

01.morningbird

Early morning in South Kolkata, recorded in October 2003.

02.dover-lane

Morning sounds of Dover Lane, South Kolkata, recorded in November 2006.

03.land-theft

Sara speaks about the loss of her ancestral land which led to her family's impoverishment. Recorded in October 2003.

Our mother did not work outside the home; our father used to sell green coconuts. The family was running fine. We owned land, a lot of land. My father did not know how to read and write. In the village there was a headman, he gave my father liquor to drink and took away all our land. He just left a very small spot for us to stay in. There I grew up.

My father used to drink a lot and the drinking made him sick. He fell ill and his liver became bad inside his chest. My daddy went to hospital. He died.

My mother brought us up. Everyone used to love my parents. My mother was very good, a very good person. But our problems began when they lost their land. My father was stung with remorse and used to feel regret and desperation: "My land has all been taken away. Where will my children live?" Then he fell ill from drinking a lot, and he died. After he died, our lives became more difficult. Then, after my mother died, we all separated. Now no one is there. Mother and father are not there, and everyone has gone their own way.

04.soil-from-a-grave

Sara remembers how, as a small child, she was told to take some earth from her late father's grave to use as a remedy for the sores on her mother's head. Recorded in November 2005.

We were given a small plot to live on, and the rest of the land was taken by the villagers. They told my mother, "Your husband sold all the land". Father was not there, he was dead and buried. We had many difficulties in the place where we lived.

At first my mother didn't go out to work. Then she started working in other people's homes. There were five of us then – me, my young brothers and sisters. My mother would work in people's houses and take care of us. Her head became covered in sores. We took her to the hospital, gave her medicine, but nothing helped; she didn't get better.

A *fakir* in the village said, "This sore will not heal. You need to get some water from the Ganges and some mud, mix the two and apply it. Then your sores will heal". So my mother got water from the Ganges and told my brothers to fetch some earth from my father's grave. But my brothers said they couldn't, they told me to do it. I was still very young, I was still wearing trousers. I said, "All right, I'll go and get some earth from the grave".

I went to the public graveyard. I felt frightened trying to pick some earth up from the grave. I felt as if people were coming from everywhere to catch me. I ran away. I couldn't get the earth. I returned

again, and again people approached from all sides. "People" means fairies. I thought that if I didn't get the earth, my mother's head would not get better. So I went back to the grave and, taking the earth, I felt very frightened. Finally, I picked up some earth from a corner, and I felt as if someone was chasing me, the fairies were chasing me. I put some of the earth in my pocket and held some of it in my hands. I ran away without looking back; running very fast, I escaped.

I reached home and fell unconscious – *dharam!* The earth was in my pocket and in my hands. They called the *maulvi*. He said some prayers, then I regained consciousness. I was asked, "What happened?" I told them, "I went to pick up earth. I felt as if someone was trying to catch me". The *fakir* said, "Daughter, you didn't look back. You did well. Because no one likes something to be taken from their body. You took earth from the grave. If you had looked back, they would have killed you. You didn't look back – you did very well".

After that, I applied the earth and Ganges water to my mother's head for seven days. After that, the sores on her head healed; she started to work again and was able to look after us. That's it.

05.mangos

Sara remembers that she wasn't a particularly well-behaved child. Recorded in October 2003.

When I was small, about six or seven, I didn't have to work. When I was eight, I had to go to school and do homework. After homework there was not much to do in the evening. I had lots of friends and we all played together. We used to wander about very far, right to the banks of the river, and play.

I didn't study hard, and my father and mother did not bother much. I went out with my friends, ate food, had fun. I was all right. When I was young I was quite happy. Then slowly, as I grew up, my friends would say, "Come on, let's go somewhere". I would stay there for two or three days. I used to eat, play and wander about. Slowly the days passed, doing these things.

I had lots of friends, and whatever my friends said, I followed them. I wouldn't listen to my parents, I just did whatever I liked. I wandered about and ate. Father and Mother used to scold me, saying, "Don't behave like this, stay at home! You should read and write!" They berated me, beat me. I'd go to school, leave my books there, then go out and pluck mangos from somebody's tree, lychees from someone else's tree, I would pull out onions, pull out radishes and eat them. When school was over, I'd collect my books and go home. And when they asked, "Did you study?" I replied, "yes".

But I didn't study. I just wandered about with my friends. I never learned how to read and write. Mother used to think that I was studying, but I never was. Then one day, my mother came to school and found out that I was not there. I had gone off to wander and play. I was badly beaten and, after that, I gave up studying altogether.

Then my mother said, "Study at home". I said I wouldn't study at home either. I gave it up. That was my childhood. By the time I was about ten years old I had learned nothing. I couldn't read and write. That is why my problems began later.

If I had learned to read and write, I could have found work and I'd be able to live well and eat well. My parents were poor. We were a poor family. We couldn't afford tuition. I didn't apply myself to my studies. If I had, I would have lived well. I didn't understand the value of reading and writing.

06.dolls

Sara remembers her childhood games. Recorded on 2 September 2004.

When I was young, I played. When I was five years old, my father died. After my father died, we had a lot of problems, difficulties. I used to go to the market, buy potatoes, onions and fish and bring them home. I used to make dolls out of rags or mud. And I used to dance with a few friends. We played in the shadows of trees with big leaves. I'd make small mud pots and play. I'd go to the fields, pick a few spring onions and play. All the children played with little pots, and I would cook. All of us together in one place. I used to do all this when I was very young. And then, when I grew up, I wouldn't go to school, I wouldn't study. I used to do a little housework. My mother and father used to own a lot of land. After all the land was sold, they were very poor. Then, when I grew older, I came to Kolkata and started working.

07.doll-bride

Playing with dolls. Sara, recorded in October 2002.

Girls and boys used to play separately. In our society, by the age of seven, boys and girls did not play together.

I used to make a mud doll, dress her up as a bride and play with her. Tear a sari to make the doll look like a bride and play. I would gather leaves, twigs and flowers and play building a home. I'd bring so many flowers from the jungle, arrange them and play. I'd make a mud doll dressed up as a bride and play with her. I'd build a home out of sand to play with.

The boys used to play hide-and-seek. Some of them would hide, and the others would look for them.

08a.nursery-rhyme

Recited by Sara, recorded in January 2005.

Bangle in my hand / lock in my hand / a money bag on the right and the left: / "Give me one rupee – / I'll go to the mullah's house." / The mullah gave me puffed rice; / eating it, I died. / People lifted me from the ground; / chanting *horibol*, / they carried me to the banks of Ganga / for cremation.

08b.nursery-rhyme

Recited by Sara, recorded in January 2005.

Eleting, Beleting, Cham, Chiting / Cham went to the riverbank. / On the bank there was a threshing board. / His brother, a boy like gold, / went to graze his cows. / The cows ate the grain, / and the boy was caught by his ear.

08c.nursery-rhyme

Recited by Sara, recorded in January 2005.

Laloo ate red chilli; / Laloo's bum burned like fire; / Laloo took eight annas and went to see the doctor; / the doctor wasn't there, / Laloo clenched his buttocks.

08d.nursery-rhyme

Recited by Sara, recorded in November 2005.

This fat-headed policeman / laid twelve eggs; / one egg broke, / now the child is sad.

08e.nursery-rhyme

Recited by Sara, recorded in November 2005.

Mango leaves in clusters; / use the whip, / the horse will gallop. / Elder sister, stand aside – / here comes my mad horse; / the mad horse went crazy, / so it was shot with a gun.

08f.nursery-rhymes

Recited by six-year old Kashmira, recorded in November 2005.

Rain drops in the lychee garden, / one drop falls on the tea stall. / Oh dear friends, do not study; / let's go to the cinema near the station. / Wearing sunglasses / and a ladies' wristwatch, / let us go to my father's house, / there is a garden near the house. / Brothers and sisters get married – / what a scandal! / If I had known that before, I would have gone to school, / but my school is closed, / and I can smell the fragrance of hibiscus.

Mountain and cliff, / juice and water. The soft sound of the leaves when the wind blows; / the beauty of the flower.

Apple is hard, / pomegranate is red, / grapes are juicy – / nothing is left in the house; / Mother has gone to the next village. / The rice is hard, / I will not eat that rice, / I will not go to school today. / My school is closed, / and I can smell hibiscus.

The soft rustling of the mango leaves can be heard; / seven brothers-in-law have had their food – / where is the second one? / Oh the married lady, give him the towel. / No, I will not give him the towel. / I am not willing to give my daughter to him; / I will give my daughter to he who is rich. / Everything depends on money / and this is an insult to this son-in-law.

In our village there are small huts; / there is no seventh storey in the house or fifth. / We do not hate each other / and have respect for our elders. / We have a small village, which we love like our mothers; / we decorate it with lights, and we have enough sand.

There are many fields filled with rice and many ponds; / water glitters in the moonlight. / All the trees live happily together; / the birds chirp from dawn till dusk, / and many flowers blossom. / Latim latim katim fatim / the frog is playing the flute, / there is a flower on top of the broomstick, / the girl is dancing. / A snake, vermilion, and a burnt rat.

Mango leaf, lychee leaf, dodul blossom; / break the dodul and see: a newborn boy. / Today for the first time he will eat rice; / tomorrow he will get married. / Khoka will go with me on the path strewn with dodul flowers / the birds are chirping where the dodul flowers have blossomed / and the girls of the Bagdi caste are calling. / Once, twice, thrice – / the little married girl has many qualities. / Do not add salt to the curry.

Thin bamboo sticks, / the river is flowing. / We, the people in the village, are separating the little stones out from the grains; / the girl has put kajal on her eyes, / her head is covered with a veil, / and she has long hair.

First floor, second floor, third floor, / the policemen have gone to Nimtala; / the policemen have two rods, / but my brother is not a supporter of the Congress Party. / The Congress Party police have laid thirteen eggs; / one egg is found to be rotten; / the little boy is sad.

Ten, twenty, here is the prawn curry. / Who will pay how much for it, please say?

Ten, twenty – get together! / Fly away the butterfly; / Mother says, “Go to school!”

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety, a hundred / a hundred and hundred harmonized, the butterfly flew away. / Mother says, “Go to school!” / Father says, “Get out of the house!”

09a.lullaby

Sung by Sara, recorded in April 2004.

Go to sleep, my doll – / why won't you sleep? / Sweet songs your mother sings for you. / Go to sleep, my doll.

09b.lullaby

Sung by Sara, recorded in April 2004.

Oh lalalalala, / vessel of milk, / sugar candy in the milk; / Munna is happy.

09c.lullaby

Sung by Sara, recorded in April 2004.

Sleep, sleep – / I'll cover you with the end piece of my sari; / your lover has come and gone.

10.lullabies

Two lullabies sung by scroll artist Manimala Chitrakar from Naya in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur District. Recorded on 2 November 2005.

The child has fallen asleep, / and the village is silent now. / The birds have eaten their grain; / how will I pay the rent?

1.

The child has fallen asleep, / and the village is silent now. / The birds have eaten their grain; / how will I pay the rent?

2.

Come, sleep, come, sleep / come, sleep, everything is all right. / Come little bird and give sleep / to my baby's eyes. / My baby will not sleep / and cries all night long.

Come, sleep, come, sleep / come, sleep, everything is all right. / Come, sweet sleep, / and give sleep to my baby's eyes. / My baby will not sleep / but keeps crying.

Come, sleep, come, sleep / come, sleep, everything is all right. / Come, little bird, / give sleep to my child. / My child has not eaten all day.

Come, sleep, come, sleep / come, sleep, everything is all right. / Come, grandmother / sit down in the room, / come, hold the child. / My child will not sleep and wants to be with you.

Come, sleep, come, sleep / come, sleep, everything is all right. / Golden child – do not cry! / Sleep in my lap. / Don't you know it's me, your loving mother!

Come, sleep, come, sleep / come, sleep, everything is all right.

11.love-song

Bhatiali song, i.e. a song originally performed by boatmen travelling downstream on Bengal's rivers like the Brahmaputra and Hugli; "bhata" meaning ebb or downstream. This song is from the perspective of a female lover waiting on the riverbank; here performed by Sara in January 2005.

My heart's dearest – in spite of loving you / I could not make you mine. / Silk loving water – / how beautiful to see; / night loving the moon – / how radiant! / All my life I've only had sorrow, / I've had nothing else. / My love for you – why wasn't it sustained? / My heart's dearest – in spite of loving you / I could not make you mine.

12.marriage-song

Sung by Sara, recorded in April 2004.

Who walks, my friend, / along the road to the south? / And you are here, my friend; / your days are passing / in hope and in fear. / Who knows, my friend, / how I am? / Come at once and find out! / The golden colour has turned dark; / my father and mother have given me in marriage. / This dark boy has captured my heart. / I will break out and escape from the net. / Mother and father will wander far / like madmen.

13.puberty

Sara speaks about the end of a village girl's childhood and the perils of young love. Recorded in October 2003.

