

Hassles of fraternizing with celebrities

From my real life experience I have learned, and that too has been a real hard learning, that fraternizing with celebrities initiates a lot of mortifying situations. I am an offstage person, and when I use the term offstage I mean it denotatively, for I never be onstage although I work essentially for the stage—I write and translate stage plays. So one can rightly guess I have to mingle with stage and also television and movie celebrities – many of whom are my good friends too. I even talk to, and associate and socialize with them regularly. The irony is more often than not I have to take the brunt of fraternizing with them, and there are multidimensional hassles that I go through.

First, take the example of visiting a place with the accompaniment of a celebrity or celebrities, be it to an art exhibition, theater house or a coffee-shop. Being an offstage person as I savouringly as well as proudly indulge in chitchats and laughter with them some youths of both sexes (often some very adult females/males too), who start eying them hungrily to seize the right opportunity to get exclusive selfie-shots with their smartphones. When

actually they get to do snaps, they obviously consider me either a stranger or intruder, or even perhaps a good-for-nothing sycophant. They obviously cut me out from the frame, and I feel irreparably slighted and left out.

Secondly, most of the cultural correspondents, both print and electronic, are magnetized by the big names so much so that they all hypnotically rush towards them whenever they have any opportunity, even if those celebrities have had nothing to do with the event or occasion the reporters are supposed to cover. One of my experiences was like this: this young journalist came to the premiere show of one of my very well known translated plays, Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (Himmotima). Next morning, to my utter dismay, I found out in the newspaper both the directorial and translation credit-lines of the play were given to the big name only because he directed the play.

Thirdly, I am often asked by many theater groups to participate in seminars or discussion meetings as paper presenter or discussant. I even do moderations

occasionally. But many a time I have noticed cultural correspondents conveniently omit my name as I sound disgustingly unfamiliar to them. I have even marked many reporters write the names of the celebutantes who were not even present in the seminars or meetings deliberately eliminating their unheard of names. They do it because they do not often attend these seminars or meetings personally, instead they copy the names of the paper presenters/discussants from the invitation cards or press-releases released well in advance.

Fourthly, I wish to add one of my very personal anecdotes here to log the kind of embarrassments non-celebrities often go through fraternizing with celebrities. Only last month one of my translated plays *Dear Liar* premiered. A reporter of a Bangla daily called me for a write up not knowing that I translated the play, only because he was instructed by the celebrity-actor of the play to do so. Obviously he was not familiar with my name. As we talked over phone it also revealed (though not very surprisingly) to me that he had no knowledge of the fact that my name had anything to do

with the translator of the acclaimed legendary play *Galileo* by Bertolt Brecht, which has been revived by Nagorik after almost twenty years. Like most of the cultural correspondents he too was more carried away by the big names of the actors of the play – Aly Zaker and Asaduzzaman Noor – never bothering to know the name of the translator.

But there are occasional windfalls too. It so happens that out of pity many admirers of these celebrities while taking selfies or photographs invite me into their frames. But that is much more humiliating than being slighted or left out, for I suffer from the feeling of being an unbidden person all the same. But I find solace by telling myself, after all we are the celebrity makers if not the celebrities themselves, for we playwrights and translators make them speak the dialogues that help them become celebrities. One has to seek some kind of comfort someway or other, doesn't one?

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The writer is a theatre activist, playwright and theatre critic. He is also a Bangla Academy awardee for translation.

WHAT'S IN THE THEATER?
ABDUS SELIM



A product of ABBASUDDIN SHONGEET ACADEMY

He sat there in the rickshaw, his mother holding him firmly on her lap, as the rickshaw travelled the inner roads with potholes in Banani. He was around ten years old. This was on Mondays and Wednesdays, when *Abbasuddin Shongheet Academy* in Banani offered him a chance to learn music. Anondo was very keen and never missed a class. His father would pick them up later when the classes finished after 5 pm. Anondo wished there was more. This was around 1992 when the Academy was adorned with the august presence of Ustad Omar Faruq (in classical music), Maestro Abdul Latif (folk songs), and Guru Sudhin Das (for Nazrul songs). His thirsty soul was very eager to take more from these extraordinary tutors under the able guidance of Maestro Ferdausi Rahman, the Principal of the Academy. He completed all five years of this curriculum.

Amidst his training, he had the opportunity to be a child artist in *Khalamoni* alias Ferdausi Rahman's famous children's programme, *Esho Gaan Shikhi*. While he practiced the songs and participated in the shows, he eagerly devoured everything around him, which included the frolics and dramatization of the two puppets Mithu and Monty in the *Esho Gaan Shikhi* program. He participated in other programs on BTV titled *Rumjhum*, *Shorgol* and *Shubheccha*. He also enjoyed meeting other celebrities of drama, music, dance, and all the creative arts who happened to



frequent the Rampura TV studios when Anondo was recording for the children's show. Anondo Khan won the National Award in two categories in *Notun Kuri*, children's competition aired on BTV. One was for Nazrul Sangeet and the other was for Patriotic Songs, receiving the prize from the Prime Minister in 1995.

During those five years at the *Abbasuddin Shongheet Academy*, he recalls sitting in Virginia, after completion of his show in the 17th Nazrul Convention, were great

exposure for him. He is reminded of being personally taught by Ferdausi Rahman and opened his repertoire in 2018 with the famous Nazrul song taught to him by her *Asibe Tumi Jani Priyo*.

For me, talking to him is like seeing a bud growing and blossoming into the full flower. This particular song was written for Abbasuddin Ahmed by poet Kazi Nazrul Islam in the late 20s and marks a great song for the Abbasuddin legacy; I was so touched by the song he chose!

Anondo works as a software development manager and is settled in USA. His thirst remained and so did his adulation and amazement at the maestros from whom he had learned so much. In USA he started teaching small children and ended up having students aged five to 75! One day, he thought of presenting a show titled *Esho Gaan Shikhi* in Washington DC (it is now available on the YouTube), paying tribute to his Gurus in December 2016. He went through a six week rigorous training with his students to present this program on stage. Of course, all the rehearsals had to be on weekends and thanks to the parents of these children, who showed equal zest in bringing this effort to fruition; Anondo Khan was even able to produce the two puppets Mithu and Monty with puppeteers from his friend circle to enable the program to be a replica of what he had experienced in his student years.

LIFE'S LYRICS
NASHID KAMAL



Anondo is not only involved in cultural events and website maintenance in USA including *Bangamela*, *BAAI*, *DUAFI* and others. Anondo is an enthusiast social worker. He coordinated a voluntary initiative for around 36 deprived kids. In Bangladesh, he collected and distributed clothes to people in North Bengal (2012) and distributed relief to cyclone SIDR hit victims (2007). In USA, he takes part in yearly Food Donation Drive for shelters in Maryland and Virginia.

I was reminded of Abbasuddin Ahmed (1901-1959), who as a student had started a community service for parents whose children had black fever. Abbasuddin lived in Cooch Behar, West Bengal, where he had a students' group who would stay up all night when youngsters would suffer from black fever and provide relief to their parents for the same. After his metric exams, Abbasuddin hung the harmonium on his neck and sang his *Bhawayya* songs, going door to door and collected RS 400 to start a girl's school in his village named Balarampur.

Anondo not only follows Abbasuddin in music, Anondo follows him in his social work too. I hope there are many more replications of Anondo; the privileged must think of others who are not equally so.

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