

Lib

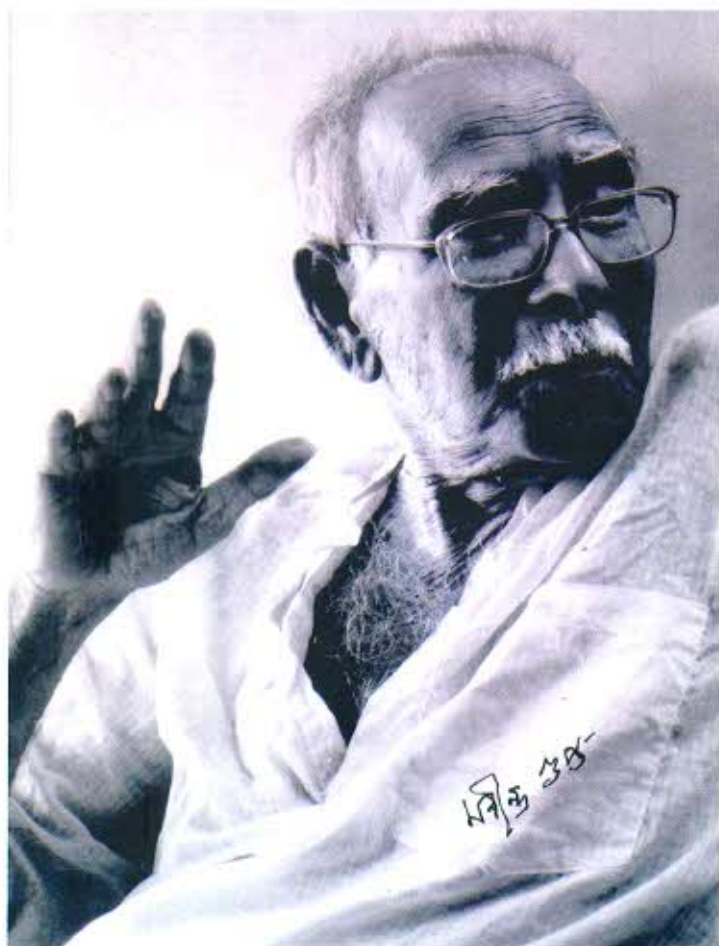
27 March 2014



Sahitya Akademi

meet the author

Manindra Gupta





Born in the association of nature in 1926, Manindra Gupta spent his childhood days in his ancestral village in East Bengal, where channels criss-cross the localities and boats are the main source of transportation. The Kirtankhola river was the main river in the neighbourhood. In those days forests and jungles were everywhere in the surroundings. Trees, plants and waterways were his best mates in that span of his early boyhood.

English translation of two stanzas of a poem from *Lal Schoolbari* is given below to illustrate the connection of Manindra Gupta with waterways :

The Boat

The boat moved through the
 red schoolbuilding —
 Gradually, the water smells of danger ...
 Ocean! Ocean!
 Water breaks at the horizon,
 Underneath, virgin corals display
 blooded agitation
 Not water, but the day burning on
 an infinite steel-deck.
 On some strange water, boatman slogging
 for ten hours...

Translated by Rajlukshmi Debee

From the very childhood Manindra Gupta faced a lot of hardships— both emotionally as well as

physically. But his perception of the surroundings never blurred— he looked into depths of minds and expressed them in appropriate words as well. Just have a look into a description of his grandmother after his grandfather's death from his autobiography and you will realize :

'Thakuma kintu ekebare onno manush hoye gelen. Jeno tini matmate laal par sari aar mota mota sankhar jorei etodin hankdank korten, sonsar shasan korten — ekhon sankha bhenge, than porar pore ekebare nirbak hoye gechhen. Ekhon je ja korte bolche tai korchhen, baki somoy kaday bheja onath beralchanar moto ghorer ondhokar kontite boste thaken, ar nishut ratre nistobdho swore chomok bhenge bolen, "Oi, Oi, Oi dekh, dorjer phank dia bura amake dake !" Dadur mrityur choddo diner modhye thakuma mara gelen.'

