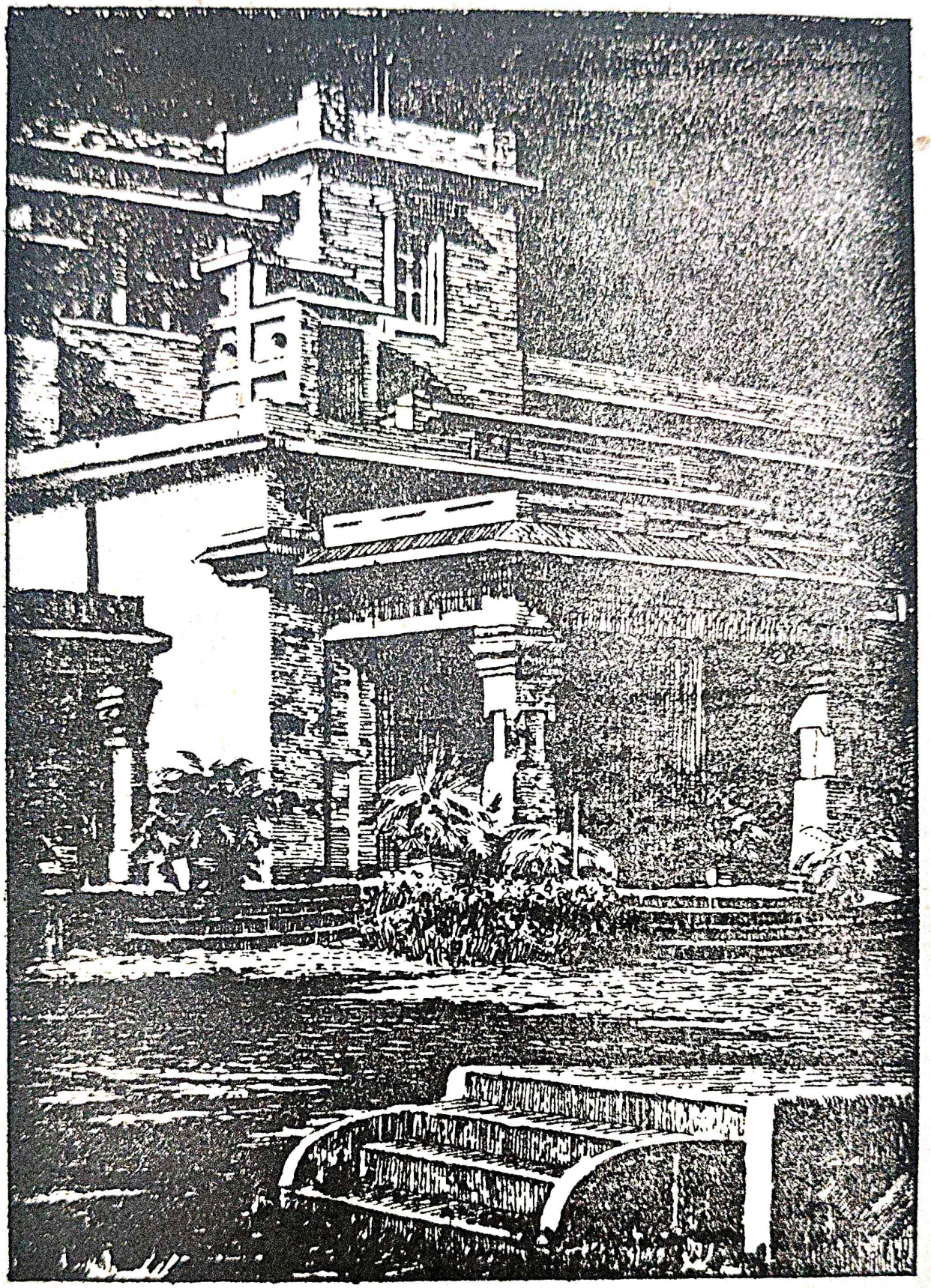


UTTARAYANA

SANTINIKETAN

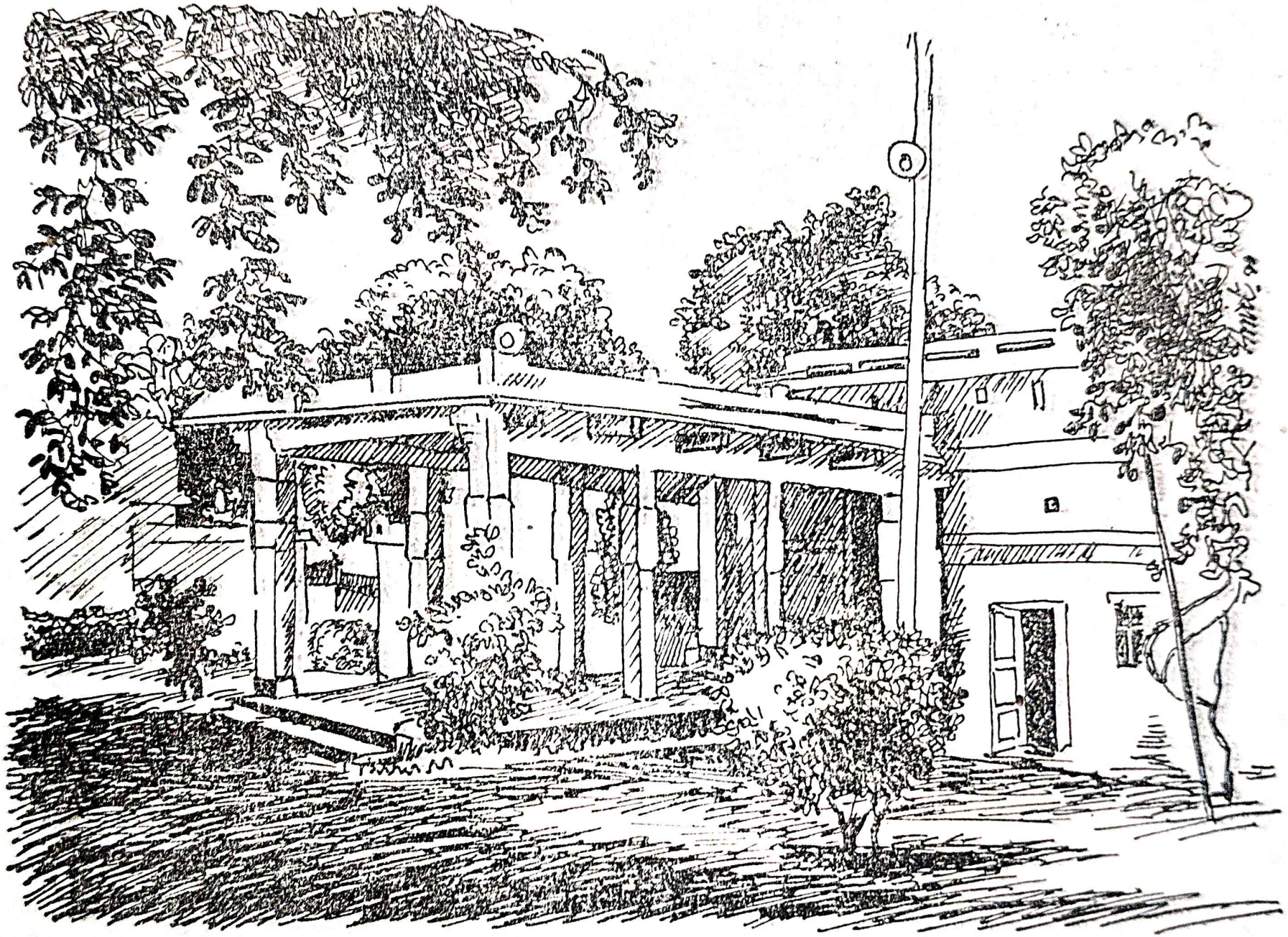
First Edition 23 December, 1979

Copy Right : Bandana Chattopadhyay

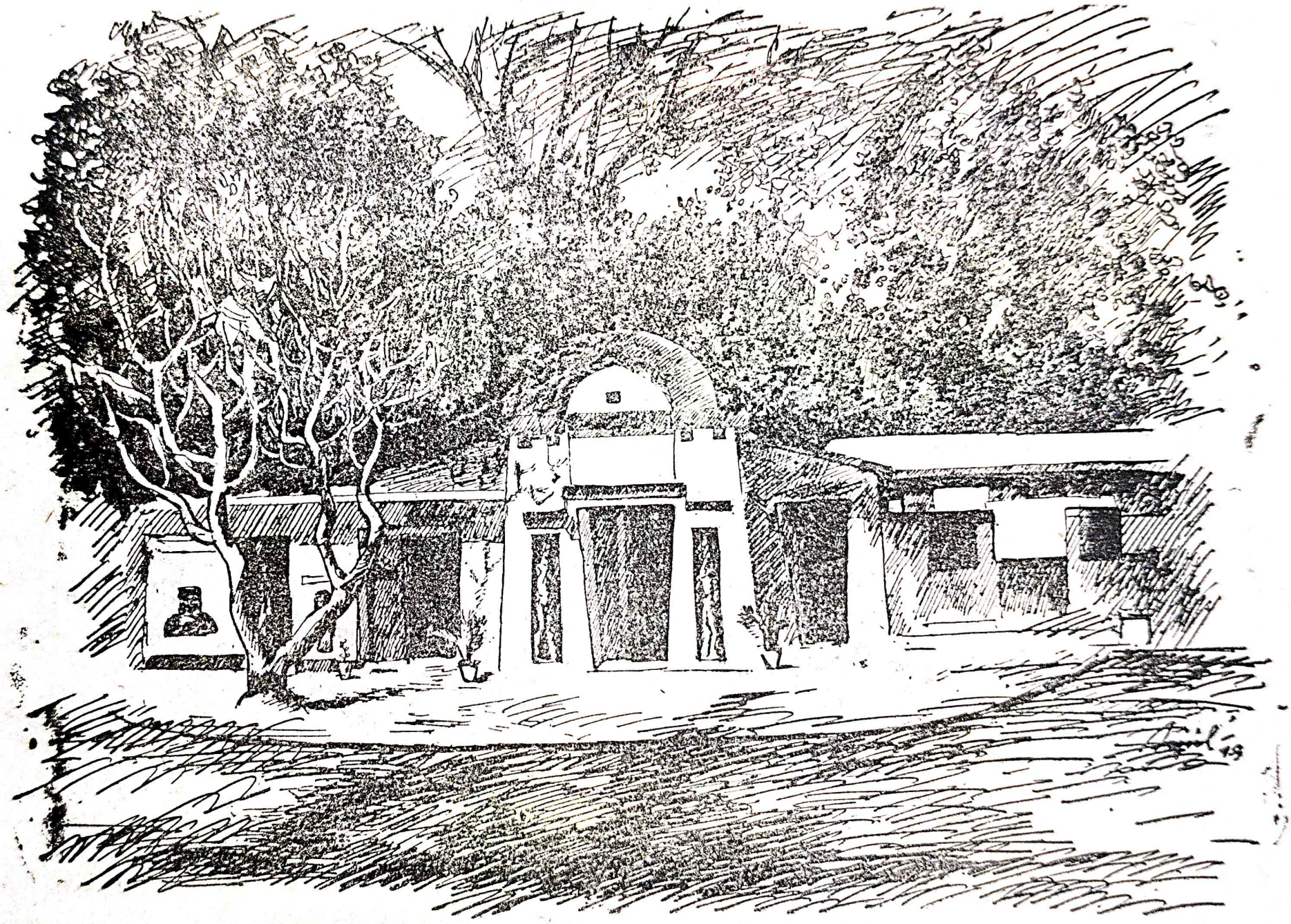
Price Rupees : Two only

Published By Bandana Chattopadhyay
Santiniketan

Printed by : Modern Priting Works, Bolpur



KONARKA



SHYAMALI

SANTINIKETAN

The Poet's Home at Uttarayana

'Uttarayana' was Rabindranath Tagore's home in Santiniketan, during the last years of his life. The name does not mean any single house, but the whole complex. The Uttarayana houses came into existence one after the other—Konarka, Udayana, Chitrabhanu, Shyamali, Punashcha, Udichi.

Two little thatched huts were first built in the vast field lying on the north of the Ashrama. This is the story given to us in the third volume of the Poet's biography, by the much revered Shri Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay :

"Earthen huts with thatched roofs and slit bamboo panels to the doors, just as the Poet fancied them. The floors of the rooms were of mud, with gravel beaten into them. Only the small bathroom had a cemented floor. It was the Poet's desire to spend his life in the simplest way, away from everything. ...In time

everything about the house was changed and the result was Konarka. And beside it, by slow degrees, rose the mansion of Uttarayana (Udayana).

After living in many other houses—the old Santiniketan house, Dehali, he first came to live in Konarka within the Uttarayana complex in November, 1919. Afterwards slowly and gradually arose the other houses Udayana. Shyamali, Punashcha, Udichi and in complete harmony with them a lovely garden, creating a charming atmosphere.

It was a superb expression of delicate and artistic taste, but there was no indulgence in luxury or modishness. It did not depend on hoarded wealth or expensive paraphernalia, but on the way the artist's mind was shaped.

The poet had the houses built according to his own taste, small houses of one or two simple rooms, surrounded by wide verandahs.

The houses were open on all sides, north, south, east and west—the bright light from the sky and the wild winds from the distant horizon rushed in.

The other houses of Santiniketan, Sinha-Sadana, the old library, at present Patha-Bhavana office, the Kalabhavana hostel, Havell Hall, Chaitya, Pantha-Nibasa, Uttarayana, each charms the eye with its different architecture. They refine and broaden the taste.

Should one examine the houses in minute detail, one would not discover any great disharmony between them. Each has been built in perfect tune with its surroundings. Instead of being arrogant examples of modern European builder's art, these houses are matchless examples of oriental architecture.

