

## SHORT FICTION

### Frame

### Mrinmoyee

**Tamali Neogi**

Assistant Professor in English  
Guskara College (affiliated to the University of Burdwan)  
West Bengal  
tamalineogi13@gmail.com

---

### Frame

It is a hot summer evening. A middle aged woman is having her evening walk down the lonely lane of Ananda Colony. At a little distance, the figures to be seen are only of three dogs, one completely black and the other two are yellowish. At her surprise she finds all the three street dogs to be healthy. She gives an oblique glance at them where on heap of sand they seem to be then relaxing. "Really I am frightened of dogs otherwise who does notice them so keenly?" she says to herself. Then it came to her mind that she hasn't yet met one fellow being that evening. And just at the very next moment she discovers that though it is already ten past five, yet all the windows of almost every household are still closed. It is probably because of the unusual heat that afternoon, she thinks. The next issue to which she gives a second's thought is the speed at which she has always preferred to have her walking. She is not sweating; gentle walking at that hour is something about which she has always felt crazy. What has been irritating the plump woman? She stops, bends a little and removes the shoe from her left leg. She brings out a tiny stone chip that somehow has managed to enter her shoe, she doesn't know how. As she doesn't know why her boss at Mitra & Sons Company has suddenly stopped her incremental benefits, two years back. Distracted by the fragrance of Bakula flowers, she

immediately understands that she is at the head of the water tank crossing from where she has to take a left turn following her usual routine but that day she stops there for a while, thinks a little and walks slowly to the tree. She collects some flowers and decides to dry them before putting them inside an envelope. She would make a gift of it to Rakhahari Da when next time they are to meet at Dr. Baral's chamber. Once Rakhahari Da had expressed his wistfulness for this, she remembers while gathering up the flowers. Pratul's jokes on her friendly attachments with Rakhahari come to her mind. What splendid moments they have spent together in friendly gatherings. "I know it would only be another resource for you to be used at right time" she says to Pratul, with whom still she shares almost everything.

Rakhahari is the only person at her neighbourhood who helped her to procure widow pension while everything was set against her after the sudden demise of Mr. Pratul Sharma, husband of Mrs. Smritikana Sharma. When the pain of gout gets increased and Smritikana can not visit Dr. Baral's chamber to collect the dosage of homeopathic medicine, she telephones Rakhahari Da who helps her out. Widower Rakhahari and Smritikana have by then learnt to ignore the indirect insults and gossips of society people of Ananda Colony. Again, Smriti becomes thoughtful. For the last three years she has found her husband to be under tremendous mental pressure. Though he never allowed any alteration to be there at his routine duties towards his wife and family, she indeed noticed at moments that he rarely smiled in those days, even not when the fact was brought to his notice. He had always been a man having amazing sense of responsibility, a man of utmost sincerity who never desired Smriti to be feeling disturbed or tormented on any ground. Even then for each of her discomfort, small or big, minor or major, hadn't she held him responsible in one way or the other and didn't ultimately it lead her to behave wrongly with him in each case? It becomes difficult for her to forget what affection he had always have for her and with what grace he used to cover all of her faults. Actually she had always been a spoilt child to him and her peace and happiness were of supreme importance to him. Is there still any meaning in it if she wishes to know more about it or protests against the injustice and harassment that were hurled upon him by his authority that actually led him to.... She is still unable to find the answer just like many other times she has tried for it. Smriti remembers that morning. Like any other day, he went out for morning walk. He didn't return in time leaving Smritikana worrying. Then in the afternoon police came. Ranaghat... body. Smriti tried hard to understand in the next few months exactly what had led to such disintegrity in his character, leading to that ultimate betrayal of trust. Then at the AG Bengal

office she met Mr. Chadda whom she believed to be her husband's well-wisher and one of his good friends. Mr. Chadda insisted her to have a cup of tea with him at the office canteen and there for the first time she came to know how the senior officer had harassed her late husband for almost five years over a case; Pratul had actually protested against the privileges and undue promotional advantages, one of his female colleagues was enjoying in those days. Pratul's due promotion was withheld for years and even through influence, some measures were taken so that he was to face immense difficulties in pension related matter. Later Rakhahari Da also told her that for years Pratul had requested his senior to consider his case but every time very gently he was asked to wait and his case was deferred showing the other emergent issues. He had waited and waited but never lost his patience. The pain was always there but deep inside him, remained unexpressed, as Smriti comes to have realized much later.

