

Literary Legend Speaks

Interview of Meena Mishra with P.V. Laxmiprasad

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Q- A sneak peek into the life of the Literary Legend -Meena Mishra

Ms. Mishra is an award-winning author, poet, short story writer, social worker, novelist, educator besides being a well-known publisher. She is the owner and CEO of The Impish Lass Publishing House, Mumbai, who entered the publishing world with the sole belief that Each Soul That Writes Has the Right to Get Published. She is the epitome of how a fascinating, socially driven, inquisitive mind is pivotal to the brilliant growth of society and self. Be it in the field of academics, social responsibility, or as a publisher Ms Meena stands tall due to her salient work. She is a fine blend of humility, integrity, diligence, and benevolence; a path breaker and motivating leader.

A self-made person she strived extremely hard to beat all odds in order to achieve excellence from a very young age. Marriage brought her to Mumbai offering her the platform and opportunities which otherwise would have been distant dreams. Ms. Mishra successfully

managed to turn all odds in her favour based solely on passion and grit. Coming from a small town didn't pull her confidence down.

Her tryst with the city of dreams has become legendary based upon the numerous awards that have been conferred upon her. Not one to selfishly gloat in pride, Ms. Mishra has been instrumental in sharing her good fortune with educators, learners, and struggling writers. She has also influenced multiple social causes thereby bringing a huge difference in the lives of less privileged people.

Meena Mishra has served Maharashtra in the field of education for 27 years as an English teacher. She was invited by Bal Bharati (official publishers of education department Maharashtra) and has contributed for the new textbook as a reviewer. Her articles and views are published in various educational magazines and newspapers helping learners and educators alike. She has received many awards for her contribution to the field of education including international awards. Her recent endeavour is the creation of a group called SSC EDU Warriors to conduct free training sessions for teachers teaching the Secondary School Certificate course across the state of Maharashtra.

She has also been working as the International Coordinator for British Council activities for more than 11 years. Ms. Meena Mishra has judged several illustrious and popular literary competitions and festivals notably the Lit fest. of IIT Bombay and the NM college fest., of which she is one of the sponsors now. She is also a regular panellist for various literary and educational platforms namely the Asian Literary Society. Her poems are published in several magazines including the prestigious Indian periodical Woman's Era. They have been translated and published in Spanish magazines as well. She has been a contributing author and poet for more than 200 books. Some of her books include –

- 1) *The Impish Lass - Book 1* (autobiographical anecdotes)
- 2) *The Impish Lass - Book 2* (stories revolving around her)
- 3) *Emociones Infinitas* (a collection of poems)
- 4) *No! I Don't Love You!* - (novel for creating awareness against online relationships)

The books edited by her include-

- 1) *Oops!*

2) *I Owe You One!*

3) *No! I Am Not Okay!*

4) *Tell Me My Love!*

5) *I Ain't a Saint!*

6) *My Alma Mater*

Her recent release *The Impish Lass Book 2 (TIL Stories and More)* has received rave reviews from its readers including the highly distinguished Indian nuclear scientist Padma Vibhushan Dr. R. Chidambaram. This book was also published as a research paper in *American Research Journal of English and Literature* under the title- Meena Mishra's *The Impish Lass Book 2 – A Study of Socio- Cultural Issues in India*.

She has received the Best Indian Author Award for her latest novel, “No! I Don't Love You!” that has been written to create awareness against online relationships. It will also be made into a short film for a greater impact on the youth of our country.

Ms. Meena Mishra is a one-woman army behind *The Impish Lass Publishing House* that serves as a platform to plethora of people from all walks of life in India and abroad to share their thoughts and experiences that act as gospel to aspiring youth. As part of her Corporate Social Responsibility and as the CEO of *The Impish Lass Publishing House* she has provided a platform to thousands of students and teachers to get published under her free publishing project, “The Young Bards.” Most notable among these has been the case of an 8-year-old student Mihir Sane, living in New Jersey who got an opportunity to publish his book on the legendary Chhatrapati Shivaji under her free publishing project. The book titled “Told and Untold Stories of Shivaji, was released by the MNS founder Shri Raj Saheb Thackaray. The book was also well received by the honourable Education Minister of Maharashtra, Ms. Varsha Gaikwad.

