

## **Coloured Hanky** **An Adaptation of *Othello***

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### **A Brief Introduction**

*Staging Shakespearean plays in Indian theatres during the colonial period was a common practice. We have come to know that there was a staging of **Othello** in Bengal on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1848, where one Bengali “Bustomchurn Addy” acted in the role of Othello, which had mixed reactions among the British citizens and administrators after and before the staging of the play in Sans Souci Theatre. Nevertheless, Professor Sukanta Chaudhuri mentions the name of the actor as ‘Baishnab Charan Addy.’ The British people didn’t like the kissing scene of Desdemona, a renowned British actress by Othello, a native Indian actor. Interestingly, Rabindranath Tagore translated **Macbeth** when he was merely a child of twelve years. Rabindranath did this translation as homework directed by his tutor. Unfortunately, two pages of this translation could be made available by the researchers while the remaining part is yet to be discovered.*

*After a gap of a considerable period after independence, directors started falling back on Shakespearean plots to represent the contemporary social, economic and political condition of Bengal. The Bengali film industry saw an adaptation of Shakespeare’s **The Comedy of Errors**, translated, localized and filmed as **Bhranti Bilas**. Thereafter, Ranjan Ghosh’s **Hridmajhare (Live in My Heart)** in 2014 is again an adaptation of **Othello**. The plot moves around Abhijit (Othello), a Professor of Mathematics in a renowned college of Calcutta, and Debjani (Desdemona), a cardiologist who meets and falls in love with Abhijit. Debjani gets in touch with her old friend Subhajit (Cassio), which initiates jealousy in Abhijit. His jealousy slowly takes over the best of him, and the events unfold, leading him to kill Debjani. Ghosh has, very intelligently, focused on the causes, like doubt, jealousy and superstition, which have led to Abhijit’s downfall.*

*Aparna Sen’s **Arshinagar (Mirrors ville)**, released in 2015, is an adaptation of the famous romantic play **Romeo and Juliet**. It portrays the contemporary social, economic and political status of Bengal, showing the demolition of the slums to pave the way for civilisation, Hindu-Muslim riots based on hurting religious emotions and the total setback of the law.*

*In 2016, two films based on Shakespeare came out in close succession, the first one being **Hemanta** by Anjan Dutt in August 2016. The story talks of the jealousy of the younger brother towards the wealthy elder brother who is a businessman and his conspiracy to be the master of his legacy. Srijit Mukherjee's **Zulfiqar** came out in October 2016, and the audience witnessed a combination of **Julius Caesar** and **Anthony and Cleopatra**. The first half of the film adapts **Julius Caesar**, while the latter half adapts the plot of **Anthony and Cleopatra** and the two halves are skillfully linked instead of mixed throughout the film. Othello has been adapted in Hindi as **Omkara**. The structure is kept intact, but a story suited locally in the Indian context has been introduced.*

*The theatre in Tripura saw a desperate attempt on the part of Natyabhumi with Sanjay Kar, the renowned actor as the director presenting an adaptation of Shakespeare's plays. **Chasmaiyer ful** is an adaptation of Shakespeare's **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. Siddhartha Chakraborty wrote the script jointly directed by Sri Sanjay Kar and Sri Sandeep Bhattacharjee. Probably Natyabhumi can claim the credit of producing an adaptation of Shakespeare in Tripura for the first time. The play was staged for the first time in 2007. The plot is humorous based on the incidents, sentiments, etc. in Tripura. This has been backed well by conversations using local dialects. On the day of the performance, there were roars of laughter from the audience.*

*A couple of months ago, Sanjay Kar staged his second play, **The Colored Hanky**, which is an adaptation of **Othello** by William Shakespeare. The play by Shakespeare is set in the contemporary Ottoman–Venetian War during 1570–1573.*

### ***Abstract of the play Colored Hanky***

*Sanjay Kar used the historical backdrop of Imperial Tripura as the plot of his play when the Mughal emperor Suja wanted to defeat the existing king conspiring with Nakkshatra Roy, another claimant of the throne of Tripura. The existing king, Gobindo Manikya, had chosen a young, brave, and strong man from the fishermen's community as his commander-in-chief. Thus, Atulchandra is the Tripura prototype of Othello the Moor. Both have a black complexion, and they come from lower-class families. Through the conversation of several other characters like Aghore, who is modelled after Iago, the ongoing hatred towards the lower class has been expressed. This has been clearly expressed in the conversation between Aghore and Rudranarayan. But the King needs a brave heart like Atul, and so he gets his due from the king. However, he falls in love with Debaleena, a beautiful young woman from the*

royal family who is much younger than Atul. As a villain, Aghore planned to disrupt this relationship. He succeeds in implanting jealousy and distrust in Atul against Debleena, and Rangeen rumal (a coloured hanky) plays a crucial role in this misfortune of the duo. Atul gave this to Debleena as a gift from his mother, which he believed had some magical power. He advises Debleena to keep the hanky in her safe custody so that it is not lost. The cunning Aghore has this information and uses his wife, Daliya, to steal the hanky from Debleena. Ultimately, the frenzied Atul killed his wife out of jealousy and soon after, he killed himself knowing the truth from Daliya.

### ***Critical Observation on Sanjay Kar Handling the Play***

*It is interesting to see also how Shakespearean plays were either translated into Assamese language or performed in Shakespearean English verbatim right from the colonial days till now in the capital town or elsewhere in Assam. But this may be a unique attempt by Sanjay Kar to perform a Shakespearean tragedy as well as a comedy in a local setting using a local dialect. Throughout the play, Sanjay Kar has proved his fecundity over this adaptation by using the local setting and the local dialect for conversation, thereby making the audience enjoy the Shakespearean tragedy with local flavour and taste. The comic relief within the tragedy gave additional amusement to the spectators. Mr. Kar did not try to recreate the murder scene of Desdemona that is found in **Saptapadi**. Instead, he had the same scene presented in the local dialect with Atulchandra's afflictive soliloquy that touched the heart of the audience.*

### ***The Coloured Hankey***

#### **The Play**

#### **Scene-I**

(As the light falls on the curtain, a band of singers accompanied by musicians appears. With the musicians playing their instruments, the chorus begins to sing.)

Song:

Oh God, at first I bow down to Thee, the God of all gods.

Next, I revere the greatest playwright the world

Shakespeare is his name.

His timeless creations are not confined  
To the border of any country,  
The stream of the nectar knows no bound  
Who can stop it? O brother!  
Who can block it?  
Lights gleam in a far-off country  
Illuminate the horizon.  
The bees is after honey.  
Move in a swarm!  
We'll now relate a story.  
Please do enjoy it,  
The treasure of that playwright we encroach upon  
We're exploiting consciously. O, friends!  
Doing it deliberately.

(Lights go off. When the lights are switched on again, the musicians are seen entering the stage with their instruments. The symphonists start playing. From the side wing, some villagers enter the stage carrying a strong man on a bamboo loft. Drums, kansi, cymbals, and conch shells begin to play.)

Villager 1: Hoi hoi hoi!

Villager 2: Hoia hoia hoi!

Villager 1: (sings) Let's play the drum and the conch shell, / play the kansi and the cymbals,  
/ let's dance, everybody, / to welcome the new morning!

Chorus: Let's welcome the new morning!

The Villagers: Atul Chandra has become the army commander,  
Our status has improved,  
He is like father, like son,  
He has made us proud of him.

All the villagers: He has made us proud!

Villager 2: Hail to Atul Chandra Jaladas!

All: O hail!

Villager 3 (a granny): Listen, everyone. Today is a day of joy for us. Our boatman Sukkur's son has been honored by the Tripura King with the commander's (Hazari) post. So it's a day of honor for the fishing community here, which they should celebrate.

