

Kiriti Sengupta

My Glass of Wine

I was studying Dentistry, and was in my final year of studies. I was introduced to the local church by one of my college friends. It was under the auspices of the Church of North India (C.N.I.). She was eager to get me baptized at the earliest, as she found me her soul-mate. To be honest, this particular notion of being a soul-mate was something too weird! And I never nurtured such a belief myself. However, visiting the church, and getting involved with the weekly sessions of Bible-reading fascinated me. I was quick to gather the nuances of Christianity. It deserves a mention that the lady-friend who took me to the church was herself a Hindu, and belonged to an orthodox Brahmin family. It was seemingly paradoxical! My family was not so strict about me changing the way of my lifestyle. Yet I didn't have the courage to convey the news to my father, who was particular about certain regulations of the so called Hinduism. He was an initiated devotee of Belur Mutt, a prominent organization founded by Swami Vivekananda, a foremost follower of Paramhansa Sri Ramakrishna. We used to have some ritual-based religious acts in home at frequent intervals. Nevertheless, I continued with Dentistry and regular readings of the Bible. What was so inspiring about Christianity? Well, I found its prayer sessions interesting indeed. The way a group of people prays towards the achievement a certain goal is, in fact, the most fascinating feature of the Christians. I remember, when I approached the Father (of the said church) about my older sister being unwell of her marital life, he stood upright and advised all the followers to pray for my sister. They prayed aloud. It was mindboggling! Trust me, it gave an immediate relief, and my older sister was able to find some peace in her life! One morning I went to the church and told Father, "I wish a formal baptism." The Father said, 'You need to get spiritually baptized first.' As I inquired about the way of getting baptized spiritually, he said, 'Invite Jesus into your life. Invite Him wholeheartedly. You will find changes on your own as He comes into your heart.' I was desperate. I closed my eyes and with full concentration I urged, "Oh Jesus! I am inviting you to come in, and be my savior." I fail to remember what have had happened next. All I can remember now is this: I felt some unique sensation within, there was a mild headache, and I had interestingly tender eyes. As soon as I looked at Father he said, "You are done, my boy!" It came as a big surprise. These were, in fact, a few initial words I wanted to share with you all, for my first sip of red wine has had its relation with my being a

part of Christianity. I vividly remember I was first offered homemade red wine in a Christian congregation. Until then I never tasted any kind of alcoholic beverage. I was told that red wine makes one remember of the divine blood that Jesus sacrificed! Frankly speaking, I never questioned the logic in favor of or against such a statement until I experienced the so called Hindu Tantric way of worshipping God!

For those who are unaware of *Tantra* I would like to convey that alcoholic beverage is used in sufficient quantity during the conventional Tantric rituals. Here the priests prefer to sport blood red attires. They consider the color symbolic of the divine power. On the other hand, the word *Qurbani* is a familiar term with the Islamic people. Irrespective of its true implication you will find sacrifices of living animals (goats, and cows) in their traditional festivals. The sheer sight of blood and the deafening screams of the species are perhaps linked with prosperity, energy, and vigor. Now if I correlate these things together, I find the elements of blood, power, alcohol, and red associated intimately with divinity. I won't mind if you find me controversial, but I should raise the question: How can the amorphous God be related to any worldly element? Is it essential to associating with blood?

Blood Related

It was not branded, but a homemade
wine.
Intimately divine,
I drank it first
right after I was spiritually baptized.
Ah! My olden golden days of north India.
I often wondered
why the wine was made and

I have had been corrupt...

The Hindu *Tantrics* prefer the sight
of red light.
Be it of the attire, or of
the holy sacrifice!

And in conventional practice of Islam
Qurbani is made a popular station.

You and I
The Father and son
the legacy goes on.
Inevitable – impeccable,
blood relation...

As I traversed

Would I name it an encounter? Well, my first encounter with Bengali literature started way back in the year 1995 at the famous Coffee House of Calcutta. I must put it in place that I remain a lazy reader until now. Those were my golden times of youth and vigor. And it was my first date with my girlfriend, Bhaswati whom I married after six years of courtship. As we sat on the chairs and ordered two cups of coffee, I initiated a 'not so romantic' conversation with her. I consider my first date boring as I was asked, "Did you read *Shesher Kobita* (The Last Poem) by Tagore?" I went speechless, and waited for a while. I was trying to organize my response. Until then I never had heard of something like *Shesher Kobita*. I politely replied, "Look, I don't read poetry at all." Bhaswati gave a quick smile, and I was relieved. Off late I realized that Bhaswati had considered my response in a light spirit! My dear readers, hopefully you are aware that *Shesher Kobita* is a landmark novel by Tagore.

I made my mind to read the novel as fast as it was possible. In those days we used to mark our love letters with literary quotations. Letter writing remains a lost art until today, and trust me; I loved writing pretty long letters in spite of my poor Bengali vocabulary! This is indeed a pity, and I do repent on my inability to master the world's sweetest language, which is Bengali. But, reading a novel for the sake of my girlfriend was not my cup of tea at all. In the meantime Bhaswati informed me that I could well buy a cassette of an audio play of *Shesher Kobita*, for she thought that I might had been occupied with my text books of Dental Surgery. Oh, poor she!

Being a student of North Bengal University I used to spend those days in Siliguri, which is a prominent town in the district of Darjeeling. Our college hostel was quite distant from the main town, and I had to travel for almost an hour to fetch a cassette of the audio play. The intra-city conveyance was not so prompt then. However, as I switched on my Philips walkman I was taken aback! A play enacted through voice renditions by noted Bengali artistes from Calcutta. It was touching, enchanting, mesmerizing, and soul stirring, to say the least. A moody composition by Tagore...

Thus began my journey into the world of literature. As I said before, I remain a lazy reader until today. I do not prefer reading long writings, be it poetry or prose. And I believe that there are numerous others who belong to my category of readers. My observation is such: Writers are indifferent at times, and they think that their writings will be chosen by many, who may do justice to their efforts invested in the literary projects. As a reader I have tried to find a clue. Honestly speaking, I have failed to derive anything satisfactory. Literature plays varied roles in human lives; the first and the foremost role is entertainment!

What about poetry? Do poems entertain the readers? Poetry may prove to be captivating, enchanting, melodious, rhythmic and fantasizing, but

can never entertain in the first place. Poetry delivers. Poetry communicates. Poetry bridges up. Poetry inspires. Poetry evokes. Poetry provokes. Poetry enlightens. Poetry illumines. Poetry heals. And through all these facets poetry may entertain its readers finally! My new attachment to the world of Bengali poetry set out with the poem, *Tui* (Thee). It had been dedicated to one of my disciple brothers, who through his deeds left behind an ill-defined, seemingly endless agony, which acted as the 'initiator' within me, the poet Kiriti. I have been fortunate to have met with a few of serious Bengali writers and poets, who have motivated me enough to carry on with my dream of being the author of the literary endeavors. Writing, I think, is all about consumption — more you consume the fuel of your being, better is the outcome!

Consumption

Consumed time
like an infant consuming
milk; inevitable
it remains.

Killed essence of
the eternal soul; and consumed,
essentially I remain ...

Kiriti Sengupta is a professionally qualified Dental Surgeon from Calcutta, a bilingual poet and translator both in Bengali and English. He has four books to his credit: *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*, *Kritya*, and in international anthologies – *Heavens Above: Poetry Below* (Canada), and *Twist of Fate* (U.S.A.).

