turn to?

Lakshmicharan : No, no, Ramkumar, you should go away.

Ramkumar : Yes, I will go, but first let me finish the bandage. You don't worry, Lakshmidha, they will not be able to find me. And anyway, there is not much difference whether I am inside the jail or outside. Such brutally they have beaten you, they haven't spared even women and children. All because we want a school for our children! They are ransacking the whole village, beating up whomsoever they can lay their hands on. Such barbarians they are, and they pride themselves as civilised.

Kumari : From now onwards we also need to defend ourselves.

Madhuti : The inspector has threatened to demolish the school building, with more police.

Kumari : We shall stand in a wall around the school when they come, and if they attempt, we will break their bones.

[Nagendra and Nagurai runs in]

Narendra : Dada, it's disastrous! The police have arrested Mungkurai.

Ramkumar : What are you saying? How could they do that?

[Lakshmicharan sits up, Madhuti and Kumari come closer]

Nagurai : We were coming through the road, when they took him away.

Narendra : What should we do now?

Madhuti : Let's go right now, and snatch him away from the police.

Ramkumar : Haven't they already gone far off?

Narendra : No, I don't think; they fired on Mungkurai, it hit him. That's why he couldn't run off.

Ramkumar : Oh God! (busily) Come, come, let's go.

All : Let's go, let's go.

[They run out with bows, arrows, sticks and takkals]

Scene-XXI

[Mahendra enters and keeps talking to himself]

Mahendra : All of them have gone to deal with the police, they will soon know. A few bodies surely will fall today. The police have guns; if Mungkurai dies today, it will be good for me, I can marry Hira. If the bura doesn't give his daughter, I will forcibly take her away, he doesn't know me. [sees on the other side] Arrey, isn't this Mungkurai walking! Hadn't he been shot on his leg? They are looking for medicinal herbs from the forest. Even the Ramkumar is there. Oh! I see. Let me inform the police immediately; no, no, first I should inform Dadu.

[Exits]

Inter-scene

[Enters Padmamohan]

Padmamohan : The people of the state recognised the real face of the Raja through Jan Shiksha Andolan. This Raja was our enemy, he didn't let us build schools. Maharaj Birbikram died in the middle of this Andolan. But the situation didn't improve with his demise. His administration, his officials still continued with exploitation of the poor peasants. They raided poor villagers to extort their meagre resources in the name of revenue collections. If the military visited the villages, the villagers were forced to carry their provisions and baggage. People asked, if the Raja had died, then why should we render titun anymore? To protect themselves from the atrocities and exploitation of the administration, the hapless civilians came together on a new platform. They changed the name of Jan Shiksha Samity to Gana Mukti Parishad. In the meantime, the ruling class didn't sit idle, they also launched an alternative organisation called Prajamangal Samity. Then, Tripura Sangha. There was another in the name of K.B.R.B. – Kirit Bikram Rakshi Bahini. Now you watch the rest of our play. The scene is in the King's court.

[Exit]

Scene-XXII

[The King's Court]

- Mantri : Everything is running as before, only our beloved Raja is no more in his place. His young son is sitting on the throne.
- Senapati : He doesn't understand anything, only looks around in wonder as we rule the state.
- Purohit : The institution is more durable than the individual, even though Raja is dead, the Raja lives through his institution eternally, forever. The Raja, the Rajpurohit, attendants, Raj amatyas, Kartas, zamidars are the rulers, the death of one doesn't alter the truth.
- Senapati : The Royal rule is sustained through fear evoked in the minds of the subjects.
- Mantri : The King derives his might from the fright of the subjects. The King may be dead, but let the fright prolong, we must resolve to retain that.

- Senapati : But the subjects have become restless, declaring in brazen voice, "No more will we give titun. We want more rights, democracy and an end to Regent's Rule. We want Ministers through vote, and will not accept anything less than self-governance".
- Mantri : Senapati!
- Senapati : Yes, Mantribar, forming Gana Mukti Parishad, they are spreading the fire of rebellion throughout the hills and forests; by training themselves in arms and firepower, the hilly tribals are preparing for overthrow of the monarchy.
- Purohit : Senapati, I can foresee fast approaching doom.
- Senapati : Heard that they have declined taxes. And refusing titun any longer.
- Mantri : Why are so many soldiers maintained if they can't restrain such unruly subjects? Senapati, no more delay should be entertained; crush them today itself using Tripura Sangha and K.B.R.B. Let the rebellion cease right now.
- Purohit : If there is any truth in the myth of Brahmin fury, let all those dark clouds of uncertainty and misfortune be blown away. Let the royal legacy and grandeur reign forever in this land! Senapati, you are our only hope in this hour of crisis. Lead your soldiers and decapitate all those unrelenting heads.

