

CHAPTER TWO

BADENWEILER, LAUSANNE

Kamala

ON SEPTEMBER 4TH, 1935, I WAS SUDDENLY RELEASED FROM THE mountain jail of Almora, for news had come that my wife was in a critical condition. She was far away in a sanatorium at Badenweiler in the Black Forest of Germany. I hurried by automobile and train to Allahabad, reaching there the next day, and the same afternoon I started on the air journey to Europe. The air liner took me to Karachi and Baghdad and Cairo, and from Alexandria a seaplane carried me to Brindisi. From Brindisi I went by train to Basle in Switzerland. I reached Badenweiler on the evening of September 9th, four days after I had left Allahabad and five days after my release from Almora jail.

There was the same old brave smile on Kamala's face when I saw her, but she was too weak and too much in the grip of pain to say much. Perhaps my arrival made a difference, for she was a little better the next day and for some days after. But the crisis continued and slowly drained the life out of her. Unable to accustom myself to the thought of her death, I imagined that she was improving and that if she could only survive that crisis she might get well. The doctors, as is their way, gave me hope. The immediate crisis seemed to pass and she held her ground. She was never well enough for a long conversation. We talked briefly and I would stop as soon as I noticed that she was getting tired. Sometimes I read to her. One of the books I remember reading out to her in this way was Pearl Buck's 'The Good Earth'. She liked my doing this, but our progress was slow.

Morning and afternoon I trudged from my *ptnsiort* in the little town to the sanatorium and spent a few hours with her. I was full of the many things I wanted to tell her and yet I had to restrain myself. Sometimes we talked a little of old times, old memories, of common friends in India; sometimes, a little wistfully, of the future and what we would do then. In spite of her serious condition she clung to the future. Her eyes were bright and vital, her face usually cheerful. Odd friends who came to visit her were pleasantly surprised to find her looking

better than they had imagined. They were misled by those bright eyes and that smiling face.

In the long autumn evenings I sat by myself in my room in the *penfion*, where I was staying, or sometimes went out for a walk across the fields or through the forest. A hundred pictures of Kamala succeeded each other in my mind, a hundred aspects of her rich and deep personality. We had been married for nearly twenty years, and yet how many times she had surprised me by something new in her mental or spiritual make-up. I had known her in so many ways and, in later years, I had tried my utmost to understand her. That understanding had not been denied to me, but I often wondered if I really knew her or understood her. There was something elusive about her, something fay-like, real but unsubstantial, difficult to grasp. Sometimes, looking into her eyes, I would find a stranger peeping out at me.

Except for a little schooling, she had had no formal education; her mind had not gone through the educational process. She came to us as an unsophisticated girl, apparently with hardly any of the complexes which are said to be so common now. She never entirely lost that girlish look, but as she grew into a woman her eyes acquired a depth and a fire, giving the impression of still pools behind which storms raged. She was not the type of modern girl, with the modern girl's habits and lack of poise; yet she took easily enough to modern ways. But essentially she was an Indian girl and, more particularly, a Kashmiri girl, sensitive and proud, childlike and grown-up, foolish and wise. She was reserved to those she did not know or did not like, but bubbling over with gaiety and frankness before those she knew and liked. She was quick in her judgment and not always fair or right, but she stuck to her instinctive likes and dislikes. There was no guile in her. If she disliked a person, it was obvious, and she made no attempt to hide the fact. Even if she had tried to do so, she would probably not have succeeded. I have come across few persons who have produced such an impression of sincerity upon me as she did.

Our Marriage and After

I thought of the early years of our marriage when, with all my tremendous liking for Kamala, I almost forgot her and denied her, in so many ways, that comradeship which was her due. For I was then like a person possessed, giving myself utterly to the cause I had espoused, living in a dream-world of my own, and looking at the real people who surrounded me as unsubstantial shadows. I worked to the utmost of my capacity and my mind was filled to the brim with the subject that engrossed me. I gave all my energy to that cause and had little left to spare.