(All the fishermen cry out in joy.) Even the waves bow down in front of our Atul Chandra. Even in the deep forest or in the water, the beasts of prey flee at the mere sight of our Atul Chandra's shadow. Even the pirates feel threatened just to hear the name of Atul Chandra. Such a valiant man as our Atul is now the commander of the King's army.  
All the villagers: We would like to hear about the reactions of our fearless commander.

Villager 3: O, our brave commander, please share your feelings with us.

Atul: Allow me to bow down before all my seniors, hug my friends and contemporaries, and greet my Muslim brothers. I navigate the waters that flow through the plains of Tripura. When the people of Tripura are brutally killed or looted by robbers, or during a foreign invasion of my motherland, I feel that the Water God emboldens me with the courage and strength to fight these enemies of Tripura. Thus, whether in water or on the plains, wherever fishermen and individuals from other castes and clans of the kingdom are in danger, I am there to safeguard their lives and property. Perhaps this is why the King of Tripura chose me for the position of Commander of his army.

All: Hail to you, Atul Hazari, the Chief of the Tripura Army!

Atul: My friends, Tripura is my mother. I will fight to my last breath to protect my motherland. Now, let us pay tribute to our King Gobindo Manikya.

All: Hail to Gobindo Manikya, our king! (All the actors leave the stage, and the lights go off.)

## **Scene II:**

A lane adjacent to the palace. It is night. Aghore, Atulchandra's bodyguard, and Rupendra, the son of the zamindar from an affluent village in the plains of Tripura, are both drunk.

Rupendra: An upper-class noble is now serving someone from the fishermen's community. It's a matter of shame for the whole community.

Aghore: Please don't rub salt in my wounds like this. No, I'm not serving him; rather, I'm a servant to myself.

Rupendra: I can't understand how the nobility and the courtiers of the state have accepted someone from the lower class as the Commander of the State Army.

Aghore: How can they disregard him when the Maharaja himself has chosen him from one of the backward classes in the state?

Rupendra: The son of a...

Aghore: Keep your tongue retrained, you, the son of a landlord!

Rupendra- What makes you angry? This scurrility is against the Commander. Son of a bitch! He must be an expert in hypnotization. What an ugly face he has! Also, a giant-like appearance. Luck has favoured him though. Debaleena, the daughter of Rudranarayan, has also fallen in love with him.

Aghore: Not only has she given her heart, but she has also given everything else she possesses. Otherwise, how could she elope with him?

Rupendra: My heart is burning, brother. Our marriage was almost fixed, but suddenly, the Dewanji changed his mind.

Aghore: I am suffering as well, my friend.

Rupendra: So, you are also troubled, I see.

Aghore: Even as a man of the upper class, I've to work as a bodyguard for someone from the lower class. I hate that job with all my heart.

Rupendra: Oh, I understand.

Aghore: I convinced some prominent figures in our kingdom to recommend me for the position of duffadar, which they did, but he dismissed their recommendations.

Rupendra: Duffadar means the assistant to the Hazari (commander), right?

Aghore: Yes.

Rupendra: I heard that the position was given to Keshablal.

Aghore: It's pure nepotism, my friend. Keshablal is a buddy of our Hazari, and he's quite talented in mathematics. Over time, we'll see how he grows a moustache on that cheeky face of his. Let me tell you, those who don't develop their talents promptly will suffer throughout the year. You know how much I dislike him—the man from the lower-class fishermen's community. In this rivalry over love, you are his opponent. My hatred and your jealousy are both directed at him. Our shared resentment will surely work together to bring down that lowly Atul Chandra Hazari.

Rupendra: Great! Please share your plans with me.

Aghore: First, go to the Dewanji immediately. Confront him about how she could marry another man after the marriage with his daughter was already settled.

Rupendra: Now? In the dead of night?

Aghore: Yes, be brave. Go ahead.

Rupendra: Let's go. We need to make some desperate decisions to resolve this matter today.

Aghore: Okay. Let's go.

(Both leave the stage. The lights go out.)

### **Scene III.**

(The court of Dewan Rudranarayan. Aghore and Rupendra enter, surprised to find no one inside.)

Aghore: What happened? No one is here, even though it's an urgent call. (An impatient Atulchandra looks towards the wings.)

Aghore: These are all mischievous plans of Rupendra, the son of the landlord of Sarail. He must have conspired to humiliate you. My Lord, may I say something, even though it may not be befitting for an ordinary man like me? Please forgive me for this.

Atul: Alright. Go ahead.

Aghore: My Lord, please marry her as soon as possible.

(Entry of Dewan Rudranarayan. Following him are Rupendrakumar and other courtiers.)

Rudranarayan: Where is my daughter? Someone must tell me! Honourable courtiers, this Commander has enchanted my daughter. Please suggest how to punish him for this offense. This uncouth fisherman's son has run off with my beautiful daughter, beguiling her, although we don't even drink the water offered by his class!

Atul: Respected Dewanji, don't forget that you are speaking with the army commander of the King of Tripura.

Rudranarayan: Shut up, you brute! You must admit in front of all the esteemed guests here that you have abducted my daughter by trickery.

Courtier 1: O Lord Dewanji, please control your anger.

Atul: O honourable Dewanji, I admit that your daughter is with me at present.

Rupendra: Look how he is misusing the dignity of a higher post for personal benefits.

Courtier 2: Who are you? I don't know you.

Rudranarayan: He is Rupendra Narayan, the son of the landlord of Sarail, an affluent village on the plains of Tripura. The marriage of my daughter has been fixed with him.

Atul: Let me announce before you all that I've already tied the knot with Debaleena.

Rupendra: Courtiers, see how this power-drunk scapegrace commander has lost his senses. He must be practicing black magic.

Courtier 1: O Lord, answer the charges brought against your use of black magic.

Atul: I didn't dare to pursue such a bright star until she came down to me of her own will.

Rudranarayan: It's impossible! He is lying. All this is fabricated. My daughter is timid; she feels insecure even looking at a stranger. Do you believe that such a girl could be desperate enough to forget her social status and marry a man from the fishermen's community who is double her age?

(Enter Debaleena)

Debaleena: O my father and all other respected individuals present here, I prostrate before everyone. I have something to say.

Rudranarayan: O my daughter! You have returned. Please tell us whom you love and prefer the most—your father or that brute.

Debaleena: O Lord! Please guide me on which side I should be on. My noble father, I perceive here a divided duty: I am bound to you for life and education; you have taught me to respect you. You are the lord of duty. However, at a certain point in a daughter's life, love and affection become divided. You gave me life and raised me with your unfathomable love and care. It seems as if you would bring me the Moon from the sky if I ask for so. You have

devoted yourself to make me happy, and I am equally respectful and affectionate towards you.  
But another part of my love—

Courtier 1: Please tell us, my child. Let us hear.

Rupendra: O my sweetheart, please tell the courtiers that you are my betrothed.

Debaleena: The other part of my love is devoted to this brave army commander.

Rudranarayan: Oh! This is shameful. I am truly ashamed. This has disgraced me greatly.

Debaleena: Oh, my Father.

Rudranarayan: Shut up, you rascal! You have no right to address me as father.

Rupendra: How shameless, you impudent girl!

Courtier 2: Please be quiet. O my daughter, tell us how the commander has hypnotized you, making you fall for him.

Debaleena: My father was cordial towards Atul Chandra. He used to invite Atul Chandra to our house often.

(The lights slowly begin to dim. Atul and Debaleena stand in the contracted light.)

Atul: This looks odd.

Debaleena: Which one?

Atul: You often bring me to your room.

Debaleena: My father is very open. He is happy with his daughter's happiness.

Debaleena: Yes, my soldier! Can you tell me which romancer has conspired to hide honey within a flower?

Atul: I don't know his name or address, but I know for certain that he has stored enough honey within you to make you so beautiful.

Debaleena: I'm very much insignificant compared to your valor. Please tell me the stories of your gallantry—the tale of the pirates that—

Atul: The pirates stole me and sold me to a dacoit from an upland country. Himautullah, the vicious dacoit, trained me in all the skills of dacoity. Their camp was in the Jaintia Hills of Sylhet. Within a short period, I escaped from the camp. I swam across the Kushiara River to reach Barak Valley, where King Cach ruled.

