MULK RAJ ANAND

ACROSS THE BLACK WATERS

KUTUB

ACROSS
THE
BLACK WATERS

A Novel

by

MULK RAJ ANAND

KUTUB PUBLISHERS LTD.
BOMBAY

First Published, 1940

First Indian Edition, 1955

Published by Mughni Amrohvi for Kutub Publishers Ltd., Ganesh Bhawan, Kiln Lane, Lamington Road, Bombay-7, and Printed by U. Narasimha Mallya, Proprietor, The B. B. D. Power Press, Cottonpet, Bangalore - 2

ACROSS THE BLACK WATERS

By the same Author

Fiction

COOLIE

UNTOUCHABLE

TWO LEAVES AND A BUD

THE VILLAGE

THE SWORD AND THE SICKLE

THE BARBER'S TRADE UNION AND OTHER STORIES

THE BIG HEART

THE TRACTOR AND THE CORN GODDESS

SEVEN SUMMERS

PRIVATE LIFE OF AN INDIAN PRINCE

Essays

PERSIAN PAINTING

THE HINDU VIEW OF ART

THE GOLDEN BREATH

THE BRIDE'S BOOK OF BEAUTY
(In collaboration with Krishna Hutheesing)

APOLOGY FOR HEROISM

HOMAGE TO TAGORE

LINES WRITTEN TO AN INDIAN AIR

ON EDUCATION

KING-EMPEROR'S ENGLISH

For Children

THE STORY OF INDIA

INDIAN FAIRY TALES

此为试读，需要完整PDF请访问：www.ertongbo

To

MY FATHER

Subedar Lall Chand Anand, M.S.M.

(Late 2/17th Dogras)

This book was sketched out in a rough draft in Barcelona—Madrid during January and April 1937, and entirely rewritten in Chinnor, Oxon, between July and December, 1939.

M.R.A.

I

'MARSELS!'

'We have reached Marsels!'

'Hip, hip, hurrah!'

The sepoys were shouting excitedly on deck.

Lalu got up from where he sat watching a game of cards and went to see Marseilles.

The sun was on its downward stride on the western horizon as the convoy ships went steaming up towards the coast of France, with their cargo of the first Divisions of Indian troops who had been brought to fight in Europe, a cargo stranger than any they had carried before. The hot, red afternoon, stirred by a chill breeze from the stormy gulf, lay quivering on the town, which sheltered beneath a few steep rocks.

'Is the war taking place there then?' a sepoy asked.

No one answered him, as most of the sepoys did not know where the war was. In fact they had not known where they were going until it was announced in the orders of the day that a message had been intercepted through the 'telephone without wires' on the ship, that the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, Lord Kitchener, who had once been Commander-in-Chief in Hindustan, had told the House of Lords that two Divisions of the Indian Army were on their way to France. The Lords had clapped their hands, it was said, and had sent their greetings to all brave ranks of the Indian Army. The King-Emperor, too, had sent them a message, reminding them of the personal ties which bound him and his consort, Mary, with the Indians since he had visited India for the Delhi Durbar, congratulating them on their personal devotion to his throne, and assuring them how their one-voiced demand to be foremost in the conflict had touched his heart . . . The sepoys had been excited by these messages, the edge of their curiosity sharpened by the first authentic news which they had received of their destination. And the lives of the N.C.O.s. had become

unbearable answering questions, 'Where is France?' 'Is that England?' 'Where is the enemy?' 'How many miles is it from here?' . . . Now one of them was asking 'Is the war there?'

Lalu felt, however, as if the naive questioner had taken the words out of his own mouth. For the rim of the sky was full of bloody contours, as if the souls of the war dead were going through the agony of being burned in their journey from hell to heaven. The battle might be raging there, though it was foolish to think so, because surely there would have been a sound of guns if the front was so near.

Lest someone should be looking at him and prying into his thoughts he began to walk away towards the prow of the ship.