Travellers from our own country and abroad, research workers, sightseers who visit India, specially those who do not come merely as travellers, but with the eager intention of seeing places famed in history, such as the Taj Mahal, Jumma Masjid, Jaipur, Ajanta, Ellora, Nalanda, Konarak, Meenakshi and other temples, do not consider the Uttarayana houses less important than the historical places in architecture, beauty and variety, as every one will agree.

Visitors to this place are charmed by the architecture and beauty of the houses in which

the Poet once lived, specially Udayana and Shyamali. They realise how good taste can create lovely and artistic things. Perhaps after returning home and resuming their unlovely daily round of duties, the memory of Uttarayana brings comfort to their minds, even for a short while.

The huge palace of Uttarayana is partly one-storeyed, two-storeyed and three-storeyed—the roofs are all on different levels. There are many rooms large and small. It is an unusual building, named Udayana, because it faces the east.

This large building took shape slowly, from its inception in 1919 to its completion in 1927-28. A combination of different styles is the principal attraction of the house. The walls are covered with cool matting : the doors and windows are beautifully decorated ; the red cement floors shine and glow. These and the furnishings of the rooms, the curtains on the doors and windows inspire and influence good taste and give pleasure to the mind.

I have already mentioned the fact that the house was not built in a day, or even according

to a single plan. Different architectural designs of the orient have been employed here and in keeping with them, new styles have been used to build the different parts of the house.

There is a covered verandah before the front-door and open verandahs on either side. The covered portion looks like a stage, somewhat like the summer theatres of China.

The front-door leading out of the covered verandah bears traces of Moghul influence. The windows opening on the uncovered parts of the verandah are decorated in many colours in the Japanese style. The pillars in the verandah are fine examples of Buddhist architecture, as in Ajanta-Ellora.

The front-door opens into the well-furnished drawing-room, decorated after the styles of north and south India. Above the matting on the walls are wooden panels, on which hang copies of the Poet's drawings. The chairs and divans are in the new style, combining eastern and western ideas of art.

The inner hall is filled with beautiful wood-work executed by skillful hands. There are

seats along the walls, with an empty space in the middle. Special functions may be held here. There is a suggestion of the interior decoration of Java and Bali.

The south room is in the Japanese style, wooden railings, colours and so on.

Next to the Udayana building may be seen the high roof of the cook-house. It looks like a part of the temple architecture at Barobudur. The furnishings of the cook-house are in keeping with the design of the rest of the house, alcoves in the walls, chairs, tables, low stools.

