

SATEE

By the courtesy of the artist, Mr. Nandalal Bose.

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THE TRIAL

ACT I

KHIRI THE MAID SERVANT

Khiri

OME people have the means to be good in gorgeous comfort, and others like us groan under the burden of their goodness. Their charity grows fat in their easy chairs, while we carry out their mission with the sweat of our brows. They reap undying fame and we early death.

A voice from without

Khiri! Khiri!

Khiri

There she calls! No time for poor me even to nurse my grievance!

ENTERS RANI KALYANI

Kalyani

Sulky as usual!

Khiri -

That proves I am made of flesh and laugh. blood.

Kalyani

What is your latest grievance?

Khiri

That I made a wrong choice when I chose you for my mistress. Why should I come to a Rani's house, if I must serve a whole world of ragged riffraffs, cook for a needy neighbourhood bred in dirt, and wear out my fingers washing their dishes? and all this with nobody to help me!

Kalyani

Help you could have enough if your tongue did not sting out all the servants I brought to my house.

Khiri

You are right. I have a sensitive mind,

and cannot bear the least wrong around me. This fastidious delicacy of mine dooms me to solitude. The servants you had were pure-blooded robbers, blessed with a dangerously innocent look.

Kalyani

And what about yourself?

Khiri

Holy Mother! I never claim to the exception. I freely take all that I can lay my hands on. Yet I have but a single pair of them. The Creator made these to grab and to hold; therefore if you multiply hands about you, you divide your possessions.

Kalyani

But your solitude seems to be bursting with a crowd of nephews and nieces and a miscellaneous brood of cousins. Hasn't each of them a pair of hands for their share? You anger me and yet make me laugh.

Khiri

If only you laughed less and got angered more, possibly you could have changed my nature.

Kalyani

Your nature change! Not even when you are dead.

Khiri

This is encouragingly true. It makes me hope that death will be cautious about claiming me. There! look at that lazy crowd waiting at your gate. Some of them have the story of a sick husband, who obligingly never dies, and some of an uncle, whose death remains for ever fresh with its endless claim to funeral rites. They bring their bags full of lies, to expense.

range the r solid silver. I never cease to wonder we certain people can have a special relish for being cheated.

Kalyani

The poor cheat because wealth is often meaner than poverty. However, tell me why, last evening, when I fed the poor, sweets were scarce and also milk.

Khiri

Very likely the pastryman and the milk-vendor like to give you a fair chance to be cheated.

ENTER NEIGHBOURING WOMEN

They shout

Long live Rani Kalyani!

Khiri

missed their fill of good fare yesterday, their lungs would show it this morning.

Kalyan.

Who is that girl with you, Fiaring Inever saw her before.

Second woman

It is the new bride come to our house. I have brought her for your blessing

Khiri

It is easy to guess what you mean by blessing.

Kalyani

She has a sweet face.

Second woman

But not a particle of jewelry has she brought from her father's house.

Khiri ·

"They are all safely stored in your own chest," whisper those who are in the secret.

Kalyani

Come with me into my room.

(Kalyani goes with the woman and the bride)

First woman

The uncommon cheek of that woman.

Khiri

It is tiresomely common.

Third woman

But this surpasses anything that we know.

Khiri

Because it benefits somebody else but you.

Third woman

Your wit makes our sides burst with laughter.

First woman

Whatever we may say, our Rani has the biggest heart in the world.

Khiri .

In other words, she is the biggest for under the Sun.

Fourth woman

That is true. You remember how blind Andi was loaded with money, merely for fun, it seemed to me.

Third woman

And that old witch of a potter woman took away from her a real woolen rug as a reward for her facility in weeping.

Fourth woman

There is no harm in charity, but must it be foolish?

First woman

But she has such a sweet nature.

Khiri

A great deal of one's sweetness belongs to one's pocket.

Fourth woman

What I object to inher is her familiarity; with vulgar people.

Third woman

She could easily have a better companion, to say the least, than Kedar's mother.

Fourth woman

It is simply courting the applause of the vulgar.

Khiri

Such is the way of the world. It is all give and take. She supplies food to our mouths, to gather back praise from them.

She gets the best of the bargain. For food is vulgar, but praise is for the great.

Fourth woman

There they come back from the Rani's room, that woman with the bride.

First woman

Show us what you have got.

Second woman

Nothing but a pair of bracelets.

