

The Rakoshi Devis: A Play In Two Acts

- Payal Trivedi

To Those Who Inspired Me to be Fearless:

**My Parents, Goddess Tara and Revered Babaji,
My Guru Janardan Ghosh**

Forward: The Rakoshi Devis are the candid destructors of the *Man's* world. They are infamous as the *Impious Demons*. It's believed that their presence maligns the mind and as a result entirely corrupts the 'moral' sense. Their force devastates the 'order'. They are the indomitable, the unconquerable that is invoked during the voodoo practices or the tantric *pujas* and the most scary exorcisms. They are popular as the radical rebels, the unbridled devils that can only be controlled by resigning in front of their unprecedented power. No *Man* wants to submit but every *Man* has taken the decision to restrict the Rakoshi Devis to a strict circumference by the means of some *Mantric* practices. They cannot move out of the area in which they haunt. However, they do not leave any opportunity to kill any *Man* who happens to enter their vicinities.

Cast: Group of several Men
Woman I
Woman II
Woman III
Man

ACT I: Scene I

(The play has a jungle as the backdrop but absolutely no settings should denote a forest on the stage. There should be a symbolic indication of wilderness. The action takes place in the darkness of the night and except for the need to highlight the presence of the characters on the stage; there should be no variations in the lighting effects to create any particular impact in the presentation while the actors speak their dialogues. Instead, the intensity of the speech of the characters could be conveyed through the use of music which may act as an integral backdrop during the rendition but must not overpower the volume of the verbal expressions. Costumes should be extremely simple. Most importantly, though the Rakoshi Devis are not at all good-looking in the traditional sense, their ugliness must not supersede their unpleasant mannerisms during the performance of the play. They appear disgusting in fact, abnormal and induce horror every time they speak.)

The curtain lifts. A crowd comprised of several men looking at a corpse. It is evident from their sinister expressions and their interaction that they are severely worried.

“Shocking. The *sixth* in the row”!

“*Indeed. This is hideous*”!

“What *can* be done? We've tried our best but...”

“In vain”.

“Yes, in vain. We've not been able to do anything except *thwart* their *entry* into our premises”.

“Useless! It has *not* stopped them from this brutality. We are getting killed one after the other!”

“Yes. It is so unfortunate we are *helpless* in front of them”.

“What can be done? We can't even *see* them! How can we *do* anything?”

“Yes! They are *invisible*. All we know is that they *are* there. Somewhere. Here between us. With us.”

“Or rather... *Within us*. Even if we want to escape we *can't*. They make sure we are trapped. Can't say. Just Pray to God we are saved. Anyway, let's take this for the funeral.

(They lift the dead body and start leaving)

As they are going, three grotesque looking women enter the stage. It is obvious that the men cannot see them as they keep walking without a tinge of change in their mannerisms. The women come and stand facing the audience. Each has an extremely intimidating expression on her face. The action begins with the loud, in fact, cacophonous sound of temple bells. When the women hear the bells, they immediately cover their ears as they get very uncomfortable. Unable to bear the sound, they fall down and scream in utter frustration and agony. The sound of the bells recedes in the background as they are heard speaking.)

WOMEN: (*unbearably*) Stop this noise! O! No! It is killing us! Damn it! We can't hear this! We don't want to get suffocated. The bells- Oh! The bells- Don't You dare!!! (*yells.*)

WOMEN I: (*wallowing*) I said stop ringing these bellssssssssss

WOMEN II: (*wincing in agony*) Don't! Don't! I said Don't! You all don't know what you are doing! I will...

WOMEN III: (*fractiously with extreme discomfort*) Oh! They would not understand your distress and discomfort. They are hell bent upon inflicting this torture on us!

(The bells suddenly stop ringing. The women heave a sigh of relief and start the conversation.)

WOMAN I: Hah! I thought I was almost killed!

WOMAN II: Yes. I felt the same. (*abruptly*) I am sure it's their conspiracy. They *know* we are here. They *want* us to perish.

WOMAN III: Undoubtedly!

(Taking sneaky steps forward with horrid expressions)

- Now is the time we enter their realm. We backfire their plans. *(suddenly alarmed)* But! they seem to have got a whiff of our approach. It had to be *clandestine*. But how did *they* know we *are* here that they started ringing these bells? *(tries to go further when she is held back by woman I)*
- WOMAN I: *(preventing)* Watch!!! What are you trying to do? Don't cross *this* limit. Don't you know we are *barred* from crossing *this* line? If we go that far, we would be destroyed. We are still *safe* because we are *within* our circumference. *(In the mode of admonition)* One step more from your side and you'd be - *dead*. They won't *leave* you as you enter *their* territory. Ours is the *woods*. We have to be here and this is the *borderline* *(pointing towards a Mantric thread tied from one end of a tree to the other)*. Don't ever try to *override* this rule. It is in *our* interest.
- WOMAN III: Fine. True. Very *true* indeed. However, what can be done by being here! All that we can do by appearing at this border that divides us from them is *stand* and *wait*. If we can't go *beyond* this, there is *no* use at all. How would we execute our plans? And if we don't *(says expressing ravenous hungry feeling)* *execute* then how would we *sate* ourselves?
- WOMAN II: Yes indeed. Something *needs* to be done about this *limit*. If we somehow go to the other side, we would be able to *(smiling with greedy look)* *Devour*. And it is of no consequence waiting here for someone to arrive and... *(as she is about to complete her sentence, there's a flash of lighting. The women cannot tolerate the glare. They turn around in extreme discomfort)*
- WOMEN: Who is there? Or rather what is there that has encroached upon our privacy? Whoever you are. Please switch off the light. We are not comfortable. *(A man enters with a torch)*
- MAN: *(stops)* Did someone speak? *(Moves the torch in all directions to locate the source of the voice.)* I can't see anybody. I can only hear some voices... Fine. I will put off my torch if you don't feel fine.
- WOMEN: Oh! Thanks a ton.
- MAN: It's O.K. But, who are you? I mean, it's unusual to see someone feel uncomfortable in *torch light* when it's so *dark*.
- WOMAN I: Well. There's a lot that is *unusual* about *us*. We are...
- WOMAN II: *(Interrupting)* Well. We are...
- WOMAN III: *(preventing her from speaking)* Well. All you need to know is that we *exist*. We are here. *In front of you*.
- MAN: What does *that* mean? I *cannot* see any of you *properly*.

- Besides, it's dark and you have not even allowed me to switch on my *torch* to see you clearly. You are literally *invisible*!
- WOMAN II: So now we are ignored to this extent that we are invisible!
- WOMAN I: We cannot be *seen* he says! Yes. It's actually not his fault. We are *generally* invisible to any *Man* who sees us.
- MAN: What do you mean? Can't you understand. There's no light. How can I see when there's *no light*?
- WOMAN I: (*laughing*) That's the point. You see. Generally you believe what you *see*. You *don't* believe something *is* there if you are unable to see it with your own eyes!
- MAN: That's how it *should* be. Otherwise, you are not *human*. Generally humans see and identify with their eyes.
- WOMAN III: You mean you *will* identify us if you *see* us. Right?
- MAN: Right. *Certainly* right.
- WOMEN: (*in a somber tone*) Fine.
(*All of a sudden the three women appear in front of him. He screams in horror. Attempts to run when the women detain him*)
- WOMAN I: Well, wait. Where are you running like this?
- WOMAN II: This is an *insult* to us! This sort of a behavior as if we were...
- WOMAN III: As if we were some sort of *ghosts*!
- MAN: Well. I think I *have* seen three *ghosts*!
- WOMAN II: Why? How have you *seen* us now when there's *no light*. Are we visible to You?
- MAN: Yes, but before- I mean- you weren't seen at all. I could hear your voices. I thought it is dark so I was not able to see you- I mean- You know torch helps to see *clearly*. But I did not know you could be seen in darkness- without torch light! Also- I mean- Please...
- WOMAN III: That's the point. As we are *not* ghosts we can be *seen* with ordinary eyes understand! You just need to *open* your eyes. Your eyes were *closed*. So you couldn't see us. Now you *can* because you have *opened* you eyes! See. That's very simple. Can you follow?
- MAN: No. I fail to understand what you mean sorry. (*aside*) What's this going on? They are visible in such darkness without torch light? Something's wrong. I can't see anything but them!
- WOMAN II: That's what we want! Henceforth you should see nothing but *us*!
- MAN: What?
- WOMAN I: Nothing. We are *women* understand. (*pause.*) Oh! How much do we have to struggle to explain that we are *not* what we are *commonly* understood. (*with a grimace*)

