

# SHONALI

## *The Color of Gold*

### THE FABLE FROM CHICKEN NECK CORRIDOR

*"In 2024, after Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was ousted and exiled to India, Bangladesh slipped into chaos.*

*The India-Bangladesh border, especially around my hometown, Siliguri's 'Chicken's Neck Corridor' was locked tight.*

*But many still tried to cross."*

Amid this chaos, Emu (23, naive, honest), a poor Hindu boy in Banglabandha (Bangladeshi Border village), lives with his younger sister Joya (19, pretty, smart). They are orphans. But they have their best friend 'Shonali', a golden hen that their grandmother said lays golden eggs but only if she is truly happy. But it never laid a golden egg in front of them or their Parents. But still Emu believes his grandmother's story from childhood, that someday it will. So every sunrise, the siblings try to make the hen happy but fail.

Still they believe.

Their only source of income is one cow. Every day, Emu sells milk to survive. One day his cow falls sick and he needs money to buy medicines for her. He goes to some local men to ask for money. They say he should let the cow die and leave the village with his sister for their own good, as communal riot can ignite anytime against the minorities. A middle-aged man, Pervez, offers him money, but in return Emu must work for him. He agrees.

At night. Emu and Pervez reach the border, where long stretches of barbed wire cut through the land. There is no proper gate, only small gaps and loose sections people have used before.

Everything is quiet, but tense. They know the guards can come anytime. They export goats, sheep, and hens to India. The animals are pushed and dragged through the narrow gaps in the wire. The animals panic, get stuck, and cry out. On the Indian side, men wait in the dark. In return, they send cows. They use long bamboo poles and ropes. The cows are tied tightly and lifted into the air and carried over the fence. Seeing the animals in pain, Emu feels uneasy. But when Pervez hands him the money, he stays quiet and takes it.

In the morning when he comes back with the medicines, he finds out his cow is dead and his sister is mourning. The golden hen, Shonali sees all the despair and becomes sad and leaves the house. She walks through fields and farmland & flies above the barbed wire to the other side. Emu & Joya look for Shonali and see her on the Indian side of the fence. They try to call her back but she doesn't come back.

Emu has no other choice but to illegally cross the fence. Joya tells him to let go of the hen and look for work. But instead he keeps Joya in a Muslim neighborhood house where she is believed to be safer and at night dodges the BGB Guards (Border Guard of Bangladesh) & exports himself beyond the fence just like animals.

In the morning, on the Indian side, Pritika (21, Indigenous Bengali girl) is farming her land with her Mother when she finds Shonali. She feeds her and decides to keep her. Her Mother Pranita (47) says that her son loves chicken and on his birthday they can celebrate and eat meat. Pritika resists and says Shonali is her friend now and she won't let it happen.

On the other side, Emu looks for Shonali in every corner but can't find her. He sleeps at a barn with another Indian milk seller, Mannu, whose cow was stolen and exported to Bangladesh. Emu feels guilty because he was part of it. But at night, he sees his milk seller friend watching reels on TikTok of village girls. He sees a self made reel of his sister taking a bath in the open. He feels embarrassed but doesn't admit it's his sister.

At midnight we see Pritika practicing a Korean dance imitating K-Pop star Lisa. And her wooden room is broken but walls filled with Girl band members of Blackpink. An alarm rings, it's her baby brother Prema's birthday, he is 8, mute but can hear partially. She makes him cut a small cake, makes him try to sing a K-Pop song. He can't speak words but can make noise and hum the tune and dance along the groove of La-Lisa love me song, (body unbalanced: partial autism) and falls suddenly. Starts crying. Pritika's mom scolds her and puts him to bed.

Next morning we see many army trucks entering the border area and the village talks about how the Indian army is now building new check posts and fencing the unfenced borders. Emu overhears the conversation and panics.

Joya is in Muslim neighborhood's house and while she tells about her 100k followers to the neighbour's daughter, who helps her make reels, doing daily chores, washing dishes, wiping the floor but somehow they look seductive.