And yet I was very far from forgetting her, and I came back to her again and again as to a sure haven. If I was away for a number of days the thought of her cooled my mind, and I looked forward eagerly to my return home. What indeed could I have done if she had not been there to comfort me and give me strength, and thus enable me to re-charge the exhausted battery of my mind and body?

I had taken from her what she gave me. What had I given to her in exchange during these early years? I had failed evidently and, possibly, she carried the deep impress of those days upon her. With her inordinate pride and sensitiveness she did not want to come to me to ask for help, although I could have given her that help more than anyone else. She wanted to play her own part in the national struggle and not be merely a hanger-on and a shadow of her husband. She wanted to justify herself to her own self as well as to the world. Nothing in the world could have pleased me more than this, but I was far too busy to see beneath the surface, and I was blind to what she looked for and so ardently desired. And then prison claimed me so often and I was away from her, or else she was ill. Like Chitra in Tagore's play, she seemed to say to me: 'I am Chitra. No goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self.'

But she did not say this to me in words and it was only gradually that I read the message of her eyes.

In the early months of 1930 I sensed her desire and we worked together, and I found in this experience a new delight. We lived for a while on the edge of life, as it were, for the clouds were gathering and a national upheaval was coming. Those were pleasant months for us, but they ended too soon, and, early in April, the country was in the grip of civil disobedience and governmental repression, and I was in prison again.

Most of us menfolk were in prison. And then a remarkable thing happened. Our women came to the front and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there of course, but now there was an avalanche of them, which took not only the British Government but their own menfolk by surprise. Here were these women, women of the upper or middle classes, leading sheltered lives in their homes—peasant women, working-class women, rich women—pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of government order and police *lathi*. It was not only that display of courage and daring, but what was even more surprising was the organizational power they showed.

Never can I forget the thrill that came to us in Naini Prison

when news of this reached us, the enormous pride in the women of India that filled us. We could hardly talk about all this among ourselves, for our hearts were full and our eyes were dim with tears.

My father had joined us later in Naini Prison, and he told us much that we did not know. He had been functioning outside as the leader of the civil disobedience movement, and he had encouraged in no way these aggressive activities of the women all over the country. He disliked, in his paternal and somewhat old-fashioned way, young women and old messing about in the streets under the hot sun of summer and coming into conflict with the police. But he realised the temper of the people and did not discourage any one, not even his wife and daughters and daughter-in-law. He told us how he had been agreeably surprised to see the energy, courage, and ability displayed by women all over the country; of the girls of his own household he spoke with affectionate pride.

At father's instance, a 'Resolution of Remembrance' was passed at thousands of public meetings all over India on January 26th, 1931, the anniversary of India's Independence Day. These meetings were banned by the police and many of them were forcibly broken up. Father had organized this from his sickbed and it was a triumph of organization, for we could not use the newspapers, or the mails, or the telegraph, or the telephone, or any of the established printing presses. And yet at a fixed time on an identical day all over this vast country, even in remote villages, the resolution was read out in the language of the province and adopted. Ten days after the resolution was so adopted, father died.

The resolution was a long one. But a part of it related to the women of India: 'We record our homage and deep admiration for the womanhood of India, who, in the hour of peril for the motherland, forsook the shelter of their homes and, with unfailing courage and endurance, stood shoulder to shoulder with their menfolk in the front line of India's national army to share with them the sacrifices and triumphs of the struggle....'

In this upheaval Kamala had played a brave and notable part and on her inexperienced shoulders fell the task of organizing our work in the city of Allahabad when every known worker was in prison. She made up for that inexperience by her fire and energy and, within a few months, she became the pride of Allahabad.

We met again under the shadow of my father's last illness and his death. We met on a new footing of comradeship and understanding. A few months later when we went with our daughter to Ceylon for our first brief holiday, and our last, we seemed to have discovered each other anew. All the past years that we had passed

together had been but a preparation for this new and more intimate relationship.

