Tom said, 'The British gave India the railways. They were the rulers. They went to India to build their empire, not to develop India.'

When we returned to the flat Tom's mother was busy preparing food in the kitchen. While we were eating she asked me what I thought of Buckingham Palace and whether the Queen was there. I sensed her adoration of the Royal Family in her voice.

In India the Government had just taken power away from the independent Rajas, Maharajas, and Nawabs. Before Independence Orissa had many princely states and my father worked in one of them. When I was very small I visited him in the forest. The Raja and Rani came on shikar and stayed in the dak bungalow. A reception was arranged by the local villagers to welcome them. As the son of the forester I was chosen to present the garlands. I was taken to the Raja and his wife but they looked quite different from the descriptions of kings and queens my grandmother had given me in her stories. I was disappointed they had no crowns on their heads. They seemed so tall that I stood in front of them not knowing what to do. They bent down and I put the garlands around their necks.

After supper Tom gave me an A–Z map of London. 'You can look after yourself now', he said.

The sunshine did not last. There were sudden downpours and changes in temperature. I realized the weather was unpredictable. So it was necessary for me to dress properly. Tom's mother said, 'You must be careful, dear, otherwise you'll get horrible arthritis.' She warned me to air my clothes, especially underwear. I did not take her advice seriously; I did not know what arthritis was.

I went to Kingston to buy suitable clothes and travelled by trolley-bus. It was comfortable and the fare was cheap. I sat on the upper deck, enjoying the view of the River Thames and the houses. I was advised to go to Hepworths and told how to get there. It was a small shop and the manager treated me as a special customer. He reminded me of the tailors in Bombay who treated every customer as special. I bought myself a suit, a raincoat with a lining, and a pair of woollen trousers. I had to make my Indian shoes waterproof by sticking rubber soles on them.

I started feeling tired and exhausted and wondered why. I realized it was due to the extra layers of clothes over my body

—underwear, shirt, pullover, jacket, raincoat. I was carrying several pounds of extra weight. Tom's mother advised me to wear a hat to protect myself from the rain and the cold. She gave me a scarf and a trilby hat. I looked at myself in the mirror. I liked my new image of a 'brown sahib' but only for a while. I soon realized it was not really me and started wearing my Indian-style clothes.

To gain experience in architecture it was necessary for me to get a job, my first in England. I wrote to an architect in London. I knew his name because one of his books was prescribed for my course in Bombay. My teachers had told me he was famous.

I drafted a letter and showed it to Tom. He smiled and without saying anything he changed it completely. 'My respected Sir' became 'Dear Sir' and my opening sentence, 'I most humbly beg to submit', was crossed out. 'Yours faithfully' replaced 'I have the honour to remain, Sir, your most obedient servant'. He ended the letter with 'Looking forward to hearing from you'. After a few days I received a reply calling me for an interview. The letter was addressed to 'P. Mohanti Esq.'. I asked Tom what 'Esq.' meant. It was a polite substitute for 'Sir' or 'Mr' he said.

The architect's office was situated in a small Georgian terrace near Tottenham Court Road tube station. My A–Z map helped me to locate it. Tom had emphasized that I should be punctual and I got there in time for my interview at eleven.

I reported to the receptionist, who asked me to wait. After a while a man came up to me and introduced himself as the architect's partner. He helped me to carry my drawings upstairs to his room. I thought how considerate he was as this would never happen in India where the employers feel superior and use their employees like servants.

The partner was in his mid-forties, dressed in a conservative style. His room was old-fashioned with antique furniture. I was taken aback, first by the building and then by the decor, as the firm was famous for designing modern buildings.

I showed him my drawings. He examined them with great interest and said, 'I like your drawings. We like Indian architects; they're good and conscientious. But you haven't got any experience in this country.'

'If all the architects I go to say they can't offer me a job because I have no experience in this country, how do you think I'll gain experience?'

