Spark

Word.World.Wisdom



India
Decoded

August 2011

AUGUST 2011

INDIA DECODED

Dear Reader,

It is never easy to talk all about India in one issue. However, what we have done is to earnestly try to bring in as many perspectives as we can in the August edition of Spark themed, 'India Decoded'.

We have a beautiful poem by R.Seshan that will awaken the Indian in you and remind you of your responsibilities towards the nation. P.R.Viswanathan brings to life Mother India yet again through his words and this time, she is worried about what's happening to her. Meera Sundararajan captures the various contradictions that make India what it is, from a commoner's point of view. Bijesh Krishnadas decodes the most talked about topic in India today—the Lokpal Bill. Parth Pandya brings in an interesting perspective with his piece—talking about the India that exists outside of India—the NRI community. Varsha Sreenivasan throws light on the martial art legacy of India—something that we ought to be proud of. Anupama Krishnakumar pens five '100-word' stories that capture little fragments of the Indian way of life. Vani Viswanathan writes an amusing piece on the connection between India and animals.

Amrita Sarkar portrays the many hues of the Indian woman through her painting, while Bharat Baswani and Nilesh J.Bhange showcase the true beauty of India through their amazing photographs!

Anupama Krishnakumar talks to four young Indian writers who sparkle among Indian authors taking the Indian English literary scene by storm. Catch Anjali Joseph, Amish Tripathi, Preeti Shenoy and Kartik Iyengar in conversation with her.

We hope this issue will not just be an enjoyable read but also one that will let you think about your role in the country's progress. Happy reading! See you next month!

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05 August 2011

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POETRY

POETRY BY R.SESHAN

THE ROAD TO FREEDOM



 ${\sf A}$ s the clock struck midnight,

A Nation stood as one,

A thousand battles had been fought,

The War for Freedom won.

Three hundred years of slavery,

And generations of shame,

Were swept away in a tidal wave,

As martyrs marched to fame.

From every corner of this land,

Sprang men of steel and grit,

With guns and swords and mighty words,

They threw the British out.

And towering above all the rest,

There rose a single man,

In a simple loin cloth he stood,

And dared the British Raj.

In the history of the world till now,

No fight like this was seen,

The might of the British Empire crumbled,

Against a non-violent dream.

For every name in the Hall of Fame,

There were a million more,

The deeds they did and the price they paid,

None will ever know.

The air of freedom that we breathe,

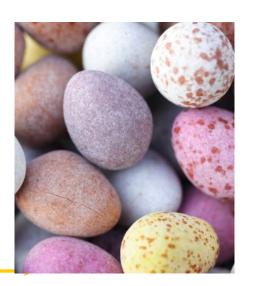
Was paid in blood and tears,

Be proud of this Nation, friends,

And make this Nation proud.

Non-Resident

INDIA



It's a well-known fact that there is an India residing outside of India in countries like the U.S., the U.K. and Australia. What exactly are the sort of sentiments that run within the minds of these non-resident Indians (NRIs)? Parth Pandya writes on the global Indian's life. Among the many things he talks about, is also their perception of the country that's their real home.

30 million of my brothers and sisters live outside India. I learnt about these siblings in a pledge I learnt in school. The number -- I need to thank Wikipedia for it. What does it mean to be a population larger than countries like Australia and Malaysia? A diaspora this size can hardly be called sporadic. Do we then have an India outside of India that is without the hegemony of borders and the dissonance of states? Is this the India of the NRI, by the NRI and for the NRI?

Each one of those who has ventured out of India to go to their destinations — be it the United States of America, or the United Kingdom, or down under in Australia, or to unexpected locations like Iceland, carries a snapshot of India that forms the basis of how they remember their place of origin. Every subsequent trip to India is an exercise in revising this image. How often have you seen the shocked expression on the face of an NRI when he looks at a menu in a restaurant

in India and utters, "Oh, is that dish worth Rs. 200?" Never mind that the same person would not blink for a moment when gobbling down a latte and a slice of bread to go with it even though it may cost the same. It isn't their fault – the complaint is not about the money involved. The shock is that of not recognising that while the India in their head has stalled to when they last visited it, or mainly, when they last spent a good time experiencing it, the real India that is growing and mutating in all ways and means, has moved ahead.