Debaleena: Then—

Atul: That's enough for today. Your father must be waiting for you.

Debaleena: No, no! Please tell me something more. Did they allow you to go scot-free?

(Atul demonstrated physically telling her how he escaped the prison)

Atul: I killed five guards to escape from jail and came to this mountainous region of Tripura. Here, I found shelter with Keshablal, a tribal member of the Choudhury clan. Since then, he has become a close friend of mine. But that's another story. Please bid me farewell, my beautiful lady.

(The flashback ends, and the characters are present in the moment.)

Debaleena: My mind is devoted to Atul's brave deeds.

Courtier 1: It is clear from what the bride said that she willingly stays with Atul.

Courtier 2: O Dewanji, a man's beauty lies in his qualities. Your son-in-law may not be handsome, but he has enough potential to appeal to someone of the opposite sex.

(Enter the guard)

Guard: Hail to Maharaja Gobindo Manikya!

O gentlemen present here, the Maharaja has called for an emergency meeting.

Courtier 2: At this hour?

Guard: Yes. We have just received information that Subedar Suja Sah is preparing to attack the plains of Tripura.

All: What a bad news!

Guard: Therefore, all of you are asked to accompany Hazari to attend the meeting.

Atul: This is a bolt from the blue.

Courtier: O Commander! You have another chance to showcase your valour.

Atul: I will protect the borders of Tripura with the last drop of my blood. Dalia, please take Debaleena home with you.

Dalia: Alright, My Lord. (Debaleena tries to return to Atul, but Dalia forcibly takes her away.)

Rudranarayan: Please proceed, honourable courtiers. (Rupendra and the two other courtiers exit.) Hazari, let me warn you that a daughter who can cheat her father may also betray her husband. If you trust her, you might be gravely deceived. (Exit Rudranarayan. Atul remains on stage, feeling lonely, worried, and seriously contemplating Rudranarayan's words. The lights go out.)

#### Scene IV

(The residence of Aghore. Dalia is folding clothes. Debaleena and Keshablal are on a cot arguing while playing dice.)

Debaleena: I have won, and you have lost.

Keshablal: No, you lost. I won't accept defeat.

(Dalia enters the room with some clothes and laughs at their argument.)

Dalia: You two have started disputing with each other over a game!

Debaleena: Look! He's losing but still arguing.

(Keshablal gets up and looks towards the wings.)

Keshablal: It seems this storm won't be over tonight.

Dalia: Everyone advised Debaleena Madam to stay at her father's house, but she turned down that advice. Instead, she insisted on staying with her husband at the battlefield.

Debaleena: How can I stay with my father when he has renounced me?

Dalia: You are as good as Goddess Laxmi.

Debaleena: How have I become godly?

Dalia: Our Master has been upgraded from Commander to Subedar after marrying you.

Debaleena: Don't undermine his bravery, didi. His promotion is a reward for his victory in Arakan. But I'm feeling very scared inside.

Keshablal: Don't worry. Our Subedar will overcome the Mughal army just like he defeated the Mogs.

Debaleena: Blessed be your words, my bro. \*(She looks at the wings.)\* Look, Aghore Dada is back.

(Enter Aghore.) Is there any news from the war front?

Aghore: The war has come to a halt due to incessant rain and storms on the war front. Hundreds of Mughal soldiers were washed away by the waves of the river. The Army Chief is now in the camp at Comilla.

Keshablal: Are there any new orders for us?

Aghore: If the weather clears by tomorrow morning, we must move to Comilla and leave Rangamati. Palanquins and bodyguards are all ready for the move.

Dalia: O my lady! I hope the suffering caused from your separation will soon come to an end. The bridal bed of our newly married couple is still waiting.

Keshablal: It will take place now in the Meherkul fort—a befitting place for the Army Chief.

Debaleena- (Pushing Keshablal lightly) - Leave me.

Aghore- But I've to manage two wars at a time.

Dalia- Two war fronts?

Aghore- Yes. One is at the battlefield while the other is at night with you.

Dalia (biting her tongue): What a shame! It seems you don't feel embarrassed at all. (She throws the clothes from her hands toward him.) It's very undignified. Ashamed, she swiftly leaves the place.

Debaleena pulls Keshablal into the rain, giggling.

Debaleena: How beautiful the rain is! Let's drench ourselves in the rainwater. (The two begin to soak themselves in the rain, splashing water at each other.)

Aghore :(Soliloquy) Shit! What's happening between these two? I can't believe my own eyes. In the name of the security of the beautiful wife of the Army Chief, they have developed such

a hideous relationship. Okay, I've got a clue. Now you'll see how far I can go along with my mathematics.

Dalia (from backstage): Dinner is ready! Everyone come and join us.

Keshablal (to Aghore): Let's go. (He leaves the stage, grabbing Debaleena's hand.) (As they exit, Rupendra jumps onto the stage.)

Aghore: How come you are here?

Rupendra: I need to discuss some urgent issues.

Aghore: At this hour of the night! In my house?

Rupendra: How long can I endure mosquito bites in the jungle?

Aghore: If you can't endure the bites, how will you enjoy the nuptial bed with our charming Debaleena?

Rupendra: O my Debaleena! (He takes out a bag full of gold ornaments.) Here, take this, Aghore.

Aghore: What's this?

Rupendra: These are gold ornaments meant as gifts for Debaleena at the time of our marriage. Give them to her and tell her that these are made for her. I'll adorn her body with gold ornaments if she agrees to marry me even now.

Aghore: Oh! So you want to teach me how to love. You got lost somewhere / in whose heart have yours inserted to appease that heart. My position and my ego are all lost for you.

Rupendra: Please allow me to stay in Meherkul so that I can have a glimpse of my beloved from afar.

Aghore: I do need you there very much.

Rupendra: You need me too?

Aghore: My eyes cannot be deceived. Debaleena is involved in an adulterous relationship with Keshablal.

Rupendra: Have you become a drug addict lately, dada?

Aghore: Not at all. I have witnessed it with my own eyes. I know how coquetry begins.

Rupendra: I'm sure Debaleena loves Atul Chandra with all her heart.

Aghore: My foot. She does not. True, she fell in love with the fisherman's chap at a very delicate moment attracted by his heroic stories. Compared to him, Keshablal is more beautiful, sober, educated and comes from a well-to-do class.

Rupendra: Right you are.

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Aghore: Come here. (He whispers something to Rupendra.)

Rupendra: If you can do that, dada, I am ready to give you half of my property.

Aghore: Try to keep your promise. Go to Comilla and meet me there incognito.

(Dalia from backstage): Where are you? Come—

Rupendra: As you told me, I'll meet you in Comilla disguised. (Each of the two walks away in opposite directions.)

## Scene V

The war-winning song plays. The soldiers create several compositions with the rhythm of the song.

The song:

Look! The Victory Flag of the War is fluttering high/

The Tripura soldiers are moving ahead with Atulchandra/

Let's all say Victory for the Kingdom of Tripura/

In the terrible war, there is a bloodbath in the river Titas/

Mughal soldiers are backtracking against the bravery of Tripura soldiers/

Victory to the state of Tripura /

At the interval, the commander comes back to the fort/

There is jubilation all around/ Cries Atulchandra/

Victory for the kingdom of Tripura.

Soldiers – Hail to Atulchandra! A Celebration for him.

Atulchandra- Friends, Our soldiers have fought bravely to carry out Maharaja's strong determination to protect the border of Tripura. We'll fight unto the end to stop foreign aggressors from conquering our land. Because of the bad weather, there is a three-day ceasefire. So I request all my soldiers to return to their respective tents, rest and enjoy. Huzzah to Maharaja Gobindo Manikya.

