



Meena Mishra's the Impish Lass Book-2 – A Study of Socio-Cultural Issues in Contemporary India

P.V. Laxmiprasad

KARIMNAGAR, India.

Meena Mishra, a Mumbai-based academician, educationist and a creative writer has many records to her credit. As a keen observer and writer, she has published two short story collections to her credit besides heading a professional publisher. Her publishing house is named as The Impish Lass Publishing House, located in Mumbai, the Business capital of India. She entitled the second story collection after the publishing house "The Impish Lass –Book 2 which was first published in 2021. The stories, long and brief, concise and pointed, depict life and people around her society. The stories further project her maturity in assessing and evaluating the society in full view of life. Though they can be reckoned to be stories in the creative sphere, they are replete with pregnant thoughts and observations. As a reader, I couldn't resist reading them in two attempts. Such is the style that Meena Mishra adopts in order to capture the reading hands. I reckon that she knows how to hold the readers in attention when they turn around each page. She builds them up with a greater knack. If creativity is her chief forte in inventing proper materials, settings and locale, it is her novelty that lends charm and elegance to the stories. A creative writer lives in the plots and characters so as to make them live in the minds of readers. Meena Mishra is adept in reaching out to her readers with adroit skill and mastery. Her impressive readable style has particularly caught my attention as she has knitted the stories in fine description and meaning. It is to the credit of her craftsmanship that the stories convey more of hidden beauties than those of outward expressions.

In the first run up to my evaluation, the stories are laden with everyday observations like the fruits of a tree are loaded. They provide artistic beauty even though rooted on her soil and life thereby a fine amalgamation of action and drama unfolds the realities for the readers. Climax –building is her asset in the stories. In fact, they enlighten the readers since they contain profound wisdom. Even a layman simply gets back to those narrations as she almost does in each story with ease and flexibility. Readability and adaptability are undoubtedly her assets of storytelling. Diction and collocation are perfectly balanced in the stories.

The story that leaves me absorbed is undoubtedly "How I Spent My First Earning". It is a story of her narrative skill and

technique. Simple English is the evidence of one's mastery over the language. Here in this story, Meena Mishra uses a style that is simple, easy and readable. It is easily comprehensible too. She recollects how her first earning came to her by way of a prize of 300/ rs in an essay writing contest. She goes nostalgic as she goes back to her principal when she was summoned to be informed about the result. The news of a felicitation function gladdened her very much. She felt like the richest girl in the world. Meena did not waste the prize money and instead bought a casserole for her mother. It was altogether an earning that put her in eternal joy and happiness. All her family members were lost in cacophonous celebration upon her victory in the essay contest and the prize which Meena eventually cherished in her heart. That was saved in the pockets of her heart forever. In yet another brilliant story entitled "How TIL Fought Her Demon", Meena Mishra presents the inhibitions and disgraces that a girl faces in the society. She is highly relevant to contemporary times and finely depicts it around a girl. The irritations, blues and frustrations and more than all these biting remarks, her physical appearance becomes a subject of debate and criticism in society. She describes her as "an average looking girl who had got fair amount of facial hair due to hormonal changes. She was shorter than other students of her class." (13). The story followed it up with how Priyanka, who was her cousin, made worst comments about her dress code which eventually drifted her into depression. Life for her hit back to a righteous action after a few years of laments. It is so common in Indian society that girls are subject to certain bad comments even by fellow-girls. Meena appears as a reformer than a mere story –teller. She exhorts the readers to observe the teenage with utmost precaution because that becomes the era of mayhem if neglected at a later stage and so it was for TIL. Shortcomings, amusements self-loathing and depression hold all the girls until the realization dawns upon them. Life is full of twists and turns. Girls have to face them and come back to seek a life of solace and leave fantasy. Ignorance of age is to be rooted out by leaving out all the dreams and illusions in life. She conveys a message to this nagging problem that any girl has to come out from the shackles of society. "She took it further by writing poems and short stories and pursued her



