

INTERVIEW



Padmashree Manzoor Ehtesham

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By Prof. V.G. Nand

Born on April 3, 1948 in Bhopal (capital of M.P. now), Manzoor Ehtesham comes from a pathan family. His father who was a lawyer by profession was a very broad-minded person of liberal thinking with keen interest in education and encouraged his children not only to pursue the discipline of their choice but also to have their own views, their own choices in all matters be they personal, religious or social.

An engineering drop out Manzoor Ehtesham diverted his energies towards literary pursuits and profitably used them in writing fiction and stories. His first story 'Ramzan-Mein-Maut' appeared in 1973 and first novel 'Kuchh-Din-Aur' in 1976. In due course came his most appreciated and award-winning novel 'Sookha Bargad' followed by other novels 'Dastaan-e-Lapata', 'Pahar Dhalte', 'Vasharat Manzil'; first collection of stories 'Tasbeeh', then 'Tamasha and other stories'. 'Sookha Bargad' has been translated into English and published by Rupa & Co. Talks are on for its translation into Italian. He also co-authored a play 'Ek-tha-Badshah' with Satyen. He has won a number of awards for his creations: Shreekanth Verma Smruti Samman and Bhartiya Bhasha Kolkata Samman for 'Sookha Bargad'; Veersinh Deo Puraskar for 'Dastaan-e-Lapata', both novels; Vageshawari Puraskar for 'Tasbeeh' a collection of stories and Pahal Samman, over his entire writing in 1995. He was honoured with Padmashree, a national honour,

by Bharat Sarkar in 2003. He is settled in Bhopal and lives at Shilpakar House, Opp. Grand Hotel, Bharat Talkies Chowraha, Bhopal, M.P.

1. Could you please tell us a little about yourself? You got Padmashree purely for literary achievements or some other work you might be doing apart from writing ?

I belong to a middle-class Pathan Muslim family of Bhopal. My father was educated in Islamic disciplines and could read and write Arabic, Persian and Urdu. He did not avail his degree for any job but continued with the family timber-trade. He saw to it that his progeny got education more keeping with times and I studied in an English-medium school. Our elders came to Bhopal State in around 1840s. They were educated in the mould of the day but came hunting for a living in a state that seemed to provide asylum to Pathans. I was reasonably good in school, with a liking for reading and writing without confusing it with getting printed.

I got the Padmashree for my writing.

2. How did you change the track from engineering to literary pursuits ?

It was not changing of tracks: I am an engineering drop-out. Drop-outs happen because of wrong decision-making.

3. How do you account for 'Sookha Bargad's' popularity ? Why have the people liked it so much ?

I don't think it achieved any phenomenal success. Yes, it has been appreciated. Because it tackled a theme that mattered much in our Nations life. It said so without mincing words. It was a protest against the hypocrisy that governs our lives. It tried to say all that in an honest manner through the sufferings of a generation being held responsible for the wrongs their elders committed.

4. Don't you think in 'Sookha Bagard' your energies have been more consumed in discussing Hindu-Muslim attitude, hold of religion on life due to which the delineation of major characters namely, Rasheeda and Suhail has suffered ?

I wonder. If it did not help building those characters but undermined their growth, than it is failure. My intention was to portray one of life's so many dilemmas. A pity we know or care to know so little about each other that it has to be explained over and over again.

5. Looking to the extreme physical intimacy in which Rasheeda and Vijay are involved, can we say the Indian society and in particular the Muslim society is changing on this front ?

Rasheeda and Vijay are characters of a narrative that suggests there is a big gulf between our personal and collective lives. Personal honesty despite being of great value cannot, and repeatedly is not enough in our daily social intercourse. This is neither blaming nor pleading any one. Nor can one predict what future holds. Physical intimacy is metaphorical and it cannot be said that the Muslim generality is a mirror-image of that kind of open-mindedness.

6. Is the failure of Rasheeda and Vijay and Suhail and Geeta to take their relationship to culminating in marriage due to religious and cultural differences ?

Because of lack of trust. For that, there can be ample justifications. A good relationship need not ultimately culminate in marriage. Religious and cultural differences are a reality but so is the fact that a number of people have been able to overcome them.

7. Is 'Sookha Bargad' auto-biographical ?

As much as most of my other writing.

8. The title 'Sookha Bargad' appears to be symbolic but too subtle for an average reader to understand. Do you agree ?

I do. I wish I was able to find a simpler title conveying the same anguish and concern.

9. You have headed Nirala Srujanpeeth in Bhopal ? Please tell us something about it.

Nirala Srujanpeeth was created to provide writers and scholars an ideal set-up to do their work and help the younger lot who seek advice and help. It is presently defunct.

10. What is current literary scene of Hindi and Urdu in general and in M.P. in particular ?

Nothing to speak of. Hindi has the benefit of more funds so there are more number of activities. Otherwise equally insignificant. The government Akademis are the biggest disappointment.

11. Your mother-tongue is obviously Urdu. What made you write in Hindi ?

I wanted to reach out to a large readership.

12. Finally, having raised questions pertaining to religion, castism, regionalism, language, communalism in this novel do you see any solution to these issues involving our country ?

A creative writer can protest. Social reformers have to think remedies and bring about the change. And we really need some sincere ones.

Bio:

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Prof. V.G. Nand is a retired Principal and Professor of English having taught English language and literature at graduate and post-graduate levels. He has taught Communication skills and public speaking to college students as also to professionals doing C.A. course. He had conducted Public Speaking and Effective Communication Course for Fifteen Summers for the Rotaract [Main] Club of Dombivli in recognition of which he was awarded Late Appa Datar Trophy for Best Social Worker of the town in 2001. He is a poet and translator with two publications to his credit namely TRIVIDHA in 2007 – a collection of poems in three languages, Marathi, Hindi, English and DHOOP KA SAAYA in 2012 – a collection of poems in Hindi. He has done a dozen of translations, seven of which have been published. ‘Relationships’ by N.F. Jain (English into English); some poems of Late Prof. and poet Keshav Meshram’s poems from Marathi into English appearing in Indian Literature Vol. XXIII No. 1 and 2 in 1980; two of his poems appeared in, ‘Poisoned Bread’ and ‘No Entry for the New Sun’ published by Orient Longmans in 1992 and Disha Publications in 1992 respectively, both edited by Arjun Dangle; ‘Toba Teksinh’ – Saadat Hassan Munto’s story from Hindi into Marathi for Tarun Bharat in 2005; SONBA a short novel by Ramakant Jadhav, from Marathi into English published by Aai Publications Dombivli, in 2000 and by Hope India Delhi, in 2006; ‘SONJATAK’ by Ratanlal Sanagra from Marathi into English published by Signet Publications in 2002 and Padma Binani’s A To Z Mahabharat from Hindi into English published by Binani Foundations in 2012.