All- Huzzah to Maharaja Gobindo Manikya.

(While everyone else leaves the stage, a woman with her face covered enters. Even after the soldiers exit the stage, Keshablal remains.) The woman shouts. It's Priyanka.

Priyanka: Oh! My heart aches.

Keshablal: Tell me what happened.

Priyanka: Oh, my mother!

Keshablal: Won't you tell me what happened?

Priyanka: A thorn is pricking me. Oh!

Keshablal: Shut up. This is a fort area, and if you shout, you'll be thrown into prison.

Priyanka: Is it not bad if a thorn pricks me within the fort area? Only shouting is an offense, right?

Keshablal: Okay, sit here and extract the pricker.

Priyanka: The thorn doesn't prick me in my leg.

Keshablal: So what?

Priyanka: It's here (showing her chest).

Keshablal: What! (His eyes and face are bedazed.)

Priyanka- these are the spikes of youth.

Keshablal- (Stammering) How to remove these thorns?

Priyanka- By love!

Keshablal- (stammering) let me leave!

Priyanka- Take care! If you move one step further away from me, I'll shout.

Keshablal- How daring? Do you know whom you are talking with?

Priyanka- I'm not interested to know. I want a customer

Keshablal- Customer?

Priyanka- Yes, I need one customer. Don't you understand?

Keshablal: Who are you?

Priyanka: Everybody in this locality knows me. The zamindar, courtiers, and soldiers—all of them.

Keshablal: It means you are a— When the army is committed to fighting unto death to protect the motherland, you are involved in—

Priyanka: War? Yes, in this war, I am in this profession to protect six lives. Do you understand? In these days of desperation, I have no choice. For me, whoever pays me has the right to enjoy my body.

Keshablal: Shame on you! I feel you have no sense of disgrace.

Priyanka: No, I don't have any. Just get out of this fort and see with your own eyes how the villagers around the fort are struggling to survive during this time of war. Farming, trade, and commerce are all at a standstill because of the war. How do we feed ourselves?

Keshablal: These are all anti-nationalist arguments. You have come here with the sole purpose of diverting the mindset of the soldiers.

Priyanka: The soldiers enjoy my company for free, claiming they are serving the nation. So I must serve them. That's why I now need courtiers, princes, and so on.

Keshab: (taking a coin from his waist) Take this and leave at once.

Priyanka: A silver coin? May I know who you are?

Keshab: An employee of the royal court.

(Priyanka looks at him with awe. The light goes off.)

## Scene VI

\*(Within the camp of the fort, preparations are underway for the bridal bed of the army chief. Dalia and one of her confidantes are preparing Debaleena for the program by singing and dancing.)

Song:

Krishna has come to Radha's bower,  
Got the humble bee in the flower.  
Radhika is dressed as a peacock,  
White incense paste and garland,

The friends have brought these for  
Krishna to apply on Radha's cheeks.  
The bridal bed is illuminated,  
Radhika is dressed as a peacock.

Dalia: Your face is blushing.

Debaleena: (bashfully) Didi—

Dalia: Look, such a great warrior will surely be defeated by the glance of your eyes.

Debaleena: I have never dreamt of a bridal bed in a tent within the fort.

Dalia: Tonight, there will be a storm in the bridal bed while you two exchange love for each other. The wind that blows over the banks of Titas will stop blowing near this tent. At your conjugality, the morning sun will forget to draw an end to the night.

Debaleena: Didi, you have all the sweet honey and ghee within your tongue. But at the end of the night, there will be preparation for the war again.

Dalia: The shell bangle and sindoor of the Sati Laxmi bride will protect and help the brave warrior return safely from battle. Listen—here he comes.

(Laughter. Aghore and others wait at the door of the conjugal bedroom along with Atul as the bridegroom.)

Aghore: The nuptial bed is ready, My Lord.

Atul: Great.

Aghore: All these arrangements were made by Dalia herself.

Atul: Beautiful.

Aghore: Please permit us to leave, My Lord.

Atul: You and Keshablal ensure the flawless security of the fort. Let all of you enjoy yourselves. Good night, everyone.

Aghore: As you wish. Let's go, Dalia. (Slowing his pace) Here, every moment costs a thousand gold coins.

(Giggling they leave the place.)

Atul: - the night has all of a sudden become mysterious to me. Who is this celestial nymph? After the extreme tension of the war, this cool and soft touch is no doubt excellent. So much happiness in my life! The soldiers of the Tripura army have driven away the soldiers of the Mughal Subedar on the other side of the Meghna River. Noornagar, Meherkool and Nabinagar- all are again captured by the Rangamati administration.

Debaleena- You are the most courageous of all. You'll win all the battles.

Atul- Yes I'm a hero in the war field but a slave of your love here.

Debaleena: You too are the god of my life. For the past fortnight, when I cried incessantly, I shared my sorrows with the vigorous waves of the river Gomoti in the month of Sravana. "O dear waves! You are going to meet the river Meghna, but see, I have no opportunity to meet my love. So take my tears to him." (She begins to weep)

Atul: O my beloved!

Debaleena: Please assure me that you will never, ever leave me.

Atul: I promise, with the Moon in the sky, the water of the river Gomati, and the breeze of the Titas as my witnesses—you are the gift of my hundred years of worship.

Debaleena: Let there be no end to this night.

Atul: I'll give you a gift tonight as a mark of our union.

Debaleena: What?

(Atul takes a handkerchief from his waist.)

Atul: Keep this.

Debaleena: A colored handkerchief. The stitching is so beautiful!

Atul: My mother gave me this on her deathbed, advising me to give it to her daughter-in-law. Keep it carefully. It is a guarantee from me that as long as you have it, there will be none to separate you from me.

Debaleena: No one will succeed in separating you from me.

Atul: There is a consistent conspiracy against the king for the throne; no ethical policy to win a battle and no end of tricks from the potential lovers to win the heart of a sweetheart.

Debaleena: Don't speak like that in front of me. A devoted wife gives her body and heart to one man only.

(They embrace each other.)

Atul: I find all my happiness in your embrace. Often, I feel as if I could float under the open sky on a boat, leaving everything behind and resting my head on your lap in the waters of the Meghna.

Debaleena: From an army chief, this statement is shocking.

Atul: Power and wealth have ensnared me. At this juncture, I cannot even trust my shadow. But Aghore is undoubtedly trustworthy. Dalia, too, is innocent. I can have faith in both of them.

Debaleena: Your friend Keshablal is also trustworthy.

Atul: Keep your eyes open. Be vigilant. The Mughals excel at espionage.

Debaleena: The crookedness of war can't overshadow Love. Let us set aside thoughts of war for now and embrace only love.

(The music plays as Atul and Debaleena come closer to each other in the bed. The lights go off slowly)

### Scene VII

(Inside the fort, the soldiers are making fun in a drunken mode. Keshablal is in charge of the security. The soldiers begin to sing)

Soldiers singing:

Gone, sunk, drowned,  
The Mughal soldiers have floated  
Down the streams of Meghna.  
The enemy has been defeated.  
Let us celebrate  
The overthrow of the foe  
In the currents of Meghna.

Soldier 1: It's a pity that the Mughals came to fight against us. They have been washed away by the waters of Meghna.

Soldier 2: On one hand, we celebrate the victory of the Maharaja of Tripura, and on the other, the Army Chief is enjoying his bridal bed.

Song:

The bridal night of the Army Chief  
Is flooded with moonbeams.  
Let's eat, drink, and be merry!  
Down with the Mughal army,

Which the streams of Meghna have carried away.

Aghore: All right, you've had enough enjoyment. Now go to your tents and get some rest.

(Everyone except Aghore and Keshablal leaves.)

Keshablal: They enjoyed themselves quite a bit.

Aghore: But you didn't take part in any of these. Keshablal, can you guess what trick is our Subedar applying in his boudoir now with his bride?

Keshablal: Our bride is very gentle. She has a great mind as well.