As children grow up, girls of seven or eight years old, they play with others bare-bodied. At that age they do not realize what love is. At twelve they start to menstruate. And in time, when they reach puberty, they become aware. They see others in a different way and understand love. Boys and girls fall in love. Some tell their parents and are given in marriage. Others get married on their own. Perhaps a girl reaches puberty, then loves a boy; they go somewhere and do some things, and she conceives a child. Being afraid of her parents, she goes to hospital, and the baby is destroyed. The boy might say, "Because I loved you, you had to kill the baby". If that boy really loves the girl, he

might marry her. Since boys are sometimes really bad, he might say, “Bah! Who will marry this girl?” In the end, when the parents find out, they kill their daughter in order to preserve their honour. Or they drive her out of the house, and the girl has to flee her village. In the end that girl has no help from anywhere. She will have to do any work, or else be forced to go onto the street. After all, she has had a baby in her womb. Perhaps the boy betrays her. “I loved this boy, I reached puberty and loved this boy, but he has ruined my life.” When a boy ruins a girl’s life, sometimes she dies. Perhaps she runs away from home and is reduced to walking the streets. He changes her life.

As long as she stays with her parents, she is fine. Her parents might bring her up with much love, then when she grows up, she can do whatever she likes. The girl who does not listen to her parents – there is suffering in her fate. Actually, parents want the best for their children, so that, “my girl will study well, eat well, we’ll give her in marriage, into a good home. She’ll have a family”. Perhaps the child will listen to her parents and live.

Then there might be a girl who does not listen to her parents. She rebels. She will suffer, and she will have to endure the suffering. The girl who listens to her parents has no suffering in her fate. Her parents, after careful consideration, give her in marriage. Then the daughter has the right to tell her parents, “you considered carefully and gave me in marriage, and now I am suffering”. But the girl who marries on her own cannot complain to her parents. She has made her own suffering.

14.child-marriage

Sara speaks about the age of marriage then and now. Recorded in October 2002.

Where we lived, girls would get married at the age of twelve or thirteen. If not at twelve, then certainly by thirteen or fourteen. Nowadays of course, marriages take place much later. But in my day, a girl would be married by thirteen, fourteen. Nowadays she is twenty, twenty-five and still single.

I think they were afraid that the girl might get spoilt. So, while she was still a child, they would marry her off. Nowadays nobody minds, and she goes with this boy or that boy. In my day, they would be married off early, so that there was no dishonour and no disturbance in society.

The boy’s parents would tell him, “You are now married. You should be decent. The girl is growing up in her own house. You should grow up as well and find good work. You must earn money”.

Once they were married the boy wouldn’t take the girl to his house at once. The girl would stay in her parents’ house so that she didn’t run away. She was bonded. The girl would grow up in her parents’ house, become a young woman. The boy would grow up, find employment. Then he would take her home.

As for myself, I was married at fourteen or perhaps fifteen. Then I stayed at home for one or two years. When I was about seventeen, I went. I was there for about five years. Then I left.

15.first-marriage

Sara speaks about her first – failed – marriage. Recorded in October 2003.

When my mother was alive, she didn't have any money for my marriage. But I loved that boy. I was a fourteen-year-old girl then, fourteen or fifteen. I loved him and I married him. After the wedding, my husband's parents said, "You married on your own. We cannot let you stay here. You will live on your own".

We lived on our own; I lived with him and felt good. He went to work and brought back his earnings. Then my husband's mother and father said, "All right, since you have married, bring your wife home". Then I went to live there, and by and by my mother-in-law began to love me. I was living well. Then my husband fell for another girl. He used to stay with her for days and nights, and when he came home, he wouldn't eat properly, wouldn't talk to me, he wouldn't say anything. I asked, "What has happened to you?" He never said, "I love another girl". He told his mother, told everybody else, but he never told me at all.

Then one day his friends told me, "he is in love with another girl". I said, "I don't believe that he would fall for another girl". One or two days passed. After three or four days, I asked him. He said, "No, it's all lies, it's not the truth". Then another two days later, he left in the night. I asked, "What happened?" He said, "Nothing happened. I'm in love with another girl." "Why did you love me and marry me then? If you love that girl – why did you marry me?" "I felt good, I did it. Now I don't like it. I am leaving you." "You cannot leave me. Where will I go? What will I do? I have no one. Mother is not there, mother has died, all my brothers live on their own. Who will take care of me?" He said, "I don't know who will care for you. If I like you, I will keep you. If I don't like you I won't keep you".

He kept going to that girl, and there was no peace in my room. He used to beat me. He wouldn't speak properly, wouldn't come and go regularly. My mother-in-law scolded him, "Why are you destroying this girl's life? Why did you marry her? Now, after marrying this girl, you have gone to another girl and love her. What will happen to this girl?" "She'll take care of herself. She'll leave me and marry again." "Marry again won't do. I have no one – where will I go? No children," I told him. He didn't even listen.

He'd go to her and come back. Then he married that other girl and brought her to our room. After that, he used to quarrel with me, beat me. Then I said, "Give me up. I will not eat in your house. You can stay with your bride". He said, "I give you up". Then my mother-in-law and father-in-law said, "No, don't give her up. If you leave her, she'll have a lot of trouble. She has no father nor mother; all her brothers live on their own and don't care. Where will she go?" "Where she will go we don't have to say. She'll find a way." "Do what you think is right." Then he gave me up.

Then what was I to do? Where could I go? There was no one. My husband was living with another girl. He had left me. After that, I left. I went to my brother. He said, "Since he has given you up, there is nothing to be done. You will stay at home. You'll have to eat what we have. You will eat what we have in this house". I stayed there. After a while my brother started telling me to look for work. So I said, "All right, if I can find a good job, I will take it. Then I'll buy some land and build a house".

I stayed there for three, four, five months. I used to eat with my brother, stayed with him. In my brother's house, there was not much peace. He was poor. Then I told him, "Are you staying here? I will go somewhere else to work. I'll eat there". Saying that, I left.

16.second-marriage

Sara speaks about her second partner and another failed relationship. Recorded in March 2003.

The second fellow was a man from my area, and we knew and loved each other even before my first marriage. When I'd separated from my husband, we got to know each other again. He came back to me. "Your husband has left you. Now I will stay with you."

As for this place, I was also here before. I came here after separating from my husband. And then the other man came to see me here. He came and said, "Stop working on the street!" But I said, "I can't do that. I have children, I have a sister. You may look after me, but you won't look after my family! Will you give them food to eat? No, you won't. You may support me, but you will not give food to my family. I have to earn an income for my family".

"All right, do what you like. If you don't mind, I don't mind either. You look after your family, I'll take care of myself. You feed your family, and when I feel like it, I'll come and stay, or go home."

Initially I worked in a flat at Chandni Chowk. At that time, I got to know a boy. He used to work in a hotel. He used to go to work then, after work, we'd meet and got to know each other. He brought me here. "Come with me. I'll show you some good places. You can get work there". Then I saw that he meant working on the street. The household work ended there. When it was over, I came here. That boy used to come now and then, he used to talk... but he was bad. He drank a lot. That is why I gave him up.

17.brothel

Sara speaks about another failed relationship and the beginning of her sex work. She uses the terms working the "street", "line", or "bridge", referring to a bridge crossing Tolly Canal, where many of the women go to find customers at night. Recorded in October 2003.

When I left home, I used to work in a house. I used to cook, wash dishes... I lived there, ate there. I earned 400 rupees. For that money I did all the work, washing dishes... I lived there, and there was a restaurant nearby. I fell in love with a boy who worked there. I liked him. I worked and, little by little, slowly, I began to love this man. I used to go out with that boy, wander about. Then the boy asked, "Do you have a family?" I told him, "Only my brother is here". "Well, how much salary do they give you here?" I said, "400 rupees". "Is that enough for you?" "It's not enough, but what can I do? I am alone. I have no father nor mother. I am all alone. I have to stay in Kolkata." "No. I'll take you to another place where they will give you much more money. It's good work. You will earn a lot of money." I said, "I don't know anyone. I don't know..." "I will take you there." "All right. If there is good work and good money, I will go there." After saying that, I didn't give up my job immediately, I continued to stay there. The boy said, "Let's go". I said, "I won't go now. I'll go in a month if you show me where I can find good work, good employment, and good money". "All right."

I had a relationship with that boy for two months, and it was good. But I couldn't do anything with just those 400 rupees. So I said, "Show me where I can find good work. Take me there". He took me, and I saw what the work was. Then he said, "Here, this is the work you have to do".

Every day I went out and found customers. The man that I loved wanted to marry me. He said, "I will marry you." But he took me there. He left me in the line and did not marry me. I stayed there. He had said, "You'll earn a lot of money, build a house, and you'll have some money left over for yourself. Those 400 rupees are not enough". In that way, giving me a lot of advice, he left me there. I stayed there for a month. I went out to find customers.

Some of the customers were good, some were bad. Some people behaved well, some behaved badly. What could I do? Having gone there, I stayed there. Whatever I earned was taken by that man. He used to take everything, he used to eat and stay and even then, night and day, there was a lot of quarrelling and he used to beat me. That boy wasn't a good person. Initially I thought he was a good person; then I saw that he was evil. He used to drink a lot, that man. At night he used to drink a lot of liquor. He abused me, made fun of me. I sent him away: "Go away; you are evil! Since I have taken up this work, I will live alone. I will live alone, I will earn alone and live alone".

But he stayed, he wouldn't go. He made fun of me, beat me. I told another man, "Look, this man has brought me here. I work all night, and he takes all my earnings, he abuses and beats me – make him go". Then he was driven away. After he was gone, I began to live alone. I worked and kept the money. I ate what I liked and did what I liked, wore good clothes. With the money I made I bought some land in the village and kept it aside. I have a younger sister, I need to look after her, I take care of her.

When I went home, they asked, "Where are you living?" I told my brothers and others in the village that I worked in Kolkata. "I have a good job in Kolkata, I get a salary of a thousand rupees and have a place to stay". I never told them that I was working the line on the bridge. I told them, "I have a good job". My brothers said, "You are doing well, stay there".

I come and go. I earn my own money and spend some of it on myself. I have an income, I have bought some land. I need to build a house, I have a younger sister to take care of. I have things to do in my life.

I eat good food, dress well, and now I'm just alone. I didn't get married again. I earn, I eat, I am free and I live on my own. No one tells me what to do. Today or tomorrow, no one can tell me what to do. I'm now all by myself. Whatever I feel like doing, I do. Wherever I want to go, I go. Whatever I want to do, I do. If I want to go somewhere, I go. Whatever I like to eat, I eat. All by myself, I eat. Whatever I feel like wearing, I wear. All day I do nothing, but once it's night, I go out.

Some people are good, some people are bad. There are many who come to the house and behave properly. Many behave well. With those who are good, I behave well. But those who are bad – I don't care about them, I send them away. If a person is good, I treat him well.

I earn and I eat all by myself. I'm quite all right. I don't need anyone. I live alone, I take care of my own future. When I eventually grow old and don't have money, it will be difficult. Therefore, I need to save some money. Now my health is good, I am young. Now I need to save some money. Now I'm all alone, I earn money, I eat, and I am all right.

18.sharing

A culture of mutual sharing in Sara's house community. Recorded in October 2002.

There is the hospital, and there is a doctor. If one of us gets sick, there is a government doctor. The government doctor treats us. If the girl has no money for medicines, she will get it from the community. The money is raised from each household – ten rupees from here, something else from somewhere else.

The girl might have been working all her life. Now her parents are no more, there is nobody to look after her. Finally, she has come here. The poor girl is all alone. So from the community we collect ten

rupees, five rupees from various homes, and take her to hospital. And when she gets better, we get a good name, too; because we have saved the girl by our own efforts.

Say someone dies and there is no money to buy the coffin and the flowers. Then we raise contributions within the community, buy the casket and the flowers and dispatch the body to the burning ground. This is a custom we have in our community.

It's like that in our house, you can go and see. Perhaps in my room there is rice, but I have no vegetables. Somebody will give me a little curry. I'll give some meat or rice to someone else. We have this give-and-take among us friends. The idea that, "I won't give this or I won't give that" – that's not how we do it. We readily share with each other. But of course, if I have a quarrel with someone, we won't share for some time. I won't ask her what she's cooked.

19.cleanliness_purity

Sara speaks about the meaning of cleanliness in her household and purity in the hearts of the working women. Recorded in March 2003.

This house is constantly being visited. Just as we clean our dirty courtyard in the village, we clean this courtyard, too. Cleaning it means that we sprinkle some Ganges water on it in the evening. Why do we do that? For women to earn money, make an income, Lakshmi enters. Money enters the house. Therefore the passage has to be cleaned. That is why water is sprinkled. We also burn incense. Just like the water that we sprinkle, it is pure. Why do we burn incense? Because in the room the girls keep their deity. They perform *puja*. In every room there is a god they worship. By burning incense, the girls keep their rooms clean. "Clean" means that the girls can earn some money and everything will be all right. No wind, no evil spirit, nothing bad will happen to them. Street girls... Therefore we have to keep the place clean. Like, with a shop, the shopkeeper cleans and dusts his shop. He lights incense sticks, burns incense. Here it's the same. They burn incense, bow before God and go out onto the street. No misfortune will befall them. The street is good. Their health is good. Lakshmi enters their room, and the women earn a little money. That is why incense is burned.

We bathe ourselves and keep ourselves clean, and Lakshmi enters. If a girl is dirty, doesn't burn incense, Lakshmi won't enter her room. Money won't come. Will Lakshmi enter a dirty house? Will God enter such a house? That is why you have to be clean.