'So we have come across the black waters safely,' he said to himself apprehensively, as if he really expected some calamity, the legendary fate of all those who went beyond the seas, to befall him at any moment. Truly, the black, or rather blue, water seemed uncanny, spreading for thousands of miles. It seemed as if God had spat upon the universe and the spittle had become the sea. The white flecks of the foam on the swell, where wave met wave, seemed like the froth churned out of God's angry mouth. The swish of the air as the ships tore their way across the rough sea seemed like the fury of the Almighty at the sin which the white men had committed in building up their powerful engines of the Iron Age, which transported huge cities of wood and steel across vast spaces, where it was difficult to tell in which direction lay the north, the south, the east or the west.

If his father had been alive and present, he would certainly have prophesied disaster for all those who had crossed the black waters, and he would have regarded this war to which they were going as a curse laid upon the sahibs for trying to defy nature.

'But why am I turning superstitious and thinking such thoughts?' he rebuked himself. He had always defied his father and preened himself on his schooling, and he did not realize that he had inherited many of his father's qualities, not only the enduring ones such as his short, lithe wiry frame, his love of the land, his generosity, his stubborn pride and his humour, but also his faith and his naivete.

A few sea-gulls were coming out to meet them, and more seemed to be seated on the hills above the bay, but on closer view the latter proved to be houses.

It was thrilling to be going out on this adventure, he felt, 'like the pride of the beggar who suddenly finds wealth'. The smoke from the funnels of the convoy ships before, behind, and on both sides, was talking to the sky. The sea spoke the language of his soul, restless and stormtossed, while the wind went bursting with joy in the sun. And the ship was urging him forward into the unknown. He was going to Vilayat after all, England, the glamorous land of his dreams, where the sahibs came from, where people wore coats and pantaloons and led active, fashionable lives — even, so it was said, the peasants and the poor sahibs. He wondered what was his destiny.

The rocking of the boot unsteadied his steps a little and there was a strange disturbance inside him which kept welling up and choking him as if he had eaten a frog. He had prided himself on resisting sickness, when almost all the other sepoys had rolled about in their vomit, and hoped he was not going to make a fool of himself now at the end of the journey. Perhaps he had been smoking too many cigarettes, which the Government was distributing free. Or, perhaps, it was the fear of the Unknown, now that they were getting to their destination. But he had slept badly the previous night and had dreamt a weird dream about Nandpur, in which his mother was crying over the body of his dead father, and his brother, Dayal Singh, was rebuking him for running away when they most needed him. Only to him the village seemed far from here now. . . .

'Oh Lalu! Son of a sea-cow! Let us go and get ready,' called young Subah, the son of Subedar Major Arbel Singh, his round red face flushed as if he had got the direct commission which his father had been negotiating for him on the way, as the boy had been self-importantly telling everyone.

'You go, I am coming,' said Lalu evasively to shake him off, and stood with the hordes of sepoys who leaned on the railings, watching the little tugs which had come out and were pushing and pulling the steamer from where it had slackened over the placid waters of the bay towards the wharves.

Lalu smelt the rich sunny smell which was in the air, and felt that the entrance of the harbour was a wonder such as only the heart could feel and remember.

'Boom! Zoom!' The guns thundered from somewhere on land.

'Oh, horror! The war is there!'

'To be sure! . . .'

'The phrunt!'

The sepoys burbled gravely, looking ahead of them, fascinated, in wonder and fear, intent.

But a Sikh N.C.O. said: 'Have your senses fled? These are the guns of the Francisi warships saluting us.'

And, indeed, the convoy ships answered back acknowledging the greetings, and the booming stopped.

Before the ship came to a standstill a number of French officers came up on board with some British officers and shook hands with the officers of the regiment. The French sahibs looked like the Indians with their sallow complexions, but very solemn and sad.

The sepoys looked at them and wondered. They were afraid of talking in the presence of the sahibs and stood silent or slipped away.

The shrill crescendo of the ship's sirens shook the air with an urgent, insistent call.

