Volume 18 Issue 34
Originally issued as A5



Global Journal of human-social science: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 18 Issue 5 Version 1.0 Year 2018
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

A Poetic Odyssey: Journey of *Krittibas* and 'Shakti-Sunil' Duo

By Mr. Anupam Das

Abstract- After Rabindra Nath Tagore, a huge number of poets tried to leave the beaten track of simple narrative and dared to try something new. Krittibas, the magazine, just created a platform for those who practiced it. So critics marked them as decadents who wrote poems without any meaning and their works are nothing but hodge-podge. Later, when a new generation of readers admired these poets, particularly Sunil Gangopadhyay and Shakti Chattopadhyay, a new chapter was added in the history of Bengali Poetry. Nowadays, no one can ignore the contribution of the magazine and the 'Shakti-Sunil' duo. Without following any western ism, they just changed the surface of poetic culture. Remembering those days, their contribution seems much more effective for the budding poets. Their Confessional tone of poetry is an established genre and demands much attention.

Keywords: krittibas, sunil gangopadhyay, shakti chattopadhyay, confessional tone, bengali poetry.

GJHSS-A Classification: FOR Code: 950199



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



© 2018. Mr. Anupam Das. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

A Poetic Odyssey: Journey of *Krittibas* and 'Shakti-Sunil' Duo

Mr. Anupam Das

Abstract- After Rabindra Nath Tagore, a huge number of poets tried to leave the beaten track of simple narrative and dared to try something new. *Krittibas*, the magazine, just created a platform for those who practiced it. So critics marked them as decadents who wrote poems without any meaning and their works are nothing but hodge-podge. Later, when a new generation of readers admired these poets, particularly Sunil Gangopadhyay and Shakti Chattopadhyay, a new chapter was added in the history of Bengali Poetry. Nowadays, no one can ignore the contribution of the magazine and the 'Shakti-Sunil' duo. Without following any western ism, they just changed the surface of poetic culture. Remembering those days, their contribution seems much more effective for the budding poets. Their Confessional tone of poetry is an established genre and demands much attention.

Keywords: krittibas, sunil gangopadhyay, shakti chatto-padhyay, confessional tone, bengali poetry.

I. Introduction

If the word 'Modernism' is applied to the 20th century Bengali literature or more particularly in Bengali poetry, it was a multi-phased one. After the enormous effect of Rabindranath Tagore, there was a natural void and the Bengali poetic stream flowed in various and different directions which was queer and quite decadent. There were poetic revolts although the threads of tradition continued by decades one after another. Those who chose a different path were living legends and were still alive, and left dreamy vistas for their posterity. Jibanananda Das, Bishnu De, Buddhadeb Basu and others were already in the limelight of Bengali poetic arena. In this situation some young college students gathered with a perspective of writing something new. They tried to build a new platform for those new poets who were experimenting with new forms of poetry with new themes and words. In the later half of the 1940, there was an impetus of French and English influence in poetry which later established the confessional tone of Bengali poetry. In 1953, the famous little magazine *Krittibas* was published and today the history of Bengali poetry is incomplete without analyzing the contribution of it.

In the Preface of the collection of this magazine, Sunil Gangopadhyay, the co-founder of Krittibas says:

"We have no pre-conceived ideas on the publication of Krittibas, it was a chance, not well thought of, unexpected, sudden, Deepak Majumdar and I were classmates in a school in North Calcutta. … The black traces of partition, nevertheless, overshadowed our everyday life. Deepak, a Bohemian, a communist, had already served two years' imprisonment and was a frequent writer of the then famous magazines. … A mature brain should have thought twice before approaching, but our young blood forced us to jump into the proposal. One Sunday morning, both of us, ignorant but adamant without the least idea about the literary world went straight to the main office of Signet Press at Elgin road, with our script."