love for literature, finally finding refuge in it" (15) proves how best one can avoid demons in life. "Accept the good and leave out the bad" should be the everyday Mantra of a girls' life in particular that of a teenager. Her next story entitled "Her Boss" is deeply rooted in reflections of life that captivates women employees and finally puts them to untold troubles at a workplace in the Indian scenario. She narrates the events and experiences of her friend named Risa in this story. The story is a gripping account of how Risa is subject to pressures and burdens of workplace in the hands of her boss J.K.Mishra. Both happened to be classmates in Primary school in New Delhi. The narrator lost touch with her when her father was transferred to Mumbai. Her physique, build, complexion and laughter have particularly impressed her in those days of school life. She vividly recollects all those that had happened there in fine details. The narration gets prominently figures when she narrates her own experiences about her new boss. One gets the feel that how women employees are treated in offices in particular by men who head such institutions. If male arrogance and chauvinism rules it in the spectrum of life of women, it is how Risa describes her new boss as one finds it most commonly in Indian situations, "This boss of mine, he is the most ill-mannered person I have ever seen. Even if I am just five minutes late, he gets angry. He keeps me on my toes throughout the day. My whole energy gets drained meeting the deadlines given by him" (21). Risa proceeds to describe his character as, "He is arrogant, proud, haughty, over-confident" and the worst part is that every worker is petrified of him. His eyes are sharp and penetrating. Nobody wants to work for him. I don't know how to deal with him" (21). Thus the shackles of professional life figured prominently in the story which was later followed by a personal life of love and marriage and co-existence. Just as one finds that any two women when they are married usually share each other's experiences about conjugal bliss. Life for women creates tsunamis and shocks at workplace. This story is just a grim reminder of all that she had faced. A sort of frustrating professional life was taken away by a life of love and marriage. The wonders, whispers, and pleasures of a married life marked the narration of the story. Meena Mishra describes her journey as "She reminded me of a sea shore that had just experienced tsunami, and still bore traces of rubble and destruction" (21). The unending woes of Professional and married life are very succinctly portrayed in the story. If Meena is successful as a creative writer, it is because of such social issues that find creative expression and exposure. She has done it in a superb nicety. That speaks volumes of her creative talent. In the story entitled, "Candid Story Rejected", Meena deals with three main characters and as usual the story moves around them. They are Pratikshit, Aditya and Jugal. They are well familiar with each other's likes and dislikes. But the story moves around their boss who was a principled man and whose actions speak louder than words. On a day, the three friends decided to take leave for five days from the office to break from monotonous work.

Pratikshit was the first to convince his boss by applying tactics and tricks. He got the leave sanctioned. The second of them, Aditya too cooked up a story to get the leave from the boss. He was granted leave in the end. But the unfortunate was that of Jugal who could not cook up any story to convince his boss ultimately failed though his friends showed him how to do a story. All sorts of ideas failed to produce any outcome. Even all his exaggerations went in vain. His request was rejected in the end. Evasive tactics don't work out well for him just as they did in the case of Pratikshit and Aditya. Life isn't an easy cakewalk for all the three. The story is a harsh reality of unexpected turns and twists. The next story "Travelling with Kids Around" is a story of common household experiences of a travel with family members especially when it is done with kids. It is a recollection of how their journey brings back memories of different hues and plights. Debates about foodstuff figured in the story. 'Not all eat alike' is an Indian concept is finally evoked. If the child prefers to take something which the elders may avoid it is usually the Indian practice of different tastes and cuisines. It has become a fashion too. First she encountered it with her son and later with her husband. Mumbai becomes the centre stage of this story because life there is subject to fast culture. She presents the intensity as "The saddest part was that the caregiver and her sick husband had no other option but to bear with the cacophony" (97). In the end, it wasn't cacophony at all, for these parents as the chatter of children immersed them. "Frame It Right": is a story of ambiguities in language construction that finally created confusion among the recipients of Telegram. 'Right word at the right place' is emphasized in the story. One message left the entire members in chaos and confusion. To their surprise, the telegram was misquoted. They heaved a big relief in the end. Meena Mishra begins the story with an anecdote as "words are very powerful. They can construct or ruin situations. One needs to be very watchful while communicating. But unfortunately, the most careless used are the 'Words' which can break hearts, hurt feelings, excite sentiments and cause a lot of anxiety" (101). True to her observation, the story is a reminder of how language is used in specific contexts. Towards the end, one finds that the family was informed that the sender of the telegram had lost his mother. Only if the telegram would have been framed as, "My mother died come soon," this entire episode of confusion and slip up could have been avoided. The telegram brought sad news for them. They rushed to the village but found to their amazement that telegram was misquoted. As Meena rightly observes that "the incorrect choice of words converted them all into broken twigs of a tree, filled with tears of loss" is a true reminder of life during the times of telegram (104). Here I am reminded of my experience when I listened to an Australian pronouncing the sentence as "I came here to die" instead of "I came here today". The devils of bad pronunciation and incorrect framing put the listeners or readers into utter confusion. Language is funny sometimes and lethal at others. Meena exposes the

