



## Feeling Susceptible

### Suranjan Pramanik

A strange, sultry atmosphere hung heavy in the house, casting an unsettling pallor over the entire household. Although no quarrel or misunderstanding had occurred within this family, an undeniable sense of unease permeated the air. Everyone could feel it. Satyabrata, as usual, appeared serious, burdened, and perhaps even embittered.

The last day, Satyabrata left his office wearing his typical serious expression. Upon returning home, he exchanged only a few words with Manika. Lately, he had developed a habit of speaking little with her. He spent an hour teaching school

mathematics to Parmitha. Satyabrata and Anshuman could not find a way to break the ice.

Satyabrata was not naturally cheerful or jovial. That was simply not his nature. He carried a persistent air of disturbance and reserve about himself. This was not the first time he had sunk into such prolonged silence. There was a hint of madness that sometimes flickered in his eyes. Manika occasionally feared that he might succumb entirely to this madness, yet she couldn't confide these worries in anyone. Parmita and Anshuman, however, had their own suspicions.

Not long ago, Anshu had asked, 'Did you and Baba have an argument last night?' This year, Anshu had entered the twelfth grade, and though his question seemed innocent, Manika replied, 'No, there was no disagreement.' Anshu chose not to press the matter further, sensing that something was amiss within the household.

Satyabrata headed to the pond for his daily bath, and upon his return, he spread out his towel on a hanger at an end in the courtyard. Parmita broke the silence, asking, 'Why are you so quiet today, Baba?'

What could his response be? Satyabrata pondered this question. Although he had no particular inclination to speak, he must offer some reply. 'I am lost in thought,' he finally said.

During lunch, he exchanged a few words with Manika. 'White rice—*miniket*—how much rice do we consume in a month, Manika?'

'Almost fifty kilograms?' Manika replied.

He glanced at the kitchen ceiling and remarked, 'The kitchen needs repairs...' After that, he lapsed back into deep thought.

Satyabrata was on his way to the railway station to catch the 8:21 train. His T-shirt bore an ominous message on both the front and back: a stark reminder of death. Murder and death seemed to be everywhere. Often, Satyabrata would react while

reading the newspaper, 'People should not meet their end in such a way.'

Among the passengers on the train, there were several young men, most of them around twenty years old. When Satyabrata discussed these unsettling thoughts with others, he found that some shared his sentiments, while others simply brushed it aside, saying, 'It was destined to happen. Those who are dying are all underprivileged people.'

And it was something akin to this that was written on Satyabrata's T-shirt, a message scrawled in red ink. Blood seemed to drip from the letters 'y' and 'g' in 'dying'...

After a long time, the T-shirt had finally found its place—on Satyabrata's body. The letters glinted in the morning sunlight at 8 a.m.

The local train pulled into the station, kicking up dust from the platform. Satyabrata's gaze was fixed on a particular compartment. He quickly boarded the train, headed towards Howrah, and secured a seat at the front.

Roy Da occupied the front seat, engrossed in a newspaper spread across his lap. Satu turned his attention to the paper, where a headline in bold letters stood out: 'The Middle Class Itself Poses a Threat.' Some passengers glanced at Satyabrata's back, curious about the words on his T-shirt. It was always something unusual—the American flag, Titanic Love, Bruce Lee, or various other things.

Then Satu asked himself, 'Which class do I belong to?' I am a man whose dreams have never been realized, except for the occasional purchase of one or two poetry books despite my poverty. My wife owns just one bra, and I possess only one pair of underpants. We can't provide a more comfortable life for our two children. 'What's the matter, Satu?' asked Kesto da, 'Why do you look so upset?'

'Nothing happened! I'm just reading the newspaper.'

The newspaper caption featured some news: rising prices for wheat and rice, subsidy cuts on fertilizer—white rice—*miniket*—50 kg a month.

"Can we discuss white rice any longer? Shouldn't ration sugar be accessible to everyone, not just income taxpayers? Public sectors that are struggling will be shut down. His eyes unconsciously turn to Dutt Da. The family sector of Dutt Da is also in dire condition. Three children—two of them are daughters—none of them have been married off yet, although they are of age. The son may be in the tenth grade. A long, deep sigh struggles to escape Satu's chest. There has been an increase in the Defense Sector's budget.

