

# THE SIGH PRESS

AMPERSAND INTERVIEW 14



Earlier this summer, we met Sonnet Mondal when he participated in the seventeenth *Voce Lontane, Voce Sorelle, Festival Internazionale di Poesia* in Florence. We're honored to interview him for our 14th Ampersand. Look forward to original poems from Mondal in our Autumn Issue that will grapple with the issue theme, "Legacy."

In the meantime, please visit [thesighpress.com](http://thesighpress.com) and remember we post on Facebook at least three times a week.

Mundy Walsh & Lyall Harris, Editors



photo credit: John Minihan

Sonnet Mondal writes from Kolkata, India, and his latest poetry books include *Karmic Chanting* (Copper Coin 2018) and *Ink and Line* (Dhaulti Books 2018). He has read at literary festivals in Macedonia, Ireland, Turkey, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Germany, Hungary, and Slovakia. His writings have appeared in publications across Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia. Mondal was one of the authors of the “Silk Routes” project of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa from 2014 to 2016. Director of Chair Poetry Evenings International Festival, Mondal edits the Indian section of *Lyrikline* (Haus für Poesie, Berlin) and serves as editor in chief of *Enchanting Verses Literary Review*. He has been a guest editor for Poetry at Sangam, India, and Words Without Borders, New York. His works have been translated into Hindi, Italian, Chinese, Turkish, Slovak, Macedonian, Slovenian, Hungarian, and Arabic.

[WWW.SONNETMONDAL.COM](http://WWW.SONNETMONDAL.COM)



TSP: *What book (not written by you) comes closest to capturing something about you? What is this aspect?*

SM: Something difficult to pinpoint when you have a mutable mind. Certain pages of some books or certain stanzas of some poems unapologetically flash my experiences, but then there are quite a few of them to mention; but I feel the book *The Essential Rumi* has a lot to tell about my thought process – about muses I have perceived but have never been able to put it down the same way.

TSP: *With the world the way it is and the innumerable distractions in daily life, how do you find the time and dedication to pursue something as ephemeral as an idea?*

SM: I feel that's the only thing I can do to escape the noise all around. With every sound getting inside me, my soul is becoming heavier each passing day and there will be a day when it won't be able to carry the load any further. I lock some heavy thoughts on paper through poetry so as to allow me some more time to move.

TSP: *What is the biggest personal obstacle you must overcome in order to write?*

SM: Expectations.

TSP: Are you “writing about what you know” as your own biography intersects and comingles with global issues? How would you characterize your point of view?

SM: I literally cannot write about things which I haven’t experienced. I have tried but failed to put myself out of my experiences when it comes to writing poetry. Global issues have always been a part of my writing. I believe poets have a responsibility to create a narrative that can give rise to discourses and literary debates, which, in turn, can outline the cultural history of the world. I always try to reach the acme of imagination through acidic truths, be it through my own personal experiences or through experiences arising out of global issues.

TSP: From *To Syrian Children*

The Unborn ones, please retreat to your mother’s womb  
The mouths of guns are shouting outside.

*Perhaps artists make work not only to understand and interpret the world, but also in order to survive it. If you can name it with some specificity, what compels you to write?*

SM: The very worth of our being gets exposed subtly through our *Karma*. We do not need to worry about immortality, as the particles we are made up of and the thoughts we render to this world never die. It is essential how we use our *Karma* to decipher the worth of living, sustaining and dying. But, in this process we shouldn’t worry too much about the fact—that there is no concrete answer to the reason behind life, because the very importance of our existence floats in darkness and blankness. Even the space that time gives us to lead our life is filled with blankness. Neither

time moves nor does it have any direction. Ways of seeing this blankness might vary, but we should always be flexible in accepting diverse theories and reject anything that comes as an obstacle to our flexibility. Through this we can not only activate our surroundings positively but understand our inner self and its importance to various elements of the world.

My writing emerges from the reaction of my consciousness with daily incidents, accidents and encounters, and takes their form through the words I chant, to realise the importance of *Karma* and awareness in my life. My poems are a part of my 'Knowing' which is supported by the unwavering will to inquire, perceive, and discern.

TSP: *It has been said that artists pursue one question in different ways throughout their work. Would you say this is true of your writing? If so, what is your question?*

SM: Just as every morning is same but still different, my muse captures the same road through which I travel to the office every day in different ways. The interrogations are different, the faces are different but the crowd and place are same. In the same way, the same question: *if inconclusiveness is the ultimate conclusion?* comes to me in various forms.

TSP: *What is something few people know about you?*

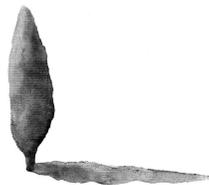
SM: Few people know about the fact that I have a daily government job apart from writing.

TSP: *If you met your 25-year-old self, what piece of advice might you give?*

SM: Go slow—just like flowing, knowing your course and terminus. If you run, *Time* will run faster. If you stand, it would stand too. It's just like your shadow. So just flow, without flooding.

TSP: *Tell us something that recently struck your funny bone or share your favorite joke.*

SM: A man whom I just recently met and admired offering me a *Gun* deal.



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