Third woman

It sounds like a practical joke.

Fourth woman

You remember Piari got for her newly narried daughter a gold chain besides a pair of earrings.

Second woman

Pity is not for the poor, but fortunate are they who have the reputation for it.

Fourth woman

The generosity of the rich is 2 merhobby, it is only to please themselves.

Khiri

If only Lakshmi, the Goddess of Luck, were kind to me, I would show how to be kind in proper style.

Second woman

We pray that your wish may be fulfilled.

First woman

Stop your chatter! I hear the Rani's footsteps!

Fourth woman

(Loudly) Our Rani is an angel of mercy.

Third woman

Wealth has been blessed by the touch of her hands.

ENTERS KALYANI

Kalyani

What are you all so busy talking about?

Khiri

They have been furiously ploughing the ground of your good fame, harrowing,

hoeing and raking, weeding green thing that bore flowers

Kalyani

ever)

Before you go home remember that if gifts had to flow parallel with expectations they would have run dry and disappeared from the world within a few days of creation. (She leaves the room).

Fourth woman

Isn't that spiteful? She must have been eavesdropping.

Khiri

No need for that. She is old enough to know by this time that the praise that grows to excess before her face is generally pruned thin behind her back.

Fourth woman

Really, you people ought to control your tongues.

Third woman

If only you can do it, it won't matter much if the rest of us fail.

Khiri

Enough for the day's work of detraction. Now you can go home with eased hearts and try to forget the smart of receiving favours. (The women go.—She calls—) Kini, Bini, Kashi!

(THE GIRLS COME)

Kashi

Yes, Granny.

Kini and Bini

Yes, aunt.

Khiri

Come and take your meal.

Girls

. We are not hungry.

Khiri

For eating hunger is not essential, but opportunity is. You will find some milk in the cupboard and some sweets.

Kashi

You are doing nothing but eat all day. Appetite has its limits.

Khiri

Bur go, things are immensely more limited. Bin, why don't I see the silver comb you had in your hair?

Bini

Poor Khetu's girl-

Khiri!

I understand. Benevolence! The plague is in the air in this house! It is fatal for a girl of your circumstances. Our Rani indulges in wasting her means only to prove that they can never be exhausted. But for you to give is to lose for ever, do you not see the difference? Now then, off to bed.

(They go).

ENTERS KALYANI.

Khiri

Life has become a burden to me, Rani.

Kalyani

You seem to bear it with Wonderful

Khiri

I swear by your feet, I am serious. I have news from home, that my aunt, my father's youngest sister, is on her deathbed.

Kalyani

A year is hardly past since I paid you the funeral expenses of this very same aunt, the youngest one.

Khiri *

What a pity! But you seem to have a keen memory only about my poor aunts.

Kalyani

Does it choke you to ask from me? Must you lie?

Khiri .

Lies are necessary to give dignity to begging. Truth would be monotonous and mean.

Kalyani

But, have I ever denied you, when you asked?

Khiri

To neglect our weapons, when not needed, is the sure way to miss them in the time of need. But I must tell you that you encourage lies by believing them.

- Kalayani

They will fail this time,

Khiri

I shall not despair about my next chance. Till then, my father's youngest sister shall never be mentioned again.

(Kalyani goes out laughing)

Mother Goddess of Luck, your favourity bird, the owl, must have daily carried yo to this house. Could it by mistake alighton my shoulder, I would feed it with choic morsels of mice flesh till it became languid and lay at my door.

(Enters Goddess-Lakshmi)

Khiri

Visitors again!

Lakshmi

I am willing to leave, if I am not wanted.

Khiri

I must not be rash. That seems to be a regular crown on your head. And yet you don't look ridiculous with it as a real queen would do. Tell me who you are.

Lakshmi

I am Lakshmi.

Khiri

Not from the stage?

Lakshmi

No, from my heaven.

Khiri

You must be tired. Do take your seat, and do not be in a hurry to leave. I know full well you have no mercy for those who have brains. It is, I suppose, because the clever ones need never die of starvation and only fools need your special favour.

Lakshmi

Are you not ashamed to make you living by cheating your mistress?

Khiri

It is because you are perverse in your choice that those who have minds live upon those who have money.

Lakshmi

Intellect I never despise, only the crooked minds I avoid.