The late poet Buddhadeva Bose described the house and its fittings in his book entitled, 'Sav Peycohhir Desh' :

"It is needless to say that the best house in Santiniketan is Udayana, not only from the point of architecture, but also from the point of comport. We went round this house built by Rathindranath under his own guidance, one day. It is indeed worth seeing. The unimpaired beauty of harmony through sudden corners, turnings, differences in level, that is so evident out-of-doors, is noticeable indoors as well.

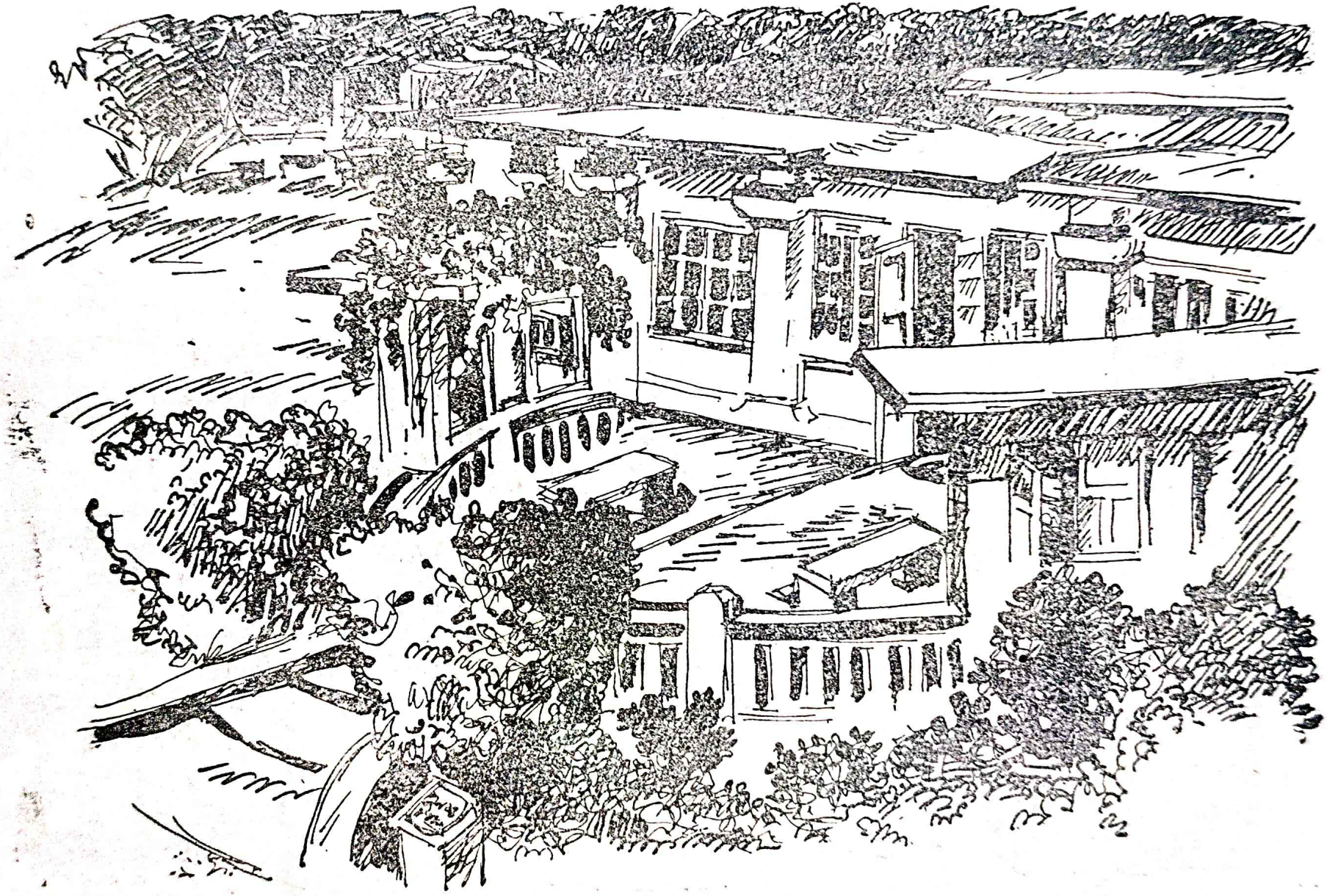
There are also numerous pictures and other works of art. In the drawing-room downstairs and in the large dining-room all the pictures have been painted by the poet. But we saw paintings by Abanindranath, Gaganendranath, Nandalal Bose, Rathindranath, Pratimadevi and many others, all over the remaining portion of the house.

The whole house is a veritable feast for the eyes. I liked Miss Poupee's rooms best. ...The bed-room is open on three sides, north, south and west. The view from the west is delightful.

Bare rolling fields meet the sky: in the north-west corner where clouds gather and whence rains come, the view is open to the horizon. This room should have been named *Shaoni*. I cannot imagine a better place to watch the monsoon arrive. Through the long panes of glass in the windows, the eyes drown in the grandeur of the rains, the mind drowns. The poet's son Rathindranath once said that when monstrous clouds gather in this corner of the sky and rush forward, it is an unforgettable sight.

This is what he said about the furniture—"Their unique quality immediately strikes the eye. Even the most insignificant object of daily use is beautiful and not only beautiful, but unique, unique with a character of its own. A bold originality speaks out from everything. There is a spare neatness in every object, chairs, table, bedstead, curtains. There is not a hint of showiness and display of wealth. Here too there is a combination of East and West. The framework of the objects is western, but the work is in the Indian way. There is no back to the dining-room chairs to lean against...but the idea is probably to encourage the Indian way of sitting on flat wooden seats (*pidis*) during meals.

Santiniketan furniture does not follow any fixed style—changes in proportion, size and shape are made with a view to convenience. There may be a gap in the bedstead, where one may keep one's books and small objects, if one wants to read in bed. Or there may be two shelves at the head of the bed, to accommodate a glass of water, a packet of cigarettes, books,



PUNASCHA

UDICHI

note books, pens, according to need. It is because these things do not follow transient fashion that there is no danger of their easily becoming out-of-date. The stamp of personality on them is durable.

Adjoining Udayan there are several out-houses, the cook-house, the servants' quarters, the store-rooms, rows of small buildings facing a gravelled courtyard. They make a charming sight. Behind them are the gardeners huts and outside them the granaries and the deep well in the beautiful north Indian style. The water-tank above the porter's room charms the on-lookers' eyes. All in all, very few buildings in the whole of India can compete with the Udayana architecture.

Next to Udayana there is a concrete gate-way covered with *Malati* and *Madhu-Malati* creepers and beyond the gateway, in the lap of a huge *Shimul* tree in the north-west corner, nestles Konark.

During the autumn vacation of the year 1919, Rabindranath was travelling in Assam, when two huts with mud walls and thatched roofs were built for him on the northern side of the Ashrama grounds. Gurudeva put up here on

his return, instead of at 'Dehali', where he had been living.

The mud huts did not last very long and in their place rose the house now called Konarka. Its present appearance was achieved after many changes. Shrimati Rani Chanda has described Konarka in her book called, 'Gurudeva'.—

"Gurudeva lived in Konarka. He had it built according to his fancy. He had it made in such a way that no matter in which room he would sit writing, he could have an uninterrupted view of the distant horizon all round him. So a room was built on a high foundation, open on all four sides, with only four pillar-like brick supports in the four corners, to hold up the roof. In the south-western corner of this room and at a much lower level a bedroom with attached bathroom was built and a similar room on the south-eastern corner. Whenever Andrews came to Santiniketan, he stayed here, so that he could be close to Gurudeva. At other times Gurudeva had his meals in this room. All this I saw in those early days."

The large room in the middle is the drawing-room. One has to go down a couple of steps to reach the famous red verandah of

Konarka, which projects east ward under a roof supported by rows of pillars. It is like a stage, open on three sides and on the red gravel right in front of it, stands the famous *Shimul* tree which the Poet tended with such loving care."

Shrimati Rani Chanda continues, "At the end of one rainy season an infant *Shimul* tree germinated right before the front verandah. Gurudeva was delighted when he saw it. He looked after it from day to day, watered and manured it regularly. Rathindranath felt nervous, because *Shimul* trees grow very fast and have fragile trunks. If a storm brought it down, the roof of the verandah would be crushed. It would be far better, if the tree were not allowed to grew there.

