

My first write-up

Going down the Kharguli road, one day I noticed from the rickshaw a new house being constructed atop a small hillock. I could not get a very clear view from the moving rickshaw; however, I could make out that the house was being built by a man with an artistic disposition. In front of the house there was a long, extended wall and on it was engraved some modern art like design. I have seen such designs in cinema and exhibition halls nowadays, but I have not seen people wasting their time over such extravaganzas in their homes. The design of the house was like a photograph of a modern architectural piece – a floating veranda on one side and on the other a netted room, and so on and so forth.

Why did it occur to me that this was a residence? It could also have been a high-school or some government office? But such probabilities did not arise in my mind at all. Rather, I felt certain that I knew this person. O, if he were to build a house he would undoubtedly build something like this; would he be content building an ordinary RCC structure or an Assam type house like you and me?

Whatsoever, the rickshaw had travelled quite some distance. While returning I got busy talking to other people; I did not remember the house again. I reached home to find a letter enclosed in a government envelope and endorsed with a government seal awaiting me. I looked closely; it was a letter from the Radio. My brows contracted; I had stopped writing stories lately. What were these people looking for now? I opened the letter with apprehension. Ah! Saved! Not a story – they wanted a talk – “My First Write- up.”

But why this? What immature tiny creature who had just been weaned away from his mother’s milk and whose beard had not yet started sprouting, unable to withstand the outrage of his emotions and feelings had put pen to paper? Who is impatient to know about this?

Whatever, if they have asked then definitely there are people who want to listen to all this. I thought over this; what was my first published thing? Ages ago I had written a story entitled *Asanta Electron*. Many consider that to be my first story and that with it I had made my entry into my literary life. However, no, - that is not my first story (and in context – that was a story I had written with the expectation of winning prize money in a competition; there was no literary purport in writing it). Even earlier, during school days, in Jubilee issues of *Bahin* etc some stories were published – extremely Marxist stories. ‘In revolution there is a solution to all things’ – something along that line. This Marxist ghost perhaps haunts all youths but fortunately unlike the old man, who sits on Sinbad’s shoulders, it is not stubborn; this fever sweats out on its own after a few days. Fortunately no writer or reader remembers these outbursts today. Phew! I had also written mystery stories in children’s magazines; not detective stories but like O’Henry’s stories – some mystery being revealed in the last line kind of story. But are those the first ones? No there was an annual school magazine, I recollect that a couple of something was published there, a translation of an English poem; I had once gone with my father to Calcutta when I was in Class V or VI. An imaginatively written travelogue, “A Glimpse of Calcutta” was a follow up of that trip; in what train we had travelled and at what time; at what time we had changed train at Golokganj; what snacks we had had with tea on the trip; *Ideal Home* Hotel at Mirzapur street. In the terrace in a tailoring room lived Shri Harendra Nath Kalita, He was our travel guide in Calcutta. Wrote about the experience of travelling in a tram, visit to the zoo and museum and all the things we saw there; the savoury mixture of *New Market* is famous; we also ate it.

Perhaps that was the first published article. Okay, then that settles it. I will tell whatever I recall of that travelogue....

I go out – meet Padma my classmate from school on the road outside. Padma is building a house. He says that cement is available but very expensive. He goes on to speak

of the design of his house. By the by, I mention that the other day I had seen this artistic type of a house at Kharguli.

"Kharguli?" he queried. "Where exactly?"

I mention the location. Padma says, "Oh that is Nip's house ..."

"Nip? Which Nip?"

"Who else but our Nip – Nip the film maker."

I recalled Nip instantly. Nip was our contemporary, the only creative and industrious boy from amongst us. He was interested in drawing. Even in those days he would be talking about cinema and theatre. Later on he really went on to make cinema; he made a mark for himself in that field. We had not met since school. Our orbits did not cross. Sometimes we just drew near each other. I would perhaps be going on a rickshaw and from the opposite direction Nip would be driving along on a Standard 10; we would spot each other and raise our hands in acknowledgement.

"Hi! How do you do?"

"Fine, Brother."

We would wave again. The car and the rickshaw would cross each other. Once again turning our backs towards each other we would move away in opposite directions.

At school Nip put in all effort to bring out a hand written magazine – he had named it *Anjali* – if I recollect correctly. Nip would illustrate it. With great effort Nip would also write down the stories in his beautiful handwriting. At times Dhiren who shared the same bench, would force his "help" irrespective of whether Nip needed it or not. Precocious Dhiren. If all of us had opted to study Sanskrit, Dhiren had chosen to study Parsi. He is a professor of dance nowadays; clever Dhiren – with wise, wise looks and wise, wise words. The magazine was written in an exercise book; on the cover page was a girl with open, long hair; there was a garland of flowers around her neck. She was offering a lotus with folded, raised hands to a rising sun. The magazine would be brought out two or three times a year – there was no fixed norm. The annual subscription was one *anna*. Everyone would not give the *anna*. Whatever money was raised Nip would use it to buy hard bound exercise books, nib, ink and coloured pencils. Each reader could keep the magazine for four days, the writers for one week.

