

Attraction Is The Action

My life after coming into the orbit of Sabyasachi Guha

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Suryodaya

In a couple of week's time I called Guha again. After some chit-chat he said, "Would you mind if I asked you something?" I said, "Of course not." "How old are you?" I said I was 36. "You know, if you flip the digits you'll get my age!" "That's 63!" I exclaimed and we had a hearty laugh together. Then he asked me about my work, my parents and who I lived with in Pune. It was a brief call.

When I got married into a royal family from Serampore in December 2008, I didn't know what it would be like to live with a person who was mentally ill. I was unaware of the fact that the apparently normal behavior he exhibited initially, was the result of regular and controlled medication. Anyhow, I realized soon enough that I could not continue living like that. I decided to walk out. It was August of 2010. I took leave from my office, packed a small bag, boarded a bus to Mumbai and flew to Kolkata. Nobody had any clue what was going on, not even my parents. It was Durga Puja time in Bengal and the mood was festive everywhere, except in my mind. I had a steely resolve yet a dark uncertainty loomed before me. My parents were shocked but they didn't ask for any reasons and stood by me through everything. After my vacation was over, I went back to Pune and rented a place for my brother and I to stay together. I returned to work. Next, I decided to take legal help to get a divorce. My father approached an old lawyer in Kolkata known to one of his friends. He said it was a very complicated and lengthy process and no one could tell how many years it would take to get the papers. But miraculously, even to the lawyer's surprise, it was done in just a few months. I had to go to the court once and nobody asked me anything. My lawyer spoke to the lady judge and I just showed my face and walked out in twenty minutes. Thus ended my disastrous tryst with the institution of marriage!

Seven years later I entered into another relationship. This happened before I wrote my first letter to Golda. I was in a peculiar fix. I thought I didn't want a relationship, yet I was in one and then I wanted out! I wasn't able to handle the demands of a relationship, yet I couldn't pull myself out of it. Then happened my third phone call with Guha. Surprisingly, the first question he asked me that day was, "Do you have any relationship?" He hadn't asked me any personal questions before. I blurted out uncontrollably, "I do, but it is becoming impossible to continue it!" He exploded into a laughter that lasted for about half a minute! I listened in awe. Soon after, things turned out in a way that threw me out of that rut. The relationship lasted four months. When I look back now, I feel Guha's laughter kicked up a storm that blew away everything that could possibly come in my way of getting into his closest orbit - like Mercury around the Sun!

Around August 2016 another storm started gathering momentum. I had to quit my job because I refused to bow down to the tyranny of my boss. Before leaving on my terms, I shook up the entire hierarchy of the organization right up to the

top. I was surprised how fearless I felt at that time. It was as if some hidden strength had bubbled up from my deepest interiors. I moved on.

Back in Kolkata, life was rather unremarkable until the morning of October 3rd when I woke up to read a letter from Golda. She wrote:

Hello Tanusri,

*I am following up on your email where you expressed an interest to meet with Guha when he is next in India. I am happy to inform you that he will be in India from **25th October to November 28th**.*

Please find listed below the upcoming dates and places that he will be visiting.

<i>25th October — 28th October</i>	<i>Mumbai</i>
<i>28th October — 7th November</i>	<i>Kolkata</i>
<i>7th November — 10th November</i>	<i>Jalpaiguri</i>
<i>10th November — 15th November</i>	<i>Kolkata</i>

From 15th November Guha will be in Bangalore but the duration is yet to be determined as he also plans to visit some other cities south. Please feel free to contact me anytime to discuss the details further.

*Perhaps we shall see each other soon.
All the very best.
Golda*

To say I was delighted would be an understatement. A charge of excitement ran down my spine! My mind started spinning webs of stories imagining what it would be like to finally meet the man on the other side of the phone line, and whose picture had a hypnotic effect on me. I received another letter from Golda on October 21st.

Hello Tanusri,

Following up on our conversation, the address where Guha will be is as follows:-

*Suryodaya,
4th Floor (as you exit lift, first door on right)
171 SP Mukherjee Road,
Mudiali (near Lake)
Kolkata*

*We will be expecting you anytime after 10:00 am.
Look forward to your visit.
With respect
Golda*

“Suryodaya” means sunrise in Bengali!