Gurudeva was grieved to hear this. The tree grow taller every day. Another monsoon and a *Malati* vine appeared at its foot. Gurudeva twined the delicate new creeper round the trunk of the young tree. Let the vine grow under the protection of the tree. A day came when the youthful *Shimul* became a mighty tree. To this day the *Malati* vine clings to, twisting itself round and round the sturdy trunk."

The Konarka house itself was constructed after many break-downs and re-buildings according to the Poet's fancy. Each room is higher or lower than the next. One has to climb up or down in order to pass from one room to another. They are all built on different levels; so are the roofs. There are fourteen terraces on different levels. The stairs leading up to the roof—two flights of steps on two sides, to go from one terrace to another—seats on the roofs—ordinary people marvel at the ingenious device and pattern of the whole.

After Gurudeva's death, his daughter-in-law Pratima Devi lived mostly in Konarka. The Red House was a favourite of hers. Konarka is full of her memories—she would sit there, thinking of by-gone days. In those days the lights of Konarka were as the guiding light of Santiniketan. Today the house is hallowed by memories of Rabindranath, Rathindranath and Pratima Devi.

On the east side of Konarka stands the dark mud house called Shamali.

"I am the favoured son of the green earth. I am closely related to the dark soil, I love it deeply. It is not for me to live in brick man-

sions. I shall live like the earth in this earthen hut. One day I shall be one with the earth. So be it. I am warming up the relationship before hand." These lines are quoted from the book 'Alapchari Rabindranath' by Shrimati Rani Chanda, whom the Poet regarded with affection.

In March 1935, Rabindranath returned to the Ashram after a tour of North India. 'Shyamali' was under construction according to his directions. The district of Birbhum is dry and arid. The huts are built of mud and thatched with straw, with the result that fires are frequent. It is not easy to put out the fires. because of the lack of water. The poor villagers are reduced to destitution. The only way out is to build roofs of concrete, which they cannot afford.

The Poet gave a great deal of thought to the problem and finally hit upon a solution. The walls are always built of mud ; if the roofs are also made of mud, there will be no danger of fire and it can be done very easily, with locai material and labour.

The Poet decided to build for his own use, a house entirely of mud, from floor to roof-top. In the Uttarayana compound of those days,

there were only the Konarka house and the Uttarayana mansion. There were long discussions between the Poet, the architect Surendranath Kar and the artist Nandalal Bose, as to how a mud hut would look, so close to the big houses.

The workman/Gourdas Mondol came from the adjoining village of Bhubandanga. Santhal men and women worked as labourers, digging the trenches, mixing the clay, putting up the walls. Word spread to all the villages lying around that a house with an earthen roof was under construction.

The village people would stop on their way to the weekly market and gaze with awe at the mud roof. In front of the house, there is a half-moon shaped terrace open to the sky. Under the practical guldance of the artist Nandalal and Ramkinkar, the students of Kalabhavana carved figures in relief, all round the outside walls of the house.

Shri Soumyen Adhikari transcribed the mem oirs of Pratima Devi. The carefully presented pages of this diary contain a fair amount of information about Shyamali :

"Rabindranath was a believer in work as

well as a poet ; he was also given to whimsical fancies. The thought of the miserable condition of the villagers was always at the back of the poet's mind. He wondered how to build cheap houses for the village folk. He thought it would be cheaper and also reduce the risk of fire, if the roofs too were built of mud

Work commenced within Uttarayana itself. The first sketch was designed by Surendranath Kar and Nandalal Bose himself devised the perspective on the pattern of Nalanda and Barobodur. The house was strongly built of mud, pitch and cow-dung. My husband, Rathindranath added to this mixture finely-chopped, 'bena' plants, ***Bena*** is a kind of reed. Shyamali was plastered with this mixture.

Nandalal Bose entrusted the high relief-work on the walls to Ramkinkar. So far as I can remember, a few Kalabhavana students—Chitraniva Chaudhuri, Gouri Bhanja (Nandalal's daughter) Rudrasha Hanji and others helped in this work. The subject matter for this relief work was provided by the terra-cotta designs of Bankura, the lives of the Santhals in the neighbouring villages, Moghul miniatures, to-

gether with a decorative design and a single figure from Ajanta,

On both sides of the front door stand figures of Santhal men and women and a Santhal couple in the eastern corner. These are Ramkinkar's original contributions. The Krishna-Gopini figures on the back wall are copied from Ramkinkar's originals, The huge battle-steed in high relief on the eastern wall is by Nandalal. The battle-steed has been taken from a broken-down temple in a marketing village called Bali-dewan in the Go-ghat section of the district of Hughli. The Mother and Child and the Man on the Palm Tree on the western wall, the Pranam (Obeisance), the group of Santhal girls and the soldier with the deer—all on the front wall, as well as the Herd of Deer and the panel of geese on the back wall were executed by the boys and girls of Kala-bhavana under the direction and guidance of their 'Master-Masha' Nandalal Bose.

By this time the Uttarayana gardens were flourishing. Round about 'Shyamali' Rathindranath planted mango and eucalyptus saplings in close combinationg, their colours matching that of the soil, just as Nandalal had wanted. One

can now see the hermony between the house and the surrounding landscape."

The mud house was completed in about a couple of months. A description of the house-warming ceremony, on the occasion of the Poet's birthday, on Vaisakh 25, of the Bengali calendar 1342 (May 8 1935) appeared in the pages of the Jaistha number of the monthly magazine Prabasi :

"When the ceremonies were over, a large number of those present advanced in orderly file towards the mud house, newly built for the Poet. He called it 'Shyamali'. He has expressed the wish to live in this house from now. It is built of earth in such a way that even heavy rainfall cannot distort or damage it in any way. It is the first house of this type to be built here. The artist Surendranath Kar had the house constructed to his own plan and he has decorated the outside and inside of the house with earthen figures and ornamental designs."

The day after the birthday and house-warming celebrations the poet wrote to Shrimati Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis :

"My birthday was celebrated yesterday... My mud house is ready too— It is lovely and

quite worth seeing. Even the roof is of mud—something quite unheard-of. Villagers filled with curiosity, come to see it. If they could build their roofs of mud, instead of straw, it would be to their great advantage. There would be no risk of fire and the straw could be used as cattle-feed."

Rathindranath and Pratima Devi were in Europe at the time and the Poet wrote to Rathindranath on Baisakh 29 :

"The celebrations of Baisakh 25 are over. The house-warming was added to them. The mud house looks beautiful. For quite a while Nandalal's party worked hard day and night to complete the figures on the wall—with the help of lamps at night. The most curious visitors are the villagers. They feel encouraged by the thought that roofs can be made of mud."

The house on the east of Shyamali is called *Punascha*, The Poet lived in Shyamali for a year. The whole of 1936. The monsoon arrived that year with terrifying violence. Cracks appeared in the mud roof of Shyamali. A tarpaulin covering had to be used to save the walls. The roof was repaired at the end of the monsoon. Gurudeva was not very pleased

with Shyamali. Shrimati Rani Chanda wrote in her book, 'Gurudeva' :

"Gurudeva grew dissatisfied and said, 'The place is stuffed with things, I feel like a prisoner among them. There is no room to stretch my limbs. Build me a room beside this. A single room with open verandahs all round it."

This house was built at only a few cubits distance from Shyamali. The walls are of mud, the roof of concrete. He took up residence in the new house. This house too underwent many changes, according to necessity and the Poet's fancy. The open verandahs were all enclosed with glass. Walls were built on the east and west sides. Its first appearance was totally changed.

The two-storeyed house to the south-east of 'Punascha' is known as *Udichi*. The Poet lived for two years in Punascha, up to 1938. He could not live anywhere for long. He lost his fancy for Punascha and grew bored.

Shrimati Rani Chanda has written about this in her 'Alapchari Rabindranath' :

"I have asked Rathi to build me a very small house, this time. Two-storeyed, with a

single room upstairs, open on all sides. I don't want anything else. I have had enough, I have lived in many houses, but this will be my last. I shall live upstairs close to the sky. I shall look at the sky, I shall close the glass windows when I feel like it. And I shall watch the green leaves on the tree-tops flutter and shiver in light and shade."