Today it is up to me, tomorrow up to her. There is no anger, no dispute, we decide among ourselves. Today it is my turn, tomorrow yours, the next day hers, one after the other. One day I cannot do it and ask someone else to do it – I have to pay 20 rupees. If I do it myself, I clean the house with water and dry it with a cloth. The whole courtyard has to be washed and dried. In front of the rooms also, the passage is washed and dried. Then I burn incense, and that's it.

20.customers

Sara speaks about different types of customers. Recorded in October 2003.

On the bridge, the girls... A strong, young, beautiful girl has many customers. People know them, they earn good money. Every day customers visit those girls who are young, strong and good. But those who have lost their strength, who have lost their good looks, who have grown old – not many men visit them, and they don't pay that much money either. Those who are beautiful, good looking,

young go to the bridge and get customers. The customers don't go to those who have aged, who have become old. Taxi drivers and coolies go to them. Good men, rich men – factory owners, office employees – good and rich men visit the good, pretty girls. A good-looking, beautiful girl finds good customers: office employees, businessmen – these kinds of people. Only coolies and taxi drivers go to those who have grown old.

Sometimes a man will visit the same girl every day. He likes her and perhaps marries her and takes her home. He marries her, keeps her with him, they start a family; that girl goes from bad to good. She was bad, she used to work the line on the bridge, but a good man took her; she doesn't have to do this evil work any more, so becomes good. He took her with him, and now she leads a good life. Then there are others who like a girl and stay with her. They stay here in these quarters; they eat and live here. Those who have grown old cannot live well, they have to manage with whatever they can get. Once a woman grows old, good men will not visit her. Good customers visit the young and pretty girls.

21.community

Sara on ageing in her profession. Recorded in October 2002.

When I grow old there will be less energy in my body. I need to understand that I cannot do this work forever. I will have to find work in other people's houses. But there are some instances of women who have set aside some money. Then they can get along by opening a shop or doing business. A woman who doesn't save, who spends whatever she earns – in the end she'll have to work in other people's houses for a living. A wise woman saves maybe two or three hundred thousand in a bank. Then she withdraws the money, starts a business and lives.

There are women here who have bought their own houses and cars. They had hundreds of thousands in the bank, and, when they reached that age, they withdrew the money and started a business or opened a shop.

Maybe they will stay here. Why not? They don't harm the place. There is a rule in the community: outside you can do what you like. But keep the community safe. Protect the community, live properly, and the community will protect you.

22.afterlife

Sara muses upon her fate in the afterlife. Recorded in October 2003.

I have come so far. Allah sent me into this world. Allah said, "You will get married, well and decently. You will be a good person in your husband's house". But it was not in my destiny. Allah had written that, "All your life you'll have to stand on the bridge, work and live".

When I die, I will go to Allah's house, and Allah will ask, "Why did you do that dirty work? Why did you go to the bridge and do that dirty work?" Then I will say, "How was I to eat? I had no choice". Allah will answer, "You could have washed dishes and eaten. You could have done some other work and eaten. You could have done laundry and eaten. Why did you do this dirty work?" Then I will say, "I was forced to". And Allah will say, "No. This is dirty work. It is a sin". Then he will judge me and punish me severely. They will stick knives into me. Fire. They will cut me with knives, roast me over fires, torture me. He will say, "Did I send you into the world to do this? I sent you to make a good

home for your husband, live well, eat well – that is what I sent you to do. I didn't send you to do this work". Then I will say, "I couldn't do all that". Allah will deliver his verdict.

23.daily-routine

Sara on leisure time during the day. Recorded in October 2002.

I like Kolkata. I have been here for about ten years. In those ten years I've started to feel at home here and to like the city. Because I can earn a little here, and I live comfortably. What is there to earn in my home place?

Sometimes we go to see a movie. Sometimes we go to the Victoria Memorial for a stroll. Sometimes to the zoo. If I am sitting and feeling in a gloomy mood I will say, "Come on, let's go to the cinema", and we'll go and watch a movie. Another day if I am sitting all alone and I don't like it, I will say, "Come on, let's go to Victoria" – and we'll go. Still another day if I'm sitting at home feeling a little depressed, we will go to the zoo. Our mood lifts. After all, I have no mother or husband. I get bored sitting alone in the house. So we go out to enjoy ourselves a little. It is our own earnings and food. I don't have a husband, I cannot sit at home while someone else takes care of me. So it is my earnings and my spending alone. And when it is time for work, we go out, and then we come back.

24.good-man

Sara describes a "good man"...

A good man means someone who is affluent, very rich. He may have his own work, by doing this work he has managed to stand on his own feet, and now he is well off. Someone who is poor has no job, he lives in great difficulties, maybe he has to work in somebody else's house, or he has to live off whatever his parents earn. If he is poor and he is accused of something, he will be put in jail. But if he is rich and something happens to him, he is not afraid. He knows that he has money. He pays money, and people say that he is a good man.

And being rich like, say, some educated girl, she gets a job, she has money, she lives well. But those who are poor have no job, nothing, they have difficulties. A poor girl doesn't have a job. She works in someone else's home. Or else she has to live on what her parents give her. Some poor girls start to go out onto the streets and become bad. As for the rich, they have no troubles. They have money, they live well, eat well, and their daughters – even if they become bad – will not get a bad name. Because they have money, and money can cover everything up. They have money, they have a good reputation, they have everything. Even computers. They have no troubles. All the troubles are for the poor. They have no jobs, nothing. The daughters of the well-off live well. Poor girls have trouble.

25.good-woman

...and a "good woman". Recorded on 2 September 2004.

Those who are rich might spend a lot of money giving their daughter in marriage, and their daughter does well and lives happily. Sometimes a girl is married off with a lot of money but then, after a while, her husband falls for another girl and leaves. Those parents who are rich take the girl back and look after her. They have no problems. As for a poor girl, she has to look here and there, selling off

the land they gave her in marriage. Then after marriage they live together for a while, but he might be the type of man who leaves her in the end. They have two children, he leaves them. Her parents are poor. They do not understand. The girl suffers. In our country there are many people who need work. Some girls knit sweaters, others roll cigarettes, some work in other people's houses, and they get along. Once their husband has left them, they have no choice. They have to take whatever job they can get, just to live. Rich boys and girls have no problems. They live well. The amount of trouble that poor girls have... All men are not the same. Some husbands might marry and look after his wife. But there are others who fall for some other woman and leave her. Then that girl is in trouble.

26.diligence-and-idleness

Sara juxtaposes the virtue of diligence with the vice of idleness. Recorded in October 2003.

In the morning I wake up, get up, mop the floor, wash the dishes, wash clothes, go to the market, cook. In a house there may be two or three girls and we agree the chores between us. "You wash the dishes and mop the floor; I'll go to the market. Or else you cook," I tell her. She says "Ouf! I can't do it, I've got a headache". I tell another one, and, "Ouf! I've got a headache". Some of them are afraid of work. Lazy. Fat and lazy. They don't want to do any work, just sit and relax and live comfortably. This is harmful for their own bodies. If you work all the time, your body remains energetic. Whatever the work – mopping the floor, cleaning utensils – doing this work keeps your body fit. Your body remains vigorous. All they want to do is sit and eat, "I'll just sit and have some food. Somebody will cook. Somebody will cook and I will eat". They don't want to make their body work. "I'll save my body." If you don't do any work, if you don't mop the floor, your body loses its strength. Your body becomes even lazier. The more you work – cook, mop, go to the market – the better. Those who just say, "I can't do it" are crooks, with the mind of a devil. "I'll do nothing, I'll just sit by myself, wander about, go to sleep" – they are harming themselves, their own bodies. There is always someone who has a headache, aching legs, fever – it's their own fault. If you keep your body active, you stay fit. If you don't work, your body becomes weak. Your blood does not circulate and your body gets unfit. If you work, run about, your blood circulates well and your body stays fit. If you want someone else to do your work, you need money. The VIPs have a lot of money. They can afford it. If you keep thinking "I cannot do it," do you think someone else will do it for you all the time? No one will. You must work for yourself. Cook for yourself and eat. It is good to wash the dishes and eat your own food. Who will cook for you? Who will wash your dishes? A girl who is afraid of work, when she goes for a visit and sits in someone else's house with her hands in her lap, she will have to hear a few harsh words. But people will say nice things about someone who is busy working, "She is good, she is not afraid of work, she does everything – she washes the dishes, cooks..." People say that a girl who doesn't work is "afraid of work". Nobody likes her. But everybody loves the energetic girl. That's it.

27.cooking

Sara prepares her evening meal, recorded in October 2003. You'll find the background story (in German) in the record "Der Puff" in: Marschall, Wyss-Giacosa, Isler, "Genauigkeit: Schöne Wissenschaft" (2008, 143–157).

28.distrust

Sara doesn't think it is wise to trust people – especially men. Recorded in October 2003.

Nowadays it's no good to get very friendly with friends. The boys these days are bad. Seeing a girl, the boys give them a lot of love in the beginning. Loving them, they want to make them their own. After a few days, when the girls have fallen for them, the girls love the boys very much, and the boys love the girls. After a few days, two months or four months have passed, the boy's heart is satisfied, and he changes.

Perhaps your own mother loves you. But your brothers and sisters only love her to their own advantage. They all love the money. My mother, father – even if I don't give them any money, they are good. A mother gives milk to the child of her womb for twelve months, and whether they are good or bad, they have to endure the child. Other people may not do the same.

After a boy gets married, he separates himself from his family. He doesn't love his sister, he doesn't care for his mother, he only cares for his own family. But no matter how bad the boy is, his mother still loves him. A mother loves her sons and daughters. Their mother makes them human. "They will earn money and feed us and take care of us in the future." But nowadays boys don't look after their parents. In this world nobody cares about anyone else.

These days a boy gets married, keeps his wife for a while, then abandons her. He is now in love with another girl, so who can you trust? You can't trust anyone. Nowadays a boy will love you for two days, then become evil. A boy loves a girl for a few days, marries the girl, keeps her with him, then gives her up. He says, "That girl is bad". He gives her a bad name. "You've been with another man." He tries to harm her by giving her a bad reputation.

People say that the child of your womb is good. But the time comes when even this child becomes evil. It may be that a daughter really loves her mother. That's it. Beyond that, I don't trust anyone. I trust my father and mother; I do not trust friends, your own husband – even he will become evil.

He might sell you off to someone else or have a relationship with someone else, "I will eat well, I will relax!" Nowadays so many men want this. Nowadays men corrupt everybody. They bring girls here, duping them: "I'll marry you! I love you!" With these words, they bring them here and make them do this evil work. Then they consume whatever they earn. The men bring them and then use them or else they sell them.

Perhaps it is not as bad as that, but I have no faith in anyone. It's not good to go anywhere with anyone, it's not good to tell your true feelings to anyone. Keep your personal matters secretly to yourself.

It's best to go your own way; it's wrong to follow someone else's views. It's bad to obey someone who tells you to "come here, go there". It's pointless. Do whatever seems right to you.

29.hindus-and-muslims

Sara speaks about her house community of Muslims and Hindus, recorded in October 2002.

Say a girl is a Hindu, she will worship Bhagwan and offer *puja*. I worship my Allah and give him *salaam*. She takes a bath and offers *puja*. I take a bath and worship Allah. She has her own religion, her beliefs. It doesn't matter that we do not worship together. She worships her Bhagwan, I worship my Allah. We are all separate in prayer.

We do not ask, “Why do you worship Bhagwan?” Or, “Why do you worship Allah?” We never have quarrels over this. You worship your Bhagwan, I worship my Allah.

Perhaps once a year we go home for Id. We have *ramzan* now, and the fasting started today. One month from now we’ll have Id-ul-Zoha, then we will go home. We women will gather in a house, in the headman’s house or another big place. Fifteen or twenty women will meet and pray. Those who don’t know how to pray are taught.

So you might say *namaz* in your room?

No. But it is possible. If you clean your room and your bed, then you can do it. *Namaz* can be done anywhere. If you want to say *namaz* on the road, that’s also possible. Everything has to be clean, and your heart should be pure. It is possible if your heart is pure.

30.room-of-dream

A Fakir song – the Islamic equivalent of a Hindu Baul song. Both Bauls and Fakirs emphasize the futility of religion and caste, and both aim for a mystic – direct – union with the divine. The most famous Fakir singer was Lalon Fakir, who was born in the 1770s in what is now Bangladesh. The singer here is Sara, recorded in January 2005.

In the room of dreams / I am dreaming. / When I wake up, nothing is there. / Was my dream false or true? / I built a house of gold; / the house was eaten by termites; / my heart has to endure this. / The big boat, as it floats / water seeps in. / What can I use to bail the water out? / My heart has to endure this. / Gabriel will come swiftly, tie my hands and legs. / If not the Lord, / if not the Prophet, / who can set me free? / The words of the Prophet, / the Koran of thirty parts – / that Koran will cause no suffering.

31.nobody1

Sara recounts a dream in which she heard someone calling her from her room, but no one was there. Recorded in November 2005.