Pritika wakes up in the morning to see her mother is tying Shonali and going to butcher her. She stops her mother and they quarrel. Pritika blames her mother for their condition and slams her choice of marrying a man who after their birth went to the Middle East and never came back, and chose to abandon them. While they fight, it starts to rain and all their fresh harvest gets wet. They are on a mission to put all paddies quickly inside. If they fail, they won't have rice to survive for an entire year. Emu, passing by, sees them work in the rain and comes & tries to help Pritika. In the process, he sees Shonali. He stops the work and asks where she got the hen. She says it's her hen from a long time. Emu says it's his and tries to take it. They have a fight and Pritika's mother doesn't let him take her and they get physical. Emu takes Shonali and runs. Pritika chases him. She is a fierce runner. She catches him in the middle of an open field where a football match is going on in the rain. She beats him. He tries to defend himself but the boys and some crowd come in rescue of their village girl and they beat up Emu. Some say he is an illegal trespasser, Pritika says he is a thief and some say a Bangladeshi is enemy of the nation and get enough reasons to lynch him. Pritika tries to stop but they don't.

They strip Emu and drag him to the new border checkpoint guarded by 9 BSF Soldiers. Senior Guard Milan Joshi is angry with the mob and tells them to go away. He interrogates Emu and comes to know he crossed the border for his hen and he lives in the adjacent village on the other side. Since he is from a minority religion from Bangladesh, the Guards are not so hard towards him. Milan Joshi sends a couple of BSF boys to Pritika's house to check if they have a hen of Emu. The two army men come to take Shonali. Pritika resists, they forcefully take her. But surprisingly finds a golden looking egg under her. Pritika and family are shocked too.

The two boys come back and report that the hen is with Pritika and Emu is speaking truth. Emu pleads for his hen but army men say Pritika's mom has slaughtered her. Emu is in tears. Milan calls Bangladeshi guard Rafiq Alam and hands over Emu. Rafiq Alam(45) bullies him and calls him a soft man crying for hen and they drag him and throw him in the middle of a farmland in Bangladeshi area.

At night, BSF men catch the two boys fighting over a strange egg. It looks dull yellow, almost like any egg, but feels heavy in the hand. One man taps it with his nail, it makes a faint metallic sound. The boys refuse to let go, shouting and pulling at each other. Milan Joshi steps in, slaps one aside, and picks up the egg. He weighs it in his palm, he says, they are fools fighting over one egg. They should look for the golden hen. The boys panic. Under pressure, they lead the men to a hidden cage where Sonali sits quietly in the dark.

Pritika and family are having a vegetarian dinner on Prema's birthday. Pritika is sad and they discuss their missed chance of change of fortune. But she won't give up. She will plan how to get Shonali.

We see Emu is devastated and has lost all hope. His sister cooks food and serves him, he refuses to eat from her hand because she sold her integrity. Joya says she had to do something to earn and it's an easy way. Brother & sister have a fight and end up breaking down. Emu accepts that he is a foolish dreamer. Now he will live his life on practical grounds.

We see a passing of a year montage:

- Milan Joshi and his 8 Armymen wait everyday, try everything but Shonali never lays an egg. Pritika is caught stealing hen and is warned to stay away.
- Pritika goes to Siliguri (nearest town) and sells her crops, stays there for a while, gives a dance audition. She fails in the audition.
- Emu starts working in a construction site but his small injury from lynching causes an infection and he starts to become sick.
- Joya deletes her TikTok account. She starts working as a maid in a nearby town. She also tries to study again, but life has become heavier.
- Milan Joshi gives up on trying Shonali's eggs. And speaks to a few gold dealers, who can give him the best rate for the gold he has, precisely 190 grams.
- Emu's condition worsens. His body swells. There is pus. Fever does not go away. He becomes too weak to work and is thrown out of his job. Soon, he is bedridden. A local doctor tells Joya that it is sepsis. The untreated wounds from the lynching have infected his whole body. He needs proper treatment, possibly in Dhaka. The best treatment is in India, but crossing the border now is almost impossible, even with a medical visa.
- Joya struggles to buy medicines. She cannot pay. Pervez helps, but in return he pressures her to marry him. She feels trapped and threatened.

