

A Lecturer's Life

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The famous painting by Abanindranath Tagore, 'Bharat Mata' was fixed to the wall just behind where he sat; it seemed to radiate a mystic hallow, the painting in rich colours of saffron, yellow, orange and ochre, beautifully depicting the persona of Mother India. An imposing figure, Professor Binod Bihari Bhoumick, supremely confident, leafing through a book, and giving his opinion, as three other voluminous books lay in a neat pile on the right hand side of his desk. He was speaking to the journalist from Ananda Bazaar Patrika, batting question after question, with ease and expounding each and every point with crisp movements of his fingers. He was telling the person that The Calcutta Arts & Science College was his alma mater and he had studied here and how he put in all his soul into studying. How he had got his Phd some years back and passed first class and topped the exams, and it was only recently, he said in a self effacing manner, that he became famous for his theories on education.

The journalist seemed to ask him many questions regarding how, students flocked to his room and that he lectured at length and students listened awestruck, absorbing every single word as if it were gospel. He lectured for more than ten hours per day and had got the accolades for the same. He was particularly famous and developed a soft corner, almost a fan following among the female students, because he was a handsome young literary success. He wrote mostly in Bengali but some times in English too. In the span of just a few years, he had grown into a literary giant having published such immense and profound books, as titled:

'History and influence of British colonialism on Bengali Literature'; 'Kobiguru : A study into the mind of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore'; 'Erosion of bengali culture in Modern times'; 'Revival of Art education in India : The Necessary Initiatives' and many more notable ones.

He had actually been a success like no professor. The students called out to him 'Professor Binod Bihari this', 'Professor Binod Bihari that'; all the time and his phones always kept ringing, those media people never left him, always bothering him about his next book and wanting to conduct interviews on how he had successfully propounded one of the most successful models of the education system that had brought a new lease of life to arts education. He agreed that even senior professors agreed and acknowledged his immense contributions and

suggested it all be put to practice. He had invented a new format for arts plus science as an amalgamation, that would turn the course of education. 'There is no need to separate arts and science into watertight compartments, for real intellectuals are those who had a depth of learning spanning various areas of knowledge', was his oft quoted statement, in order to spark the growth of intellectual India we had to follow the new model to compete and leave the west way behind. A new paradigm from India that would go on to influence western thinkers and educational institutions as the liberalism that western society encouraged was also something that Prof. Binod Bihari acknowledged.

It was one of those usual interviews he had to take up, and he was very tired by the time he finished it. He had been to Shantiniketan the previous day, the tranquil, rustic environs had been a great balm, a good digression from his daily hectic schedule – he had picked up some pointers on what would be some of the other great ingredients to good education.

As soon as he was done, he got a call on his mobile phone, Shukriti was calling, she was one of the leading lecturers from the same college. They had met sometime back and had found their interests matching, they had now decided to marry, soon, it would be a great beginning to a successful life ahead. He took out his car and drove at a steady speed, picked her up and went to a lounge bar which played loud remixed music, they had a light dinner together and then he left her back at her house and drove on to his apartments at the posh locales of Calcutta. Changing into his night dress, he sat at the mahogany table, wrote a few pages of his upcoming book and then went to sleep.

'Way IN to HELL', it read, what was that ?

'Way IN to HELL' read the dark stencilled letters on the metal plate fixed to the wall, what was he seeing? He removed his spectacles, rubbed his eyes and looked again. Oh ! He was mistaken, he must have been imagining something else, he read it now slowly and pushing his glasses up, so his eyes saw through those thick lenses, this time it read: *'Way IN'*.

Ah, he was here, at last, nervously looking at either side of the gate he stared at the road inside. On a chair beside the gate, sat a watchman, as thin as he was, this instilled some courage in him, and he went up to him and asked.

"This is the Madhusudan College of Fine Arts right ?"

"What do you see there ?", asked the watchman through his tobacco stained teeth not bothering to look up, pointing at the arched board over the gate, as he rubbed the tobacco on his left hand with the right thumb, putting the pouch back into his shirt pocket.

"Was just asking", said Binod Bihari Bhoumick.

"Have you come here for the post of a lecturer ?", he asked now looking up and

also thoroughly enjoying the tobacco concoction he had stuffed into his mouth, giving Binod Bihari a thorough look from head to toe, as if he were a street thug or something.

"Yes you are right, precisely so" replied Binod Bihari.

