

High Impact Factor 8.1458 ISSN



Vol. 12, No. 2



**Double-blind
peer reviewed**



Referred Journal



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CLRI May 2025

Page 122-126

The Dial

Pradip Mondal

Pramit hastily enters the room and flings his bag on the bed. But this is just the opposite of his tidy nature. Today he is late by one hour.

The round golden dial on the wall ticks 7. Tamali brings him a glass of cold water from the kitchen. She also adds to it some drops of fresh lemon. She sits beside him and spreads her flaccid hands around his sweaty neck, "Have you faced any traffic jam on your way back home?" She is right in asking the question as it is a regular phenomenon. But perhaps it has been something else.

She unbuttons his shirt and mops up the sweat from his face with a towel. She puts the shirt on a wall hanger. This is Pramit's favourite shirt—a striped blue shirt. Tamali gifted it to Pramit on his 30th birthday. He likes the blue colour very much. On the other hand, she likes the pink very much. He had gifted her a pink *saree* on their first marriage anniversary.

She asks him with a frightened face, “What happened? Why don't you speak?” She puts the glass under the table with an apprehension. Pramit fumes and breaks his silence, “what the hell do the fertile heads of our office think?”

Pramit's proposal has been refuted at the General Meeting. By nature, Pramit is very laconic. He offered a well-thought suggestion at the office. But they turned a deaf ear to his suggestion. He furiously mutters, “All these are meaningless meetings. Everything is decided beforehand. The authority just arranges it merely to maintain a formality”.

Tamali then offers him a plate of butter toast. Usually Tamali prepares this for him as evening refreshment. Then she prepares for him a cup of hot refreshing green tea. Then Tamali hurries for the arrangement of the dinner. Perhaps, she will prepare for him some toothsome dish tonight. Her culinary skill is laudable. These three years, she has been a perfect helpmeet.

Tamali closes the windows and turns on the light. The dial appears much brighter. The dial ticks 8.

Pramit falls feebly on the lap of the bed. He stares at the dial on the wall. He bought this clock with the money of his first salary. It's his proud possession. It's not because it is bit exorbitant but it is a constant companion of *their* weal and woe. He thinks, *our* dial is much better than the square clock in our office room. He finds in the round dial of their home a sense of perfection...a universe in miniature; though he is aware that the universe is full of faults, dualism, and conflicts. But he loves this geometrical shape.

Silence reigns in this rented closet. Pramit dreams of taking a double or triple room apartment. He even dreams of buying a plot and building a dream home for themselves. After half an hour, silence is perturbed by the intermittent whistlings of the pressure cooker.

“This dial is so nonchalant. Unlike me, it never fatigues, it never shows anger, hatred, bitterness, or any other emotions”, he muses morosely. It is an embodiment of stoicism. She still loves him with unflagging care. He never begged pardon of her for his *faux pass*.

He watches raptly different kinds of magic movements of the three dissimilar hands of the golden dial. “The dial is a perfect circle”, he glues over the round clock.

“Three hands have no enmity or jealousy with each other. They tick forward with differing pace, yet they create a perfect harmony”.

Pramit always sought perfection, though he very well knows that there is no such thing as total perfection. Sometimes, he is deluded by the mirage of it.

Hours pile over hours. Hours make a day, a week, a month, a year, a decade, an eternity. He mutters, “Hours are produced by the constant turns and twists of the hands”. “Are not the ticking sounds their agony and deep sigh of pain?”, he broods over...

He is too weary. Langour grips him from all sides. He thinks of retiring to bed early tonight though he need not catch the 8:30 bus tomorrow. Tomorrow is Saturday and a holiday for him. He is planning to go to a theatre with her to watch a newly-released Hindi film. She loves to watch Hindi movies. He thinks of having their dinner at an affordable restaurant thereafter. Now-a-days, they don’t frequent restaurants.

Tamali calls him from the kitchen, “Do you hear? There’s a movie on World Movies channel...*Shadows of Time*. It’s a

Bengali film by a German director. Have you watched it?” Pramit wryly replies from his bed, “No”. The dial ticks 9: 30. It’s their dinner time. Tamali smilingly suggests, “Let us have our dinner while watching the movie.” Pramit nods affirmatively with a lukewarm smile. His smiles are so rare now-a-days.

“On her birthday on April 26, I must buy you a beautiful golden wrist-watch with a nicely-crafted dial...yes, round dial for perfection”, Pramit makes a promise looking at the mirror in front of the basin. He could not give her anything on her previous birthday. Tamali did not show any profusion of chagrin for this. Is this called ‘unconditional’ love? “I have been so selfish and miserly”, he thinks.

The next day, Tamali also decides to surprise Pramit by gifting him a cream-coloured trouser on his birthday which also falls a few days away—on April 30.

On her birthday on April 26, after sending her husband off to office, she walks towards the highway. She tries to cross the highway to go to the shop on the other side. A speeding truck knocks her and her slender body gets wheeled over.

Her husband is supposed to come with a golden wrist-watch in the evening. She will not be able to hear the tick-tock of that watch. Her heart also stops ticking now. It is destined to be her day of death as well. *April is the cruellest month.*

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