

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

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## 5 **Abstract**

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

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17 **Index terms**— krittibas, sunil gangopadhyay, shakti chattopadhyay, confessional tone, bengali poetry.

## 18 **1 Introduction**

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

30 In the Preface of the collection of this magazine, Sunil Gangopadhyay, the co-founder of Krittibas says: "We  
31 have no pre-conceived ideas on the publication of Krittibas, it was a chance, not well thought of, unexpected,  
32 sudden, Deepak Majumdar and I were classmates in a school in North Calcutta. ? The black traces of partition,  
33 nevertheless, overshadowed our everyday life. Deepak, a Bohemian, a communist, had already served two years'  
34 imprisonment and was a frequent writer of the then famous magazines. ? A mature brain should have thought  
35 twice before approaching, but our young blood forced us to jump into the proposal. One Sunday morning, both  
36 of us, ignorant but adamant without the least idea about the literary world went straight to the main office of  
37 Signet Press at Elgin road, with our script." ??Krittibas Panchas Bachar Nirbachita Sankalan, ??] With this  
38 courageous step of these two young poets, Bengali poetry started a new journey. Their attempt to write poetry  
39 different from Tagorian as well as the then Modern became a topic to discuss in the Bengali literary world. Their  
40 magazine was a long lasting one when compared with the other magazines which were fleeting ones. They run it  
41 without any sponsorship, without any attempt to make it public and without any big names. Little magazine,  
42 have a very short life span and Krittibas struggled a lot . Moreover, it was not a path-breaking idea of the editors  
43 of Krittibas as it had its predecessors. Buddhadeb Bose's 'Kabita' magazine, Sanjay Bhattacharya's 'Purbasha'  
44 became a myth in the literary world of Bengali little magazines. 'Kabita' created a new vista in Bengali poetry  
45 and this legacy was successfully carried on by Krittibas. These poets initiated new trends in poetry expressing

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46 their innermost secrets aloud for all to hear. They drew the pictures of the disturbing and changing facets of the  
47 Time. Sunil Gangopadhyay recollects: "The name Krittibas is not just only a name of a magazine, our vibrant  
48 youth, our dreams, our arrogance, our desires, sweat all are integrated with this name." ??Krittibas Panchas  
49 Bachar Nirbachita Sankalan, ??2] However, this effort gradually developed a new poetic diction and genre which  
50 intentionally discarded any foreign name. Their poetic style and diction were spontaneous and the form in which  
51 they wrote had uniqueness. And this new poetic genre later termed as confessional poetry. These poets initiated  
52 a new voice in poetry. Ugly and grotesque inspired their poetry in the same manner as the beautiful and the  
53 good. They glorified the personal and private, expressed their innermost secrets aloud for all to hear. While  
54 the uses of slang with the elegant words in the poetry were not very much in tradition, the poets of Krittibas  
55 forwarded them as these words were the actual expressions of modern poetry. Poets of Krittibas were criticized  
56 and rebuked for their outspoken language. Their poems were marked with obscenity and this obscenity, the  
57 desire behind such poetry is not to hurt or shock. But the languages shocked and hurt a group of critics and the  
58 people who lived in the world of Tagorian didactic poetry and songs. They were not familiar with such 'unpoetic'  
59 decadence and condemned these poets.

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

68 Allen Ginsberg was specially related with this magazine and this can be a story apart. Ginsberg was a  
69 budding poet of Beat generation and he was not much famous as a poet even in America then. During his world  
70 tour, he put his feet in Calcutta for few months and got acquainted with Sunil Gangopadhyay. The Bengali poet  
71 remembers: "Our mere acquaintance was turned into intimacy as we spent evenings, sharing thoughts, developing  
72 acquaintances with world literature,? We and our friend spent wee hours of the evening in Nimtala Burning Ghat,  
73 discussing occult sciences with the saints and smoking opium. ? Allen's photograph of a poor beggar girl with an  
74 umbrella over her head was printed on the cover of our magazine ?Few portions of Ginsberg's unprinted journal  
75 about his visit to India was also printed in our magazine ? This friendship helped us to develop our insight, to  
76 increase our literary endeavour about literatures of different countries and also other worldly affairs." ??Krittibas  
77 Panchas Bachar Nirbachita Sankalan, ??4] Allen ginsberg also in return remembered 'Sunil Poet' in his poem  
78 'September in Jessore Road':

