



[WWW.PINTERSOCIETY.COM](http://WWW.PINTERSOCIETY.COM)

**VOL.7 / NO.1/ SPRING 2017**

---

## AUTHOR INTERVIEW

**“I feel hurt when I am not accepted as a mainstream writer... The caste question continues to haunt.”**

**Kunti in Conversation with Anjali Singh**

### INTRODUCTION:

Kunti is a well-known Hindi Dalit poet and a social activist. She was born in Alampura, Madhya Pradesh on 13 April 1957. Her poems have appeared in number of magazines, Newspapers, etc. She has two poetry collections in her name and felicitated by number of awards for her poetry including ‘*Sahitya Shiromani*’ in 2014 by India Intercontinental Culture Association (IICA) and “*Rani Laxmibai Veerta Puruskar*” by the UP Government in 2017.

The interview was conducted on 26 March 2017, 3:00 pm at the Lalit Kala Academy Guest House, New Delhi.

**Anjali Singh: Please tell us about your journey as a poet.**

**Kunti:** I started writing in the 1980s. Mine was a big family and I observed lots of things around me. I had always been a sensitive person, rather too sensitive. I got disturbed by the different events occurring around me. In 1980, I witnessed the birth of a baby for the first time. I was jolted. There was a storm inside and I wrote my first poem "*Janani*". Since then I have continued writing.

**AS: When did publishing start?**

**K:** I published my first poem in 1981. I was encouraged by my brother and I decided to send some of my poems for publishing. I contacted people in Raipur newspaper *Amrit Sandesh* and received a positive response. My early poems appeared in print in early 1980s and the journey started. Since then my works have been a part of various anthologies published from time to time.

**AS: Is it wrong to say that the Dalit women's writings in Hindi appeared post 1990s?**

**K:** No it is not a wrong notion. My case was different. I had a prosperous background and my writings were promoted by family and friends. But the scene was not so encouraging for the majority of Dalit women writers. They were writing before 1990s but could not publish their works. The encouragement was lacking.

**AS:** Still it indicates that Hindi Dalit women's writings were present before 1990s.

**K:** Yes! But they lacked documentation and remained confined within a limited place.

**AS:** Please tell about your poetry collections.

**K:** When I had built up a considerable corpus of my poems, I decided to bring out the poetry collection. I approached publisher *Shilpayan* located at Shahadra, Old Delhi. In 2011, my first poetry collection "*Andhere Mein Kandeel*" was published. The book was launched at Sahitya Akademi Delhi. The event was sponsored by Ramnika Gupta. It was attended by some noteworthy writers like Maitri Pushpa, Dr. Anamika, Asgar Wajahad Saheb, Ramesh Prajapati, Ajay Navaria, S.S. Noor (Head of *Sahitya Kala Akedemi*), Sudha Arora, Vivek Mishra, Madan Kashyap, Anita Bharati, etc. The event was aired on DD I and DD II National Channels. This poetry collection has earned me a lot of fame. My second poetry collection was "*Paanchva Mausam*", published by Kafla Publications, Chandigarh in 2014. I wrote this for my own pleasure and for myself alone.

**AS:** True! There is a lot of confessional element in the second poetry collection.

**K:** Yes. Now my third collection "*Titliyon ka Shrap*" is also ready for publication. My primary focus has been Women and Dalit literature.

---

**AS: Your first two poetry collections “*Andhere Mein Kandeel*” and “*Paanchava Mausam*” are wide apart as per themes and issues are concerned. How do you comment on that?**

K: Life has many shades. Love and relationship as themes have engaged each and every writer at some point in their career. Thus I too could not resist the appealing theme and the result is “*Panchava Mausam*”. When I started writing, my objective was to comment on the situation of different women around me. Whether they stayed at home or went out to earn livelihood. How are they seen and perceived in the society? Though I belong to the Dalit community, but I feel that there is a great similarity in the condition of women within and outside the Dalit community. For some time, I kept the caste question aside and felt as a woman who wrote on behalf of other women irrespective of caste and class.

**AS: You have raised an important point here. You dismiss caste question while penning down your thoughts and wrote as a woman. In literature, the caste question is well marked! There is a separate representation for Indian Women Writings and Dalit Women’s Writings. How do you comment on that?**

K: I see the separation of Dalit Women Writings from Indian Women Writings as another form of social oppression. I ask them how a Dalit woman is different from other women. Do they have a different body and mind? Are we not Indian enough? I see it as an agenda of a specific class to separate Dalit women’s writings from the main stream writing.

**AS: So you perceive the separation of Dalit Women's Writings and Indian Women's Writings as regressive?**

K: Yes. Though it is true that there has been a painful history of oppression and trauma running since ages against Dalit community, but things have changed. Education has made a dent in the sordid saga. Improvement can be seen but the oppression continues. Ways and means have changed. Gone are the days of bonded labors but the narrow mindset of upper caste educated people is still the same.

**AS: Your argument is pointing towards a crucial issue of inclusion of Dalit Women's Writings into the mainstream writings. The need of an hour is to break the compartments within the Women's Writing and to read a literary writing independent of author's caste. Is that so?**

K: Yes. We have proven our merit. Education has liberated us. Time has come to acknowledge and appreciate our work but not through the caste lens.

**AS: Are the issues of Dalit Women's Writings and Indian Women's Writings, the same?**

K: Yes. They are certainly women's issues. It is an irony that women's education was advocated for the first time by Savitri Bai Phule. During 19<sup>th</sup> century, even Brahmin women were declined education. Phule fought for all. But who remembers her? Did mainstream activists and authors promote her name as the first women educator and a feminist? Did they adopt her as their icon? It makes

---

me sad when I see that her seminal contribution to the women's liberation has long been forgotten.