We came back all too soon and work claimed me and, later, prison. There was to be no more holidaying, no working together, not even being together, except for a brief while between two long prison terms of two years each which followed each other. Before the second of these was over, Kamala lay dying.

When I was arrested in February, 1934, on a Calcutta warrant, Kamala went up to our rooms to collect some clothes for me. I followed her to say good-bye to her. Suddenly she clung to me and, fainting, collapsed. This was unusual for her as we had trained ourselves to take this jail-going lightly and cheerfully and to make as little fuss about it as possible. Was it some premonition she had that this was our last more or less normal meeting?

Two long prison terms of two years each had come between me and her just when our need for each other was greatest, just when we had come so near to each other. I thought of this during the long days in jail, and yet I hoped that the time would surely come when we would be together again. How did she fare during these years? I can guess but even I do not know, for during jail interviews, or during a brief interval outside there was little normality. We had to be always on our best behaviour lest we might cause pain to the other by showing our own distress. But it was obvious that she was greatly troubled and distressed over many things and there was no peace in her mind. I might have been of some help, but not from jail.

The Problem of Human Relationships

All these and many other thoughts, came to my mind during my long solitary hours in Badenweiler. I did not shed the atmosphere of jail easily; I had long got used to it and the new environment did not make any great change. I was living in the nazi domain with all its strange happenings which I disliked so much, but nazism did not interfere with me. There were few evidences of it in that quiet village in a corner of the Black Forest.

Or perhaps my mind was full of other matters. My past life unrolled itself before me and there was always Kamala standing by. She became a symbol of Indian women, or of woman herself. Sometimes she grew curiously mixed up with my ideas of India, that land of ours so dear to us, with all her faults and weaknesses, so elusive and so full of mystery. What was Kamala? Did I know her? understand her real self? Did she know or understand me? For I too was an abnormal person with mystery and unplumbed depths within me, which I could not myself fathom.

Sometimes I had thought that she was a little frightened of me because of this. I had been, and was, a most unsatisfactory person to marry. Kamala and I were unlike each other in some ways, and yet in some other ways very alike; we did not complement each other. Our very strength became a weakness in our relations to each other. There could either be complete understanding, a perfect union of minds, or difficulties. Neither of us could live a humdrum domestic life, accepting things as they were.

Among the many pictures that were displayed in the bazaars in India, there was one containing two separate pictures of Kamala and me, side by side, with the inscription at the top, *adarsha jori*, the model or ideal couple, as so many people imagined us to be. But the ideal is terribly difficult to grasp or to hold. Yet I remember telling Kamala, during our holiday in Ceylon, how fortunate we had been in spite of difficulties and differences, in spite of all the tricks life had played upon us, that marriage was an odd affair, and it had not ceased to be so even after thousands of years of experience. We saw around us the wrecks of many a marriage or, what was no better, the conversion of what was bright and golden into dross. How fortunate we were, I told her, and she agreed, for though we had sometimes quarrelled and grown angry with each other we kept that vital spark alight, and for each one of us life was always unfolding new adventure and giving fresh insight into each other.

The problem of human relationships, how fundamental it is, and how often ignored in our fierce arguments about politics and economics. It was not so ignored in the old and wise civilizations of India and China, where they developed patterns of social behaviour which, with all their faults, certainly gave poise to the individual. That poise is not in evidence in India to-day. But where is it in the countries of the West which have progressed so much in other directions? Or is poise essentially static and opposed to progressive change? Must we sacrifice one for the other? Surely it should be possible to have a union of poise and inner and outer progress, of the wisdom of the old with the science and the vigour of the new. Indeed we appear to have arrived at a stage in the world's history when the only alternative to such a union is likely to be the destruction and undoing of both.

