

## How Not to Kill Tagore

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### Introduction: The Seed in the Smoke

The suffocating, bitterly cold winter evening of December 1937 wrapped its heavy, smog-choked arms around the sprawling, chaotic heart of Calcutta. Deep within the labyrinthine, impossibly narrow alleys of the College Street district, the air was a thick, almost breathable soup of conflicting and overpowering scents. It smelled aggressively of roasted, heavily spiced peanuts, the sharp, eye-watering tang of raw ammonia rising from the damp, moss-covered open gutters, and the heavy, intoxicatingly sweet perfume of burning sandalwood incense wafting from a tiny, hidden corner

shrine. The sky above, entirely blocked out by the leaning, decaying silhouettes of ancient, crumbling colonial balconies, was a bruised, sickly shade of deep indigo, completely choked with the thick, grey-black coal smoke that continuously belched from a thousand kitchen fires.

Inside the claustrophobic, incredibly cramped confines of "Babu's Chai Khana," the sensory assault was absolute and entirely inescapable. The tiny, violently hot room was illuminated only by three heavily carbon-stained, dangerously flickering amber kerosene lanterns that hung precariously from a sagging, heavily termite-eaten wooden beam. The lamps cast long, erratic, violently dancing black shadows against the peeling, sickly sea-green paint of the damp plaster walls. The air inside was a dense, humid fog, intensely saturated with the aggressive, mouth-watering aroma of violently boiling, unpasteurized buffalo milk, the incredibly sharp, spicy kick of freshly crushed green cardamom pods, and the pungent, heavy musk of cheap, tightly rolled tobacco bidis being smoked by entirely too many sweating men in entirely too small a space.

The cacophony was deafening, a relentless, vibrating wall of sound. The incredibly loud, continuous, and high-pitched hiss-spit-sizzle of the massive, blackened iron tea kettle boiling over onto the glowing, violently orange-red coals provided a constant, aggressive baseline. Over this, a dozen different, highly heated political arguments raged simultaneously. Men in coarse, deeply wrinkled cotton kurtas and heavy, scratchy woolen shawls screamed themselves hoarse, their voices a jagged, overlapping symphony of deep, guttural Bengali and sharp, rapid-fire Hindi. They violently slammed their thick, heavy glass tea tumblers down onto the deeply scarred, violently

sticky wooden tables with incredibly loud, sharp clacks that rang in the ears.

Sitting entirely alone in the absolute darkest, most heavily shadowed corner of this chaotic, sweltering room was Shikhar Godhwan. He was a man in his mid-thirties, though his deeply lined, intensely exhausted face made him look at least a decade older. His coarse, unbleached cotton dhoti was heavily stained with the grey, gritty dust of the city streets, and he smelled faintly but undeniably of sour, nervous sweat and the stale, deeply depressing odor of absolute, crushing poverty.

In his incredibly thin, violently trembling hands, he clutched a highly fragile, incredibly dry, and heavily yellowed scrap of newsprint. The paper was entirely brittle, feeling exactly like a dried, dead autumn leaf between his calloused fingers. It was a violently torn, deeply faded clipping from an obscure, highly radical vernacular newspaper dated entirely back to 1911. The faint, incredibly musty smell of ancient, decaying paper and dried, flaking black ink rose to his flaring nostrils, a completely toxic perfume that he inhaled like a dying man gasping for pure oxygen.

The weak, sickly amber light from the violently flickering lantern barely illuminated the faded, completely smudged black type, but Godhwan did not need to see the letters clearly; he had obsessively, entirely memorized the agonizing words. It was a deeply cynical, completely unverified, and highly toxic opinion piece detailing the 1911 Delhi Durbar, aggressively and falsely claiming that Rabindranath Tagore, the deeply beloved, universally celebrated son of Bengal, had specifically penned his magnificent, heavily revered song, "Jana Gana Mana," as a sycophantic, completely subservient ode of praise to the visiting British monarch, King George V.

Godhwan's jaw clenched with such incredible, violent force that he could physically hear the sharp, sickening grind of his own molars inside his skull. The intensely bitter, highly astringent taste of the over-boiled, deeply black tea in his mouth suddenly turned to the distinctly foul, incredibly metallic taste of raw bile and sheer, unadulterated hatred.