I was sleeping, I was dreaming. It was around one or one-thirty at night. I was dreaming that I went to the market and bought this and that and returned home. After that I washed the dishes, mopped the floor. I did everything in my home. I had fetched water. I was dreaming that I went to the market at eight or nine in the morning. After returning, I wanted to cook. I fetched wood and lit the mud stove. I gathered the utensils. I was about to start cooking. I put the rice pot on the stove. And then I heard somebody calling me – “Sara!” I did not answer. I never answer if someone calls me just once. When they call me two or three times, mostly three times, I answer. This time, having been called twice, I went and opened the door. No one was there. I looked left and right – nobody there. I was not cooking, not mopping, not doing anything. I woke up and checked the clock, it was one-thirty at night. I realized that I had been dreaming. Then I went back to sleep. That’s it.

32.mother

Reba recounts a dream visit by her deceased mother and relatives. Recorded in March 2003.

One night, lying asleep, I saw that my mother had come and was stroking my hair. She said, “No, my dear, I am still here near you”. I was feeling very sad. I was all alone. No one was near me. Then one night while I was asleep, I saw that my mother had come. She said, “Well, dear, will you give me some rice?” I didn’t realize that she was dead. “You want rice? Sit down, Mother.” “Must I eat all by myself?” My elder brother had come, too. He was also dead. “Your brother has come, your grandmother has come, your father is here – and I have to eat all by myself?” “All right. Make everyone sit down.” They all sat down.

After eating, they all left. While still sleeping, I saw that my grandmother had come. She said, “Give me some water!”

Coming back with the water I found that Father and Mother were not there, my uncle and grandmother were not there. I asked, “Where did they go?” My brother said, “Why, when you went to fetch water, they went behind you!” “I didn’t see them.” “Yes, they were right behind you!”

33.tears

Reba cries in her sleep. Recorded in March 2003.

I was sleeping, and I felt very sad. My father came and stroked my hair. “Why are you crying? I am near you. What are you afraid of? I am here, stroking your hair!” Sometimes I feel sad. I don’t see my mother that often. I’ve only seen her once or twice. My father comes now and then; he used to love me very much. I was his only daughter. He comes now and then and sits by my head. “I am right beside you. What are you sad about?” I used to see this occasionally. I would be filled with sadness and feel like crying. I loved my mother. My father died when I was very young, when I was about ten or eleven. This is what I see.

I used to cry in my sleep. Dawn was breaking, I would cry in my sleep without waking up. Sometimes in my dream I would see that it was morning. Then I’d wake up. I cried inside myself, but sometimes tears would flow from my eyes.

34.nobody2

Sara doesn’t find any solace in her dreams. Recorded in October 2002.

When I was very young, say ten or eleven years old, I used to have lots of dreams where I would grow up, I’d have a good marriage, a good husband, earn a lot of money and live happily ever after. I used to have that dream very often, when I was young. I grew up, and such was my fate that I got married into a home where, for about two or three years, I was happy with my husband. Then my husband fell in love with another girl and my family broke up. So that dream about growing up, having a good marriage and living happily did not come true. That dream was shattered.

Then sometimes I have a dream where I have a child in my lap, I am playing with that child. When I get up in the morning I find there is nothing.

My fate has always been dark. I don’t even dream about my parents. There are people who see their father, their mother, their husband – everyone. But I can’t see anyone. My mother has died. I might be asleep, and my mother could appear and stroke my head. I can’t get that kind of solace.

Or I might be sleeping and my father could come and ask, "How is your child? How are you?" I cannot see that. My mother has been dead for five years now, and in those five years I have not seen her even once. But my husband who left me, I can see him in my dreams.

35.childless

Sara remembers hazy dreams. Recorded in October 2002.

I was lying in bed yesterday, dreaming. Thinking that my man is not with me. Then I dreamt that I went home and my friends said that my husband had died. I asked, "How did he die so suddenly?" "He died because of quarrels and violence." I said, "No, you're joking". They said, "We are not joking". Then I saw lots of people approaching; they quarrelled and beat each other up.

Another day I was sleeping and suddenly felt frightened. Someone had come to my home but I didn't feel like working. And sometimes at night, I have topsy-turvy dreams about flowers and fruit. Yesterday I was lying in bed and suddenly I felt fed up with everything.

My heart goes pitter-patter, I'm all alone. My father and mother have passed away. I dream that somebody is coming to grab me, someone comes to beat me up. Sometimes it's a snake. Sometimes I see a tree in full blossom and all kinds of fruit. People ask me, "What is the problem?" I can't sleep at night. I feel restless. One night I had a dream that someone had arrived from my home village to call on me. And he said, "Come on". I have so many dreams like these. Most of them I forget. Sometimes people come to grab me, to beat me up. Sometimes I'm taken along twisting lanes. I try to console my heart when I get up in the morning and see there is no one there. What does it all mean?

Sometimes I feel like I can't breathe. I feel as if I am about to die. I walk along the streets, feeling depressed. After all, I have no one here, and nothing seems to make me happy. Sometimes I see and feel myself nursing a child. I had a child, but it died. Since then I've been childless. I cannot understand why I see these things.

36.lost

Sara recounts a dream where she was abducted by devils, recorded on 2 September 2004.

I was asleep, and in my dream I saw that I had travelled very far. I had lost my way. "What's happened? I cannot see my home – where am I?" Then, far away in the distance, I saw a big river, a river full of fast-flowing water. I thought, "This is not my home. Where have I gone? I don't know this place". I had been taken there by the devil. At night the devils had taken me there. I could see them in my dream, luring me on, "Come! Come!" We went a long way, and then I saw that there was nothing. In all four directions only jungle, more jungle and trees. I couldn't see any houses – only river, water. Then what did I do? I turned and walked back. On the road I saw a very old man. I asked him, "I want to go to such-and-such a place – where is that place?" "But that place is not on this road! This is a different road. How did you come here?" "I was called by a friend and I came here. I journeyed here." He said, "No, go back home! Turn around and go back home!" Then I returned home. I sat outside for half an hour, ate my food, went inside and slept. After a while I woke up and found it had all been nothing. I was lying in my room.

37.cremation-place.

The Dom (or Domba) mentioned by Sara are an ethnic group – possibly related to the European Roma – who live scattered over the whole of North India. Their traditional occupations include drumming during festivals and private celebrations, and work on cremation grounds. In North Indian Santal society, Dom women serve as midwives. Recorded in October 2003.

Three days ago I was asleep, and in my dream I saw that my mother had died. She was calling me, “Come here! Come here!” I went very, very far. Very, very far. Mother, Father – no one was there. I could hear my mother calling me.

I saw that I had gone a long way and reached a jungle. “Ma! Ma! Ma!” I was calling. But my mother was not there. Then I saw a big tiger. A big snake and a tiger. The snake wanted to catch me and bite me. I was crying out, “Ma! Ma!” I was shrieking, but my mother was not there. It was a devil. The devil had called me there. A tiger was after me, a snake was after me. Running and running, I fled far away.

I saw a huge river. I stood by it. When people die, they are cremated. I had reached that place. I saw that many ghosts had come to catch me. I was panting and panting. A woman was standing there – huge, tall, wearing a white sari. “Come here! Come here!” she called, but I was afraid, I didn’t go. “Who is she? She’s not my mother!” I turned around and saw that there was no snake, there was no tiger, there was no one around. I was panting and panting.

Finally, I escaped. I went a long way away, and I saw the people who burn corpses, the Dom... I had gone to the place of the Dom. They asked, “Why are you panting so hard? Why are you running?” “You see, sir, my mother was calling me. Running and running I came here, and I found a tiger and a snake chasing me, coming to bite me, chasing me, so I came here. On the cremation ground a tall woman in a white sari was standing, she beckoned me to ‘Come here! Come here!’ But instead I turned and came here.”

They said, “Mother, you have nothing to fear! The devils are chasing you. The devils are after you. You sit down here. No devil, no ghost will come here. There is a temple, the Mother’s Temple is here, the Goddess is here, sit down here. Rest here, you have nothing to fear. No tiger, no toad, no evil spirit, no ghost – nothing will come here. Mother, you come here and sleep near us”.

But I did not sleep; I was full of fear. They burn corpses, burn bodies – after all, they are Dom. I was thinking, “Should I sleep here?” “Yes, mother, sleep!”

There they burn corpses. Saddhus are there, and the Dom. In fear of my life, I sat down there. I sat down, and then I slept. While I was asleep, all of a sudden, water dripped onto my eyelids, waking me up. I realized that nobody was there. No snake, no toad, no tiger. That tall, sari-clad woman was not there, the cremators were not there, no one was there.

Then I said, “I had a dream”. When I woke up, there was nobody anywhere. I was sleeping in my room. When dawn broke, seeing my brother and others near him, I said, “Last night I was sleeping, and I had a dream. I saw so many things! A snake, and then a ghost came to catch me, and then I went to where the Dom stay. I went to sleep, in the dream. I saw all this at night”.

Three days ago, I saw this in a dream. I asked, “Is this dream good or bad?” They said, “It was done by the devils. The devils made you see this. The devils are evil. So they did this to you. Water from a tree dripped onto your eyelids, waking you up. But there was nothing. You were sleeping in your room”. That’s it.

38.double-mouthed-snake

Dreams recounted by Naisha, recorded in March 2003.

I had died. I was lying in my coffin, and my younger sister came to pick me up for a feast. I got up and I said, "I will definitely go. I've got three children. I will go to see them; I will go at once". In her house, all the delicacies were prepared for a feast. I have a five-year-old daughter. I had taken a chain for her, a gold chain. And one for my mother – I love my mother very much, I love her more than my father.

I made my mother and daughter wear their chains. The children were crying, "You're going away! You're going away!" I told them, "No, I'm here. I will come whenever you call me! For your sakes I have to come!"

Now, three or four days ago I was lying asleep. Previously I used to see many things in my dreams: eggs, ripe guavas, green chillies. Three or four days ago, I saw a snake. One snake with two mouths. The snake jumped on me. In my sleep I thought, "What's this?" I screamed and grabbed the snake. It wasn't very big. Then I woke up and, turning around, I realized there was no snake. I got up and said, "What did I see?" My insides had dried up. I was afraid. I was all alone. I got up and drank water. I asked myself, "What's the time?" I saw it was about half past two, or three.

39.quarrel

Dream recounted by Shakira, recorded in October 2003.

In my dream I saw my husband. I had wandered a long way. Ahead of me, I saw a river. I said, "What is the point of fighting with my husband?" Then I went very far; walking and walking I lost my way. Then my husband came back from very far away. I had found my husband again. I returned home. Coming home – a lot of quarrelling. My husband beat me. Lots of quarrelling. Then, separation from my husband. After separation, I came to Kolkata. In Kolkata I started a small business. I gave up my husband. After leaving him, a day came when I took another person's hand. Taking his hand, and with my children, I came back into society. Now I am living somehow. This is my life's first story.

40.fall-from-heaven

Naisha recounts a dream about a government employee who rode his motorbike high up into the sky in order to kill himself, but didn't succeed. Recorded in October 2002.

There was a government employee. He had a wife and a child. He had been injured – that's why he tried to kill himself. He said, "I will get on my motorbike and ride up into the sky". In his mouth was a cigarette, I could see it very clearly. He flew away on his motorbike. He was wearing blue clothing, and on the back of the bike there was a bag, an iron bag.

Such a tall, well-built person! Then he flew up, and when he was upside down he said, "If I die, my wife and child will get a huge amount of money. I will fall down deliberately, and I will die".

So he deliberately fell down. After he fell, he got up! Having got back up, he walked away, and his blue clothes immediately turned white.

A tall, well-built fellow. He was not even slightly hurt. Another person then held him and led him away, and the vehicle was nowhere to be seen. When I came out, a crowd had gathered. They said, "The man fell down, and nothing happened to him!" I saw very clearly with my own eyes that he had fallen down! He had told his wife, "I will fly very high up, and then deliberately fall down and die!"

But he did not die! The people helped him up and took him away. I was amazed, and my heart started pounding. Then I got up. In my home there was my mother, my sister-in-law and other relatives. I told them what I had seen. They said, "Oh, he's so huge! These fellows don't usually get hurt, also because they wear a different kind of clothing. They don't easily get hurt".

41.rock-and-ice

Dream recounted by Naisha about a deceased lover being frozen in a glacier. Recorded in March 2003.

After coming to this place, one person, a soldier, an army man, used to love me a lot. He used to come and visit. He had gone to Darjeeling. From Darjeeling, he had not come to see me for six months. What I saw was rock. Over there – only rocks. That's where he did his duty, among the rocks. And I saw ice, cold ice. All sorts of things can be found in that ice. People say that if someone dies, their body is thrown there. I saw that a person was lying in the ice. He was frozen hard; he was asleep. Somebody came to me and said, "You know the man who loves you so much? He is calling you to his house". "Why would I go to his house? He used to come here. I will talk to him right here. Why should I go to his house?"

She said, "No! He loves you very much, as you know. He called for you." "When?" "He came a week ago. He feels restless and longs for you."

Telling this lie, she took me, and when I reached there I found a corpse, a dead body. I thought it could be his father or mother. They made me sit down. I looked up and I saw that the face was looking at me. The man who loved me so much. Then his mother said, "Ma, he used to love you so much. That is why I brought you here. I could not tell the truth, so I brought you here by telling a lie. Whatever he owes you, forgive him!" I was weeping, and some people were holding me. I said that I'd forgive him to the extent that he loved me. Then he was buried. The burial was over, dusk fell, and I came back to my own place. That's it.