The new house was built on four sturdy pillars on the ground, to the south-east of Punascha, just as Gurudeva had wanted. His little book of poems called *'Senjuti'* was published at this time, (1938). He named the house 'Senjuti', but later changed it to 'Udichi', remembering that the house stood on the eastern edge of Uttarayana.

In his book called 'Sab Peyechhir Deshe, the poet Buddhadeva Bose wrote :

"From this point I liked Udichi very much. The Poet's last house and I think, his best. Beauty and enjoyment have united here. It is the only two-storeyed one among all the houses that have been built for the Poet. Although double-storeyed, it is not very high. The ground-floor is flush with the ground. A creeper climbs up the eastern wall and one has only to stretch

one's arm to touch it. If one stands on the first fioor verandah, one has a novel view of the whole Ashrama. One feels as though one were seeing it for the first time. ...This upper floor is as beautiful as it is comfortable".

Pratima Devi's studio is called *Chitra Bhanu*. It was built in the south garden of Udayana, in keeping with the style of this garden. It is an example of landscape gardening—after the usual pattern of Japanese gardens with their rest-houses. The ground-floor was bare at first, due to the needs of the garden. Later it was altered into Rathindranath's workshop. From outside the house looks like a rocky cave and was known as the cave-room, 'Guha-Ghar'.

Rathindranath planned all the furnishings. The inside of his workshop looks like a ship's cabin. The most attractive object in the room is a large bed, meant for rest and work. It is built on a cement platform. The walls are covered with matting.

On the north side of the bed are wooden shelves to hold books and other things, so that whatever he needed was at hand.

There is a hidden lamp for reading in bed, with a secret drawer for one's keys.

On the south side there is a fine brass netting which can be raised or lowered on ball-bearings. In front is a cotton net to keep off flies. It is like a screen and can be drawn from either side to be come a mosquito-net. Ordinary visitors are astonished and intrigued by the ingeniousness of the plan.

There is a carpentry table in a corner of the south wall. On the table and the wall before it, there are arrangements to hold different kinds of delicate carpentry tools. On the other side, under the table, there is an electric drill with a transformer.

When Rathindranath worked bere, specially when he did his wood-work, he used a 100 watt lamp.

The pillars in the room are encased in wood. The drawers in them, where screws, nails, drills etc are stored, are covered with metal, Under the window before the raised platform of the bed, are pigeon-holes for official papers and so on.

There is a little table with lacquer work. There are matching chairs, easy-chairs, cane stools (*moras*) with Batik covers and other suitable pieces of furniture.

There are two doors. Beside one of them, there are specimens of the original soil strata of the site of Uttarayana and a lasting section of the soil at Uttarayana, from the tube-well in October, 1935. Beside the other door there is an interesting collection of walking-sticks, used by Rathindranath. There is a cemented platform in front of the cave-room, facing west, beside Lake Pompa, where people gathered for afternoon tea.

On the upper floor is Pratima Devi's studio Chitra Bhanu, with a huge glass window on either side, so that the room may have the full benefit of the sunlight.

Wooden shelves of unique design are fitted to the walls and there are beautiful chairs and tea-tables. There is a small round window on the west ; through its little circle may be seen the complete landscape of the garden, with the lake and its surroundings. The outer verandah is open on all sides—the staircase leading upstairs is lovely. The flower-beds beside the verandah and stairs and a wealth of crotons, the rider on horse back carved in stone in the middle of the verandah—an example of Kalinga sculpture- all these things make the house

Rathindranath's greatest contribution.

Buddhadev Bose wrote in his 'Sab Peye-chhir Deshe' :

"Pratima Devi's studio stands on this edge of the garden. The ground floor had been lying useless up to now. Rathindranath has recently turned it into his work-shop. The room is so small and so low, that it reminds one of a cave. Creepers cling to the outside walls, stones have been inset, increasing the resemblance. Because of the room upstairs, the cave-room is cooler and it is extremely secluded and surrounded by beautiful scenery, even by Santiniketan standers. Inside the room is a very law and small table, a couple of chairs and a bed with bolsters. The bed looked rather high for Santiniketan. I became aware of the special character of the room, which is something more the furnishings and adornments."

The people those thoughts, labours and creative talents contributed to the building of the Uttarayana houses, are the Poet's son Rathindranath, Pratima Devi, expart in creating grace and beauty, the artists Surendranath Kar and Nandalal Bose.

They devised new designs day and night,

utilising the lessons they had learned during their travels in the West. It meant more expense, but Gurudeva did not mind. He never interfered with creative work, though his financial condition was at that time, far from satisfactory.

All his life, Gurudeva devoted his tireless efforts in building up a centre for oriental studies at Santiniketan. The artificial atmosphere of the West was checked here. The pursuit of learning, good taste, the creation of atmosphere all followed the lines of Gurudeva's ideals and contemplation. That is why the eyes of all the people of learning and talent in the world were turned towards this institution'

When the Poet was alive and afterwards, talented and learned men from different parts of India and abroad came here in the hope of catching a momentary glimpse of the Poet and to come into contact with Santiniketan. Apart from the pursuit of learning, the highest and most valuable asset of Santiniketan is its intense and intimate association with Nature,

In this context, Pratima Devi seated on the verandah of Konarka, (July-August 1963) dictated her memories of the olden days to her transcriber Shri Soumen Adhikari;

"You want me to tell you about Uttarayana? From the days of Gurudeva, the master of the house and after his demise, as long as my husband Rathindranath was alive, Uttarayana was the meeting-place of all the famous intellectuals, scholars and talented people of the world. You cannot imagine those days. They will never come back again. They are stored away in shining glory within the treasure-chest of my memory.

In these closing years of my life, it is the memory of those happy days that keeps me alive in this vast, silent and deserted mansion. I cannot give you dates and years—my memory has become weak—I remember Andree Karpel, a learned and artistic French-woman. Her simple knowledge of and respect for oriental art are worth remembering. I was her friend you could even call me her pupil. She lived as our guest here in Uttarayana. There was also Stella Kramrisch, grave, reticent, with a deep knowledge of oriental art—she stayed here as our guest for a fairly long time. Her conversations and discussions with Gurudeva, sitting in the Udayana drawing-room, moved me deeply. You will never understand these things.

A foreign sculptor called Margaret Milward was our guest at Udayana. Her portrait of Gurudeva in plaster has been preserved in Rabindra-Bhavana. Besides these, there were Sylvan Levi, Lesny, Pearson, Ramanandababu (Chattopadhyay), all entertaining people, of whom Gurudeva was very fond. Then there was Andrews, They were all accommodated in different houses in the Uttarayana complex.

Gandhiji came in 1940. Gurudeva arranged for his stay in 'Shyamali,. Gandhiji came here twice, even after Gurudeva's death and always stayed in Shyamali. The scholarly Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay came with his wife and stayed in Shyamali, as Gurudeva's guest.

Saratbabu (Chattopadhyaya) came. All his discussions with Gurudeva, as well as a reception in his honour, were held in the Udayana hall.

Subhash Bose came. I remember he stayed for two days. He had long and secret talks with Gurudeva in Udichi. A reception was arrangrd in the mango-grove in his honour.

The Rabi-Basar function was held in Udayana. Sajani Das, Jaladhar Sen, Ramananda Chattopadhyay, Prafulla Kumar Sarkar, Naren Deb, Sm. Radharani Devi—I can't recall all the names, but a large number of literary people came. Gurudeva was not well at the time. Gurudeva was invested with the title of 'Bharat-Bhaskar' by the Tripura Raj, here in Udayana.

He sometimes took classes in the Udayana hall. Dramatic rehearsals were held here—the whole house hummed. You can ask Santidev about this.

At the very end of his life the University of Oxford endowed him with an honorary doctorate. Sir Maurice Guyer and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan came on this occasion. They were our guests in Udayana itself.

The Sahib was delighted with our Indian food.

I remember the celebration of the Poet's last birthday on this verandah. His 'Crisis in Civilisation' was read. How deeply moving was this last historical address.

He was taken to Calcutta from the upstairs bedroom of this house, seriously ill. It was July 25, 1941.

Anxious students, teachers, workers stood dumbly and sorrowfully all round Uttarayana. This departure was his last. We lost him, all of us. It took us a long tlme to recover from the blow.

