

LITERARY LEGEND SPEAKS

Dr. P. V. Laxmiprasad's Interview with Dr. D. Gnanasekaran



Dr. D. Gnanasekaran

LP (**Laxmiprasad**): Please tell us about your family background.

DG (**D. Gnanasekaran**): I belong to a village-based farming community and so farming was the mainstay of my parents. My boyhood up to my schooling was spent without electricity at home as the entire village remained untouched by electricity then. I am the second among five children to my parents, and the only one to be blessed with higher education and a govt. job. I got married with a physician and have got one daughter and twin sons, all doctors by profession.

LP: You are an academician-turned-critic and creative writer. Please share your experiences with the readers.

DG: Yes. I am primarily an academician as I was appointed for that purpose. I confess that teaching is my passion and I love my live interaction with students in the classroom. An opportunity came my way to review books for the journals and magazines published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Puducherry, and I grabbed it happily. I love reading books by nature and that instinctive urge helped me do the reviewing assignments to the best of my satisfaction. In this process, I think, the fledgling critic in me was evolving by degrees and grew into a full-fledged critic later. As I was seriously engaged in teaching, research and guiding PhD scholars, I felt I could do all this only with a certain creative potential in me. However, this

active spark of creativity inspired me to blossom into a full-time creative writer after superannuation. Off and on I used to write poems and contribute to journals and magazines.

LP: In my evaluation you are a critic with a lot of potential. How do you view this observation?

DG: Thank you. I feel humbled by your observation. I suppose I have an innate critical bent of mind looking at things from different perspectives. In addition, my experience as a teacher and my love for reading helped me a lot to nurture my critical sensibilities further. My consistent practice of attending National and International Conferences/Seminars may have honed this skill of mine much more.

LP: You've written all types of books. Which one do you think is both challenging and time-consuming?

DG: Yes. I've written poetry, criticism spanning many different literatures, fiction, a book on stylistics, a host of articles on ELT and also translated works from Tamil into English and vice versa. Of all these types of intellectual outpourings and exercises, translating a work, especially poetry, is really challenging and time-consuming too.

LP: How do you define a short story?

DG: Many stalwarts like Maupassant and Poe have variously defined a short story before. I have nothing more to offer except that a good short story should have material enough to grip you from beginning to end.

LP: How do you handle both the genres of writing, for example, criticism and creativity?

DG: Writing criticism also requires creativity. In this the exercise involves a work written by another writer, and the role of a critic begins where a writer's role ends. It's an intellectual work of analyzing one or more aspects of a work under study, and at the same time, I feel, one cannot do this without a certain amount of creativity. On the contrary, a creative work involves a writer's unique way of applying the imagination to the chosen material, both real and imagined, and giving his composition the intended structure and the scale of intensity as felt by him. Of course, works, both critical and creative, are ultimately the products of human thinking.

LP: You have published a book titled *Stylistics of Poetry: A Practical Approach*. How do you rate Indian poetry in terms of stylistics from your viewpoint?

DG: Stylistics is an area of Applied Linguistics and I love it. Generally speaking, it is an intellect-based explorative linguistic study to discover how a poet has used the English language, and the methods or strategies, otherwise known as poetic techniques, adopted by him to convey his thoughts, feelings and emotions poetically. Any poem pregnant with innovative themes and techniques lends itself well to stylistics, and a few poets in India experimenting with poetry-writing really touch some established benchmarks.

LP: You're a bilingual writer. Please share your experiences as a teacher and a writer.

DG: Tamil is my mother tongue and I am considerably strong in it. The medium of instruction at school was Tamil and so I had a natural bent for Tamil literature. At times, being bilingual in class helps me as a teacher to convey ideas and subtle feelings with more clarity and poignancy.

LP: You're known as a translator. Is translating a text demanding or pressing?

DG: Definitely. Translating a text is really demanding. The translator has to be equally strong in both the languages, the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL) in terms of vocabulary, grammar and usage.

LP: Your two story collections, *Are You My Dad? And Other Stories* and *A Divine Visit and the Human Touch: A Collection of Short Stories* appear to be rooted in your first-hand experiences. What were your first impressions and influences before you attempted to write them?