His attachments with his family members tend to decrease, as he repeatedly said in his autobiography, and the attraction of the world enveloped his mind.

He was only eight when his guardians - his grandparents died. He was then brought to Silchar of Assam in the care of his maternal grandparents. Silchar was a small tea-planters' town in the valley of river Barak. While writing in the later phase of his life, childhood came back to him again and again. The ending lines of the complete edition of his autobiography *Akshay Mulberry* ran thus :

Hoyto atiter ekta samaye kichu kichu manuser chelebelata ektu beshi samparasarito chilo.

By 1941 his school days were over and he left Silchar, as well as Barisal, for ever and came to Kolkata.

In 1943, he joined Indian Army's Engineering Division. And after completion of his course in Engineering he got his posting at Lahore Cantonment to receive combatant training. Living with fellow soldiers in a barrack or tent was really an experience for him! After demob, his army-life ended in 1946.

He was employed in the Dept. of Industries, Govt. of West Bengal. His service-life came to an end in 1984 when he retired from his job. But a little earlier in 1981 he wrote the first volume of his autobiography *Akshay Mulberry*. Even before that he initiated the publication of his literary magazine *Parama* as an editor in 1969. His first collection of poems *Nil Patharer Akash* appeared in the same year also, though it was first published in book-form with two other poets in 1948.

In his novel entitled *Prem, Mrityu Ki Nakshatra*, Gupta transformed an apparently simple plot into a magical tale of relationship and destiny. In his *Gadya Samgraha*, Gupta expressed an unfathomable love for the aboriginals and the

endangered species living in this planet. He holds that the ultimate significance of man's existence lies in his ability to remain as a part of the everlasting flow of trees, animals and water. Though Gupta authored some fictional works, his contribution to the field of contemporary Bengali poetry placed him among the greats. What is poetry to him? Let's have a look at his own words:

'A poem is not merely a collection of beauty, and it's certainly not the embodiment of the paragon 'Tilottama' either. A poem, rather, has a unique structure and an organic whole. If we compare, it may appear as a bright female figure or the stature of a strong male person; it may also represent a blossomed creeper or even sometimes you may feel it as the giant of a quiet and calm ancient tree.

Every poem has a separate and unique simile lying in the huge treasury of nature. A good poem is composed of many insignificants and some significant all of which remain attached to each other in an infallible association.'

'The most quiet practice being meditation at the corner of your

Manindra Gupta with his wife Debarati Mitra





Receiving Sahitya Akademi Award in 2011

room, the most solitary game being cross-word puzzle, my poetry writing is far cheaper, docile and solitary than those. A painter, a dancer, an actor or a player claims a lot of attention, service, price, and hope from the family and society. I don't ask for such things. While writing my poetry I don't ask for a single farthing from the family fund, or don't disturb and make someone deaf by rehearsing or practising for voice training. I don't light up the room till mid-night, don't return home untimely or late and don't arrange poetry sessions at my home.

Let me confess, when I write poems on the back leaf of an used cash-memo or scribble it on the brown packets of dry tea or book-wrappers, it flows smoother. One of my friends, after his business was closed, gifted me a full book of delivery-challan. The size was demi-octavo, the pages were yellow, pink and white in turn. I wrote all my poems of *Lal Schoolbari* on those delivery-challans.'

Through his whole life Manindra Gupta gathered a lot of experiences which are so varied in themselves.