By that time Smriti has already taken the right turn and we see her then telephoning someone. After approximately three minutes it is finished. She notices two boys in bi-cycle coming from the opposite direction. They greet her and while nodding in response of their greeting, she understands that she has been murmuring almost all the time. "WHY WHY WHY" she uttered distinctly then. After five more minutes she reached the gate of the house named 'Banani' and pushed the bell. A man in brown T shirt and pyjama opens the door. She enters and the man follows her inside endearingly. She wipes her forehead with her hanky and sits gently on a single sofa set. He goes inside the kitchen and brings a cup of lavender tea for her. She points towards the writing table and there he gets a list of items to be purchased from the market the next morning. He puts the list inside his pocket and sits at the sofa seat just opposite her. He holds her hands engagingly and gives her the key of the shelf where in a file he usually keeps all the papers of life insurance, provident fund etc. She refuses to have it as usual and asks lovingly instead whether he knows about her papers and files or not. She enters the washroom to be fresh. There has been some problem with the tap at the household. After a short while she grumblingly comes outside and calls him irritatingly; he seems to be arranging some official documents in an engrossed manner, the job he has been busy with throughout the past few days. The way she is about to start talking makes it clear that she is in the mood of complaining against him. But something stops her that time. She repeats her question when she gets no answer of it as to his preference relating the menu that night. She tries to get his attention for the third time while she feels the presence of a young boy who holds her tightly to prevent her from collapsing at the gate. After a few minutes, Smriti gains consciousness and with the assistance of the young boy she enters her house.

The young fellow is Pratul's nephew Akash, who has come to stay with her after ..... That evening she asks him to have an appointment of their lawyer at his earliest. Never before she said 'yes' to Rakhahari's proposal of starting a lawsuit against the office of Pratul's senior. But about one thing she is sure then. If law can't give justice in time, it can give one the cause of living. Smriti enters her room to have a change and the bell rings. A man from local photo shop declares himself. Smriti in a white 'saree' with narrow yellow border arrives at the drawing room. Akash is that time completely speechless as never since his uncle's death he has seen the lady wearing white as he hasn't seen any photograph of her dead uncle in the household so far. Smriti, in a low voice, asks the man to show the samples of frames – the man is instructed over telephone to bring those with him. Smriti brings out Pratul's photograph from the brown envelope she has carried with her. For a while she looks at her husband's face steadily before she chooses one frame for it.

### **Mrinmoyee**

The little girl is standing at the portico. There are traces of anger and disappointment on her cute face. It seems that she is deeply unhappy. Ramala her attendant has already tried her best to bring her inside the house. But she has denied firmly to do so and her mother Mrs. Prameela Choudhury knows that she will be sitting there awaiting her father until he arrives. She asks Ramala to keep a vigilance on her from a distance. It is 10a.m that Sunday morning but still she has not taken her breakfast. Her father whom she endearingly calls Babuli, is out on an errand and she is determined not to take any food until Babuli gives her a big size lozenge. On her demand Babuli has to put one lozenge each night under her pillow when she is asleep and it has surely frustrated her that she has not found any lozenge under her pillow that morning.

Four years have passed and the little girl is then eight years old. Holding her father's hand she is eagerly expecting the arrival at the adjacent corridor of the labour room. She knows that her brother is coming; her Ma has prepared her for that for the past eight months. All of her questions are being patiently answered by her Babuli. She jumps and shouts in joy when the nurse comes out from the labour room and says "yes! It's a boy". For the next six days Mrs.

Chowdhury has to stay at the nursing home and at home Ramala di is there to answer the thousand queries of Mrinmoyee. In the meantime, Mr. Chowdhury makes some necessary changes at home for the newcomer. On the daughter's demand he has to buy a new cradle for the newborn and obviously rubber-made bathtub and other sets too. Mrinmoyee's excitement is boundless when her mother comes back with the big surprise, her own brother. Mrinmoyee spends next two months amidst great joy\_ in happiness, playfulness, expectations and learnings. Then there comes the Doctor and along with him an unprecedented unhappiness moves forward to darken the prevailing atmosphere of Chowdhury villa. Meningitis is detected; tension, anxiety, nervousness, hospitalization, painful days and nights, agony and finally the death.

The sudden change in her world makes Mrinmoyee growing up fast. Now he is Kartick da and not her Ma who cooks the food at house and it is her duty to take food to her Ma who for the maximum hours of the day keeps herself confined in a room. She feels happier when she's at the school and while at home her Ma's unnatural grief and mood swing make her day and nights sorrowful. Often at nights she comes to hear her father's convincing words silently. Nothing seems to console her mother and gradually she starts behaving strangely. She has started to speak to herself. She laughs, she cries, she shouts though Mrinmoyee finds no apparent logic behind anything she has been doing those days. Even at times she becomes violent. Now Mrinmoyee sleeps at Ramala aunty's room. One morning after waking up but still at bed she perceives a great upheaval at home. Her father has been instructing someone to lock her in the room as she has come out of her room naked. Hearing that Mrinmoyee is about to run to her Babuli when Ramala aunty enters and tries to console her. She's puzzled. She is full of fears. Ramala di asks her to use the attached washroom and not to go outside the room that day. She brings her breakfast there after a short while. From that day Mrinmoyee's mother remains locked in the room. There is a small window opening to the corridors. At times Mrinmoyee stands waiting at the corridor silently in hope of having a glance of her beloved mother. But when incidentally her mother comes in front of the window and sees the lonely girl standing there she starts making so passionate requests to her to open the door that the girl becomes nervous and full of tears. She runs away to Ramala di, to Babuli. And she is at standard six when Babuli first speaks of sending her to mission hostel.