- Senapati : Yes, I will soon march to decimate this arrogance forever.
- Mantri : The Queen has decided to accede to the Union of India.
- Purohit : What are you saying Mantri, the name of Independent Tripura will be wiped out forever from the history of the land.
- Mantri : Dwija! You are aware that the small state of Tripura is surrounded by Pakistan on three sides. Moreover, the strong wind of Communism is threatening to destabilise the state. Any day there may be a resurrection.
- Purohit : Kaliyug, dismal kaliyug.
- Mantri : (satisfied)The Government of India is signing treaties with the princely rulers of all the provincial kingdoms. The dignity of the King, his attendants and courtiers will be retained as present, only the sovereign authority will shift to the Union.
- Purohit : (gleefully) That's better than losing everything. Even if Brahmatej does no longer remain allied to Kshatratej, it will remain tethered to the allowance from the Republic of India along with the royal allowance.

[Enters a Messenger]

- Messenger : Mantribar, there is bad news. The subjects have revolted.
- Mantri : Rush Senapati, rush, without any more delay. Put off this fire of rebellion before it becomes

a wildfire. (Senapati readies to depart with his sword raised)

Senapati : I am inflamed today by the fire of vengeance. No rebel will be spared by this sword of mine.

Purohit : Bless you Senapati ! Let the roar of your guns today submerge all thorns and pave the way for the accession of Kirit Bikram to the throne of his father, Bless you!

[Purohit blesses Senapati with raised hand.]

*[Senapati with his open sword prepares to depart. **Lights dim**]*

Inter-scene

Padmamohan : The Military was back once more in the village, in a search operation looking for Gana Mukti Parishad members from house to house. In the name of search operation, they in fact plundered the poor villagers. They broke their pots and pitchers, kicked things around and created a racket throughout the village. Accompanying the soldiers were agents of Tripura Sangha and K.B.R.B. The Chaudhuri Thakur of our village became the commander of K.B.R.B. But no one joined his party. Some how he influenced two idiots to become his henchmen. Watch out how the Thakursaab parades in front of you.

Scene-XXIII

[Chaudhuri blows a whistle and instructs two men to parade]

Chaudhuri : Attention! [*the two stand in the Stand at ease posture*] Oi, is this the way I taught you to stand for the *Attention* posture? Stand like this. [*Chaudhuri shows them, and they follow clumsily*] It's okay, that will do. Now we will parade, Kadam Tul— Left right [*they start march without lifting their leg*] You should lift your legs; when I say 'left', you should lift your left leg, when I say 'right' lift your right leg, this way, this way; [*they can't do*] Dhut! you donkeys, where has Mahendra gone? He could have trained better. [*wipes sweat from his forehead*] Listen, today the military will come to the village, you will accompany them and show the houses of Gana Mukti Parishad members. Do you understand, you idiots, you have to parade along with them in the same pace.

Agent1 : Thakur, I am scared, if the Mukti Parishad members kill me.

Chaudhuri : Dhur idiot! You will be with the military. And remember, that school house they have built, you will put fire to that.

[Mahendra enters with a habildar]

Agent2 : Thakur, if they can catch us, they will kill us.

Habildar : K.B.R.B. Commander Chaudhuri Thakur!

[salutes him]

Chaudhuri : (getting nervous at the address)What?

Habildar : There is an order.

[hands over a piece of paper]

Mahendra : He he! I have shown him the way to our house.

Chaudhuri : Oi Mahendra! Practise them how to do parade. (to the Habildar)They are K.B.R.B. agents. They will be with you and show the houses of those Shanti Sena members.

Habildar : Bahut achha. (Mahendra and the two agents salute clumsily)

Mahendra : Let's parade.

[They leave]

Habildar : You read the order.

Chaudhuri : Dhur, do you think I can read? You read it out for me.

Habildar : We will camp in your house, and have food as well.

- Chaudhuri : That's alright, eat as much as you can. But first you take rest for few days, then we can start our operation.
- Habildar : No, we don't have time, we have to crack down this uprising within seven days. Nanikarta will visit next week, before that we need to finish their leaders and shift to the next village.
- Chaudhuri : Listen, military, I am telling you, not even a single villager should be spared. Every single man and woman have joined Gana Mukti Parishad. They have started a school, they are defying the king, don't render titun anymore. Not even a single one should be spared, you should finish them one by one. Do you understand what I have said? Otherwise no one will survive, your king will not survive, you will not survive, and myself, I am already dead as it is.