October 29th, 2016 (Guha showed me just recently that this number adds up to 21, a multiple of 7) was Diwali for most of India and Kali Puja for the Bengalis. Folks at my home were busy preparing for the festivities but my mind was constantly wandering off. Was I anxious? Maybe. I got ready, booked an Uber and left home. I called Sanjiv to say I was on my way to Suryodaya. He received me smilingly at the door as I came out of the lift on the 4th floor. I sat on the left corner of a big couch facing the huge living room. There were quite a few people there. I saw Golda and she smiled at me. Sanjiv said Guha would arrive in 10 to 15 mins. The room was quiet as everybody sat silently. After a while I heard the noisy rattle of the old lift. Amongst the many voices that drifted in from the other side of the main entrance, a booming laughter dominated the soundscape. As I shifted in my seat in anticipation, a man of delicate frame, dressed in all white, smiling ear to ear, walked in followed by a group of people. I watched the spring in his step as he came in and sat next to me on the other end of the big couch. We said hello to each other and I sat silently, watching. I don't remember a word of what he said that day and I didn't ask him anything either. After he started talking I saw many people in the room doze off. I thought "What kind of strange people are these?! They have come from all over the world to listen to Guha and now that he is talking, they pay no attention and fall asleep! Couldn't they show some courtesy and try to listen to what he has to say?!"

As he spoke he kept smiling and glancing at me. He seemed a very simple and easy person to me. Before I left, he asked me where I lived in Kolkata. When I said it was Mukundapur, he said he had never heard that name before. "I would like to go visit your village one of these days," he said. I thought he was joking. He told me later that he actually thought I was from a nearby, nondescript village and that he had such fond memories from his childhood of rural Bengal, that he wanted to go see mine!

I didn't call or try to get in touch after the first meeting. Instead, I received a call from him a few days later. He invited me for lunch at Suryodaya. He would joke with me later, "You showed no interest after the first meeting. I thought she seemed like a nice girl and looked interested, what happened to her?! Then I had to call you!" I bought some *mishti doi* and showed up on time for lunch. Sanjiv had cooked several dishes and had laid them out beautifully on the table. This was my first taste of the kind of food Guha ate and treated his friends to. I knew he was traveling to Jalpaiguri with friends on the 7th of November for three days and I wanted to know if I could come. When I asked for his permission he seemed very pleased. He grinned, then turned to his other friends and said, "Look what this girl is saying! She wants to come with me to Jalpaiguri!" I booked my hotel and air tickets the next day. I think the next time I saw him was at the hotel in Jalpaiguri on the evening of the 7th. My flight from Kolkata to Bagdogra was a couple of hours after his. All of us were staying at the same hotel and everybody gathered in his room in the evening. The room was overflowing with laughter and high energy. "He has such a pleasing personality," I thought. I was introduced to Julie on this tour. For the next two days we moved around the town, drove by the forests and went up to the hills of Mongpu, where Tagore had stayed on a few occasions.

On the night of November 8th, India's Prime Minister announced the demonetization of 500 and 1000 rupee notes. We were out for dinner when Guha got the news from Revathi, an old friend of his. We quickly returned to our hotel and Guha gathered everybody for a discussion. He said he had a stack of 500 rupee notes, which a friend had given him in exchange for US dollars. The very next thing he did was to pay the hotel's bill in full, for all eight rooms, for as long as we were staying. That's how he got rid of the soon-to-be-defunct bills. It was the first time I saw somebody who was not afraid of losing money!