- Foolish!
- MAN: What?
(*The three of them try to advance towards him. He recedes in horror*)
- WOMEN: (*staring dreadfully*) Look, listen...
- MAN: (*avoiding them*) I cannot look at you. You are so. So. (*aside*)
I won't ever switch on my torch now. If they look like this
without torch light, how would they look when the torch
is on!
- WOMAN III: What?
- WOMAN I: (*In a melodramatic explanatory tone*) Sisters, Please
comprehend! He means to say, we are three *ugly looking*
women!
- MAN: (*aside*) horrifying!
- WOMAN III: What did you say?
- MAN: (*Retreats in fear. Speaks as if to himself*) I can't believe my
eyes! I am seeing three *ghastly* looking women in front of
me. What do I do? (*shivering*) O God! Never imagined
anything of this sort would happen to me. I should not
have taken this way!
- WOMAN III: That's true. You often *do* what is *barred* right?
- WOMAN I: (*giggling*) Yes. It is their habit. First to bar us and then to
do what is barred!
- WOMAN II: O Man! *Why* are you so scared? Just because we are not
good looking matching *your* common standards of
beautiful, charming or sexy women etc. etc. etc...
(*Before he utters a word, the other two women surround him. They bombard him
with their frightful expressions. He almost gets petrified seeing their faces.*)
- WOMAN III: (*bullying*) Yes. Answer us! You haven't even looked at us
properly and yet are giving us such *repulsive* reactions. We
cannot tolerate this insult. You *understand*. We won't!
(*growls*)
- MAN: (*panting in fear*) Please. Leave me. Let me go. I am
literally scared!
- WOMAN I: (*Laughing hysterically*) Cheers sisters! We have scared a
Man. We have. In Reality! Actually...
A Man is never scared. Of *us* I mean. Otherwise he fears
many things but not *us* I suppose...
- WOMAN II: (*nodding her head gawkily*) Indeed. Indeed. If we have
scared him it is a matter of pride. (*To woman III*) Is it not?
- WOMAN III: (*claps vehemently*) Well undoubtedly. I am very
happy!!! (*dances in violent joy around the man*)
(*The man does not speak anything. It is obvious that he is getting miserable*)
- WOMAN I: *Man!* *Why* are you so anxious? We are *not* ghosts or
something. Please. Relax. We are just three *women*. And
you are a *Man*. After all what can we women do to you? In

- fact, we *can't* do anything even if we *want* to!
- MAN: (*trembling*) What do you *mean*? What do you *want* to do to me?
- WOMAN I: (*shrugs indifferently*) Nothing! *That's* what we mean. (*melodramatically*) We are *poor* women. The *subordinate* class. The *oppressed- Inferior* in every way to *Men*. We are just supposed to *follow* them and their orders or *fear* them. That's what we know and you are scared of *us*!
- WOMAN II: In fact, let me make this clear. *We* must be scared of *you*!
- Woman III: Of your *intentions* rather!
- (*As the man hears this, he gets a little worked up and says in a mood of clarification*)
- MAN: Wait a minute. I've nothing *unwarranted* in my intentions. Besides, what has a man to do with women *like you*? Horrendous looking women in the dead of the night resembling the vampires, the witches, the the...(Stops speaking as he notices that the expressions on the faces of the women become more terrifying. However, this time he tries to gather his strength and act normal.)
- MAN: (*In just a manner of casually carrying the conversation further*): Well! Let's change the topic of our interaction. Doesn't matter how you look. But *who* are you and *what* are you three women doing in this dark forest in the middle of the night? *This* I think is an *important* question. Isn't it?
- WOMAN I: Sisters. Now see! He is in his *Manly* element ready to decide what is important and unimportant for us to answer. (*seriously looking at him clenching her fist*) Look *Man*. Don't ask us anything. Don't you think *we* are answerable to you!
- (*tries to advance towards him. He takes steps back in fear when woman II interrupts*)
- WOMAN II: Relax sister. He is just being friendly. Isn't it?
- MAN: Yes. Indeed. I was just trying to help!
- WOMAN I: Help! We don't encourage *unsolicited* help.
- MAN: Oh!
- WOMAN III: Listen, *Man*. We know *who* we are. And *what* we are doing here in the middle of the night is not *your* look out. *You* just *be*.
- MAN: All right. Then stay here. I am going. Goodbye.
- (*He starts when the women encircle him. He knows that they are trying to thwart him from going but behaves casually*)
- MAN: So, I think, it was a good introduction and now tell me *what* you want if you *want* anything and just let me go if you have *nothing* to say. Just *don't* come in *my way*.

- WOMANI: Look *Man*. We three have *forgotten* our way. You seem to be a localite. Just aid us to find our way out of this jungle. Then you can go. That's it!
- MAN: (*in a condescending mode.*) O! So you three need *assistance* to come out of this forest is it? I will. I know the way.
- WOMAN III: Sisters! We have finally found someone who *knows* the way out! The *Man*. He can *never* go wrong. He is *used* to leading *women*. He *will* help us to go out of this labyrinth in which we are since...
- WOMANI: Sister No! Just don't utter a word! He *doesn't* need to know anything extra!
- MAN: Extra! What does that mean?
- WOMAN II: Forget *what* means *what*. Don't be confused with words. They often mean what they don't mean? Right?
- MAN: What are you all upto?
- WOMAN III (*sulks*): That's the question. Does anyone know *what* is one upto? (*staring ominously*) Well *Man*. Just do as told. Will You?
- MAN: (*in a reluctantly resigned tone.*) Fine. I will. I need to keep the torch on however (*clarifying*) to find the way though!
- WOMAN III: Fine. But see it should not hurt our eyes!
- MAN: I *will* take care.
- WOMAN I: See! They understand *only this*. Or else they *don't* comply.
- WOMAN II: The *eternal truth*!
- (*The Man does not utter a word. He merely signals them to follow him, keeps the torch on.*)

Scene II

(*The three women walking after the man as if emulating his footsteps*)

- WOMANI: Now *Man* since you have *graciously* accepted our request of *helping* us to get out of *this* forest, I want to clear your doubts. Listen carefully. We three are from the province nearby. Actually, we came to attend our friend's wedding and while returning home, it got late. We thought we could take this short-cut through the forest in order to reach home at the *proper* time. There's a *deadline* given to *women* you *know*. Nevertheless. This short-cut did not help and we got lost. We are *very* sacred in fact. *Truly*. One never knows *what* could be in the jungle. Animals, dacoits you *Know*...
- WOMAN II: (*Interrupting*) Or rather ghosts!
- MAN: (*troubled*) O! Please. Don't talk about *ghosts* in the middle of the night. You never know they may appear right here in front of us. It is very scary indeed. (*something strikes*

