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# THESPIAN

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## Editor

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Interviewed Manoj Mitra  
Taken By: Gitanjali Das & Arup Sankar Misra  
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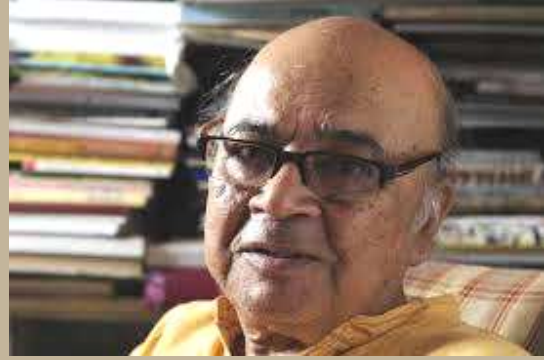
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## INTERVIEW

“If you want to do theatre, you will have to understand it properly...”:  
Interviewed Manoj Mitra

(Interview Taken by Gitanjali Das &  
Arup Sankar Misra)  
(Edited by Bivash Bishnu Chowdhury)



*Actor, Playwright and Director, three existences in one appearance – this is probably the example of what we call ‘harmony’. From his busy schedule, Manoj Mitra gives us his valuable time for a while and his worthy words mark the beginning of our journey.*

THESPIAN : *Any gleeful memory from your childhood regarding theatre?*

Manoj Mitra : To act in a theatre is itself a gleeful memory from my childhood. Because I had a strong will to work in a theatre and also I knew that it would be in no use in my future. The one-night performance! To stay together with so many people! A spontaneous happiness! There was nothing to achieve. I knew that my poor performance would not matter at all, but tried my best to do well. And it was not my profession, never thought it would be. But the joy of doing something good from my own, the spontaneous, unparalleled happiness – these are the gleeful memories.



THESPIAN : *When and how you started to do theatre professionally?*

Manoj Mitra : There was no particular time as such. I acted in school, in college, then formed a group. And in the due course of time, the group continued and it is still continuing.

THESPIAN : *Was there any plan behind the conversion from story-writer Manoj Mitra to dramatist Manoj Mitra? Or the overwhelming success of Mrityur Chokhe Jol instigated this transformation?*

Manoj Mitra : No, there was no so called planning. I used to write stories, and then I wrote a play. I realised that the form and the language of the play were easier to me to write. I was being able to express myself more comfortably.... Writing a play is far more different from writing a story or a novel. A play captures all the movements of the character. It fascinates me a lot. All the movements of the character can be visualised and should be visualised in a play. Don't know whether I can successfully do it or not, but this very aspect of binding together all the things in a given frame (of a play) is very endearable to me. And... a major part of a theatre occurs in the backdrop. The main action or incident does not appear on stage, rather it happens behind, be it a Shakespearean play or some other. Theatre is always an act of reaction of the characters. An incident needs not to be presented on stage.

THESPIAN : *Dramatist Manoj Mitra and actor Manoj Mitra – who is influenced by whom? Whom do you think better?*

Manoj Mitra : I think nothing. I do both the works and like to do equally. If a footballer is asked that in which leg he is more successful, he will not be able to answer. Because, while scoring, he never thinks which leg is being used. So it is difficult to answer this question.



THESPIAN : *In your plays like Narak Guljar, Mesh Rakshos, Noishobhoj, Rajdarshan, you have incorporated many political elements within their apparent comic dialogues. Are these your conscious efforts?*

Manoj Mitra : No, these are all unconscious efforts. Neither I can take any political colour nor can I stand on stage and cry out my opinions. So my writing says it all. And this style is deeply rooted into the nature and culture of my country. I always try to say some truths in my works which sometimes make some people unhappy.

THESPIAN : *There were many incidents where the performance of your play got interrupted due to political interventions and pressures. What were the impacts of such incidents?*

Manoj Mitra : There is no impact of such incidents. They stopped at their own will. So there is no question of any impact. Rather I had written some plays. So it had a fruitful impact on me.

THESPIAN : *Whom do you consider the best character from all of your performances?*

Manoj Mitra : It is almost impossible to answer this question.

THESPIAN : *You had established 'Sundaram', yet you had to move out from that. Why? Why did you stop 'Ritayan' when the tradition of breaking and joining of the groups was never discouraging in Bengal?*

Manoj Mitra : No, no. There was never any break of relationship between me and 'Sundaram'. Only due to the distance there was a temporary pause. I used to go to Ballyganj for rehearsal and I still do that. Sometimes it becomes difficult. But the relation and



friendship never ended. May be I did not want to work in a particular production, so distanced myself from that. Yet the relationship never got bitter. Even I worked with 'Sundaram' while I was in 'Ritayan'.