[*Krittibas Panchas Bachar Nirbachita Sankalan,* 9]

With this courageous step of these two young poets, Bengali poetry started a new journey. Their attempt to write poetry different from Tagorian as well as the then Modern became a topic to discuss in the Bengali literary world. Their magazine was a long lasting one when compared with the other magazines which were fleeting ones. They run it without any sponsorship, without any attempt to make it public and without any big names. Little magazine, have a very short life span and Krittibas struggled a lot . Moreover, it was not a path-breaking idea of the editors of Krittibas as it had its predecessors. Buddhadev Bose's 'Kabita' magazine, Sanjay Bhattacharya's 'Purbasha' became a myth in the literary world of Bengali little magazines. 'Kabita' created a new vista in Bengali poetry and this legacy was successfully carried on by Krittibas. These poets initiated new trends in poetry expressing their innermost secrets aloud for all to hear. They drew the pictures of the disturbing and changing facets of the Time. Sunil Gangopadhyay recollects:

"The name Krittibas is not just only a name of a magazine, our vibrant youth, our dreams, our arrogance, our desires, sweat all are integrated with this name."

[*Krittibas Panchas Bachar Nirbachita Sankalan,* 12]

However, this effort gradually developed a new poetic diction and genre which intentionally discarded any foreign name. Their poetic style and diction were spontaneous and the form in which they wrote had uniqueness. And this new poetic genre later termed as *confessional poetry*. These poets initiated a new voice in poetry. Ugly and grotesque inspired their poetry in the same manner as the beautiful and the good. They glorified the personal and private, expressed their innermost secrets aloud for all to hear. While the uses of

Author: M.A.[Eng. Lit.], Independent Research Scholar.
e-mail: dasanupam23@gmail.com

© 2018 Global Journals

slang with the elegant words in the poetry were not very much in tradition, the poets of Krittibas forwarded them as these words were the actual expressions of modern poetry. Poets of Krittibas were criticized and rebuked for their outspoken language. Their poems were marked with obscenity and this obscenity, the desire behind such poetry is not to hurt or shock. But the languages shocked and hurt a group of critics and the people who lived in the world of Tagorian didactic poetry and songs. They were not familiar with such 'unpoetic' decadence and condemned these poets.

This decadence was not an effect of the evil minds of the poets, but it was a demand of time. Although purely apolitical, the influence of Second World War cannot be denied. Moreover, the independence brought shock and disappointment in the face of modern Bengali poetry. The independence followed by some dark chronological events: partition of Bengal, Hindu-Muslim riot and the Great Calcutta Killing, refugee problem, assassination of Gandhi, shook the poets and it was faithfully rendered in the poetry of this age. To satisfy the minimum needs of life, the hungry villagers crowded the streets of the city. The screaming of the hungry mob for a bit of rice still echoed on the minds of the poets. The lanes, by-lanes, streets were crowed by the starving families. American poet Allen Ginsberg also penned this picture in his poetry as he saw the city during his visit.

Allen Ginsberg was specially related with this magazine and this can be a story apart. Ginsberg was a budding poet of Beat generation and he was not much famous as a poet even in America then. During his world tour, he put his feet in Calcutta for few months and got acquainted with Sunil Gangopadhyay. The Bengali poet remembers:

"Our mere acquaintance was turned into intimacy as we spent evenings, sharing thoughts, developing acquaintances with world literature,… We and our friend spent wee hours of the evening in Nimtala Burning Ghat, discussing occult sciences with the saints and smoking opium. … Allen's photograph of a poor beggar girl with an umbrella over her head was printed on the cover of our magazine …Few portions of Ginsberg's unprinted journal about his visit to India was also printed in our magazine … This friendship helped us to develop our insight, to increase our literary endeavour about literatures of different countries and also other worldly affairs."

