

SUNIL GANGOPADHYAYA

NASHID KAMAL

When I met him in Kolkata, the first question that I shot at him was "Why your autobiography is called Half my life?"

He replied "Because no one ever tells the complete story." How true, I thought.

I told him how much I enjoyed his description of holding the hands of his fifty year old ailing father while taking him to consult a doctor. Sunil remembered holding the same hand grip tightly when he was a school boy. How roles had changed!

Sunil never played 'holi' as he had only one shirt. He hid when his friends came because he didn't wish to get wet, and then have nothing to wear, how frank!

He and his comrades had started an organization, a literary one. They held meetings in rented premises. When their funds ran out, they rented the room of a prostitute. The latter was horrified to see so many men! They reassured her that they only required the room. People can draw from their experiences of struggle; nothing is too low, too base to be given recognition. Everyone's role matter.

I had an opportunity to interview the writer and poet Sunil Gangopadhyaya on Tara channel, Kolkata in 2005. The first question that I asked was, "In his opinion which poem or write up of his would be synonymous with his name?"

He replied, "Keu Kotha Rakheni."

I asked him if he had spent a lot of time, thinking, pondering, writing, rewriting this poem.

His reply was, "No, actually I had promised a poem to someone and totally forgotten about it. On the eve of the publisher's arrival, I went out with my friends and came home late, went to bed straight away. Around 3am, I woke from my sleep and suddenly remembered that the poem was due. I was feeling guilty about not keeping my word and those were the lines that came out of my pen. The rest just followed. I never even thought that this would be a noted poem of my life!"

All these question answer sessions were in Tara channel where I was hosting a

programme called *Bangla Amar Bangla*. I told him how I read his story of partition, feeling uprooted and lost as they migrated from East Bengal to the West. I said, "I have been hearing of a similar experience from my father about their migration from Kolkata to Dhaka." Sunil's eyes lit up. I said, "Since you have narrated the story behind *Keu Kotha Rakheni*, I will

narrate a story about Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam and his Islamic songs. Abbasuddin used to budge Nazrul for writing Islamic songs. One day Nazrul was deeply immersed in writing a play and Abbasuddin came to collect his Islamic song. Nazrul was a bit irritated and asked him to wait.

Abbas waited in the living room, until it was past *Zohr* prayer time (Lunch time 1:30pm). Again Abbasuddin knocked on Nazrul's doors. Nazrul came out and snapped "I told you, I have not finished writing the song. I am busy with my play!" Abbasuddin politely replied, "I came for a prayer mat, not for the song. My *Zohr* prayers



are due." Nazrul went to a steel almirah, took out a fresh towel and gave it to Abbasuddin. When he finished 12 rakats of his prayers, Nazrul handed him a piece of paper with the song *He Namazi Amar Ghore Namaz Poro Aj*.

Sunil's eyes lit up again, "I don't think I have heard this song? Can you sing it?"

I sang for him as the TV programme ended.

Sunil Gangopadhyaya, a dear name in Bangla literature had great love for this part of the world. On his 70th birthday, one of my dear friends and Tagore exponent Shama Rahman went to sing for his birthday celebrations. Sunil told the audience that his best birthday gift would be the policy to allow Bangladeshi channels in West Bengal. After hearing this, I had bought the book *Manush Manush*. Sunil's concern for Bangladeshis was overflowing like a cup full of nectar. I had always liked his writing, but now I liked him too. Sunil Gangopadhyaya is a great humanist and his concern really touches me.

THE WRITER IS AN ACADEMIC, NAZRUL EXPONENT AND WRITER.

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