

Classic Poetry Series

**Sunil Gangopadhyay**  
**- poems -**

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# Sunil Gangopadhyay(7 September 1934 -)

Sunil Gangopadhyay (Shunil Gônggopaddhae), is an Indian poet and novelist.

## <b>Early Life</b>

He was born in Faridpur in what is now Bangladesh. He studied at the Surendranath College, Dumdum Motizhil College, City College, Kolkata - all affiliated with the University of Calcutta. Thereafter, he obtained his Master's degree in Bengali from the University of Calcutta in 1954.

## <b>Literary Career</b>

He was the founder editor of *Krittibas*, a seminal poetry magazine started publishing from 1953, that became a platform for a new generation of poets experimenting with many new forms in poetic themes, rhythms, and words. Later, he started writing for various publications of the Ananda Bazar group, a major publishing house in Kolkata and has been continuing it for many years. He became friends with the beat poet Allen Ginsberg while he was traveling in India.

Ginsberg mentioned Gangopadhyay most notably in his poem *September on Jessore Road*. Gangopadhyay in return mentioned Ginsberg in some of his prose work. After serving five years as the Vice President, he was elected the President of the Sahitya Akademi on February 20, 2008.

Sunil, along with Tarun Sanyal, Jyotirmoy Datta and Satrajit Dutta had volunteered to be defense witnesses in the famous trial of "Hungryalism" poet Malay Roy Choudhury.

## <b>Personal Life</b>

He married Swati Bandopadhyay on February 26, 1967. Their only son, Sauvik was born on November 20, 1967.

## <b>Works</b>

Author of well over 200 books, Sunil is a prolific writer who has excelled in different genres but declares poetry to be his "first love". His *Nikhillesh* and *Neera* series of poems (some of which have been translated as *For You*, *Neera* and *Murmur in the Woods*) have been extremely popular.

As in poetry, Sunil is known for his unique style in prose. His first novel was 'atmaprakash' and it was also the first writing from a new comer in literature published in the prestigious magazine- 'desh' (1965). It was critically acclaimed but some controversy arises for its aggressive and 'obscene' style. Sunil said that he was afraid of this novel and went away from Calcutta for a few days. Satyajit Ray, the iconic film-maker thought to make a film on it but it wasn't possible for reasons. The central character of 'Atmaprakash' is a young man of core-Calcutta'-sunil, who leads a bohemian life-style. The novel had inspiration from ' On the road' by Jack Kerouac, the beat generation writer. 'Arjun, Pratidwandi, filmed by Satyajit Ray (English title: The Adversary), Aranyer Din-Raat (The Days and Nights of the Forest, also filmed by Satyajit Ray), Ekaa ebong Koyekjon are some of his well known works of fiction. His historical fiction Sei Somoy (translated into English by Aruna Chakravorty as Those Days) received the Indian Sahitya Akademi award in 1985. Sei Somoy continues to be a best seller more than two decades after its first publication. The same is true for Pratham Alo (also translated recently by Aruna Chakravorty as First Light), another best selling historical fiction and Purbo-Paschim, a raw depiction of the partition and its aftermath seen through the eyes of three generations of Bengalis in West Bengal, Bangladesh and elsewhere. He is also the winner of the Bankim Puraskar (1982), and the Ananda Puraskar (twice, in 1972 and 1989).

Sunil has written (and still writes) in many other genres including travelogues, children's fiction, short stories, features, and essays. Among his pen-names are: Nil Lohit, Sanatan Pathak, and Nil Upadhyay.

Though he has written all types of children's fiction, one character created by him that stands out above the rest, is Kakababu, the crippled adventurer, accompanied by his young adult nephew Santu, and his friend Jojo. Since 1974, Sunil Gangopadhyay has written over 35 novels of this popular series, most of which appeared in Anandamela magazine.

One of Sunil Gangopadhyay's cult poems, Smritir Shohor has been turned into a song for the film Iti Mrinalini (2011) directed by Aparna Sen.

# A Truth Bound Sentiment

This hand has touched Neera's face,  
could I use this hand to commit a sin,  
ever again?

In the late evening glow  
swathing the hanging balcony,  
a 'daring' light had fallen on her face,  
and like a telegram,  
had instantly revealed Neera's grace!  
A hint of a smile had merged  
on her brows and eyes,  
or was it the shine of mica-fines?  
At such times,  
I so long to call that lady, just a 'babe'.  
I raise my right hand  
and with my muscles flexed,  
I whisper to myself --  
'Be worthy of her,  
Be worthy and rise'  
I touch Neera's chin --  
This hand has touched Neera's face,  
could I use this hand to commit a sin,  
ever again?