After the Poet's demise, a heavy burden of responsi-

bility fell upon my husband's shoulders. He assumed his responsibilities calmly and resolutely. Jaharlal (Nehru) and Indira (Shrimati Gandhi) belong to Santiniketan. Nehru had personality and an immense admiration for Gurudeva, They always stayed at Udayana.

Rajendraprasad, Mrs. Roosevelt, Chiang Kai Shek an his wife have been our guests in this house.

Indira Devi and Pramatha Chaudhuri lived for a long time in Punashcha, After Gurudeva died, their presence, advice and co-operation gave us fresh encouragement and inspiration. Indira Devi's advice and guidance were of immeasurable value in the foundation of the Mahila Samiti (Ladies' Committee), the study of Gurudeva's songs and even in the management of Visva-Bharati.

Sarojini Naidu came and stayed at Udayana. She was highly intellectual and had a powerful personality and a great sense of humour. For a long time she carried on the duties of the Chancellor of Visva-Bharati.

The Master-artist Abanindranath acted as Chancellor for a while. He spend his days in Udayana, painting, writing and serving art. Those were the days, At that time Uttaryana was the heart of the Ashrama. All the good work in the Ashrama went out from here.

POET'S GARDEN AT UTTARAYANA

The man who first laid out the gardens in Santiniketan, was Rabindranath Tagore's father Devendranath, whom men called the Maharshi.

In the year 1863, Devendranath purchased twenty bighas of land with two Chhatim trees (Bot : name=Alstonia Scholaris) in the middle and founded the lovely centre of meditation, of which he had been thinking.

He removed some of the gravel top-soil from the bare fields, brought in good fertile soil and planted Mango. Jambu, Jack-fruit, Haretoki, Mohua, Coconut, Palmyra, Sal, Deodar, Bokul, Kadamba, and other shady and fruitful trees. Soon everybody began to speak of Santiniketan as 'the garden'.

On 13 October, 1901, the journal 'Unity and Minister' published an article entitled 'Pilgrimage of Santiniketan of Bolpur'. The Falgun.(Feb-March) issue of Tatwabodhini, Sakabda 1823. quoted the following lines from this article : "Sometimes Maharshideva would leave the noisy clamour of Calcutta for a few days and live in a tent in the solitude of Santiniketan, His favourite place of meditation was shade of the two Chhatim trees.

The land was purchased, trees were planted ; a garden came into being and a gardener was engaged to tend it.

The gardener deserves some notice. He used to be

Raja Rammohan Roy's attendant and accompanied him to England. After his master's death, he returned to India and found employment in the rose garden of the Maharaja of Burdwan. When the Maharshi heard of this, he brought him to Santiniketan and set him to work in the gardens.

The Maharshi built the house, named it 'Santiniketan' and laid the foundations of the gardens. The Tagore family's love for flowers and gardens may be observed from generation to generation.

When the Poet's eldest brother Dwijendranath came and settled in Santiniketan, he built a small house, called it 'Nichu Bangla' and planted flowering shrubs, fruit trees, vines and creepers all around it. His son Dwipendranath built a garden around the Santiniketan honse.

In 1901, the Poet came to live in Santiniketan permanently, with his wife and children. He founded a school here and named it 'Brahmacharyashrama'. Gradully the beauty and charm of the place increased.

Later the Poet planted the Sal Avenue. the Mango Grove, the Madhvi Bower etc. The following excerpt appeared in Jogendrakumar Chattopadhyay's reminiscences of Santiniketan, forty years ago, published in Prabasi, a monthly magazine, (Magh 1346):

"Santiniketan is a vast and lovely garden. In this garden there are many kinds of fruit and flower trees, with a brick house in the heart of it. From the house to the South Gate there is a broad, straight, beautiful pathway. The path leading to the North Gate is lined on either side with a row of Amloki trees.

The small shrubs we saw are actually sal sapling, most of them waist-high, a few as much as three or three and a half cubits. Upadhyay Mahashaya told us that Rabindrababu was making a sal forest here. The saplings had been brought from a distance and planted here".

Rabindranath sent his son Rathindranath abroad for special training in agriculture. On his return, Rathindranath, at his father's request, started working on agricultural improvement in Selaidah. In 1921-22, once more at his father's request, he left Selaidah and began to work in Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Gradually, as the result of the untiring efforts of Rathindranath and his wife Pratima Devi and particularly due to Rathindranath's deep knowledge of and affection for agriculture and gardens, the Ashram became rich in the gifts of nature.

From 1919, the Poet took up residence in Uttarayana and as work on the house progressed, the gardens also progressed proportionately.

The first houses in Uttarayana were Konarka and Udayana. Then followed Shyamali, Punashcha, Udichi. Rathindranath and Pratima Devi planned the houses and gardens. The master Nandalal Bose and the artist Surendranath Kar whom the Poet held in great affection, helped them. The Poet frequently mentioned them in his letters and writings.

The sincere efforts of two of the ashrama teachers, Jagadananda Ray and Tejesh Chandra Sen in connection with the laying out of the gardens, as well as their deep love for trees and plants have always been much appreciated.

Tejeshchandra lived in the little thatched cottage called

Taladhwaja, because it was built around a living palmyra tree. In his poem called 'Kutir-basi' or 'Cottage-dweller', the Poet referred to him as 'our young friend, who takes joy in trees'.

Once when Rabindranath was in Vienna, Tejeshchandra wrote him a letter filled with Santiniketan news. A portion of the Poet's reply to this letter has been incorporated in the introduction to his book of poems entitled 'Bana-bani', the 'Voice of the Forest'.

The Poet began his letter as follows : "The murmur of the trees in Santiniketan resound in your words and fill my heart with joy". The Trees in the Uttarayana gardens and in the ashrama always moved him deeply. He would always think of the special spot in the garden, where a particular tree should be planted.

He had the greatest affection for the Uttarayana trees, those around him observed his ceaseless care of the silk-cotton trees (simul) in front of Konarka—which fertilizers to be used—which vines to be permitted to climb it, so as to enhance its beauty. In her article entitled, 'Rabindranath's love for Flowers,, published in Prabasi (Magh 1373) Pratima Devi remembers : "He (the Poet) had cactil and other spiny trees planted in the plot of land behind Konarka saying, 'In this garden your civilised blossoms will not grow, only ordinary flowers like myself.... ' He was as fond of cactil and thorny plants ās of other trees. There were laterite rocks to be picked up in the 'Khoai', where the soil had eroded. He decorated his garden with these stones. Cactil and other local plants made the place beautiful. The very sight of all this filled his heart with joy. These plants

grew of themselves and did not need much manuring. When the cactus garden was laid, he was about sixty years of age. There was a spiny tree of the genus accacia, (Like Babla-Kanta) that had been brought from Tripura. He named it 'Kanta Nageshwara'. Or the spiny nageshwara.

In the same article Pratima Devi describes the naming of the 'Bana-pulaka' or 'joy of the forest', climbing up the side of the house called Udichi and how sitting in his youngest daughter Mira Devi's house, Malancha, he christened the 'Agni-Sikha' or 'Tongue of fire'.

"He gave new names to flowers. Somebody returning from a walk beside the Kopai mentions the charming scent or colours of an unfamiliar flower. At once he would ask him to bring some those flowers. The tree would there be planted in Santiniketan. I seem to remember someone bringing him some wild flowers from beside the Kopai. He named them 'Bana-pulaka', 'the joy of the forest'. The Bana-pulaka was planted against the wall of Udichi and it is still there.

There is another flower, which has an English name. The Santhals love it and call it 'Langul phul', 'Langul' meaning 'tail'. It begins to flower in July and blossoms profusely up to the middle of autumn. It is a beautiful and showy flower, yellow and red like tongues of fire, that was why he named it 'agni-sikha'.

The garden in Uttarayana is something novel. It is filled with a variety of surprises. There are many interesting gardens in various places in India, but none can compare with the Uttarayana garden. This garden has been created with such a variegated combination of forms, such natural-

ness and harmony with the rocks, soil and plant life all round it, avoiding all artificial trash.

In every season of the year the garden seems to reveal itself decked in a carefully contrived diversity of colours, created by nature.

