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Vishwanath Bite in Conversation with Neelam Chandra

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Neelam Saxena Chandra is a bureaucrat working with Indian Railways. Writing poetry and fiction is her passion. More than six hundred of her stories/poems have been published in various leading Indian as well as international magazines/journals/anthologies. Nineteen of her books have been published including two novels, one novella, two short story collection, seven poetry collections and four collections of children's stories. .Neelam is a record holder with the Limca Book of Records for being the author with Most English and Hindi books published in a year. Neelam and her daughter hold record for being the first mother-daughter duo to write a poetry book for the book 'Winter Shall Fade' in Limca Book of Records, Miracle World Records and India Book of records. She has won several awards including an award in a poetry contest by American Embassy, Premchand award by Ministry of Railways, Rabindranath Tagore international poetry award, Freedom award by Radio city for her lyrics. Neelam has been nominated in the list of 78 most well known authors in India by Forbes for the year 2014 <http://forbesindia.com/printcontent/39097>

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Will you tell us something about yourself (place of birth, school and anything in between)

I was born in Nagpur. I studied in J.N. Tata Parsi Girls High School and then Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology, Nagpur. I love the place. It has made me what I am today.

Which books did you find yourself reading whilst growing up and which are you currently reading?

I grew up with books for my company. I began enjoying Enid Blyton which I received as a prize for getting good marks in school. Later my English teacher introduced me to the classics. Since then, there was no looking back. I began to decide what I like and kept moving.

Currently, I am exploring the good Indian Writing.

What inspires you to write poetry?

I really don't read any inspiration for writing poetry. Whenever there is an upsurge in emotions, they find their way in poems. My happiness and my sadness, my calmness and my turbulence, my stillness and my thoughts – all inspire me to write poetry. Sometimes, I may also just imagine about someone's emotions in a particular situation and write.

Who are some of your favorite poets?

Rabindranath Tagore, Gulzar, Neeraj, William Wordsworth, Robert Frost, Walt Whitman are some of my famous poets.

What advice do you have for aspiring poets?

I would advise the aspiring poets. Read a lot. Poetry can't be created without reading. Never compromise on language. I see quite a few youngsters using sms language for poetry – a trend I dislike. Write because it is your passion. Other things will take care of themselves with time.

Can you describe the time when you first realised that creating was something you absolutely had to do?

I think this was in my school days. That time I was an extremely reserved person, but had a strong voice erupting inside my heart. I would pour it upon pages in the form of poetry.

Do the Internet and social media contribute to the well-being of poetry?

I think they do to a certain extent. In the days when publishing poetry is not so easy – you get an audience if you write well.

What do most poorly-written poems have in common?

Bad language, little knowledge of grammar and lack of flow in thoughts are the most common traits of bad poetry.

What do most well-written poems have in common?

Flow in the poetry, use of good imagery and usage of simple, but apt words.

Why is it such a difficult market for poets right now?

Lack of interest in people in reading poetry makes it a difficult market. People are ready to spend money on anything but books. Hence, it is not a lucrative market for the publishers.

Has your idea of what poetry is changed since you began writing poems?

Time does changes the idea of what poetry is. For years, I wrote rhyming poems. Now, I am writing free verse most of the time. Initially, my poems were based on moments as if they are whole; these days, I look for completeness. I loved lengthy poems earlier, but now I feel a good poetry can even be four lines short. One basically matures as one writes.

What aspects of your poetry reader in general and Research scholars in particular must discover and explore? How would you describe uniqueness of each of your poetry collections?

I suppose my uniqueness lies in using simple words, but conveying deeper meanings. Moreover, I have written on a variety of topics such as those related to love, hope, universal brotherhood, desire, epics, persons, nation etc. I suppose these are the subjects to discover by readers in general and Research Scholars in particular.

Are there any new poets that have grasped your interest?

Yes, indeed. A lot of younger poets are doing a great job. Eagerness to learn, trying new styles while keeping in touch with the earlier trends is their strength. I have tried to encourage these youngsters and have even worked on a poetry book in Hindi with three of them. Authorspress has also come up with a fiction/non-fiction book wherein we have encouraged the youngsters in the age group of 11-21 to write and is titled ‘As a Beginner for a Beginning’.

How do you see the Literary Scene in India? Is it progressing or retrogressing?

It is a question very tough to answer.

The publishing world has gone through a sea-change and money matters a lot these days. As a result, for money, anything can get published. I can't tell you how much trash I had been asked to read in the name of literature earlier. I just couldn't move beyond a first few pages. These days, ofcourse, I read after thorough research on the writer and the book.

As a result, those writing well are pushed back if they are not ready to shelve money and it is a tough fight for them.

However, I believe it is only a temporary phenomenon and things will change for the better soon.

How will you judge the body of Contemporary Indian Writing in English in general and Indian English Poetry in particular?

Contemporary Indian Writing is very promising. India is a country with diversity and there are millions of stories lying unsaid. We see the new authors/poets pick up these stories either in their novels and short stories or poems and they, naturally, generate a lot of interest.

What is the role of the Central Sahitya Akademi in popularizing the Indian English Literature?

Central Sahitya Akademi is doing a wonderful job. We need to accept that English is very much a part of us now and give it a treatment it deserves.