

Up there was there a player short?

On Wednesday morning, 22nd December 2021 Debasish Bose passed away of cardiac arrest. A retrospect by his first contract bridge partner Anirban Mitra.

Most friends of our bridge fraternity knew Debasish Bose as the Holkar Champion but I knew him as Inu da- a witty friend and my first partner in contract bridge. He was almost ten years older than me but that difference hardly created any bar in our friendship. In our days of auction-bridge Inu was called the auction king. No doubt he had some sort of intrinsic card sense. I witnessed him making some seemingly unmakeable contracts and killing some unbeatable ones. Of course, in those days his oppositions weren't the finest ones. Yet he developed his own technique of card play, defense and above all the art of deception. False carding and deceptive leads were almost his routine. The benefit did not much come from the boards he psyched, false carded or made a lead of the J from the QJ. The results came from the boards where he was telling the truth and none of the opponents believed him. For obvious reasons many boards back fired - his opponents did not trust him all right but neither did his partner.

When we started playing contract bridge, in 1990, I had just graduated from Calcutta University and was doing just nothing. Inu also did nothing and neither had any intention of doing anything. He often moaned about his bad luck, his financial crisis and his loss at twenty one card rummy, known as *Mirchi*, which might have been a dialectical degeneration of the card game *Marriage*. Despite his continuous grumble, his daily expenditure was more than hundred rupees even in those days. From where the money came, banking on which his friends and lackeys feasted on egg omelettes and tea in the roadside tea shop next to Hedua park and the navy cut cigarettes that followed, I have no idea. Inu da's morning card playing sessions were done in the enclosure inside Hedua park. Most evenings were spent in a bridge club called *Cardsmen*. It had a 12 x 6 room in which at least 20 people used to assemble every evening. Following his exploits at *Cardsmen* would be our visit to *Masir Ghar*, a free-house run by an old woman. Here we used to drown our miseries in alcohol, most of the days in *Bangla* – the country liquor of Bengal. It was here in *Masir Ghar*, that we decided we would start playing contract bridge. It was no sooner said than done. WBBA used to have a sole small office in Sealdah those days. I visited the office the

very next day and had our registration done. Inu da's registration number had been 6859 and mine 6860. Our debut was in a tournament organized by Bandhab Mandir at Kasba, near Ballygunge in south Calcutta. In those days local tournaments and even the state championship entry fees were affordable to the middle class. Inu used to manage the lion share of entry fees for most of those tournaments.

Within a short period our team caught notice of Nabendu Mustafi who introduced us to Sparklers Club located at Hari Ghosh Street in North Calcutta in an old but stately building belonging to the wealthy Mitras. We played a couple of years for the Sparklers team having satisfactory results in most tournaments.

In the later years, Inu da and rest of our team members took membership at Calcutta Bridge Club, which was once upon a time a renowned bridge club in Kolkata. At that time, for personal reasons I had refused the membership offered by the club and my tie with Inu da slackened. By that time I got a school teacher's job and I was out of the bridge circuit from 1996 to 2000.

Then Inu da lifted the Holkar trophy with Asit Kundu from the Winter Nationals held in Ludhiana in 2002 and got a

job in the Indian railways in the sports quota. Some years after these good news, one day over a telephone conversation I heard that he has injured his toe.

“How did it happen Inu da?” I asked.

“While moving a heavy iron rod, it fell on my toe”, he said.

“ Why you had to move it Inu da?”

“That’s my job Anirban”, he sadly said.

I wondered that day and I still sometimes do that is this called getting a job in the player’s quota? A player of mental sport subjected to labourer's job of shifting heavy iron rods? I somehow console myself thinking that Inu da had at least got his job. There are hundreds of talent in our country in various fields who do not even get a proper meal every day.

Before settling down for a family life, Inu da had been licentious. He had several relationships with women. They were not secret affairs as he never hid anything. He was flamboyant and had no repentance for his deeds.

He was exuberant at the bridge table and never lacked energy finding partner's fault. His criticism towards other players had sometimes been ruthless.

Nevertheless, his card sense was of the first rate. This was a board from the Income Tax organized pairs tournament so where I was his partner.

♠432
♥109
♦AKJ986
♣23
West (Inu Da)

♠AJ106
♥A32
♦Q6
♣Q1086
North

♠K987
♥Q85
♦74
♣K754
East (Me)

♠Q5
♥KJ764
♦1052
♣AJ9
South

I do not remember the bidding but South had opened 1♥, Inu da has overcalled diamonds and the final contract was 4♥ by South.

Inu da led his diamond ace and switched to spades at trick two. This is was necessary otherwise declarer makes his contract. Suppose West cashes two top diamonds and plays a third diamond; North ruffs small and East over ruffs and heart.

the ♥K and a North's ace all enemy the ♣10 (on play small) plays another dummy and Now he plays to reach this

| |
|------|
| ♠AJ |
| ♥ - |
| ♦ - |
| ♣ Q8 |

| |
|------|
| ♠ Q5 |
| ♥ 4 |
| ♦ - |
| ♣A |

exits with a Declarer plays small heart to thereby drawing trumps. He plays which East must and runs it. He club from finesses the ♣J. two more hearts ending:

On the last heart when North pitches the spade Jack, East who has come down to four cards is squeezed. If he discards a spade, declarer will cash his ♠A, return to hand with ♣A to enjoy his ♠Q. If East discards a club instead, declarer cashes the ♣A, enters dummy with ♠A and enjoys ♣Q.

After a spade switch at trick two, declarer was helpless. In practice, he played small, I won the ♠K, played back my second diamond got my diamond ruff. Now, what made Inuda switch to spade at trick two, I cannot say. But that was Inu da's style. We got an average in this board as almost no declarer could make four hearts.

Of bridge system and gadgets he did not care much. Though in the recent years I heard he had been forced to memorize some of them due to his partnership with some 'scientific' players.

Just few days earlier there was a physical bridge tournament organized by the Barrackpur Bridge Unit of West Bengal. The first physical tournament after the lock

down. I and Inu da were supposed to play in the same team. He called the day before and said that he wasn't well and will not be able to play. We played without Inu da and won the tournament. I called him after the tournament and learnt from him that he was better. I also joked and said " If you are feeling better why don't you come and take your share of prize money?" I could hear him smile but didn't realize then that it was an unmirthful smile.

Even two days ago I heard that he is playing the inter- rail tournament. And today everything is over.

I am not a strong believer of life after death. But if it exists in any case, I am ready to revive our youthful days and my partnership with Inu da all over again.