Another characteristic of these gardens is the international nature of the gorgeous combination of plants. One is filled with wonder at the sight of Indian and foreign flowers flourishing side by side, in the fall splendour of their beauty.

No plant is considered too lowly for this garden; it is like the Poet's own song, 'We are all kings here'. The unique style of the gardens is the result of long years of endeavour and experiment, based on actual experience. Horticulturists are filled with wonder at the happy union of oriental and western plant-science. To the student of Horticulture the garden is like a vast and living laboratory.

On either side of the path leading from the garden gates, there are rows of eucalyptus and deodars. On the left stands the Tagore Museum, 'Bichitra'. In front of it and on both sides there are Cassia, Melia azedarach (Mahaneem) Spathodia, Amlaki, Erythrina indica (Palta Mather), rain-trees and in between them, the clustered shadows of the eucalyptus.

Below them is the conservatory for delicate plants and flowers and a pretty thatched shed, were a pair of gigantic Cranes live.

As one enters Uttarayana, one notices a variety of Indian and foreign flowers in slightly shady places on either side. There is no discord in this arrangement. The gardens

created by human hands fit beautifully into the landscape. Where the path from the entrance ends in a large gravel terrace, there are Kend (Bot. Name—Diospyros tomentosa) and cassia trees and bougainvillea mingling with the ground,

No two rooves of the house called 'Udayana' are on the same level. It is an unusual and charming piece of engineer's work. Matching these rooves there are two rows of coconut trees and in front of them a line of Kurchi (Holarrhena antidysentarica) muchukunda (Pterospermum acerifolium) and himjhuri (Millingtonia hortensis). In front of them is the rose-garden laid out in angular Mughul design. If one stands there one senses a courtly Mughul atmosphere.

There is no extravagant planning in the space between the rose-garden and the road. One sees only rows of Spathodia muchukunda and shishu, which protect the extremely delicate petals of the rose from the sun's harsh rays. Beneath these trees there are many species of Indian and foreign bushes, growing in an easy and natural manner, They do not violate the essential beauty of the garden in any way.

The fencing round the rose garden and other places attract the eyes of the onlookers—a dense green line of Tagore, Mehedi, Kamini, Basanti or Ramdhan Champa, Bana pulak, Rangan, Tamarind, Muchkunda trees and many kinds of vines and creepers, malati, madhavi, Madhumalati, Agni-Sikha, Nilmonilata all growing happily together.

There are two huge pitchers of wonderful shape,

standing on either side of the entrance to the rose-garden. They have a history of their own. They are two of the gigantic pitchers in which the whole year's supply of ganga-water was stored in the Jorasanko house in the old days. Rabindranath mentions them in his memoirs, called 'Jivana Smriti'. Rathindranath brought them over from Jorasanko and settled them in front of his rose-garden in Santiniketan, giving a slight Chinese touch to the Moghul stylisation.

On the gravel in front of the rose-garden cassia trees open their umbrellas on either side and between them a palmyra 'stands on one leg' as the Poet described it.

Beyond the gravel terrace is the entrance to the row of houses, Konarka, Shyamali, Punashcha, Udichi. The concrete arch-way is built after the Buddhist style of architecture, as seen in Nalanda. White Malati-juthika and madhu-malati vines make a shadow over it. On either side of this delicate whiteness, the beauty of the bougainvillea's bold colourfulness charms the eye.

The first house is Konarka, before which an ancient silkcotton tree (Simul) stands silent, in the embrace of malati and madhumalati climbers.

Leaning against Konarka is the famous creeper which Pearson brought. When it blossomed and Rabindranath saw the intense blue of the flowers, he named it Nilmonilata', 'nilmoni' meaning 'blue Jewel'. He also composed a poem of the same name.

There used to be a pretty thatched cottage called 'Mrinmoyee', beside Konarka, when the cottage broke down, a raised terrace was built on its foundations,

reminiscent of Rajput architecture. There are bougainvillea bushes at the four corners and beds of resplendant season flowers, in keeping with the natural beauty around them.

Next to it stands the historic earthen cottage, Shyamali. Beside it and behind it stand thick-shadowed jambu, mango, tamarind, bael, eucalyptus—adding an other-worldly solemnity to the scene. This background brings the architecture of Shyamali to life. One feels as though one were entering a Buddhist Vihara, to offer worship. That was why Gandhiji loved Shyamali. A flowering gulancha or wood-tagor gives a homely touch to the cottage.

In keeping with the architecture of Punashcha and Udichi, there are little-known foreign and Indian flowers and crotons.

The main garden lies behind the house, Udayana. Its beauty is superb and variegated. The plot at the entrance to this garden, has been built up after the pattern of Japanese landscape-gardening. The whole design follows the Japanese style, from the planning of flower-beds, the selection of garden-lamps, flower-pots and plants, to the construction of artificial pools. The whole garden has been made with such remarkable skill. within such a tiny area that it is like a beautiful creation of magical art. As soon as one grows aware of the whole atmosphere, it is easy to imagine that one is standing in the garden beside a Japanese Pagoda.

There is a wonderful stone image of the Poet here, executed by the Polish sculptur. It has been placed in the happiest position possible.

In keeping with this charming landscape, there are

beautiful flower-pots made of concrete set with coloured ceramics (broken pieces of china cups and plates), designed and executed by Rathindranath Tagore. There are special types of cactii and other beautiful plants in these flower-pots, which charm all garden-lovers.

There are other pots as well, living memories of the Poet's travels in Japan and the East Indias. (Rabindra-Sangama Dwipamoy 'Bharat O' Shyamdesh : Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay).

As one passes through the gate in the middle, the parrots and different varieties of pigeons raise an out cry,—as Abanindranath put it—who is there ? I say, who is there ?'

In the inner garden there is an artificial lake called Pompa, with an island on its bosom. On the island a Bottlebrush tree kneels down and leans over the water of the lake. An uneven paved Path way over the water, leads to the island. The whole scene is built in the style of Japanese landscape gardening.

Along the four sides of the lake there are flowering plants and artificial rocks with beds of season flowers, many rare and valuable trees and a veritable international flowers-show with foreign and Indian exhibits—Albizzia leblek siris), Anthocephaus Cadamba (Kadam), Adenanthera pavonina (Rakta Chandan) Couroupita guianenris (Nag-lingam), Mesuaferrea (Nageswar). Bauhinia purpurea (Kanchan), white champaka, Golden champaka, Parijata (Brownea ariza), Jacaranda mimosaefolia, Saraca indica (Ashoka), Butea Monosporma (Palash), Mimusops elengi (Bakul), Bombax malabarica (Simul , Dulbergia Sissoo

(Sishu), Cassia fistula (Indian laburnum) Gliricidia Maculate (Basant Bahar), Grievillearobust (Silver oak), Acacia Moniliformis (sonajhuri), Araucaria, Peltoforum, Lagerstroemia-flos-reginae (Jarul-Pride of India). Magnolia grandiflora, Melaleuca leucodendron (Bhurja-Patra), Milingtonia hortensis (Himjhuri), Plumeria acutifolia—rubra (Gulancha) Gulmohr (Poinciana regia), Putranjiva, Ravenala madagascarienris (Traveller's Tree), Spathodea campanulata (Tulip Tree), Pachyra insignis defferent types of cassia etc etc. and many spice trees—Cinamonumnobilie (Tej Pata), Cardamomum elettearia (Aalach), Daru-chini (Cinamonum zeylanicum), curry leaf, and among them the sacred camphor, sandal etc.

There are numberless small and medium-sized trees bushes, or shrubs of Indian flowers Gardenia florida (Gandharaj), Murraya—exotica (Kamini), Nyctanthes arbortristis—(Sefalika), Nerium oleander (Karabi), Radha chura, Krishna chura, Dalim (Punica granatum), Lawsonia alba (Mehendi), Jusminum Samboac (Bela). Tabernaemontana (Tagur), Thivetia nerifolia (Kalkiphool), Hibiscus (Jaba), Ixora (Rangan), Cassia alate (Dadmari), Lugerstroemia indica (Phurush), Ochna—squarrosa (Ramdhan champa) and

besides them rare and uncommon foreign beauties like Acalypha, Allamanda, Aralia, Barleria, Beloperone, Buddleia, clerodendron, Crossandra. Hoimskioldia, Cycas, Dombeya, Galphimia gracilis, Hameliâ patens. Hamiltonia Suaveolens, Jacquinia ruscifolia, Lantana, Poinettia pulcherrima, Russellia, Tecoma, Thunbergia, Thuya Compacta, ornamental Bamboos etc. etc.

