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Subhajit Bhadra Interviews Dr. Suresh Chakravarty

*Dr. Suresh Chakravarty is a Professor and HOD, Dept. of
Psychiatry, GMCH, Guwahati.*

*Subhajit Bhadra is an assistant professor in the Department
of English at Bongaigaon College, Bongaigaon, Assam.*



Q1. You must have led a childhood that have influenced you in your adult life. Kindly elaborate?

Ans. When I was a boy, I was very lean and thin. My mother did not allow me to go alone anywhere even to my maternal uncle's place. She did not allow me to play outdoor games like football with my school and village friends. She was always protective. She was afraid of the thought of me breaking my leg or getting injured while playing outside as this would have hampered my studies, and was very much concerned about my food and studies. So naturally, I was very attached to my mother. I used to sleep along with my mother till class 8, when I got promoted to class 9, only then she allowed me to sleep alone. I lost my mother at the age of 15, when I appeared

for the Higher Secondary examination in 1976. My matric result came out two weeks after my mother's demise. She was only 54. I lost my father in 1977 before my PU test examination. Probably that has influenced my adult life.

Q2. Kindly tell us about the environment in which you were brought up?

Ans. I was the youngest among seven siblings. My elder sisters were like my mother. My life was a little bit comfortable. My primary and high school was at a walkable distance. During leisure, I used to come to my house and took whatever available at house, mostly banana or guava. When there were nothing left to eat for me at my house, my mother used to keep half of a roti, from her part and sometimes "*bhator nisoni*". I used to take it and went back to school. We had herd of goats and I used to take them for grazing and looked after them during leisure. I also used to do fishing with my father.

I had been a nature lover since my childhood. During the rainy season, the murmur of water in the paddy fields with green colour of "*ahin*" and the golden field of our "Aghoan" attract me most. The river "*pagladia*" is one kilometre away from our home. During summer, it rose like a sea, we used to come with our seniors to see and got thrilled with its *Tandav Naritya*. All those beautiful events are still vibrant in my memories.

Q3. Where and how did you have your elementary education? Tell us about those days?

Ans. I started my primary schooling at “297 number Pajipar Prathmik Vidyalaya”. At class 3, I appeared for “Britti Parikhya” and got a scholarship. In the year 1969, I joined Barbari ME School, which became Barbari High School in 1970. Our Headmaster was late Adyanath Deka Sir.

Deka Sir would not allow me to join a reputed high school, when I got promoted to class 7th. In our school, there were no BSc teachers for teaching maths and science subjects. For classes 9 and 10, Deka Sir hired a BSc teacher for our math and science subjects. We were required to finish most of the syllabus within our summer vacations because our school was a venture school and not a permanent one.

My result created a wave because I was the first one from my school to get admitted in Cotton College. Probably it gets additional importance, as my mother passed away just few days ago before the result came.

Q4. Where and under what circumstances were you geared to pursue your stint as a medical student?

Ans. I think I was born to become a doctor. Some memories of my childhood still comes to me as sweet memories. When I was a child, I used to make lotus flower as my stethoscope after stripping out its petals. My grandfather was a cultivator. People used to call him as Zamindar, so during the rainy season, we would serve *Jalpaan* to *Halowai* and *Rowani*. They pretended to be sick and I used to examine them. But when I grew, I lost both my mother and father. I saw untimely deaths and

probably that is the turning point of me becoming a doctor.

Q5. Did you always nurture the ambition to become a Psychiatrist, if so then why ?

Ans. I have never thought to be a Psychiatrist till my 3rd year of MBBS, when we had posting in medicine ward. During that time, Gauhati medical college was in Paan bazaar, today's MMCH hospital. After 9 to 11 am clinics, we had some time to take a bus to medical college hostel at Bhangagarh. The Psychiatry ward was near the medicine ward and the patient used to sit in the benches of the hospital veranda facing mighty Brahmaputra. One day, I started talking to them and gradually started enjoying their conversations although, I did not understand its underlying meaning. Later it became my habit and my class mates started teasing me "your patients are waiting for you, looking at you, go and talk with them ". Probably it is me who was more attracted to them, rather they attracted me to know the unknown world through them.

Q6. How is psychiatry learning different from other branches of medical science?

Ans. Psychiatry is a new branch of Medical Science. When I was a student, I was taught by my mentor and professors that it deals with disorders of mind and mostly all phenomenon were tried to explain from psychological point of view by Sigmund Freud, but now everything has changed , Psychiatry now becomes a disorder of brain and

its subtle functions but major difference still persists that other medical disciplines rely on investigations but psychiatry don't have conclusive investigation procedure till day and has to rely on talking with the patient.

Q7. When and under which circumstances did you write your initial stories?

