

Bye-bye Mridula

VIJAYANAND GUPTA



A couple of months ago Mridula Bose was found living on Juhu Beach, uncared for and unloved. Thanks to the timely attention she received from samaritans, this former school principal is today on the Howrah Mail, travelling back to her family in Kolkata

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City bids adieu to its most celebrated beggar

Mid Day impact

VIJAYANAND GUPTA

School principal turns beggar

Says she cannot return to Kolkata and let her family see her in this condition

Report in the Mid Day on November 28, 2001

Principal who sang for alms heads back to Kolkata

Shailesh Bhatia

AT 8 pm yesterday, a small group of people gathered at Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) to bid farewell to 44-year-old Mridula Bose, perhaps this city's most celebrated beggar.

A former high school principal, Bose ended up singing for alms at Juhu Beach after a couple of tragedies. But nearly two months after Mid Day first carried her story, a rehabilitated Bose, who has received psychiatric help in the city, bid adieu to well-wishers and began her journey back east.

Bose was once the principal of Ramkrishna Mission High School, in Satna, West Bengal. She was burned in a freak accident, which left her scarred, both physically and psychologically. Her brother sent her to Mumbai to help her forget her troubles. But on her first night in the city she was robbed of all her belongings on Juhu Beach. With no other alternative, she took up residence on the beach, singing for alms.

The other vagabonds soon realised she was no ordinary beggar, and harried her. She complained about this to the Santa Cruz police, who also realised she was no ordinary tramp. She quoted Kalidasa and Shakespeare, and sang Rabindra Sangeet.

Once her story was reported, many concerned people and organisations volunteered to shelter and rehabilitate her. Dr Bharat Watwani, who runs the Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation, a voluntary organisation dedicated to mentally afflicted destitutes, took Bose



FAREWELL: Former high school principal Mridula Bose on the Howrah Mail yesterday

to his Dahisar hospital.

After two months of treatment, Bose is keen to rebuild her life. She says, "I will go back to my family and start a new life. Maybe I will start teaching again or maybe I will join Mother Teresa's ashram and do social service." There are no traces of the earlier despondency that led her to describe herself as a "caged bird".

Dr Smita Watwani, who has been keenly involved in Bose's treatment, says Bose's homesickness shows the treatment has been successful. Since Bose was diagnosed as epileptic and psychotic, treatment will have to continue for up to five years, she adds.

Neha Mehta, a social worker at Shraddha, is accompanying Bose to

Kolkata. "My job is to meet Mridula's family and explain the situation to them. They have to be told to continue the medication and keep in touch with Dr Smita and keep her informed about her progress," explains Neha.

Bose is confident of a warm welcome back home. "I am sure my brother and nephew will take care of me. I made the mistake of venturing out alone to Mumbai and found out that things don't always turn out as planned. I was lucky to get help in my hour of need," she says.

As the Howrah Mail chugs out of the station, Bose hurls out an invitation. "Come to Kolkata, I will cook lovely sweetwater fish in a mustard curry for you," she says.