Samaritans to aid of destitute principal

Scholar beggar now in Dahisar nursing home. Several others come forward to help

Shailesh Bhatia

"My world is about to change," says Mridula Bose, former principal of Ramkrishna Mission High School, near Kolkata, who has been singing songs for money on Juhu Beach for the past four months. The beggar was discovered when she walked into Santa Cruz Police Station to complain about the other beggars on the beach harassing her.

Now, after a story in Midday about the beggar woman who could quote Kalidas and Shakespeare, Sankriti Shlokas and Wordsworth, several people have come forward to give Mridula the assistance she needs.

"I have received more than 15 calls from people and institutions who want to help Mridula. Some came personally to the police station to meet her," said Senior Inspector Vilas Tupe, of the Santa Cruz police.

For now, help has come from the Shraddha Nursing Home, Dahisar, which is run by Dr. Bharat Vatswan. Vatswan, who was a social worker, to the Santa Cruz police on Wednesday evening.

Tupe arranged for Vatswan and Mehta to go to the beach and find Mridula. Mehta said, "She was just lying on the beach, clutching her small bundle of belongings and a copy of Midday in which her story had appeared. She readily agreed to come with us to the nursing home."

Tupe, who has examined Mridula, said, "There are some signs of psychological imbalance. Such biochemical disturbances can be treated with medication. There are very, very good chances of her recovering in just over eight weeks."

He added, "Normally, in such cases, when the patient starts responding to medication, she may want to rise back to her earlier social status. Whether she wants to go and stay with someone, or return to her family in Kolkata, will depend on her at the time of her discharge."

Yesterday afternoon, Mridula seemed at ease at the nursing home. "This place reminds me of Mother Teresa's Ashram in Kolkata," she said. "Everyone is kind to me. All the fussing over me is giving me an inferiority complex. I like it here, but I feel like a bird in a golden cage. I will truly be happy when I am free to lead a normal life."

Vatswan said, "This is a common case of people not diagnosing a mental problem and treating it on time. People run to a doctor for a common cold, but tend to ignore mental health."

If Mridula decides not to return to Kolkata, she would have several options. Those wanting to help include Anuradha Baluwalla, an Air India airhostess, who was in the news a decade ago for rescuing Ameena, a minor from Hyderabad. Ameena was airlifting to a plane at Delhi airport and sent to Saudi Arabia to be sold as a child bride.

"I want to take Mridula with me to Hyderabad. She can live in my flat for the rest of her life. After all, my mother used to be a teacher too. I will not let her spend another night on the beach," Ahuwalla says.

Due to her flight schedule, Ahuwalla was unable to meet Mridula, but she added, "I have psychiatrist friends in Hyderabad who will be able to give her the best help she needs."

Mridula was happy to know that Ahuwalla had offered to take her to Hyderabad. "I would like to be in the company of decent people who stimulate me intellectually."

Offers to help have also come from Mahua Chanda, who works in a financial firm and has compiled a list of institutions that could treat Mridula. Chanda also personally volunteered to be of assistance.

Nalini Shetty, of the Shraddhanand Mahila Sangh, Matunga, is also willing to treat and rehabilitate Mridula at the institution. "Since she has a degree in music, and a fabulous voice, she can teach music," she said.

Mridula, while on leave as principal, had received 20 per cent burns on her face and body in an accident. She never recovered...