These migratory birds who leave the shores of Mumbai or rise above the smog of Delhi share a common trait – the desire to go back. I'll focus on a small sub-section to illustrate my case. Consider Indian students who come for graduate study in the U.S. From my extensive conversations with colleagues who have signed on for this non-resident experience, I have come to describe the



Literally. It is a fabulous experience, a coming-of-age for homegrown boys and girls, a step into a life which is tangentially opposite to the one you know, a rite of passage that will shadow you for the rest of your life. Therein lies the dilemma. How influential is the shadow? How long will the effects linger? How long are you bound to stay in this country? Expatriates often fail to clearly answer the one question that they should have answered foremost: why exactly are they here? For the love of God, money, education, partying, freedom, women, men, rental cars, Walmart, rental apartments, unlimited refills of soda, Taco Bell, long weekend deals, rolling Rs: one of these, all, or none? They go to the U.S., get through their Masters, get their first paycheck, their first car, make first serious attempts at arranged nuptials, actually getting married, getting their H1B visa stamped, applying for the green card, buying the first house, fussing about their lawn, buy bulk groceries from Costco and if productive, have a couple of babies too.

situation with what I call the 'n+5 theorem'. Excusing a few variations, almost every story starts with folks boarding an airplane wearing a ridiculous suit, with loads of relatives happy to see them off and a sense that they aren't really prepared for the unexpected. The trip abroad is a shift of the magnitude of the movement of tectonic plates. The breaking up of world into continents. Literally. It is a fabulous experience, a coming-of-age for home-grown boys and girls, a step into a life which is tangentially opposite to the one you know, a rite of passage that will shadow you for the rest of your life. Therein lies the dilemma. How influential is the shadow? How long will the effects linger? How long are you bound to stay in this country? Expatriates often fail to clearly answer the one question that they should have answered foremost: why exactly are they here? For the love of God, money, education, partying, freedom, women, men,

rental apartments, unlimited refills of soda, Taco Bell, long weekend deals, rolling Rs: one of these, all, or none? They go to the U.S., get through their Masters, get their first paycheck, their first car, make first serious attempts at arranged nuptials, actually getting married, getting their H1B visa stamped, applying for the green card, buying the first house, fussing about their lawn, buy bulk groceries from Costco and if productive, have a couple of babies too. The seemingly unbreakable sequence of events stated above is punctuated with trips to India where a few tears are shed with the parents, comments are made about how India is progressing, observations are made about how the country has changed beyond recognition, pleasant nods are given when told that kids are best brought up in India, U.S's role in world affairs is tch-tched, and a general doomsday prediction is made about how your life will go down the drain if you decided to stay on forever in the U.S. Sum of all fears, expectations and conversations is a common refrain: I'll come back to India in five years. Somehow, the magical number of five has stuck. Perhaps it has do with the arithmetic around finishing your degree in two-three years, getting a job and recovering or accumulating some money, depending upon how graduate life has treated you. Somehow, five seems the talismanic number that people agree upon as a good time to have enjoyed the good life before they head back to their roots. Somehow, five seems to be the acceptable threshold at which you haven't done too much to break all ties with your family and friends, where you and your American passport-holding kids will have least trouble adjusting back to the reformed India. However, if it were all so easy to pack up and start all over again, why isn't it so? It's a vicious cycle of voluntary entrenchment. You dig your heels in, enjoy the stability and yearn to be swept off by the ocean waters you see from your stakeout place on the top of the trees. There is still always the hope, always the desire, for you know you don't belong here. The plan to return is always existent, just difficult to implement. Hence the 'n+5 theorem' that you hear often: the time of return to India is 5 years ... from today.