Milan finds Pritika in the farmland and tells her that Shonali didn't lay a single egg. Pritika says if he gives her a chance, she knows a trick to get it done. But she should get a share too. Milan agrees. Pritika comes and meets Shonali at the army checkpoint. She tries playing the same K-Pop song and dance in front of Shonali, the same routine she did on her brother's birthday. But she fails. She tries to keep her with another hen, and change Shonali's mood but she fails this time also. She keeps her on her lawn, where she laid an egg previously. But fails again. The army takes back Shonali. The post is sad and quiet. One army man suggests why not get the real owner Emu.

He can get this done. Milan calls Rafiq Alam and reveals the secret and makes him a partner, asking for his help to get Emu.

Rafiq reaches Emu's house and finds him bedridden. He searches the entire house but finds no gold. He threatens the siblings, asking them to reveal where they have hidden it. When they insist they have nothing, he stays back in the house. By midnight, he understands the truth, they are genuinely poor, and Emu is close to death. He tells Emu that his hen is alive and has laid a golden egg. Emu feels relieved that Shonali is alive, but he does not believe the part about the golden egg. Rafiq pressures him to reveal the trick, but Emu says there is none. Joya steps in. She agrees to help, but only if they get a share of the gold and he helps them settle in India. Rafiq agrees.

Emu fights with Joya, he refuses to cross the border this time. He says maybe Shonali is truly happy there. But Joya says, this is the best hope they have to change their lives and keep him alive. Emu hesitantly agrees with only hope of seeing his best friend 'Shonali'. Before leaving, Joya takes her grandmom's small books of chants and an old Hindu calendar book "Panjika".

Rafiq doesn't include any of his BGB army in the plan. He helps Emu and Joya cross the border, dodging his subordinates.

Milan is shaken to see Emu's condition. Emu asks to see Shonali first, and as soon as he holds her, he breaks down in tears, clutching her close to his chest. Joya wants to see the golden egg. Rafiq is curious too. Milan shows them the miracle. Emu is stunned, he cannot believe that his faith was true all along.

Milan asks for the trick. Before Emu can say anything, Joya steps in. She says it only happens during certain star alignments, so it cannot be done right now. First, they need a proper place to stay and a doctor for Emu. Milan agrees and arranges for them to stay at Pritika's house.

Pritika is surprised to see Emu. She apologises to him. Emu is gentle with her, but Joya is not. She blames Pritika for her brother's condition. Pritika tries to explain, but Joya is not convinced, and the two girls get into an argument.

Joya declares that she will make Shonali lay an egg. Pritika challenges her, saying the hen laid a golden egg for her, not for them. Joya accepts the challenge.

A doctor comes to examine Emu. He gives medicines and asks Emu to come with him for further tests. Emu asks for a couple of days' time. The doctor explains that his blood pressure is very low, and if it drops further, his body will not be able to carry oxygen and nutrients properly to vital organs. He warns that the infection has spread in the body and it can lead to death.

Joya reads her grandmother's calendar book again but cannot find any clear clue. She sees some scribbles, box-like drawings, a hen in the middle, and directions marked around it, but she cannot understand them. Pritika goes to an old woman who runs a chicken farm, trying to learn everything she can about how hens lay eggs.

Next midnight they are called to the checkpoint. Rafiq Alam arrives alone. Milan & Rafiq wait for a miracle to happen. Emu refuses to fake any trick. Joya goes forward: She chants mantras from Grandmother's book, keeps her in a particular direction as per vastu but fails.

Pritika tries: warmth, care, love, plays Korean music, makes a warm nesting area, gets a unique seed from old women, feeds the hen but fails.

Seeing everyone's greed, and his own desperate condition, Emu goes to Shonali and starts cracking jokes. The others laugh, but Shonali does not react. He tries harder, acting like a clown, trying to make her happy. He dances, even though his body cannot support him, but he does not stop. Slowly, his laughter turns into something else. He begins to laugh uncontrollably, then breaks down. He starts crying, begging Shonali for a golden egg. All his pain comes out at once. He howls, unable to hold it anymore. Shonali brushes Emu's legs and quietly walks away.