42.abortion

Dreams and memories recounted by Koumadi, recorded in October 2003.

I had a dream in which two or three people were chasing me. But I wasn't able to run. I was trying to run but I couldn't. Someone came to catch me. Two people. They caught me. I asked them, "Why have you caught me?" But they didn't let go. They held me fast.

One other day I dreamt that my father had died. He came and said, "Give me some water, my daughter. Give me water, I want to drink". I said, "You have died! Where will I give you water from?" My father said, "No, I haven't died, I am still alive. Give me some water, I want to drink!" But I didn't give him water or anything else. He was angry; I saw him standing there. I saw my mother preparing deep-fried vegetable balls. My father went and ate. When I woke up I was at home. I saw neither my father nor mother, no one was there.

And then my two children – I have left them in the village. Sometimes I see them in my dreams. That they have come to me. That they are crying. I see my husband. He has married another girl. He has a lot of fun with her. He used to quarrel with me, he used to beat me. All this I see in my dreams.

Once I dreamt that two snakes were chasing me. I didn't understand – two snakes, and how fiercely they chased me! In the morning I said, "Mother, two snakes were chasing me!" Mother said, "You aborted your child, so the fruit is chasing you!" In my dream I saw two snakes chasing me. I asked my mother, "Mother, why are these snakes chasing me?" "You didn't want the baby, that's why the snakes were chasing you".

I got married in Murshidabad. My husband used to drink a lot, he used to mistreat me. He quarrelled with me, and then he married another girl. After that, he drove me out. "Take the children and go!" He threw me out of the house, and I returned to my father's home. I still see those things in my dreams. I see his other wife and my children. My children are not with me. He enjoys his other wife in front of my eyes; when he sees me, he beats me – these are the things I see in my dreams.

After going to sleep at night, I have dreams. I dreamt that a ghost was coming to grab me. It sat on my chest. I tried to move with all of my might, but it wouldn't let me, perching firmly on my chest. I tried to call for help, but my voice was stuck inside. Outside nothing could be heard. I called to my older sister, "Sister, sister!" But my voice didn't come out. Inside I was shouting very loud, but nothing could be heard outside. My sister was sleeping right beside me. She couldn't hear me. The demon held on to my chest and wouldn't let me move. Slowly I turned over, and it left. I don't know what that was. I saw it in my dream.

After that I had another marriage. After my husband left me, his friend married me. After marrying me, my husband's friend took me to his home and gave me a lot of affection. For almost two months he kept me in peace. After that – what quarrelling! He beat me and argued. He had a wife already. That wife would also quarrel with me. She had a daughter of my age. They would beat me and quarrel.

In the end – how long could I bear this quarrelling in my life – I took poison, I took four doses. I took this poison on an empty stomach. My husband had gone to the market. He came back. Having taken the poison, I was sitting outside on the cot. He asked, "Hey! Why are you sitting here?" "See, I'm sitting here, I am not feeling well." He put his cycle on the kickstand and slapped me. Pang! Then he started to drag me around by my hair. "Don't pull me! I have taken poison!" When I said this, he pulled me into the room. He fed me eggs, tamarind and other things. After eating it, I lay down, then I was taken to hospital.

My husband didn't come to the hospital. They took me to Lalbagh hospital and put me on a saline drip. They sucked the poison out with a pipe. In the morning, I saw the nurse and asked, "What happened? Who brought me to this hospital?" "You took poison! You were left at the hospital yesterday. How much has been done to you! Saline..." My limbs were swollen. "Please take this out, I want to go to the toilet." She said, "No. I will give you a bedpan, you can urinate in bed". I said, "No! I'll go to the bathroom". I tried to pull the saline drip out, and it made blood start flowing, the blood spurted out. The nurse said, "Don't you have a mother or father here? What are you trying to do? All this blood!"

The nurse scolded me and took out the saline drip. Then she took me to the toilet and brought me back to the room. There I saw my husband, my brother-in-law, one of my in-laws – they all had come to the hospital. Two police officers asked, "Woman, why did you take poison? Tell us!" Then my

husband and in-laws' faces all turned pale; they blanched with fear. "What will the wife say?" I said, "Listen! I took poison on my own. Nobody caused me any trouble". When I said this, all their faces were full of smiles. Brother-in-law, parents-in-law...

Then the officers said, "You are protecting your brother-in-law, mother-in-law, your husband. You took poison because of them. No one takes poison unless there is some trouble". "I didn't take poison because of them. It was my own decision. They love me very much."

I said this in front of the police and in front of the doctor. Then my husband, my mother-in-law and brother-in-law went back to our neighborhood and said, "Our daughter-in-law is very good. She didn't get us into trouble". My husband was good for a while. Then he ran away with a girl he loved. He is now in Bangladesh. He took a mature girl and went off to Bangladesh, and they say he's still there. I came to this line. My children are still with my in-laws. Sometimes I go to visit them. I see them and come back. My children are there. If they need clothes, I give them clothes.

At home I am with my mother, and I have an elder brother. My brother has a wife and two children. My younger brother creates troubles now and then. He doesn't treat me badly, but he causes trouble. He does no work. He asks someone for a hundred rupees, then later on he cannot return the money and comes back home.

One day I had a dream: I was returning from my in-laws' house. There was a sawmill. I saw my brother and his friend. They had been tied up. I asked, "What happened? Why are you tied up?" "I think we have stolen something. We took something, and now they are keeping us tied up." What was I to do? I went and loosened the cord. A guard came and said, "Hey girl! Why did you loosen the rope?" I set them free and told them, "Run! Run!" My brother and his friend, how they ran! Then I was caught. "We won't leave you! You freed your brothers!" Weeping and crying, my dream ended. I looked around – where am I? What happened? I was lying in my bed.

43.rape

Sara recounts dreams of violence and pain. Recorded in October 2003.

I am asleep. Dreaming, I see that I had gone a long way away. I had made beautiful houses there, very beautiful houses. Having built the houses, I was staying there. I had left my home place. Somebody had taken me there. Having gone there, he had built many houses, and I lived there. Then I realized that I was remembering my own home. Mother was there, Father was there, my brothers and sisters were all there. Then I woke up and I saw that there was no one. I was sleeping here. "Here" meaning right in this room. Then I had another dream that someone took me far away into a jungle. Having taken me into this jungle, he tied me to a tree. Having tied me up, he asked, "What do you do for work? What are you doing? Whatever you're earning, give it to me!"

The boy that I had kept in my life gave me no peace. He took me away, tied me up, he wanted to take everything, wanted to kill me. I said, "Take whatever there is, but don't kill me". Then I woke up and found that I was in my room.

I always have these worries and have recurring dreams where I have two or three children. In the dream I play with the girl, suckle her, carry her around. When I wake up, there is nobody. And sometimes – why does this happen? – I see fruit in my dreams: mangos, lychees, jackfruit – I see many types of fruit. I see snakes, I see frogs, and I ask, "Why am I having this dream?" And they say, "This dream is about having children. You see these sorts of dreams before conceiving a child".

I have a dream where someone takes me far away and leaves me there. In the dream I see that someone is taking me very far away. He has come to beat me or kill me, to cut me up. Then, sometimes, I am being taken away from my home. I have many dreams like this. I am lying down. All of a sudden somebody calls me, "Sara, come here! Sara, come here!" I'm going, I'm going, I'm going – I go very far. Then suddenly I wake up and see there is nobody anywhere. Sometimes I worry: why do I have these dreams? I can't explain it.

One day I was sleeping, and all of a sudden my mother called me. My mother called me, I woke up and found that nobody was in the room. Sometimes in my dreams I see my father, I see my mother, I see my child. I see lots of people in my dreams. Sometime I feel as if I have died. Then, after an hour or two, when I wake up, I see there is nobody anywhere. I see lots of fruit.

Sometimes, I see that someone is taking me away, someone is coming to kill me. These are the kinds of dreams I have. I have these dreams all the time. Somebody trying to force me: "Give me what you have!" I have this type of dream. I have so many stories to tell about my life. After all, ever since childhood I've had many difficulties. There was this man who brought me here and left me to do this evil work. Sometimes I have dirty dreams. I see that someone comes, and drunkenly takes his pleasure with me. I have these types of dreams. Once I dreamt that I had been taken somewhere, and four or five boys were raping me. Once, while sleeping very deeply, I dreamt that a man came and took me away to some jungle, where five or six boys raped me. They hurt me and cut me with daggers and other weapons. That's enough, stop.

44.murderers

Sara's friends try to murder her in a dream. Recorded in October 2003.

One or three days ago, two days ago, I was sleeping in my room and I had a dream. Two or three of my friends had come. I don't know why they hated me so much. They were full of hate. My friends called to me, "Let's go out!"

They had come to kill me. They had left knives and everything in a jungle and then they came to my home. They planned to kill me with those knives. I didn't understand. They came and said, "Sara, come!"

I went and saw an open field with the jungle behind. They had hidden the knives to kill me there. They told me to sit down: "Sit!" I asked, "Why do you hate me, why so much hate? Why did you bring me here, and why do you want to kill me?" "You will find out." "What will you do, we have nothing to do with each other? Whatever you want to tell me you could have told me at home." They said, "We need you here".

Then I saw that two or three people were hiding over there, armed with knives. I was sure they wanted to kill me. "What harm have I done to you?" I said, "Wait! I want to pee". "No, you cannot go." Their plan was to kill me. They wanted to murder me. "I have to pee." They said, "One of us will accompany you." "Come on, then." I entered a thicket. Thanks to my excuse, I managed to escape. I ran from thicket to thicket. They followed, looking for me, searching for me everywhere: "Where has she gone? Where has she gone?"

I ran and finally reached the road. I saw two or three people walking ahead of me. I said, "They called me away from home in order to kill me. I don't know what grudge they have against me, but they are determined to kill me."

Those people said, "All right, you stand here". Then they told me to go: "You go! If anyone comes, we will see."

From there I ran and ran and escaped. I reached home. At home, I told everyone what had happened. I said: "They took me away to kill me. I don't know why they hate me." "All right. We will ask them in the morning."

But those people were afraid, and early in the morning they ran away. After that, I slept in my room. When the day dawned, I heard the crows cawing. The crows were cawing, I woke up, and I saw that there was no one anywhere and that I was sleeping in my room. That was a dream I had.

45.boatmen-song

Bhatiali song, i.e. a song originally performed by boatmen travelling downstream on Bengal's rivers like the Brahmaputra and Hugli; "bhata" meaning ebb or downstream. This song was sung by Sara in November 2005.

In sorrow my life has passed, / my forehead shows no happiness. / Enduring sorrow since the time of my birth; / my forehead is burned black; / this is the person I am.

46.ferryman

Sara speaks about the boat landing place on Tolly Canal (Adi Ganga: the "Ancient Ganges") where, depending on the water level, large wooden barges connect the Eastern Kalighat and the Western Chetla areas as either ferries or else, tied together, as a somewhat shaky pontoon bridge. Recorded in October 2003.

When there is water, the boats are poled by the ferrymen. When it's dry, the boats are tied up. Having drunk, the ferrymen lie in their boats. All the offerings and rituals that take place are thrown into Ganga. People come from distant places to make their offerings. In the temple, some give flowers, some give money. They throw all that into the Ganga. There is a lot of water in the Ganga. When the tide reaches Babughat, a lot of water comes in. When the water arrives, the fishermen work their boats. When the tide has passed, they tie up the boats in a line. Then people walk across them on their own.

Ganga water is not good. All the drains and dirt goes into the water. But when the tide reaches Babughat, a little fresh water comes in. The water doesn't last long; it only stays about half an hour or fifteen minutes, then the water recedes. When it rains heavily, there is a lot of water, and it floods people's homes. Then the water recedes.

Ganga water is full of sewage. Dirty water. So what? In this very water people bathe, give their offerings, wash things. The flowers from the temple, the garbage – it is all thrown into Ganga. Of course they do not throw dead bodies in there. They just throw the garbage, and people come from afar to make their offerings. Many communities come, from Bihar, and perform their offerings there, with that water. However dirty it is, they have to use that water, because they think that Ganga water is holy. They do these things in line with their beliefs. In spite of everything, so many people take this water away and say, "This is Ganga water, it's holy". But that is not the real Ganga water. The real water comes and goes. They bathe in that dirty water, they do everything in that dirty water.

When the tide comes in at Babughat, the ferrymen ply their trade. You have to pay 25 paise to get to the other side. Now they have tied them up. Those who work the boats drink liquor. When they tie the boats up, they are free. When the water is in, they work the boats, and when the water is out, they rest.

47.crows-cawing

Kolkata's ubiquitous crows, recorded in April 2004.

48.crows

Sara describes the good and bad qualities of Kolkata's ubiquitous crows. Recorded in October 2003.

Crows are very bad, the worst of all animals. They eat everything. When cows die, dogs eat them, when birds die, dogs eat them, so do crows. They eat everything. But when a crow dies, dogs don't eat them. Nothing eats them. Crows are dirty; very, very dirty. When the weather is hot, they dry up. And in winter they become beautiful. When it rains, they feel happy. In the cold, they feel happy. When it rains – happy. And then they become beautiful.