DG: I have gone through numerous experiences, both predictable and unpredictable, in my roller-coaster life and also seen others around me going through the myriad vicissitudes of their lives, subjecting themselves to different emotional existential demands. All these lay dormant for long because of my hectic academic responsibilities, and when I felt it's about time someone got to hear me, the emotional turbulences in me surged forth and morphed into short stories, of course, as a result of the cumulative impact of my wide reading effort and day-to-day real life interactions with people from various walks of life, linking the past with the present.

LP: How do your short story collections impress your readers?

DG: As I told before, in my short stories I reacquaint myself with the pleasures of my childhood, boyhood, youth and all my past on the one hand, and at the same time I try to

share my pleasure and pain I've had with my readers on the other. So I strongly believe these are stories where one can relate to the characters, laugh, cry and feel with them.

LP: Academicians in India today don't take literary criticism seriously. They just contribute articles to journals and anthologies as a professional requirement. What do you think are the reasons for this?

DG: In a way, true. Most research and research-oriented activities in India today veer off the desired track and move toward a mere fulfilling need of either employment or career advancement. As a result, I'm afraid the real spirit of intellectual pursuit is increasingly diminishing.

LP: How best does a creative writer make his/her work reflect his/her ideas, values and tastes?

DG: The ideas and experiences of a writer may be personal, local and contemporary. But when all these get rolled up into a work of art in the hands of a good writer, they transcend space and time and are likely to excite or appeal to humanity perennially. Creative writing immensely gives opportunities that we need and opens up more and more vistas for us to behold and get bewildered. This serves as an inspiration to write more and more about life and look at human relations in all possible permutations and combinations.

LP: Is Tamil comparatively a better medium to communicate than English in terms of literature?

DG: No doubt one can express one's emotions and feelings, however universal they are, much better in one's own mother tongue since this kind of expressing oneself involves an intimacy and much more lucidity.

LP: There is Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Puducherry. Have you ever been influenced by Sri Aurobindo's teachings?

DG: I have had a long association with the literary luminaries of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. I often gravitate myself toward the most inspiring aspects of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

LP: I heard that Puducherry is the earlier name and that is why Pondicherry was dispensed with. Which one is culturally and linguistically correct to use?

DG: Originally this place was called Vedapuri in ancient times, and when the French occupied it, they called it Pouduke, and ‘Poudu-ccery’ (new-settlement) was derived from it. This name was wrongly spelt by a French copyist as ‘Pondicherry’. Now it has been corrected and the original name has been restored.

LP: How do you view the French influence on your native culture?

DG: As it has happened elsewhere in the process of colonization, the French language and their culture impacted the local language and culture and led to the hybridization of the native language and more importantly, the introduction of a disciplined way of administration.

LP: Do we need to touch upon spiritual values in our writings?

DG: In my opinion, if we can’t balance between social and spiritual life, however rich, powerful, famous and successful we are, we can’t feel truly satisfied. There is always a feeling of dissatisfaction within and it is the inner voice, that is, the voice of our soul that often points out the lack of balance in our life. I don’t deliberately preach but spiritual values get suffused with my writings in consonance with the type of characterization and situations I conceive in the natural course of narration.

LP: Where do you place Indian Writers and Indian Writing in English?

DG: Besides British English, several other Englishes have come into existence today, like American English, Canadian English, etc. Indians writing in English have become competent enough to express their thoughts, emotions and feelings in English almost on a par with their European counterparts. The Indian Diaspora has accelerated the growth of Indian English phenomenally. So, Indian literature in English including translations from different Indian languages has enriched our corpus of literature as a whole further.

LP: What’s your advice to aspiring story writers in India?

DG: Aspiring writers need to fervently read the great masters of the art of story-telling from across the world. In this way, you should first equip yourself with the necessary tools and different styles of communication for proper, effective and flawless composition and presentation in conformity with the nature of the intended work before attempting to translate your ideas, experiences, hopes, frustrations, memories, etc into literary products interestingly, with the stamping of your individuality on your finished product.