Aghore: Ladies like her are also skilled in coquetry. (He opens a bottle of wine and offers it to Keshablal.) Take a sip.

Keshablal: Not now. Let me complete my duty first. I become addict even after just a sip.

Aghore: Let it be. What's the harm? The night is still young. You have enough time to finish your duty.

(Unwillingly, Keshablal takes a drink from the bottle.)

Keshab: Just once, dada.

(Aghore takes the bottle from Keshablal and pours it into his mouth.)

Keshab: I've already been under the spell of!

Aghore: Who? Your Boudi?

Keshab: Shame on you. What are you saying?

(Aghore starts singing.)

Aghore: I pull open the ribbon that ties the hair in the early hours of the night, and the hair flows free like a flood swayed by love.

(Keshab begins to dance in a drunken state. Aghore hides behind the scene. Rupendra enters disguised.)

Aghore: Start the action as I instructed.

Rupendra: What if he draws his sword?

Aghore: Let him do so. Always remember:

Even if you beat me, I won't respond. I have tied a winnowing fan around my back;

Utter as many of your abusive words. I have put cotton in my ears.

Rupendra: Hail to thee, Mother Tripureswari!

(He comes out from hiding and continues to irritate Keshablal.)

Rupendra: Look how drunk he is while on duty, an employee of the royal court, he is though!

Keshab: Wait! Who are you? How did you get here?

Rupendra- I'm returning home from the market. Who are you?

Keshablal- I'm Hazari.

Rupendra-(Laughing loud) Hazari! In a drunken mode? I, too, think myself as Maharaja Gobindo Manikya.

Keshab- I'll tear off your tongue instantly.

Rupendra- Negligence in duty and using abusive words like a lower-class person.

Keshab- You rogue! (He opens his sword)

Rupendra- Will you strike me? Just try once - - -

Keshab- I'll kill you today.

(Rupendra runs across the stage shouting, followed by Keshab. Standing at a distance, Aghore enjoys the scene.)

Rupendra- Oh my God! He's going to cut me into pieces. Please save me, whoever is there.

Aghore- Please restrain yourself, Hazari.

Keshab- A vile character. He has come to advise me about my duties. I'll cut him to pieces.

Aghore- O my Hazari Keshablalji. You are in a drunken state. You'll be in trouble if the neighbours come and find you like this.

Keshab- A devil- he doesn't know who I am. I won't stop until I punish him tonight.

Rupendra- Save me, please. A drunkard is going to kill me.

Aghore- (in a low voice to Rupendra)- Shout louder.

Rupendra- (in a louder voice) Help me, please. Save me, please.

(Atul enters the stage with his bodyguards. Rupendra falls at his feet.) Why is there so much noise at this hour of the night?

Rupendra- This alcoholic is almost going to kill me.

Atul- Who are you?

Rupendra- I'm an innocent villager. I was returning from the market to my village. As it was late, I thought I would spend the night in the fort. As I tried to enter, this cockeyed man stopped me and forced me to drink alcohol. The more I refused, the more aggressive he became. He wouldn't heed my request. Then he took out his weapon and warned me that if I didn't drink, he'd kill me.

Atul- Guard, show him the way to his home.

Guard- Ok, my Lord.

Rupendra- A man of such nature brings shame for the Tripura army.

Atul- Oh, Guard.

Guard- Leave without any further delay. (He pulls the disguised Rupendra off the stage.)

Atul- What happened, Keshablal?

Keshablal- This unwanted man entered the fort area and began to use foul language towards me.

Atul- Where have you been, Aghore?

Aghore- (Stammering and repeating words throughout) It pains me to share what just happened. But as it is an order from our Lord, I must share what I saw with my own eyes. Suddenly, I found Hazari chasing the man with a sword in his hand. My Lord, that man must have irritated Hazari, for sure. Otherwise, he is very gentle.

Atul- Ok, stop. Why are you faltering? Are you trying to flatter your superior? Keshablal, although you are my friend, your offense is unpardonable. I am suspending you from the position of Hazari right now. Aghore will take charge of the same post from now on.

Aghore (Surprised) My Lord! I---???

Atul- Yes, you. (Angrily moving towards Keshablal and, out of hatred towards him, says) Shame on you, a drunkard. (Atulchandra leaves the place. Keshablal becomes speechless.)

Keshablal- I have lost everything - my prestige, fame, and glory.

Aghore- What a strange decision! A punishment heavy awarded for a trifling crime.

Keshablal- Shame on me! I received a deserving punishment for dishonoring my duties.

Aghore- Don't lose heart, bro. It happens in the workplace. Sometimes, you have to bear with the insults of those in higher authority. Only then can you gain promotion.

Keshablal- I have dishonoured the faith entrusted upon me by the Chief. I'm unqualified and incompetent. (He gives away his sword to Aghore)

(Taking the sword from him)

Aghore –I can't explain how challenging it is to hold the position that you once had. Look, there is a way. Seek the help of your boudi.

Keshab- boudi?

Aghore- Yes. The Subedar's wife is also a Subedar. That's the only place where every man – from Maharaja down to the boatman- has a weakness.

Keshab- Should I share my malfeasance with this god-like woman?

Aghore: Don't hesitate. You need to tell her so that the army chief returns your post. O bro. When we fail to get the fruit from a tree, we use a pole. Isn't it?

Keshab: Alright, I understand, but if I find the chief in front of me while I go to meet her there?

Aghore: How'll you manage the post of Hazari if you are so dullard? Go by the back door to meet her.

Keshab- Who else will give me such a good suggestion at the time of my crisis? You are my dada in the real sense. (Keshab expresses his gratitude by shaking hands with Aghore. Aghore has a smile of triumph. The light goes off)

### **Scene- VIII**

(The tent of the Chief. Aghore and Atul stand outside. Within the camp, Debaleena and Keshab are conversing. )

Atul- Maharaja should come down heavily on the conspirators if he gets any hint of such a cabal.

Aghore – Any news of a conspiracy within the palace will affect the soldiers' morale.

Atul- Right. (He looks perturbed. Meanwhile, Keshab leaves the tent through the back door after discussing it with Debaleena. Aghore notices this.)

Aghore- This is improper. Why should one leave through the back door-

Atul- What are you murmuring, Hazari?

Aghore- Someone has left the tent through the back door. It shouldn't be so when there is a main door-

Atul- Who did you see? (Debaleena approaches Atul.)

Debaleena- Is it true that a squad of fifty cavalrymen is joining the Tripura army?

Atul- Who told you?

Debaleena- There are many people around us who can share this good news. Will you do me a favour?

Atul- What?

Debaleena- Please restore Keshablal to his post. He regrets his actions from the bottom of his heart. (Atul looks at Aghore for a moment.)

Atul- Let's not discuss this issue now -We can talk about it later

. Debaleena- When? This afternoon?

Atul- No.

Debaleena- Then tomorrow at noon?

Atul- I have an important war- related discussion tomorrow afternoon. A royal representative is coming from Rangamati.

Debaleena- Then in the evening tomorrow or in the morning the day after?

Atul- Will you stop? (Debaleena becomes sentimental at his harsh tone and turns away. Atul realizes this and tells her.) Ok. Tell him to come whenever he likes. I'll honour his request.

Now go inside. We have something important to discuss.

Debaleena- Ok. I know you will honour my request. (Debaleena returns cheerfully.)

Aghore: Let me leave as well.

Atul: No. Who left my tent through the back door? You haven't disclosed the name. (Aghore remains silent) Tell me the name.

Aghore: Keshablal.

Atul: If there is a front door, why did he go through the back door?

Aghore: (Intentionally stammering) Yes—no. It's not right.

Atul: What's wrong? (Pauses for a moment) Why so silent?

Aghore: I am your servant at your orders. Ugly thoughts always disturb me.

Atul: Hazari, tell me right away what you want to share.

Aghore: To distrust anyone is not right, especially in a husband-and-wife relationship.