He smiled. From the expression on his face I knew he was not expecting that reply from me.

'All right. I'll give you the job.'

He showed me round the office and explained the type of work they were doing. It ranged from small housing projects to large scale office development. He introduced me to Tony, the architect I was going to work with.

His secretary brought us coffee. While drinking it he said, 'We have employed Indian architects before, but never black architects. We don't want to offend our South African clients.' Later on, when I moved around London, I saw notices in estate agents' windows: 'No blacks, no Irish, no children, no dogs'.

I was amazed that educated professional people could have such views and express them openly. The architect was honoured by the Government for his contribution to religious architecture.

There were very few Indians in London. They were usually scholars, students, or the sons of the rich. When I saw an Indian in the street I felt happy. We stopped and talked to each other. The students and scholars lived in hostels around Fitzroy Square. A few Indian restaurants and grocery shops had opened to cater for their needs. The Government of India managed a hostel for Indian students, mostly doctors. They worked hard to get their qualifications as soon as possible in order to return to India. Some were married and had left their families behind.

I started my job a week later. I was worried I might not be able to recognize the architect who interviewed me. English faces looked similar to me then and I had difficulty in distinguishing one from another. But as soon as I saw him I knew it was him. That gave me confidence.

The office hours were from 9 to 5.30. I got up early in the morning and travelled by train and underground. They were always full and I had to stand all the way. The journey took nearly one hour and when I arrived wearing all my new clothes I felt so exhausted that I had to sit down quietly for half an hour to recover.

But it was safer than commuting in Bombay where the trains were so overcrowded during the rush hour that some passengers precariously hung on to the carriages from the outside. There were many fatal accidents.

I always thought it was a waste of time and energy to commute

for myself. I spent a long time arranging my room. I took my gods out of the case and put them on the table. I looked at them carefully. Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe, an incarnation of Vishnu, has a black face with round black eyes. The realization that my god was black gave me confidence. His elder brother, Balabhadra, has a white face and his sister, Subhadra, has a yellow face. I am sure this was a deliberate attempt to bring the races together through religion.

Hospitality is natural in my village. Strangers are always welcome and it is a religious act to look after them. A stranger should never leave the village displeased. Who knows, he may be Vishnu in disguise! Stories are told to children to teach them to show kindness towards travellers and strangers. I remembered a story my mother told me.

'Once upon a time there was a Brahmin. His name was Krupa Sindhu. He was married, but had no children. He was kind, religious, and so generous that he gave all his wealth away to the poor. A time came when he and his wife had nothing to eat.

'One day his wife said, ''We have no relatives. You must ask a friend to help, otherwise how can we manage? There's no food in the house.''

'Krupa Sindhu replied, ''I have a friend who could help us but he lives in a distant place. If I went to see him he might solve our problem.''

'It was decided that Krupa Sindhu would visit his friend. His wife borrowed some rice from a neighbour's house and she made ten pieces of pithas, rice cakes. She divided them into two equal portions, one for her husband to eat on his journey and one for herself.

'Lord Vishnu knew this. To test the Brahmin couple's devotion he came to their house disguised as an old man. ''I haven't eaten anything for many days,'' he said in a trembling voice. ''Please give me something to eat.''

'When the Brahmin couple looked at him their hearts were filled with compassion. They felt it was their duty to look after the stranger. They invited him into their house as their guest and the Brahmin's wife gave her portion of the pithas to the old man to eat.

'Lord Vishnu knew there were only ten pieces of pithas in

Krupa Sindhu's house and his wife had given him her portion. He wanted to test the hospitality of the Brahmin couple further, so he asked for more.

'The Brahmin's wife gave him Krupa Sindhu's portion and Lord Vishnu ate one more pitha. That left four which the Brahmin's wife kept for her husband's journey, and they both went without food.

'Lord Vishnu was pleased with their devotion but wanted to test them even further. "I'm so weak. I have no strength to walk. Can I spend the night in your house?" he asked.

