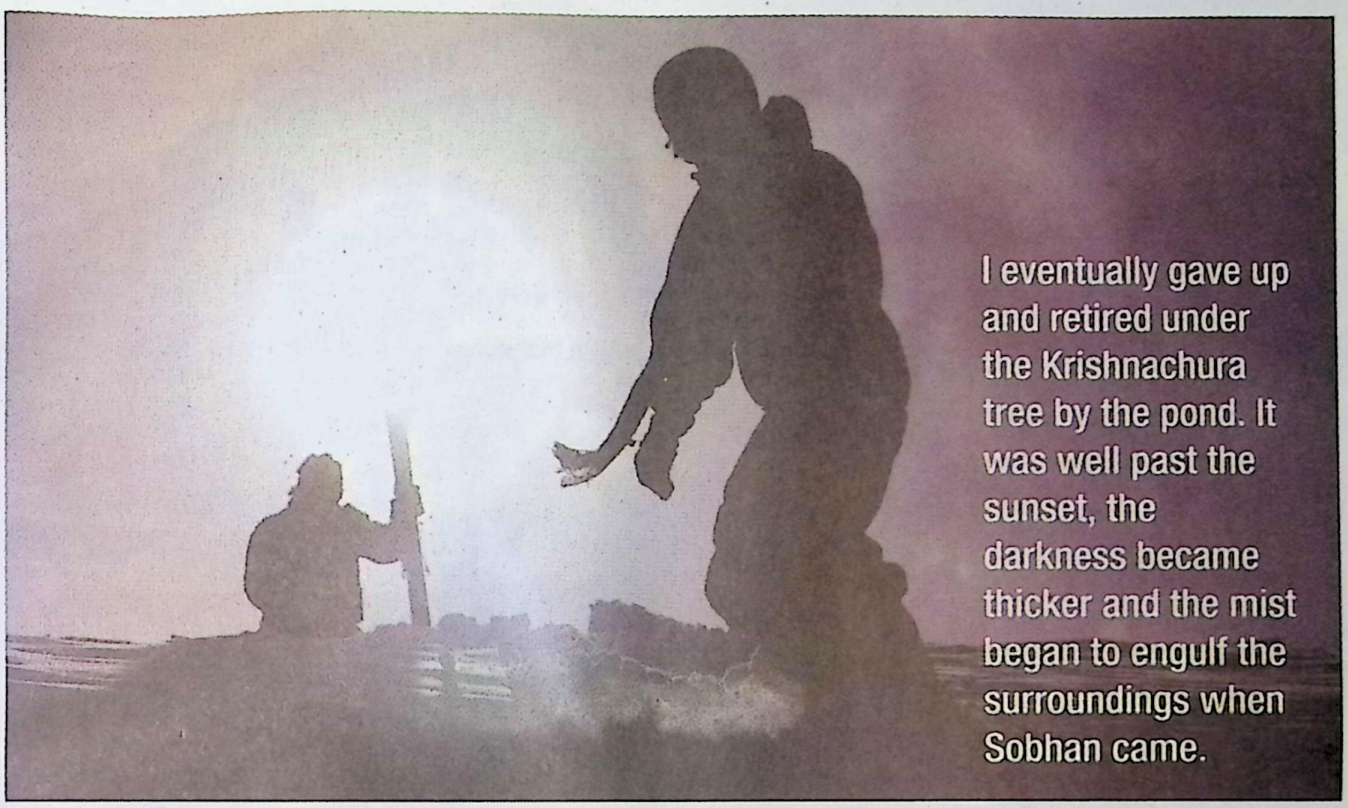


spreading it on the courtyard to dry. As I saw from my childhood a mood of elation prevails in all households during this great season.

The end of the day would mean all those who worked ceaselessly during the whole day would now take a break, sit in the courtyard or sit on the steps of the ghat by the pond. They would talk of the crop; it's past and present, stories associated with the harvest; some from their experience and some made in their imagination. All these small talks would reflect their happiness, their satisfaction and their sense of fulfilment. This year the usual cheerful spontaneity in them seemed lacking. I thought it was my imagination. We, the city dwellers, bring back our sense of restlessness and our bitterness back to the village and often think that they think the way we do. So, I did not allow myself to be led by my thoughts. I tried to enthuse others by being exuberant. It did not work as well as I thought it would. I eventually gave up and retired under the Krishnachura tree by the pond. It was well past the sunset, the darkness became thicker and the mist began to engulf the surroundings when Sobhan came. Sobhan is my neighbour. He is a menial labourer and lives from hand to mouth. Sobhan is also my friend though he does not want to sit before me out of reverence to the 'class' I belong to. I have to ask him to sit. He brings a piri from our kitchen and sits.

In his usual style he keeps quiet for a length of time. So I have to encourage him to talk. This time it was difficult for me to inspire him to converse. I think, for some reason, gloom had the better of him. After three cups of tea and a lot of persuading when I failed to make him talk and got up to go back to my room, he mumbled something. I sat back again. He cleared his throat and asked me in his characteristic modest manner, "Dada is there really going to be an election?" I said, "That to the best of my knowledge there was going to be an election." He said that then perhaps the prices of the essential commodities would become cheaper, wouldn't they? I said that I was not too sure of that. It depended on so many things really. He obviously could not follow me. His next question was if the election was going to be free and fair. I said, "why do you ask that question?" He said, "The problem is that in the past I have hardly been able to cast my vote." I said that well this time the election commission had assured us of a completely free and fair election. He asked, "But what if I am not allowed to go beyond my dwellings on the day of the election?" Why should you be worried, who wouldn't let you go to vote? I said. He said, "No I was trying to say that those that had bought off the votes in the past and would not let us vote; I hear that they have all been freed; if they...!" By now I had started to lose my patience and curtly said, "Look Sobhan, if you have so many ifs and buts in your mind; don't vote. You had a good harvest and be happy with that." Sobhan said, "But dada if I can't vote the harvest would become bitter. We'd be in the same dungeon that we were in. I left his company for the night because I had no answers." ■