

## **An evening with Indrani Raimedhi**

**[ This is an interview of Indrani Raimedhi madam (IRM), taken by Sanhita Baruah (SB) and Abhinav Bhattacharyya (AB) published in the 2012-13 issue of AECIAN, the annual magazine of Assam Engineering College.]**

*Indrani Raimedhi is a well-known journalist, columnist and writer. She is an Assistant Editor features in The Assam Tribune, a premier English newspaper of the North East region. Author of eight books, she has been the resource person in IGNOU's phone in radio programme on creative writing. Her books have been selected for purchase by the Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation and the US Library of Congress. In 2004 she was awarded the Kunjabala Devi Award for Investigative Journalism on women's issues. Her fortnightly column 'The Third Eye' appears in The Assam Tribune, and has enjoyed great popularity.*



*SB: Madam, we know that your journey in writing started pretty early and you have been writing since your school days. When was it that you realised that you wanted to opt for a career in journalism?*

IRM: Actually, I was not aware that a career in journalism was possible. Interestingly, before even getting enrolled in school, my father enrolled me in the State Central Library of Shillong, where I spent the early years of my life. When I got my library card, I came across the book 'Around the World with Sally Baxter' in which the narrator goes to and reports from places all over the world. This idea impressed me a lot and that is when I was convinced that I wanted to pursue journalism. Since I was a voracious reader from my childhood, I have always had a desire to write. I also realised in that tender age that if I become only a writer, it will require me to be detached from the rest of the world, whereas journalism could be a connecting link between a writer and the world.

*AB: Indeed, it is. Talking about being a writer, when did your career in writing actually begin?*

IRM: Since my college days, I have been contributing articles to The Sentinel and The Assam Tribune. Along with the fact that I was getting my pocket money from writing, it was a source of great satisfaction that my articles went through the hands of someone as reputed as Dhiren Bezbaruah Sir with minimum corrections to be published. I started with being in the lowest position, i.e., sub-editor cum trainee and it has been a learning process ever since.

*SB: During the early stages of your career, did you face any difficulty or discrimination because of being a woman?*

IRM: Not anything that I can think of, particularly. Actually more than being a woman, it was because I was very young when I joined the industry that I faced certain difficulties. It did discourage me at times and I had to work harder. But I gradually made them realize that I was actually serious about my work. It is a myth that a woman has to prove her worth. Downplaying your gender you can actually work hard to become a better you.

A woman has to manage both her personal life and work life in parallel in order to be happy. It will be disturbing if I neglect my children while pursuing my professional aims. But if I devote all my time to my family a time will come when I will regret that I did not utilize my full potential. Being a career woman, you have to prioritize, give up something to get something and I am not embittered about it. But what I didn't give up on was books.

*AB: Well, that is my idea of success when one can excel in one's career and yet give time to their family. Is this the same for you?*

IRM: Actually, success is self-containment. Fame comes with a territory. Try to express and explore your potential. Success is not arriving at a place but travelling happily.

*SB: If I'm not wrong your first anthology of short stories came in 1986. How difficult was it to get your first work published?*

IRM: Surprisingly it was not much difficult. The germ of the collection came from my association with IGNOU. I was a young mother at that period of time and was not working. I was amazed that IGNOU was providing a correspondence course in creative writing. I took enrolment for the same in addition to Mass Communication. I was appreciated by the examiners on the short stories I submitted. Regarding publishing, I approached Modern Book Depot and they were willing to publish it.

*AB: Madam, among the large number of books that you have read, do you happen to have any favourite author?*

IRM: It will be unfair if I take the name of only one writer. I like the writings of different authors and for different reasons at different times. Having said that, I must say John Cheever, an American novelist is a gem of writer.

*SB: Madam, how do you think the electronic media has affected the print media?*

IRM: Effect of any piece of work is transitory in electronic media whereas print media helps you to absorb it in your own leisure and go deeper into it. The news in e-media is forgotten easily when a fresher news comes and takes its place. Moreover, there is a struggle for the news to reach a wide number of people. Students of journalism should try both the media to find what suits them best. It's good when both the media goes hand in hand.

*AB: Do you see a day when the print version of The Assam Tribune gets completely converted to its e-version?*

IRM: One day I do see it coming as this has happened to some other magazines as well.

