

ART TALK — A NONFICTION COLLAGE

By Bitan Chakraborty

(Translated from the original Bengali by Kiriti Sengupta)

Anguish hits me abruptly like the unexpected waves in the sea, even if I remain at a safe distance. I try to avoid it by all means. Time, sound, those so-dear-eyes, intimate hugs — they avoid me on the other hand. And I keep waiting on the highway holding a hot cup of tea. My long wait for the coveted touch, but it does not seem to end. Like the illegitimate lover a lone agony adheres to my being. In this restaurant of heartbreak I enjoy a table at the corner, and while sitting there I can see the light of the day diminishes gradually and it falls asleep behind the urban shoulders. I can hear *Batas bohe mori, mori/ Aar bendhe rekho na tori...* (*The wind runs restless/ Do not keep your boat chained...*). I approach the sea once again, but where would I possibly shelter my boat? The shore has only its share of my cafe of distresses.

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Since childhood I have been told artistes die from long starving! People say, Bijan Bhattacharya, the ace theater artiste, once remarked, “You have felicitated me with a garland of fragrant tuberoses; you should have given me a garland of *Bok-ful* (flowers of hummingbird tree) instead, so we could have fried* the flowers to eat.” My friends often tease me: “If you are not a Uttam Kumar or Dev Anand or a Sunil Gangopadhyay, you would need to forget your hunger if you are unto practicing any form of art.” A few months back a well-known English daily has urged to create a full-fledged, professional industry from theater. But then, can theater be sold?

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What is the true implication of the word “income” to an artiste? To become rich, a millionaire? Or to secure the basic needs of healthy living and honestly dedicate the rest of the time to practice art? Once I had an opportunity to visit a rural fair where I got mesmerized by the renditions of a woman singer who was at her fifties. It was midnight, and she was wearing a white sari. She was singing *Kirtan* (devotional songs) on the stage. More than an hour passed by; as she ended her performance the singer beseeched: “Audience, please, give me alms as much as you can afford!” I was skeptic; the woman did not appear to have belonged to a poor family. Why was she begging off the audience then? She waited for some time but failed to collect a considerable amount of money. She felt shy perhaps, and said, “Listen dear audience, I sing and don’t do a job to earn a living. I live my life on the alms that I accumulate from begging, and thus I secure my close attachment to the art of singing.”

*Note: *Bok-ful-fry* is a palatable delicacy in Bengali households.

Bio:

Bitan Chakraborty spent eight years learning and actively participating in Group Theater under the auspices of the esteemed Jangam. Bitan does not quite like to be marked as an Engineer, and he dreams to live a life of a theater artiste. He has established Hawakaal Publishers in the year 2010, and published many Bengali writers and poets. Bitan has authored *Obhinetar Journal (Actors’ Journal)*, a nonfictional memoir in Bengali. He is awaiting the publication of his first collection of short stories, expected to be released in January 2016.