- him*) Besides. This jungle. You know about the *Rakoshis* right?
- WOMEN: Rakoshis?
- MAN: *(in a mode of scaring them)* Yes. The *Rakoshis*. The bloodthirsty female demons. They haunt the woods in the middle of the night!
- WOMAN I: Have you seen any Rakoshi?
- MAN: *(firmly)* Certainly *not*. *(gesticulating fear)* I have just heard *stories* of them.
- WOMAN II: Oh! So why think about what you have not seen and fear. Right?
- MAN: Yes. Indeed you *are* right.
- WOMAN II: Sisters Did you hear? *He* says we are right! The *Man* feels we women are right! *(laughs raucously)*
- WOMEN I AND III : *(aside)* Good for him! *(giggle)*
- MAN: *(thinks)* I was trying to scare them. But of no use. These women *don't* seem to be vulnerable.
- WOMAN I *(smirks)*: Oh! So that was the plan *Man*. To *scare* us. But don't you dare to engage in such stupid act. Certainly. We are *not* at all sacred.
- MAN: *(aside.)* O! How can she know what I was thinking? These women don't seem to be normal.
Well anyway, it seems safe if I act normal. *(snaps his fingers and speaks aloud.)* See. That's the point! Then why don't you find your way alone? When *you* don't fear anyone, why have you asked *me* to help you? Three of you seem quite *capable* to wade through this forest.
- WOMAN II: *(in a hoarse voice)* Hmm. Sisters-So the *Man* thinks *we* are capable. *(all three start laughing aloud as if in a fit of frenzy)*
- MAN: *(uncomfortable)* See. Please. I had to take this way because the other path was very long and I had to reach somewhere urgently. I need to leave. Let me go. Find your way out yourself. I *can't* help you!
- (WOMAN II pounces at him. The man feels extremely scared and gives a loud cry)*
- MAN: O my god! Someone save me please. Can anyone hear me? Please. Help! I am in trouble!
- WOMAN II: Look *Man*. *Why* are you in such *consternation*? Can't *you* just guide *us*? After all, it is a prerogative of a *Man* to *guide* a woman right?
- WOMAN I: *(staring at him cunningly)* Yes. Sister is right. We are *giving* you the *right* to be a *Man*. *(suddenly changes her statement)* Or rather- Sorry. Very sorry. You are the *Man* so you *have*

- all the *right* to guide us.
- WOMAN III: We have to just follow you. So we are doing our duty. You have nothing to be alarmed about. We *can't* do you any harm.
- WOMANI: Even if we *want* to. (*laughs*)
- MAN: Well. I wish I never get an opportunity to guide women like you. *Phew*.
- WOMAN II: Enough! You are humiliating us just because we are not – BEAUTIFUL.
- (*shrugs her shoulders*) So what if we look a bit *different*!
- MAN: (*aside*) Different! I feel *anomalous* would be the word for your appearance. (*sees the cruel expression on each of their faces and becomes alert*)
- (*aloud*) Devis. Please. Don't get vexed. I was just trying to say that... (*Before he completes his statement, woman three becomes exhilarated*)
- WOMAN III: What an expression! Sisters. *Devis*. We are *Devis*. Oh!
- MAN: Actually, in our community, we call women *Devis*. That's the means of address. We *respect* women after all.
- WOMAN II: Oh! Respect. Do you?
- MAN: Yes. We are *cultured* people. We believe that women are embodiments of the *shakti Devi*. We *worship* them. We *never* insult them.
- WOMEN: O! We see! That's good!
- WOMAN I: This means that you'll do as we say, because you *respect* women?
- WOMAN II: Sister. can't you see. He has *affirmed* he *will*.
- WOMAN III: Oh yes. (*grabs his collar and speaks sternly as if to scare him*) Finally. So you agree to help us find our way through the forest?
- MAN: I don't want to. But since I have no choice (*before he completes his sentence woman II intervenes*)
- WOMAN II: No Choice! Ha ha ha! What are you saying? We heard *Men* always *had* choices!
- MAN: (*with a grimace*) See I think you three are just trying *meander* without any destination.
- WOMAN I: (*giggles*) See. We three think that *everyone* is *meandering* in this world. (*pause.*) *Without* a destination!
- MAN: Stop this babble! What *does* this mean? Human beings are *supposed* to *have* a destination.
- WOMAN II: (*smirks and whispers looking at the other two women*) So he is talking about a 'human being'.
- WOMAN III: (*murmurs*) But we are not!
- MAN: (*suddenly gets alarmed*) What? What on earth did you say?
- WOMAN III: What?

MAN: (*frenzied out of fear*) That you are *not* humans!

WOMANIII (*insincerely*): Relax. *Man.* (*implicitly indignant*) When were *women* considered humans? (*Gives a horrid expression which terrifies him but this time again he tries to conceal his fear*)

MAN: See. I think I must leave. Do hell with you three and your way. I don't...

WOMANII: Why are you scared of us?

MAN: (*trying helplessly to hide his fear*) I am *not* scared. I Just want to go from here. (*stammering*) I ...am ge... tting... irri.. ta...ted!

WOMAN II: (*cachinnates*) Sisters. The *Man* is getting fractious. He is not enjoying our company it seems.

WOMANI: He He He... Or rather he is scared out of his wits but doesn't wish to be exposed as-

WOMANII: (*strikes him hard with her fist*) As a coward!

MAN: Oh I'm hurt! (*Perplexed*) Coward! Where does this come from?

WOMAN II: A *Man* never gets scared of a woman. (*frowns*) He can get scared of *everything* but a woman right?

MAN: What are you three upto?

WOMANIII: We are up to you (*laughs loud*)

WOMAN II: Yes we are!

MAN: Oh I *cannot* understand you!

WOMEN: *No one can understand us...!*

All three encircle the man. Heavy background music. Lights fade.

Scene III

(The man searching the ground with the help of his torch trying to locate something. As he does not get the thing he is looking for, he gets frustrated.)

MAN: I give up! It is *extremely* dark. I *cannot* find it.

WOMANI: Sisters. The *Man* gives up. But you said you'll find it.

MAN: But, I *cannot*!

WOMAN: Is there anything a *Man* cannot?

MAN: Look. Ever since we have met, you three are *taunting* me.

WOMANII: Not at all! We can't dare to...we are just *meek* women!

MAN: (*whispering*) Meek! Ugly looking Vampires!

WOMANII: (*grinding her teeth*) What? I think you don't have any idea what you are speaking *Man*?

WOMANIII: Yes. I feel the same. He's *insulting* us - Insulting us just because we are not good looking in the *standard* sense. If we don't *look* good that doesn't mean *we are not good*!

WOMANI: *Indeed.* See. We are just requesting you to help us that's it. We have lost our belongings and (*the man interrupts her*)

- MAN: Belongings! You are telling me to hunt for your bag of eatables in the darkness when nothing is visible and you!
- WOMANII: That's it! *Nothing* is visible. But you can see that we are *ugly* right?
- MAN: (*embarrassed*) See I don't *mean* it. I just felt you three are just- I mean to say-
- WOMANII: O.K. forget it. Leave it I think *you* cannot find it.
- MAN: Thanks for understanding I *cannot* find it!
- WOMANI: But, I want to ask you. Just because we look a bit *different* you don't wish to help us. I mean.
- Is it that a man can help *only beautiful* women?
- MAN: Look, I didn't say that.
- WOMANII: O.K. forget it. Let's walk. : (*clenching her fist*) We have to find our way *through you*.
- MAN: What?
- WOMANI: She means that you *will* help us won't you to find our way
- (*All three start laughing. They look horrific. Woman I comes and occludes his way. She looks the epitome of danger*)
- MAN: (*tries to avoid her and speaks in a mode of intimidating them*). See. I can sense something malicious beneath your apparently *foolish* statements. Tell me who you are. What are you doing here in the middle of the night or I'll leave you here and go. Three of you will have a *tough* time finding your way through this forest. Any lion, cheetah will grab you or at least a dacoit will surely
- (*before he completes his sentence woman II says*)
- WOMANII: Oh! Don't try to pretend that you can intimidate us by animals and dacoits. We have been through *worse*
- (*as she says this, the other two women move towards the man. It becomes apparent that they have something dreadful in mind. The man gets nervous*).
- MAN: (*moving back*) Look! Don't try to scare me. I am *not* afraid, understand. Can't you three just stay away from getting across to me that you are-(*pause*)
- WOMANI: We are what? speak!
- WOMANII: Yes. Speak. Who do you think we are?
- WOMANIII: The Rakoshis?
- MAN: No! Please. I didn't mean it!
- WOMANI: Then? Speak!
- MAN: I think you three are...
- WOMANIII: Open your mouth! Three what?
- WOMANI: Sister. Relax. Look *Man*. We three would be what *you* want us to be!
- MAN: What? Really?
- WOMANI: Indeed. That's what we are *taught*. To become what *they*

say.