**AS: Dr. Ambedkar too brought Hindu Code Bill in favor of all women venturing beyond caste question.**

K: Yes! But who remembers him now? Recently his statue has been erected in California and labelled as, "Symbol of Knowledge". How many people in our country would approve of the honor bestowed on Baba Saheb? The women especially owe a lot to Savitri Bai Phule and Dr. Ambedkar but on contrary, they have forgotten those great people. We Dalits too have benefitted from the education. If we progress and express ourselves then it disturbs the mainstream authors.

**AS: Please tell about the awards you have received.**

K: I have been felicitated with "*Bundelkhand Ratan*" award by the Cabinet Minister Aditya Pradip Jain. My collection *Andhere Mein Kandeel* has been felicitated by *Kadambari Award* in 2013, from Indian Intercontinental Culture Association and *Akhil Bhartiya Kavayatri Sammelan, Gujarat* in 2012. I got *Hindi Sevi Samman* from Shri Shyam Singh, Padma Vibhushan Awardee. Recently I have been awarded *Rani Laxmibai Veerta Puruskar* by UP CM Mr. Akhilesh Yadav in 2016 for my contribution as Juvenile Magistrate and painter.

Since my childhood I painted small things till it matured into a full time engagement. I have painted lots of pictures on Dalit Life. At present around 400

illustrated works from my collection have been selected in *Hans Patrika*, *Yudrat Aam Aadmi* and around 200-250 illustrations have gone into the different publications of Ramnika Gupta Foundation. As a painter, I do not focus on the face or body. Rather each of my painting is a story in itself. It expresses the context and situation. It so happens that when I feel jolted or disturbed and mind explodes with words, a poem is created and if words fail me then painting takes the form.

**AS: In our conversation so far, you have made an important point that time has come to do away with class and caste in Women's Writings and liberate it from the caste question. Do away with the tags of Dalit women and Indian women writings since a woman is a woman. My next question is how you see your writing as different from the men's writing? How are your issues different from them?**

K: A woman shares double responsibilities of inside and outside chores. Like mother Earth, she nourishes and acts as a central unit to her family. Her seminal presence anchors the whole family and influences their behavior. If she is energetic and positive, her strength is radiated in her family members too. This energy and her concerns for family reflect in her writings while as these are absent in men's writings.

---

**AS: Please elaborate on the recurring issues reflecting in your works; issues which are close to your heart and inspire your work.**

K: I get disturbed when I see that a woman wants to do something but the societal pressures hinder her. Still I always tell them not to get deter by that. Even if society stops you, develop your ways in such a way that you snatch the opportunity. Just thinking and complaining won't solve the problems. It is important to discipline your lives. Save time for your passion. Once people see your progress, encouragement follows.

**AS: You are pointing towards the fact that if Dalit women are lagging behind, it's not only the societal pressure but also an inertia at their end too.**

K: Yes! Whether she is educated or not, one has to be aware of one's strengths and work towards strengthening them. Whatever she wanted to achieve at some point of her life but could not do so due to any reason, for them I would say that in one's life age does not matter and there is no rules applied for the right time. Whatever your likes are, be it stitching, embroidery or reading a book, pursue it. Give time to yourself. First bring determination in yourself, then change will follow in the society. Only complaining will not help.



**AS: You have stressed on two major points those disturb you. First the negativity in the society that hinders the creativity of the women and second, lethargy and lack of positive energy among the dalit women. What else?**

**K:** I get angry when I witness the double standards of educated upper caste people. They look for the ways and means to humiliate us. We are negated and our achievements are questioned. Even my achievements and awards were linked to my caste and not the merit! I feel hurt when I am not accepted as a mainstream writer. In spite of so many awards caste question continues to haunt. As I mentioned earlier even my awards are being confronted. Such painful experiences jolt me and I express the inner turmoil through the poetry.

**AS: How do you see the future of your community and Dalit women writings?**

**K:** I disagree with the term Dalit women writings. I question the need to label and compartmentalize the literature. A writing should be seen as a writing. As far as Dalit writers are concerned, Dalit women are writing but the avenues of publication are extremely limited. I appreciate the contribution of people like you who promote and contribute to the readership. If there are more people and scholars like you, a lot can be done to bring forth the literary representations of Dalit women to the foreground.

---

**AS: The main challenges stated by you is how to reach the wider readership and publication issues.**

Kunti: Yes! Publishing requires money. It is a costly affair.

**AS: One observation I want to add here is that there have been numerous literary events occurring in Delhi but not even a single Dalit poet was seen.**

K : True. The notion of equal representations on the literary platform is still a farfetched dream. Everywhere caste and class demarcation is prevalent. Society is still fractured and people operate within set boundaries. In many places I visited, men overshadowed women on the stage. Many a times ratio is as low as one in ten and I am not referring to dalit women alone. Still the patriarchal mindset has narrowed the mindset of the society. The appreciation comes only when a woman achieves certain goals and proves her mettle but for the starters and strugglers, the societal oppression and pressure continues.

**AS: Thank you ma'am for your valuable time and sharing your views. The fundamental point raised during the conversation was to do away with the labels and compartments and read the women's writings as the women's writing, keeping caste and class aside.**

**Anjali Singh** is a research scholar, pursuing Ph.D. from English Department, GGSIPU, New Delhi, under the supervision of Dr. Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi. Her thrust area is Dalit Women's Poetry in Hindi. She has presented papers in several conferences on related themes and published research papers in journals. She is currently teaching English at undergraduate level at Delhi University.

[anjali1375@rediffmail.com](mailto:anjali1375@rediffmail.com)

---