In the meanwhile, life in the adopted country of native dreams carries on its dance of deception. A life where the body remains cocooned in a veneer of comfort, yet laments that the soul rests entrenched in the familiar discomfort of the motherland. The above example cuts through one slice of the different characters that make up the diaspora. Each character serves up a different story. It is the story of the first generation immigrants, who worked their way up the chain in completely uncharted territories to give themselves and their kids a better life.

They find refuge in the few instances they can connect with their motherland - the Indian grocery store, the movies, their social circle, the occasional Diwali and Holi celebrations and the wafting smells of food in the kitchen that increase their nostalgia when set to tune to old film songs. It is also a story of the student who ventures abroad to seek higher education. These stories vary from those who came here before the explosion of opportunities in India to the latest recruits from India for whom the foreign land is not foreign at all, what with the exposure they get thanks to television and the Internet. It is also the story of the foot soldiers of the IT service industry in India, setting up temporary shelters in the far reaches of the world. Indians living abroad span the spectrum — from being much-maligned as H1B workers to the target of racist attacks in Australia, from bringing up a generation of cliché fulfilling high-achieving South Asian kids to becoming the impromptu ambassador for India whichever setting they are in. They'll stay up to watch cricket matches where India feature, but be equally at ease with discussing NFL at the water cooler the next day. All unaccustomed sons of an accustomed earth.

Each story makes up a thread in this intricate quilt that represents non-resident India. In today's world, where 'Vasudaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) is taking shape more than ever, the India we know goes beyond its borders that form that beautiful shape that adorns maps and emblems. It resides, well and alive, in its non-residents.

THE NEW FACE OF INDIAN WRITING

Introduction and Interviews by Anupama Krishnakumar

Well written, well-articulated words are intoxicating. They unleash magic. The writing styles – the way these words are delightfully put together may be different but the result is the same. The words reach out to the inner you – only that the 'you' would differ in every case – the readers that the author is trying to cater to.

At Spark, one of our constant endeavours has been to get good authors talking to us about the art of writing, the effort that goes into writing a book and just what their writing world is all about! So, this month, for the first time ever, we feature four authors together. And they are no ordinary authors, mind you – they have been cracking the bestseller charts in India. And we couldn't think of a better theme than 'India Decoded' to present some young authors who are taking the Indian English literary scene by storm. What's more – all these books are set in India or are about India.

We are pleased to feature Anjali Joseph, author of 'Saraswati Park', published by Harper Collins in 2010. The book has drawn lot of praise from literary circles and Anjali Joseph has also won two awards for her debut novel this year – the Betty Trask Award and the Desmond Elliott Prize. 'Saraswati Park' has also been shortlisted for the Vodafone Crossword Awards (2011) under the 'Fiction' category. With terse and intelligent responses to my questions, Anjali Joseph proves why she is the really good literary writer that she is. Don't miss this interview.

'The Immortals of Meluha' – if you are a book lover and read Indian writing, there's no way you wouldn't have heard about this book. We are delighted to present an interview with Amish Tripathi, the bestselling author of 'The Immortals of Meluha' (2010) – the first book of a trilogy based on Lord Shiva. The book has sold over a lakh copies and the second book of this trilogy (published by Westland) 'The Secret of the Nagas' is due for release in mid-August. Amish, who mentions that he has written absolutely no fiction before this book, surprised me with his down-to-earth attitude, when he said that he considered the book a blessing of Lord Shiva himself. Well-detailed and interesting responses – that's what I got for my questions. I tell you, you have to read this interview.





