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## Gulnaz Fatima in Conversation with Ruskin Bond

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Q.1 Sir, first of all I just want to thank you for giving me your precious time from your busy schedule. I want to ask some questions related to your personal and professional life as well, as I am writing my doctoral thesis on your short-stories.

Ans. You are welcome, please proceed.

Q.2 Sir, How do you feel, when a researcher comes to you, and you see a number of researcher are going on your works through out the world?

Ans. Well, let us see, it has been 15 or 16 researches in the last 20 years. I get nervous when they come for interview because I have to answer them of a lot of questions and half of my day will be gone (laughs) but still its nice to know that some people are interested to do research in my work and taking it seriously enough to do (Ph.D.) on it, which is a subject I never did, so I am rather happy to know that.

Q.3 Sir, I am working on your short stories please tell me, why did you think to write in this genre of literature?

Ans. Yes, for very practical reasons, you see when I started writing for the living in my twenty years, in those days in India we did not have many publishers, not more than school books and text books, college books not general fiction, so for my stories, and I was basically a short-story writer, I had to sell them to magazine and news papers and in those days and in those days there were not many news papers and magazines as we have now a days, and for most of them

I wrote short-stories and another reason to write short-stories because it could be written in a couple of days and then I was young and I could write fast and I could bombast the magazines and newspapers.

Q.4 Sir, Why didn't you prefer to write novels and novellas?

Ans. When sitting down to write a novel, it would take more time than a short-story and sometime it take years to be completed, but I also preferred the medium just because I, ever as a reader, prefer reading short-stories to long novels, and I like the form of short-story because many of my favorite writers were short-story writer like Chekhov, Maupassant, Somerset Maugham, and Charles Dickens etc.

Q.5 In my research work I have covered almost every type of your stories, except your ghost stories. In children's omnibus there is a story entitled '*Sita and the River*' would you like to discuss about it, is it a fictitious story or a real one?

Ans. Well, what inspired it, when I was living in Delhi in my six standard, I came across a brief account of this episode and a girl and her experiences and so I expanded on it and recreated the incidents because I felt this story worth telling because it also showed the common humanity between different sects of people from different background, religion and ethnic groups and there were people who were ready to help each other so all that bring common humanity rather than the conflicts and assassinations.



Q.6 Please tell me a little about *Somi, Kishan and Ranbeer*. You mentioned these names in many of your stories. Are you still in contact with their families?

Ans. Well, they were in 'Room on the Roof', which was my first novel and that first novel was based on journal I kept in 1951, after finishing my school I turned the journal into a novel later on a couple of years later when I was in England and I used the character with the same names, so *Somi, Kishan and Ranbeer* were real character with the same names, and now sixty years have passed, *Somi* is alive and well, and he is settled in America and have a family. He is an Engineer. *Kishan* also became an Engineer, sadly he died in a car accident in

Goa, some fifteen years ago, and Ranbeer I lost touch with him when I came back from England, he was not longer in Dehradun, so other two correspond on mail me time to time. Somi still writes to me, he has grand children now.

Q.7 Who are your favorite contemporary authors?

Ans. Not many, I still much the writers I grew up on that, the writer of 30s and 40s, writers like Somerset Maugham, Rudyard Kipling, ... and others, but I don't specially depend on contemporary authors, but I still read crime fiction for relaxation so I am up to date with that sort of fiction and I also go back to classics time to time.

Q.8 What have you liked most in India?

Ans. In India, well, friendship, also the English variety of experience of life styles of livelihood from North to South, East or West continues change, so you can never run out of stories or something to write about as you may be in the West or in other countries, life style does not very much change from France to Italy to Spain to Holland like difference by in large but the life style is very similar.

Q.9 What will you suggest to upcoming writer, who are new in this field, and how can they improve their writing skill?

Ans. Well, the more they read the better they will write, the more you write the better will you write too, so I think the more familiar you are literature, in general good writers, your own style will improve, you do looking people and creating characters and stories and I think it always influence, I think and should be influence by other writers, being a writer keep your own originality, because not two genuine writers write in same style, but we learn a lot in actual language and writing and Ruting Ruting words together and so many things.

Q.10 You have acted in 'Saat Khoon Maaf', how was your experience of acting as you were fond of acting and singing in your childhood.

Ans. Yes, I was very fond of acting in my school days, they always gave me the role of drunken man, in which they would fill the bottle of visky with tea, without sugar and milk in it, so that it would look like visky and I had to pretend to get drunken on it but in 'Saat Khoon Maaf' they very kindly made me a priest and I am not a priest pleasfully, but I had this shot with Priynaka Chopra in a cafe and give her a fatherly kiss on the cheek and I did this so clumsily at first time that I knocked my glass off and they said to give another kiss, she was very supportive about it. After seven takes and seven such kisses director said 'Mr. Bond' I think you are doing it deliberately (laughs) so it was any way no more kisses so that was my only role in movies and nobody affered me any more acting since then.

Q.11 What is your perception about 'Sussana', is she a loving and caring wife or a frustrated women?

Ans. She was a real character, going back in history, hundred years back, she was a rich woman and therefore she attracted fortune hunter and in same time she was lovely and needs company. She was fond of getting married but later,

when she discovered that their intentions were not good, she got rid of them in very different way.

Q.12 Most of your stories are in first person narration. Are these stories really based on your experience or a fiction only?

