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A TALK WITH NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL WRITER

(Interview)

Dr. Bijender Singh

Editor-in-Chief

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal



A renowned poet, novelist and short-story writer Neelam Saxena Chandra presently works as a Joint Secretary for U.P.S.C., New Delhi. She has been an Engineering graduate from VNIT and she has done her Post Graduation Diploma in IM & HRD and also in Finance. She has completed a course in Finance from London School of Economics. She has four novels, one novella, five short-story collections, twenty-five poetry collections and ten children's books to her credit. She is a bilingual writer; writing in English and Hindi. She holds a record with the Limca Book of Records-2015 for being the Author having the highest number of publications in a year in English and Hindi. She has won second prize in a poetry contest organized by American Embassy and in a National poetry contest organized by Poetry Council of India, 2016. She has received Bharat Nirman Literary Award in 2017, Premchand Award by Ministry of Railways, Rabindranath Tagore International Poetry Award, Freedom Award by Radio City for Lyrics along with other awards and honours. She was listed in Forbes as one among 78 most popular authors in the country in 2014.

Present interview was culled keeping in view her multifarious personality and her proclivity for writing. In this interview she tells at length about her personal as well as professional life and most particularly what she thinks about herself as a poet, novelist and short-story writer. Here are some of the excerpts of the conversations held between us:

It is a pleasure to interact with a multi-faceted personality like you. Please accept our congratulations on releasing six of your poetry books in a day.

It is my pleasure to be interviewed by your team. I owe my success to my family, my publisher and my readers.



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Script of the Interview

BIJENDER SINGH: Please tell about yourself. How did you turn for writing for the first time?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: Basically, I am an Electrical Engineer. One may feel that Engineering and writing are eons apart. However, they are complementary and one harmonizes the other. I can summarize my feelings in these lines:

Unchained words flow
creating magic on paper
and we name it
poetry...

I have been writing poetry even since I was a child. I don't really remember when I turned to writing poetry for the first time. I think

On the anguished pages of my diary,
The poetry droplets fell as balm;
Gave my mind a new vivacity,
And made my heart oh so calm!

BIJENDER SINGH: How do you see a writer in yourself? Please let me know the whole range of sort of stuff you have picked for your writing and why?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA:

I think I write
To smoothen those edges sharp,

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Which protrude and hurt me
And about the helplessness harp...

I am inspired by the very common day-today incidents happening around me to write. My subjects vary from romance to social issues to kid's stories to ghost stories, but I think the common element that binds them together is my angst against bad practices and traditions that have outlived their period and I demand equality for all.

BIJENDER SINGH: When did you start writing for the first time? Were you inspired from any person in your life or was this writing process a spontaneous activity?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: As a kid, I used to write poetry, but these would normally be locked and sealed in my diary to which rarely did the people have any access. However, I first wrote and sent a children's story for publishing to "Champak" in 2008. This was after having coined more than two thousand stories for narrating to my daughter.

BIJENDER SINGH: Please narrate the route how your first book was published and how did you feel at that moment and now when you have more than 45 books to your credit, how do you feel? What sort of difference do you feel now as a writer?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: My journey into the world of publishing hasn't been very spectacular. After having published around 50 stories/poems/articles in national magazines, I thought of having my own book. I planned a children's book and this was published by Naman Publishers, Lucknow. At that moment, I felt on the top of the world. I hadn't really seen myself as a writer and used to look with awe at the other authors. I pinched myself to believe if it was indeed true. There was no book launch and no press release. The book came very simply, but did well.

Now, after having published 45 books, I feel really wonderful. I've carved out a name for myself and my views are respected. I give all the credit to my publishers who thought that my writings were worth publishing, my friends and my family who encouraged me and my readers who read what I wrote.

BIJENDER SINGH: Are you inclined towards fiction or poetry and why? What is that draws you to write poetry and which forces trigger you off for scribble novels?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: Though poetry and fiction appear to be different, they are essentially the same. In both, we are either narrating our own feelings or the sentiments of the character in question. The rules of writing a poem and story are slightly different and here comes the distinction.

I write fiction as well as poetry. For me, poetry is essentially an experience of my heart, whereas, while writing fiction, it is mostly imagination which comes into play. Therefore, to vent out my feelings, I scribble poetry and when I am thinking of someone, I write fiction.

BIJENDER SINGH: Do you write for living or you live for writing?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: I live for writing. I am also in a full-fledged job which

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demands my time. In whatever little moments I can spare at night, I sit with my laptop and pour out my feelings. My job nourishes my mind and my writings feed my soul.