weaknesses of framing a right word for a right context. "Long Drive" is a story of Lockdown blues during pandemic times that ravaged the entire world. The worst part of lockdown as the author puts it is undoubtedly education sector that suffered unexpected troubles and plights with online teaching. Every teacher has faced the problems of online teaching across the globe. It is a story of her own experiences as a teacher who dealt with online teaching. The woes of it became unending with technology being supreme and Numero Uno. All of a sudden, teaching fraternity had to learn technology to teach online classes. Meena Mishra presents her own plight in the story. The magical sights, confirmation of attendance, triumph and excitement by the teacher and the taught, collective voice – all dominated online teaching. In between, there were technical lapses like frequent disruption of internet or poor signaling caused enormous pressure on the teachers. It was a battle between virtual classroom and physical classroom that story writer rightly projected. It is still a battle of millions of teachers that Meena Mishra has become the mouthpiece of online teaching. It is what I reckon a representative story of the world. She recollects that, "My thoughts and sense of nostalgia still had not left me, and I was now carried back to the time, and when the world would ring in regular school, heralding the end of the paper" (109). Managing online attendance is a big problem. As a result, online teaching poses problems in handling technology. A rigorous training is definitely a solution. As one who is novice in such techie issues, she lost the data and failed to retrieve the same speaks of poor handling of online teaching which every teacher faces even now. Google Drive and Zoom Apps are common household names in the world. The lessons of online teaching are forever remembered and Meena Mishra gets back to student life once again as a student. Lockdown makes her learn the lessons of online teaching techniques typically like a student. 'A teacher is an everyday learner' is emphasized in this story. In the story "Tormentor, No More!" is a story of tacking and planning and executing anything in life. It brings rewards to those who plan perfectly to save themselves from any danger or otherwise any threat. Being defensive is good but the story has many lessons to teach girls of this generation. Meena Mishra picks up a story of contemporary society and examines the confrontations and challenges by girls when someone proposes to them by social media. Phone numbers and WhatsApp status create both good and bad results. Interactions on them result in a bit more friendly familiar than that of an acquaintance. Truly, the story is a reflection of such practices even in lockdown time because a smart phone was their only pastime object. Thus, as story unfolds the climax, the boy named Prabhakar started sending messages telling her that he would love her much and wait to see her. Contrary to his expectations, the girl rejected the offer. After a few times of blocking and unblocking the phone numbers, finally the girl decided to come out openly instead of hiding and dared him. It was more like an eye opener. Blocking of

Phone number creates problems for the receivers as Meena shows in the story that to unblock them should do well instead. Any girl, as the moral of story conveys it, must be conscious of individual strength and 'punch in the gut' would be considered ideal. Blocking of phone would result in retaliations and revenges. One must raise his or her capacity to handle it. Such people can overcome these problems. "It is high time girls stop being defensive" (123) substantiates to this argument well enough. A typical reformer and revolutionary, Meena suggests a solution to all the girls that they avoid reacting to situations. I am impressed by the conclusion of story, "Think, plan, and tackle it successfully. Then it becomes a lifelong lesson" (123). Indirectly, the story awakens consciousness, and awareness among the girls. Finally empowerment is focused through the story. As a teacher of English, Meena Mishra devotes a story to her Chemistry teacher in "My Chemistry Teacher". It speaks of her love, affection and devotion to the teaching fraternity. Teaching is a sacred profession. Teachers are the backbone of society. A teacher creates a doctor, an engineer and a scientist. He is universally recognized. His position in the society is supreme and significant. History, as Meena writes, brings back the great bond between Ekalavya and Dronacharya, the most ideal relationship between teacher and student. She cites the quote as, "Education is the base on which we prepare the blueprint of our life" (143). School and education are most unforgettable for her. As a student and later as a teacher, Meena recollects the sanctity of profession and its subjects. "It is about learning various subjects" truly echoes her love and spirit of education. School, on the other hand, connects children at one place – meeting point where it imparts mental, social, psychological and emotional development of oneself. In fact, school learning is foundational and fundamental. It is school teachers who are most revered in society. There is no grudge, enmity or jealousy among the kids who become outright innocents at the school. The special reference of the story revolves around Anjana, the Chemistry teacher and Rahul, the student. All her attempts to control him yielded positive results. He scored 95% marks in Chemistry which for him was a big achievement. He thanked his teacher (Anjana) for her care, concern and interest. She is the most ideal teacher of her school. Meena rightly describes the moment of pride as something, "Though Anjana was partial, Rahul was groomed in such a way that he topped the score because of his teacher". For obvious reason, Rahul hated the subject. But in the end, he scored the maximum which delighted everybody. The writer in Meena fondly recollects the statement which Oscar Wilde held good, "What seems to us as bitter trials are often blessings in disguise" (147). A teacher can change the future of his or her students. This was proved in the story when Anjana had to be stern with Rahul which paid rich academic dividends. Usually, the success of any student is attributed to the teachers. This story is just a reflection of dedication and devotion of teachers who make the society as perfect citizens.