[*Krittibas Panchas Bachar Nirbachita Sankalan,* 14]

Allen ginsberg also in return remembered 'Sunil Poet' in his poem 'September in Jessore Road':

"Is this what I did to myself in the past?
What shall I do Sunil Poet I asked?
Move on and leave them without any coins?
What should I care for the love of my loins?" [*September in Jessore Road*, Allen Ginsberg, from *www. Poem-hunter.com*]

When Sunil Gangopadhyay come to write poetry, Bengal was torn apart, Tagore was no more, Gandhi was slain, and materialism had devoured the society. That was not a time to write poetry of love. But when we analyze Gangopadhyay's poetic oeuvre, it is seen that a major portion of his poems is replete with love. He constitutes a space for womanhood in his poetry which is simple yet sublime. He showed his infatuation, his melancholy, his sexuality, and ultimately his honesty towards them. This is evident in the poems of 'Neera Series', where his expressions are of a true lover. His women are dynamic, mystic, and sharply sketched with individuality. He always wanted to know the depth of women psychology and never able to measure. To him Neera is 'more distant than even the day I was born'. He wishes her to

"hand the ensign of heavens
In your almond-coloured palm
And proclaim throughout the world that in your chin
The glowing mystic light
Will stay eternally." ['Naswar' (Ephemeral) in *Suniler Shrestho Kobita*, 103]

He wanted love and to be loved and his poems are enliven with such simplistic relation of man and woman in the midst of socio-political agitation. People forgot to love and this poet taught them the process of love even in such dire consequences.

His poetry is rich in images which are drawn from everyday life and we encounter them here and there. Yet they are sometimes awe-inspiring in their appeal to us. He confesses to his ladylove:

"I have given my last remaining love to the girl before you
My heart is empty now, like a highway in midnight
Glistening concrete road, lit in every nook and corner
Waiting is hidden in darkness …"['Prembihin' (Loveless) in *Suniler Shrestho Kobita*, 38]

This image is a common one, but the presentation and exaggeration of it is far from being common. The varying shades of darkness and light denote the instability of empty heart, but in midnight none cares to trade the path as it is deserted. These rich images often form the theme of his poems. He did not used recurring images and that is why they do not bore the readers. We can cite here another one:

"I have opened my lips from three miles away
Like flowers to offer to gods
I am priest, look, my waving hands, spontaneous slokas
My heart is non-Hindu, face Semantic, in love different as Coptic Christian."
['Tumi' (You) in *Suniler Shrestho Kobita*, 78]

© 2018 Global Journals

He presents himself as the votary of beauty of her ladylove, and his religious identity is faded by his offering of love. This wondering and stunning similes and images are found in almost all his poems. Love is a haunting theme in his poetry and his treatment of this theme is quite different from his predecessors.

Sunil Gangopadhyay was a prolific writer and he wrote not only poetry. He wrote short-story, columns, and most importantly novels. He was a representative novelist of his age and awarded Sahitya Akademi Award in 1982 for his most popular novel, *Sei Samay* (Those Days). But from heart he is a poet and his poetic soul is revealed in most of his writing. He is anxious about his loss of poetic language but when he finds it he is elated. He carefully chooses his diction and points it aptly to his theme. Unlike his prose, his poetry derives not from built-up reality. They are spontaneous, resourceful, vigorous and yet meditative:

"Each line, word, comma, dash, tress, of this poem
with the dots of i are rushing towards you,
your locks of hair around the half slept tender face …"
['Neerar Jonno Kobitar Bhumika ' (A Preface to Poetry for Neera) in *Suniler Shrestho Kobita*, 45]

His poetic diction is his major concern and he expressed it in most of his poetry. He looks for an ultimate language for poetry and his poetic soul remains unsatisfied. He craves for an antic language to present his abrupt images, stunning thoughts, honest themes and beauty of life. He tries to reach that superior ledge of poetry from where he can see his creation and justify them in a moment. This sincerity towards the language of poetry makes him a poet with a difference. To him, "the description of your face is the summery of all art", and he confesses:

"I am near the sunshine lake yet unlike Valery
I could not find those words I craved, unveiled reflection.
But love promised me to show its image in secret."
['Kobir Dukkho' (Sorrow of the Poet) in *Suniler Shrestho Kobita*, 111].

