

INTERVIEW OF KIRITI SENGUPTA

--by Dr. Sunil Sharma

“Poetry is perceived to be scary by the general readers of literature”

Kiriti Sengupta is a leading bilingual poet, novelist, critic, editor and translator. He is a dental surgeon by profession. Recently he published widely-acclaimed books in English like *Reciting Pens* and *The Unheard I and My Glass of Wine*. Excerpts of a provocative literary conversation with the young talented writer about literature and allied topics conducted by **Sunil Sharma**:

Q: Why poetry? Is it relevant to consumerist culture?

A: I find poetry much interesting amongst the literary genres available in the market, and autobiography comes next to poetry. When I say ‘market’ I accept the consumerist culture, although I may not support its strong implications. My taste is important to me, and these taste-buds on my tongue are the ones I got from my family.

Q: Is it not in a minority now?

A: I don’t think so; yes, if you consider the salability quotient, poetry titles rarely turn bestsellers. And if I agree to your point, should I say poets belong to the privileged species that enjoy much support from the government? Had it been true in reality, I would have been in the lucky lot.

Q: Your definition of serious poetry?

A: If it is poetry — it is serious. There is no universally accepted definition, yet I follow the one as postulated by William Wordsworth in his *Lyrical Ballads*: “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” There is another take by the noted translator-critic Atreya Sarma Uppaluri from Hyderabad, “Poetry is life in words, and life is poetry in action.”

Q: Does biography matter in the writing of serious poetry? Bio and composition, are they mutually inclusive or exclusive?

A: Poetry projects varied shades of our lives, thus, biography is indeed an important factor. Hence, biography and composition are mutually inclusive, unless the poet writes on public demand.

Q: Why does it not sell, good poetry?

A: There are multiple factors. Poetry is perceived to be scary by the general readers of literature. Abstract metaphors, and difficult imageries make poetry repulsive, and the readers fail to connect. Finally, it is the indifferent attitude of the poets at large that results in a communication gap.

Q: International poets that appeal to you? The aspect that you like in them?

A: Among the living poets, I will name two: W.F.Lantry, and Hulya Yilmaz. Lantry has his gracious charm that is palpable in his poems, while Hulya's works are filled with life, and its evolution. They are the ones I admire most.

Q: From dental surgery to prose-poetry author, how has been the other journey?

A: It has been really exciting to say the least. I have had my share of refusals from the editors and publishers; I consider these my learning of the finer nuances.

Q: You have captured a lot of literary mind-space in a short span through consistent use of productive social media. How do you rate SM and its effect in to-day's culture of instant amnesia?

A: Social networking is interesting and can be used in considerable amount, if your aim is honest. You get the chance to meet new people who may well turn the admirers of your works. It all depends on how you use it.

Q: Your series of 10 poets is a big hit and a unique abbreviated history of a poet and summation of their poetry. How did you get the idea?

A: It was not my idea, honestly speaking, it was the editor, Subhankar Paul of the well-circulated Bengali journal Hiranyagarbha who conceptualized the matter, and practically induced me to write my observations. I was amazed to note the remarks of my fellow poets and other readers, and finally I approached Yayati Madan Gandhi, the founder-president of the Poetry Society of India. He has been so kind to produce and publish the manuscript. My Dazzling Bards (Volume I) is expected to release within a month's time.

Q: You have been published in the U.S.A. How is the response there for the Indian poets?

A: I am grateful to the Inner Child Press, Limited (U.S.A.) for re-publishing my books, The Unheard I, and The Reciting Pens. It was not self-publication, but they have wonderfully reproduced my works. My books are up on Amazon.com now. It really feels nice. I must say that Indian poets are well accepted worldwide.

Q: Which one comes more easily to you, prose or poetry?

A: It depends...especially on my mood. Writing consumes time, and labor. That's all.

Q: Competent dentists are awfully busy. How do you find time for your literary pursuits?

A: I am practicing dentistry since thirteen years now. I have purposefully cut short my professional engagements to certain extent in order to pursue my passion that is writing. Moreover, time management is a crucial factor, and I'm grateful to my family for their ceaseless support.

Q: Your views on translation? The criteria?

A: Translating literature into other language is perhaps the most difficult of the literary enterprises. I have been translating articles and poetry since 2008, and the only criterion that I follow is: I make sure that the original writer/poet approves my work prior to its publication. Translation is said to be a thankless job, for the translators are not given their due recognition. In most of the cases the translators are never paid their remuneration at all. These are a few issues that need to be addressed soon.

Q: Your favorite regional writers? And why?

A: Without a second thought, he is the numero uno Rabindranath Tagore. He is stunningly alive in all Bengali households through his poetry and music. We have so many researchers in India who are in a better position to postulate the factors that are responsible in his staying alive, in spite of the fact that he had left his mortal frame years back. I think it was his intrinsic spiritual rhythm that captured our minds and souls. You will find that in *The Reciting Pens* I have had worked with three published Bengali poets from Calcutta: Joya Mitra, Ranadeb Dasgupta, and Suddhasatya Ghosh. I interviewed them to explore their psyche, and translated some of their works into English. *The Reciting Pens* was primarily written for the English-speaking readers.

Q: Can arts revolutionize ways of perception and usher in required change?

A: Certainly yes, but it has to join hands with the modern technology in order to fetch the desired results.

Q: Your plans?

A: I am expecting the release of *My Glass of Wine* during this Christmas. It is a novelette based on autobiographic poetry. Again, *My Dazzling Bards* is in the pipeline. I'm planning to write about the life, works, and vision of the legendary educationist-poet Dr. Madan Gandhi (Ph. D., D. Lit.). My hands are full, I think!

Q: Thanks.

A: Thank you so very much, sir. It was indeed my honor to answer your questions, and I thoroughly enjoyed the session. Please accept my humble gratitude.

Brief Biography

Dr. Kiriti Sengupta is a professionally qualified Dental Surgeon from Calcutta, a bilingual poet and translator both in Bengali and English. He has five books to his credit until now: *My Glass of Wine* (a novelette based on autobiographic poetry), *The Reciting Pens* (his interviews of three published Bengali poets along with his translations of a few of their poems), *The Unheard I* (literary nonfiction), *Byakul Shabdo Kichu* (Bengali poetry), and *Aay Na* (Bengali nonfiction based on free verses). His poetry has appeared in several e-zines, *Tajmahal Review*, *The Hans India*, *Kritya*, and in international anthologies – *Heavens Above: Poetry Below* (Canada), and *Twist of Fate* (U.S.A.). Details of his account can be accessed at www.kiritisengupta.com