Scene-XXIV

[Late night. An assembly of the villagers in the middle of the forest. All the youth of the village are present, except for Ramkumar]

Narendra : Why isn't Ramkumarda coming yet? It's already very late.

Nagurai : He will come soon. Look at his letter here.

Narendra : What has he written?

Nagurai : He has written (spells out) *C-o-m-r-a-d-e, R-e-v-o-l-u-t-i-o-n-a-r-y* – what is it?

Narendra : Let me see, *Greetings*. You can't read, give it to me.

Nagurai : I can read the rest, leave it now.

[They start jostling for the letter. Madhuti snatches it away and reads it silently. Ramkumar's voice from backstage]

Madhuti : (aloud) Accept my revolutionary greetings;
(Offstage) A very important meeting of our Central committee was held today. We have

resolved to reinforce our revolutionary movement against illegal taxation, military atrocities and titun practice through our Gana Mukti Parishad. After settling all the works here, I will be returning after two days. The carrier of this letter will be going to his village through your village, so I have asked him to hand over the letter to you. Coming 22nd Falgun, at 10.00pm I will be reaching you. Lal Selam.

- Madhuti : (aloud) Yours, Comrade Ramkumar.
- Narendra : Any trouble on the road?
- Madhuti : If the military gets him on the way-
- Kumari : Don't utter such things. Military can never lay their hands on Ramkumar. Even wild animals can't also do anything to him.
- Rupashri : In every house that the military enters, it asks the same question, "Where is Ramkumar?"
- Madhuti : No villager gives any information.
- Rupashri : No one provides titun any longer. The villagers obey the decree of Mukti Parishad blindly. Even if the military forces to carry baggage, they resist.
- Hiramoti : Even the fear of losing life can't force the villagers to render titun.

- Kumari : They may take our lives, but they can never force us to work for them.
- Madhuti : We will no more render titun.
- Rupashri : No, no more, will we render titun.
- Narendra : Why are you screaming? If the military overhears, it will rush in and attack us.
- Nagurai : Even military's father will not hear from here, is the military crazy to come this far? Now, start, let's sing together.

[chorus]

No, no more, will we render titun,
We will resist titun at any cost,
Dawn of freedom on the horizon,
All peasant workers must unite now,
Won't give up fight, till we get our right,
No, no way should we retreat now!

- Madhuti : Our school has remained closed for many days.
- Nagurai : How do we attend school- the military has made our life unbearable in the village.
- Rupashri : Now we can restart our school, only when there is peace.

[Enters Ramkumar]

Ramkumar : (exhausted) I am very late- all the villages that I have walked through on my journey back reveal the same state of indescribable suffering. Signs of acute scarcity of food; field crops gutted by drought, brutalities of extortion omnipresent. Every village that the military-police have entered, has turned into a living hell. Desperate to find out the leaders of Mukti Parishad, they are tormenting whoever is not cooperating with them. In spite of such savagery, the people are not opening their mouth, they are resisting, they are resisting tooth and nail.

Kumari : No one will reveal anything in spite of the military; our people are not cowards.

Ramkumar : Even with threats of death staring on their face, they are resisting titun. They are openly expressing their defiance of the king. Even if you kill us, we are not going to obey you anymore, that's what they are saying.

Madhuti : Even we will not accept the king, come what may.

[*there is a murmur*]

Ramkumar : Listen friends! It has been decided in our Central Committee Meeting that no longer should we passively endure such atrocities. We must combat every act of injustice. At the same time we should not succumb to any

provocations, we will not attack first from our side, but if attacked we will retaliate with full force.

Narendra : If we get an opportunity, we will snatch their guns.

Nagurai : That's a good idea, otherwise where will we get guns?

Ramkumar : The Indian army is coming to Tripura. Soldiers from Gurkha Regiment, Assam Rifles will be deployed to repress our uprising. After the British left, India declared itself a republic. But since the state of Tripura has acceded to the Indian union, the Government of India is sending army to contain us.

Kumari : What is a Republic, Comrade?

Ramkumar : Republic is a system of governance where the representatives to rule are elected by the public of the nation. It is nothing but democracy.

Madhuti : Then why would they subjugate us, we too are asking for the same thing.

Rupashri : Disband monarchy, restore democracy.

Ramkumar : This is the irony. The Indian government claims itself to be democratic. It has substituted monarchy and feudalism with democracy. Even we are seeking democracy

in place of monarchy. Yet acceding to the request of the Regent queen here, the Indian government is sending army to repress us. The fact is that the democracy they have established and the democracy we are fighting for are qualitatively different. Their democracy is the rich man's democracy, excluding the poor like us; they don't want poor people's democracy, this is indeed surprising.