Lalu was excited almost to hysteria and went down to look for Uncle Kirpu, Daddy Dhanoo or Havildar Lachman Singh, as he did not know what to do next. But the news had gone round that the sepoys would disembark here, rest for a day or two, then go by train to the front as soon as possible, for the Sarkar was anxious to avoid the disappointment which the troops might feel at not being allowed to rush and defeat the Germans at once. This relieved the tension somewhat, and soon he was hurrying to get ready to alight.

He sweated profusely as he exerted himself, and he felt a strange affection in his belly as thousands of throats on the harbour burst into an incomprehensible tumult of shouting. Then he rushed towards his bunk, losing his way going down the gangways, till he sighted Uncle Kirpu and ran up to him.

此为试读，需要完整PDF请访问：www.ertongbo

'Slowly, slowly, gentreman, Franceville is not running away,' Kirpu said, blinking his mischievous eyes and shaking his sly, weather-beaten face in a mockery of Lalu's haste.

'Being a man of many campaigns, you feel there is nothing new,' Lalu teased.

'I don't feel peevish and shy as a virgin, as you do, son,' said Uncle Kirpu and patted Lalu on the back affectionately.

'Where is Daddy Dhanoo?' Lalu said with a pale smile.

'First on deck in full war kit! Just to set the young an example!' Kirpu said.

'Let us hurry, then, and follow his example,' Lalu said and pulled the protesting Kirpu.

As they emerged on deck, the quay seemed to be drowned in a strange and incongruous whirlpool: Pathans, Sikhs, Dogras, Gurkhas, Muhammadans in khaki, blue-jacketed French seamen and porters and English Tommies. And there was a babble of voices, shouts, curses, salaams and incomprehensible courtesies. He struggled into the single file which was disembarking and, before he knew where he was, stood on solid earth in the thick of the crowd without Kirpu. The sepoys were all looking at each other embarrassedly or talking to the Francisis, gesticulating and wringing their hands and turning away when they could not make themselves understood. The French carried on in their own lingo, imparting information in a tumultous flow of words which all seemed like 'phon, phon, phon, something, something . . .' to the Indians.

But they were kind and polite, these Francisis, bowing and smiling and moving their heads, their hands, and their bodies in broad gestures, unlike the reticent Tommies.

Lalu stamped his feet to see if the impact of the earth of France was any different from the feel of Hindustan. Curiously enough, the paved hard surface of the quay, under the shadow of gigantic ships, full of cranes and masts and steel girders, seemed different somehow, new, unlike the crumbling dust of India. He swerved and began to tap the pavement, to jump and caper out of sheer exuberance of spirit. . . .

The quick darting notes of the bugles tore the air and the sepoys ran helter-skelter with their heavy trappings and began to get into formation.

Lalu spotted Havildar Lachman Singh, rushing towards the wide gates which opened into a road from the high wall of the quay. He ran after the N.C.O. His company was already forming while he had been procrastinating to find out the exact orders. 'Fall in, son,' said Lachman Singh with a kind smile on that brave, keen face of the Dogra hillman which Lalu had always seen sweating, owing to the energy which the sergeant put into whatever he had in hand, whether it was plying a hockey stick, instructing at the gymnasium, taking out a fatigue party, or doing any other regimental duty.

As Lalu was rushing into line, warmed by the kindness of Lachman Singh, Subah shouted 'Oi, Owl Singh!' and came and dragged him to his platoon.

'Then, what is the talk—how do you like the land of France?' Lalu asked, leaning over to Uncle Kirpu.

'This land,' said Kirpu with an amused smile, 'this land is like all the others, it came to be with the coming of life and will go down with death.'

'How can the blind man know the splendour of the tulip!' Lalu said.

'There is one splendour in men, another in tulips,' Uncle Kirpu answered.