He can say "there are rules to dream again if one dislikes it" ['Himyug' (Ice Age) in *Suniler Shrestho Kobita*, 30] because it is he who dares to dream. He turns an instant into eternity as when he meets his girlfriend for "three minutes at bus stop" and dreams her. He teaches how to love beloveds and he wanted to share his all with coming generation. He wants to share with young boys 'button less ragged shirt and lungs full of laugh'. He wants to give 'emphatic steps' throughout the city, 'cloudy sky', 'the glance of the girl beside the window'. He has reached at a mature age and these 'garments' do not suit him anymore. ['uttoradhikar' (Sorrow of the Poet) in *Suniler Shrestho Kobita*, 70]. But he never stopped writing during his lifetime and tirelessly devoted his life to poetry. Alone this love for poetry makes him bestows him eternity. In 'Sudhu Kobitar Jonno' (Only for Poetry) he thus praises poetry as his heart of life:

"This life is only for poetry
Some games are only for poetry
Cross this world alone in frosty evening
only for poetry. The glance of peace
in the face with eyes wide open,
you are a woman only for poetry
this much bloodshed is only for poetry,
this watershed in the Ganges in the cloud;
I hanker to live a long lifelike men who
lead a life of grudge only for poetry.
Only for poetry I have scorned immortality."
['Sudhu Kobitar Jonno' (Only for Poetry) in *Suniler Shrestho Kobita*, 26]

While Sunil Gongopadhyay appeared as a cult figure, there was only one poet who could match his poetic talent. Imitated by a huge number of budding poets after 60s, Shakti Chattopadhyay is by far the best lyric poet of the later half of the 20th century Bengali poetic world. Both in his chilly, jazzy, awe-inspiring poetic style and in his vision of life, he is and will be remembered for generations after generation. Before he was a poet, his life was restless one. He had no scholastic background and moreover, he was from a small village of south Bengal. He lost his lawyer father when he was an infant and was supported by his tyrant grandfather, in exchange of which he had to tend the family's vegetable garden and even till land. Because of his bohemian lifestyle he failed everywhere to continue his job. He tried his hand in novel and appointed as an editor of Krittibas's prose edition. When he went to Chaibasa(now in Jharkhand state), love for a girl turned him into a powerful love poet and published his first anthology "He Prem, He Noihshôbdo" (O Love, O silence).

Decades later, when Shakti Chattopadhyay had moved out to Calcutta, and made up his mind to write poetry, the dirty brown colour of mud, the rawness of adolescent sexuality, and the twisted speech rhythm of south Bengal began finding expression in his poetry in an altogether unconventional manner. He is inevitably bracketed with Sunil Gangopadhyay, whose literary career began at the same time as Chattopadhyay's, and who is his friend for 30 years. Yet no greater contrast could be found than that between this two – "Shakti-Sunil". Gangopadhyay - a man of regular habits, never at war with society, and always trying to enlarge his canvas with experiences picked up from life and literature, whereas Chattopadhyay is the perpetual bohemian, always drawing inwards for his inspiration. "I do something like autowritings," Chattopadhyay says, "when I allow my feelings to do anything they like with the lines, the words and the images."

His poetry is replete with fantasies and everywhere the readers face hidden surprises which are

© 2018 Global Journals

quite difficult to render. His dreamlike eloquence is packed with laced diction and the readers find solace in loneliness and ultimate realization. In 'Hemanter Aranne Ami Postman' (Postman in Autumn Forest) he shows the distance between man and nature and loneliness of modern man. Their 'letters filled with love' are taken by postmen but they hardly find their love because this separation is inevitable. The magical image with which the poem starts keeps the reader's attention which rushes towards the end, but he compels read it again:

"I have seen wandering postmen in autumn forest
Their yellow sacks have been filled with grass like dusty belly of lamb
They have found letters, old and new, from time immemorial
Those postmen in autumn forest
I have seen they are tirelessly searching
As heron's beak hunts lonely fish –''
['Hemanter Aranne Ami Postman', *Shakti Chattopadhyayer Shrestho Kobita*, 73]

In love poems, Chottopadhyay's lyrics are unequalled. His simple but grotesque expression of love is novel and he does not merely play with words and thoughts. He poses a twist in love and searches the path of love's realization and the magical effect of it. To him love is a new awakening, a rebirth and it works as a miracle. Love imposes a 'pride' in the lover's heart and it lights up even if he is in 'ragged shirt', or whatever his social position. In his sonnet no. 61, he says,

