


INEZ BARANAY is soft-spoken but beneath this gentleness is a steel-like conviction which cannot be missed. Born in Naples, Italy, in 1949 to Hungarian parents, she has spent the greater part of her life in Australia and now her identity is as an Australian writer with four novels, a collection of short stories and a non-fictional work to her credit. Inez Baranay teaches Creative Writing at the Griffith University, Goldcoast, and is at present writer-in-residence at the Department of English, University of Madras, where she handles Australian literature as well as creative writing. Her trip has been sponsored by the Australia India Council.

Fascinated by the multi-culturalism in India, she has been drawn to this country for the fifth time and is now working on a novel based on South India. Reminiscing about her beginnings as a writer, she smiles, "I started late... listening to my inner voice which said 'Now or never!' It was time and age that gave me the confidence."

One of the formative influences in her early life was the French writer Colette. Colette's European and feminist sensibility appealed to the young Inez and she went back to her time and again. In her twenties, Inez was pitched right into the heart of the feminist struggle. When asked if she identified herself as a feminist, she answered passionately, "How can one be a woman and not be a feminist? Feminism is part of the fabric of what we are and what our choices are. Of course, I believe in the plurality of feminism. There are many kinds of feminism." Australia too had been a hotbed of the feminist struggle during the 1970s and today, discrimination on the basis of gender is prohibited by law.

Inez is conscious of the hypocrisy in society which condemns feminism as a movement while it enjoys the benefits brought by it. She is both angry and perturbed at the attitude of young women - even highly educated and otherwise-aware women - who look upon feminists as man-haters. When pointed out that feminism is still perceived as a dirty word in many circles, she retaliated sharply, "Yes... and in whose interest is that, anyway?" Echoing other feminists, she added, "Any woman who

Way with words



Australian writer Inez Baranay's fascination for India will come to the fore when her next novel, which is in its finishing stages, is published. A profile of the writer..

wants to be treated better than a doormat and does not call herself a feminist has got her terminology wrong." She clinched the discussion saying, "Feminism to me is the right to live with independence as a human being, making my own choices and being responsible for myself."

Marcel Proust has been another strong influence in her life. Perhaps this is the reason why she, as a writer, is interested in language as an art form rather than narrative as the principle motive of literature. She makes one realise that though readers may love a good story, it is the use of language that distinguishes one writer from another.

Writing is a pleasure but Inez Baranay believes that it also involves

a great deal of hard work and discipline. Inspiration comes only when the mind is set after days of struggle. She added with perception, "Every writer needs to be both a creator and a critic but never at the same time... If you are critical and judgmental while creating, the creative flow is curbed."

As a writer, Inez is not keen on putting herself into a work but would rather lose herself in it. Of her six books, only one may be classified as non-fiction. "Rascal Rain: A Year in Papua New Guinea" records her intense and complex experiences with different cultures during her stay in Papua New Guinea as a member of the Australian Volunteers Abroad. Once Inez Baranay had

heard someone say that travel is the saddest pleasure. Herself an enthusiastic traveller, she was struck by the truth of the statement and the outcome was a collection of short stories, "The Saddest Pleasure" published in 1989.

Each of her novels is different. The first novel "Between Careers," published in 1989, is set in the Sidney of the 1970s, a kind of hedonistic golden age when people enjoyed sexual freedom without the fear of AIDS, when education and jobs were available for one and all. These were also the early years of feminism and gay liberation.

In contrast, "Pagan" published in 1990, is based on a real-life scandal involving a famous music conductor and a woman branded as a witch - a woman ahead of her times and believed to dabble in occult and female spirituality. The backdrop is the Australian society of the 1950s, with its tense social climate, a consequence of new immigration. In "Edge of Bali" published in 1992, Inez explores the theme of tourism and the novel is set in Bali, Indonesia. "Sheila Power: An Entertainment" published in 1997, is an intriguing title as Sheila, besides being a proper noun, is also an Australian slang for woman. In the novel, we see the writer playing with a popular genre - "the sex-and-shopping novel".

Providing the finishing touches to her novel on India, Inez is filled with excitement and trepidation as this is her first attempt to portray India, of course from an outsider's perspective.

The scene is an unnamed rural spot in South India and Inez says, "I'm fascinated by the patents taken out on names, the pride in the family tree, the heritage and also the justified anxieties regarding globalisation. All this I've tried to put into the novel. I have also had to take into account post-colonial sensibilities. It is a story about four people. I'd love to have it published in India."

Post-colonial India as seen through the eyes of an outsider, an Australian? Inez, who is no stranger to India, should be able to present an impartial picture. Not just of rags and riches but the deeper sensibilities which set India apart from the rest of the world.

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*The Hindu
February 1, 2001*