

Neelam Saxena Chandra: A Literary Luminary Bridging Languages and Genres

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Neelam Saxena Chandra is a prolific bilingual author, writing in both English and Hindi. She has published 7 novels, 9 short story collections, 46 poetry collections, and 16 children's books. Her literary achievements include holding three records in the Limca Book of Records. Neelam has received several prestigious awards, including the Sohanlal Dwivedi Puraskar for children's literature (2018) by the Maharashtra State Hindi Sahitya Akademi, the Premchand Award by the Ministry of Railways, and the Rabindranath Tagore International Poetry Award. She has also been honored with the Freedom Award by Radio City for lyrics, an award from the American Embassy presented by Gulzar Sahab, the Setu International Award for Excellence (2024), and the Reuel International

Lifetime Achievement Award, among others. In 2014, she was listed by Forbes as one of the 78 most popular authors in India.

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Sagar Kumar Sharma (S K S): What is poetry to you?

Poetry to me is the fodder to my soul. Listening to or reading great poems nourishes my soul, keeps me motivated and makes me take giant leaps in life. Writing poetry is like meditation. I travel on the roads of happiness after having written one. And who can be more blessed than a happy soul?

S K S: Tell the readers something about your work – published, and upcoming.

I am an Indian Railway Officer, working as Chief Electrical Engineer at Mumbai. I am an Engineering graduate from VNIT and have done my Post Graduation Diploma in IM&HRD and also in Finance. I have completed a summer course in Finance from London School of Economics. I have authored 7 novels, 9 short story collections, 37 poetry collections and 15 children's books to my credit. More than 2000 of my stories/poems/articles have been published in various international/national journals/magazines etc. I am a bilingual writer; writing in English and Hindi. I hold 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. I have won a prize in a poetry contest organized by American Embassy & Arushi (awarded by Gulzar sahib), award in a National poetry contest organized by Poetry Council of India, 2016, award for writing for children by Children's Book Trust, awarded a prize for my fiction by Women's Web, etc. I have received, Sohanlal Dwivedi Puraskar for children's literature by Maharashtra state Hindi Sahitya Akademi for the year 2018 for my book "Dahleez", Humanity International Women Achiever Awards 2018, Bharat Nirman Literary award in 2017, Premchand award (Thrice) by Ministry of Railways, Rabindranath Tagore International Poetry award, Soninder Samman, Shabdshree Samman, Freedom award by Radio city for Lyrics along with other awards and honors. I was listed in Forbes as one among 78 most popular authors in the country in 2014. My poem was also placed at no 7 in a contest organized by NAMI (NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness, USA) in 2021. My upcoming projects for the year include four poetry books, which I plan to published in gaps of four months each.

S K S: How would you critic your own writings?

During my initial days of writing, my group "Poets and Writers Den" was my biggest critic, besides my daughter who would often make me rewrite a few chapters even in a novel if she didn't like them. This help me chisel my pieces better.

S K S: Tell our readers about your poetic process. Also, would you like to share some stories behind the making of your favourite poems written by yourself?

Visuals have a long-lasting impact on me, like most of us. If I see someone in pain, someone in apparent happiness, or even a picture of something extremely pleasing or unpleasing to the eye, poetry erupts. Nature seems to enchant me as is evident in many of my poems. I have discovered deepest philosophies of life in the greens. Often, I write to either motivate myself or the world.

Coming to stories of making of poems - One of my poems titled “Tearful Adieu”, which was even transmitted by Doordarshan, was written when I realised that one of the persons working under me had asked his wife to abort the third child since she was a daughter (which he came to know through unfair means only, naturally!).

I often go into the skin of characters. Another poem placed at no 7 in a contest organized by NAMI (NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness, USA) in 2021 was an entire piece of sheer imagination, wherein I described the feelings of a daughter of a schizophrenic father.

S K S: T S Eliot said, ‘The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.’ What is your objective correlative? What is your story in verse?

As a child, I was a loner. I would speak very little and hence, like that wise owl, would hear more, feel more and needed a media to represent my views. Poetry became that medium.

Now, it is like a canvas where I paint my emotions through verses. At times, they are just black and white; while at other time, they are vivid.

S K S: What are your poetic resources?

Emotions...just my emotions!

S K S: Do you think poetry is a gateway to other creative arts? Of late, poetry is being talked of as a vehicle of social change, what do you think?

Oh yes, poetry is indeed a gateway to other creative arts. Let me talk about my own journey for this particular question.

I used to love anchoring programs, for which I would write down my own “muktaks” or short poems. I also tried writing comedy skits, which I would direct (and often act in!). Poetry further led me to painting too and I tried my hands at that also.

Poetry has been a vehicle of social change, not only now, but through eons. It’s like painting a picture of society and once people see it, feel it, change happens. Our mythology passed on as verses from one generation to the next for years, and that was also meant for people to learn the way society should move. Others like Rabindranath Tagore, Premchand, Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das etc could also see what’s not so good in society and what could be made better and wrote stories and poems based on that. Slowly, but steadily, things did change.

S K S: How do you see creative arts as a medium of gender sensitization?

More aware the people are about gender sensitisation, more careful and considerate they are about the issue. So writings by different people or by same poets/writers at different times and with different style of presentation on the issue certainly helps. I have seen things changing from the time I was a small girl to present times. So, I am a firm believer that more changes are just witting round the corner. They are here to arrive. Creative Arts have surely been a catalyst.

S K S: With many talented poets coming up with their remarkable works in recent days, do you think a ‘fresh canonization’ of poetry is necessary?

I don’t think so. Canonization is never good. New methods of writing evolve because people think of them differently. And old forms always stay evergreen.

For example, in the past, rhyming verses were the only known forms of good poetry. Over the time, free verses are more written and read. However, who won’t enjoy a creation of William Wordsworth? Both forms co-exist beautifully and let them be as they are.

S K S: Thank you, ma’am, for finding time for the interview. Honoured to have you in the book, Writers Speak, Vol. 2.

It’s absolutely my pleasure. Even if one person gets inspired after reading this interview, I would feel awesome.