The lives of humans become beautiful when the rains start, or when winter starts. For crows it's the same. When it is hot, they suffer. They lose their feathers; they dry up. But when it is cold, they shine.

And what do they eat? They eat the corpses of cows, corpses of goats, corpses of dogs. If humans die they eat them, if snakes die they eat them; crows eat anything that dies. But when a crow dies, nothing eats its flesh. No animal eats it. When a crow dies, its flesh shrivels up and just stays there. Not even ants eat it. It is so nasty, so bitter, so full of gas! Nobody eats crow flesh. Crows eat every creature's flesh. The crow is the dirtiest animal of all.

There is one more point. Crows are very good in one sense. If someone is about to come to my home, the crows let me know beforehand. When a crow goes "kai, kai, kai, kai," it means that someone is coming. That's a good thing.

When crows converse with each other, all the crows come and gather in one place, and they have their discussion. We cannot understand who their leader is. When all the crows have assembled, one large crow arrives, and that is the leader. All the crows sit together and talk in their own language to their hearts' content. God knows what they are saying. And then, when the leader flies off, all the other crows leave.

So many people feed the crows. They give them cooked rice, biscuits, bread. Why do they feed them? Because when something happens, crows give you an early warning. Sitting on the roof or sitting on the door, they say, "kai, kai, kai, kai!" People understand that surely someone is coming. Crows tell them. In that way, crows are good. But from another perspective, crows are very bad. No one eats their flesh, it's the worst of all. Crows eat every type of flesh. But nothing eats crow's flesh. It's bitter and disgusting.

49.single-crow

This crow spoke a different language. Recorded in October 2003.

50.storm

Naisha remembers a dramatic dream featuring a violent storm and a double-mouthed, fire-breathing snake. Recorded in October 2003.

I was sleeping, and there was ferocious wind and rain. My clothes were hanging outside, and the storm blew them away. My home was a mud hut. I was sleeping in the mud hut.

I can't describe that terrible storm. I could see no one. I got up and asked myself, "What's happening? So much rain and wind?!" Then someone said: "There was a storm".

I went out to look for my clothes. They had gone. Then I said, "I was sleeping. Why didn't I see the storm and the rain?" I got up and saw water all around me. The potholes had turned into puddles. I looked up at the sky.

In the sky I saw an enormous snake with its mouth wide open. Fire poured out of its mouth.

Then the storm returned and carried everything away. All of them saw it! And I didn't?! After the fire came out of the snake's mouth, the storm returned. Then my heart began to pound: dadadh, dadadh... That was one dream I had.

51.snakes

Sara talks about people's fear of snakes and snakes' fear of humans. Recorded in October 2003.

Everyone feels frightened when they see a snake. When a snake sees a human being it feels afraid, too. Why does a snake fear a human being? Because it understands that, "If I let him see me, he will kill me". The human being thinks, "If I let it see me, perhaps it will bite me". But small snakes, snakes which are found in the water and others, are fine. They don't have any venom.

The worst snakes are the black vipers and cobras. If those snakes bite someone, bite a person's hand or another limb, you have to bind that limb to prevent the venom from seizing the entire body. If the venom gets hold of their body, the person will die. If you get a black viper or cobra bite you will die. If it bites your foot, you need to tie the foot. If you don't, then the venom will take hold of their body and the person will die. But a snake will not bite everyone. It only bites people in whose fate it is written.

Tiger – view / snake script

If a tiger sees a person, it will attack them. A snake does not bite unless it is written in someone's fate. If it is written that the snake will bite the person; no matter where they are, it will bite them.

If it is not written in your destiny, the snake might even enter your room, come near your bed, but it won't bite. It is not right to simply kill every snake. If you try to strike it, it will strike back. If it does you harm, then you kill it. When it has done you no harm and you try to kill it, you must die.

Snake venom is very dangerous. If a snake bites someone and the venom spreads around their body, then that person won't survive. You have to call a shaman to brush them with leaves. The venom

needs to be neutralized. If it can be neutralized within half an hour, then the person will survive. But if the venom takes over the body, that person will die.

If the black viper and the cobra bite... There is one more: the laudanka – that snake flies. It lives in the foliage of plantain trees. It is slim, thin, green in colour. It only bites you in the forehead. It flies at you and strikes. The moment it strikes you on the forehead, you die instantly. This snake can rarely be seen – very, very rarely. It flies about like a bird. It lives among pumpkin creepers and in plantain trees. It hides in the pumpkin creepers where nobody can see it.

The big pythons and other types of snakes don't bite humans. Water snakes only eat fish. They don't bite human beings, they are fine. Black vipers and cobras are really dangerous. But they only bite those in whose fate it is written. They don't bite other people. But everyone runs away when they see a snake, afraid that, "If it sees me, it will strike me". The snakes are equally frightened and say, "Flee! Flee!"

If humans see a snake, they take sticks and bush knives, they cut it to pieces and kill it. But the snake thinks, "I did not intend to bite them, why have they come to kill me?" And it flees for its life.

Snakes shouldn't be killed thoughtlessly. But humans don't understand that. The moment they see one, they kill it. "It is evil, it's an enemy. It bites human beings and eats them." So the moment they see a snake, they kill it.

52.snake-dreams

Sara talks about the frequent occurrence of snakes in dreams. Recorded in October 2003.

Perhaps in your dream you see a snake. You are asleep, and snakes approach from everywhere. I was deep in a forest with lots of snakes. I was asleep, and lots of snakes came near. I went far into the jungle, and snakes were everywhere. To see snakes in a dream is very good! But then, some people say that seeing a snake in your dream is bad. Why do people see snakes in dreams? I don't know.

Many people see snakes in their dreams. A snake, or a tree full of fruit, and then you go somewhere and you see a festival, a market. Snakes gathering from all directions, and you sit there surrounded by snakes: "Snakes have come to bite me. I'm playing with snakes".

People say that seeing a snake means that a child will enter your womb. I don't know whether it is good or bad to see snakes in dreams. You should ask someone. As a matter of fact, truly, snakes are often seen in dreams.

53.brassband1

A brass band in Kolkata's Mahatma Gandhi Road, recorded on 2 November 1996.

54.hawkers1

Hawkers on Chowringhee Road, recorded on 12 June 1997.

55.bus-accident

Sara speaks about Kali who, still today, demands an annual human sacrifice in West Bengal's Murshidabad District by means of a fatal traffic accident. Recorded in November 2005.

Before reaching Murshidabad there is Kali's house. Year after year something happens there, someone dies. Taking the shape of a person, a girl maybe, she appears, and then there is an accident. And Kali, having drunken the blood, calms down.

Two months ago a bus coming from Bokultala was passing Ghorimatala where Kali lives. There is a banyan tree there where a temple has been built.

A girl, maybe Kali, was walking there and the bus crashed, trying to avoid her. Twenty people were affected; five were admitted to hospital and fifteen were killed. The bus ran over some of their heads, and their brains spilled out; it ran over their chests, and their hearts spilled out; it ran over their faces, and their faces were smashed in. That's how fifteen people died.

Five people went to hospital. The fifteen who died were taken to the police station and covered with plastic. Those who had their addresses with them had their addresses written on their chests so that their relatives could take away their corpses. Five bodies didn't have an address with them – no letters, no papers, nothing was found. There was no information on those five corpses about who they were, where they lived, where their homes were, where they came from, what purpose they had for travelling. People who saw the news on TV came and took away the corpses. The five corpses that had no information about their homes were immersed in the Ganges after the post-mortem.

Every year something like this happens near that Kali Temple – there is an accident. A bus accident, a motorbike accident – whatever it is, at least one person dies. Kali demands one, consumes them. Due to this it was decided that money would be collected and a ritual sacrifice would be performed.

If this was not done, people would continue to die there, one by one. Some time ago there was a bus crash and four people died. Kali had taken the form of an old woman and, trying to avoid her, the bus had crashed. When this happens, people – four, five, two or one – die. Two months ago many people died, fifteen people altogether. People were shocked and decided to perform a big sacrifice, so that there would be peace.

56.kali

Sara recounts the legend of Kali. Recorded in April 2004.

Kali was a good girl. She was a good human being. But back then, when she was on earth, Kali was a very bad-tempered person. Very short-tempered. She killed lots of people, all over the world. Anyone who went out – she just killed them. Then Lord Shankar started to ponder, "If she kills all the people in the world, who will be left to worship us? Who will worship us? No one will give offerings to us".

Then he thought: "Kali... I'll have to find a solution. Otherwise Kali's anger will not cool". Lord Shankar was thinking, "This anger has got to be cooled down. Otherwise she'll kill all the humans, and who will worship us then?" Shankar thought: "I must find a solution and cool Kali's anger". Meanwhile Kali was killing, killing, killing.

She returned home. For some time Kali stayed in the house, and when she thought about going out and killing people again, Lord Shankar lay down outside the door: "As soon as Kali steps over me, her anger will cool".

Kali got ready; she dressed up very elaborately in her room. She took her sword to kill people and drink their blood. She drank the blood of all the people she killed.

Lord Shankar lay down outside the door. He lay down a little way off, in an open space. Kali dressed up to go out. She came out. Lord Shankar was lying there but Kali didn't see him. Kali put her foot on Lord Shankar's chest and said, "What's happened?" She saw Lord Shankar lying there: "What have I done?" Kali's tongue came out and her anger cooled. The moment she put her foot on Lord Shankar, her tongue came out and she said, "What have I done? I have committed a great injustice". Kali's anger cooled.

Then Lord Shankar said, "You must give up this violence and killing so that people will love us and worship us". So Kali gave up all her slaughtering and killing. She sat peacefully in her abode. Then all the humans said, "Kali has become good. Now we will worship her".

From that time on people have worshipped Kali. They bow down before her and love her.

57.kali-song

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal sings a song dedicated to the Goddess Kali. Recorded on 20 August 2006.

Oh Shyama, Kali, come dancing to me; / Mother I will go with you! / Golden bells around your red feet – / I can hear their jingle. / I call you oh Mother, oh Mother and sit up in your lap; / peace I will find in your lap.

Oh Shyama, Kali, come dancing to me; / Mother I will go with you!

Are you really dangerous, / oh Shyama Ma, oh Mother, / and make us fear the darkness? / I will spend my days / chanting Kali, Kali, Kali. / Oh Shyama, Kali, come dancing to me; / Mother I will go with you!

58.kolkata

Baul singer Vishnupada Das speaks about the recent changes to what he calls Kolkata – the capital of West Bengal – and Kalighata, the city of the Mother Goddess Kali. Recorded on 27 October 2003.

In the past, the city of Kolkata was good. Once upon a time Kolkata was a good city. Now Kolkata has turned into two cities. Kalighata is no longer Kali's place. It is a place of cunning. Too much deviousness. The prestige and dignity of the past are no longer there, people have changed. The city has changed as well. Kalighata also has various aspects. Kalighata is still Kali's place, but the people have changed. Kali's city is good, I like it. It is my birth place, naturally I like it!

The city of Kalighata is good. But the crowds of people have changed it so much. Our mother at Kalighata is an attentive mother. If you call upon her, she responds. But now – what have we done? We have surrounded her with secrecy. Mother was never secretive. By making her secretive, we are destroying Kolkata.

So many people are there. When you go there, they demand money. I may want to go and perform a good offering, but I will not be able to do it.

This fellow says, "give me something," that fellow says, "give me something," another fellow pulls me aside – all this is happening. She is shrouded in secrecy. There is no secrecy. Mother was never

secretive. Whereas in Dakhineshwar you join the queue and make your offering. You make your offering according to your wishes. It's not possible to do that here. "You want to make your offering? Come, sit down here. I'll do it for you." "How will you do my offering? You have not made your own offering, so how do you expect to do mine?"

But I have to give it, I cannot avoid it. Which is why I say that she has been shrouded in secrecy. Mother is a mother. She never moved away. Since we have become greedy, we are doing all this. Kalighata is Kalighata, Dharamtala is Dharamtala, it hasn't changed. Dalhousie is Dalhousie, that hasn't changed.

Everything is all right; only we humans are not. That is why there is so much cheating in Kolkata now. Kalighata is Kalighata. Kolkata is the capital – there is no capital greater than Kalighata. Kalighata used to be a very peaceful city. We have turned it into a city of violence.

59.big-city

Painted scroll song performed by scroll artists Manimala and Swarna Chitrakar from Naya in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur District. Recorded on 2 November 2005. For further information on the two singers see Kaiser, Painted Songs (2012: 46, 166pp.).

Strange happenings in Kolkata – / how should I find words, brother? / I feel like laughing, I feel like crying – / listen one and all! / Howrah Bridge is a thing which strikes terror – / thousands and thousands of vehicles pass over this bridge. / Listening to tales about this bridge I am amazed; / thinking about it, I cannot think any more. / How much will I think, oh my heart! / I saw the underground train and almost died: / they have opened the earth to let a train run underground – / this is amazing news! / Hearing these facts, I wrote a poem; / I still don't get to eat – tell me why, oh God! / I came to Kolkata, hoping I could sell scrolls. / The gentleman who had called me did not even speak to me; / I had hoped the gentleman would take a scroll and give me money, / but he took nothing. / Kindly, the gentleman gave me a useless address; / I took the address and wandered about – / I could not find the office. / People like this live in Kolkata, / but there are very generous people as well; / when I talk about them, I feel like crying.

