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TRANSLATION

Short Story

Protibeshi (Neighbour)¹

Ramkrishna Mandal²

Translated by Susanta Kumar Bardhan³

Winding up all sorts of work at his Hotel and closing it, Sudhakanta returns home at 10 P.M. Thereafter dinner is taken and it is followed by his going to bed. Tiredness due whole day's sore labour drags him to the world of sleep the moment he goes to bed. In one spell of sleep the entire night elapses. But last night Malati's whimper awaked Sudhakanta

--"O, what has happened? What has happened?" Shaking her body fear-stricken Sudhakanta asked her.

--"I am feeling throbbing ache spreading from waist to belly." Malati uttered a-crying.

Sudhakanta rushed into the other adjacent rooms; his son was sleeping in one and two daughters, in the other. He called them and awaked them all.

He asked his elder daughter Mani—"Slightly oil-massage your mother's belly. By that time let Bratin and me go out and call in Dr. Datta." Father and son went out of the house in a motion of running.

It was just three minute walk to reach Dr. Datta's house. Dr. Datta was known to Sudhakanta. When he first came to join his duty, he boarded in Sudhakanta's hotel and put up there for seven days. From the very first day Sudhakanata several times took his son, daughters and wife to Dr. Datta for the treatment of their fever, dysentery, etc.

The moment they rang the calling bell, the dog started barking violently. From the upper floor the heavy tone of the doctor was heard—Who are you?

--Sir, I am Sudhakanta, the owner of Basudhara Hotel. Sudhakanta spoke in trembling voice.

--At such late at night? What is the matter?

--Sir, my wife is having belly ache. Kindly come once to my house. Such was the submissive prayer of Sudhakanta.

--It is now midnight; even in the evening I do not go to any house on call. The doctor conveyed his firm decision.

--Please sir, the condition of the patient is severe. Please consider it with sympathy. I am your neighbour. Just three minute walk to reach my house.

The doctor remained unmoved; he said--Now-a-days there is no neighbor as such. All are self-sufficient. As you are still requesting, fetch the patient here.

--Doctorbabu, fetching her within ten minutes. Saying this Sudhakanta with his son rushed to his house.

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At the dead at night rickshaw was not available. Both of them took the trouble to carry the patient to the doctor.

Doctor came out after ten minutes. While checking the patient, he said—there is no meaning in harassing me in such a way. Attending chamber and hospital throughout the day, I have just gone to bed.

Sudhakanta got angry with such words of the doctor but suppressed his anger and said—You see, We have fallen in danger and so have called you in.

Doctor did not respond this. Handing over the prescription to Sudhakanta, he said— Administer the injection now. Medicine will start from the morning.

Sudhakanta asked—How much is your fees?

--Fifty. This was the unhesitating reply from the doctor.

Laying down Malati on bed in the room, Sudhakanta said to his son—Father, go to the medicine shop by the side of the hospital which you will find open this time and fetch the injection quickly. Let me see if Param is available to push the injection.

Younger daughter Kani said—Param uncle's house very far from this place, father. In the house of Pabitra Chattujye (shortened form of *Chattopadhyay*), stays on rent Sutapadi, nurse in the Police Hospital. Let me go with you to call her; she knows me.

Pabitra Chattujye's house was within 200 yards from Sudhakanta's. Both father and daughter ran to that house. Their calling aroused Sutapadi.

Opening a window, she asked them--What has happened?

Kani said—My mother is having severe belly-ache. An injection will have to be pushed. Will you please come to our house for this?

Sutapadi said—Wait two minutes. I am coming.

Having pushed the injection Sutapadi sat by the side of Malati. Within fifteen minutes, pain started getting alleviated. Sleep came down to the eyes of Malati. Sutapadi stood up and said—Now let me go. Accompany me to reach my residence.

With folded arms Sudhakanta very politely said— We have caused your pain in such way. What could we do? Being helpless we had to call you.

Sutapadi smiled and said— You have done the right thing. This has not caused any pain to me.

Being hesitant Sudhakanta said--Please don't mind; how much is your fee?

Sutapadi said--What are you saying, Sudhakantababu? Why will you pay me fee? It is my duty as your neighbour to do that little. Will you not come to my help at the time of my danger?

Getting unprepared Sudhakanta said— Do not take it as my audacity. I could not understand that. Come, let me accompany you.

Both started walking side by side. Their shadows in the light of street lamps began longer and longer.

Notes:

1. Ramkrishna Mandal's Protibeshi (Neighbour) was published in collection of *Sabuj Māchh* by in 1407 (Bangla Calender year)
2. Ramkrishna Mandal is Retired Reader in Bengali, Suri Vidyasagar College, Birbhum. He did his Ph. D from Visva-bharati, Shantiniketan, India. He has established himself as a literary figure in the Bangla. He has published several volumes of short stories, literary critical essays and humorous stories. He edits *Abakāsh: SāhityaPatrā*, a literary journal in Bangla.
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