'Without hesitation they offered the old man shelter for the night and gave him the remaining four pieces of pithas for his supper. They only drank water.

'During the night they discussed the problems of the old man. "He's so old and weak, if we had enough money and food we could keep him in our house and nurse him."

'Lord Vishnu knew what the Brahmin couple were saying and blessed them. In the morning when Krupa Sindhu and his wife got up they were amazed. Their mud house had changed into a palace and the old man had disappeared. They realized what had happened and knelt down to pray to Lord Vishnu for his kindness.'

But the house in Leeds was not a palace. It was neglected, with an empty basement and a deserted back yard filled with broken furniture. The front door was never locked. There was an old table in the hall where letters were left by the postman. The landlady came once a week to collect the rent and empty the meters. She cleaned the staircase and the passage but the bathroom was always dirty. The water ran cold before I had finished my bath and the comforts of Surbiton seemed like a dream. There was no large garden, only a small patch of grass in the front of the house where I often sat in the morning. The other lodgers were nurses, teachers, and social workers and I rarely saw them.

My street ran along the back of the university, connecting a park with the town centre. It was a long sloping street with a gentle curve and containing some departments of the university, a school, offices, and private houses of which many had been converted into bed-sitters. While walking to school I saw mature trees breaking the monotony of red brick and views of industrial

Leeds; rows and rows of houses and factories with chimneys spreading to the horizon.

Leeds seemed dull to me after London and Europe but it was exciting for the local people. It served as the market centre for the area, with facilities for many kinds of entertainment. It had a theatre, a music hall, and a number of cinemas. The pubs were famous for Yorkshire bitter. An old Victorian pub near the Town Hall sold jugged hare and sausages and mash. It was a popular meeting place for the staff from the university and the college of art. The town centre throbbed with life on Friday and Saturday evenings when the crowds flocked in for a night out. After the pubs closed I saw groups of young people staggering along the pavement singing loudly. There were frequent fights between the men, with the girls trying to restrain them. It was a common sight to see men standing against the walls urinating or being sick. By contrast, well-dressed men and women came out of the famous Queen's Hotel or the theatre and got into their chauffeur-driven cars.

Leeds was a city of contrasts. Some lived in great Victorian mansions in Headingly while many were crammed into back-to-back houses with outside lavatories and no proper washing facilities. The Town Hall, with twenty steps, decorated Corinthian columns, and large stone lions, stood proudly as a great monument to the commercial achievements of the city. It was one of the largest civic buildings of its kind and was opened by Queen Victoria with great pomp and ceremony in 1858, the year after the Indian Mutiny. The words around the vestibule—'Europe-Asia-Africa-America'—reminded the people of Leeds that the Queen's rule extended to all corners of the world.

I passed the Town Hall several times a day on my way to the school. If I had been specializing in Victorian architecture, Leeds and its Town Hall would have provided me with sufficient material for study. To me Leeds was a perfect example of a Victorian city with a great sense of unity.

My school specialized in modern town design and my classes started at two in the afternoon and continued until eight in the evening. Out of eight students in the full-time course, five were from India and only three from England. First there were drawing classes for the full-time students. One was an economist and did not know how to draw. We all helped him. Every lunch-time he

brought fish and chips from a shop opposite and ate them in the classroom. We objected to the smell but he said it was an English custom. It was also the cheapest lunch available. A meal at the school canteen cost two shillings, but fish and chips cost him one-and-sixpence.

In the evening we had lectures—the history of town planning, landscape design, planning law, sociology, traffic engineering. Our lecturers were part-time and experts in their own fields. Some travelled long distances to teach us.

My first project was to design a housing estate in a Sheffield industrial area. It was my first opportunity to see for myself what industrial areas were like in Britain. During my previous visits to Sheffield City Centre while working in London, Sheffield had looked clean to me. But as I approached the area the smell of sulphur fumes from the nearby steel plant was overpowering. The sun was struggling to shine through the dusty sky. As I walked round I saw terraced houses covered in thick layers of black dust. A woman was washing the steps of her house. I spoke to her.

