

NATI BINODINI

By Brojendra Kumar Dey

EPISODE ONE

SCENE I

House of GIRISH GHOSH.

Enters ATUL (GIRISH's brother) and SURATKUMARI (GIRISH's wife).

ATUL

What a disaster, boudi (sister-in-law).

SURAT

Oh no, now what do we do, thakurpo (brother-in-law)?

ATUL

You find mystery in everything. You don't take things seriously. I am feeling frustrated here, and you're amused by it. The day dada (big brother) decided to do theatre with women; I ran to you. And what did you do? You grinned and said, "Thank goodness, I won't be seeing men with mustaches playing the queen's part."

SURAT

What disastrous news did you bring today? Are they putting less curd in roshogolla (sweet) in Baghbazaar, or has Kodom Ali sold his cigarette shop?

ATUL

Enough of that. I am leaving.

SURAT

Oh, no-no. Don't just serve eggplant fry without luchi (deep-fried round flatbread).

ATUL

Dada wouldn't have acted this way if you were serious and not indifferent to his actions. He's going to drink himself to the abyss. Don't you have any tears left in your eyes?

SURAT

I am praying to God. You too, start praying, thakurpo.

ATUL

Any God or dog cannot solve this problem. You tell dada, "If you don't quit drinking and theatre, then I'll starve myself to death."

SURAT

I listened to you once and said that. As more time passed, I was starving, and I started to see stars. At last, I had some pantabhat (cooked rice fermented in water) to deal with my hunger.

ATUL

Oh, whatever! Just go with the flow (if you die); only foxes and dogs will shed tears for you.

SURAT

Humans will cry as well, but not in sorrow, in joy. Do you know my status as the wife of an eminent actor? You'll see. Today those who are disgusted by his drunkenness, tomorrow they will worship him as the great poet.

ATUL

Do you know what your great poet is up to? He is quitting his job for theatre.

SURAT

Thank goodness. Then I don't have to serve breakfast at nine o'clock. To hell with the Parker company.

ATUL

What? How is he going to provide without a job?

SURAT

Why? There's theatre.

ATUL

Theatre is uncertain. If there's profit, only then will one get paid; otherwise, you'll starve. Do you understand that?

SURAT

As long as the person who works understands that, it's enough for me. It doesn't matter if everyone understands everything or not. You're not the provider, and neither am I. Let the responsible person carry the load—now you go to the market and get some good koi fish and cauliflower.

ATUL

You better have rice.

SURAT

We have rice for the next five days.

ATUL

After that?

SURAT

We will think about that later. We are not going to tie a rope around our neck just because we will die tomorrow. Don't you know what the poet said? "The time is now."

GIRISH enters.

GIRISH

You're right!

"Trust no future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead past bury its dead!
Act,— act in the living present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!"

SURAT

You took God's name! Don't do that. Sit, I'll bring your mighty grace (proshad).

[SURAT leaves with GIRISH's umbrella and sheet]

ATUL

Dada, are you really resigning from your job?

GIRISH

Yes, I have decided to resign. Tomorrow's Monday; I'll send my resignation.

ATUL

You have such a good job, and you'll quit it just like that? The company owners are Sahibs (British), now they give you 150 rs. They might promote you as a head clerk with a 500 rs—salary per month in two years.

GIRISH

That might happen, Atul. But if I dedicate myself to the theatre, theatre might benefit in the next ten years.

ATUL

What would you get out of it?

GIRISH

I will advance if the nation advances. Everyone says a developed stage represents a civilized culture. We didn't have professional

playhouses; we accomplished that after so many years. We don't have good plays; we don't have full-time actors; we don't have dedicated workforces; we don't have a devotee of theatre who would study theatre, dream about theatre, and only wish for theatre's advancement. I will fulfill this void, Atul. Bengali theatre will be reconstructed as a true place for worship, and I will do that.

ATUL

And how about your family?

GIRISH

Pratap Jahuri will give me 100 rs if I become a full-time member of the theatre.

ATUL

You'll trade 150 rs for 100 rs!

GIRISH

Only 50 rs in the loss. But I will gain so much more. This gain is not just for the nation; this gain is mine. Even after I work as a bookkeeper for 50 years at the Parker company, no one will know Girish Ghosh, but they will know me through theatre.

ATUL

Don't chance the uncertain, dada. If the theatre fails, Pratap Jahuri will not give you any money. What will you do when that time comes?

GIRISH

Didn't you listen to your sister-in-law? We will decide when that time comes.

ATUL

Boudi is a woman, and you're not. You'll be doomed if you continue to do theatre. Brahmins purify their ears if they hear your name.

GIRISH

They do it in the daytime, but they go to the theatre at night to watch the girls sing.

ATUL

Your neighbors call you a drunk.

GIRISH

When they need a free ticket, they call me "sir."

ATUL

When women see you, they cover their faces.

GIRISH

These women go to the theatre and bow to me. I do not care about praises or criticisms, Atul...—whoever starts significant task experiences endless suffering. In every century, some people try to demolish the old and orthodox systems and build a new path, they go through all sorts of agony and condemnation, and they might suffer, but the future generations enjoy the sweet fruits of their hardships.

ATUL

But...

GIRISH

They don't give up listening to what other people say, or they don't worry about trivial things like "what am I going to eat tomorrow?" That's why we have moved forward from bullock pulled carts to the steam engine, and we are moving forward in an extraordinary rate due to the innovative discoveries.

ATUL

Theatre is for entertainment. I don't understand, what it has to do with culture and civilization?

GIRISH

Your boudi understands that.

ATUL

She doesn't seem happy to hear about you quitting your job.

GIRISH

Didn't she? But I thought otherwise. Okay, I promise if she isn't happy, I won't quit, and I will stop doing theatre.

ATUL

Let me touch your feet. I'll get boudi.

[Exit]

GIRISH

Even Suratkumari does not want me to do theatre? But she is the one who understands me the most. "Things are not what they seem."

[SURAT enters.]

SURAT

[Offers GIRISH a glass of alcohol.] Here, take it.

GIRISH

[Takes a sip.] You don't forget to bring this, do you? Even if we fail to get rice and lentil from the market, there's always alcohol at home. Other women want their alcoholic husbands to quit drinking, and you supply alcohol to your husband.

SURAT

I can't force you to quit drinking. It's better to drink at home other than getting drunk outside.

GIRISH

Aren't you disgusted with me like others?

SURAT

No. I see everyone else is intoxicated. Some of them are intoxicated over money, some of them are intoxicated in love, and your brother is intoxicated thinking about your wellbeing.

GIRISH

Strange! Sometimes your statements perplex me! Tell me, don't you want me to quit drinking?

SURAT

Of course, I do. But I don't fret over it. Whoever is responsible for your intoxication will help you to stop.

GIRISH

Are you talking about God? God doesn't have a place in my life. I don't believe in them, and they don't believe in me. Why are you laughing?

SURAT

If there's God, they will come to you.