Ms. Meena Mishra has received high acclaim from esteemed newspapers like *The Times of India* and *Mid-Day*. Her articles have been featured in *The Times of India 'NIE'* and in ‘Brainfeed Higher Education Plus’ a leading educational magazine of the country.

Her ability to multitask various academic and social activity with candour, defines her as a well-balanced and brilliant individual.

Ms. Mishra is the proud recipient of multitudinous awards in 2020-21 for her contribution to the field of education and literature, some of them being:

She is recipient of – Marathi Bhasha Rajya Shikshak Puraskar-2022

She has received 1st prize in Elocution Competition for teachers organized by the Education department of Maharashtra.

She has received 1st prize in inter-school singing competition for teachers.

She has received 1st prize in inter-school Poetry writing Competition for teachers.

She has received Agnitia (one who deserves recognition) Award for her contribution towards students' learning.

She has received 2nd prize in inter-school essay writing competition for teachers.

She is recipient of Pathbreaker of the Year Award by Harper Collins in recognition of practicing innovative teaching methods to help learners construct knowledge.

She is a regular contributor to the educational journal “Winds of Change,” published by one of the biggest academic publishers of India- Madhubun Publications.

She has been awarded Wordsmith Award for her short-story by Asian Literary Society.

Her novel “No! I Don't Love You!” dealing with creating awareness against online relationships was appreciated by Union Minister Shashi Tharoor and has been accepted by a filmmaker for converting it into a short-film.

Her literary journey was published as the cover story by Literary Mirror to inspire the youth.

Her poem was read and appreciated by the living legend of Bollywood – Mr. Amitabh Bachchan.

She has received certificate of appreciation from IIT Kanpur for becoming a panellist for their Lit-Fest.

She has received token of appreciation from IIT Bombay for becoming a panellist for their lit-fest.

“No! I Am Not Okay!” the book compiled, edited and published by her, to create awareness towards mental health issues , was released at Sahitya Akademi by the director and has been

praised by Dr. Rajesh Sagar (member of Central Mental Health Authority- Govt of India and Head of Psychiatry- AIIMS) and Dr. Sadhana Kala (National Icon Endoscopic Surgeon of India- New Delhi).

She is invited to inaugurate lit fests of various schools and colleges across the country.

Under her Young Bards project, she has published thousands of students and educators across the globe.

Her views on matters of concern have been published in suburban newspapers of Mumbai.

“Great Asia Magazine,” has dedicated a special page for her stories.

She has received a certificate of appreciation for conducting an enlightening creative writing session for the department of English- Nagpur University.

She is a regular panellist for Asia’s largest lit-fest ‘Umang.’

She was invited by the famous St. Columba’s School, New Delhi for the inauguration of their first lit-fest.

To create awareness amongst the patients and caregivers, she has published a book “Ostomy Management and Stoma Care,” that was released in Chennai.

Her initiative of publishing the students and educators in a hassle-free manner, was covered by Times of India’s NIE.

She was also the winner of the prestigious ‘Womennovator Award’ as well as ‘1000 Women of Asia Award,’ given in association with the Indian Ministry of Electronics and Information technology. She has been nominated for the ‘2021 ELTons Outstanding Achievement Award,’ by the British Council. The list continues with Ms. Mishra currently becoming a member of the Maharashtra Women’s Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Special Needs).

Her outstanding contribution to the field of Education and Literature for the last two decades is a testimonial of her intellect and innovation is best suited for the coveted acknowledgement.

Ms. Meena Mishra was also nominated for the prestigious Padma Shree Award in Literature and Education.

Q. You are the CEO of the Impish Lass Publishing House. How did the very idea of establishing a Publishing House enter your mind?