'I spend my whole life trying to keep this place clean, but it's impossible. In an hour it will be black again.'

When I told her I was a student of town planning and was studying the living conditions in the area, she invited me in. The house was neat and tidy and spotlessly clean. She made me a cup of tea and told me about herself. Her husband worked in the factory; the children were grown-up and had moved away. She was alone during the day and spent her time cleaning.

'It's a full-time job', she said.

She told me the air was so bad that several of her neighbours suffered from bronchitis and TB. There was an outside lavatory and no bathroom. There was no hot water supply and she had to heat the water in a kettle.

I had no idea that people in England lived in such unhealthy conditions. But later on I found many people in Leeds living in back-to-back houses without proper ventilation, sanitation, or washing facilities. In my report I said the area was not suitable for human habitation. My teacher scolded me.

'You are asked to design a housing estate, not write philosophy.'

'I don't think anybody should live there.'

'Why not?'

'The atmosphere is polluted with sulphur fumes. How can you expect people to live there?'

'That's not your look-out.'

'Should I ignore the fumes?'

'But people do live there', he insisted.

'They shouldn't live there.'

'All right, if you are not happy, prepare a report for the town centre of Richmond. I think you will like it.'

I did like Richmond. It was a delightful town set in the Yorkshire dales, with old houses built of stone and a Georgian theatre. The town was clean and surrounded by green fields. Life seemed gentle. What a different world from Sheffield and Leeds, I thought.

My next project was to design a housing estate with a shopping centre, blocks of flats, and a church. High rise flats, called slabs, were considered fashionable, and so I was required to put some into my scheme. I prepared a layout with a park in the middle. Around the park I placed houses, flats, and a shopping centre connected by a network of pedestrian ways. I did not provide a church because I was not told the religious beliefs of the community. So I designed a multi-purpose building which could also be used for worship. To each house I attached a self-contained flat where the grandparents could live.

I discussed the project with my supervisors and prepared models and drawings. Then it had to be assessed by an external examiner. He was an architect from the university. He looked at my scheme and asked me to explain it to him. When I had finished he said, 'What makes you think grandparents want to live with their children?'

'It's good for them', I replied. 'The family can help each other. The old won't feel lonely and the grandchildren can learn a great deal from their grandparents.'

'You have come here to *learn*, not to *teach* us how to live', he said.

'I'm only suggesting.'

'What makes you think your suggestions are right? And you haven't provided a church.'

'What kind of church? Anglican, Catholic?'

'Anglican,' he replied.

'In the project it doesn't mention the denomination; it only

says a church. There are so many divisions I didn't know what kind of church to provide. What about the non-Christians, the Jews or Hindus or Muslims who may come to live there?'

'You are not here to change our society. You have been given a brief and you have to accept it. Get your qualification first and then talk about change.'

My interview was the longest. I did not realize that I should not have expressed my views but only listened to his. Afterwards the head of the department said to me, 'You upset the external examiner.'

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I was only trying to explain my project and the ideas behind it. Do you think I should apologise to him?'

'No, forget it', he replied.

But I got poor marks.

My Polish teacher was disappointed. He was my guide and thought mine was one of the best projects. I had tried to bring people and nature together and he thought my scheme had originality.

'People don't like new ideas in England', he said.

My life soon fell into a pattern. I got up early in the morning and listened to the news on the radio Tom's mother had given to me. It opened like a jewel box and was operated by a large battery. My breakfast was a bowl of cereal with milk and several cups of tea. Then I worked on my drawings for the school projects. Around midday I had lunch in my room and walked down to the school. When my classes were over in the evening I returned to my room and painted. The village symbols changed, reflecting my moods. Gradually they became a means of self-expression.