60.begging-song

Performed by scroll artists Manimala and Swarna Chitrakar from Naya in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur District. Recorded on 2 November 2005. For further information on the two singers see Kaiser, Painted Songs (2012: 46, 166pp.).

Give us something, you city dwellers – / that's why we've come to Kolkata. / You are my relatives – / that's why we've come to you. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / that's why I've come to you / to sing songs in scroll paintings. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / I will satisfy you. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / you are my relatives. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / that's why we've come to Kolkata. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / we have a really miserable life at home. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / we've come here to earn money to feed our children. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / that's why we've come here to sing songs on port painting. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / that's why we left our village and came to the city. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / we've come here risking our lives on the busy roads. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / there is no end to our misery. / Give us something, you city

dwellers – / you are my relatives. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / we have not come here permanently, / we will go away. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / have mercy on us! / Give us something, you city dwellers – / that's why we've come to Thomas. / Give us something, you city dwellers. / We pray that Thomas will take us to his land. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / give us some money. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / then we might live happily with our children. / Give us something, you city dwellers – / you are my relatives. / Give us something, you city dwellers.

Namashkar!

61.hawkers2

Hawkers on Chowringhee Road, recorded in June 1998.

62.brassband2

A brass band on Kolkata's Mahatma Gandhi Road. Recorded on 2 November 1996.

63.chhath-procession

Procession during *Chhath Puja*, a festival expressing gratitude for the life-giving force of the Sun and his sister Chhathi Maiya. Recorded in early November 2002.

64.drummers

Just before *Kali Puja*, the annual celebration of the goddess Kali, groups of Dom caste drummers stand along Hazra Road near the old Kali Temple, demonstrating their musical skills and waiting for engagements. Recorded on 31 October 2002.

65.drummers

Just before *Kali Puja*, the annual celebration of the goddess Kali, groups of Dom caste drummers stand along Hazra Road near the old Kali Temple, demonstrating their musical skills and waiting for engagements. Recorded on 31 October 2002.

66.drummers

Just before *Kali Puja*, the annual celebration of the goddess Kali, groups of Dom caste drummers stand along Hazra Road near the old Kali Temple, demonstrating their musical skills and waiting for engagements. Recorded on 31 October 2002.

67.drummers

Just before *Kali Puja*, the annual celebration of the goddess Kali, groups of Dom caste drummers stand along Hazra Road near the old Kali Temple, demonstrating their musical skills and waiting for engagements. Recorded on 31 October 2002.

68.drummers

Just before *Kali Puja*, the annual celebration of the goddess Kali, groups of Dom caste drummers stand along Hazra Road near the old Kali Temple, demonstrating their musical skills and waiting for engagements. Recorded on 31 October 2002.

69.immersion

At the end of *Kali Puja* the Kali idols which adorn the streets and lanes of Kolkata during the festival are carried in festive processions to the bank of the Hugli river and immersed there at Babughat. Recorded in early November 2002.

70.human-life

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 26 August 2006.

Do you think / that nobody knows / what you do in this world? / Human life in all its beauty will never return. / Whatever you do in your life / is recorded in Chitrugupta's book. / Justice will be done by the Lord; / you cannot avoid his eyes. / Human life in all its beauty will never return; / you cannot just come and go in this world. / Human life in all its beauty will never return. / Whatever you hide in your mouth, / is all the more revealing; / do not insult / the heaven of your heart. / Be wary, oh mind, and lead this life; / night follows day; / man is God, his incarnation. / Bhaba says, "Open your eyes and see"; / human life in all its beauty will never return.

71.cabin

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 27 October 2003.

People call me Baul. / I do not require cow's milk; / inside myself, I am reborn again and again. / People call me Baul. / I beg from door to door. / Whatever I receive, it suffices; / I've never asked for the shine of comfort's star. / My lute is my friend for life; / it helps me overcome sorrow. / People call me Baul. / A small cottage is good enough for me; / in it there is heaven and hell, / and heaven dances in joy. / I am not bound by rituals; / I just ask, "Which way should I go? / How should I live this life?" / Inside the cottage is a world – / a world of joy! / Birth happens again and again; / people call me Baul.

72.baul

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 26 August 2006.

Everyone calls me Baul; / but I have not been able to become a Baul. / Tell me, how can I endure such pain? / Everyone calls me Baul; / but I have not been able to become a Baul. / Even though I wear saffron garb, / carry a lute in my hand, / and leave my house wearing sacred beads – / I am unable to free myself from cravings and desire. / Everyone calls me Baul; / but I have not been able to become a Baul. / My mind searches for fame, wealth and books; / I run the risk of forgetting you. / I don't know if I'll ever return to this world; / my birth will be meaningless if I return with empty bags. / Let my soul be the soul of a Baul; / how long shall I wander in my meaningless disguise? / Everyone calls me Baul; / but I have not been able to become a Baul. / Tell me, how can I endure such pain? / Everyone calls me Baul.

73.body

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 20 August 2006. The song seems to have been composed by the famous Lalon Fakir, who was born in the late 18th century.

Silently, God lives in the cage of your body; / tell me, have you seen him? / I am unfortunate; / tell me, have you seen him? / Silently, God lives in the cage of your body. / I went to the cremation place; / when I returned home, I found Him. / Every day we hear about someone who has died; / but does he go to the burning place? / Silently, God lives in the cage of your body. / Four corpses of four religions adrift on four sides of the river; / when Lalon heard about these deaths, / he immersed himself in the ultimate goal of life. / Silently, God lives in the cage of your body; / tell me, have you seen him? / I am unfortunate; / tell me, have you seen him? / Silently, God lives in the cage of your body.

[Speaking:] Lalon Fakir speaks; he says that he cannot see God, so he asks everyone if they are able to see Him. My body lives or dies, but my soul perseveres. This is the spiritual message he spreads to the people so that they can understand the magnanimity of the Almighty. After we die, we all go to the same place; religion makes no difference. And the soul unites with God.

74.clay

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal performs a self-composed song. Recorded on 19 March 1996.

[Speaks] Let me sing a song which I have composed.

This body of clay will burn into ashes; / this body of mine is rotten anyway – / why should it make me proud?

[Speaks] One who is rich and enjoys having property – why should he care for a poor person like me?

Just as the idol-maker makes images with straw and clay, / God made me in flesh and blood. / My blood is full of insects; the insects keep gnawing on me. / Where will the cot remain, the mattress and bed? / Within a few days we all will reach the same destination. / One is a king, the other a pauper; / we will all go to the burning place.

75.field

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 26 August 2006.

This field belongs to someone else; / it is where I toil, / but I am not its owner. / The owner of this field / will not let me / see Him; / who can I tell about my sorrow? / I cannot meet Him; / who can I tell about my sorrow? / I am not the owner of the field.

I do not allow Him to cultivate this land according to His wishes; / that is why it does not yield crops; / oh Guru, I suffer throughout the year. / I have paid the rent, / but still this field is being auctioned. / Even though I try to impress Him; / He still does not answer my calls. / I am not the owner of the field; / this field belongs to someone else.

Crying out of distress throughout the year; / then He comes. / I have sowed and harvested the crops / and handed them to the Guru. / Even after working hard in this field, / I cannot enjoy the crops. / Fakir Lalon says, "I cannot reach him; / when I call, he does not answer". / I am not the owner of the field.

76.alone

Recording of Manimala Chitrakar, a scroll artist from Paschim Medinipur District of West Bengal. We had invited her and her colleague Swarna Chitrakar for a recording session in our hotel in South Kolkata and at one point asked if they knew any other songs besides their customary scroll performance songs. Complying with our request, they sang several of their own Muslim community's songs. This recording was made on 2 November 2005.

You keep calling home "home", / but it is not your home. / Your real home is your coffin; / but you keep calling home "home". / You have come all alone and you will go all alone, / no one will go with you; / your brothers and friends will stay behind. / How beautiful is this woman! / Lying in her coffin, / her beauty and youth have left her; / it's all turned to dust. / Whoever feels proud about their beauty and youth – / come to the coffin and see! / Where will Father and Mother reside? / They remain in my heart. / I will leave and go away; / how can I express what I feel? / You made your home with diamonds and pearls, / you dream on a bed made of diamonds. / But you have to leave and go. / You keep calling home "home", / but it is not your home. / Your real home is your coffin; / but you keep calling home "home".

77.peacock

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 19 March 1996. This song belongs to a category of esoteric Baul songs called *ulto baul* (*ulto*: reverse), the meanings of which are only known to members of the Baul community. See also track 79.

See the dance – see the peacock dance! / My mother did not give birth to me; / I was born from another womb; / I was not born in a room or on the ground. / On the bank of a dried-up river, / a frog sits on the head of a snake, / and nearby the peacock keeps dancing. / A lady aged eighty / instigated a love affair between mother and son. / This song was written by Uncle Halin / whose house is in Borishal. / Thinking about these bizarre events, / Halin left his home and family. / While committing a theft, / the thief was caught and tried; / the trial took place before the high court; / but the three judges were dead.

78.mad

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 19 March 1996. The singer's reference to his disregard of "Chaitanya on his chariot" hints at a conflict between followers of Shiva and those of Vishnu/Krishna. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a Bengali mystic and leading exponent of Vaishnavite practice during the 15th and 16th centuries. His own hagiography connects him to the Rath Yatra, the big chariot festival of Puri (Odisha) in honour of Lord Jagannath (i.e. Vishnu/Krishna).

I did not become mad for nothing; / I couldn't find a real madman to my liking. / Open your eyes and you will find fake madmen in every country, / oh Shiva! / Only a few of those are genuine. / Some people are mad about property, / and some are mad about women. / Some are mad about riches, / some are mad about fame, / but who is mad about reality? The real madman dances with the guru; / that is the root of real madness. / Brahma is mad, and so is Vishnu; / another madman proves elusive: / Shiva is mad and lives in crematoriums, / he intoxicates himself with *bhang* and datura. / I yearn to join him and become mad myself! / I will not pay attention to Chaitanya on his chariot. / I couldn't find a real madman to my liking; / that is why I couldn't become really mad myself!

79.worlds-egg

Another example of an esoteric *ulto baul* song. Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 19 March 1996. See also track 77.

Have you heard the funny story / about the elephant who passed through the eye of a needle? / It's very strange indeed.

[Speaks] The meaning here is the same as in the fakir song about the bird sitting in a flower garden, singing the name of Allah. It talks about a bird, but you have to consider which came first – the bird or yourself.

Reaching the market of Gourlila, I am surprised: / there is a moringa tree bearing mangos; / the mangos contain black plum seeds, / and out of those seeds grow saplings. / Look, inside an egg there are fourteen worlds and markets, / as well as a duck and a drake; / here the four aeons have converged in one spot. / And inside this egg another egg; / it is very strange indeed.

80.bird-cage

This one, and the next two songs also seem to be compositions by Lalon Fakir. As is common in some forms of orally-transmitted folk songs in India even today, Lalon has quasi-signed his songs by mentioning his own name in the lyrics. This performance was by Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 26 August 2006.

The unknown bird inside the cage – / how does it come and go? / If I could catch the bird / I would chain it up inside my mind; / how does the bird come and go? / The cage's door is tightly shut, / but there are cracks. / Oh come, bird with bells around your legs. / The unknown bird inside the cage – / how does it come and go? / It is your fate, / or else you would have understood that the bird is of your doing. / One day, breaking out of the cage, my bird / will hide in the forest. / The unknown bird inside the cage – / how does it come and go? / Oh my mind, you wait for the cage to approach you, /

but you are not prepared. / "We do not know when the cage will break", / Lalon says, crying, "oh bird," Lalon says, crying. / The unknown bird inside the cage – / how does it come and go? / If I could catch the bird / I would chain it up inside my mind; / how does the bird come and go?

81.caste1

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 20 August 2006.

Society wonders about Lalon's caste; / I have wandered the world / but I did not find a guru of my caste; / society wonders about Lalon's caste. / Through circumcision, a boy becomes Muslim; / what becomes of the girl? / A Brahmin man is recognized by his sacred thread, / but, God, how do I recognize a Brahmin woman? / Society wonders about Lalon's caste. / The garlands of sacred beads have different names, / but do they help to distinguish the castes? / Where are the marks of caste in our comings and goings? / Oh Guru – where are the marks of caste in our comings and goings? / Society wonders about Lalon's caste. / I have seen realities of caste all across the world. / Lalon says, "God, I have distributed love in society while ignoring caste". / Society wonders about Lalon's caste.

82.caste2

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 26 August 2006.

Oh my caste, it is gone! / What's happened? / Oh my caste, it is gone! / No one is ready to follow the right path; / everyone hesitates. / Oh my caste, it is gone! / What's happened? / Oh my caste, it is gone! / What was your caste when you came; / what caste did you bring into this world? / What will your caste be when you will leave this world? / Think, my friend, and tell me. / Oh my caste, it is gone! / What's happened? / Oh my caste, it is gone! / Brahman, Chandal, Chamar, Muchi – / everyone bathes on the same riverbank; / does it rid them of their caste? / Oh my caste, it is gone! / What's happened? / Oh my caste, it is gone! / He who secretly eats at the house of a prostitute; / does it rid him of his caste? / Seeing this, Lalon says, "I have not seen the shape of caste". / Oh my caste, it is gone! / What's happened? / Oh my caste, it is gone! / No one is ready to follow the right path; / everyone hesitates.