I always wanted to publish my writings. I sought a publisher and ardently waited for the book. To my dismay it turned out to be much lower than my expectation. This paved way for me to start my own publishing company to satiate my dream and dreams of many passionate writers like me. I created a platform for aspiring writers at a bare minimum cost and made dream come true of many who had subdued their creative side having got caught in their mainstream responsibilities as a professional or as a home maker. I could see the joy in each contributor. I always believed Each Soul That Writes Has The Right To Get Published.

Q. What is the vision of The Impish Lass Publishing House?

The Impish Lass Publishing House works on the philosophy of its founder –

“Each Soul That Writes Has the Right to Get Published.”

Q. What is the mission of your publishing house?

A wisp of thought, a flow of ideas and a vision of letting writers get published; all led to a colourful dream ignited in the heart of an Impish Lass and made way to multifarious voices about life. My publishing aims at providing a platform to aspiring poets and writers to get published without hassle, at a reasonable rate. We also come up with many free publishing projects to serve literature and society.

Q. Can you throw light on your family background?

I was born in a small village called Pindaruch that is in Darbhanga district in Bihar. This place had no hospital, and I was born at home. My father was a central government employee, working with CCL at Hazaribagh a small town that was in Bihar but now is in Jharkhand. I was raised at Charhi. We used to stay 20 kilometers away from the town as CCL’s colony was at Charhi, a place that is surrounded by hill, mountain, river, trees and flowers. My love for nature got nurtured in this ambience.

My father was the eldest in the family, supporting his parents and seven siblings back home at Pindaruch and we five- my parents and we three kids. I wonder how with his meagre income and rationed resources he took care of his three kids’ studies and other needs. Not only that, we grew up seeing our distant relatives visiting us from various villages after completing their studies in search of job. They would stay with us till they could afford to get their own rental apartment. My father would happily search for a job for them and arrange for their stay. Maa,

was always happy hosting them with love and care. We never felt they were outsiders. For us they were family.

Q. How was your journey from Hazaribagh to Mumbai?

We had a small school in our neighbourhood and all the kids of our town studied there. I do not know what made me demand my mother to put me in an English Medium school. My mother who ardently loved me deemed it her responsibility to satisfy this need. She was not much educated but sought help from people and succeeded in enrolling me in the English Medium school with the meagre savings she had with her. That sowed seed for my journey of life. After that I went to Women's college in Hazaribagh.

Then I did my Masters in English Literature. As I was doing my studies, I also worked as casual announcer in AIR. I weaved stories and narrated. I became popular in my neighbourhood.

Then I got married and had to move to Mumbai. I did my B.Ed. from the Mumbai University. So, I had moved from a small village to a metropolitan. This city and my husband's support added manure to my aspirations.

Q. You are an academician turned creative writer. Please share your experiences with the readers.

I got settled in Mumbai after my marriage. We had to start our livelihood from the scratch. I was very new to the city set up. I never was afraid. I had trust in the almighty and my ability. I worked on our family's progress with faith. Everything was new. I left no stone unturned. I could see opportunities at all avenues. I started with giving tuitions. It was not easy. I had to learn to use the public transport of the mega buzzing city. I had to familiarise many of the routines of the city. Every step was a learning. I had many challenges from taking care of my kid to balancing work-life. I found a way for everything with strong will power and support of my husband. I studied and upgraded my qualification too simultaneously.

Each day I grab all the opportunities that come in my way and always enjoy exploring.

Q. You have written a good number of books. Which one do you think is both challenging and time-consuming?

I have written four books-

1) *The Impish Lass - Book 1* (autobiographical anecdotes)

2) *The Impish Lass - Book 2* (stories revolving around her)

3) *Emociones Infinitas* (a collection of poems)

4) *No! I Don't Love You!* - (novel for creating awareness against online relationships).

“No! I Don't Love You!” is a fiction. Writing a fiction is challenging as it isn't something you have experienced hence it needs a good amount of research work.