- Hiramoti : What kind of democracy is that then?
- Ramkumar : Listen, our struggle is becoming more difficult. We need to develop a very cautious and resilient movement to resist them. We, the males will not stay in the villages- whenever the army comes, we will move to deep forests.
- Nagurai : Who will stay in the villages, then?
- Madhuti : We will stay there.
- Ramkumar : And the old and the children.
- Narendra : If the army marauds on them?
- Kumari : We ourselves will defend.
- Rupashri : As long as there is this takkal in hand, we are not afraid of anyone.
- Ramkumar : Friends, let's take our fight from now in the path decided by Gana Mukti Parishad. Listen

to this declaration sent from Mukti Parishad.
And then take an oath. We will fight with our
lives. Till the last breath. Until people's
democracy is restored, and monarchy is
usurped.

[takes out a paper and reads from it]

Shanti Sena, prepare yourself. Put forth your
steps in unison. To face the real enemy.
Consolidate your strength and let us seek
newer intensity. Come, let us make our
organisation invincible. And vent out our
deepest hatred for those demons who are foes
of humanity.

Inquilab Zindabad.

*[Every one raises their fists in order to take oath, light
switches off]*

Scene-XXV

[Few soldiers are sitting by the side of the road, talking]

Sepai1 : I am exhausted with this wandering, two more days and you will see me collapse.

Sepai2 : Day and night, without any rest or food, we are roaming from village to village, barging in every house and beating them up.

Sepai1 : Which dirty work they will enforce on us today, who knows?

Sepai2 : This is unbearable, I will give up this dirty job.

[enters a habildar]

Habildar : Aye, what are you fellows doing sitting here? There will be a major operation today. Nanikarta himself has come with the commander, with full reinforcement we will march to Padmabil. Padmabil village is the heart of all insurgent activities. Today they will be paid for. All those scoundrels conceal themselves in the forests, leaving behind their women and children in the villages. Fine strategy they have picked up. Today even the women will not be spared.

Listen, get ready soon, any moment the order may come.

[about to exit]

- Sepai 1 : Huzoor, killing women- I can't do that.
- Habildar : Shut up, you swine! Go and hide under your wife's aanchal. You will find solace.
- Sepai2 : What to do, Huzoor? God has given us a little less courage than you.
- Habildar : Shut up! Don't address me just with huzoor in the field, call me karta huzoor! I have royal blood flowing in my veins. I am a kshatriya.
- Sepai2 : Forgive my sin, karta huzoor, I am poor in remembering.

[A whistle blows offstage, they become restless]

- Habildar : No, no, that was not meant for us. (looks at his watch) Ours will be little later. Oye, listen, the people of this village are defiant, they don't pay taxes, neither render titun, even dares to challenge the king. Such brazenness! That's why we will lynch all of them, women, oldies and children. We will root them out.
- Sepai 1 : Oh God! I can't do that, huzoor!
- Habildar : Oye beta, I will take away your job by reporting against you.
- Sepai2 : I beg of you, Karta huzoor, kill me, but don't take away my job.
- Sepai 1 : This job has left us unfit for anything else, Huzoor.
- Habildar : Keep it in mind, Government has ordered that

if we can't catch those Mukti Parishad members, we have to put fire to the whole village. Burn out everything. Then you can watch how they will come out of their hiding. Old men, women, children, whoever we find, should not be spared. Torture them till they expose the whereabouts of their leaders.

Sepai1 : But Karta huzoor, I am a kshatriya; being a kshatriya, how can I raise hands on women and the weak.

Habildar : Shut up! You don't have to worry about all those things.

Sepai2 : Since we have to do the job, the sin will be ours, Karta huzoor.

Sepai1 : The Yamadhut will be scouting for us.

Habildar : You have come to war, at any cost we have to win the battle. We can't afford to pay heed to the issues of virtue and sin. Don't you know the rules of military; you can't question or argue, you have to follow orders.

Sepai1 : I can't.

Sepai2 : Even I can't.

Sepai1 : They are our own people, why should we fight them? Are they our enemies?

Sepai2 : Why should we burn villages, their houses, why?

Sepai1 : What have they done?

Sepai2 : What is their crime? There is no food in the villages, they have asked for a tax reprieve. They are like our own people, our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters.