Khiri

The intellect, which is too straight, is only another name for stupidity! But if you promise me your favour, I give you my solemn word that henceforth my dullness will delight your heart. I shall be content to remain a perfect bore shunned by all intelligent people.

Lakshmi

Do you think you will ever be able to spend a farthing in charity?

Khiri

nly at the fringe of one's surplus, it adds to the beauty of the view—and it can also be made paying by good management. Only change our mutual position, and you will find the Rani developing a marvellous talent for devising means to get what is not her own. On the other hand, I shall become perfectly silly in swallowing lies and parting with my possessions, and my temper will grow as insipid as that of an egregious saint.

Lakshmi

Your prayer is granted. I make you a Rani. The world will forget that you wer were a servant unless you yourself selp it to remember.

Khiri

Should the elephant even the weight of its tusks? Mh

Malati ds

Yes, Your Highness!

Khiri MALATI

Teach this girl why she ed by attendants.

Malati

Remember that you are a kace sprand-daughter. In the Nawab's house, where I used to serve, the Begum had a litter of pet mongooses; each of them had four maids for their attendants, and sepoys besides.

Khiri

Kashi, do you hear?

Åttendant

Moti of our neighbourhood craves audience.

. Khiri

Malati!

. Malati

Yes, Your Highness!

Khiri

What is the form of salutation expected from visitors in your Begum's house?

Malati

They have to walk forward, salaaming by touching the earth at each step, and then retire walking backward, salaaming again.

Khiri

Let_Moti

Moti

Zatic.

, the

ing.

Malati

Moti

'ani Mother. Today, being ay of the moon, is for fast-sgiving.

Khiti

Your mani Mother can ascertain the phases of the moon even without your help, if she finds it profitable.

Moti

Let me receive alms from our Rani and ake leave singing her praises.

Khiri

The first part of your prayer I prefer to ignore; the rest I graciously grant. You may leave immediately singing my praises. Malati!

Malati

Yes, Your Highness!

Khiri

- Let this woman take her leave in proper style.

Moti

Then I go.

Malati .

Not so easily. Bend your head down. Take up the dust of the floor on the tip of tyour nose. Once again. Once more.

(Moti goes.)

Khiri

tenthe ring you

Khiri

You must admit that a thing either remains, or is stolen, or lost, or

Bini

I have given it away.

Khiri

Which plainly means that someone has cheated you of it. Tell me, who has it?

Bini

Mallika. She is the poorest of all your servants, with her children starving. I have such a heap of rings, I thought...

Khiri

Listen to her! Only those of moderate means earn fame by spending in charity, while the rich in doing it earn ingratitude. Charity has no merit for those who possess too much. Malati!

Malati

Yes, Your Highness.

Khiri

Mallika must be dismissed at once.

Malati

She shall be driven away,

Khiri

But not with the ring on her. What music is that outside my palace?

An attendant

A marriage procession.

Khiri

A marriage procession in front of th. Rani's house! Suppose I happen to object, what is there to prevent me? Malati!

Malati

stress !

THE TRIAL

Khiri

Ask my guards to give everyone of the party ten strokes with a shoe.

First attendant

Only ten strokes! It almost sounds like a caress.

Second attendant

They ought to rejoice at this happy ending.

Third attendant

Our Rani has the gift of humour, for which God be praised.

ENTERS A MAID SERVANT

Maid

My pay has been in arrears for the last nine months. To slave and yet to borrow noney to feed oneself is not to my taste. her pay up my wages or allow me leave and go home.

Khiri

To pay up your wages is tolerably good, but i, saves a lot of trouble to allow you to leave. Malati!

Malati

Yes, Your Highness.

Khiri

What is your advice?

Malati

Let her be fined at least a hundred rupees.

Khiri

As she is poor I remit fifty rupees out of her fine.

First attendant

Rani, you are kind.

Second attendant

How lucky for her to get fifty rupees for nothing.

Third attendant

You can as well count it nine hundred and fifty rupees out of a thousand.

Fourth attendant

How few are there whose charity can bear such a drain.

Khiri

You do make me blush. (To the maid servant) Now you may go away with proper ceremony and finish the rest of your weeping at leisure outside my palace.

(Malati takes away the maid making her walk backwards with salaams)

RE-ENTERS MALATI

Malati

Rani Kalyani is at your door.

Khiri

Has she come riding on her elephant?

Malati

No, walking. She is dusty all over.

Khiri

Must I admit her in?

