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Sahitya Akademi



Kailashben Antani
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invite you to

meet the author

Himanshi Shelat





Himanshi Shelat is a prominent name in post-modern Gujarati Short Story. Invaluable is her contribution to Gujarati literature during the last three decades, not only in fiction but also in other literary genres - drama, essay and memoir. Born at Surat on the 8th January 1947 in a cultured family, Himanshi attended Jeevan Bharati, a reputed school in Surat. Her grandfather, Kalidas Shelat was a learned and eminent journalist. Her mother Sudha Shelat was an ardent and voracious reader. Both played a vital role in moulding the personality of Himanshi Shelat. While in school, she was a favourite student of painting under the wings of Vasudev Smart, an esteemed painter, who helped her cultivate a special liking for the art of painting. The atmosphere of cultural ethos at home and in the school thus instilled in her, from her childhood days, a fondness for literature and music, too, in addition to painting.

Though she did post graduation in English Literature, her love for the mother tongue

led her to opt for Gujarati as her subordinate subject when she hardly knew that Gujarati was to be the powerful medium of her creative writing. She was a popular English teacher at M.T.B. College. However, deteriorating standards of education and casual indifference of students towards literature disturbed her. She began to engage herself in social work, a field of her choice. It was an endeavour from which she could later harvest fruitful achievements after her retirement from teaching in 1994.

Drawing from her personal resources Himanshi Shelat worked for destitute children - roaming on a railway platform, crouching in slums or languishing in remand homes - and undertook for some time the challenging task of reaching out to sex-workers. This first hand encounters later provided her with raw material to create many of her short stories. Her affection for the fauna - dogs and cats, monkeys and squirrels and frogs - is so deep that many pets have become her kinsfolk. These experiences have surfaced in the form of narratives in her work titled *Victor*. The readers not particularly fascinated by animal life, too, are moved by the narratives in *Victor*. In her capacity as a creative writer Himanshi Shelat has not only participated and presented papers in a number of literary seminars at regional as well as national level but also successfully organized similar seminars. Selected for Sahitya Akademi's 'Travel Grant to Authors' scheme, she had travelled in 1994 to Kolkata and

Shantiniketan. Proved to be the leading established writer of short stories after 1980, Himanshi Shelat's more than one Short Story Collections have been prescribed in the syllabi of almost all the Universities in Gujarat.

She has constantly raised her voice against communal hostilities, political intrigues and current social ills in spite of lack of sensitivity exhibited by the masses as well as the leadership. Her submissions on these topics reveal the fact that her concern for society at large is not a mere lip service. Her short stories artistically depict the themes of communal discord, lack of passion verging on cowardice of the masses, rigid and ruthless bureaucratic insensitivity of the system and amid it all the despair of helpless individual.

Her first collection of short stories, *Antaraal*, had attracted attention of readers as well as writers. Since then, during the last decade and a half Himanshi Shelat has given five collections that establish her as a Gujarati

short story writer of reckoning, quality-wise as well as quantity-wise. Without emulating or following a particular school of writing she has explored her conscience and charted a distinct path of her own perception. She steers clear of pre-suppositions or biases; her only beacon is the story. She conceives the story from her day-to-day experiences and observation of the ambience. Events neither crowd her stories nor are they lost in the torrent of narration. In almost all her stories events get immersed in the innermost consciousness of the character before emerging, hailing and stirring the reader. Conspicuous is her honest effort to shed non-essential elements of traditional as well as the so-called modern short story, to apply her talent in order only to extend the rich culture of Gujarati Short Story.

Himanshi the storyteller is conscious about the need of technical perfection but does not let the technique interrupt her expression. 'I favour neither the



With family members

introduction of unnecessary complexities nor extreme concern for technique nor indulgence in dazzling stylistic effects laboriously created just for the sake of it nor the contrived use of words to the extent of stunting the very keenness to read a story,' says Himanshi Shelat in the preface of *Antaraal*, her first collection of short stories. In her stories she has simply but unambiguously depicted reality-inner as well as outer - and subtle nuances of emotions. Ironies of life, anguish and loneliness, ethereal sensations and delicate tenderness form the kernel of her creations.

Although Himanshi Shelat may not be labelled as a feminist or a committed writer in a narrow sense, many of her stories are centred around women, each of whom has her unique inner world of intense sensitivity that does not remain hidden from the readers for long because the author shares the story with the readers, because the story is framed out of their environs. Her characters are always conscious of their lot, their fate and their helplessness, for they are women living in a patriarchal society. In her fiction we find various shades of a lonely feminine existence because her women characterisations hail from every strata of society. Neutrally and poignantly Himanshi examines the heart-rending agony of women involved in extra-marital relationships. There are stories about sex-workers and their grim existence, a topic hitherto untouched in Gujarati short stories.