Ans. We have seen the Assam movement of 1979, had lost one year of our academics at that time. We had just joined MBBS course . College was closed due to agitations, so whole day there was nothing to be done, except taking part in the agitations. Probably I have took my pen to pen down my feelings. My first published story was in college magazine. But my real journey starts when I wrote "daijik bhabe jibita ezak manooch aru eti atmar marmantic apamrityut"- based on a real story of a bomb blast at Gauhati railway stations. I have seen the victims and helped our seniors in dressing them. The story got first prize in college week and as well as in the competitions organized by Ahom Sahitya Sabha for under 25 in the year 1982-83.

Late Jogesh Das Sir, Shilabhadra and Atulananda Goswami, the noted laurate were the judges. They encouraged me a lot and since then I started writing stories.

Q8. Did your professional experience help you write stories?

Ans. When I started writing stories, I was a student and not a professional. My first published story in reputed magazine was in *Prantik*. Dr. Bhabendranath Saikia sir was the chief editor of Prantik. But after joining in Psychiatry, I have tried to my level best not to bring my patients history as character of my stories. I tried to keep my profession and passion as parallel lines as much as possible, but it definitely help me in portraying their misery and their sufferings as human feelings.

Q9. You always write about the mental universe of human characters. why?

Ans. In writing a story, I never planned to write the mental universe of human but it is the character of my stories who leads me to surge their mental universe otherwise it will be simply due to my personality.

Q10. Who are your favourite Assamese writers? Have you been influenced by them?

Ans. As I have mentioned earlier, the three judges , they themselves renowned writers in Assamese literature in their own context . So I have met them personally and read their stories and was very much influenced of their writings. I met Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya at Atulananda Goswami's house. Goswami sir introduced me to him in 1985. He asked me how many short stories I write in a year. I kept myself mumbed. He again advised me if you don't write 12 stories in a year, how come you be a great writer.

I had a warmth relationship with Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia. I can claim that I have read almost all his stories. Probably most of my initial stories is published with him in Prantik under his editorship. He edited one paragraph of my prize winning story and since then I tried to be more cautious. The last story under his editorship in Prantik he could only change one word of my story. I still have great respect for him. I met Saurabh kumara Chaliha sir- his Duparia, Ehat Daba, Golam, attracted me more than Asanta electron.

But it would be incomplete if I not mention Hiruda, I never knew him before, that he used to read my short stories. When we met he used to ask me, are you writing new stories. He was like my elder brother to me, such a great man.

Q11. Who are your favourite western writers? Did you learn anything from them?

Ans. I have started reading Hemingway, Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Maxim Gorky, when I was in class 8th. Later during my college days I focussed on Hemingway's writing. I like his writing style. His quote "There is nothing to writing, all you do is sit down at a type writer and bleed" and I do believe in his quote. Later on, I started reading Marquez, Paulo Coelho, Orhan Pamuk . I also love readings of Kazuo Ishiguro.

Q12. What do you think about contemporary Assamese literature?

Ans. Due to my professional obligations, sometimes I do feel pity for myself that I could not keep up with the pace of all modern literatures. So, I am not the right one to comment on this area but I am confident that Assamese literature stories and novels are compatible with other Indian literature. Young writers have come with new techniques and styles of writing. The story writing have been divided into stories of the heart and stories of the brain. Recently lots of novels are coming up in historical background that is definitely a positive area and I am hopeful about the bright future of Assamese literature.

Interviewee's Bio

Dr Suresh Chakravarty

Dr Suresh Chakravarty (M.B.B.S & M.D.) is a Professor and HOD, Dept. Of Psychiatry, GMCH, Guwahati. Prof. Chakravarty is a post graduate teacher as well as examiner at Guwahati University, Assam University, Silchar, Shrimanta Sankardev University, Manipur University, Tripura University and West Bengal University of Health Sciences, Kolkata. He is also an inspector of MCI, Govt. Of India.

In Assam, he is famous as a short story writer more than a psychiatrist. He has published more the 150 short stories including two books. His short stories have been translated to Bangla and Hindi languages. He is the recipient of best short story writer (award under 25) bestowed by Axom Sahitya Sabha in 1983-84.

Interviewer's Bio

Subhajit Bhadra

Subhajit Bhadra, born in 1980 in Guwahati, Assam, is a gold medallist in M.A from Tezpur University. He is a freelance writer, poet, critic and translator. He has published a number of books including *The Masked Protagonist In Jewish American Fiction*, *The Man Who Stole The Crown*, *The Rising Sun*, a book of poems in Bengali and a translated work titled *Selected Stories of Arun Goswami*.

He has written a book on *History of English Literature*. He has also been published widely in Indian literature, a bi-monthly journal of Sahitya Akadami. At present, he is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Bongaigaon College, Bongaigaon, Assam.



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