83.allahs-garden

Baul singer Vishnupada Das from Dhakuria in the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, recorded on 19 March 1996.

There, sitting in an orchard, / a bird takes the name of Allah. / Flower garden all around, / with banners in all four corners. / The bird is flying in airy space; / its body is one colour, / but its wings are four colours, / and the Prophet's name is written on them. / Even though the bird has wings, / it doesn't fly, it walks on its feet. / And even though it has teeth, / it swallows its food without chewing. / The bird recites the Prophet's Koran.

84.drops-of-water

Song about the volatility of life, sung by Sara and recorded in November 2005.

A drop of water trembles on the leaf; / life is volatile, too. / It is impossible to know / when I will have to leave.

Who is your confidant / and who is the stranger? / Allah is my confidant, / and humans are the strangers.

Who will give you the tooth-cleaning spray, / and who will give you the earth? / Allah will give me the tooth-cleaning spray, / and humans will give me the earth.

85.fate

Sung by Sara, recorded in November 2005.

Whatever God has written in my fate – / no one can change. / What shall I do and where shall I go? / I cannot make it out. / Life is full of sorrow.

86.medina

Sung by scroll artists Manimala and Swarna Chitrakar from Naya in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur District; recorded on 2 November 2005.

We will go to our beloved Prophet's land, / so let us set sail! / We will go to the Prophet's land; / we will be able to touch his feet. / We will sail across without any problem; / let us pray and set sail. / The Lord of the two regions will see the community safely across; / we will kiss the feet of the Almighty. / We will go to our beloved Prophet's land, / so let us set sail! / Oh boatman, don't delay; / untie the boat, we will sail to Medina. / The Prophet came to the world; / when he wept he wept a thousand pearls, / when he laughed, he laughed diamonds. / Companions of the sage – / what is there for us to worry about? / In my heart the Ka'aba, / in my eyes Medina. / We will go to our beloved Prophet's land, / so let us set sail! / The Prophet's companions / will never know falsehood of the heart. / Later, oh my friend, you will see the Prophet. / What has been said by the sages – / there is no need to worry at all. / We will go to our beloved Prophet's land, / so let us set sail!

87.pride

From a recording session with Qawwali musicians Faiz Ahmed Faiz (harmonium, vocals) and Mantu Bose (tablas) on 23 August 2006 in Kolkata.

If you wish to take the name of Allah, / first you have to consider the Prophet. / Word is everything in this world; / word is Kalimah and Darud; / word is Koran. / There are 90,000 words in the Mi'rādsch spread by Asia Nabi. / Prophet Murshid says, "Human life is not meant for luxury; / you have responsibilities to exercise in this world". / You must not be proud of your beauty and wealth; / come here and listen to my words. / Who is an emperor and who is a beggar? / Everyone is human. / We come here for four days and then go back; / everything is fleeting; / everyone is human. / Why do you indulge in quarrels and forfeit prestige? / In the eyes of God, everyone is equal; / he distinguishes between good and bad. / There is still time; / take the name of the Prophet; / otherwise you will be without a home. / We come here for four days and then go back; / everything is fleeting. / Some people say that there was a temple, / some say that there was a mosque. / If you do not know

who you are, / then you are not a true human being; / everyone is human. / Who is an emperor and who is a beggar? / Everyone is human.

88.flute

From a recording session with Qawwali musicians Faiz Ahmed Faiz (harmonium, vocals) and Mantu Bose (tablas) on 23 August 2006 in Kolkata.

Life is full of disaster; / I am here for four days – / that is why I am scared of life. / I am a human being, / but I fear human beings.

[Speaks] Saints and clerics do not enjoy luxury in their lives. Similarly, we should learn to make sacrifices in our lives.

Come, let me give my life to someone else, / before death comes to me. / I cannot endure the blood.

[Speaks] My wishes are not fulfilled; I may have many wishes in life, but none of them becomes reality.

I would rather break my heart than see the one I love in sadness.

[Speaks] Let me lose everything, but let me see a smile on the face of my beloved God.

Life is like a flute. / A flute is useless without the holes. / Similarly, life without pain has no essence.

[Speaks] Even though life is full of sorrow, I cannot stop smiling. Since I have been born, I have to spend my days here.

Life is like a rented home; / eventually you have to move.

[Speaks] Life is temporary. One day we will have to leave this earthen structure.

Life is like a rented home; / eventually you have to move. / When death calls, / you have to leave this home.

[Speaks] Death does not forget anyone. What happened to the kings who owned the entire world?

What had happened to Sikander / who once said that, “This entire world belongs to me; / some say that this sky, along with its constellations of stars, belongs to me”?

[Speaks] Everyone says that, “this earth belongs to me, it all belongs to me, this wealth belongs to me,” but nobody says,

What is our final destiny? / When death calls, / you have to leave this home.

[Speaks] Night follow day, it will always continue like this. And we live in the hope that our life will continue tomorrow.

We live in the hope that day will follow night / but we cannot be sure we will see another day.

[Speaks] We have to toil hard to secure a good place in our eternal life. Only through hope can we achieve something in life, otherwise we will remain unsuccessful.

We live in the hope that day will follow night / but we cannot be sure we will see another day. / Before stepping onto a flowery path / you have to walk a thorny path. / The moment we die, our body has no importance. / Everyone can see that a candle keeps burning. / Has anyone realized that

it is the wick which is burning; / do you ever think about the wick's burning? / It is because the candle is full of sorrow; even the candle cries; / similarly, human beings cry.

[Speaks] The candle is a symbol of human life. We burn a candle at a mosque or temple because it reflects our life.

God says that everyone has to perform their duty. / Why does the candle cry? / Who will extinguish it? / You are destined to burn; / crying will not help. / All your life you have to endure sorrow. / Everyone, irrespective of religion, is born from the earth and returns to the earth after death.

[Speaks] Hindus are burnt to ashes after death, Muslims and Christians are buried.

Everyone, irrespective of religion, is born from the earth and returns to the earth after death. / Hindus are burnt to ashes after death, Muslims and Christians are buried. / Moonlit nights come for four days in our life; / all the rest is filled with darkness.

[Speaks] Every human being has four stages in their life: childhood, youth, middle age and old age.

This life is a short dream; / find someone to love for this time. / When life reaches death, / you have to repent for leading a life without joy.

[Speaks] Where in this world is true love?

Everyone can see how the candle keeps burning. / Has anyone realized that it is the wick which is burning; / do you ever think about the wick's burning? / It is because the candle is full of sorrow; even the candle cries; / similarly, human beings cry.

[Speaks] The little insects are born and live for a while; then they burn in the candle's flame and die. The same happens to humans. But even though it will kill us, the light attracts us. If you light a candle in the forest, all the insects will assemble around it.

Has anyone realized that it is the wick which is burning; / do you ever think about the wick's burning? / It is because the candle is full of sorrow; even the candle cries; / similarly, human beings cry. / The insect dying in the candle's flame asks, / "Why do you burn us to death?" / Oh candle – why do you burn? / Who will console you? / What is in your fate will inevitably happen. / You have to suffer throughout.

[Speaks] Today words have no value. Nobody can be trusted.

I gave a wedding dress to someone, / but he gave me the ceremonies. / From the moment of birth we talk about love, / but we do not know what it means; / we don't know what to expect. / You don't follow your parents' teachings; / you have to learn throughout your life while melting drop by drop. / Life is like a rented home; / eventually you have to move. / When death calls, / you have to leave this home.

89.waking-the-dead

From a recording session with Qawwali musicians Faiz Ahmed Faiz (harmonium, vocals) and Mantu Bose (tablas) on 23 August 2006 in Kolkata.

[Speaks] The power of a saint is so immense that it can bring a dead body back to life and make fruit grow on a barren tree.

The flames extinguish in his name; / only a saint can do it; / only a saint can create peace in Heaven. / Oh kind-hearted Prophet, / please help me overcome all my hurdles in life. / I cannot row this broken boat. / Oh kind-hearted Prophet, / please help me overcome all my hurdles in life. / You are the kind-hearted Prophet; / I tell you my wishes; / you listen to everyone, / so why not to me? / I will not leave you / if you do not listen to me now. / Oh kind-hearted Prophet, / please help me overcome all my hurdles in life. / I cannot row this broken boat. / Why did you come to this desert, leaving behind a luxurious life? / Why did you stay in the dark, plagued by mosquitos? / Oh kind-hearted Prophet, / please help me overcome all my hurdles in life. / I cannot row this broken boat. / Oh, the kind-hearted Prophet / will never fail this worshipper, / but He will not fulfil your every wish in spite of your sacrifices. / Oh kind-hearted Prophet, / please help me overcome all my hurdles in life. / I cannot row this broken boat.

90.wild-animal

From a recording session with Qawwali musicians Faiz Ahmed Faiz (harmonium, vocals) and Mantu Bose (tablas) on 23 August 2006 in Kolkata.

[Speaks] I will tell a story. One day Biswa Nabi, the Prophet, was walking along when he came across a hunter who had caught a deer. The deer prayed to Allah, saying, "Allah, if you grant me the power of speech, I will beg the Prophet for freedom from this hunter, because I have left my children behind and I have not seen them for so long". Allah granted her wish, and the deer said, "Biswa Nabi, release me from the grip of this hunter; I will return at once after visiting my children".

The Prophet told the hunter about the deer's request, but the hunter replied, "How can I trust her? I have caught her after a difficult chase. How can I let her go?" Then the hunter said that he would let her go because he was unable to refuse the Prophet's request. Biswa Nabi, who loves everyone in this world, said, "All right, let her go and tie me up instead. I will stay with you until she returns. I will follow your orders".

So the hunter thought, "That's not a bad idea. I can make the man do more work than an animal". And he let the deer go. The deer ran back to her children. When she met them, she said:

[Sings] For you I came back. Drink my milk, and then I will leave you.

[Speaks] Hearing this, the fawns replied, "Mother, you have only just come, and you are telling us to let you go after drinking milk from your breasts? What has happened to you?" Then the mother explained her situation:

[Sings] A hunter has caught me. How I managed to make him release me is another story. Mohammed, the Prophet of this world, helped to free me. He took my place, and I have to rush back once I've fed you.

[Speaks] Then the fawns began to cry and, after hearing what had happened to the Prophet, they told their mother:

[Sings] It is for us that the Prophet is in the hands of the hunter. We will not drink your milk, oh Mother. Please take us to the Prophet. Oh Mother, let us go right now; do not stop us. Rather than drink your milk we wish to touch the feet of the Prophet. Drinking the water of his feet will satisfy our hunger. Oh Mother, please take us to the Prophet – don't delay.

[Speaks] Then the mother told her children, “Oh my children, I am already in danger. Why do you want to go there?” But the fawns were determined to free Nabi first and only suckle afterwards. Seeing that her children were undaunted, she agreed to their request. She set out on her way through that forest with her fawns.

[Sings] Seeing the Prophet from a distance, the fawns asked their mother, “Is that our Prophet from Medina, Mother? Please take us to the Prophet, oh mother. Take us to the Prophet, oh mother. Please take us to the Prophet.” The hunter who stood in front of the Prophet did not realize who he was. But the fawns told their mother from a distance, “Is that our Prophet from Medina, Mother?”

[Speaks] Meanwhile, the hunter saw the deer approaching with her two fawns.

[Sings] He was excited to see all three together: “I will get three instead of one. I have never seen the wild animals of the forest obeying the orders of a human before. These three from the forest are innocent and blinded by love”. “Please take us to the Prophet, oh Mother, please take us to the Prophet.”

[Speaks] The hunter confessed his guilt to the Prophet: “I am sorry, I didn’t recognize you. Who are you? Please tell”.

[Sings] The hunter requested, “Oh, do let me know who you are. Generous as you are, who are you? I want to remain as your servant touching your feet”. “Please take us to the Prophet, oh Mother, please take us to the Prophet.”

[Speaks] When the hunter said that he wanted to become the Prophet’s servant, the prophet forgave him his sin and let the hunter read the Kalimah. After reading the Kalimah, the hunter underwent an inner change. He sent the deer back to her fawns.

[Sings] The wild animal has come back and changed the hunter’s life. Oh Prophet, listen to me. The wild animal has come back and changed the life of the hunter. Oh Prophet, listen to me. The hunter read the Kalimah and set the animal free. Abdul Karim became mad in love with God. “Please take us to the Prophet, oh Mother, please take us to the Prophet. It is for us that the Prophet is in the hands of the hunter. We will not drink your milk, oh Mother, please take us to the Prophet.”

91.street-beggar

A beggar walks along Chowringhee Road with the evening crowd, playing a simple, haunting tune on his harmonium. Recorded in June 1998.

92.street-dogs

Midnight at the old Kali Temple, recorded in October 2002.

93.nocturnal-bath

Night time near the old Kali Temple: a lone Saddhu takes a late bath in the Tolly Canal or, as the locals respectfully call it, Adi Ganga – the “Ancient Ganges”. Recorded in June 1998.