Brevity and economy of words are the most remarkable merits of these stories because the writer has been able to meet the challenge of creating a compact structure within a limited framework. Her world of experiences and sensibility expands and diversifies in the third collection, *E Loko*. Contemporary problems and futile struggles against them, despair and timidity amounting to cowardice of the society, are the themes treated by her with commitment yet without bruising the artistic touch. Measured by technical as well as artistic yardsticks these stories are proved meritorious works.

Himanshi Shelat is no stranger to Gujarati readers. Her creative faculty has been and is being acknowledged at regional as well as national level. Her first collection of short stories, *Antaraal*, had earned the award of Gujarati Sahitya Parishad (1987). The second, *Andhuari Galimaan Safed Tapakaan*, with four state-level awards and Sahitya Akademi Award (1996) was the first Gujarati short story collection receiving this honour. *E Loko* was awarded the first prize of Gujarat Sahitya Academy (1998). *Platform Number Chaar*, a book of her memoirs earned awards not only from Gujarati Sahitya Parishad (1999) and Gujarat Sahitya Akademi (1999) but also the 'Nanjan Gudu Thiruma-lamba Award of Kannada' (1999) from Karnataka. *Aatham Rang*, an autobiographical novel based on the life of renowned painter Amrita Shergil was selected for an award by Gujarat Sahitya Academy

in 2002 but Himanshi Shelat did not accept it and proclaimed her desire not to be considered for literary awards in future.

Temperamentally Himanshi Shelat is a loner, prefers to keep away from large gatherings and shuns publicity. She believes in silent perseverance. She writes in a simple and striking style with deep concern for creation

itself. A possessor of *Kaaryitri* as well as *Bhaavyitri* genius, she chooses to take a respite until the creative urge compels her to produce something worthwhile. Prolific writing is not her forte. Dr Shelat, a rare blend of Commitment and Creative Art, has made a sincere and honest effort to enliven the values and standards she talks of in actual life.

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Short Stories

ANTARAAL	1987
ANDHAAR GALI MAAN SAFED TAPAKAAN	1992
E LOKO	1997
HIMANSHI SHELAT NI	2001
VAARTA SRUSHTI SAANJ-NO SAMAY	2002
PANCH VAAYAKA	2003
KHAANDANIYAA - MAAN MAATHUN	2004

Memoirs

PLATFORM NUMBER CHAAR	1998
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Essays

VICTOR	1999
EKADAA NEE CHAKALI-O	2004

Novellas

KYAARI MAAN AAKAASH PUSHPA ANE KAALAA PATANGIYAAN	2006
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Novel

AATH MO RANG	2000
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Translation in Other Languages

DRUT VILAMBIT

Translated by Others

FROZEN WHITES IN A DARK ALLEY & OTHER STORIES	2007
Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi	

Other Contributions

MONOGRAPH ABOUT SURREALISM	1987
University Grantha Nirman Board	

GUJARATI KATHA SAHITYA MAAN NARI CHETANAA
R.R. Sheth & Co.

A CHRONOLOGY

- 1947 Born 8th January, Surat, Gujarat
- 1968 M.A. (English)
Lecturer in English at MTB Arts College, Surat
- 1980 Ph. D. on subject 'Theme and Technique in the novels of V.S. Naipaul
- 1984 Joined Nandigram - a commune in search of alternative life style and devoted to the welfare activities for the tribals
- 1987 Won award for *Antaraal* from Gujarati Sahitya Parishad
- 1989 Formed a charitable trust Shishu Sahay for underprivileged children
- 1992-93 Chairperson of the Juvenile Welfare Board, Surat,
- 1993 *Andhaari Gali-Maan Safed Tapakaan* won Umashankar Joshi Award & Gujarati Sahitya Parishad award
- 1994 Dhumketu Award for *Andhaari Gali-Maan Safed Tapakaan*
- 1994 Visited Kolkata and Shantiniketan
Opted for Voluntary Retirement
- 1996 Sahitya Akademi Award for *Andhaari Gali-Maan Safed Tapakaan*
- 1997 Founded Setu Trust for the activities in the field of Non formal education and functional literacy
- 1997 Gujarat Sahitya Academy Award for *E Loko* a collection of short stories.
- 1999 *Platform Number Chaar*, a memoir, won 'NanJan Gudu Thirumlamba Award of Kannada language
- 2000 Gujarat Sahitya Academy award for *Platform Number Chaar*
- 2001 Gujarati Sahitya Parishad award for *Platform Number Chaar*



Delivering a speech at Women's Conference - 2005