One may also see many varieties of Indian and foreign climbers and creepers. Aparajita (Clitoria ternatea), Nilmonilata (Petrea Volubilis, Madhabi—(Hiptage Madhabilata), Malatilata (Aganosma caryophyllata), Bougainvilleas, Agni-Sikha or Glory Lily (Gloriosa Superba), Jasminum Jhumkolata (Passiflora), Quisaualis indica (Madhumalati) Allamanda, Asparagas, Beaumontia grandiflora, different kinds of Bignonia (Purpurea, venusta etc), Ipomoea, Lonicera Chinensis (Honeysuckle) Tecoma etc. etc,

Numorous kinds of croton. Anthurium. Alocasia, Begonia, Dracaena, Acalypha, Arolia, Coleus, areca palms, Duranta–Variegata, Manihot, Panax, Gerbera, Marranta and other plants with decorative leaves shed their beauty in greenhouses and other cool places.

Rathindranath planted different species of season flowers, so that all through the year, in the hot weather, the rainy season, as well as in winter, there would be a wealth of beautiful flowers in the Uttarayana gardens. In the hot and rainy season one may see Petunias, Gaillardia, Zinnia, Balsam, Coreopsis, and other flowers. In winter are Dahlias, Chrysenthemums, cosmos, Nastertium, phlox, Calendula Dianthus, Pansy, Antirrhinums, Astets, cronflowers, Hollyhock, Marigolds, Carnations etc. etc. When all these flowers bloom at the same time in a splendour of exquisite variety of shape and colour, the garden appears to have been brought into being by the touch of a magician's wand.

A large variety of fruit-trees is scattered all over the grounds of Uttarayana, Mangoes, Jambus, Litchi, Narikal, Sapheda, Jack-fruit, pomegranates, Chalta, wood-apple, kul, phalsa, tamarind, Amloki, limes and lemons of different kinds, Guavas, Chinese guavas and other fruit. They enhance the attraction of the orchards for all the pupils and students of the Ashrama, from the Shishu-Vibhaga or primary section, upwards.

There is a tiny two storeyed house adjacent to the little lake Pompa. Its name is 'Chitrabhanu', but some call it 'Guha-ghar', the cave-dwelling. Its architecture mingles gracefully with the garden. Pratima Devi had her studio upstairs and Rathindranath his workshop and living quarters downtairs. It looks like a cabin in a steam-ship. The outside of the Guha-ghar is decorated after the style of Poet's own pictures : animals, hills, caves in stucco-work, executed by Rathindranath. Among these designs there are crotons, with various climbing plants above them. There are lilies and flowering grasses in carefully tended beds spstairs. All the trees planted around the place are in harmony with the flowers.

The gardens lying just behind Udayana have been made after the Moghul pattern. There are small trees set in rectangular and triangular formation like a maze, with a pool in the middle. There are beds of flowers and climbing plants trailing over high and low walls. Should the visitor walk along the patterned pathway and mount a single step, he will find himself in a garden, with a fountain in the middle and small bushes in the four corners and flower-beds on low walls.

In the western corner of the raised garden there are seats beneath a pergola of climbing plants. In the angles of the garden there are receptacles for lotus and water-lilies.

Steps leading down from the western side, take one to an area covered with small and medium sized flowering plants of many kinds and beyond them are the well-kept gardens of Malancha where the poet's youngest

daughter lived.

To the south of the raised garden are the very modern nurseries and green-houses which had originally been planned by Rathindranath. The nurseries and vegetable plots are shaded by various kinds of trees.

Another characteristic of the gardens behind Udaynan and adjacent to Chitra-bhanu is the fence made of creeping mangoes, lichis, sapheda, which cover the walls with a layer of green. This wall is reminiscent of Elmhirst's house Dartington Hall, in England.

On the north side of Bichitra, (the Tagore Museum) there is a vast orchard of climbing trees, Mangoes, Lichi, sapheda, Guavas. Jamrul, Morus indica, Citrus, etc all trees with sturdy trunks and branches which Rathindranath has converted into climbers. Everyone who sees them marvels at the sight.

Rathindranath and Pratima Devi have travelled in many countries round the world and they have given the gardens of Uttarayana an international atmosphere made by a cambination of ideals.

Here it should be mentioned that the English ideas of Garden-planning includes resisting from interfering with the course of Nature—planting trees and bushes in keeping with the surrounding landscape, without spoiling the latter. This may be observed in these gardens.

The Japanese technique as followed here, creates a fabric of enchantment with infinite skill, within a tiny area,

The Mughal influence may also be traced in the intermixture of the natural and the artificial.

On the occasion of the exhibition of Rathindranath Tagore's art-works and painting in new Delhi in 1948, Stella Kramrisch wrote :

"...Rathindranath Tagore knows flowers by his love for them and by science. He is a biologist by training. He is also the architeet of his garden in Santiniketan. To its luxuriant harmony he has brought plants from many parks of the earth and from the undergrowth of the Indian jungle, he has made them all thrive together, each in the soil it requires. He cares for them, knows and paints them. With loving science he draws the firm logic of their patterns and gives them the space and ground on which they breathe their fragrance."

Rabindra–Bhavan : Bichitra

The two-storeyed house on the left, that catches the eye as soon as one enters the Uttarayan compound, is called Bichitra.

Rabindra-Bhavan was founded in 1942 as a Tagore Museum and centre of Tagore studies.

The emmense sacrifice, endless zeal and untiring efforts of Rathindranath, the Poet's son made the Bhavan possible. In the first stage, the work was carried on in the ground floor of the Udayana house itself. Latter, in 1961, during the Poet's centenary celebrations the museum was transferred to the house called Bichitra.

It houses a variety of the Poet's effects—his original menuscripts, letters, original drawings and paintings, his personal effects, presents and awards received by him from different countries.

There may also be seen original paintings and sculptures by Gaganendranath, Abanindranath, Nandalal, Aist Haldar, Epstein, Ju Peon, Ramkinkar, Sudhir Khastagir and other distinguished artists.

The Rabindra Bhavan library and its attached archives are indeed a diamond-mine for people engaged in Tagore research.

Besides the well-ordered exhibition hall, there is the reprographic section, where recorded Tagore songs and the Poet's own voice, films based on his works, wire records etc, are preserved.

The Preservation unit of Rabindra Bhavana contains the Poet's manuscrjpts, paintings, all the manuscripts, letters, documents appertaining to the Tagore family, other pictures, news paper cuttings and other objects,. These are preserved according to scientific methods.

The houses and gardens of Uttaraynan are now part of the Museum. The maintenance department protects and preserves the houses and gardens and attends to the public relation duties. The Howrah Motor Company Limited of Calcutta has recently taken upon itself the national duty of repairing and preserving the worn-out old motor-car, used by the Poet and members of his family.

CAR USED BY

GURUDEVA RABINDRANATH

Maintenance

By

THE HOWRAH MOTOR COMPANY LIMITED

GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- I gratefully remember the Late Amiyakumar Sen, whose encouragement was at the root of this effort.
- I acknowledge my indebtedness to the Vice-Chancellor Shri Surajit Chandra Sinha for his permission and encouragement in the publication of this work.
- I thank the weekly 'Desh' and its editor Shri Sagarmoy Ghosh for publishing these two pieces in the paper.
- I am indebted to Rabindra Bhavana, Public Relations department aad the artists Amit/ Basu, Urmila Basu (Kapoor) for their generosity in permitting use of their line sketches etc.
- I also thank my brother Shri Purnananda Chattopachyay, Shri Anathnath Das and Shri Sitikantha Bhattacharya for their help and encouragement.
- I am deeply grateful to my colleagues and friends in Rabindra Bhavan for their unstinted aid.

Lastly—My deepest debt of gratitude is to Sjta. Lila Majumdar, whom we all revere in the Santiniketan Community, for her great kindness in translating this humble booklet of Mine with the care of which she alone is capable.

Bhavana
Library
UG 2235
VISVA-BHA