I recalled – my first article had appeared there (even though hand written) and somehow that copy of *Anjali* remained with me. Another incident came floating into my mind making me blush with embarrassment. This happened a few years ago – a marriage had just been celebrated in our house; the house was filled with a host of relatives and children. A couple of days after the wedding a host of both young and older sisters and sisters-in-laws, had gathered together to open the stack of wedding gifts. They cleared a half-broken book rack to keep the new books. Stacked there were all manner of books and magazines over twenty-twenty-five years old. They were covered with dust and cobweb – school grammar, geography, old note books of essays, other copies, English notes written by J.L. Banerjee, notes of *Raghubangsham*, piles of old issues of *My Magazine*, *Bahin* from Madhav Bezbarua's days, a tattered History of English Literature marked V. V. Imp in red and blue and what not. Sisters tucked the loose end of their sarees into their waist and using all force started dusting on a war footing. They raised quite a dust storm. I ran away from there. I returned a little later, for some reason, to find an uproarious situation. Everyone had broken into peals of laughter and in every face and pair of eyes could be seen glimpses of mirth. A sister-in-law was reading out a line or two from something held open on her lap and all surrounding her had burst out into laughter. I could not understand what was so funny that was making them laugh so. When they spotted me they began to fidget. They stopped laughing. But their eyes continued to sparkle. One of my sisters-in law slowly brought out a hand written copy, held it out towards me and said, "Bapu, see what is written here?" Confused, I took the copy in my hand – the page they were reading had a travel story. Some boy had gone to see Hajo's Haigrib Madhab's temple (an idol with a horse's head is worshipped in this temple in Hajo, Assam) and he had written a very

detailed and eulogised, poetic description on the trip – “When the vermillion rays of dawn in the eastern sky pushed the cover of darkness from the bosom of the earth, at that auspicious moment our car set out for North Guwahati – for the heritage filled three religion *Pithasthan* (pilgrimage place)” – something along these lines. “It was the month of June but inside the car the restless breeze of spring freshened and enlivened our body and mind – but somewhere beneath a bridge countless stones. Should we fall a watery grave was certain.” Stone and water! This ass perhaps considered them to be one and the same thing. My sisters and sisters-in-law were looking at my face. I said spontaneously, “Whoever has written this rubbish! Should be thrown away.” They immediately burst out into a peal of laughter. Suddenly it struck me, why were they asking me to read all this? I immediately recalled my essay and what Nip had told me later about Dhiren to pacify me. “Look Nip”, Dhiren had said, “he has written in a very blunt manner. Wait. Let me take this with me today. Let me correct his language a little.” Not paying any heed to Nip’s objections he placed my few pages in between his notebook and the next day made the whole thing into a ‘watery grave’ and gave it to Nip. All that Nip saw was that he had copied the whole thing beautifully. My face and ears turned red. I saw my eldest aunt trying hard to suppress a smile behind her covered face.

How I escaped that unbearable situation I do not exactly remember today. However bad a child may be the parents never abandon their love for their child. Similarly, I too have not abandoned the first published child born of my mind. After all the wedding guests had returned to their respective homes I retrieved my *Anjali* from the piles of old books and dumped it safely away in the dark cavern of a deserted drawer – I did not have the courage to read it. But still let it remain....

I hurriedly return home and in pursuit of truth pull open the jammed drawer, dust the cobwebs, cough after breathing in the dust; see countless healthy white ants scatter and run away. Pull out all the junk one by one and heap them on the floor, and finally access the safely stored *Anjali* of boyhood days.

The listeners will feel perturbed to know that the *Anjali* was in such a state where it could no longer be read. The thick copy, from cover to cover, had numerous fine holes of different sizes – small, large, medium Even at that instant some very good, healthy white ants were busy working on destroying the lotus maiden’s identity. One stray sentence here and another there was in a position to be read in my travelogue – the rest were all holes and cuts. The pages had disintegrated. They had the red colour of a rusty sword; they were like the sheet in a child’s bed – every page contained variously shaped watery maps – in other words, I have no way of boring my listeners There is no requirement for me to flush red. There is no need for the other person to cover a suppressed smile behind a cloth.

But consider the strange connections. It was like a jigsaw puzzle where there are numerous variously coloured hard board pieces. The pieces by themselves have no meaning but placed correctly they form a beautiful picture. The first piece a constructed house in Kharguli, the second my certainty that I knew the constructor. The third piece was the letter from the radio asking for my first article. The fourth piece – the information that the house belonged to Nip. The fifth piece my first article emerging accidentally in Nip’s magazine – strange coincidences. Extra Sensory Perception. Divine? Whatever it is, at least it is certain that the gods are sometimes merciful. Time and their agents – white ants, sun and water have beautifully given judgement on the case – there is now no need to be perplexed.

(Radio Talk)