MAN (*looking here and there trying to locate somebody*):

They? Who they?

WOMANII: (*Pointing towards the audience*) They. They tell us and we become. See they *have* understood!

MAN: I cannot get a word of this...

WOMANII: But *they* have got the meaning of *our* statements.

WOMANIII: Doubtlessly! See how uncomfortable they are... (*laughs*)

MAN: Well. I have *not* comprehended what you are saying. It all simply appears meaningless to me.

WOMANI: Sisters. Why do *Men* claim that what we say is *meaningless*?

(*music as the backdrop. They encircle the man and speak. Their expressions become intense.*)

WOMANII: When are they unable to decipher the meanings of our statements?

WOMANI: When they want to deliberately *ignore* the seriousness of what we mean!

WOMANIII: Well. It is quite clear. (*advancing towards the man perilously*) They don't *want* to understand *us*. So do they have the right to express what they feel? But they keep saying things irrespective of whether we understand - and we- We just have to say Yes, My lord. Whether we like it or not. We just need to nod our heads. Even if our opinions differ. We have to *pretend* that we are *with* them. Why? because they are habituated to listen to *yes*. If there's a *no* from our side, we are *damned* till *eternity*. (*looks at him with envy*) Right Man?

WOMANI: They *command*!

WOMANII: We *obey*.

WOMANIII: They are *masters*!

WOMANII: We are *servants*.

WOMANI: They are *coordinators*. We are *subordinates*.

(*music fades and seamlessly two women disappear from the scene while the conversation continues between the man and the woman who remain on the stage.*)

MAN: What? This all is rubbish!

WOMAN: NO, it is certainly correct!

MAN: Times *have* changed. There is a lot more *equality* of sexes!

WOMAN: Hilarious! Equality? rubbish!

MAN: Women enjoy a lot more privilege than they used to in the earlier days.

WOMAN: Privilege?

WOMAN: No. Your *attitude*. Your *bias*, your *prejudice* is still the same.

MAN: What do you mean?

WOMANII: It means. We are still *exploited*, insulted, *assaulted*, *raped*, *smoldered*, *killed* and *destroyed*. But now it is not worthy to tolerate (*he looks into her eyes. They are inflamed with anger.*)

MAN: Please. Don't talk like fools! In today's *progressive* times we must think about the *opportunities* that women have and not just the fact that they are still exploited and things like that...

WOMAN: O Man! Don't be a *hypocrite*. We *already* know the concept of equality that is *apparent* but actually *non-existent*.

WOMAN: Yes. We know the *sexism* that prevails within *implications*...

MAN: Well - This is *prejudiced* outlook. Times *have* changed. Today, women enjoy the freedom that is given to them.

WOMAN: See! *That's* the point. We are *given* freedom. You are *born* with it.

MAN: This is *bias*. Today women have achieved *great* heights. They get everything they desire. They are the *modern* women. They have reached the zenith of success.

WOMAN: And they have always had a *price* to *pay*. *They know!*

MAN: *Who?*

WOMAN: (*Pointing at the audience.*) They have understood what *Price* they have paid!

MAN: What price? *Nothing*. Certainly Not! This kind of narrow-minded argument does not befit someone who belongs to *this* era. A woman of today won't speak like this!

WOMAN: Oh! And a *Man of today* won't call women like us *ugly*. (*reprimanding*) Understand?

(*As she says this, inconspicuously the other two women join the conversation taking place between the man and the woman who are already on the stage.*)

MAN: Oh! So, that's the point. I just said something about your looks and that's your concern right. (*laughs.*) Much ado about nothing. Hah! O.k. you are *very* beautiful.

WOMANII: We *object* calling ourselves what you want to- understand!
WOMANIII: (*shrugging her shoulders with a foul look*) absolutely. Why should you typify us? (*grimace*) ugly or beautiful. We are *just* women.

MAN: (*pacifying them*) Fine. Fine. Don't be annoyed. Let's leave this discussion and get on with our target to reach home out of this forest.

WOMANII: Sisters. See. He wants us to *obey* him. When he says something. We have to stop.

WOMANIII: Yes. (*looking fiercely*) after all he is a *Man*. If *he* says stop. We *have* to stop.

- WOMANI: (*shouts*) But he won't stop when *we* say stop. Right.
- MAN: (*irascibly*) Look. Enough of this *frivolous* talk. It's of no use. We need to go. If you wish to come along I will help you to go out of this forest or else (*before he completes his sentence woman II comes and stands in front of him blocking his way.*)
- WOMANII: Or else what?
- MAN: Or else nothing. We will be stuck up here. (*tries to pretend that he is calm*)
- WOMANII: Sisters. I think. He is right. Let's move. But just tell us *when* to stop.
- MAN: Fine. Where have we reached by the way?
- WOMANII: How would we know? *You* know the jungle. *You* must tell us.
- MAN: (*looking here and there. notices something and gets shocked*) How is this possible!
- WOMANI: What?
- MAN: We have walked haven't we?
- WOMANII: Yes, slowly though because we've been interacting all the while but we *have* covered a certain distance undoubtedly.
- WOMANIII: (*pointing at the road.*) See. We have!
- MAN: (*Shocked*) This can't be! We are at the same place that we started from! (*suddenly something strikes him*). Who are you three?
- WOMANI: *Women* who are *lost* in the *jungle*.
- WOMANII: Yes!
- WOMANIII: yes indeed!
- MAN: Please. This cannot be with ordinary women. We are at the same place. (*with anxiety*) I think- I -am -trapped. (*imploring*) Please! please! Please! let me go. I have done nothing. I have to go. I just took the *wrong* way. The shortcut to reach home that's my only fault. I should not have. Please let me go. I beg of you.
- WOMANII: Popular saying sire. A *shortcut* is often a *long cut* sire.
- MAN: I have realized this. Please forgive me. I think I am on the wrong way.
- WOMANII: No a *Man* can't be on the *wrong* way. He is always on the *right* way.
- MAN: I accept. I am on the wrong way. Now please leave me. Who are you three? I am afraid you are not the... (*The conversation henceforth is only between man and woman. It seems that the other two women apparently disappear but are present as indignant listeners of the conversation that takes place between them.*)
- WOMAN: The what?
- MAN: The... the... the...

WOMAN: TheWhat?
MAN: You are no *ordinary* woman. You are a *wicked* demon - a Rakoshi!
WOMAN: Just because I *don't do* what *you* say you think I am no *ordinary* woman ! I am a Rakoshi!
MAN: Would you please stop or else I would have to stop you *my* way understand!
WOMAN: Is that a *warning* or so?
MAN: Whatever you want to understand. It's *your* choice. Don't stop me from what I intend to do. Do as I say and don't try to probe into *my* matters. Or else I would have to do it *my* way.
WOMAN: Fine. But I *refuse* to do as you say!
MAN: Don't cross *this* line.
WOMAN: IWill
MAN: You devil. You don't dare! You are supposed to stay within *this* line.
WOMAN: And you don't have any line, any limit?
MAN: Don't argue!
WOMAN: I will.
MAN: Then I will do it *my* way. (*goes towards her. She recedes with fear. He threatens her*) Listen and listen very carefully. You are *not* supposed to question *me* or violate *my* rules or else-
WOMAN: Or else?
MAN: You are free. *Absolutely* free to *leave*. I have *nothing* to do with *you* henceforth. Break the family.
Go away. But if you want to be here with me you will have to be *normal* woman!
WOMAN: And what is a *normal* woman?
MAN: One who *knows* her *limits*. Beyond a point if you wish to exercise your volition you may go.
WOMAN: I would.
MAN: Fine. Cross this line and you are damned till eternity!
WOMAN: I defy. I cross this line of yours.
MAN: You Devil!
WOMAN: Yes! I am Rakoshi- the Devil!
(*At this point, the other two women reappear and buttress the woman confronting the man*).
WOMEN: Yes we *are* Rakoshis the Devils. Did you get it!
MAN: (*changes his demeanor instantly*): Hey! Please. Stay away. When did I say you are Rakoshis. Devis!
You are just unnecessarily getting worked up!
WOMANI: See, *Man*. Don't try and act smart. Show us the way or else.
MAN: Or else?
WOMANII: prepare to *die*!