*THESPIAN : Different types of characters in your plays, like the old man in Sajano Bagan, Hekim in Galpo Hekim Saheb, Dhritikanta in Munni O Sat Choukidar or Dhritarastra in Ja Nei Bharate, always enchant us. What is the inspiration behind such creations?*

Manoj Mitra : Of course, there is inspiration. You can see, many extraordinary people roam about around us. They have extraordinary goals, extraordinary perseverance. These characters sometime differ from the common men. But people bear such peculiarities. I do not like to work with very common characters. These characters are also familiar, but still there are some differences.

*THESPIAN : In your long theatre career, you never have experimented with the form of presentation. Is there any fascination toward proscenium?*

Manoj Mitra : See... I never wanted to produce or direct a theatre. So I have lot of weaknesses in this area. I cannot ignore my limitations, and I don't bother about this. So far I can, I try to compensate these loopholes with my script. But I don't consider it as a good strategy. If you want to do theatre, you will have to understand it properly, you will have to obtain the capacity to do something new and you will have to reach at a minimum level by studying, understanding, engaging in workshops and so on. But unfortunately and peculiarly, I don't have any fascination toward direction. That is why, I do not try to do any experiment and if there is anything in my work, that is hidden in the script itself. Even there are not so



much experimentations in my scripts – only there are the formation of characters, creation of dramatic situations and dialogues to make a simple presentation. These are the reasons behind the success of the plays. So I don't bother about what I do and what I don't.

*THESPIAN : What is your opinion about the direct impact of foreign plays on Bengali Theatre, especially in 1950s and 60s?*

Manoj Mitra : I have no opinion as such. I never read a notebook to answer the questions, only wrote what I had read. The same thing prevails here, that is, I believe in original plays. Moreover, I am not only a director that I should work with different kinds of plays. I should read and know about other plays, but why should I directly use them? Though I have used plays or stories of other writers, but that are very negligible in number. I always like original plays to work with and that's what I do. But I am not criticising or opposing the directors who have done this. They have enriched Bengali Theatre a lot by their many significant contributions.

*THESPIAN : There is no separate institution for theatre studies in our own language in Bengal. As a senior dramatist, director and teacher, what is your stance regarding this?*

Manoj Mitra : Yes, the necessity is obvious. Rabindrabharati University was established with this ambition and dance, drama, music, visual arts – these were the base of it. It was unique. But in the due course of time, with the increase in the number of students, many other streams and subjects were added and somehow it lost its way.



THESPIAN : *What, according to you, are the duties of Natya Academy and the established groups in Kolkata in countering the poor condition of theatre in the remote places in Bengal?*

Manoj Mitra : Yes, it is very much necessary and the groups are trying to do that. Some kind of awareness has been created. Moreover, there are Divisional Festivals in three divisions – North Bengal, Presidency and Burdwan. Such festivals will be organised in each district very soon. The *Natyamela* , organised by Natya Academy, is being hosted outside Kolkata, like in Asansol, North Bengal and so on. Nevertheless, there are many problems too and Natya Academy and the Cultural Department are trying to sort them out. But, an untidiness is there.

THESPIAN : *Is there any necessity to invigilate the proper expenditure of the grants for theatre, sanctioned by the Central Government?*

Manoj Mitra : Definitely. It is mandatory for the authority that is sanctioning the grants to ensure the proper expenditure. Unfortunately, the money has never been properly utilised in any field in our country! There are many groups that claim the grant and only do one production in a year, just for formality. So, this should be properly invigilated.

*Here we end. This little moment with Manoj da rekindles few thoughts. In reference to his words we can admit that happiness plays an important role in every beginning of our lives. In absence of it, spontaneity staggers. Theatre, in our childhood, springs from mere happiness and probably we never think to make it our profession. But time has come to think about it. And if there is no institution for theatre studies in our native language, this thought will remain confined within the realm of dream and the momentum will continue to stagger in the hands of the makeshifts. We cannot always depend on exceptions. This responsibility of establishing some kind of institution for theatre studies is meant for Thespian also and we wish that time will tell of us in future.*

[Translated by Arup Sankar Misra, PhD Research Scholar, Department of English and Other Modern European Languages, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, W.B., India.]