*SB: Having worked in the field of journalism for more than fifteen years, what changes have you noticed in this field during this period?*

IRM: There has been a tremendous change in the technology behind journalism in the past few decades. When I joined this field way back in 1989, we had the PTA system instead of the currently used DTP process. In the PTA system, as you might know, it had boxes in which the bromide paper was washed and hung up and sometimes each individual letter had to be corrected in the case of a mistake. So, it was a very complicated, time-consuming and painstaking affair at that time. Secondly, we had no access to the internet at the time which meant that the images could not be downloaded by a single click as is done today. Moreover, because of limited internet access the research and origin of certain terms was more difficult and the confirming the veracity of figures was very subjective, to put it plainly. So life as a journalist has become much easier today than it was two decades back; thanks to technology. But at the same time, I feel that the journalists today have become intellectually lazy, what with everything available at their fingertips.

*AB: While we are on the topic of technology in media, how do you think technology has changed the field of literature and journalism?*

IRM: I think it has changed much, though the basic definition of literature has not changed at all. You see, someone might be reading a Harold Robbins or Hadley Chase in a printed form in their hand, and somebody else might be reading Márquez or Kafka in their electronic medium. So it is what you read that matters and not where you read it from. I think the influence of technology in literature has, in fact, made it more exciting and glamorous. Today you can even find videos of Madonna reading verses from classic poems on YouTube and I can only see that helping literature gain a wider audience.

*SB: Ma'am, you must have had a lot of joyous moments in the journey of your life. Could you please share a few?*

IRM: *(Thinks and smiles)* If I have to point out then I would say that my most joyous moments were my two sons being born. And also one more was when my elder son got selected in IPS. I feel that joy is not something that you wait for to happen but rather it is something that you create. Little things in everyday life make your life joyous- like, I listen to soft classical music while writing and that gives me great joy. I also derive joy and happiness from reading- I am very fond of reading and I make it a point to read at least something new every single day. So I feel life itself is a very joyous experience if you count your blessings.

*SB: And any bitter moments?*

IRM: Not really. There has been ups and downs, but nothing substantial to take my smile away *(smiles again)*

*SB: True. I hope your smile always remains as it is. Madam, you were also briefly a teacher at Don Bosco School, Panbazar. How was that experience?*

IRM: It was a very good and satisfying experience, actually. I taught there only briefly, for a few months. But in that short span of time, I was able to connect with the young students which, I think, helped me in my writing career as well. I could feel the pulse of those young boys and it helped me understand human behaviour better. I should add that it was also

challenging at times, to control those young, restless boys some of whom were very naughty as well. Overall it was a nice experience.

*AB: You definitely are an inspiration to many aspiring journalists who would like to follow your footsteps. What is your advice to aspiring journalists and writers?*

IRM: Thank you. The first advice that I would like to give budding journalists and aspiring writers is to be observant. One needs to be particular about details, sincere in work and learn from people. Moreover, I would ask them to read voraciously and across a wide spectrum. Read classic literature, non-fiction articles, fiction pieces- just keep reading and you will grow as a writer too. I consider literature to be similar to music, beautiful and having no boundaries. *(Pauses)* Lastly I will say that a writer should believe that they can change the world with literature. This will give them the necessary motivating drive to keep writing. They should not be afraid to experiment with different forms of literature and be as versatile as possible.

*AB: Since you mentioned, I would like to know your opinions on different forms of literature?*

IRM: As I said literature transcends all boundaries of time and geography and it holds true for all forms of literature. When we talk about types of literature we have fiction, non-fiction, biographies, short stories, poetry and so on. While in non-fiction the source of research is internet or other sources, in the case of fiction it is mostly experience. I think the difference comes more in the technique of writing than anything else. In short stories, one comes directly to the point and the impact is felt pretty soon. On the other hand, novels take longer build to the characters up and are more of an acquired taste. There is something called flash fiction too that interests me, which basically is a style of writing having great brevity and it presents impactful writings in very short lengths. Moreover, there is another form gaining much popularity among youngsters nowadays known as the chick lit. I am not very fond of this form of writing as I do not quite agree with the content of it; moreover I feel that it has less lasting value and thrives on getting instant attention.

*AB: Madam, what will be your advice to today's youngsters especially the students of Assam Engineering College?*

IRM: One advice that I like to give young people is live life fully. Work hard but do not be a workaholic. I am alarmed by how some youngsters nowadays put their life on permanent display on social networking sites. Life has become shallow and exhibitionist to some extent. I shall advise the students of Assam Engineering College to do their studies properly and chase their dreams.

*SB, AB: Thank you Ma'am for your time. It was a pleasure talking to you.*

IRM: I also had a good time conversing with you. Honestly speaking, I am impressed by the quality of the questions you put forward. I did not expect such in depth questions. I wish you all the best for everything ahead in life.