Lalu was too enthusiastic about the adventure to feel as Kirpu felt, but he looked at the amused unconcern in the face of the experienced soldier who accepted fate with the resignation of a mild cynic and who smiled at everything with a gentleness born of some hurt. Then he gazed at the lined, grave, mongoloid face of Daddy Dhanoo, who had just outlived the accidents of time, space, life, and death and did not speak at all, as if he had become neutral, immortal. Their behaviour was so different from Subah's blustering and his own excited manner.

But the band struck up a tune for the route march and the orders of the officers rang out, and the heavy tread of ammunition boots, the flashing of arms, the rustling of uniforms, transformed the air.

'Vivonlesindu! Something, something . . .' the cry rang out, above the 'lef right lef' of the N.C.O.s, from the crowd, which stood five deep under the awnings of tall, white-shuttered houses under the shadow of the harbour walls.

Lalu felt a shiver pass down his spine, and he felt shy walking as a man among men through a crowd of cheering spectators. But the cheering continued.

A Tommy cried back on behalf of the sepoys: 'Three cheers for the French—Hip hip hurrah!'.

The sepoys repeated: 'Hip hip hurrah!' 'Hip hip hurrah!'.

Lalu scanned the faces by the cafés, the dock gates, the huge sheds and warehouses with tear-dimmed eyes. An irrational impulse was persuading him to believe that the dirty, squalid outskirts of this town were a replica of the outer fringes of Karachi Harbour. The presence of trams, motors, ships, moorings and masts encouraged the illusion. And, as he peered into the narrow, filthy lanes where women and children stood crowded in the windows and on the doorsteps, under lines of dirty washing, as he saw the small, languid, unkempt Frenchmen in straw hats and with flourishing moustachios, it all seemed so like the indolent, slow-moving world of an Indian city that he felt an immediate affinity with this country.

'Vivleshindou! Vivongleshindu! Vivelesallies! . . .' the cries of the crowd became more complex as the sepoys entered a square beyond the small fort which stood on top of a hill where the warehouses ended, and where the greenish sea made an estuary, congested by hundreds of small boats painted in all the colours of the rainbow. And Lalu almost stumbled and fell out of step through the wandering of his eyes among the faces of the women who shrieked and waved their hands at the pageant of the Indian Army.

'Look out, heart squanderer,' called Subah.

'Can the blind man see the splendour of the tulip?' Lalu repeated his phrase.

As the troops turned left and marched up the hill along the Canbière the throngs multiplied on the broad pavements outside the dainty fronts of the shops and of the beautiful high buildings decked with flowers. They were mostly women and

children, and lo and behold, as is the custom in India, they threw flowers at the sepoys while they cried: 'Vievongle-shindoos! Vivangleterre! Vievelesallies! Vive. . . .'

Lalu could not keep his eyes off the smiling, pretty-frocked girls with breasts half showing, bright and gleaming with a happiness that he wanted to think was all for him. Such a contrast to the sedate Indian women who seemed to grow old before they were young, flabby and tired, except for a cowherd woman with breasts like pyramidal rocks! . . . Why even the matrons here were dressed up and not content to remain unadorned like Indian wives, who thought that there was a greater dignity in neglecting themselves after they had had a child or two!

'Vivonleshindou!' a thousand throats let loose a tide that flowed down the hill from the mouths of the throngs on both sides.

'What are the rape-mothers saying?' asked Kirpu, playing on the last word affectionately to take away the sting of abuse latent in the classical curse of India.

'What knows a monkey of a mirror's beauty!' said Lalu, adapting his phrase to the current description of the hillmen as monkeys.

'You don't know either,' said Kirpu.

'They are saying something about the Hindus,' said Lalu.

'What knows a peasant of the rate at which cloves are sold; he spreads a length of cloth as though he were buying two maunds of grain,' said Subah to Lalu. 'They are saying "Long live the Indians". I can understand, because I know Francisi.'

'All guesswork and no certainty,' said Kirpu sceptically.

'Vivongleshindous! Vivelangleterre! Vivonlesallies! . . .' the cries throbbed dithyrambically.

'You don't know the meaning of that, do you?' said Lalu to Subah.