Suddenly, Satu's mind stops working. The newspaper's headline burns into his eyes: "The employee community is quite upset and angered—war surcharges—the World Bank affected: the Chief Minister is worried about the fate of the struggling sectors. Frustration pervades the entire state."

Satu closes his eyes. A heavy tiredness washes over his body. It might be a moment of respite. A soothing break for the eyes.

'Satu Da,' Kunal asks, 'what are you thinking so deeply about?'

Satu opens his eyes and looks on, 'No, nothing too serious.' After saying this, he turns his gaze towards Dutt Da's face, appearing quite lost. Does a man become thoughtless after prolonged exposure to anxiety? His eyes then turn again to the newspaper. He could see a cartoon of the Finance Minister, good-humored, with the budget under his arm. Yesterday, he was sitting in the office canteen, watching the budget session on television. Members of the ruling party were clapping on the tables. At this point, his mind couldn't engage; he was watching the screen but noticed a terrible scene unfolding before his eyes—people, walking or sitting, were dropping dead on the earth.

Death! Is it because of this that he wore the T-shirt today?

‘Roy Da, could you put down the paper?’ Kesto Da makes this request, which unsettles Satu a bit. Something echoes in his ear, but it doesn't become clear.

‘How was the budget?’ asks Kunal.

‘Fantastic! It was the war that was desired,’ Roy Da replies. Satu feels there's a strong sense of irony in Roy Da's response. Yet, he wanted to say—no, not everyone desires war. But he couldn't summon the courage to express it. He fears backlash. He saw how voices against the war were drowned out by the joyful chorus of patriots.

‘Dada, are you mocking?’ says one of them.

Satu turns to look. An unknown person. Roy Da notices it too.

‘No, bhai,’ he replies.

‘There's no mockery in it,’ Kesto Da adds, ‘our eternal enemies are at the borders; we need to be more vigilant than ever.’

This time, Satu truly feels anchored.

Satyabrata doesn't notice any significant difference or reaction in the office. Everything seems normal to him. Some of them are, of course, upset about the income tax. This was expected—the patriotic fervor reached its peak during the war, and its impact still lingers. Making jokes and having fun during office hours are as common as daily habits—only Satyabrata can't engage.

Ram Babu approaches his table and says, ‘Satta, are you feeling alright?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘You look somewhat different.’

Satyabrata stares at him for a moment and replies, ‘Nothing in this world happens according to the will of common people like us, does it?’

Ram Babu can't come up with an explanation for the statement. Reflecting on his past experiences, he answers, 'All of this is up to the will of the Almighty.'

'Ram Da, have you ever considered that I might be killed any day.'

'It's just your imagination.'

'The war preparations are getting much stronger, Ram Da.'

Ram Babu intends to ask, 'Have you gone mad?'

Satu finds a seat during his return trip. Kunal has saved this seat for him. The compartment is quite dark. They can't see each other's faces. Shortly after boarding the train, some discussions echo in his ears—these discussions arise from their conversation about the decreasing prices of various computer equipment and internet components. The language they're speaking is incomprehensible to him. Yet he's listening. While listening to the conversation, he suddenly breaks his silence in exclamation—'My lord, dinosaurs!'

All fall silent. The train's wheels are spinning rapidly on the rails, their sounds echoing in the silence. After a brief moment, Satu breaks the silence—'I mean, the world is going mad, like the dinosaurs of ancient times.'

'Why did you say it has gone mad already?' replied Dutt Da.

'Dutt, I've heard,' said Roy Da, 'that computers can now write poetry and songs, isn't it?'

Just after Dutt Da's reply, Kunal said, 'Oh, is that really the case? We are witnessing poetry.'

Satu is aware that Kunal is teasing him. He used to remain silent when he realized this. Sometimes, he took this teasing too seriously. This time, he gave a nonchalant reply, 'But there may be a lack of depth in it.'