First attendant

She should sit at a proper distance.

Second attendant

Let her stand behind your back.

Third attendant

She can be dismissed by saying that Your Highness is tired.

Khiri

Malati!

Malati

Yes, Your Highness!

Khiri

Advise me what to do.

Malati

Let all other seats be removed but your own.

Khiri

You are clever. Let my hundred and twenty slave girls stand in a row outside that door. Sashi, hold the state umbrella over my head. Malati!

Malati

Yes, Your Highness!

Khiri

Is it all right?

Malati

Perfect! like a picture!

Khiri

Bring her into my presence.

(Malati goes out and returns with

Kalyani)

Kalyani

Are you well?

Khiri

My desire is to keep well, but the rest the world tries its best to wreck me.

Kalyani

I must have a talk with you in private.

Khiri

Nothing can be more private than this. Only yourself and I. These are mere. servants. Malati!

Malati

Yes, Your Highness !

Khiri

Is it possible to send them away?

Malati

I shudder to think of it.

`Kalyani

Then let me tell you briefly. Our Pathan King has forcibly robbed me of my lands.

Khiri

You are not joking? Then those rillages Gopalnagar, Kanaiganj and

Kalyani

They no longer belong to me.

Khiri

That's interesting. Haven't you some cash left?

Kalyani

Nothing whatever.

Khiri

- How funny! That sapphire necklace and those wonderful diamonds and that.

Kalyani

They are all taken away.

is unstable like a water drop on a lotus keeping.

leaf? And your jewelled umbrella, and that throne with its canopy-I suppose they also have followed the rest.

Kalyani

Yes.

Khiri

This is instructive. Our sages truly say that prosperity is like a beautiful dream that makes the awakening all the more dismal. But have they left you your palace?

Kalyani

The soldiers are in possession.

Khiri

It does sound like a story—a Rani yesterday and today a beggar in the street.Malati l 😗

Malati

Yes, Your Highness !

What do you say?

`Malati

- Those who grow too high must have their fall.

Kalyani

If I may have shelter here for a short time I can try to recover my lost fortune.

Khiri

How unfortunate! My palace is crowded with my servants—no space left where a needle can be dropped. Of course, I could leave you my room and try to rough it in my country-house.

First attendant

Absurd !

Second

It will simply break our hearts.

. Kalyani

I cannot dream of putting you to such inconvenience. I take my leave.

Khiri

Must you go so soon? By the by, if you still have some jewelry left, you may Doesn't our scripture say that wealth leave it with me for permanent

Kalyani

Nothing has been saved.

Khiri

How late it is. It gives me a headache if I am made to talk too much. I feel it already coming on. (Kalyani goes) See that my State chair and footstool are carefully put back in the store-room. Malati!

Malati

Yes, Your Highness!

Khiri

What do you think of this?

Malati

It makes one laugh to see the frog turning into a tadpole again.

An attendant

A woman craves your audience. Shall I send her away?

Khiri

No, no, call her in. I am in a delightful mood today.

ENTERS THE WOMAN.

The woman

I am in trouble.

Khiri

You want to pass it on to others?

The woman

Robbers came to my room last night.

Khiri

And you must take your revenge on me!

The woman

I ask for your pity.

Khiri

Pity for what you have lost yourself and nothing for what you ask me to lose?

The woman

If you must reject my prayer, tell me where I may get it granted.

Khiri

Kalyani is the proper person to suit you. My men will go and show you her place.

The woman

Her place is well known to me,—I go back to her! (Revealing herself) I am the Goddess Lakshmi!

Khiri

If you must leave me, do it in proper style.—Malati, Malati, Tarini! Where are my maids?

(Enters Kalyani)

Kalyani

Have you gone mad? It is still dark, and your shouts bid fair to wake the whole neighbourhood.

Khiri

What ugly dreams I have had all night! It is a new life to wake up from them. Stay a while, let me take the dust of your feet. You are my Rani, and I am your servant for ever.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

INDIAN SETTLERS IN AFRICA

II

HAVE in my possession a pencil-written manuscript, which was given to me by an Indian friend, who travelled many long journeys with me in East Africa. We had talks together which sometimes continued far

into the night; and I always found his nature the same,—simple, religious, free from the least touch of racial bias, perfectly frank and open, and essentially truthful. He had a great wish to accompany me on all my journeys, and it would have been a delight to me

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