I created you. At that moment, the umbilical cord was cut. But now you are not a child, not even a young woman anymore. The scars of time have begun appearing on your face. You are an educated woman—just the other side of thirty. Are you sad because you didn’t have a normal childhood? Think of Yajnaseni! That great lady, Draupadi, born of the sacrificial fire—did she ever have a childhood? She was the outcome of anger, humiliation, and the desire for revenge! Imagine that you are my Yajnaseni. For me, you are a ray of light—so let your name be Sikha. You are born to fulfill a specific objective. You aren’t merely a ray of light—within your body are a thousand rays of light. Within every word, a spark of light, great physical energy.

Come, Sikha, let’s now start by looking at you closely. You are a representative of our times. A woman of our times who has passed thirty. Let’s see if we can find the vermillion mark of marriage on your forehead, in your parted hair! Yes, you are married. On your forehead, the vermillion spot. On your ankles, anklets; toe rings on your toes. Other ornaments on your body. A beautiful sari wrapped around you. You must have married into a wealthy family. The sari end that covers your head slips every once in a while. I take pleasure in looking at you—see how the creator turns into a child in front of the creation! On your face, a rain cloud. To make me
happy, you smiled a little and your face looked so very sad. Did I really create you as this dark desolate cloud? You used to talk about burning with force and vigour. What’s this? Was creating you such a waste? Let me now wipe your tears, touch your trembling lips. You want to say something? Why do your lips tremble? Tell me—brush off your sorrows for me. I will bear everything. Pray that no thorns tear your feet. You are my creation!

Oh, in which language will you speak, O Sikha? You look at the sky with an empty gaze. Standing near the windows and looking at a kerchief of sky—that is the lot of the Sikhas. Can I compare you to Tenjin or Edmund Hillary, that you will traverse all distances? That you will thus become the saviour of the spirit of humankind? No, I am helpless. I can create in your mind the desire to cross the ocean, but I cannot give strength to your limbs. You must forgive me for that.

Here I see you. You are standing alone in the crowded Kalyan Mandap—at someone’s marriage party. Many people greet you. Are you a close relative of the new bride? You saw me. Caught hold of my arm. Introduced me to your husband. But he was not interested in talking to me. Hinting that he was busy, he moved away to chat with another beautiful lady. You did not let go of my hand. The heat of your hand was slowly warming mine. Tell me, Sikha. Who is she? For whom did your husband ignore you? I couldn’t know when you slipped away, but, later, I heard a lot of gossip about you. Someone was saying, “I would have jumped into a well or taken poison.” Someone else responded, “Comes from a poor family. She is hanging on for the sake of the ornaments, the car, and the wealth. If it had been one of my daughters . . .” An old lady commented, “What can she do? She has two kids. The prestige of her family is at stake.”

I knew then that you were the daughter of a poor family, married off to a rich man. And do you lack something, that you keep trying to hide behind your sari, jewellery, and wealth? A young man said that because your mother-in-law had suddenly been taken ill, you rushed alone from the feast and took her to the hospital. The driver was having his dinner, and when you asked for the car keys, your husband saw what you were doing. Another dimension of your identity was revealed to me. You are not only a good wife and mother but also a good daughter-in-law.
What do you understand by the term “good,” Sikha? One who bears all and cries quietly near the kitchen fire, or who rushes without a thought to the hospital in a time of need? True, I have created you, but you seem to be a little afraid. What was the purpose of your birth? Born from the sacrificial fire, Draupadi was the instrument for the destruction of the Kuru dynasty. And you flicker on—for how many years? The span of your marital life—ten or twelve years? I don’t know that lady who was with your husband, but as I grow intimate with you, she somehow looks repulsive, in spite of her beauty.

When I created you, I didn’t know that your future would be so sad. You are soaked in the mud of life—what we call figuratively the agony of life. You may not have had a childhood, but you have a past that is full of the scars of misunderstandings. I couldn’t tolerate all this thought. I created you! How could I close my eyes to the flow of your life at this unfortunate time? I waited to hear something more, but in vain. You are my creation. Without saying a word, and yet managing to say so many things, you mocked my creatorhood. Really, I am so helpless!

Again one day, I met you in front of the convent school. Holding the hands of your two children, in the crowd of other wards, you were walking toward your chocolate-coloured Maruti car. I couldn’t reach you, but I could reach the women gossiping about you. “How quiet! If she had been with her husband, her feet wouldn’t have touched the ground!” “The horse has no horn. If it had a horn, it would have torn up the very earth!” Someone else said, “Has anyone seen her husband? He didn’t turn up even on parents’ day. You have to admire this woman!” Another curtain was raised from my eyes. You are the victim of your husband’s neglect. You struggle to give your children a decent childhood. If you had narrated your woes to these women, they would probably have said, “Oh,” in front of you, and then giggled behind your back. But your courage and indifference make them gossip about you, no doubt. What are you really? Somehow, I feel demeaned in the presence of your strange personality. Did I really create you? Tell me, Sikha! How have you been able to control so much vital energy with such confidence? If you open your mouth, there will be an explosion. Probably you know it in your quiet way—Draupadi has somehow told you about this.
Once I saw you in front of the Rama Mandir. You looked ethereal, with the flowers and offerings for the god. Soothing all your agony and unhappiness, you had turned into a tranquil devotee. Today, you climbed down from the rickshaw. Walked straight in. Went to the deity. Paid your obeisance. On turning around, you saw an aged woman. I was watching you from a distance. Probably you didn’t know. You came close to the woman. Gestured to her. She said, “You probably knew I would be here. Sit for a moment. Let’s talk.” Then your lips parted. Really, I had waited such a long time to hear you speak. My waiting came to an end.

You said, “Mother, I am living my fate. You don’t have to worry about me. If my husband has lost his way, the fault is mine. If his family peace has been disturbed, I have to take the blame. Let me spend the rest of my life beneath that kerchief of sky. That I am someone’s wife, someone’s daughter-in-law, is enough. Why didn’t you first find out whether he was married?—but I will never ask you this, not after all this time.

Those days are gone. Poor girls like me face such problems. You are a lonely widow. But what about him? Educated, rich—why did he agree to more than one marriage? Did he have no sense of responsibility? Was he so self-indulgent? Pray to God for me, Mother. Let my children grow up well. Not so that they will take care of me when they grow up, but to be responsible heirs to their family. I have to go, Mother. It won’t do to talk for so long. I have a lot to do.”

You rushed away, true. But I could hide myself no longer—I stood in front of you. O Sikha, the waves of the sea rush toward you! Such grief hidden in your heart! That face that expresses such faith—that face is not entirely yours. That person whose one word of kindness can make a woman cross the seven seas—that person hardly exists. You expressed awkwardness on seeing me. Smiled. Did I get caught while acting innocent? You called me to one corner of the temple. Looked at the sky. The sky we both saw was not the entire sky! Why don’t you say anything, Sikha? But I don’t have the patience, the energy to ask anything. I know I should not hurt you anymore.

You signal that this kerchief of sky is yours. One cannot make a nest here. It is only enough to flap one’s tiny wings and go on until one is tired. Sikha, I don’t know if I should express my condolences or my congratulations to you. I only pray that your kerchief of sky takes on the colours of
the rainbow. That you find an Aladdin’s lamp of great faith and assurance. Did you notice how tactfully Valmiki arranged for Sita to enter the earth during her test of fire? Otherwise, how insignificant Lord Rama would have looked next to her!