Lord Jagannath and the lotus had influenced my thought from early childhood. During festivals I decorated the mud walls and floors of our houses in the village with rice paste. I made the brushes myself with straw. The lotus was the main symbol. At harvest festival it was used with stylized footprints to welcome Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. Another version of the lotus symbol was used in the autumn festival of Dassera to worship Durga, the Goddess of Energy. Lotus and lilies grew in abun-

dance in the ponds around the village and I watched the buds gradually bloom. The lotus opened with the sunrise and closed with the sunset. It was a symbol of love with the sun. The lilies bloomed at night and had a romantic relationship with the moon. There are many references to these flowers in Oriya and Sanskrit literature. Vishnu's feet where the devotees offered themselves are compared to the lotus. The paintings were not permanent. After each festival the walls were given a coat of mud plaster and painted with different symbols for the next one.

In Bombay while painting in watercolour, the paper dried so quickly that I had to soak it in water before applying the paint. That is how I developed my present technique. I soaked the paper first in water and applied layers of paint, making them flow into one another, while controlling them to produce the effect I wanted. It needed constant practice and experiment and an understanding of the paper, its grains, absorbent quality, and the reaction of the paint to its damp surface. Once a mistake is made it cannot be corrected. But the result is immediate and I find the medium suits my temperament.

The school of town planning was a part of the college of art. I met the teachers and art students and got on well with them. They invited me to visit their classes and see their work. The atmosphere was stimulating and I was inspired by it. I spent many mornings there painting and making pottery.

One day in the pottery studio I was making a piece of sculpture in clay when the students came and watched me. I was surprised. But they told me they were asked by their teacher to see my work. I was using symbols which were new to them. They wanted to see more of my work and I invited some of them to my room. They liked my drawings and paintings and wanted to exchange them with theirs. For the first time I felt appreciated and that gave me encouragement. Until then the colour of my skin and my Indian qualifications were considered inferior and I was beginning to lose confidence in myself. The teachers and students wanted to know more about my village and its culture and I was invited to talk to them.

At the art college young girls and boys were being trained to be painters, sculptors, and commercial artists. My school of architecture in Bombay was part of the college of art. I saw students there sketching from plaster models of Greek and Roman sculptures.

The art school was started by the British and the method of training was Western. In the life classes I saw students sitting around live models, sketching and painting in deep concentration. The students of architecture often joined these classes but they felt superior to the art students. They were going to be professional people whereas the future of the art students was uncertain. Some became teachers and others designed posters and calenders. I had no idea that artists exhibited their work in galleries and sold them. There were no commercial galleries in Bombay but a charitable foundation had started an art centre with galleries where exhibitions were held.

In my village there were no professional artists, only craftsmen. Each craft was the speciality of a particular caste and the skill was handed down from generation to generation. The family provided the training. The potters belonged to one particular caste and their job was to make pots for the villagers. The weavers, goldsmiths, and carpenters all belonged to different castes. The villagers demanded high standards from the craftsmen. A pot is not only functional but also should be aesthetically beautiful. Villagers spend a long time selecting. In my childhood I watched my mother choose saris, bangles, and jewellery and that helped me to develop a sense of appreciation. Practically everything in our house was handmade. In England I found that art was no longer a part of life. The students were being trained in art colleges but their talent was not used to enrich life. Everything in an English home was mass-produced. This helped me to understand the beauty of my village way of life.

As a child I always thought of myself as an artist. The villagers did too, and invited me to advise them on decorating their homes and selecting jewellery and saris for weddings. In Leeds I realized it was possible to become a professional artist.

I met some art teachers who were devoted to their students. From time to time I showed them my work and discussed colour and technique. They were always ready to advise. There was a sculptor who was interested in India. He had a long white beard and looked like a holy man. He invited me to visit his studio. While drinking tea I told him about my experiences in Leeds.

'Prafulla', he said, 'people don't know anything about India. You must teach them. They are like shells and you have to break them open. You may find a pearl.'