Rafiq and Milan look at each other and agree that no one knows the trick. Maybe the first egg was just a coincidence, and they should wait for another one. Rafiq asks for his share from the existing gold. Milan refuses. They argue, but nothing is

resolved. Rafiq leaves angrily, breaking whatever understanding they had.

Emu wakes up in the morning and, for the first time in days, he feels slightly better. There is a small sense of relief. He spends time with Prema, and the two slowly become friends. Prema begins to like him.

In the kitchen, Pritika and Joya get into another argument. Pranita is already upset with the situation, strangers from across the border staying in their house and depending on them. Emu walks in and lightens the mood. He says there is no need to worry, his sister makes the best fish curry and she will cook today. Joya is not very happy about it, but she doesn't refuse.

Emu, Pritika, and Prema go to the pond to fish. The air is calm, water still, small ripples spreading as they sit quietly. Slowly, a softness grows between Emu and Pritika. Pritika talks about the day she saw the golden egg. She says for a moment her heart stopped. In that moment, she understood why Emu crossed everything for the hen. Emu smiles faintly. He tells her he never came for the egg. For him, it was always just a story. He came for Shonali. Since childhood, she had been his only friend. He pauses, thinking. He says it still feels strange, all his life he believed his grandmother's story, that Shonali would lay an egg only when they were truly happy. But the only time it happened... was when he and Pritika were fighting. Pritika looks at him and says maybe, somewhere inside, they were happy. A kind of happiness they didn't even realise. Emu looks at her, a little shy now. He says maybe it was because he saw the prettiest girl he had ever seen. That was enough for him to feel happy.

Pritika blushes, looks away. Emu gently asks her if she was happy that day. She shakes her head. Says her life has not given her many reasons to be happy. She tells him about her mother, who came from Nepal and worked as a bar dancer in Siliguri. Her father met her there, married her, brought her to the village... and then left for the UAE and never came back. Since then, it has only been a struggle.

Prema suddenly pulls Pritika towards the water, excited. Emu watches her, a quiet warmth growing inside him. He notices movement in the water, quickly reacts, and manages to catch a big Rohu fish. Prema jumps with joy, holding it proudly. For a brief moment, everything feels light.

During dinner, Pranita tastes the food and is quietly impressed with Joya's cooking. Everyone eats together, fish and rice, simple but warm. Pritika and Joya are still guarded, but the sharpness between them softens.

Later that night, Emu and Pritika sit outside under the open sky. Joya brings Emu's medicine, Pritika feeds him. Joya teases him saying maybe he is getting better because of Pritika. Emu smiles faintly.

Joya takes out her grandmother's old books. The pages are worn, filled with small notes, drawings, and markings. Pritika asks about it. Emu begins to tell their story.

Their grandmother was from Kolkata, before independence. She met their grandfather while working in a chicken farm. They were poor, but in love. After marriage, they moved to his ancestral village in Banglabandha. Back then, there was no border. The land was one.

He says Shonali came into their lives from that farm. And one day, here, she laid a golden egg. With that, they bought land and built a life. But after partition, everything changed. Their home fell on one side, their land on the other. Papers, borders, permissions, nothing worked. Shonali never laid another egg. Slowly, they lost everything. Poverty became normal. Years later, during Covid, their parents died. It was just the two of them left, with a cow, a small hut... and the same miraculous hen.

There is silence after the story.

Pritika listens carefully. She says her grandfather had bought land in this area long back. Now she is trying to get the papers transferred, but there is always some dispute. Nothing is clear here.

As they sit, Prema plays in the mud, drawing lines with his finger, then wiping them away again and again. Joya watches him absentmindedly. Then something feels familiar. She slowly opens the book again. Joya looks at one of the drawings, a hen in the middle, a sun on one side, a moon on the other, small directions marked around it. It doesn't feel like a puzzle, but something she has seen before.

She looks around. The house. The courtyard. The fields. Pritika also starts noticing. The way the land stretches. The direction of the light. The open space between their fields. They don't say anything immediately. They just begin to look more carefully.

