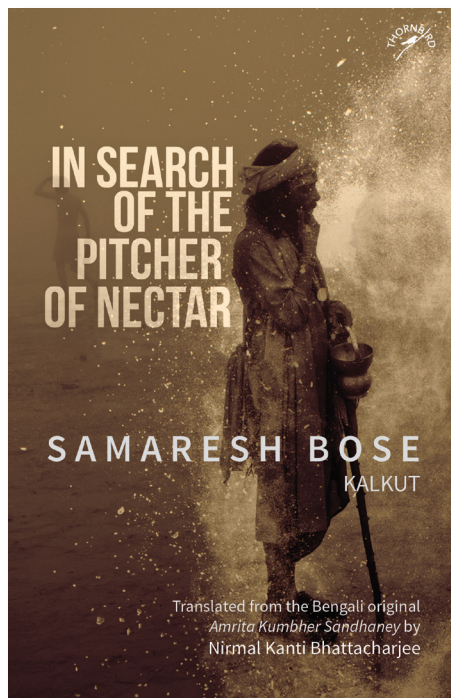




*Perfect read for all those who have visited the Kubha-mela, those who haven't but aspire to, as well as those who seek nothing religious or even spiritual but have a penchant for learning about life, about people.*

*Offers a social commentary on human civilization, its prejudices, politics and practices of everyday life.*

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## *In Search of the Pitcher of Nectar*

*Samaresh Bose*

*Translated from the Bengali original Amrita Kumbher Sandhaney by Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee*

**An experience of a journey, a philosophy in itself...**

*In Search of the Pitcher of Nectar*—a book about pilgrimage, but is it?

Authored by Kalkut aka Samaresh Bose, this travelogue narrates the author's experience of visiting the Kumbh-mela, the holy site of the confluence of three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, at Prayag, where pilgrims bathe at a designated time of the year. According to Hindu mythology, the nectar of immortality, *amrita*, arising out of the churning of oceans by gods and asuras, was spilled from the pot, *kumbh*, in this location. The seekers believe that bathing in the confluence is a means to atonement or penance for past sins.

The narrator commences on this journey with the desire not to achieve atonement, but to learn about life, about people. Through his eyes, one is also able to discern the double standards of society. Masses of people come together on the same journey, but are unable to leave behind their prejudices, addictions and afflictions—all in the hope of God taking their pain away with one dip in the holy waters.



**Samaresh Bose** is regarded as one of the greatest Bengali writers of all times. He spent his formative years undergoing varied work experiences including hawking eggs on the streets and working as a foreman in the Ichhapore ordnance factory. He wrote his first novel at the age of 21. Since then, his works have received much appreciation and have been made into award-winning films. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award (1980) for his novel *Shamba*. Among his more successful novels and short story collections are *Baghini*, *Ganga*, *B. T. Roader Dharey*, *Shashtharipu*, *Rituranga*, and others. He also excelled in writing travelogues under the nom-de-plume Kalkut.



**Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee** taught English Literature and Comparative Literature at various universities and has worked in such institutions as Sahitya Akademi, National Book Trust, and K.K. Birla Foundation. An accomplished translator from Bengali into English, he has translated fictions of Tagore, Manik Bandyopadhyay, Mahasweta Devi, Sunil Gangopadhyay and Sirshendu Mukhopadhyay. Recipient of the best translator's award from IBBY Congress, held in London in 2012, for translating Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Bhayankar Sundar (Dreadful Beauty)*, Mr Bhattacharjee has co-edited a collection of stories of displacement from Assam, titled *Barbed Wire Fence* (Niyogi Books), and two volumes of *Best of Indian Literature* (Sahitya Akademi).

## Extract from the book:

*I look inside my mind. There is a void there. People say, it is hard to find a soulmate. Is it true? I have never come to an understanding with my mind. We often run after variety with an empty mind. We are crazy about finding something, though we do not know what we are seeking. Someone has said, 'It's futile to search for Him in this earthen Vrindavan.' Someone else has said, 'If you know yourself, you can know the unknown'. And still another has said,*

*'Whatever I desire, I desire it by mistake*

*Whatever I get, I do not want it.'*

*The search for variety is in reality a search for our own mind. In the guise of seeking a man, we seek a compatible mind. So, when a friend asked with a touch of sarcasm, 'Why are you going to the Kumbh-mela? For religious purpose?' I replied, 'Just to see.'*

...

*The friend persisted, 'To see what? Lakhs of people blinded by faith?'*

*Blinded by faith! If lakhs of people are blinded by faith, then why not search for the reason? What is that celestial blinker which can blind lakhs of eyes? ...*

*... 'I don't know if they are blinded by faith, but I am going to see the gathering of people. Our desire for other things may be satiated, but the desire to see and taste humankind is insatiable. What is more strange than humankind in this world?'*

*My friend was not convinced. His lips curled in ridicule. Then he argued a lot. There is no point describing those arguments now. We are always eager to see and to achieve what we have not seen or achieved. The unknown, and the unfamiliar always beckon us.*

*True, we keep living with people all the time. We see their different types and forms. But there will be much more people of much more nature and hue in the place where I am going. We see our neighbour year after year, but we may not notice any special trait in him. When we see the same person in a different atmosphere, we are surprised to see a new light falling on him. How strange! In fact, we do not know our mind. So, we constantly look for beauty outside. ...*

*Why do we look for beauty in everything? Because we search for our minds. We try to discover our own strangeness in the mirror of the beauty of lakhs of people. This strangeness is the touchstone. Draw a line on it. You will at once know if it is gold or iron.*

*No, no further delay. My mind is already on the move, now let me move my feet too. Let me dive in the Kumbh—ocean of a lakh of hearts.*

(pages 5–8)