Collection

It started with postage stamps—
Then matchboxes, coins, masks,
butterflies, pebbles,
Finally moon rocks.
But these are fit for milk-fed children—
Therefore, my gaze then shifted to
adult manly things.
And I can say, in my proud collection
now there are
About fifty chastity belts worn by
European satis,
Pigtails and scalps complete with hair tufts
Ripped from Red Indian braves
while alive,
Murderous choppers of Naga and
Bornean headhunters,
Strangler saris of Bengali suicides
(including two Balucharis),
Tattooed skin from the backs and lower
bellies of Maori beauties,
Post-nuclear-war black, yellow and white
human foetuses, at different stages.
At present I am searching for
The brain of a sadhu in contemplative
trance, and
A round rod that fits a square hole,
as in a sheath,
Or vice versa.

Samgraha, Translated by Ananda Lal

Presently, Manindra Gupta lives in Kolkata with wife Debarati Mitra.



Receiving Rabindra Puraskar in 2010

Select Bibliography

Poetry

Neel Patharer Akash, Kolkata, 1969
Moupokader Gram, Parama, 1974
Lal Schoolbari, Parama, 1978

Chhatrapalas Chaitye Dinashes,
 Parama, 1986

Sharatmegh O Kashfuler Bandhu,
 Parama, 1992

Kabita Samgraha, Parama, 1994
Nameru Mane Rudraksha, Chittrak,
 2000

Tung Tang Shabda Nishabda,
 Kishalaya, 2005

Shrestha Kabita, Dey's Publishing,
 2005

Bone Aaj Concherto, Austric, 2009
Kabita Samgraha (New Edition),
 Aadam, 2011

Barir Kapale Chand, Kabitirtha,
 2014

Essays

Chander O'pithhe, Ulukhar, 1991
Tahara Adbhut Loke, Kabi Birendra
 Chattopadhyay Smaran

Committee, 1992

Parabasi, Kurani O Daruma-Sun,
 Uttaradhikar, 1998

Janamanush O Banamanush,
 Kishalaya, 2005

Gadya Samgraha, Ababhas, 2007

Ulto Katha, Katha Satya, 2011

Memoirs

Akshay Mulberry, Pratham Parba,
 Parama, 1981

Akshay Mulberry, Dwitiya Parba,
 Chittrak, 1998

Akshay Mulberry, Tritiya Parba,
 Chittrak, 2004

Akhanda Akshay Mulberry,
 (Complete in one volume),
 Ababhas, 2009

Criticism

Drakshapunja, Shunri O Matal,
 Ababhas, 2010

Biography

Rang Kankar Ramkinkar, Ababhas,
 2014

Novel

Prem, Mrityu Ki Nakshatra,
 Ababhas, 2005

Edited

Ek Bachharer Sharestha Kabita
1972-1976, (5 volumes of yearly
anthologies of contemporary
Bengali verse, Fellow-Editor Ranjit
Sinha, Parama,.....

Abahaman Bangla Kabita (in 3
volumes)

Vol. I - Caryagiti to Iswar Gupta,
Paa, 1989

Vol. II - Madhusudan Datta to
Nazrul Islam, Off-beat, 2000

Vol. III - Jibananda Das to Sunil
Basu, Anapeksha, 2006



At his home at Garia

A Chronology

- | | | | |
|------|--|------|---|
| 1926 | Born at a village in Barisal (now in Bangladesh). Lived in his village-home with grandpa and grandma | | |
| 1933 | Left Barisal for Silchar to live with maternal grandparents. Admitted in a high school | 1956 | Graduation from the University of Calcutta |
| 1941 | School days over. Arrived in Kolkata | 1969 | Edited <i>Parama</i> , a poetry magazine |
| 1943 | Joined the Indian Army's Engineering Corps -I.E. | 1984 | Retired from service. |
| 1946 | Back home demob | 2005 | Received Bishnu Dey Smriti Puraskar |
| 1948 | A self taught Sunday Painter, he worked hard | 2010 | Awarded Rabindra Puraskar by Govt. of West Bengal |
| | | 2011 | Received Sahitya Akademi Award |

Part of a page of Akshay Mulberry designed by Manindra Gupta

