

WRITING FROM THE HEART

For Shauna Singh Baldwin, being an author comes after you've written, so the work has to be the goal. "I always wanted to tell stories," she says. Priyanka Chakrabarti explores the various facets of her latest book, *The Selector of Souls*.

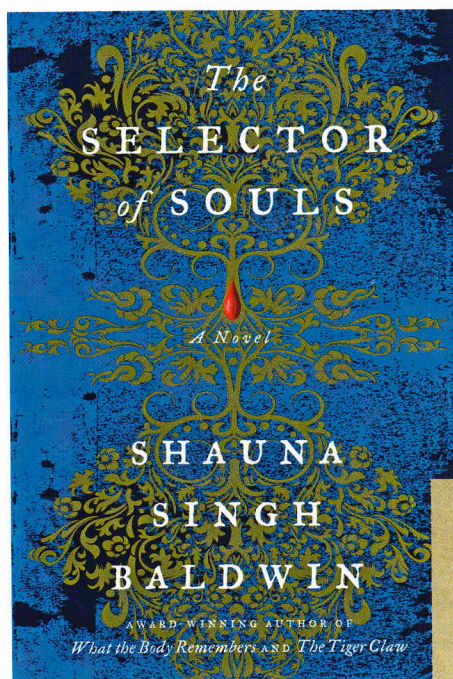
Shauna Singh Baldwin is a Canadian-American novelist of Indian descent. Having written three novels, two collections of short stories and a book of non-fiction, Baldwin has created quite some buzz with her latest book *The Selector of Souls* (Simon and Schuster).

The Selector of Souls began coming in flashes in 2005 – Anu, the Hindu-Christian mother who never wanted children; Vikas her adman husband; a saffron-clad *swami*; a little girl Chetna growing up in Toronto; Rano the Hindu-Sikh cousin in Toronto who so desperately wants a child; a convent in the hills; an Irish nun and the Jesuit Father Pashan...

"My cousin works for the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) in India and tells me sex selection is about everything. A novelist should, I thought, stay away from such a subject. Let demographers tell the world that seven million women went missing since the nineties because we humans have been selectively aborting daughters. I also knew the novel should not be about Hindus, since I am not a Hindu. Nor should it be about Christians, since I am not Christian. I just wanted to write a story about a pair of cousins, one in India, one in Canada," says the author.

This book is a meditation on creating and destroying. "How can we redeem ourselves after destroying? I hope it leads readers to discuss how we honour the feminine-creative spirit in our lives; how we honour our creations and the creations of others," she adds.

So does she have a soft corner for women related issues? – "I am concerned



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about issues of reproductive rights – both masculine and feminine. I am concerned that women should own their own bodies and make independent choices, and not end up disowned by their families for daring to be individuals," she avers.

Speaking of her writing techniques, Baldwin says, "Creating is mysterious, strange and fun! I imagine, and then apply logic, economics, psychology, philosophy,

social science, research, oral interviews, travel... Then I revisit, confirm, research, read books and more books. And then apply humour and aesthetics and give it to encouraging personal readers. All this takes years and that's why I have other sources of income." Currently, she also plays the role of a CIO of a medium-sized company.

According to pre-conceived notion, it is believed that Indian-origin writers based abroad usually write about glamorous or romantic subjects. However, Baldwin begs to differ, "I don't find discrimination against women, female infanticide, daughter



Above: Shauna Singh Baldwin
Left: Book cover, *The Selector of Souls* (Simon and Schuster)

aversion, sex selection, pay and inheritance inequity, elder abuse, domestic violence, rape, AIDS, and casteism either glamorous or romantic, but my characters face these issues in *The Selector of Souls*. If characters don't have spirit, readers wouldn't be entertained or surprised."

The author thinks that reading a novel about social injustice may simulate model behaviour, but shedding tears over imaginary people is only the beginning. "After reading a novel like *The Selector of Souls*, it's up to the reader whether or not to change his or her behaviour. And often when discussing a novel, readers find other people of conscience to help begin the process of change," she concludes. ☺