BIJENDER SINGH: Please tell something about your childhood experiences as a girl. Do you feel that the girls and women are still living under patriarchal dominance even after being a writer, model, star or a celebrity?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: I was born in a typical North Indian family where girls are brought up for marriage. However, my mother had a different dream for me. She wanted me to study and do something unique. You can say that I am trying to live up to her expectations, despite the hurdles and difficulties.

Patriarchal dominance is there in the society to a large extent, though the society is trying to break its shackles. I have myself seen the revolution during my lifetime. However, the change is slow and it will take a few more decades before it is replaced by equal treatment.

BIJENDER SINGH: Do you consider yourself a feminist writer or not? Please tell why do you think so?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: This is a complex question and can't really be answered in affirmative or negative. What I can say is that many of my short story collections deal with issues related to women. Even the protagonists of my novels are women who realize their strength when they are challenged.

BIJENDER SINGH: What sort of poetry do you write? Who is your favourite poet who inspires you to write poetry?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: I can't really classify my poetry as I indulge in various forms. I write whatever appeals to me at that moment.

Various poets have appealed to me at various points of time, but right now, I am a fan of Gulzar sahib. The depth in his poems is amazing.

BIJENDER SINGH: In which language do you feel comfortable to give vent to your emotions?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: I am a bilingual writer, writing in English as well as Hindi and I am equally comfortable in both of them. I let my emotions take their own course, and this includes the choice of language.

BIJENDER SINGH: What sort of problems did you face in your early writing career?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: Frankly speaking, I didn't face any major problems since I was writing for the sheer pleasure that I derived out of it. Getting published was a desire, but not the aim. I had a lot of patience. Whenever I was rejected, I wondered how I could improvise. My climb up the ladder has been slow but steady.

BIJENDER SINGH: Please tell about the theme of your latest novel *In the Flickering of an Eye*?

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NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: It's a story set in the interiors of Haryana. The social conditions in the country form the background of the story with sagotra marriages playing a crucial part. I am just pasting the story in short for those who are interested in it.

"Twenty five years worth of 'what ifs' and 'if onlys' have haunted and tortured Vinay. He cannot help but go back in time again and again to that one moment that changed his life forever. A chance encounter with a person from his past, and a journey through the majestic hills of Kalimpong lead him to some of his answers, in the form of an elusive woman, who bears a striking resemblance to the woman he loved and lost. Will he finally get his happily-ever-after? Or will his story, tarnished when he was nineteen by the gotra system, forever be punctuated with too many fullstops? Read on to find out more."

BIJENDER SINGH: What sort of recurring themes are in your poetry?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: Inspiration is a recurring theme in my poetry. I believe that a motivated person can do wonders. I try to make my reader more enthusiastic and vivacious.

I've also written a lot on social issues, since these are very close to my heart. Words have an innate strength in them and it is through my poetry that I wish to raise awareness about the issues.

BIJENDER SINGH: How do you see yourself as a writer in a couple of years?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: I wish to write more and more meaningful stories/poems that are strong enough to touch the hearts of my readers.

BIJENDER SINGH: How do you manage writing despite being a traditional Indian wife, an officer in UPSC, a mother, a wife and in many other roles in the Indian society? How do you derive time for bulk of your writing?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: Various factors play an important role in my sojourn in the world of writing:

1. Being in a senior managerial job, I learnt to prioritize things in life.
2. It is nice to have a supportive family who've believed in me.
3. Since the flow of my emotions is strong, I find time to write despite the challenges.

BIJENDER SINGH: Can the writing in the present Indian scenario feed an empty stomach for the full time writers? How do you feel about the conditions of the present writers?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: The condition of writers is not good. There was a moment in my life when even I thought of giving up my job and taking to full time writing; however I dropped the idea seeing the scenario. Even senior writers are not paid properly. Publishers will be after you when they wish to engage you for working with them, but they always dilly dally when it comes to payment of royalty. I did have a few bad experiences myself, but luckily, I have had more good experiences than the bad ones. A majority of the writers

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do face a lot of issues and the conditions are not conducive for feeding an empty stomach in India.

BIJENDER SINGH: What message would you like to leave for the young writers?

NEELAM SAXENA CHANDRA: I wish to tell the young writers to have more patience when it comes to writing and getting published. Becoming famous should not be the target; the aim should be to write well. The rest shall follow sooner or later.

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