Ans. As I said, many of the incidents and peoples are from real life, I often embellish or expand on them like, take uncle Ken, I wrote humor stories rounding this character and then I gone well beyond the real facts into inventing stories but still they must be true to his/her nature of character that they can look like a real character.

Q.13 Is Uncle Ken a real character?

Ans. Yes I did have an Uncle Ken and he was whatever scam so he became a good character like grandfather, grandmother and big interesting stories. Sometime friends become good characters to write on them. My latest novel *Maharani* is also again as a basis in reality. I started it as a short-story but it gradually became a novel as I carry on writing.

Q.14 Sir, You also have written love stories which frequently end with a tragic note, I would like to ask what is your own perception of love and married life?

Ans. Well not so much tragic note or melancholic notes because it may be it reflected myself in my 20s, you can call it my romantic period when I was always falling in love (laughs) so it got reflected in the stories, some other have rather not tragic but sad and if it might say that not happy ending anyway all that may be for getting life funnier. So I am not as romantic as I used to be (laughs). So as I said 'Love' in a lot of my stories are based on real people or actual incidents and when I run out of people, I write those stories, so there is always something to write.

Q.15 Is 'Sushila' a real character?

Ans. Yes 'Sushila' in 'Love is a sad song', is a real character, that story probably close to autobiography ... as any, not much fiction arise in that one, so some stories are almost true and another you might say apart from reality.

Q.16 How did you get inspiration to write 'A Flight of Pigeons'?

Ans. It is a story basis on a real girl I met, and then I expand it because it was worth telling to people.

Q.17 Sir you have seen both pre and post independent India, as you see now things are different, everybody is going to be a materialistic. What will you say about modern India, where values and traditions are losing their importance day by day?

Ans. People were always materialistic in fact, if you go back may be its more competitive now, may be there are more openings more career for young people but the competition is also much more difficult now because so many coming through school and you have this traffic almost necessity of getting marks of 80% or 90%, you know when I visited school this did not matter, I mean so important so its, but I think in that time in 1950s, 1960s, I don't think there is a great change, I think everything is same, at that time people wanted to

make money too, its not like that they were not materialistic, just the opportunities were limited, in that time, you finish school or colleges go into law and medicine and if you don't study, you can join the army and so many others, but did not have as today you can see a lot of opportunities are there to make good career. I was setting in a book shop a couple of weeks back at sunny book shop a young man came and asked me 'Sir when did you do your MBA (laughs) so I said there was no such thing as MBA when I was young. It is about 15 years back, along with IITs and so many different courses and line careers that are opening today.

Q.18 Have you ever been to Aligarh?

Ans. Yes I visited Aligarh in 1960-61, I stayed there for a couple of days, when I was doing some research not for academic purpose at the same time I was writing 'A Flight of Pigeons' In Aligarh there was a head quarter of General of Maratha Army and then I went to Shahjahanpur in those days, even still it has a big pathan population, in fact Shahjahan gave that capetown or district for them to be settled there at the time of Shahjahan's reign and name of captown was also given after Shahjahan and there I collected much material for 'Flight of Pigeons' as it was the centers of Pathan's population.

Q.19 What are you doing how a days, are you going to give a gift of new story to your readers?

Ans. I keep writing new stories and books, my latest novel Maharani which published two or three months back and a book of poetry for children 'Hip Hop Nature Boy' is also new, now I am writing new stories, a couple of children's book, staring another novel, writer don't retire, they may be old but their mind still functioning because there is no pension or provident funds for writer (laughs), so you have to keep making money so you can't stop writing and beside this I enjoy writing even if I did not need the money, I would still be writing.

Q.20 Is there any message you want to convey to your reader?

Ans. My readers ..., I will thank them for appreciating my stories and being my readers for so many years and I hope they will continue too to be so.

Q.21 There's a query from my supervisor Prof. Iffat Ara, she wants to know that when you sit to write, is everything which you write is pre planned or it comes in your mind spontaneously?

Ans. Both, usually a story, I mean a writing, I write it in my mind first and visualize it them I sit down and you can at least go through with it, without coming up against obstacles running out ideas because you know exactly what you mean to do so with writing stories fiction you have to write it in your head first then put it into a language but sometime in poem or verse it might be more than a sudden urge to put down feelings or thought, you know in poetry it is more spontaneous as you write.

Q.22 Are you editing a magazine 'KLOUD g'?

Ans. Yes, I am connected with a school in Bhubeneshver as an ambassador, I go there something and for it give me a change from Mussorie and I also like to

see coastal area there from 'Puri to Downpou' and then I also go to school. In school, I am one of the penal of so called experts, who interview and select children and then give them scholarship in terms of money. Yes, I am editing *Kloud 9*, a national magazine for school children from the same school in Bhubeneshver.

Q.23 Please, Tell me a little about your adopted family?

Ans. Yes, I have a large adopted family. Gautam is studying in Bhubeneshver and Siddhartha is doing fashion designing in NIFT in Chennai. I am living here with Rakesh and Beena parents of Siddhartha, Shristi and Gautam.

Q.24 What do think about social gatherings like literary festivals and parties?

Ans. I don't socialize much in parties and I am really a shy and privet person but I go to book shops on Saturday and I meet readers there, and a lot of people do come. Not only local people, but the visitors also come to see me from different parts of the countries. They come and buy books and take photographs with me.