Christmas 1935

Kamala's condition took a turn for the better. It was not very marked, but after the strain of the past weeks we experienced great relief. She had got over that crisis and stabilized her condition, and that in itself was a gain. This continued for another month and I took advantage of it to pay a brief visit to England

with our daughter, Indira. I had not been there for eight years and many friends pressed me to visit them.

I came back to Badenweiler and resumed the old routine. Winter had come and the landscape was white with snow. As Christmas approached there was a marked deterioration in Kamala's condition. Another crisis had come, and it seemed that her life hung by a mere thread. During those last days of 1935 I ploughed my way through snow and slush not knowing how many days or hours she would live. The calm winter scene with its mantle of white snow seemed so like the peace of cold death to me, and I lost all my past hopeful optimism.

But Kamala fought this crisis also and with amazing vitality survived it. She grew better and more cheerful and wanted us to take her away from Badenweiler. She was weary of the place, and another factor which made a difference was the death of another patient in the sanatorium, who had sometimes sent flowers to her, and once or twice visited her. That patient—he was an Irish boy—had been much better than Kamala and was even allowed to go out for walks. We tried to keep the news of his sudden death from her, but we did not succeed. Those who are ill, and especially those who have the misfortune to stay in a sanatorium, seem to develop a sixth sense which tells them much that is sought to be hid from them.

In January I went to Paris for a few days and paid another brief visit to London. Life was pulling at me again and news reached me, in London, that I had been elected for a second time president of the Indian National Congress, which was to meet in April. I had been expecting this as friends had forewarned me, and I had even discussed it with Kamala. It was a dilemma for me: to leave her as she was or to resign from the presidentship. She would not have me resign. She was just a little better and we thought that I could come back to her later.

At the end of January, 1936, Kamala left Badenweiler and was taken to a sanatorium near Lausanne in Switzerland.

Death

Both Kamala and I liked the change to Switzerland. She was more cheerful and I felt a little more at home in that part of Switzerland which I knew fairly well. There was no marked change in her condition and it seemed that there was no crisis ahead. She was likely to continue as she was for a considerable period, making perhaps slow progress.

Meanwhile the call of India was insistent and friends there were pressing me to return. My mind grew restless and ever more occupied with the problems of my country. For some years I had

been cut off by prison or otherwise from active participation in public affairs, and I was straining at the leash. My visits to London and Paris and news from India had drawn me out of my shell and I could not go back into it.

I discussed the matter with Kamala and consulted the doctor. They agreed that I should return to India and I booked my passage by the Dutch K.L.M. air line. I was to leave Lausanne on February 28th. After all this had been fixed up, I found that Kamala did not at all like the idea of my leaving her. And yet she would not ask me to change my plans. I told her that I would not make a long stay in India and hoped to return after two or three months. I could return even earlier if she wanted me to. A cable would bring me by air to her within a week.

Four or five days remained before the date fixed for my departure. Indira, who was at school at Bex nearby, was coming over to spend those last days with us. The doctor came to me and suggested that I should postpone my return by a week or ten days. More he would not say. I agreed immediately and made another reservation in a subsequent K.L.M. plane.

As these last days went by a subtle change seemed to come over Kamala. The physical condition was much the same, so far as we could see, but her mind appeared to pay less attention to her physical environment. She would tell me that someone was calling her, or that she saw some figure or shape enter the room when I saw none.

Early on the morning of February 28th, she breathed her last. Indira was there, and so was our faithful friend and constant companion during these months, Dr. M. Atal.

A few other friends came from neighbouring towns in Switzerland, and we took her to the crematorium in Lausanne. Within a few minutes that fair body and that lovely face, which used to smile so often and so well, were reduced to ashes. A small urn contained the mortal remains of one who had been vital, so bright and so full of life.

Mussolini Return

The bond that kept me in Lausanne and Europe was broken and there was no need for me to remain there any longer. Indeed, something else within me was also broken, the realization of which only came gradually to me, for those days were black days for me and my mind did not function properly. Indira and I went to Montreux to spend a few quiet days together.