'Why?'

'Do you think we are the kind of people who can afford such e-tech? We haven't reached the level of having deep pockets.'

This creates a gap in understanding.

‘Whatever it is, the internet is somewhat like modern poetry,’ replied Prabeer.

Prabeer often made comments about poetry with the aim of needling Satu. Satu had become known as a poet during his daily commute. Of course, he had tried his hand at writing poems like ‘All My Songs Targeting You,’ but he hadn’t disclosed this to them. It is true that he has a great love for poetry. Often, he quoted from poetry and proverbs while talking to others, which led others to consider him a poet. When discussing and debating poetry, he favored modern poetry. Above all, he is a poet. It is Prabeer’s habit to mock the poet, Satu. And Satu is quite determined to make Prabeer understand modern poetry.

Whether it’s suitable to draw a comparison between the internet and modern poetry is another matter. Satu, in the context of the ongoing discussion, said, ‘Now, Prabeer, you understand, if you don’t engage in deep thought and mutual understanding, you can never be a man of knowledge. Dutt Da can understand what you cannot; I can appreciate the poetry you cannot.’

‘Whatever it is, there’s no need to understand too much. Excessive understanding can be dangerous. I may become a talker like you and make comments everywhere.’

‘But,’ replied Kunal, ‘Satu Da remains silent almost all the time.’

‘That is true. Today also he was silent—suddenly, dinosaurs...’

Satu intends to reply, ‘Even within the world of dinosaurs, the seed of success is hidden.’

‘At any time and in any moment, I might be killed like the incidents in the newspaper—bullets or a printer—something like that is racing towards me— You are also the target— You too, you too— All my songs targeting at you, the thong, the bullet is racing— The bullet is racing, targeting at you—’

Satyabrata returned to his room. He stayed awake late at night, trying to compose a poem with that line. Finally, he decided to send the line to a poet and went to sleep.

This morning, everyone is cheerful. A sense of freshness on Satyabrata's lips! An amazing song. Parmita woke up to the tune. She looked at her father with her sleepy eyes and said, 'You seem so happy!'

'Happy?' replied Satyabrata— Anshuman stood at the door. Another song on Satyabrata's lips. 'You were a different man yesterday, and today you are like this—unbelievable,' said Anshuman, 'why are you so happy?'

'Eureka,' answered Satyabrata.

At that moment, Manika came out of the kitchen and stood there, saying, 'What's going on?'

Again, another song. Standing in front of Manika, he replied, 'A dream.'

Satyabrata noticed the disapproving look from his family. They faced many challenges in their family.

After two more days, as Satyabrata sees himself in the dream, others notice the same thing; he is marked with the letters on his back and front sides: "A bullet is tearing—you the target."

**Note:** This story was originally written in Bengali by the writer Suranjan Pramanik and translated into English by Subhajit Bhadra.



## **About the author: Suranjan Pramanik**

---

Suranjan Pramanik primarily writes in Bengali.

---

## **About the translator: Subhajit Bhadra**

---

About the translator: Subhajit Bhadra is a gold medallist in M.A from Tezpur University. He is a freelance writer, poet, critic and translator. He has published a number of books including *The Masked Protagonist In Jewish American Fiction*, *The Man Who Stole The Crown*, *The Rising Sun*, a book of poems in Bengali and a translated work titled *Selected Stories of Arun Goswami*.

He has written a book on *History of English Literature*. He has also been published widely in Indian literature, a bi-monthly journal of Sahitya Akadami. At present, he is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Bongaigaon College, Bongaigaon, Assam.

---

## [Get Your Book Reviewed](#)

If you have got any book published and are looking for a book review, contact us. We provide book review writing service for a fee. We (1) write book review (2) publish review in CLRI (3) conduct an interview with the author (4) publish interview in CLRI. [Know more here](#).

## [Authors & Books](#)

We publish book releases, Press Release about books and authors, book reviews, blurbs, author interviews, and any news related to authors and books for free. We welcomes authors, publishers, and literary agents to send their press releases. Visit our website <https://page.co/Vw17Q>.