'Ohe, leave this talk of meanings, you learned owls,' said Kirpu. 'Any fool can see that they are greeting us with warmth and hospitality. Come give a shout after me, "Long live the Francisis".'

'Long live the Francisis', the boys shouted, and the calls were taken up, followed by roars of laughter.

Now the enthusiasm of the women in the crowd knew no bounds.

'Vivonleshindous!' they shouted and laughed.

'Bolo Sri Ram Chander ki jai!' one of the Hindu N.C.O.s shouted.

And the sepoys echoed the call.

'Allah ho Akhbar!' someone shouted, and was echoed back by the stalwarts of the Muhammadan companies.

'Wah Guru ji ka Khalsa! Wah Guru ji ki Fateh!' shouted a Sikh somewhere. And the other Sikhs took up the call while someone, more full throated than the rest, added in a shrill tenor: 'Bole so Nihal, Sat Sri Akal!'

And as a river in flood flows unchecked when once the dams of resistance have burst, so the calls of enthusiasm flowed across the tongues of the endless legion, emphasized by the stamping of determined feet, and punctuated with snatches of talk. And the long pageant, touched by the warmth of French greetings, inflamed by the exuberance of tropical hearts marched through this air, electric with the whipped-up frenzy, past churches, monuments, past rows of shuttered houses, châteaus and grassy fields, till, tired and strained with the intoxication of glory, it reached the race-course of Parc Borely where tents had been fixed by an advance party for the troops to rest.

After a march past various mounted English and French generals a sudden halt was called. The general of the Lahore Division trotted his horse up to the head of the forces, adjusted a megaphone to his mouth, and shouted in a Hindustani whose broken edges gained volume from the incomprehensibility of his tone and emphasis:

'Heroes of India. After the splendid reception which you have been given by the people of France and the way in which you have responded with the calls of your religions, I have no doubt that you will fulfil your duties with the bravery for which you are famous! . . .'

The band struck up 'God Save the King' and all ranks presented arms. After which the various regiments marched off towards the tents allotted to them.

When they had dispersed and reached their billets, and began

to take off their puttees and boots, they found that their feet, unused to walking since the voyage, were badly blistered.

'Wake up, lazybones, wake up, it is time for you to say prayers,' Uncle Kirpu was shouting as he crouched in bed puffing at the end of an Egyptian cigarette.

'They must be tired,' said Daddy Dhanoo, affectionately, as he wrapped the blanket round himself, shivering in the dawn, and mentioning various names of God, 'Om! Hari Om! Ishwar!'

'If we don't wake early we shall not get the ticket to heaven,' said Lalu as he stretched his body taut like a lion, yawned and rose, calling: 'Ohe, Subiah'.

'Who? What? . . .' Subah burst, startled out of a fitful sleep, stared at Lalu with bleary, bloodshot eyes and then turned on his side.

'Has the bugle gone?' Lalu asked, hurrying out of his bed as though he were frightened.

'No, I was saying that you will be late for your prayers,' said Kirpu.

'Where does one say them?' Lalu asked as he started to dress. 'And does one say them seated on English commodes or crouching like black men who relieve themselves on the ground.'

'God's name is good!' Daddy Dhanoo said before Kirpu had answered. And he yawned, his big eyes closing, while the various names and appellations of the Almighty multiplied on his lips, his mouth opening like that of a tired pekingese. This was his way of evading discussion on the topic because he had been the butt of all jokes since he had slipped off the polished edge of an English style commode on the ship.

'Om! Hari Om!' Lalu parodied him. 'May you be consigned to your own hell, and be eternally damned, Almighty Father of Fathers.' And he went out of the tent blaspheming.

Every blade of grass between the tents on the race-course shone in the light of the rising sun, while a sharp cool breeze blew from where the blue line of the sky lost itself in the mist around the dove-coloured châteaus on the hills.

Lalu walked along, impelled by the superstition which he had

此为试读，需要完整PDF请访问：www.ertongbo