- MAN: What?
- WOMANIII: Yes. What's your *use* if you cannot show us the way out!
- MAN: See. I am also trying to find the way out. (*puzzled*) But I don't gather why are we at the same place after walking so much? Please allow me to assimilate.
- WOMANI: Hmm. Fine. A few minutes more.
- MAN: Minutes?
- WOMANIII: *Man!* Enough! Show us the way out of this forest or else we will kill you!
- MAN: You can't do this! You did not show any such intention! I mean to say. You wanted help. What have I done that you want to *kill* me?
- WOMANII: Because *you killed us*.
- MAN: (*hysterical*) What!
- WOMANII: Don't be so madly surprised. You destroyed *us*. We destroy *you* now.
- MAN: How on earth did I destroy you?
- (*Conversation continues between man and woman.*
The other two women freeze)
- WOMAN: Please. Please don't do this to me. For god's sake. *What* are you trying to do?
- MAN : See. It is *your* fault. It is *my* territory. You are *forbidden* to encroach here. You stepped inside. You crossed this line so you are *bound* to be taught a lesson.
- WOMAN: But it is important for me to do this work here. I cannot do this elsewhere. I have to be in your territory to do this.
- MAN: Then get the fruit of your *audacity* woman!
- WOMAN: Don't advance towards me. Please. Let me go. I would be devastated.
- MAN: You *deserve* to be devastated!
- WOMAN: Don't do this. I would be nowhere. I won't be accepted by anyone in my family.
- MAN : That's not my problem. Why did you cross this line?
- WOMAN: Because I *had* to.
- MAN: Then face the dire consequences of the same. Only then will you learn you shouldn't cross this line. You *Rakoshi!*
- (*A loud scream. The Man covers his ears. As the noise fades, the other two women normally release their freezing position and intervene in the conversation*)
- MAN: What happened?
- WOMANI: Nothing. Have you found the way?
- MAN: I think I am just about to. Please wait for some time. Oh! I see. What's this? (*looks at the mantric thread denoting a circumference.*) (*thinks*) I presume, we need to cross this line to go ahead. I feel *only then* we can go *out* of this forest.
- WOMEN : Don't! Don't Don't go out of this line and in fact, we *can't*

MAN: cross it.
Why? It seems someone has marked this border. We *need* to cross it in order to go out.
WOMANI: Don't! Man. We can't!
MAN: Then how can you go out! We have to! (*he crosses*)
WOMEN: (*agitated*) O NO!
MAN: There's nothing to fear. Come. (*tries to grab a woman's hand*)

(*Conversation between man and woman. The other two women slowly recede in the background.*)

WOMAN: Don't pull me like this!
MAN: Why?
WOMAN: Because, I *can't* I am not *supposed* to.
MAN: *Who* said so?
WOMAN: It is it. We women *can't* go beyond this. *Men can.* Understand!
MAN: Rubbish. Who believes in all this at this juncture?
WOMAN: I do.
MAN: Come. (*Grabs her hand and pulls her across.*)
WOMAN: O No! I should not have done this!
MAN: (*laughs.*) Who decides what you should have done or should have not?
WOMAN: You don't know. *You* pulled me into this. Now *you'd* only disapprove of it.
MAN: I won't
WOMAN: Yes you would.
(*Sudden transformation in the man's expressions. He starts reprimanding her.*)
MAN: Why on earth did you have to cross this!
WOMAN: Because *you* said so.
MAN: who?
WOMAN: You!
MAN: How dare you talk like this?
WOMAN: Yes. *You* only told me to cross this line and now you renegade!
MAN: Look woman! I *did not* tell you to cross it. I can *never* tell you to cross it understand. I told you *not* to cross it and now you have so *you* face the consequences.
WOMAN: But we are *equally responsible* for this...
MAN: I am not! Get it very clear you devil!
WOMAN: I won't. You *have* to take the responsibility- you rascal of provoking me to do this. I would tear you to pieces (*moves hurriedly towards the man. He runs*) Wait you! I told you *don't* force me to cross this and now you say you are *not* responsible!
MAN: But when did I drag you out! I just *told* you to!
WOMAN: I won't leave you. Get ready to get murdered. (*Runs after him ferociously while he escapes. They gradually vanish in the*)

darkness. The other two women reappear.)

“Should we cross?”

“I think we should or else...”

“But if we cross we would be destroyed. We are not supposed to!”

“Yes. But we must. It is important. The time *has* come”.

(loud music. lights fade. End of act I)

Act II - Scene I

(The man in a challenging mode)

- MAN: So, you think you can destroy me ha!
- WOMAN: I think I *will* destroy you. I think you'll be destroyed. For sure.
- MAN: Wait. Don't forget you are now on the vulnerable side.
- WOMAN: Does not matter. *I* am not vulnerable. I can kill you.
- MAN: Now you see what *price* you have to pay for crossing your limits you foolish woman!
- WOMAN: And you think *you* decide our limits. *(pause)* You!
- MAN: Of course! And if you don't want us to decide your limits. Here's the choice that you have-*death*!
- WOMAN: You want me to die Just because I want *freedom*!
- MAN: Indeed. You don't have the emancipation to decide anything on your own.
We give you the rights that you enjoy. . *(Mocking)* So don't try to pretend as if you are born free
- WOMAN: You rascal!
- MAN: *Mind your language.* Don't try to go beyond the limits.
- WOMAN: Do hell with your limits!
- MAN: Hold your tongue or else!
- WOMAN: Or else what will you do? Beat me. That's what you can do *Man*. Don't try to rule over me. I will take my own decisions!
- MAN: How *dare* you say that!
- WOMAN: Beware!
- MAN: Or what?
- WOMAN: Or I will kill you!
- MAN: *(scoffing)* You! You will kill me in *my* territory. Who can do that? No one. No one can kill me here. Don't forget *Mahishasuramardini* you cannot touch me. If you do, there will be unstoppable chaos!
- WOMAN: O so you think I *cannot* kill you!
- MAN: Try and do so and *see* the outcome!
- WOMAN: Fine. Then let's see the outcome. *(goes near him. He recedes. She gives a heinous scream and holds him. He tries to escape but in vain.)* Now what? Try and free yourself.
Come on. Come on *Man*. *(He tries hard but can't move. Is frustrated.)* O you can't escape the hold of a woman *Man* !*(laughs.)* How will you save yourself? *(He attempts to release himself and thus gets hurt as her*

long nails scratch his fist. He starts bleeding. Drops of blood fall on the floor. The woman notices something. She leaves him and goes back. All of a sudden her expressions change. She looks frightened. Lights fade.)

Scene II

(Several Men on the stage having encircled the woman. She is almost trapped. As she tries to escape, the men laugh furiously and try to grab her. They look alike. Only one man out of the lot confronts the woman while others appear clones following him.)

WOMAN: Don't you try to come near. I warn you!

MAN: See. *(looking at the other men.)* She is challenging us. Trying to scare us. *(sarcastically)* So what should we do? *(mocking)* leave her? Yes. Leave her. *(laughs)* Indeed. Leave her for god's sake or else we will be destroyed ha! ha! ha!

(All the men advance towards her. She retreats. They surround her.)

WOMAN: No!

MAN: Don't leave her. Rakoshi! See her audacity. She tried to cross the line and now she will have to pay the price for having instigated us. We warned you didn't we? But you turned a deaf ear. Now- see-what-*we* can do...

WOMAN: Don't ! You don't even dare to fulfill your undue will. You don't know *what* price you all would have to pay for insulting me understand! You don't seem to realize the detrimental *consequences* of doing this!

MAN: See! Still this audacity! Now wait. We will crush you forever! You Rakoshi!

