Nabaneeta Dev Sen (13 January 1938 -)

Nabaneeta Dev Sen is an award-winning Indian poet, novelist and academic.

<b>Personal Life</b>

Dev Sen was born in Kolkata, to the poet-couple Narendra Dev and Radharani Devi. In addition to Bengali and English, she reads Hindi, Oriya, Assamese, French, German, Sanskrit, and Hebrew.[citation needed] In the very next year of obtaining her Master degree she was married to Amartya Sen. In 1976 they were divorced and she went abroad for higher studies. Dev Sen lives in Kolkata, in her parental house Bhalo-Basa, where she was born, now declared a Heritage Building. She has two daughters Antara Dev Sen and Nandana Sen with former husband economist Amartya Sen, and one adopted daughter, Srabasti.

<b>Educational Background</b>

She graduated from Presidency College and received her Masters degree from Jadavpur University, Calcutta; and a Masters with Distinction from Harvard University. She earned her Ph.D from Indiana University.

Dev Sen completed her post-doctoral research at the University of California at Berkeley; and Newnham College, Cambridge University. She was also a University Grants Commission Senior Fellow at University of Delhi.

<b>Professional Background</b>

Dev Sen has been a writer in residence at several international Artists' Colonies, including Yaddo and MacDowell Colony in the United States; Bellaggio in Italy; and the Mishkenot Sha'ananim in Jerusalem.

She has been a visiting professor and a visiting creative writer at several universities in the United States, including Harvard, Cornell, Rutgers, Columbia, Smith College, and Chicago. In Canada, she has been visiting professor at Toronto, York, and British Columbia. Other countries where she has participated as professor include Mexico, England, Germany, France, and Japan.

Dev Sen has delivered the Radhakrishnan Memorial Lecture series (1996–1997) at Oxford University on epic poetry.

She has held the Maytag Chair of Creative Writing and Comparative Literature at

She has represented herself and India in many international conferences, both academic and literary. These conferences have been presented at the Festival of India USA 1986; the Frankfurt Book Fair 1993; and the Munich Book Week 2002.

She has held important executive positions in International academic bodies like the International Comparative Literature Association (1973–1979), and The International Association of Semiotic and Structural Studies (1989–1994). She has been the Vice President of Indian National Comparative Literature Association; chief editor of Bengali in the Macmillan's Modern Indian Novel Series. She has also served as Member of the Jury of important literary awards including the Jnanpith award, Saraswati Samman, Kabir Samman, and Rabindra Puraskar.

Dev Sen is the Vice President of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat. She is the founder and president of West Bengal Women Writers' Association.

In 2002, Dev Sen retired as Professor of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, Calcutta. She has been working with the treatment of women in world epics and the treatment of epic poetry by rural women in India.

Dev Sen was nominated as the JP Naik Distinguished Fellow at the Centre of Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, 2003–2005, where she is translating Chandrabati’s 16th century Bengali Ramayana text into English with a critical introduction and annotations.

<b>Published Works</b>

Dev Sen has published more than 80 books in Bengali: poetry, novels, short stories, plays, literary criticism, personal essays, travelogues, humour writing, translations and children’s literature. Her first collection of poems Pratham Pratyay was published in 1959.

Dev Sen's short stories and travelogues are a rare combination of fine humour, deep human concern, and high intellect, which has made her a unique figure in the Bangla literary scene. Her first short story collection was Monsieur Hulor Holiday (1980). Travelogues like Karuna tomar kon path diye and Truckbaahane Myakmahane have become classics in Bengali literature. Additional notable works include Bama-bodhini; Nati Nabanita; Srestha kabita; and Sita theke suru.

She is a well-known children’s author in Bengali for her fairy tales and adventure stories, with girls as protagonist. She has also written prize-winning one-act plays.
Fourteen

Fourteen sticks to my hair like a blob of chewing gum
Adolescence in my palms
Moonwax trickling over my brow
Sum total: zero
Dream upon dream
Sum total: zero
Like adding dew to the wind...
This green mantle
Inside my eyes filling my eyes covering my eyes
Spread out on the dust
This green mantle
Step on it for a moment
Won’t you
Should I call it love
Should I call it longing
Inside my head these dark forests
In my heart these sixty miles of empty highway
Desolate
Jamming my jaws, rocks
Choking my throat, sand dunes
Roaring inside my head, cascades
Within my eyes filling my eyes overflowing my eyes
The moon
Stars at my fingertips
Adolescence in my palms
Five rivers gushing out between the fingers of my clenched fist
The tears of the teens melt into the air
Unfree

[Translated by the poet]

Nabaneeta Dev Sen
Memories Of A Floral Clock

Standing still by the nameless road
I hear the violence of rain
Beating on the panes
Going dark

Switching off the engine is not
Switching off memory
Your eyes
The floral clock
Survive the rain
And your tongue
The unseen pendulum
Keeps ticking away
Deep inside me
Telling time
Under the soil

[Translated by the poet]

Nabaneeta Dev Sen
The Jungle Story

My exile is over, mother,
No more living in the jungle for me
Come, mother, underneath this matted beard
Feed the familiar cheeks of your child
Open up your breasts, mother, and watch how
The seven streams of milk
Gush towards my parched tongue

Look at these feet, mother, the tiny feet
Where your golden bells had jingled
Look at this arm
Upon which you had tied your talisman
When I was born
Now look at this chest where you had planted
The sapling of a heart
In a soft green stretch of sun
In the hidden mesh of this dark jungle,
Impenetrable,
Has grown a hungry tree

With toothy leaves and sharp claws
And fierce flowers
It chews on other hearts
A fine flesh-eater

My time in the jungle is over, mother,
Now the jungle lives in me.

Nabaneeta Dev Sen
When It Rains

When it rains it seems the room itself turns blue, trembles and falls like rain, as if endless time coming from nowhere fills the room, as if endless wind blowing in carries the room to the riverbank;

  turning into a boat, I float
I get soaked; swaying, shivering, I keep moving; in the distance one can see the line where

  the river meets the sea, as if all around waves hiss, as if there’s nobody around anywhere as if a profound sobbing chokes the throat as if terrifying harsh sobs strangle the room – By what strange magic the ten directions sparkle in a moment,

  as if everything will revert to its real shape, as if all is a dance,
all is rhythm, all is tinted light –
Awakening and seeing the rain, sometimes it’s like this, then I pray Oh sky break up the room and give me more rain!

[Translated by Sunil B. Ray, Nandana Dev Sen, and Carolyne Wright with the poet]

Nabaneeta Dev Sen