We returned to Kolkata on November 10th. He invited me to his hometown, Hindmotor, on the 12th. A big gang followed him everywhere! We had lunch at his family home, visited his local friends and went on a boat ride on the Hooghly River. I met many of his friends from India and abroad on this trip. I was in the same car with him on our way back when he asked me, "We are going to Antpur early morning tomorrow. Would you like to come?" I said, "I'll ask at home and let you know tonight." When I told my father I wanted to go for a day trip to Antpur, he wanted to know who the people were that I was hanging out with and why did I have to visit them so often. I didn't feel like explaining and said, "I am going anyway." It was a nice little trip. We went to the Antpur Ramakrishna Mission and had lunch there. A friend of his, a top local Police officer, had arranged everything. As we were exiting the Mission, a couple of distinguished-looking ladies and gentlemen walked in. They were probably visiting from Mumbai or Delhi. They bowed down with great respect and touched the feet of the resident Maharaj who was in the office at that time. The guy was busy chatting on his phone and didn't even bother to look at them as they prostrated. Guha rushed out of the premises and flew into a rage as he got into his car. "The guy in whose name they run this organization, Sri Ramakrishna, never allowed anybody to touch his feet," he said. "And look at these sadhus! They are shamelessly fooling people by claiming they are the true representatives of God! Such insensitivity!" I was a bit shaken by his powerful outburst. I started pondering about it on our way back and felt what he just said was an undeniable fact.

Guha left Kolkata on November 15th for Bangalore. I stayed back. He would call me once or twice every week. He encouraged me to look for a job again. Even after he returned to America, he would call every week wanting to know how I was doing and if I was having job interviews. I felt happy and was also surprised that he showed such concern about my life. Earlier I had been disillusioned and had little motivation to look for another job. Guha's gentle prodding put me back on track. I started preparing seriously and in a couple of months landed two job offers in Pune. When Guha called again, I told him I was ready to go back to Pune, to visit the two companies that had offered me employment, and decide which one to join. He was overjoyed! I remember he surprised me by saying, "You should go, it'll be good for you! And you never know, may be I'll meet you soon in Pune!" I couldn't believe my ears! I felt thoroughly charged up!

Sometime in 2008 I had written a poem *I Found You*. I can clearly recall I was overweight, lazy and depressed during that time.

*I met you somewhere my friend;
Where the hills hide in mist,
Where winding roads end in a hermitage,
Or amidst the chaos of a thriving civilization,
Where fluttering prayer flags dot the sylvan hillside,
Where dappled sunlight reaches for the mossy forest floors,
Where monks meditate in magnificent seclusion.*

*When the rains swept away a hundred years of drought,
When lightning ripped the sky
I know I called your name - and found myself lost in abstraction.*

*When a thousand stars died,
When melodies were born,
I know I held your hand - and the scent of burning sandal filled my mind.*

I know I found you.

Guha came to know about this poem around December 2017, when one day he suddenly asked me if I had ever written poetry in my life. I said I had and then dug out this one from my old emails. He made fun of my brazenly pompous attempt at writing English poetry. Then he said, “Were you hallucinating? Or was it a premonition?” I said, “I see now how fake I was then! I was so depressed that I dreamed of meeting someone who would change my life, so I imagined these things.” He said, “You know, the one thing that actually came true is you met me in the crowded city of Kolkata, like how you wrote “*Or amidst the chaos of a thriving civilization...*” He made me read this poem many times to his friends, joking and making fun of it!

One and a half years after meeting him, I wrote another poem on the 21st of March 2018.

I found you in the sunrise
Amidst the chaos of a heaving city,
Not in a forest or a cave in the mountains.
Neither a sadhu nor a fakir,
Without a garb - unguarded, effortless.
Wearing an infectious smile, without a trace of holiness!*

*I found you amidst a crowd of people,
Floating like a lotus uncorrupted,
Unmindful of the tides of praise or blame.
Neither a guru nor a guide,
Without claims or promises - a beatific simplicity.
A volcanic presence in the lives of the hungry ones!*

*I found you in this oppressive land,
Luminous, without the cobwebs of fear,
Unbound like lightning, like a feather;
A waterfall in the chasm of despair,
Without a second, singing your own song!*

*The building where I met him first was named *Suryodaya*, which means *Sunrise*.

When I read it to Guha, he listened seriously. After a long silence he said with a naughty grin, “How do you know you are not hallucinating this time?!”



My first visit to his family home in Hindmotor on November 12th 2016. I am standing third from left.

Guha's Quote:

Nothing compares to “living energy” and without it the image has no meaning. Because you are a frightened chicken, you need to hold on to some image.

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