Mrinmoyee is at standard nine when Mrs. Chaudhury commits suicide at her room. Nobody knows from where she has got the sense of doing it. She scolds Ramala aunty terribly while to her she expresses her doubts that probably Mr. Chowdhury has passed the equipments to her

room secretly to stop her suffering, forever. Henceforth though never she will do it openly, Mrinmoyee has always blamed her mother inwardly at every moment she feels lonely, perplexed and deserted. When moments of unexpressed suffering become unbearable to her she habitually goes to the portico and stands there silently for minutes, eyes fixed at distant scenes. This gradually grows to be a part of her living. Mrinmoyee is then at first year of college, studying Mathematics Honours. Her fair glowing skin, her long hair, her pretty face, her intelligence and maturity and above all the calm and poise she maintains wherever she goes, make her a remarkable presence among all in the class. By then people have stopped sympathizing with her on the ground of family tragedy. With two aged persons, Ramala aunty and Babuli, once more she has started to find happiness in life. At this relieved phase of her life she comes to meet Mr. Partha Pratim Ghosh. He teaches them Mathematics at college, at the capacity of Assistant Professor. He is one of the three teachers getting fresh appointment at that college the year she gets admitted. Nature starts to play its tricks, perhaps upon both, the bright and beautiful young student and her sir. On Mrinmoyee's request her Babuli somehow manages to make him agreed to give her private coaching which certainly provides them with more opportunities to interact with each other. Mrinmoyee hides nothing from Ramala aunty and Babuli who thinking it to be the best, sends standing invitation to the youth to have lunch with them every Sunday so that both the parties involved come to know each other more, before the expected marriage takes place.

Preparations are then going on at high speed as only ten days are left before the day of her engagement. By that time Mrinmoyee is at third year and it is decided that the marriage will take place just after the completion of her final year examination. Babuli, Ramala aunty and all of her friends have assured her that after a long phase of painfully disturbing life she is going to have a jovial time, a peaceful and blessed married life. She appears amazingly beautiful in her red sari on the day of her engagement. Her happiness touches the core of the hearts of those who have so far been her soul companions and being so have forever loved and supported her. Everything takes place smoothly and it is almost eleven that night when Partha bids good night to all and departs with his friends and family. The news comes after an hour when removing her makeup Mrinmoyee just is coming out of the washroom holding a towel in her hand. Her face still bears the satisfaction generated by her day's success. She sees Ramala aunty standing at the middle of her bedroom. To her surprise, there is an indescribable look in

her eyes. The mobile phone is there at her hand and is not yet disconnected; a voice is heard over the phone. Without understanding anything she gives her ear to it.

The old lady howls. Mrinmoyee doesn't cry. The news is not to reach Babuli that night as he is already at bed and considering his health issues Ramala doesn't think it wise to reduce the aged man to the state of destructive misery so soon, that is, just when he has started to have a feeling of contentment. Ramala, crying badly all the while, sits on the floor; Mrinmoyee in an impassive manner slowly walks to the open window. Next morning Ramala aunty doesn't find Mrinmoyee in the room. Looking at the clock she understands that she has been asleep for the last two hours. It is still early morning. Ramala rushes out of the room to see where Mrinmoyee is. Fear and anxiety have almost turned her eccentric that time. Mrinmoyee is found standing at the portico. Ramala is hugely relieved. She is staring at the gate and there is a strange blankness in her eyes, very new to Ramala aunty. Something about Mrinmoyee doesn't allow her to instantly go close to her. Minutes later she calls her by name but Mrinmoyee doesn't respond. And we, like her Ramala aunty and dear Babuli have never noticed any unnaturalness in any of her actions till then; only we have never heard her voice since then.

Five years have passed away. Those are five long years for Mr. Chowdhury without hearing a sound from his daughter before he dies of cerebral that summer afternoon. Just before Mr. Chaudhury starts his final journey, Mrinmoyee comes and sits beside his body. No tears, no words. To all the bereaved, she appears to be the silent monument of grief. For the past few minutes she has been looking vacantly\_ Ramala marks the same vacant look in her eyes years after\_ towards the procession carrying off her father's body. "Hari Bol", "Hari Bol", "Hari Bol". Hateful, attacking sounds with what a little girl was permanently torn away from her mother. She madly runs away from the scene and enters her mother's room and locks herself up from inside – something she has never done in the past speechless years. Nobody knows what happens to Mrinmoyee and her aunty after that.

---

**BIO- NOTE**

---

Dr. Tamali Neogi is Assistant professor in English, Guskara College (Affiliated to the University of Burdwan), West Bengal. She has been awarded gold medal in Master Degree by the University of Burdwan. She obtained her Ph.D from the same institution in the year 2009 on “*The Use of Comic to portray Exilic Experience in the Fictional writings of V.S. Naipaul*”. She has almost 18 years of teaching experience and a good number of research publications at various national and international journals and edited volumes. She has published a novella, *Woman of Patashpur*, in 2020. Her short stories have been published in several journals and collections.