

LIGHT

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Our house was connected to the electricity supply on the 28th. Since that evening I have been unable to write a thing.

The old lamp produced shadows and patches of darkness and light all through the house. I imagined things behind maps, beneath bookshelves and tables, in the outlines of lop-sided cupboards. We gave shelter within the walls of this house to fistfuls of darkness that entered to tell us — outside it is black and cold. The electricity comes running down copper wires and fills the whole room with bright white light. It looks down from above onto beds, pots, everything — and there are no secrets here, there is no poetry. It forbids us from having any relationship with the darkness outside; everything is submerged in its whiteness. The table is not a table: in the wood I see only light. The wall is not a wall: I see only the light on its colours. The flowers and long grasses in the vase, my coat, the next room: all are unreal. Everything the light settles upon becomes lost inside itself somehow. I never got to touch life in the raw, and now this whiteness has chased it all away. I am human, I have been defeated and lost and now I am bound in this way. My forces are immobilised. You might say that they both provide water, but a tap is not the same thing as a spring. A spring is life, a tap is merely civilisation. A stream, a river, an ocean— these are something else again. If I were in charge, I would walk every day in the rain, feeling the running water and the roughness of the sand on my feet. I would put up wooden cupboards all over my house without painting them. I would rip apart my habits and the things I am accustomed to, for these things obscure me. Let us set our lives and existence ringing down on hardness; let all artificial things lose their foothold and flee away. That is a rather purer, cleaner life. From the yard outside the door it challenges us, saying “come out if you will fight!” Society made me hide behind the security of my home. I could meet life in my little lamp’s winnowing tray of light. But now the white electric light has come to live in my house like a sentry.

I have saved the light of the lamp many times, by cupping my palm like a wall around it. I have shielded it from the calamitous breeze, and I have sensed the strength of a human being as I used my power to protect it. The lamp showed us the future, and reassured us. But this electricity does not need my protection, and it has no concern for the happiness and prosperity of my family. It shines monotonously and looks on mockingly. It tries to take the same view of every home, and I cannot love it. The lamp belongs inside the home: it is a part of the family. It cannot disappoint or mock us; it shares our sorrows as it looks out into the newness of the night. The flame dances continuously and never keeps still. Every evening there are a thousand different kinds of dance in its steep little flame, and each of them is new. The flame crackles upwards, then it bends low; it grows again, then it sways to one side. In nature on this earth, a clear evening and a sacred dawn are the fruits of great worship. Above the paths, the trees and the world, bodies of colossal time keep rising and descending. Humans emulate them gratefully as they light and extinguish their lamps. They rise and fall, climbing the steep slopes; and in the evening, when people light lamps in their houses, there is a small sunrise. The sun climbs up, the black mountain is defeated, and the rays of light spread far. After that there is day: bright long day. When the lamp is put out, a little evening comes once more, and there is a sunset. Sudden light and sudden darkness do not have this gradual quality. They lack its spectacle, its prayerfulness and its meaning; they are not poetic. The first

does not make one feel that one is coming to life, the second does not show us the end of our journey. A false lesson in existence — that is what this electricity is, this civilisation. In the light of a lamp, although I am filled with light, I have not forgotten the presence of night. But electricity insists that it is daytime in the room. My thoughts are not coherent. My thinking, my imagining — that which is me — cannot come home to me. Until yesterday this house was ours. Here we kept our memories, our past, little joys unlike any others', small pieces of disappointment left behind by hopes that were broken. But now our home is a cage for civilisation.

Today I achieved a small triumph over civilisation. I switched off the light, lit the lamp, and wrote this.

Original title: *Ujyalo*. From *Bipana Katipay*, 1960.