(Two men trap her. She tries to free herself aggressively.)

MAN: Take off her sari! Pull it off her body. Render her helpless forever. The refractory one! Now let her realize the meaning of rebuking a *Man's* pride!

WOMAN: Don't you dare!

MAN: We will. Do you think you can stop us! Do so if you have the *power*! Madam.

WOMAN: You will be reduced to ashes for this disgusting attempt. Don't come near me!

MAN: *(derisively)* Draupadi! She was still saved. You know why? Because she submitted and yearned in front of a male-god to save her. You won't be spared for you don't seem to realize that the only way you can be saved is by urging in front of a *Man*!

WOMAN: Then you are thoroughly mistaken. It seems you don't understand the woman's power, her strength and her caliber to save herself from any danger. It was *Draupadi* who destroyed the kuruvansha! Not the Pandavas!

(The men laugh hysterically)

MAN: I cannot believe my ears. See she is still going on and on. O leave this senseless blab. Don't you behave like you

were the insurmountable goddess in front of whom we would accept defeat. (*ironically*) O! Kali! We are scared of you. Please. We are scared. Spare us mother goddess! (*cachinnation*).

WOMAN: Do you know that the appellation you're using for addressing me is the testimony of a woman's ferocity that has the prowess to destroy *any Man's vanity*!

MAN: I know the power of the *goddess*. Don't teach me. The goddess is *boundless*. You *must* have boundaries. When you crossed that line, you *ceased* to be Devi. You became the Rakoshi. The uncontrollable rebellious demon that deserves to die as-

WOMAN: As?

MAN: As she's impure. By violating the norm, you have dismissed every possible mode of your salvation. It is a known fact that even goddesses have to be within their limits when they appear as humans. It is often quoted that had Sita remained within the circumference, she would never have suffered. So, you are merely an *ordinary* woman. How *dare* you cross that line! Do you think we will leave you alone without punishing you for exercising your own will!

WOMAN: Times have changed. Remember you only said. I mean. One of you said, (*looking confused as she sees all the Men who look similar*)

MAN: O! That ! that was – I'm afraid a means of bringing you out of the confined vicinities to *destroy* You forever!(*laughs.*) The other men slowly leave the stage. The conversation continues between *Man* and woman.)

WOMAN: See! So you admit that you brought me out of the limits. You were the one because of whom I had to cross the line. Don't you think that's enough to –

MAN: Don't engage me in the battle of words. You think I'm a fool. I brought you out of the limit because you could never have been *vanquished* in that area. I know very well. And if you can't be destroyed then you would destroy *me*. So it was important that I bring you in this vulnerable position. Or else, you would have remained safe. I cannot see *you* safe because if you were to remain blemishless, it would mean, my defeat. I cannot let *you* play safe in the world. I have to bring you to the place from where you could be tested. You have to go through the ordeal of fire to save yourself. That's the only remedy if you wish to save yourself understand!

WOMAN: Ordeal of fire?

MAN: Yes. It has been a trend since eons. *Prove* that your character is untarnished! *Prove* that you are the *chaste* woman.

WOMAN: (*appalled*) But. that's impossible. *You* ruined my chastity

- and now *you* want me to prove that I am the pure *virgin*?
- MAN: You mean to say I *assaulted* you?
- WOMAN: Certainly. And you've been doing this since eons!
- MAN: You're accusing me of doing something heinous. Beware!
- WOMAN: You deserve to be accused. Don't you think you are supposed to kneel down and apologize for your wrongdoing instead of asking us to submit to your undue demand of ordeals!
- MAN: Now it's enough! I won't tolerate this. Please bring the necessary things. She will have to go through the fire ordeal.
- WOMAN: I protest! I will *not* enter into this fire. I will *not* submit.
- MAN: See! You know that you're not pure. You witch, you demon. You know people will come to know you're a whore!
- WOMAN: Let them come to know that I'm a whore! I don't care. If I have done it, you've also been equally responsible in making me one. I am not one of your *mythological characters* who will enter into fire *willingly* without a word!
- MAN: Don't say that! I will *lash* your tongue out! She is the holy goddess. We worship her. She's on a Pedastal!
- WOMAN: But you just said she *crossed* the *limits*!
- MAN: She did! then she also went through the ordeal to prove herself. Can any woman of today enter fire and come out unharmed?
- WOMAN: It's foolishness to even imagine something like this!
- MAN: Yes! So now, you will never bring any goddess inside our conversation. Understand. Neither the Holy goddess Kali or the sublime goddess Sita. You are just another sinful woman who doesn't have the capability to prove her innocence and yet she crosses her limits impetuously. Listen carefully woman, when goddesses do something radical, it is because they have the power to *amend* whatever goes *hayways*. You *don't* have that capacity. So now, either prove yourself through this fire ordeal or accept that you deserve to be abused, mistreated and thus punished for *crossing* the limits.
- WOMAN: Abuse, mistreat a woman! And that's punishment according to you?
- MAN: Undoubtedly! This is the only *deterrent* for you. You would *never* dare after this. Be ready to be destroyed forever!

(Raises his hand. The woman recedes in the darkness.)

SCENE III

(As the scene opens we see the man hunting for the woman.
As he addresses her only her voice is heard.)

- MAN: Where are you? You Rakoshi?
- WOMAN: Where *you* can *never* reach.
- MAN: Where?
- WOMAN: The highest point. The zenith!
- MAN: (*loud laughter.*) O! Wait! I'll bring you to nadir!
(*The woman's scream is heard. It is so cacophonous that it almost kills the ears.*)
- MAN: Stop! Screaming so noisily you...Rakoshi! appear right in front of me. Can you hear me?
I – the invincible is calling you. If you dare to appear in front of me – come- show me yourself and then see what happens!
- WOMAN: Really! You are the unconquerable, the omnipotent and you can't find a woman! I challenge you man! Find me if you can!
- MAN: O! So you are trying to trap me in the labyrinth of your *tantra* right! Now see! have you forgotten that you are in *my* area and not *yours*.
(*takes something in his hand and flings it towards the direction of the woman's voice*)
- REVEAL YOURSELF! I *command* you.
(*The woman appears reluctantly.*)
- WOMAN: (*In extreme pain*). *Stop* inflicting this torture upon me.
- MAN: Now I *cannot* help. You *will* have to bear this. I told you a hundred times to behave yourself but you continued to be the refractory maze. I need to tame you. (*takes a handful of something and throws on the ground. It seems he draws a semicircular design.*) Now I have trapped you. Save yourself if you can. Rakoshi. You *will* die. You crossed your limits. I will burn you to ashes. (*Tries to utter a mantra when the other two women appear in front of him. They confront the man consecutively*)
- WOMAN: Stop this you beast!
- MAN: Don't intervene or else you will be destroyed. In any case, after her it's you both but I just wanted to give you some time more to live that's it.
- WOMAN: Don't you dare!
- MAN: I don't like this kind of filthy rebellious tone. *Mend* your way of talking you ugly witch!
- WOMAN: Don't call us ugly. We even told you before. Who made us like this?
- MAN: Well! *I* take the sole credit. Thanks for giving me one.
- WOMAN: So you *remember* you destroyed us. Right!
- MAN: I only remember what is *supposed* to be remembered.
- WOMAN: (*Grimace*) What is *supposed* to be remembered! And what do you remember?
- MAN: That you deserved to be disqualified from the lot of *normal* women.