"Right right, go in then, that's the office on the right side of the garden", said the watchman as if doing him a great favour. As Binod Bihari started walking in a group of boys came in on their cycles, and almost crashed into him and sped away inside, leaving Binod Bihari shaken and dabbing the sweat on his forehead with a white handkerchief. His shoes shined even though a slight layer of dust had settled over it. As he went away the watchman muttered to himself "God help the students who will have such teachers".

Stepping through the stairs, he entered a large hall, where a lady sat over the desk, shuffling through some sheets of paper. He went up and asked her about where the principal's room was and also of the interview he had. She informed him that the principal had not yet arrived and he could be seated outside for some time and that she would inform him. He thanked her and went out and sat on one of the benches, laid out one beside the other in a row.

That night he lay flat on his bed at home, totally exhausted, the thought playing again and again in his mind. What was it that made him lose out, he was unsuccessful the umpteenth time to get a job, he was qualified and also very talented as a lecturer of literature and yet it seemed like he was not able to project himself right. He seemed to come across as a nervous, insecure kind of a person without any real strength, lacking the necessary self-respect, a person unfit for the job of a lecturer. Even though he had had a short tenure as a lecturer some time back, he had actually been unable to handle the students of that particularly notorious college. The events had happened in a sequence. He understood from day one that he would be on a collision course with those roustabouts, that farce in the name of students. They seemed to hoot at him, when he was teaching and also always doing as they wished, smoking, talking among themselves, cracking nasty jokes, not the least bit interested in his lectures. He tried to be good to them at first and even thought of counselling them, asking them if they had any personal problems. But the result was the same, they continued their irreverent ways. He tried admonishing them, but they were audacious enough to talk back or ignore or even not respond. Sometimes they walked out of the classroom and most of the time, only a handful would attend. He would complain to the principal, but the principal would always blame him for not being able to control a class of only thirty students.

And two months back unable to tolerate the humiliation any more he had submitted his resignation, the principal seemed relieved on getting the

resignation letter and accepted it happily, he was content to have got rid of some nagging pain in the neck and of course of his daily complaints. The students jeered at him when he was walking out of the college. He was bitter about the whole thing and yet did not know what to do. He had started to apply for the post of a lecturer of bengali literature sometime later and would always go into the interview fumbling, unconfident and eternally nervous of something, as if they would strip him naked and flog him. He knew he could never be like those other lecturers - gossipy and chewing paan and always in a foul mood, barking and scolding the students. What baffled him was that the students hated these breeds of teachers for their foul mouth and yet seemed to fear and respect them. And he felt a form of self-pity as he were the wronged one.

He stared at the fan, as it rotated with a periodic jarring sound, the walls were as pale as he was and the plaster was crumbling in places, giving a glimpse of the bricks underneath. A lizard lunged at another and started chasing it making weird chirping noises, a battle or was it a game of mating, what was it, he lazily looked at the ceiling illuminated by a dirty yellow weeping bulb, ready to fuse anytime. He kept thinking now with closed eyes and arms akimbo, one leg crossing the other and lying on his back.

'Unfit to be a lecturer', 'Unfit to be a lecturer', 'Unfit to be a lecturer', he kept thinking. He would not go to any other college from tomorrow was what he decided. To be successful he would have to change himself, at any cost but what would he do if not work as a lecturer? He would join some literature research group at The Calcutta Arts and Science College and become a famous research fellow with the vast amount of knowledge that he had, he would get a Phd and could later write treatises on the volumes of literature he had read and the history and many other aspects of literature. It was running in his blood he knew it, he had those pure literary bengali genes, the same talent and genius of Sharatchandra Chattopadhyaya, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, Rabindranath Tagore, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, Satyajit Ray. He got charged up and a fire burnt in his stomach and he walked up and looked at the shelf of books lined neatly with volumes of bengali books and felt a warm nice feeling enveloping him. The fire burnt in his stomach, but he soon realised that the fire was to some extent also due to hunger, he had not eaten a morsel after the bland macher jhol and bhat at the hotel near that wretched college, sometime close to noon. And it was now ten at night. He walked down to the hotel at the end of the lane and had two roti's, a kophir torkari - cauliflower curry and some daal. He came back and managed to lie down and within minutes of having put off the lights, he was snoring, deep in sleep.

Now it seemed like he was seeing that dream again, the same one ...