During our stay at Montreux I had a visit from the Italian Consul at Lausanne, who came over especially to convey to me Signor Mussolini's deep sympathy at my loss. I was a little sur-

prised, for I had not met Signor Mussolini or had any other contacts with him. I asked the Consul to convey my gratitude to him.

Some weeks earlier a friend in Rome had written to me to say that Signor Mussolini would like to meet me. There was no question of my going to Rome then, and I said so. Later, when I was thinking of returning to India by air, that message was repeated and there was a touch of eagerness and insistence about it. I wanted to avoid this interview and yet I had no desire to be discourteous. Normally I might have got over my distaste for meeting him, for I was curious also to know what kind of man the Duce was. But the Abyssinian campaign was being carried on then and my meeting him would inevitably have led to all manner of inferences, and would be used for fascist propaganda. No denial from me would go far. I knew of several recent instances when Indian students and others visiting Italy had been utilized, against their wishes and sometimes even without their knowledge, for fascist propaganda. And then there had been the bogus interview with Mr. Gandhi which the *Giornale d'Italia* had published in 1931.

I conveyed my regrets, therefore, to my friend, and later wrote again and telephoned to him to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding. All this was before Kamala's death. After her death I sent another message pointing out that, even apart from other reasons, I was in no mood then for an interview with anyone.

All this insistence on my part became necessary, as I was passing through Rome by the K.L.M. and would have to spend an evening and night there. I could not avoid this passing visit and brief stay.

After a few days at Montreux I proceeded to Geneva and Marseilles, where I boarded the K.L.M. air liner for the East. On arrival in Rome in the late afternoon, I was met by a high official who handed me a letter from the *Chef de Cabinet* of Signor Mussolini. The Duce, it stated, would be glad to meet me and he had fixed six o'clock that evening for the interview. I was surprised and reminded him of my previous messages. But he insisted that it had now all been fixed up and the arrangement could not be upset. Indeed if the interview did not take place there was every likelihood of his being dismissed from his office. I was assured that nothing would appear in the press, and that I need only see the Duce, for a few minutes. All that he wanted to do was to shake hands with me and to convey personally his condolences at my wife's death. So we argued for a full hour with all courtesy on both sides but with increasing strain; it was a most exhausting hour for me and probably more so for the other party. The time fixed for the interview was at last upon us and I had my

way. A telephone message was sent to the Duce's palace that I could not come.

That evening I sent a letter to Signor Mussolini expressing my regret that I could not take advantage of his kind invitation to me to see him and thanking him for his message of sympathy.

I continued my journey. At Cairo there were some old friends to meet me, and then further east, over the deserts of Western Asia. Various incidents, and the arrangements necessary for my journey, had so far kept my mind occupied. But after leaving Cairo and flying, hour after hour, over this desolate desert area, a terrible loneliness gripped me and I felt empty and purposeless. I was going back alone to my home, which was no longer home for me, and there by my side was a basket and that basket contained an urn. That was all that remained of Kamala, and all our bright dreams were also dead and turned to ashes. She is no more, Kamala is no more, my mind kept on repeating.

I thought of my autobiography, that record of my life, which I had discussed with her as she lay in Bhowali Sanatorium. And, as I was writing it, sometimes I would take a chapter or two and read it out to her. She had only seen or heard a part of it: she would never see the rest; nor would we write any more chapters together in the book of life.

When I reached Baghdad I sent a cable to my publishers in London, who were bringing out my autobiography, giving them the dedication for the book: 'To Kamala, who is no more.'

Karachi came, and crowds and many familiar faces. And then Allahabad, where we carried the precious urn to the swift-flowing Ganges and poured the ashes into the bosom of that noble river. How many of our forebears she had carried thus to the sea, how many of those who follow us will take that last journey in the embrace of her water.