Atul: There is no question of mistrust between us as husband and wife. So you may proceed without any hesitation.

Aghore: Herein lies the real trouble, sir. An able-bodied man should keep an eye on his wife. My lord, isn't it immoral to engage in extramarital affairs—regardless of who it is, high or low, man or woman?

Atul: What do you mean?

Aghore- One who deceives her father can cuckold her husband at any time.

Atul- You are crossing your limit, I warn you, Aghore.

Aghore- Yes, I knew beforehand that you won't be able to bear these criticisms. Let me go.

Atul- No. tell me – I'm ready to listen. Let me see what you can tell.

Aghore- These are not empty words. But there are disproportions in respect of age, appearance, education, culture, family status, aristocracy- etc. between you two. Now, if our honourable lady repents- if-

Atul- I'll cut your tongue, you the son of a devil –

Aghore- You are breaking down, my Lord. (Slapping on his cheek) When will you be wise, Aghore? You have exposed your ugly mind in this way.

Atul- Get lost immediately; leave at once, I order you.

Aghore- Please forgive me. Please don't make a stir about this incident, My Lord. If you do, it will certainly affect the war. The future of Tripura lies in you. But before I leave, I request you to keep a close watch on the movement of Keshablal. (Aghore leaves. A storm blows within Atul. After a few moments enter Debaleena.)

Debaleena- Why are you standing outside? Come in.

Atul- My head, as though, became poisonous.

Debaleena: Oh! What are you saying? Okay, let me tie a bandana around your head. Dalia didi, please give me my medicine box.

(Dalia brings the box. Debaleena opens it to take a coloured handkerchief from inside.)

Debaleena: Let me tie it around your head. Oh! It's too small. Let's go inside; I need a bigger piece of cloth.

(Debaleena takes Atul inside. As they go in, the coloured handkerchief falls to the floor unnoticed. Dalia quietly enters the stage after they leave and picks up the handkerchief.)

Dalia: (soliloquizing) After a long waiting, I finally got the handkerchief—a gift from Debaleena's husband on her wedding night. She keeps it near her heart, kisses it, and often talks to it. My husband has been asking me for a long time to get it for him, but I can't understand why he needs it. Still, it's a moral duty of every wife to satisfy her husband, isn't it?

(She exits the stage smiling. The next scene begins under the same light.)

## Scene- IX

(A song is playing, accompanied by a dance, with a large handkerchief that has a design and colour similar to the original.)

Hankie, O hankie,

O coloured hankie,  
Blushed with the colour of love.  
Whatever is small, trivial, and neglected  
Stirs much at the base of the mind.  
The coloured hankie reddened with love.

(Dalia faces Aghore while keeping the handkerchief hidden.)

Dalia: I brought something for you. Would you like to see it?

Aghore: Yes. Let me see.

Dalia: No, I won't show you.

Aghore: Okay. Show me what you brought.

(Dalia brings out the handkerchief.)

Dalia: This coloured hankie!

(Dalia begins to run with the handkerchief, and Aghore chases after her.)

Aghore: Dalia, give me that hankie! I've been waiting for it for a long time.

Dalia: I can give it to you, but first, you have to promise what you'll give me in exchange.

Aghore: You'll get whatever you want. Just give me the hankie first.

Dalia: Then promise to give me gold ornaments.

(Aghore takes the bag of gold ornaments given to him by Rupendra from his waist and opens it in front of Dalia. He gives her the bag and snatches away the hankie from her.)

Dalia- So many gold ornaments!!! Ok. Will you tell me why you want it?

Aghore- I'll checkmate with this handkerchief itself.

Dalia- Checkmate? I'm confused. I can't understand anything that you say. I got my gold ornaments- and am satisfied. (She left the place happily.)

Aghore- Now, I shall keep this handkerchief in Keshablal's room. A volcano of doubts will erupt from this cloth. (He leaves. Singing with the hankie again)

Deep in the sea

Wakes up a poisonous snake

This hankie is of the heart's colour.

(Atul drags Aghore onto the stage)

Atul- You, the fiend. Tell me if Debaleena has any extramarital relations.

Aghore- My Lord, you are very much strained now.

Atul- I need proof. If you fail to - I'll cut your head.

Aghore- wait a bit. You gave your wife a coloured hankie.

Atul- Yes. I did.

Aghore- I found it with Keshablal, rubbing his beard with it.

Atul – Keshablal!!!!

Aghore- He uses this hankie for so many other purposes.

Atul- Tell me, what else does he do?

Aghore- Sometimes he calls your wife by name- Debaleena, Debaleena.

Atul- How awful! Treacherous Keshablal! I'll cut your lips.

Aghore- I heard also they had - - - in the same bed- -

Atul- In the same bed? Cheek by jowl in the same bed? Tell me, Aghore, is it side by side?

Aghore- I can't say if it is side by side or one upon another. (Atul becomes crazy like a madman)

Aghore- Calm down, my lord. (Atul holds Aghore up in the air and throws him down on the ground)

Atul: I want proof—ocular proof. (Aghore escapes.) Oh! I feel as if a thousand vultures are eating at my head. Oh! Ungrateful Keshablal! (He leaves the stage crying aloud. There is a musical interlude with the handkerchief.)

In the bed of the river,

The way snakes disseminate breasts full of poison,

This handkerchief, painted in the colour of love,

This handkerchief is soaked in the colour of passion.

(Debaleena storms onto the stage, searching for something. Dalia follows her.)

Dalia: What are you searching for, my lady?

Debaleena: My colored handkerchief. (Dalia looks somewhat caught off-guard.) My husband came unexpectedly and asked for it. He told me to give it to him right away. I can't remember where I put it. Have you seen it?

Dalia: No, Madam.

Debaleena: That handkerchief was very sacred, blessed by my mother-in-law.

Dalia: Oh! What will you do now?

Debaleena: This handkerchief is his favorite. He told me not to misplace it under any circumstances. I don't know what to do now.

Dalia: Just tell him you're searching for it and will find it soon. You'll see he will forget about it once the war begins.

Debaleena: Not at all. He has an expression of distrust on his face and in his eyes.

Dalia: Mistrust over a petty handkerchief?

Debaleena: Oh, God! I need to get the handkerchief back. Otherwise, he will be grumpy. Today, Keshablal is supposed to meet him, and his chances of getting back his position will also be jeopardized. What should I do? (She leaves the stage.)

Song: There blows the storm—beware, take care;

The termite has besieged the body—beware, take care;

The handkerchief dyed with the hue of love—

Handkerchief, handkerchief—the coloured handkerchief

Touched with the hue of first love—it's that handkerchief.

(Aghore stands at a corner of the stage with Atul.)

Aghore: Please stand behind this tree. Keshablal will come this way.

(Keshablal enters from the other side. Aghore walks towards him.)

Aghore: Hazari, where are you going? Over there?

Keshab: Please don't call me by that title. It pains me a lot.

Aghore: There is a rumour going around. (Loudly) Are you having an affair with (in a low voice) Priyanka?

Keshab (feeling embarrassed): What are you saying, Dada?

Atul: Look at how embarrassed he's become! It must be his reaction to hearing Debaleena's name.

Aghore- She herself is spreading the news that an upper-class employee of the royal court is going to marry her.

Keshab (guffawing): really?

Atul- He is so happy to hear about his marriage that he cannot resist his euphoria. Ok. Feel as if you've won. (Keshablal cleans his face with the coloured hankie) Here it is, my hankie. What more proof do I need? What more? (He leaves the stage. The lights go off.)

### Scene X

(The room of Priyanka, the prostitute. In a dim light, Priyanka and Keshablal. Priyanka is pouring alcohol into the glass of Keshablal.)

Priyanka- Take it to calm down your discomfiture.

Keshablal- He rejected my request to reinstate me. This insult can't be suppressed by any addiction.

Priyanka-Ok, I'll do so by cuddling and kissing you.

