

***AN INTERVIEW WITH KIRITI SENGUPTA***

**By Tanmoy Bhattacharjee**

I met him for the first time during the launch of *Healing Waters Floating Lamps*, a collection of selected verses, at Oxford Bookstore, Calcutta in April, 2015. Before I met him in person, I read all the books he authored, and I was in a trance when I saw him at the formal do. Little did I know he would someday author a chapbook on me and my voyage to *Heights of Life* (Hawakaal Publishers, Calcutta), under the title *A Freshman's Welcome* that would become a best-seller on Amazon, United States. He is none other than Kiriti Sengupta, who is the author of the bestselling, poetic trilogy: *My Glass of Wine*, *The Reverse Tree* and *Healing Waters Floating Lamps*. Sengupta is multi-faceted; he is a professionally qualified dental surgeon, a certified diamond grader, an enterprising cook, and a consummate writer! He is now serving as the nonfiction editor of *Literature Studio Review*. It has been my honor to have made Dr. Sengupta available for a face-to-face interview!

**Tanmoy Bhattacharjee:** Within a span of three years, you have bagged the fame as a writer, translator and poet. Which genre of writing you are perfectly comfortable with?

**Kiriti Sengupta:** Come on, Tanmoy! You mean I'm famous?

**Tanmoy:** Your journey as a writer began with *The Unheard I* in 2013. Since then the tremendous success of *My Glass of Wine*, the critical acclaim of *The Reverse Tree*, and of course, the extensive reviews and appraisal that you have received for your exclusive poetry collection, *Healing Waters Floating Lamps*, have carved a niche for you. In the last three years, no other Indian author has been discussed or critically assessed in literary journals and magazines to such an extent both in India and in the United States. Aren't these enough to establish my claim?

**Kiriti:** Oh well! I consider myself a writer. If you can remember, the *Hindustan Times* (Kolkata edition) printed the same statement as they reported the formal launch of *Healing Waters Floating Lamps*. Like other animals in the planet I'm comfortable only with my breathing, which occurs spontaneously round the clock. Other than breathing all efforts are forced, even if you are comfortable with them. One has to make him/her-self comfortable with certain actions, and I am pretty comfortable with my writing.

**Tanmoy:** I have been an eye-witness of the formal launch of your latest book of verses, *The Earthen Flute*, on February 21 (2016) in Calcutta. Your poetry has been well appreciated by celebrated poets, like K. Satchidanandan, Lorna Dee Cervantes (Olympia, Washington), Johnathan Moody (Texas), among others. What went into the making of this book? Aren't you expecting wider recognition from being a poet?

**Kiriti:** Thank you so much for joining us in the formal launch of *The Earthen Flute* in Calcutta. A lot of effort, pain and sweat are involved when you intend to publish a book, especially a collection of poems. My latest book, *The Earthen Flute*, is no exception, and I must thank my publisher (Hawakaal) for being extremely meticulous in their approach, so the reader would get the best quality of print and paper. There are twenty-one poems in this paperback collection, and it also carries a few illustrations by ace painter Tamojit Bhattacharya. I think the readers are very happy with the final product, and now it is my poetry that would be critiqued and scanned. I won't say I'm nervous, for the verses have brought positive thoughts and reviews until now. If you ask me, Tanmoy, what the book is all about, I would love to say that *The Earthen Flute* centers around humanity and behavioral pattern as prescribed in ancient scriptures. My book, in no way, can be termed religious, for religion is merely a set of beliefs, whereas humanity is a unique way to holistic living. *The Earthen Flute*, I expect, will urge readers to reflect on their earthly existence. And if it occurs, I will consider my attempt successful. Success is not necessarily associated with worldly recognition, you know. Poetry celebrates silence in one way or the other, and if my poems fail to perform its scheduled task, no matter if I receive accolades, I will not be remembered by anyone in future. After all, clamor has its charm only for a limited

period of time, but tranquility is what we long for since the dawn of civilization. I hope you can remember the last few lines of the concluding poem in *The Earthen Flute*: “*Quiet grandeur prevails over/ The pinnacle of worldly communion*” (“Struggle For Silence”).

**Tanmoy:** What is your take on traditional publishing and vanity publishing?

**Kiriti:** They both publish books; they make sure readers won't complain about the quality of their productions. One charges the author, while the other doesn't. I have seen authors take pride when they are traditionally published. I have seen many authors, who feel shy to mention that they have paid for their books. I find the entire situation funny and a non-sense affair. If you look into the books in a bookstore, you will locate many of them being published by big houses that publish run-of-the-mill stuff. On the contrary, a bookstore houses very few books from vanity presses that might be publishing outstanding contents. Traditional and vanity presses prove nothing, except for adding pride or inhibition into the psyche of the authors.

**Tanmoy:** Social networking sites offer instant popularity, and you are pretty active on Facebook. Is your readership confined within the list of your friends?

**Kiriti:** Social networks provide a wonderful reader-base, but in the long run, it is the words-of-mouth that makes a book successful among the readers. None of my books have remained confined within Facebook friends. But, I am grateful to all of them, for those are the ones who have recommended my works to their circle of followers and acquaintances. It feels wonderful when I see readers, who are not net-savvy, buying my books from physical bookstores.

**Tanmoy:** What is your stand on the present literary scene of Calcutta? Do you want to offer suggestions for improvement?