"I was never awake before in this way
By the dew, or the slap or the wind that hurls forest."
['Sonnet-61', *Shakti Chattopadhyayer Shrestho Kobita*, 122]

Here, the dew and the wind may come as love but 'slap' is quite innovative. In many poems of Chattopadhyay, readers face this type of wonder. The readers are jerked by this slap of love which compels to think them again and again. However, this love is ultimately realized by the poet in the final couplet:

"O you have awaken me now easily this way
O this bright shirt in dawn, this lonely birth conveys."
['Sonnet-61', *Shakti Chattopadhyayer Shrestho Kobita*, 122].

In his poem 'Ekbar Tumi' (Try Just Once), he shows how to obtain love especially when it is difficult to find true love. When love appears, everything in society along with person around us and the situation change magically. The pebbles generally block the heart. But it is unblocked by the power of love and its weight automatically reduced. The poem opens in a tone of some distant monologue:

"Try just once to love
You'll see, into the river, pebbles are falling from the breast of fish
Rocks rocks rocks and the water of river and sea
Blue rock transform into red, the red into blue
Try just once to love."
['Ekbar Tumi', *Shakti Chattopadhyayer Shrestho Kobita*, 98].

The image of rocks and pebbles are barriers which come between lovers and when they are released, a space for love is created. Later, in the poem these pebbles and rocks are converted into a part of heart itself because it beats or echoes the secrets and lover can store the in the cracks of rocks. It is difficult to live life as the slippery paths are not easy to walk. This stony path may give access to 'the distant doors of the pale stars of autumn' and so:

"It is good to keep some rocks in your heart
There is nothing like a letterbox – leaving them
In the cracks of rocks is a great deal."
['Ekbar Tumi ', *Shakti Chattopadhyayer Shrestho Kobita*, 99]

The most notable contribution of Shakti Chottopadhyay to Bengali poetry is his diction. A friend and critic of him, Nityapriya Ghosh told that his poems are 'Urban Pastorals'. Indeed, he used the dialect which nobody dared to use before in Bengali poetry. The down-to-earth words used in everyday language of South Bengal region found a perfect expression with all its sheer beauty and sheer complexity. He could create a musical effect with pronunciation of words and the theme–a rare combination. But he never liked weightless smartness of wordplay. His poetic diction only speaks of the realization of soul as it is seen in 'Pete Suechhi Shobdo' (Slept on Words):

"Whenever I grab words, I spend them
Like my bad luck, like the face-covering veil
If the splashing song do not come at the end of the day
Whenever I grab words, I spend them
Are the words guineas? Fake? Do I know words?
Words are carpets and are rugged blankets
If these are words, I have perplexed them
And I have slept on words – they now tug off with death."
['Pete Suechhi Shobdo', *Shakti Chattopadhyayer Shrestho Kobita*, 133]

Notes

1. Translation of the extracts of poems from Bengali are done by me.
2. *Krittibas* the Bengali Magazine was named after famous Bengali poet, who translated the *Ramayana* into Bengali.

Works Cited

1. Sunil Gangopadhyay, *Krittibas Panchas Bachar Nirbachita Sankalan*, Ananda, Kolkata, 2009.
2. Sunil Gangopadhyay, *Suniler Shrestho Kobita,* Neorose Sahitya Samsad, Dhaka(Bangladesh), 1986.

© 2018 Global Journals

3. Shakti Chattopadhyay, *Shakti Chattopadhyayer Shrestho Kobita*, Bharbi, Kolkata, 1968.
4. Sumit Mitra, *Shakti Chattopadhyay: an Iconoclastic Poet of Bengal and Sahitya Akademi Award Winner*, An Essay Published in *India Today* on March 15, 1984.
5. www.poemhunter.com[accessedon 13th September, 2018].

© 2018 Global Journals

This page is intentionally left blank

© 2018 Global Journals