Keshab- I'm a very humble man. I can solve the complexities of mathematics, but I fail to understand the intricacies of Politics.

Priyanka- My dear Sir. Politics is not everyone's cup of tea. You need to be cunning. If you want to be successful here, you need to oil the source of power frequently. You have to forget what is right or wrong and instead support the source of the power blindly. You can't be that cunning, I fear.

Keshab- You are simply a woman. How do you understand so complex matter in such a simple manner?

Priyanka- The way Earth assesses the quality of seeds.

Keshab- Your words attract me to come to you time and again.

Priyanka- And for nothing else?

Keshab- Yes, also to have sex with you.

Priyanka- Nothing more?

Keshab- What more?

Priyanka- Don't you love me?

Keshab- I don't realise this.

Priyanka- But I've ruined myself, my lord.

Keshab- How?

Priyanka- My doors are closed for everyone except you.

Keshab- What!

Priyanka- I was married when I was six to a twenty-four-year-old young man as his second wife. In my youth, I realized that he was a seasonal madcap. I had three children, but all of them died one after another. In my family, I had my old parents-in-law and one widowed sister-in-law with her two children. There was no income and nothing to eat. Hunger burnt down all of us. There was no land to cultivate, no fishing net. So, I had my body as the source of my earnings. At one point in time, my husband himself used to contact affluent customers for me. (She starts weeping)

Keshab- You are so wretched! (He brings out the coloured hankie and gives it to Priyanka) Wipe your eyes with it. I don't like to see tears in your eyes.

Priyanka- How lovely is this hankie! If I had one, I would forget to weep.

Keshab- Keep it with you. Some unidentified person has dropped this lovely hankie in my room.

Priyanka- When you'll be away from me, this bandana will remind me of you. I've cooked dried Chandana fish with brinjal today. Will you taste it? Will you be here with me at least for a day?

Keshab- Ok. Let me be. (Delighted, Priyanka goes to arrange the dish for him.)

Priyanka- This morning, I must have seen someone whose very appearance has become a blessing for me. When will the war come to an end, my lord?

Keshab- We know the beginning but no one knows the end of any war.

Priyanka- There is a disturbing news, my lord.

Keshab- What's that awful news?

Priyanka- The sons of Sahajahan are having bad blood among themselves over the occupancy of the throne in Delhi. Even in Agartala, there are covert conspiracies on the possession of the throne of Maharaja.

Keshab- What a treachery! (Priyanka brings a bowl and water to wash his hands)

Priyanka- First wash your hands – will recount the news soon. Prince Nakshatra Roy, Maharaja's step-brother, will secretly make a tie-up with Mughal Subedar Sahajada Sujah.

Keshab- What do you say? Wherefrom have you got this information?

Priyanka- The Mughal secret agents often come to me for some surreptitious news. Then I entice them with my body and try to get secret news from them instead of sharing any secret.

Keshab- The picture from Delhi to Tripura seems all the same. The greed for power and the throne makes them shift loyalty. Morality or ideology never stands in between. These grabby people have no interest in patriotism or public welfare (He leaves the lunch plate soon after)

Priyanka- What happened, my lord?

Keshab- I must send this news immediately to the capital. Let me leave. (He leaves)

Priyanka- It is inauspicious to leave your eating without completing it. Listen to me, please.  
(She comes back weeping. Light goes off)

### **Scene-XI**

(Within the fort in the camp of Atulchandra. Atul and Dalia)

Atul- Have you noticed anything suspicious?

Dalia- Not at all, My Lord. I haven't seen anything doubtful. Neither have I heard of anything fishy.

Atul- Did she send you sometimes out of my tent to do any work for her?

Dalia- Not at all, My Lord.

Atul- Try to recollect if there's any such incident.

Dalia- Never ever have I seen or heard of any such occasion. In the name of God, I can assure you that your wife is pure and innocent. (Atul became restless)

Atul- Fetch her here. (Dalia leaves) No. Dalia is simple and innocent. Debaleena and Keshab must be in their extramarital relationship throwing dust in the eyes of Dalia. (Dalia brings Debaleena in front of Atul. Atul signals Dalia to leave the place. )

Debaleena- why have you called me?

Atul- Look at me.

Debaleena (with folded hands) Please tell me what happened to you.

Atul- Who are you?

Debaleena- What sort of question is it?

Atul- Tell me who you are.

Debaleena- I'm your closest mortal -your soulmate.

Atul- (with intense malice) Yes. Look like a Goddess but at heart, you are no better than Satan's hell.

Debaleena- God knows who I am.

Atul – You are unchaste, whore and whatnot. Uff! Turn around. To look at you is a sin.

Debaleena- O my lord! You have misconstrued me. I can assure you in the name of God that I am chaste and pure.

Atul- Yes you are as pure as the flies hovering over the garbage.

Debaleena- Please tell me what my guilt is.

Atul- You are a prostitute, a whore.

Debaleena- What are you saying?

Atul- I'll tell everyone in and around the country – Look here-This woman is debauch – a cheap whore on the banks of Meghna. Her doors are open to everybody.

Debaleena- O my God. I should have died before I heard these libellous remarks from you. Listen, my body and mind are all for you. If I were anybody else's, I fear I won't get a berth even in Hell. (Starts crying)

Atul- (Soliloquizes) Am I misconstruing her? (Enters Dalia with an employee of the Royal court)

Dalia- A courtier comes from the capital with an urgent message.

Atul- Welcome, Mr. Courtier.

Courtier- I have to come here at this odd hour with an urgent order from the Maharaja.

Atul- I'm a ruined person both physically and mentally.

Courtier- We are being defeated on all fronts because of the traitor, Nakshatra Ray. Please read this letter. (He gives the letter to him and addresses Debaleena) How are you, my daughter?

Debaleena- My respected courtier, the strain of the war, as if, is working within our mind too.

Atul- (Reading the letter) What? I have been ordered to go back to Rangamati. Now it is Keshablal to look after the warfront here. (To Debaleena) It is for you, the devil. It is for your conspiracy. Keshablal. So this is again a shred of evidence against you.

Debaleena- What are you saying in front of an honoured guest?

Atul- Everybody should know. Now it is as clear as water. You- you are a wicked woman.

Debaleena- Now you have to spell out why you are blaming me adulterous. (She forcibly turns Atul towards her.) Tell me.

Atul- Get out. (He pushed her so hard that she fell.) Don't touch me with your ignominious hands. (Dalia runs fast to Debaleena)

Dalia- My Lord, What are you doing?

Courtier- Oh my God! Is this the catastrophe of the heavenly love that we saw once? It's unbelievable. (He leaves. Debaleena starts weeping)

Atul- Don't drop your tears on the ground. If the ground could bear children, then it would produce crocodiles out of each drop of your tears. Ok. I'll have to do whatever I need to do. (Leaves the stage)

Dalia- Is it for this behaviour from him that you rejected all other attractive marriage proposals, and left your parents and relatives? My lady, maybe the tension brewing up on the war front has infuriated my lord. Otherwise, a husband like our lord - - -

Debaleena- I have no husband. I have none in this world. Dalia didi, please bring the bedsheet used in my bridal bed and lay it on my bed. Then call any man from anywhere. I'll be a whore - a prostitute this night.

(She weeps. Dalia takes her in her bosom to placate her. Light goes off)

## Scene-XII

(Within the fort- Rupendra and Aghore are boozing in the tent of Dalia and Aghore)

Rupendra- You have managed the post of Hazari but I am yet to get Debaleena.

Aghore- Wait a bit. You'll get everything you want.

(Dalia enters with some food in a bowl)

Rupendra- Here come our boudi.

Dalia – Take it. (Gives the bowl to Aghore) Look, Rupendra. This is such a devilish work that to fulfil one's evil design, the mind of our lord has been envenomed. Shockingly though, such a person exists in this land of ours.