To Godhwan, whose entire, miserable life had been an endless, completely suffocating cycle of brutal, grinding poverty, heavily arrogant British tax collectors, and the deeply humiliating, incredibly loud sneers of wealthy, completely indifferent landlords, this faded piece of paper was not just news. It was absolute, blinding, and entirely holy revelation. It was the complete, undeniable explanation for why his beloved, vibrantly colorful, and deeply spiritual country was bleeding. The cultural elites, the deeply revered, heavily garlanded poets who sat in their beautiful, clean, sweet-smelling mansions—they were the real, absolute enemy. They were the hidden, entirely treacherous rot feeding the entirely foreign, completely pale-skinned beast.

He violently closed his eyes, completely shutting out the aggressively dancing yellow light of the tea stall. Behind his tightly squeezed, twitching eyelids, a completely terrifying, incredibly vivid hallucination bloomed. He saw the grand, incredibly brightly lit, beautifully decorated halls of Jorasanko Thakurbari, entirely smelling of expensive, intoxicating rosewater and blooming, pristine white jasmine. He saw Tagore, entirely draped in impossibly clean, blindingly white, completely soft silk, sitting entirely comfortably on a plush, incredibly heavy, deeply red velvet chair. And then, he saw himself. He saw Shikhar Godhwan, the forgotten, the deeply bruised, the entirely poor, violently bursting into that incredibly pristine, heavily perfumed room. He saw himself as a completely terrifying,

entirely unstoppable, and heavily armed angel of absolute, bloody vengeance.

A heavy, incredibly hot bead of intensely salty sweat rolled slowly, agonizingly down his deeply furrowed forehead, stinging his eye. He entirely ignored it. The deafening, aggressive noise of the tea stall—the violently shouting men, the aggressively clinking glasses, the roaring, heavy traffic of the street outside—completely faded away into absolute, entirely dead silence in his mind. All he could hear was the incredibly slow, deep, heavy, and completely entirely rhythmic beating of his own completely radicalized heart. Thump. Thump. Thump. It sounded exactly like the heavy, completely terrifying beat of a massive, stretched-leather war drum calling an entirely deeply desperate man to an absolutely holy, incredibly bloody crusade.

He slowly, incredibly carefully folded the fragile, completely yellowed newspaper clipping, treating it with the absolute, entirely misplaced reverence of a deeply religious man handling a sacred, divine text. He completely securely tucked it deep inside the inner breast pocket of his sweat-stained kurta, pressing it entirely firmly against his hammering chest. He violently threw a single, heavily tarnished, incredibly small copper coin onto the sticky, deeply scarred wooden table. It landed with a sharp, entirely final clink that completely cut through the heavy, smoky air.

He stood up, his wooden chair scraping violently, loudly against the completely uneven, heavily cracked concrete floor. He stepped entirely out of the suffocating, incredibly hot, aggressively cardamom-scented tea stall and out into the freezing, completely damp, entirely unforgiving, and heavily polluted night air of Calcutta. The violent, hissing gas lamps cast his completely elongated, intensely dark shadow heavily against the damp, peeling brick walls.

As he began the long, entirely exhausting, and deeply cold walk back to his completely miserable, intensely dark slum, the seed of absolute, total obsession had entirely, completely, and irrevocably taken root in the completely fertile, entirely dark soil of his deeply desperate mind. The incredibly long, completely violently disastrous, and entirely bruising journey toward the kitchen knife, the banana peel, and the completely unimaginable pain had officially, entirely begun.