- WOMAN: And why may I ask?
- MAN: Because you *disregarded* our supremacy. You exercised your own *volition*.
- WOMAN: You monster! We disobeyed your rules. You confiscated our right to *exist* and made us look like this. What we are is just a manifestation of *your thoughts* about us!
- MAN: Well said. And listen carefully you witches. I will never change my views about you- You three will remain the ugly Rakoshis forever! Because you have acted like demons, now remain as demons!
- WOMAN: Well said. Now we will show you what demons can do ... (*grinding her teeth*)
- MAN: Dare not! One step forward and you'll be destroyed. You don't know my strength. I have the power to devastate you three. You're in my territory beware. You know that you've crossed the line of safety that kept you immune from me.
- WOMAN: And do you think *you* have made us cross that line of safety?
- MAN: (*puzzled.*) Well, Yes! It was to be so!
- WOMAN: (*Loud laughter which almost deafens the ears.*) Ignorant man!
- WOMAN: We have *always* crossed the lines whenever we have *wanted* to! The biggest mistake you *Men* have perpetually made is to think we operate according to *your* will.
- MAN: See! Now you've admitted that you *are* the rebels that deserve the punishment that we've always given you. You've always done what is *not* supposed to be done behaved as you've always wanted and then blamed us for *stopping* you! You *need* to be stopped or else you will destroy the whole universe with your defiant energy! (*Suddenly a blazing light dazzles his eyes.*)
- WOMEN: You think you can stop us! *Mahishasura!* (*ha ha ha*) You think you can!
- (*The man freezes. Both the women go towards the woman inside the mantric circle. They talk to her consecutively.*)
- WOMAN: (*inside*) Don't enter this zone. You know you would be incarcerated forever.
- WOMAN: Yes we know but we have to do something to get you *out* of here!
- WOMAN: (*inside*): You can't do anything! You just go destroy him and leave me here to my fate!
- WOMAN: We can't do that! If we don't help ourselves, we will be ruined forever. We will enter the circumference!
- WOMAN: (*inside*): No!
- WOMAN: We *don't* have the choice. We will have to come inside if we want to go outside. It's always from inwards towards final emancipation.

(They enter the mantric circumference. As they step inside, temple bells start ringing loudly. The women almost shrink in pain. The man comes back to life. Three women now assume their prior identity as woman I, woman II and woman III)

MAN: Now you three are in my trap actually! brainless women. You have invited death by entering into this trap! See! I knew. If I trap her, you two will be trapped automatically!

WOMAN II: You stop these bells! Stop them we can't bear this pain!

MAN: These bells remind you of your sins!

WOMAN III: Sins! Those sins that you compelled us to commit!

WOMAN I: Yes.

MAN: No ! those sins that you committed yourself in spite of our denial

WOMAN III: Don't lie. *(in a state of barrage)* You provoked!

WOMAN II: You made sure we *make* mistakes...

MAN: Women, shut up or I will make sure that you die here and now. As such you're captivated in my *Mantric* circle from which there's no outlet. Remember, your life is in my hands now.

(He takes something in his hand and throws towards them.

They shrivel in pain.)

WOMEN: O! No! We can't take this. These bells! These *mantric spells*. Stop all this...

MAN: *(guffawing.)* You think I would listen to you and stop this. Bear this. There's only one way to escape pain.

WOMAN II: What?

MAN: Surrender in front of me. Take my aegis!

WOMAN III: No! Never! It is better to *die* than to accept your unwarranted will!

MAN: Fine! So let us see how much you can endure. Remember Evil *always* dies. Good *always* triumphs. Angels live demons die. Don't forget. By crossing the line of limit, you three did what was not *supposed* to be done. You were damned when you did what was forbidden. So you were ostracized by the community and were forced stay here in the woods. Where no decent one could enter so that you may be thwarted from further damaging their conscience. *(looks at them with hatred)* But how could *three ordinary women* be so audacious as to revolt? To defy us? No. not at all. Any woman would not *dare*! Only *Rakoshis* can. Yes. *You* three *Rakoshis* are the ones that corrupted these *three innocent docile women* and made them rebels. These three decided to flout because of you three. Now *I* the *aghor*, the *mahan Tantric*, the *mahan purusha* will destroy you forever. That's why I have come here. I heard from them that you three were trying regularly to encroach upon the prohibited territory and were trying to corrupt the sane souls. I had *warned* you.

Never try it. *Never* cross the *mantric* line. You already provoked these three into sins – grave sins that these three women could otherwise never have committed. You possessed them. Damaged their mind and tarnished their souls forever. You think that now I would allow you to do further anomaly. Not at all. They approached me to save their *pure* and *decent* women from your invasion. I have promised all those men and I will do my bit and destroy you. It is my duty as the *aghor*i to exercise control on you demons and I will. Had you remained within the confinement silently, I would not have done anything. But- you have forced me to intervene. Why did you lure that innocent *Man* into the forest and kill him? What did he do? Except that he tried to take a short cut and reach home faster than the usual time? You cannibals. I told you don't harm any *Man* who comes into your vision. Stay away from any further damage and I'll *spare* you three. You don't listen is it? You don't have the habit of obeying is it? Now see! See where you are. Face the fate that you've called upon yourself. But – there's a way to escape. Yes. I give you three a *choice*. Leave these innocent women and go forever. I will *spare* you.

WOMANIII: *Never* you rascal. Watch out! We did not kill them until they came *our* way. They had no right to encroach upon *our* privacy. To interfere in our lives. If they want a freedom, so do we. Why did they have to come in our life as dictators – stereotyping us into categories? Why? Why did they have to tell us what we are- what we should or should not do? Remember! We won't let any *Man* govern us. So we destroyed them! We had no choice. But This time, we thought we would give him a fair chance. A chance to alter himself, to change his narrow-minded perception but he *won't* budge. We penetrated into his psyche to make him realize his fault. But- We came to the conclusion he will *never* change! He will always be the same whether, in the *past, today* -or - tomorrow. A *Man* will *never* comply! We regularly *killed* Men. However, this time we realized this wasn't enough as their deaths will not annihilate *you*. You *will* perpetually live- their colossal ego- a *Man's* insurmountable pride that needs to be countered in order that justice is established for us- women! Thus, we crossed that line. The line of limit drawn for us by them and subsequently, the *mantric* line drawn by *you*! You felt we brought disaster on *ourselves* by crossing that line. But we knew we were bringing disaster on *you* by crossing that line. Beware *aghor*i! You tried to castigate us. Now, you will be destroyed! We won't spare you *beware*. You have ignited *our* fury!

WOMANII: Now we are *ready* to fight. To put an *end* to your horrendous atrocious autocracy!

WOMANIII: Yes!

MAN: Foolish Rakoshis! *You* will fight. I have confiscated all your strength. How will you fight? Surrender. And leave these three innocent women who have had enough to suffer because of you three!

WOMANI: Because of us or because of you!

MAN: Because of you. Devils. Had you not adulterated their thoughts, they would never have done what they did! For the first time we saw them rebuke *our* norms

WOMANIII: And now you'll see them do that again~!

MAN: What do you mean?

WOMANII: We mean what *you* are incapable to understand!

MAN: Fine. First come out of my *mantric* circle. Then we'll talk about your ability.

WOMANI: We can't. But-

MAN: You can't but what?

WOMANII: *They* can.

MAN: What?

WOMANIII: They can. These three will come out and show you what it is to challenge a woman's integrity.

MAN: Rakoshis!

WOMANII: Devis!

(Stage darkens. Deafening music. Slowly the stage lights up and music fades. Three women emerge. They are dressed in plain attire and have stony expressions on their face. They don't look glaringly ugly or grotesque but appear normal. Slowly they advance towards the man. He recedes in fear.)

WOMANI: So, we are ugly looking Rakoshis is it?

WOMANII: We are man-eating cannibals?

WOMANIII: We killed the *Man* right?

MAN: No Devis! I did not say anything like that for *you* three. You three are pure, decent goddesses *Sita, Savitri* - the '*satis*'- the *virtuous* women!

WOMANII: O really!

WOMANI: We are flattered. Sincerely.

MAN: Thanks. I wish to leave. *Pranam Devis!*

(As he tries to go, the three women advance towards him in great fury. He understands their intentions.)

WOMANI: *(Looking ferociously at the man and addressing the two other women)* Vengeance! Right.

WOMANII: Doubtlessly!

WOMANIII: For every injustice!

WOMANI: Fine. Let it be so then! *(takes a leap towards the man. He*

retreats. Suddenly something strikes him and he starts laughing. The women look at him in surprise.)

MAN: I know what can stop you.

WOMANI: O yes?