Aghore- And who bothers to keep the news of this man whose heart is already torn apart?

Dalia- Let this devil be caught and hanged by his neck. Let him get rotten in Hell and suffer there.

Aghore- Uff! This will be a heavy punishment on his part.

Rupendra- No, no. Make him naked and whip him on his ass.

Aghore- Uff! Calm down, please.

Dalia- Why are you reacting in this manner? Seems you are getting hurt.

Rupendra (laughing) – It seems Boudi has identified ---

Aghore- You, shut up. (To Dalia) Please leave us alone. You have spoilt the trance of our intoxication. (Dalia leaves the spot grimacing her face) And what did you say- whip on the ass? Hmm.

Rupendra- Not at all. It's just to make our boudi cheery. Dada, I found Boudi wearing all the gold ornaments I gave you for Debaleena. How is it?

Aghore- To make your boudi happy. And let me tell you that ornaments glitter more when somebody wears those. Now see how like a termite, I have destroyed the blissful family life of the Chief. Now I have to carefully notice how Nakkshatra Roy plays the dice and I've to

act accordingly. You- Maharaja Gobindo Manikya- have given the top post to a proletariat. Now let's see how you defend your throne. (To Rupendra) Now you have to perform an important work. If you can do so, Debleena will have no choice but to marry you.

Rupendra- My hackles seem getting as straight as spikes, dada.

Aghore- Come here. (He whispers to Rupendra) Take your arms and out you go soon.

Rupendra- As you order, dada. Hail to Mother Tripureswari. (He leaves)

Aghore- Now if this one kills the other or the other kills him or both kill each other, my calculation will always be the same. I'm sure even the pundits of mathematics won't be able to solve the problem like me. (He laughs) (Light goes off)

### Scene XIII

(At night Rupendra is waiting with his arms on the road within the fort for somebody to come.

Rupendra jumps on Keshablal from his hiding)

Rupendra- You, the fiend. Want to be the chief? Try to save your life first.

Keshablal- Who are you? (Opens his sword to defend himself from Rupendra)

Rupendra- Your Yama. A black sheep. It seems you aren't addicted without the smell and taste of a female body.

Keshablal- Let me send you first to Yama. Then I'll answer your queries. (He killed Rupendra in the duel. Aghore saw the duel from the back and hurt Keshablal with his sword on his leg.)

Oh! Who is this coward to hit me from my back?

Aghore- I'm your friend. This is your fate.

Keshab- You Aghore dada! You have hit me from behind. Ufff. (Priyanka comes running)

Priyanka- What happened to you, my lord? Who has hit you? Where are you all? A sword has hit Hazari Keshablal. There is a conspiracy all around.

Aghore- Here is a prostitute shouting

Priyanka- I shall complain to the Maharaja. Beware, Maharaja. Your heads of administration are all busy in power-mongering.

Aghore – You whore! How daring you are! (He strikes her with a sword)

Priyanka- Oh, Oh my Lord.

Keshablal- Priyanka, why have you come here to die?

Priyanka- My Lord, try to keep the prestige of Tripura. The hankie you gave me has been coloured in the real sense. (She takes the hankie from her waist and holds it towards Keshablal.

Priyanka dies keeping her head on the lap of Keshablal)

Keshablal- Priyanka, O Priyanka. (The light goes off)

#### SCENE-XIV

(An evening within the fort. With a lamp in her hand, Debaleena seems searching for someone at the tent door. Enters Dalia, takes the lamp from the hands of Debaleena and keeps it on the altar.)

Dalia- Don't get perturbed, my lady. Misunderstandings of this sort are common between husband and wife. See our lord will surely come to you tonight. Let the lamp be lit. (She leaves. Debaleena remains waiting. A song is heard from the background)

(The song):-

Let not the night come to an end

This night

May come, my friend, Kalachand

A lot many nights are over

The hope that I had remained within

Why hasn't my friend turned up?

And cool down my mind.

This night may come

My friend, Kalachand

The night hasn't come to an end

This night may come

My friend, Kalachand

(Gradually, Debaleena fell asleep. Enters Atul Chandra with a candle-light)

Atul- Here is the fateful enchantress fast asleep now. The stars of the sky- Let thou remain witness- I won't make a single spot on this body as beautiful as a flower. I'll only douse the light of the beauty of this deceitful lady. (Kisses her) The last kiss

(Debaleena wakes up)

Debaleena- You have come. I was waiting for you throughout the night.

Atul- Have you done any offence for which you didn't have any repentance?

Debaleena- Yes. I couldn't keep safe the coloured hankie given by you having your mother's blessings.

Atul- You have brought in disaster losing this hanky.

Debaleena- Forgive me, please.

Atul- You have given that handkerchief to Keshablal. Is it so?

Debaleena- No. Not at all.

Atul- Yes. You have given it indeed. You are lying.

Debaleena- I swear three times that I have never given him it for sure.

Atul- But I have a proof of it.

Debaleena- It's out and out false. Please call Keshablal.

Atul- He'll never come again.

Debaleena- Why? What happened to him?

Atul- I ordered to slay him.

Debaleena- Why? What for?

Atul- It seems you know nothing. A wanton woman. Why have you played in this manner with my sincere love for you? I killed Keshablal. Now it's your turn. Now have your last prayer to God.

Debaleena- Whatever you are saying is fabricated. You are committing a blunder. Trust me, please. (Debaleena hugs Atul) I beg my life to you.

Atul- There is no room for trust or doubt now. You have destroyed all. All of it. I won't give you much pain. Darling, you have lost your right to live any more in this world. (He buffered a pillow against Debaleena's face. She begins to throw her legs and hands trying to get herself free from this breathlessness. Within some moments, all her movements stopped. Dalia screams from outside. )

Dalia- My Lord, please open the door. There is a dangerous incident outside. My Lord, please open the door.

Atul- Oh! Why has Dalia come now at this hour? (Opens the door)

Dalia- There are double murders. Rupendra, the son of the Zamindar and Priyanka, the prostitute.

Atul- And Keshablal?

Dalia- He is saved somehow.

Atul- He's still living. How's that? Then Aghore must have not done his duty. (A vague sound of groaning is heard from Debleena. Dalia goes to her and asks her) What happened to you, my lady? Who has done it?

Debaleena- I myself. I have done this by myself. I have killed myself. (And she dies immediately after)

Dalia (crying) - O my lady!

Atul- She told you the last lie of her life. I myself killed her.

Dalia- How terrible it is! Why have you killed her? What is her fault?

Atul – She is Keshablal's kept. If she were pure, I would have defended her against all the odds of the world keeping her within my heart.

Dalia- Who told you all this nonsense?

Atul- Your husband.

Dalia- He told you all these? O God! He won't get a place even in Hell.

Atul- The coloured hankie that I gave Debaleena as a token of love has been given to Keshablal by her.

Dalia- I stole that hankie for my husband. My husband had a long fascination for that hankie.

Atul – Just shut up. Trying to cover up the sins of your mistress. (Shouts)

Dalia- Don't shout. You are heartless! A fool and a headstrong fellow. People rightly call you a giant- an animal. Now it's all clear to me. That disastrous hankie was given to Keshablal by my husband himself.

Atul-Aghore, you could ask me for my liver. I would have given you that. But why have done such damage to me?

Dalia- Those gods and demons in Heaven and Hell - look how there is a death of pure love. I won't spare him- be he my husband. Now I'll fight against him. (She leaves)

Atul- Dalia, O Dalia! Debaleena – O Debaleena! Is it true that there is no lightning in the sky to burn a sinner like me? (He cries like a madman) Let it be a doomsday for the Earth. (He moves round the stage) Ha, Ha, Ha. I have no place for me near the death of a pure heart. I am a ghoul. I have no place in this world. He stabs his heart with his knife. Debaleena, you have a pure heart. (He falls beneath the bed of Debaleena)

From the background, the violin plays- Let there be no end of this night. (Lights go off.)