These lips have told Neera,  
'I love you', once,  
could a deceit play on these lips  
ever again?  
Coming down the steps  
I remember, all of a sudden,  
that the most important words  
were yet to be said!  
A breeze from the alien shores  
would one day, soon,  
carry this lady away  
as nimble and graceful as a swan!  
And the stairs would all give way  
to the surge of a sudden quake!  
I stop,  
and look deep into Neera's eyes ...

I realize,  
love is such an ardent pledge,  
a deep emotional bondage,  
and a sentiment bound in truth.  
My eyes begin to burn ...  
standing on the steps,  
these lips had told Neera,  
'I love you', once,  
could a deceit play on these lips,  
ever again?

Sunil Gangopadhyay

# Easy

With ease I make a million flowers bloom,  
All at once I light up some suns, moons, stars,  
In a passing whim I blow out the moonlight  
(Remember that moonlight?) or the sunlight (remember that too?).

Don't believe a thing my detractors say.  
They might say that I am a child or a fool,  
or a magician, ---

Ragged tents, broken drums, patches  
on his black coat, but look what a deadly dance he's dancing  
on the pupils of her eyes, onlookers aren't fooled, they laugh  
but the girl will hear no reason oh how she ails from this dose  
of illusion;---Don't believe them.

Hey you revilers, look,  
look with what ease I hold up the three worlds---  
on the little finger of my left hand.  
The darkness, the seas, hills all look on amazed,  
You, only you, have forgotten the language of surprise!  
Come on into my house, and see what a wondrous house I keep.  
The roof overhead---see, but no walls have I on the sides,  
(Bounded by walls all round, dreams and phlegm in your hearts,  
marking age on your fingers, drawing fancy pictures on walls,  
carefully you guys will live!)  
While look in my house breezes of all kinds  
like faithful retainers move around, brush away cobwebs,  
test colors on cornices, busy day and night.  
I sit in my wall-less room and paint on the girl's pupils,  
Much easier this than making pictures without.

Go back, you revilers, you are foolish children, and you,  
Don't believe them when they call me magician.

[Translated from Bengali poem 'Sahaj' by Nandini Gupta]

Sunil Gangopadhyay

# Ephemeral

Neera, sometimes, it seems  
you are more distant  
than even the day I was born.  
You walk alone --  
in the autumn-woods.  
The rustle of leaves  
under your tender feet,  
fill the air!  
The mountains, sloped like a bullock's neck  
meet the horizon,  
and the evening sun  
resounding its victory-cymbals  
sets behind those hills.  
All these, Neera, seem more distant  
than even the day I was born.

Sometimes, when I've looked at the sky,  
I've seen a dying star.  
I feel a shiver in my heart,  
my eyes come down to the earth  
and to the world all around.  
At those times, Neera,  
I feel a strong desire  
to fight all that is born to die!  
I wish to place the flag of the Heavens  
in your almond-hued palm,  
and tell the whole world,  
that the ray of mystical light  
falling on your chin,  
shall stay arrested, forever.  
At that moment,  
in the distant leafstrewn woods,  
I see your enigmatic smile!

You know Neera,  
that the white pigeons that fly in the evening sky,  
even they are obscured by darkness!  
like the light of our eyes,  
and like all worldly sorrows!

It's only the misery of man  
that stretches beyond his lifetime.

[Translated from Bengali poem 'Nashbar' by Sheila Sengupta]

Sunil Gangopadhyay

# This Hand Has Touched

This golden figurine- oh dear, will she ceaselessly crumble away,  
In the night, in the sun, in the rain in the arms of another man?  
Her nipples two bared switches,- switches? Hands tremble at their touch.  
This hand has touched worms, pillows bound to chest, blood,  
In a greedless drowning to death in the blood's mucus,  
This hand has touched the shriek of tearless eyes  
This hand has touched  
This hand  
A tunnel-like alley- running through it lightning-fast,  
small change clutched....sounds of boots behind, a cigarette  
in the sleeping mirror's mouth, this hand!

No steam builds in my heart. Yet,  
we meet in the darkness of a mist, eyes flash  
like a gold coin hid in an ancient chest.  
The nipples two bared switches, hands tremble at their touch,  
Even this hand!

There are some billion doctors on this earth.  
Like Parashuram I shall kill them all  
and wake to life in a pool of their blood.  
Moonlight, like shadows of trees.  
Within it none alive. Anymore.  
Trees under the sky. Darkness, leaves bunch.  
A stream within the leaves.  
Within the stream's every vein cruelty;  
For the present, cruelty gathers her aachal away and says,  
There are the lights, my cousin waiting at the gate, I have to go now....

Go, but never again alone in the dark  
turn your neck to me, go, I shall for long  
stand in watch here and hold the dogs at bay,  
go today without fear, but never again. Today,  
go without fear. I shall stand in watch.

[Translated from Bengali poem 'Ei Haat Chhuyechhilo' by Nandini Gupta]

Sunil Gangopadhyay