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## Chapter 1: The Kitchen Knife and the Peeled Banana

The afternoon sun filtered through the intricate jali screens of Jorasanko Thakurbari, casting a geometric net of golden, dust-moted light across the cold, polished expanse of the marble floors. The veranda was bathed in a honeyed glow, warming the ancient stone. Rabindranath Tagore, now in his late seventies, sat cross-legged on a low wooden takht. His white beard, shimmering like spun moonlight in the afternoon haze, flowed over a simple, pristine white kurta. The only sound in the immediate vicinity was the soft, rhythmic scratching of his silver fountain pen against thick parchment. The air was heavy and intoxicating, thick with the intoxicating scent of blooming jasmine from the courtyard garden, beautifully intertwining with the faint, musky, and comforting aroma of sandalwood incense burning in a brass holder nearby. Outside, the vibrant emerald leaves of the mango trees rustled, hiding chirping mynah birds, while the distant, melodic holler of a street vendor selling fresh, sweet-smelling guavas drifted over the high walls. It was 1938 in Calcutta, a city whose streets vibrated with the electric, nervous energy of the freedom struggle.

Suddenly, the heavy, dark teak door burst open with a violent crash, sending a discordant shockwave through the serene air and violently rattling the decorative brass bells suspended from the ceiling into a chaotic, high-pitched frenzy. In stormed Shikhar Godhwan. He was a wiry man in his late thirties, his once-white dhoti hitched high above his bony knees and his coarse cotton kurta stained with dark patches of sour sweat and the gritty, gray dust of Calcutta's streets. His eyes, wide and bloodshot, bulged with a terrifying, righteous fury, catching the ambient light like polished obsidian. In his right hand, his knuckles white with tension, he clutched a large, heavy-handed kitchen knife stolen from the Thakurbari's own cook's block earlier that morning. The sharp steel blade still gleamed under the veranda's light, smeared with the bright yellow, earthy-smelling paste of turmeric from the midday lentil meal. His chest heaved visibly, his ragged breath loud and rasping in the quiet room, as he aimed the tip of the knife straight at the poet laureate.

"Tagore sahib!" Godhwan bellowed, his voice sharp and ragged, echoing off the high, cavernous ceilings with a booming intensity. "You traitor to Bharat Mata! You wrote that cursed song 'Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka' to praise the British king George V! Admit your sin right now, or I shall send you to your ancestors with this very blade!"

Tagore looked up slowly, his calm, dark eyes behind thick, round spectacles showing absolutely no fear—only a profound, gentle patience. He set down his pen with a soft, deliberate click against the wooden table, his hands moving with fluid grace to fold perfectly into his lap. "Shikhar beta," he said softly, his voice carrying the deep, resonant, and melodic cadence of a master orator, cutting through the ringing silence. "You are mistaken.

Please, sit down. Let me explain this to you clearly, as one son of Bengal to another. There is no need for knives or anger when words can bridge the chasm."

Godhwan remained frozen, the yellow-stained knife trembling violently in his sweaty grip, the ambient light catching the micro-movements of the shaking blade. Tagore's serene demeanor seemed to suck the oxygen out of Godhwan's fiery rage, pausing him just long enough for the poet to continue. Tagore switched seamlessly to Hindi, his tone as warm as the sunlight on the floorboards, yet firm as the teak doors:

"शिखर, तुम पूरी तरह गलत हो। 'जन गण मन अधिनायक जय हे, भारत भाग्य विधाता' का मतलब है – हे भारतवासियों के मन के अधिनायक, हे भारत की किस्मत लिखने वाले! यह कोई ब्रिटिश राजा जॉर्ज पंचम नहीं, बल्कि ईश्वर या राष्ट्र की आत्मा है जो हमारे विविध देश को एक रखती है। मैंने यह गीत १९११ में लिखा था, लेकिन यह प्रार्थना है, तारीफ नहीं। न पाँचवें जॉर्ज ने, न छठे ने, न कोई भी राजा कभी भारत की किस्मत बना सकता है। यह गलतफहमी है, बेटा। यह गाना हमारे लोगों की विविधता को समर्पित है – पंजाब, सिंध, गुजरात, मराठा, द्रविड़, उत्कल, बंगाल – सब एक होकर एक ही ईश्वरीय शक्ति के सामने झुकते हैं। यह ब्रिटिश साम्राज्यवाद की स्तुति नहीं, बल्कि भारत की आत्मा की जय-जयकार है। मैंने खुद लिखा है कि न कोई राजा, न कोई साम्राज्यवादी इस देश की नियति तय कर सकता है। समझे? अब शांति से बैठो, और हम चाय पीते हुए इस पर चर्चा करेंगे।"