79 "Is this what I did to myself in the past? What shall I do Sunil Poet I asked? Move on and leave them  
80 without any coins? What should I care for the love of my loins?" [September in Jessore Road, Allen Ginsberg,  
81 from www. ??oemhunter.com] When Sunil Gangopadhyay come to write poetry, Bengal was torn apart, Tagore  
82 was no more, Gandhi was slain, and materialism had devoured the society. That was not a time to write poetry  
83 of love. But when we analyze Gangopadhyay's poetic oeuvre, it is seen that a major portion of his poems is  
84 replete with love. He constitutes a space for womanhood in his poetry which is simple yet sublime. He showed his  
85 infatuation, his melancholy, his sexuality, and ultimately his honesty towards them. This is evident in the poems  
86 of 'Neera Series', where his expressions are of a true lover. His women are dynamic, mystic, and sharply sketched  
87 with individuality. He always wanted to know the depth of women psychology and never able to measure. To  
88 him Neera is 'more distant than even the day I was born'. He wishes her to "hand the ensign of heavens In  
89 your almond-coloured palm And proclaim throughout the world that in your chin The glowing mystic light Will  
90 stay eternally." ['Naswar' (Ephemeral) in Suniler Shrestho ??obita, ??03] He wanted love and to be loved and  
91 his poems are enliven with such simplistic relation of man and woman in the midst of socio-political agitation.  
92 People forgot to love and this poet taught them the process of love even in such dire consequences.

93 His poetry is rich in images which are drawn from everyday life and we encounter them here and there. Yet  
94 they are sometimes awe-inspiring in their appeal to us. He confesses to his ladylove: "I have given my last  
95 remaining love to the girl before you My heart is empty now, like a highway in midnight Glistening concrete  
96 road, lit in every nook and corner Waiting is hidden in darkness ??"[Pembihin' (Loveless) in Suniler Shrestho  
97 ??obita, ??8] This image is a common one, but the presentation and exaggeration of it is far from being common.  
98 The varying shades of darkness and light denote the instability of empty heart, but in midnight none cares to  
99 trade the path as it is deserted. These rich images often form the theme of his poems. He did not used recurring  
100 images and that is why they do not bore the readers. We can cite here another one: "I have opened my lips from  
101 three miles away Like flowers to offer to gods I am priest, look, my waving hands, spontaneous slokas My heart  
102 is non-Hindu, face Semantic, in love different as Coptic Christian." ['Tumi' (You) in Suniler Shrestho ??obita,  
103 ??8] He presents himself as the votary of beauty of her ladylove, and his religious identity is faded by his offering  
104 of love. This wondering and stunning similes and images are found in almost all his poems. Love is a haunting  
105 theme in his poetry and his treatment of this theme is quite different from his predecessors.

106 Sunil Gangopadhyay was a prolific writer and he wrote not only poetry. He wrote short-story, columns, and  
107 most importantly novels. He was a representative novelist of his age and awarded Sahitya Akademi Award in  
108 1982 for his most popular novel, Sei Samay (Those Days). But from heart he is a poet and his poetic soul is