Q. You are a story writer par excellence. How do you define a story? Which book are you working upon these days?

My stories are based on my experiences. I internalize all my moments and like to share my experiences unedited to my readers. A story according to me is something that the readers can relate to.

I am working upon two books that includes my latest novel ‘Pindaruch (Diary of a Maithil Girl) ,’ with an excellent editorial team of Ms. Sheila, Ms. Yashoda, Ms. Kirthika and Ms. Lalita along with the illustrious illustrator Mr. Shubham Dasgupta. The Cover page has been designed by the young graphic designer, Sneh Khatri.

Pindaruch (Diary of a Maithil girl) is my eulogy to the quaint village Pindaruch, situated in the middle of modern-day bustling Bihar but has ancient links to the kingdom of Videha.

It is my world, my home that I grew up in; I present my precious little universe with its hidden treasures of myth, legend and culture that is as old as the hills around Pindaruch in a novel blurs and blends pop culture with the mythical. The novel explores both the mystical and fantastic perspective of everyday life in a flowing 'stream of consciousness' style through the experiences of the young and feisty protagonist Sitakshi Thakur.

Sitakshi, a young history graduate from an ivy League university, is a restless soul. While nursing a heart break in LA, a serendipitous meeting with the eclectic Sharlene changes the course of her life's journey ...

She finds herself curious about her cultural history and home sick for her grandmother's hugs. She convinces her parents to let her take a year off to explore Pindaruch, her grandmother's home.

The author's use of time warp through which the legend of Lord Rama and his devoted wife Sita is juxtaposed with Sitakshi's adventures, creating epic layers to the young girl's discovery of her roots.

This journey back to her grandmother's world is also a journey to find her own identity and most of all, her purpose of her life. The journey is turbulent as it is exciting- full of humour and pathos. It sensitively captures Sitakshi's coming of age, as she learns to cope in a world so unlike her own.

The novel attempts to show that the more the time moves on, the more we stay the same. And the eternal battle between the good and the evil creates the cosmic rhythm that throbs to create life.

It is a novel that blends the genres of adventure, fantasy and humour with ease to create a fast-paced story that is un-put -downable.

The second book 'relaciones dulces amargas,' being edited by Ms. Aparna, Dr.Sanam and Ms. Ushmil.

Q. How do you blend both the genres of writing, poetry and story writing?

As a child I always liked to journal my day-to-day activities. These sowed seeds to my stories. As I honed my skills in literature, I enjoyed poetry writing. I understood the nuances of poetry writing and explored in that dimension too. Luckily my passion made me succeed in both the genres. My poems have got recognition worldwide to name a few in the international magazine and Spanish magazine.

Q. You have published many books in English. Could you please throw light on them in terms of thematic output?

I never hesitate to take themes that are considered a taboo. Many things are happening, but people fear to talk about them. When given an opportunity people like to open up and also like to read about them. I read a lot and keep myself abreast of the happenings around the world. I choose topics that linger in the society and listen to my instincts and proceed undaunted.

Q. What about your writings in Hindi? Which one do you think are you more comfortable in writing – English or Hindi?

I am more comfortable with English. I enjoy writing in English. Writing in English allows me to reach to every nook and corner of the society across the world. Not all can read and understand Hindi. On the contrary as a young girl I used to write short stories in Hindi for All India Radio. Even as a casual announcer Hindi writing helped me reach the local audience. Once a writer, I think language is not a barrier. The skill reflects in all the languages.

Q. You are very active on social media. Why are you so passionate about it?

Social Media connects me to the global world. Being active on social media has both advantage and disadvantage. I have faced challenges, but I never deter. I boldly respond to intruders and stop them from such acts. I get connected to lot many like-minded people through social media. I have a robust enthusiastic social media team that is on its toes sharing our teams' achievements and endeavours on social media. I am blessed to have with me Ms. Anamika, Ms. Madhu, Ms. Vaishali as my social media team.