**Kiriti:** There are several small groups and organizations who have been propagating poetry and literature among the budding poets and writers in Calcutta. Unfortunately we don't have one who

could look after their proliferation among the general people. You must remember, organizations and groups publicize the poets and writers, and they are but least concerned in propagating authentic literature!

**Tanmoy:** You run a publishing house as well. Do the tags of a publisher and an author intrude in each other's space by any way?

**Kiriti:** I own a small press, and I have to work really hard to make sure my publisher-being does not disturb my writer-self and vice versa. But, this is a seemingly impossible task! However, I have been considerably successful until now.

**Tanmoy:** Did you plan your trilogy?

**Kiriti:** Certainly not! I did not plan my books in any way, and they were written as spontaneously as my words flowed. I never thought of considering them as a trilogy, but my reviewers did. Looking back I could feel God has been extremely kind to me and graced with three publications, which are linked through a fine thread, called "spirituality." Perhaps you are aware that the books which constitute my trilogy belong to three different genres. My editor, Don Martin, refers *My Glass of Wine* to as a "novelette based on autobiographic poetry," and *The Reverse Tree* to as a "nonfictional memoir." There are a few academics and researchers who have spent time in determining the genre of these books. I never bothered, you know, I would rather describe them as books written in the English language and in several ways. The last book of my trilogy is *Healing Waters Floating Lamps* that has been an exclusive collection of poetry. So my reviewers are safe here (winks). By the way, you will be glad to know that Hawakaal Publisher is planning to bring out a combined version of these books, so readers need not to buy them separately, and they could cherish my trilogy in a single volume.

**Tanmoy:** This sounds really interesting! Of late, two of your books, *My Glass of Wine*, and *Poem Continuous — Reincarnated Expressions*, have been expanded to their second edition. You must be very delighted!

**Kiriti:** I feel rejuvenated by their expansions! You know, I'm a bit biased with *My Glass of Wine*, for people promptly associate my name with this thin-volume work! In this book I wanted to fetch more readers to poetry, and I've been pretty successful in my job. The first print (it was one-thousand copies, if I'm not wrong) was about to exhaust when Bitan Chakraborty, founder of Hawakaal Publisher, proposed for an expanded second edition of *My Glass of Wine*! I was hesitant in the first place, for I didn't want my readers buy the same old matter again. Bitan planned to revamp the book; he persuaded, "If you think you can add more value to your work, please do!" It took a week to set my mind, and I wrote "Alap," an introductory, long chapter that I felt necessary for my readers. It is a pity that once a book is declared a bestselling title, critics tend to diminish its merit. I respect my critics as they are the ones who decide the literary quotient of my works. Like other individuals, an author must be assessed by his/her E.Q. rather than I.Q. And critics must understand their role in publicizing world literature.

*Poem Continuous — Reincarnated Expressions*, on the other hand, is not a book I authored; it is a collection of selected, translated poems by the celebrated Bengali poet Bibhas Roy Chowdhury, rather. And I have been the sole translator who worked in this book. The first edition carried only thirty poems, but as we received some great reviews of the book both in India and in the United States (initially we were apprehensive, for translated poetry does not enjoy a good market), we planned to include twenty poems more, along with an interview that I held with the poet (it was published on *Word Riot*, if you can remember, Tanmoy). We also added excerpts from the reviews of the first edition. Don Martin, who edited the book, wrote a fresh foreword, and I wrote a long translator's note! It has been an extensive, overall expansion, and I'm thankful to my publishers, Inner Child Press, limited (New Jersey) and Hawakaal, who jointly ventured into this project.

**Tanmoy:** In *Rhapsodies and Musings* you have shared space with poet Sharmila Ray, and your works and poetics have been critically eulogized. Would you like to share your thoughts on the book?

**Kiriti:** It has been a humbling experience to share space with Sharmila Ray, one of the prominent Indian English poets in *Rhapsodies and Musings* that has been authored jointly by Ketaki Datta and Tania Chakraverty. In this book Tania critiqued my works. Although she had all my books I authored, she picked only three to write the critical analysis. No wonder, those three books constitute my trilogy, and trust me, Tania rendered her best without being influenced by me or the publisher. I won't call it a coincidence anymore!

**Tanmoy:** What is in the offing?

**Kiriti:** I'm now co-editing (along with Dustin Pickering) *Selfhood: Varieties of Experience*, an anthology of poetry and prose, which will be published by Transcendent Zero Press (Houston, Texas) in association with Hawakaal Publisher.

**Tanmoy:** Thank you so much, Dr. Sengupta. I appreciate your time and patience.

**Kiriti:** You are most welcome, Tanmoy. Pleasure is all mine!

### **Bio**

**Tanmoy Bhattacharjee** hails from Raiganj, West Bengal, India. A teacher of English language and literature, he writes English poetry and literary nonfiction. Tanmoy has authored a book of poems, *Heights of Life* (Hawakaal Publishers, Kolkata), which has been a best-selling title on Amazon (United States). Tanmoy's poems have appeared in acclaimed journals and webzines like *Asian Signature*, *The Contour*, *The Literary Herald*, *Tuck Magazine*, to name but a few. He has co-authored *Sankarak — The Literary Fusion*, an anthology based on Hybrid Literature.

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Besides, his papers have appeared on well-known journals like, *Wilderness House Literary Review* (Massachusetts, USA), *Muse India*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, among other places.

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