109 revealed in most of his writing. He is anxious about his loss of poetic language but when he finds it he is elated.  
110 He carefully chooses his diction and points it aptly to his theme. Unlike his prose, his poetry derives not from  
111 built-up reality. They are spontaneous, resourceful, vigorous and yet meditative: "Each line, word, comma, dash,  
112 tress, of this poem with the dots of i are rushing towards you, your locks of hair around the half slept tender  
113 face ?" [Neerar Jonno Kobitar Bhumika ' (A Preface to Poetry for Neera) in Suniler Shrestho Kobita, 45] His  
114 poetic diction is his major concern and he expressed it in most of his poetry. He looks for an ultimate language  
115 for poetry and his poetic soul remains unsatisfied. He craves for an antic language to present his abrupt images,  
116 stunning thoughts, honest themes and beauty of life. He tries to reach that superior ledge of poetry from where  
117 he can see his creation and justify them in a moment. This sincerity towards the language of poetry makes him  
118 a poet with a difference. To him, "the description of your face is the summery of all art", and he confesses: "I  
119 am near the sunshine lake yet unlike Valery I could not find those words I craved, unveiled reflection. But love  
120 promised me to show its image in secret." [Kobir Dukkho' (Sorrow of the Poet) in Suniler Shrestho ??obita ,  
121 ??11] .

122 He can say "there are rules to dream again if one dislikes it" [Himyug' (Ice Age) in Suniler Shrestho Kobita,  
123 30] because it is he who dares to dream. He turns an instant into eternity as when he meets his girlfriend for  
124 "three minutes at bus stop" and dreams her. He teaches how to love beloveds and he wanted to share his all  
125 with coming generation. He wants to share with young boys 'button less ragged shirt and lungs full of laugh'.  
126 He wants to give 'emphatic steps' throughout the city, 'cloudy sky', 'the glance of the girl beside the window'.  
127 He has reached at a mature age and these 'garments' do not suit him anymore. [uttoradhikar' (Sorrow of the  
128 Poet) in Suniler Shrestho Kobita, 70]. But he never stopped writing during his lifetime and tirelessly devoted  
129 his life to poetry. Alone this love for poetry makes him bestows him eternity. In 'Sudhu Kobitar Jonno' (Only  
130 for Poetry) he thus praises poetry as his heart of life: "This life is only for poetry Some games are only for  
131 poetry Cross this world alone in frosty evening only for poetry. The glance of peace in the face with eyes wide  
132 open, you are a woman only for poetry this much bloodshed is only for poetry, this watershed in the Ganges in  
133 the cloud; I hanker to live a long lifelike men who lead a life of grudge only for poetry. Only for poetry I have  
134 scorned immortality." [Sudhu Kobitar Jonno' (Only for Poetry) in Suniler Shrestho ??obita, ??6] While Sunil  
135 Gongopadhyay appeared as a cult figure, there was only one poet who could match his poetic talent. Imitated  
136 by a huge number of budding poets after 60s, Shakti Chattopadhyay is by far the best lyric poet of the later half  
137 of the 20 th century Bengali poetic world. Both in his chilly, jazzy, awe-inspiring poetic style and in his vision  
138 of life, he is and will be remembered for generations after generation. Before he was a poet, his life was restless  
139 one. He had no scholastic background and moreover, he was from a small village of south Bengal. He lost his  
140 lawyer father when he was an infant and was supported by his tyrant grandfather, in exchange of which he had  
141 to tend the family's vegetable garden and even till land. Because of his bohemian lifestyle he failed everywhere  
142 to continue his job. He tried his hand in novel and appointed as an editor of Krittibas's prose edition. When he  
143 went to Chaibasa(now in Jharkhand state), love for a girl turned him into a powerful love poet and published  
144 his first anthology "He Prem, He Noihshôbdo" (O Love, O silence).

145 Decades later, when Shakti Chattopadhyay had moved out to Calcutta, and made up his mind to write poetry,  
146 the dirty brown colour of mud, the rawness of adolescent sexuality, and the twisted speech rhythm of south Bengal  
147 began finding expression in his poetry in an altogether unconventional manner. He is inevitably bracketed with  
148 Sunil Gangopadhyay, whose literary career began at the same time as Chattopadhyay's, and who is his friend for  
149 30 years. Yet no greater contrast could be found than that between this two -"Shakti-Sunil". Gangopadhyay -a  
150 man of regular habits, never at war with society, and always trying to enlarge his canvas with experiences picked  
151 up from life and literature, whereas Chattopadhyay is the perpetual bohemian, always drawing inwards for his  
152 inspiration. "I do something like autowritings," Chattopadhyay says, "when I allow my feelings to do anything  
153 they like with the lines, the words and the images."