Q. Which of your story collections has been reader – impressed?

The Impish Lass Vol. 1 and Vol2 has been highly reader impressed. These contain the facets of my life. It has been nominated for Sahitya Akademi awards. In just a week of its release a whooping 1000 copies were sold with no formal marketing. I have always been honest in expression in all my creations.

Q. As a teacher of English, how do you manage time to cover social media, book releases and creative writings?

I plan my activities. I give 100% when I am involved in an activity. I do not crowd my brain with various portfolios. I believe things will happen. I seek help. I have many associates and team who help me out voluntarily. I never thrust responsibilities. My team has always been willingly doing the work for me. I respect their space and time. Many have told me that I understand their requirements before they themselves understand. I think it is because of the compassion I have for my associates. I value the inputs of my team. I envision and make it happen.

Q. Meena Mishra is found to play multiple roles – mother, teacher, creative writer and publisher. How are these really possible for you?

It is the undeterred passion that makes everything possible. My path has not always been rosy. I have been having challenges at every milestone. I always worked ways to tackle them. I

always see the end result and work towards it. I never give up. I feel once taken up it is bound to be achieved. I find out alternative ways rather than cribbing on the circumstances or people who have or had caused things to falter. I understand the situation and work out the next best way to get the work done. I appreciate my team and when there has been problem, I never criticize anyone in the public. I support them to my best possibility. If inspite of all the support, they do not help in completing the task, I work on better solution. If the person realizes and comes back, I look at the then situation and never carry with me any past disappointments. I trust people and help them do their best to the best of my potential. Most of the times things have worked for me and in case when things did not work, I had my team of loyal people who spontaneously gave me a helping hand expecting nothing. The mutual trust and the support I give to my team members wholeheartedly has helped me play these multiple roles comfortably. Each role I have taken, I have thoroughly enjoyed and never tried to compromise in any of the roles. I take up the responsibilities in each role to the maximum I can take up. I am never greedy to take up everything in every role. I enjoy my responsibilities. I think that is another reason for me to find balance in all my roles.

Q. How best does a creative writer reflect his ideas to his readers?

Creative writers are blessed to reflect their ideas to their readers. There are no limitations to their expressions. Creative writers if they have good vision can transform the society. I can also put it the other way, all people who have a vision or a message to impart to the society should write or at least take the help of creative writers to share it out. Creative writing is such a profound platform which truly endorses – A pen is mightier than the sword.

Q. How do you see literary writings and publications as a writer and publisher in India?

There is lot of progress in the literary writings and publications. Still a long way to go. The writers have got global knowledge these days. People are venturing into every dimension. They do not fear. Freedom of expression has increased much. Still the returns for writers and publishers are less compared to what they really deserve. Hence many writers and publishers have vanished from the field. I feel more encouragement is needed to the writers and publishers.

I do my publishing with passion. I provide an opportunity to any person who wishes to pen. I charge them very nominal to procure their book yet there are some people who still criticize the process. Most of them appreciate and are connected to me since the beginning.

It takes continuous effort to get published. Initially it has to start as a self-publishing work which requires a small investment. Publishing houses cannot afford to do the publishing free of cost. They also are in the business. They only can support the writers. The writers like in any other field should confidently invest until their writings are recognized. Unfortunately, there aren't many forums for writers to market their writings free of cost. Also, the publishing house do not get fundings to support upcoming writers.

Q. Are you a theist or an atheist?

I am a theist. I do not blindly trust God. I always believe that God helps those who help themselves. I work consciously whether anyone is watching me or not. I strongly believe there is a superpower who is always on the watch. I deliver my duties to the best of my consciousness. I also get the courage to tackle the challenges because of my belief that there is a superpower always guiding us.

Q. Given the option to a full-time creative writing career, are you ready to take up?

Creative writing is my passion. This feeds my creative component. Once an educator, I consider myself a lifelong educator. My ardent desire to teach the children can never be satiated. At no point I would forego my role of being an educator.

Having taken up multi-faceted roles, I cannot be leading in every field. I prioritize my creative journey and hence though eligible and requested to take up lead roles in various schools of Mumbai. I have been offered the post of Principal many times but I limit myself to the level where I can do justice to my varied responsibilities.

