



## “SHERA PANCHASHTI GOLPO”

(50 best short stories)

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Review By  
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In the realm of contemporary Bengali Literature Nilanjan Chattopadhyay has carved a niche for himself by dint of his short stories which are examples of the rich literature of the said Culture. Apart from being an accomplished short story writer, Nilanjan is also a very good and original novelist. His variety of themes and novelty of expression add to the stories an aura of their own. Nilanjan experiments with subject matter, theme and technique and each of his stories is unique because of the writer’s deft touch. He chooses his character basically from middle class background and provides a scrutiny of their behavior, psychology and life style. Nilanjan successfully blends reality and imagination in his stories and this fact becomes his strength. He uses metaphors, images and symbols in his stories and his language is chaste and urbane. The book under review highlights Nilanjan’s variety which is his major strength. Nilanjan’s stories and novel should be translated into English and other Indian language to make it widely available.

In *Gandha* (Smell) the protagonist Jeeten hails from a middle class background and he does not feel any moral qualms to do corrupt practice. The story starts with a peculiar incident of a mad dog which suddenly starts to frequent the residential complex of Jeeten and everybody seems to be nauseated by the vomiting smell of the liquid that comes out of the mouth of the dog. Jeeten lives two simultaneous lives- one that of a nice middle class gentleman who has earned the respect of the people around him and the other of a corrupt lusty individual who has an extramarital relation with a lady called Bashanti who however wants to suck money from Jeeten. The smell seems to be symbolic in this story in the sense that Jeeten can both literally and metaphorically understand towards the end that the vicious dog resides inside him and he also prepares him to kill the dog with a stick but he has to stand up in darkness being at a loss.



In “*Do nomboor ashami*” (Convict number 2) a simple innocent man is compelled to commit suicide as he is pressurized to become the scapegoat for a rape case. All the pretentious behavior of the people of the village including the behavior of the corrupt police officer is brought to the light by Nilanjan and the story becomes a testimony of suffering of innocent people who often have to sacrifice their lives in order to save the people in power. In such sad predicament a writer can only show the suffering but cannot offer solution. Nilanjan builds this story brick by brick and is ultimately able to bring out the pathos.

*Shahaber Dukkho* (The grief of the officer) explores the loneliness of an aged government officer who has never allowed any one near him any space to breath freely. He has always shown his rude manner and patriarchal attitude both in office and at home and thereby distanced himself from his near and dear one. The story takes a dramatic turn when his son rebels against him by first choosing English literature as his subject instead of Computer science as desired by the father and also by becoming a professor. The rebellion reaches its zenith when the son informs the proud and self controlled officer that he is going to marry a girl who was once his classmate and the son also announces that his mother would also move away from the officer’s home along with the son in his new house. One day the proud officer goes on a long drive and ruminates over his life and it is exactly at this point he realizes that how essential in life it is to love and to be loved. The author Nilanjan here seems to speak here on behalf of lonely individuals who make their lives miserable by empty pride and vanity. Nilanjan sings the song of live and creates an elegy of boredom and lovelessness in the officer’s life.

In *Bhar* (Heaviness), Nilanjan again chooses a character called Shubhendu, a typical middle class character who is corrupt in the truest sense of the term as he books a flat for him in a posh area by paying a handsome amount of 2 lakhs and he arranges their money through a corrupt deal in his office. When his wife congratulates him that he has been able to book the flat through his hard earned money he feels a peculiar weight and guilt and this fact is aggravated by the murder of his honest brother-in-law. Nilanjan shows the contrast and almost slaps the central character Shubhendu who cannot resist his greed and that is where the success of the story teller lies. There is both “telling” and “showing” in the story as suggested by Wayne C. Booth in his monumental book titled ‘Rhetoric of Fiction’.

*Durer Akash* (The Far Away Sky) brings to life the pathos of life and the frustration left behind by the relation that could not flower fully. Sunita, the protagonist is married into the family where she has to take care of the everything and her husband does not care about her emotions and sentiments. The sudden visit of Sunita along with her husband to Chandipur brings back a flood of memory when she visited the same spot along with her family members and lover Shurav ten years ago. During that visit Shaurav confessed to Sunita that he was a revolutionary and was even a brutal murderer but he also talked about his

repentance and the futile dream of a new revolutionary society. Shaurav could realize the blatant truth that revolution could not be achieved through bloodshed and this realization provided him with a new opportunity to recognize his life. But one day he was shot dead by the police and Sunita could only nurture the sad memory and their momentarily love- life. After ten years when Sunita visits Chandipur again along with her busy husband she searches and finds out the carved letter on the stone of a mountain which was done by Shaurav and tears roll down from her eye which she desperately tries to hide from her husband. It is a deeply moving human story where the twin qualities of sensitivity and compassion are evoked. The language of the story is also at par with the theme and the readers come across a beautiful sentence like “the Sea is lying like an indifferent monk”.

In *Dushon* (Pollution), the central protagonist Kumaresh works as a clerk in a government office and one day he earns the wrath of union leader who wants a favor from Kumaresh. The union leader wants the transfer of his girlfriend and then one day Kumaresh sees both of them in a cinema hall and he also marks the movement of the hands of the union leader around the girl's upper part of the body. Kumaresh cannot tolerate this tainted relation and he refuses to sign on the office file of the transfer of the girl. As a result of this unpleasant incident this simple and honest man gets transferred to another department where there is hardly any work and where Kumaresh has to work under filthy conditions and circumstances without the assistance of anyone.