154 His poetry is replete with fantasies and everywhere the readers face hidden surprises which are Volume XVIII  
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156 quite difficult to render. His dreamlike eloquence is packed with laced diction and the readers find solace in  
157 loneliness and ultimate realization. In 'Hemanter Aranne Ami Postman' (Postman in Autumn Forest) he shows  
158 the distance between man and nature and loneliness of modern man. Their 'letters filled with love' are taken  
159 by postmen but they hardly find their love because this separation is inevitable. The magical image with which  
160 the poem starts keeps the reader's attention which rushes towards the end, but he compels read it again: "I  
161 have seen wandering postmen in autumn forest Their yellow sacks have been filled with grass like dusty belly  
162 of lamb They have found letters, old and new, from time immemorial Those postmen in autumn forest I have  
163 seen they are tirelessly searching As heron's beak hunts lonely fish -" [Hemanter Aranne Ami Postman', Shakti  
164 Chattopadhyayer Shrestho ??obita, ??3] In love poems, Chottopadhyay's lyrics are unequalled. His simple but  
165 grotesque expression of love is novel and he does not merely play with words and thoughts. He poses a twist  
166 in love and searches the path of love's realization and the magical effect of it. To him love is a new awakening,  
167 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  
168 'ragged shirt', or whatever his social position. In his sonnet no. 61, he says, "I was never awake before in this  
169 way By the dew, or the slap or the wind that hurls forest." ??hakti Chattopadhyayer Shrestho Kobita, ??22] Here,  
170 the dew and the wind may come as love but 'slap' is quite innovative. In many poems of Chattopadhyay,

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171 readers face this type of wonder. The readers are jerked by this slap of love which compels to think them again  
172 and again. However, this love is ultimately realized by the poet in the final couplet:

173 "O you have awaken me now easily this way O this bright shirt in dawn, this lonely birth conveys." ??hakti  
174 Chattopadhyayer Shrestho Kobita, ??22].

175 In his poem 'Ekbar Tumi' (Try Just Once), he shows how to obtain love especially when it is difficult to  
176 find true love. When love appears, everything in society along with person around us and the situation change  
177 magically. The pebbles generally block the heart. But it is unblocked by the power of love and its weight  
178 automatically reduced. The poem opens in a tone of some distant monologue: "Try just once to love You'll  
179 see, into the river, pebbles are falling from the breast of fish Rocks rocks rocks and the water of river and sea  
180 Blue rock transform into red, the red into blue Try just once to love." ??'Ekbar Tumi', ??hakti Chattopadhyayer  
181 Shrestho Kobita, ??8].

182 The image of rocks and pebbles are barriers which come between lovers and when they are released, a space  
183 for love is created. Later, in the poem these pebbles and rocks are converted into a part of heart itself because it  
184 beats or echoes the secrets and lover can store the in the cracks of rocks. It is difficult to live life as the slippery  
185 paths are not easy to walk. This stony path may give access to 'the distant doors of the pale stars of autumn'  
186 and so: "It is good to keep some rocks in your heart There is nothing like a letterbox -leaving them In the cracks  
187 of rocks is a great deal." ??'Ekbar Tumi ', ??hakti Chattopadhyayer Shrestho Kobita, ??9] The most notable  
188 contribution of Shakti Chottopadhyay to Bengali poetry is his diction. A friend and critic of him, Nityapriya  
189 Ghosh told that his poems are 'Urban Pastorals'. Indeed, he used the dialect which nobody dared to use before  
190 in Bengali poetry. The down-to-earth words used in everyday language of South Bengal region found a perfect  
191 expression with all its sheer beauty and sheer complexity. He could create a musical effect with pronunciation  
192 of words and the theme-a rare combination. But he never liked weightless smartness of wordplay. His poetic  
193 diction only speaks of the realization of soul as it is seen in 'Pete Suechhi Shobdo' (Slept on Words): <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>© 2018 Global JournalsA Poetic Odyssey: Journey of Krittibas and 'Shakti-Sunil' Duo