Q. What cultural values have you carried from Hazaribagh to Mumbai? Did you ever find similarities or dissimilarities in life?

Basically, every Indian has the same culture. Mumbai was a new atmosphere to me, but I never felt intimidated. I always am the same Meena whether in Hazaribagh or Mumbai. My basic value systems and beliefs never changed. Thanks to my ever-supporting husband with whose support I could be myself.

Hazaribagh had a leisurely life, whereas in Mumbai everything was fast paced. The facilities and technology were at par with the global one. This I had to take some time to adopt. With the willingness to adapt, I quickly could get accustomed. Mumbai gave me lot of exposure and opportunities to explore and progress. I owe my progress to the platform provided by Mumbai.

There is so much to learn every day and it also gives me a platform to try out what all I want to.

Q. As a teacher, Meena Mishra is known to mingle freely with the students. How best are the times when you enjoyed their company?

I thoroughly enjoy the company of my students. I started my career when I was maybe just 5 or 6 years elder to my students. From then till now I feel the same rapport with my students. I adore my students and equally they adore me. They have no inhibitions with me. They can be themselves. As a teacher I do listen and correct them whenever necessary. I do not thrust on my students instead make them realise that it is important a certain way. Once they accept, they put in their heart and soul to change themselves and I always am for them. I handle young adults and these days these kids face so many challenges. I help them introspect and find the best solution. Being an English teacher, I have all the liberty to intersperse my class with content that will help build their values. I take every opportunity to imbibe values into the children voluntarily.

Q. Please share with the readers about your university days when you did MA English?

I completed my English Honours and moved to Mumbai after marriage. I had to work to support the financial requirements of my new family. To progress in my career, I had to further study and upskill myself. This is when I enrolled myself to Mumbai University. By then I had the baby, I had my work. I had to balance a lot of things when I pursued my MA. God's grace and well-wishers' help and blessings made me manage everything and complete my Master followed by bachelor's in education.

Q. Where would you like to see yourself in future?

Each day I strive to be better than the previous day. Whatever hurdles come, I feel I can shatter them and proceed. The hurdles are temporary. I look forward to challenges. I like to try out new things. I like to help the society. I am daring. I fear none or nothing. I am considerate. I care for fellow beings. All these are not to boast but to say that this is what I am.

I see a bright future for myself. I always want to venture into new arenas. When I look back, I would want to feel happy about myself for having tried out rather than relish on having a smooth pathway with no challenges and hurdles for not trying in new dimensions. I believe in trying and trying until I succeed. I am perseverant.

I am creative. I like to experiment. I would like to see myself as a role model for many aspiring literary stalwarts. I would want me to equip myself with the skills to keep progressing to the pinnacle of achievement. One achieves through hard work and perseverance. Day in and day out I put in my hard work hence, I foresee a wonderful path and place for me in the future.

Q. Where do you place Indian Writers and Writings in English?

Indian writers have a lot of potential. The challenges they have encountered or have seen others face are diverse compared to international writers. In native language they have fared pretty well. In English some have been able to penetrate and create a mark for themselves but still there is a long way to go. Many aspiring writers should come forward and explore the field.

Q. What is your advice to aspiring storywriters in India?

Story writing is a skill. This skill can be sharpened by writing a lot. To write a lot one should observe a lot. I want the aspiring storywriters to keenly observe what is happening to them, happening in their environment. They should be aware humans. They should also read a lot. Reading helps them to comprehend various dimensions.

They should write every day. They should grab opportunity to write. We at The Impish Lass Publishing House offer variety of themes for the aspiring writers. Ours is one platform that encourages people who want to put their thoughts into writing.

When one starts writing then they will have blocks. They might not be able to proceed. Never mind. Leave the day off and continue writing the following day. Initially do not look for coherence or meaning just keep writing all your mind's thoughts.

After few days or weeks or months you will find your writing getting a form. Then there will be no looking back.