"A Letter to the Chief Minister" is a story of complaint against the bribery that one Lakhan Lal duped so many unemployed youth in the state of Bihar back in 1989. The complainant was a little girl who led the fight against him. It is how Meena describes that as, "She wrote a lengthy letter to the Chief Minister informing this act. She ensured that the letter is delivered to the right person they did not stick any stamp on the envelope. Such letters would require the receiver to pay and then receive. Urgent letters were sent in this manner then" (166). Then, Lakhan Lal was removed from the party. The story is an example of how the words symbolize power to break empires. Later, Lakhan Lal realized his mistake. One letter cost his career dearly. In yet another story "Many Hands", Meena Mishra goes self-revelatory as most part of the story moves around her own struggles to look after her beloved son Pratikshit and later when he was put into the hands of her mother is but unending woes of a mother particularly in Mumbai. Life of a mother was really challenging when she had to handle dual roles –motherly duties and professional commitments. Her experiences received an equal treatment when she went in a shared taxi to Colaba. Questions of upbringing her son by her mother raised so many doubts. "Did my mother remember that he was allergic to potato and banana? Did my mother know how to warm up his bath? She was driven by such questions. All of a sudden, a word as powerful as "Maa" flashed in her mind. Her son called her as "Maa". It is Durga maa who has ten hands. Thus, the woman's duties from being a mother, a wife, a teacher are always challenging. Daily chores are an additional burden for a working woman. Later, her son grew up and that gave her to concentrate on writing. "As a young girl, I had always been

a rule-breaker" (210) speaks of challenges in the adjustments of life. She fondly recollects that she has established her own publishing house as The Impish Lass House in Mumbai which has published well over five hundred writers. She is proud to have produced a good number of writers across the country. She is currently CEO of this publishing House. She concludes the story with profound revelations and this conclusion is spiritedly echoed in her comments, "It is not about work; it is about love. It is not about the profession; it is about the passion. It is not about the books; it is about the writers that make the books what they are. It is not about my baby's cry; it is about the strong, loving, confident, sorted Pratikshit, who stands in front of today" (213). To a woman, challenges are peripheral given her determination to accomplish things in life. Meena simply proves her efficiency as wife, mother, teacher and publisher. One finds in her a professional par excellence. There are other stories which move around common experiences in life. Indeed the collection is replete with brilliant moral side of the world. "Those who tell the stories rule society" (Plato). True to this universal quote, Meena Mishra will rule the world of short stories as a creative writer in future. Most common and everyday situations find literary expression. She perfectly represents the society in different vicissitudes. This is the hallmark of her story collection. This collection of short stories fashioned an oeuvre of rare elegance, social contexts, realistic portrayals and visionary reach.

REFERENCES

Mishra, Meena. *The Impish Lass Book-II*, Mumbai: TIL. 2021. Print.

Citation: P.V. Laxmiprasad, "Meena Mishra's *the Impish Lass Book-2 – A Study of Socio-Cultural Issues in Contemporary India*", *American Research Journal of English and Literature*, Vol 7, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-4.

Copyright © 2021 P.V. Laxmiprasad, This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.