MAN: Doubtlessly! *(takes powder chalk and draws a line that separates him from the women)*

WOMANI: What's this!

WOMANII: He has drawn our limit!

WOMANIII: O No!

MAN: You can never cross this limit – good women- so are you right? *Devis* can never cross their line!

WOMEN: *(Loud laughter.)* *Devis*! We are not *Devis*!

MAN: What do you mean?

WOMANI: We are Rakoshis. The fearsome demons. You just said some time ago. We will cross this line easily as we don't care...

(They cross the line. The man tries to run. The first woman holds his fist. The second woman attacks him fiercely. He gives a loud cry. The third woman injures him severely. Lights fade for some time. After a few minutes, the stage Lights. We see several other men having gathered around the women. One of them speaks while others that appear his facsimile pose as if confronting the women.)

MAN: So you thought you can destroy us completely?

WOMANI: You are not killed. How is it possible?

MAN: It's your misconception that you can destroy us.

WOMANII: O!

MAN: Yes you already know we cannot be killed *(mocking tone.)* *Mahishasuramardini!* *(guffawing)* We can only be multiplied. The more you kill, the more we become!

WOMANIII: How can it be possible?

MAN: *(Loud laugh.)* You already know. Now submit in front of us. Finally. You have tried everything. attack, destroy almost everything. We are immune.

WOMANII: This can't be!

MAN: This is so!

WOMANI: *(Looking at other two women)* What can we do?

WOMANII: We have to do the same that we did earlier.

WOMANIII: I think so.

WOMEN: We need to - *sacrifice our sanctity*

MAN: *(puzzled.)* *Sacrifice sanctity.* What does *that* mean?

WOMANIII: You'll soon come to know what it means *Man*.

(The three stand in a row. They give a loud fierce scream. It appears they've transformed themselves into bloodthirsty vampires. They start attacking the

men one after the other and drink the blood out of their bodies. They die. Lights fade. The stage lightens after a few minutes. We see dead bodies of men scattered all over the stage as in a battlefield and the three women in a petrified state. After a while, they come to life.

WOMANI: They are destroyed!

WOMANII: Indeed, they are

WOMANIII: Victory to us!

(They hear a cry of anguish. As they try to look hitherto to find the source of the sound they hear and see a man on the ground in a moribund state.)

MAN: I am going to die! Please redeem me, Devis!

WOMAN I: So you have finally surrendered in front of us.

WOMANII: Accepted defeat!

WOMANIII: Fortunate are you.

MAN: Please forgive me. Give me back my life, mothers. Please. I *implore* in front of you. I am penitent for my wrongdoing. Restore me from this moribund state.

WOMANI: We do forgive you but we are not goddesses who can restore. We are Rakoshis!

MAN: You can!

WOMANII: *(Laughs.) Aghor!* You're asking something too much to be given to you. Don't forget. We are Rakoshis. And don't forget we are full of hatred. Venom and that too against men like you who forced us to lose our sanctity. Now don't try to manipulate us.

MAN: Ma! Please, Don't be that harsh on me! Please don't forget the purpose of your creation as the perpetual donors, the merciful sacrificers!

WOMANIII: *(Puzzled)* Are you thinking right now that we are fools? We will spare your life so that we may be the epitomes of Devis?

MAN: I will be your worshipper, devotee for the rest of my life ma!

WOMANII: Ma! You destructive *tantric*. You think you can engage us in this stupid emotional act of yours! We won't give life to you at all!

(They give a loud laughter. The man throws himself at their feet.)

MAN: Ma! Ma! Ma! Have mercy. Save me. I don't want to die. I fear death. You are filled with kindness for your children. I know. You saved the universe once from cataclysm. You save my life now.

(temple bells start ringing furiously. The three women give a loud cry in extreme agony.)

WOMANI: Don't torture us like this. Stop these bells from ringing

they will make us deaf!

WOMANII: Yes. Stop these bells. Please.

WOMANIII: Stop! We are not able to tolerate. Please.

MAN: Mothers. These bells remind you of your *sacred* existence as *Devis*. Please don't forget yourself. You're *not* demons. Please. These bells are meant to worship you in your original holy image.

WOMANI: Will you stop these please!

WOMANII: I will make sure you stop it man or I'll kill you and destroy everything out here.

WOMANIII: Yes. There will be unimaginable destruction. (*Painfully.*) Stop these bells!

(As the bells grow louder, the Man regains his prowess.)

MAN: They won't stop. The goddess has woken up from sleep. It is time for the *aarati* the temple bells will ring! Oh! Such a blissful sound that kills everything evil!

(*The jarring bells render the woman helpless. They, fall down. He becomes triumphant and proclaims aloud.*)

MAN: I would not stop worshipping you ever. The omnipotent, the omniscient one. The *Mahadevi*, *Om Jayanti Mangala Kali Bhadrakali Kapalini*, *Durga Shamashivadhatri Swaha Swatha Namostute!* (Keeps chanting the holy mantras from *shakradayastuti* – Devi confronting the *asuras*. After a while, he approaches near the women and sees them almost in agonized condition. *Laughs.*) It was your *mangalaarati* Ma! that exercised control on these devils. These evil witches that had almost consumed the sanity of these three innocent docile women. They had possessed them- made them *Rakoshis*. Destroyed them. Now they are killed. Destroyed forever. Hail to the holy goddess who saves her sons. *Kuputrojaye kavachatapiku mata na bhavati!* You have chosen this disciple of yours this *aghor* this worshipper of yours Ma to end their lives forever. I am grateful to you O Devi. Let me do the honors! (*Invokes a trident.* Tries attacking them but stops as he sees their pale faces.)

MAN: Oh! So finally they decided to leave you alone. See. They could not sustain! I knew they wouldn't be able to survive and would finally give up in this battle. Now follow me. (*brings them to a circumscribed area.*)

MAN: Don't cross this line ever. It will ruin you. Hope you three remember that you're never supposed to break the limit. Never do what's *not* supposed to be done. Stay here forever. Do as I told you. Remember, you are the *Devis* - The paradigm of purity - The embodiment of the holy

goddess. Don't besmirch her by becoming unruly. You need to understand that she is honored when you exercise control on your undue desires, your unwarranted aspirations and act as the true Satis like Sita and Savitri. If you rebuke, you'll lose your sanctity and will become *Rakoshis*. Don't ever dare to be one as *you* will meet devastating fate. (*He turns his back and attempts to go when the women address him.*)

WOMANI: Wait!

WOMANII: Wait!'

WOMANIII: Wait! *Man!*

MAN: Why? What happened?

WOMANI: *Devis* cannot cross this line right?

MAN: Yes.

WOMANII: But the *Rakoshis* can!

MAN: What?

WOMANII: *Devis* cannot cross the line of limit.

WOMANIII: If they do, they become *Rakoshis*- And, *Rakoshis* cannot cross the *mantric* line! But –

MAN: But!!!

WOMANIII: But *we* can cross *any* circumference and win. And we *will* as we are neither *Rakoshis* nor *Devis*.' (*She comes near him. The other two women stand behind her and raise their arms. She takes his trident thrusts it inside his body. He drops dead.*) We are the *Rakoshi Devis!* (*lights fade.*)

Notes: Rakoshi is the Bengali pronunciation of the word Rakshasi means a (female) demon.

Payal Kishore Trivedi is a freelance literary writer and a theatre critic. She completed her Master of Philosophy Program (2005) in Gujarat University on *Rasa theory in the works of the renowned playwright Girish Karnad* and subsequently her Doctor of Philosophy Degree program (2014) from Indira Gandhi National Open University New Delhi on *Contemporary Relevance in the selected plays (based on myths and folktales) of Girish Karnad*. She has been a student of Mudra School of Classical dance Ahmedabad and has completed learning her graduate and post-graduate course in *Bharatnatyam* from there. She has been continually writing scholarly articles for reputed journals like *Kafla Intercontinental*, *Phenomenal Literature*, *Literary Insight*, *Bridge in Making* etc. She has also presented her papers in International conference and National seminars (organized by IGNOU).