They step outside and walk slowly across the land. Joya tries to match what she sees with the drawing, not perfectly, but by feeling. Pritika follows. Pritika says softly that part of this land was always confusing, some of it falls on one side, some on the other. No proper fence here. People had come recently to mark a boundary, they tried to resist. And this dispute didn't let them sell the land.

Emu listens, slowly understanding. He walks to the spot where he had fought with Pritika that day. He asks her if this is where Shonali sat when she laid the egg. Pritika looks around, then nods.

It is the same place. The same place where people had come to measure land for a fence. They stand there quietly. No one says it loudly. But they all feel it. Maybe... It only happens here. In between. Not on one side. Not on the other. Somewhere in the middle.

Next sunrise, they take Shonali from Milan Joshi and place her in no man's land and wait for a miracle. Joya sings a lullaby her grandmother used to sing.

Nothing happens. Everyone is in despair again.

Then Pritika remembers: Flashback, when Emu had come to take the hen from her, during the fight Shonali sat down on her lawn, And there Emu had placed hand on Shonali, so did Pritika. That's when Shonali had taken the laying position. Grandmother's drawing also had her and Grandfather holding the hen together.

So Pritika tells Emu to place his hand on Shonali. Both slowly hold & caress her. Shonali feels Emu's hands, ice cold. The Sun is rising from the East and the Moon sets on the west.

Shonali lays an egg. A Golden egg.

Army men are happy. Rafiq & Milan embrace each other.

Joya & Pritika are silently in tears. Emu hugs Shonali. Then he embraces Pritika. Shonali slowly gets up and while others celebrate, she walks off to the jungle and vanishes. Emu sees her go, but doesn't stop her or tell anyone.

Milan in good faith calls Rafiq, and gives him the news. But they become greedy & plan for next time. While everyone celebrates, Emu feels uneasy and he starts walking off towards the Bangladesh Border. He feels sick and is in pain. He collapses on the ground in no man's land. Joya runs towards him. Emu looks at her, weak, barely able to speak. He says one word "Pritika."

And then he is gone.

At the same time, one army man comes running to Milan and tells him that Shonali is missing. Instead of going to Emu, the army men spread out and begin searching for the hen. Rafiq informs his men on the other side. Both sides start searching for the golden hen. The land fills with noise again. But Emu lies still. In the same place where the miracle just happened.

February 2026.

Election happens in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Nationalist Party wins. Ties between India & Bangladesh become better. The border gate opens up again.

Orders come to Milan that he & his men have to shift to another post to Tripura and leave this place. Milan bids a final goodbye to Rafiq hugging him and giving his share of the money.

People are seen crossing the India Bangladesh Border safely and life has become normal.

Pritika's house is now being fenced and divided between both countries.

Joya & Pritika are seen selling their share of a broken piece of gold in Siliguri. The Girls with Pritika's mother & brother are crossing the India-Nepal border in a rickshaw safely.

One year later, Pritika teaches dance to Nepali kids. Prema is improving with physiotherapy from a good doctor. Joya & Pritika's mom run a dairy farm. Joya & Pritika meet at the farm. Pritika asks why do you think your grandma taught the wrong trick of making the hen happy & getting the egg because when it once laid egg, Emu & her were fighting. Pritika's mom says maybe she never knew any trick and she said this so that the kids can live happily even in poverty.

Joya says yes, even in the worst times, every morning she and Emu spent two happy hours together with Shonali. That was Emu's favourite part of the day, and he woke up with so much excitement and joy.

Prema tries to speak brokenly and asks where Shonali is right now.

They all look at each other & sigh.

We see Shonali crossing lands.

Walking near river banks.

Walking into town, the local market.

Someone casually picks her up.

Truck loaded with other chickens.

Train compartment loaded with chickens.

She is in a poultry farm somewhere.

She escapes from a cage dodging a farmer.

She reaches farmland: paddy, sugarcane farming.

Walks to a barbed wire and sits on top of a border fence. And we see at nearby post written:

"India - Pakistan Border"

- Fazilka Punjab