- Habildar : You fools, they are twipras, and you are Jamatiyas; you have royal blood in your veins, you are the King's kin.
- Sepai1 : Royal blood in our veins! Then why can't we be the King?
- Sepai2 : Yes, why not we be the King?
- Habildar : Can everyone be the King, you ram? Are you drunk?
- Sepai2 : (scratching his head) No, I ain't.
- Habildar : Then you better drink, to make your head clear, and get strength.
- Sepai1 : No, I am not going to drink.
- Sepai2 : I want to be the King.
- Sepai1 : Even I want as well.
- Sepai1 & 2 : We all want to be the King.
- Habildar : (Laughter) Ha ha ha! You fools, can everyone be a king?
- Sepai1 : Isn't that democracy, where everyone is a king?
- Sepai2 : "Ministry through people's vote"- Isn't that what they are asking for?
- Habildar : Oye, traitors! I warn you not to repeat all those things. You have connections with those communists, it looks like. If I report to the Captain, your lives will not be spared. Straightway court-martial; never say again, you understand?

[Whistle blows offstage]

We will start right now, let's go. (Even he blows a whistle, the soldiers follow him)

- Sepai1 : God knows, what will happen today?
- Sepai2 : Today is for the last time.

[Exits]

Scene-XXVI

[The women are singing while working in jhum fields. The dumb son of Lakshmicharan runs in and gesticulates to suggest something terrible is imminent. When they look that side, they see Lakshmicharan approaching them]

Lakshmicharan : My daughters, keep yourselves in safety, the military has entered the village. God knows what will happen today, two three hundred of them have marched in, each carrying a gun in his hand, each one of them. Don't be afraid, my children, stay away from them.

Kumari : Don't you worry, father, you go away, we will protect ourselves.

Madhuti : If they find you, they will take you in custody.

Hiramoti : We are not afraid of the military.

Rupashri : Why aren't you leaving?

Lakshmicharan : Okay, okay, I am leaving. But stay safe.

[Lakshmicharan and his dumb son exit. Kumari, Madhuti, Rupashri and Hiramoti stare at them as they leave]

- Kumari : Bura was worried about us, but whether he will survive!
- Madhuti : If he comes in their way, God knows what will happen.
- Rupashri : If they do anything to the Bura, we will not sit quiet.
- Hiramoti : My father is very adamant, he will do what he decides. He may land himself in trouble today.
- Madhuti : Don't worry so much, her brother is there, if anything happens, he will inform us. We will not let them take him even with our lives. Come, let's work now.

[They start again to work, Lakshmicharan is seen going]

- Lakshmicharan : Uff! There is hardly any water in the stream, I am dying of thirst. My throat is parching. I can't even go to the other side leaving these girls here, lest the military does anything to them. If I am here, I can at least inform them beforehand.
[The sound of marching military offstage can be heard] They are coming this way, let me inform them, they must hide themselves.

[He turns around and starts walking fast. The military enters the stage in combat mode. In hurry, Lakshmicharan slips and falls down]

- Habildar : Halt! (screams in a beastly tone) Hands Up!

[Lakshmicharan starts screaming in fear, they continue beating him]

Habildar : Come, pick up our baggage, and take to the camp. Sepai, give him the baggage.

Lakshmicharan : (panting) I will not go, I will not work titun.

[Habildar and other soldiers continue beating Lakshmicharan. The dumb boy runs to inform the girls, they look up to see Lakshmicharan being beaten]

Rupashri : Arrey, do you see, how they are beating the bura?

Kumari : Oye, military, leave him, we say leave him.

[With this they charge ahead with their takkals]

Habildar : We will shoot you, I warn you, if you come forward we will shoot you.

Kumari : You are beating an old man, you cowards!

[They keep advancing. The military aims their rifles on them. The girls still keep advancing. Suddenly the military fires shots. Madhuti is hit on her chest, she falls down. The rest advances, again a shot is fired, Kumari falls down, similarly Rupashri is also hit, and she falls down. At that moment, the males enter the scene with bows and arrows led by the dumb boy. There erupts a battle between the two groups. Then they ambush them from hiding. A few injured soldiers flee away. Narendra and Nagurai follows them.]

Nagurai : They are fleeing!

Narendra : Scoundrels, devils, how many will you shoot?
We will show you today.

Nagurai : We will not give titun.

Narendra : We are not going to accept you anymore.

[They chase the fleeing soldiers]

Rupashri : (screams out from her lying position) We will not obey the king anymore.

Hiramoti : (cries out) O Rupashridi!

Rupashri : Don't cry, sister, say, we will not give titun, we will not-give-titun.

[collapses down]

Lakshmicharan : (Seeing Kumari, Madhuti and Rupashri) Oh God! Oh God! I had warned them beforehand, to stay away from the military. You have sacrificed your precious lives uselessly for this old man. What difference my death would have made? Why did you sacrifice your lives, why?

[light dims]

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