He gradually finds himself into a cocooned existence and whatever he does goes wrong, a fact which earns the wrath of his boss. But Kumaresh charges his officer one day in a sudden burst of anger and immediately after that he goes back to his home where he discovers his wife indulging in an illicit relation with a man whom Kumaresh also knows and a person who pretends to be their family friend. In a sudden burst of anger and frustration Kumaresh strangulates his wife and in a crazy manner he rushes to a nearby police station and confesses his guilt and also expresses his desire to sleep for sometime which astonishes the police officer. Nilanjana has been able to chart out Kumaresh's downfall almost in a crude naturalistic style which reminds one of Zola's work and the writer's masterstroke elevates an ordinary narrative into an extraordinary height.

In *Jelkhanar Jangla* (The window of the Prisonhouse) is a wonderful tale of the freedom and confinement of an artist who has been taken as a prisoner because he supposedly wrote anti-national articles and involved himself with anti-state elements. When he is given the sentence for lifelong imprisonment he only appeals to the judge that he would require his artistic equipments so that he can paint and survive. He surprisingly paints a window on the wall of the prison which brings forth fresh and vibrant light to his cell and this act earns the wrath of the jailor who accuses the artist of creating nuisance. To the Jailor this drawn window appears to be artificial but to the artist it appears to be real because he has painted it with the quest for freedom. Ultimately the artist flies out of the window into an open space where the

jailor sheds tears by realizing for the first time in his life how imprisoned he is in his own world. Nilanjan shows the duality of reality and illusion and Champions the victory of art over everything else.

*Gotanugolik Premer Golpo othoba pikashor chobi* (A usual love story or picaso's painting) is a postmodern tale where Nilanjan experiments with both texture and structure of the narrative. It speaks of the confinement and ultimately liberation of a girl called *Tilottoma* who becomes the reason for the dual between two men who yearn to earn the love of their beloved. There is a character like *BorofShaheb* who is a criminal and whose anti-social elements and activities cast a gloom over the story. He is a ruthless criminal and cunningly arranges for the duel which could earn him lot of money as it would become a major event which would be highlighted by the media. There is inter-textual reference to T.S Eliot's poem and Pablo Picaso's Painting which makes it a wonderful narrative structured around a set of different mini- narratives within the grand narrative.

This story is at par with the very best stories of world literature and Nilanjan has been able to create a polyphonic text in this story in the *Bakhtinian* sense of the term. Art can elevate life to a higher realm and this story bears testimony to this truth. Nilanjan's conception of the story is novel and his execution of the narrative is unique and the story ends in the surreal or magic-realistic manner. The story also demands active intellectual participation on part of the readers.

In *Tan* (Attraction) Nilanjan weaves a wonderful account of conflict between reality and fiction as he depicts the history of a murder through the perspective of a human right commission officer, who also happens to be interested in creating a story. Nilanjan does not specify the crime that has happened but he has been able to show how a child finds it difficult to recognize his father. The story is divided into many different parts and all the seemingly undeleted incidents forms a cohesive whole which adds a different aura to the tale. Again Nilanjan has experimented with form and technique of narrative in the story and the ending of the story is heart-rending. The human appeal that is found in the story is able to clinch compassion and sympathy from the readers. A child is supposed to be the witness of an incident of murder and which is supposedly committed by his own father and the victim happens to be his mother. The father returns from custody after six years of imprisonment and visits his son twice in a child-home. On each occasion there is hardly any talk between the father and the son but towards the end when the story reaches its climax there is a hint given by the narrator that the son probably recognized his own father.



In *Kamanapukur* (the pond of desire) Nilanjan depicts with aplomb the difficult and complex relation between a husband and wife, who do not have any child of their own. The wife wants to go to a pond where there is a scope for wish-fulfillment but it is very superstitious and unscientific. The husband is rational and calm and quiet but the wife remains obsessed with her desire to bathe in the pond where she believes she will be able to fulfill her desire. Even though the husband does not believe in such irrational belief yet he is compelled to take her to that place in order to maintain the emotional and psychic balance of his wife. The pain of remaining deprived of motherhood torments the wife and the husband also suffers equally. The husband tries his level best to support his wife who can never become a mother according to the report of the gynecologist. Nilanjan has exhibited his knowledge of medical science in this story which hints at his devotion towards his chosen vocation – A good writer has to have knowledge of every aspect of life and Nilanjan has proved in this story the truth of this argument. The ending of this story is quite dramatic as the husband finds it difficult to trace his wife in a mammoth gathering of people and it ends in an uncertain note.

The Story *Ashukh* (Disease) starts with a dramatic incident as a small child suddenly disappears from a multi-storied complex and her parents find no trace of her. The father searches every nook and corner but his effort go in vain as he becomes unsuccessful in tracing his daughter. But to the utter chagrin of everyone the girl returns and tells a scintillating story of being kidnapped.

She tells that she was lifted by few unknown persons in a car and when the criminal found out that this is not the girl whom they wanted to pick up, they immediately dropped her on the road from the car. The next section of the story becomes very interesting and meaningful in the sense that the girl's habit of telling lies and forgery becomes evident to the father which is reported to him by the headmistress of the school where the girl studies. The father surprisingly learns that the girl has earned the habit of fabricating fictitious tales and it becomes apparent that she is not in her proper senses. All these incidents create misunderstanding between the parents of the girl and the corrupt middle class mentality of the father comes out to the fore. The word disease becomes symbolic in the story as both the father and the daughter seem to find themselves in a mire of corrupt practices.

Nilanjan is a voracious reader of world literature and that is reflected in his stories.

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