If you get to Flipkart and visit the Books section, you just can't miss seeing this book with the silhouette of a young woman against a yellow-orange sky. I say you can't miss it – because it's the No.1 bestseller in Flipkart now and has been there for many weeks now. This is 'Life is What you Make it', which has featured in other bestseller charts too. Its author, Preeti Shenoy, also a blogger, poet, artist and a mother of two, is a very inspiring person! Her positive spirit is rather infectious and her readers simply adore her. Preeti Shenoy has written two books, '34 Bubblegums and Candies'(2008) and 'Life is What you Make it' (2011), both published by Srishti publishers. In her interview to Spark, she brings in the same spirit that defines her writing and life. Do read it!

How about winding up the series of interviews with a good dose of humour and loads of attitude and some yo-ness of Indian urban youth? Sounds good, doesn't it? Well, take my word for it – it's just the fitting finale for an enjoyable line-up of interviews. Meet Kartik Iyengar – author of 'Horn Ok Please—HOPping to Conclusions'(2011) – a book that has lot of insanity and wise cracks to its credit! The best part is that Kartik loves calling himself a moron all through the book and takes the time very often to let you know that you are one too (because you bought his book). In fact, Kartik Iyengar has 20k + hyperactive fans who follow him on Facebook, most of who have changed their middle-names to 'Hopper' to indicate that they belong to this social media cult. My interview with him is no different – you can get a perfect feel of his *blook* (as he calls it— the best loo book!) right here in his responses. Just don't miss it!

Thank you Anjali, Amish, Preeti and Kartik. We at Spark, wish you all the very best in all your future endeavours as you seek to enthral your audience in your own ways.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Presenting

Anjali Joseph through 'Discovering Saraswati Park'

Amish Tripathi through 'Shiva in a New Light'

Preeti Shenoy through 'Life is what you Make it'

Kartik Iyengar through 'Horn Ok Please'.

Have Fun!

DISCOVERING SARASWATI PARK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANJALI JOESPH

Anjali Joseph was born in Bombay in 1978. She read English at Trinity College, Cambridge, and has taught English at the Sorbonne. More recently she has written for the Times of India in Bombay and been a Commissioning Editor for ELLE (India). She studied Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. 'Saraswati Park', published by Harper Collins in 2010 is her first novel. In 2011, Anjali won the Betty Trask Award and the Desmond Elliott Prize for her debut novel. Further, 'Saraswati Park' has been shortlisted for the Vodafone-Crossword Award for 2011 under the Fiction category.



In an interview to Anupama
Krishnakumar, Anjali Joseph shares
her thoughts on writing, her first
book, the experience of writing it
and of course, awards. Don't miss
this short and sweet interview!



You have started your career as a writer with a work of fiction. What is it about writing fiction that you truly enjoy?

Writing fiction is a way of reordering my experiences, some actual, some imagined, that has always made sense to me.

Writers tend to be inspired by other authors. Who are the ones who inspire you?

There are probably too many to list. Samuel Beckett, Gustave Flaubert, James Joyce, R K Narayan, Marcel Proust, Françoise Sagan, the detective novels of Margery Allingham, Hergé's Tintin books, and among contemporary Indian writers, particularly Upamanyu Chatterjee and Amit Chaudhuri.

Your first novel 'Saraswati Park' is set in Bombay. What does the city mean to you?

Home. And beyond that, a delightful and infuriating place.

How much of your experiences (in terms of what you have witnessed/heard) has contributed to the plot of the book and the characters?

The places and emotions are most true to life, but the characters and incidents are invented. I did go and spend a couple of days sitting with the letter writers near the GPO; I used to commute to work on the train, and I've worked in and walked about Bombay, so many of the locations are drawn from places that caught my imagination.

It's interesting - you have chosen to bring in the character of a letter writer - that's something really different. How did you actually go about developing this character? Did you interact with such people during the course of writing this book?

I did (above). The letter writers are not exactly like my protagonist — he's an anomaly, economically at least. But they are people who are curious about life, of a contemplative bent, good at studying people, and most of them read a good deal and speak

several languages. Meeting the real letter writers came late on in the book though; I had this person in my head before, and he and his obsession with second hand books were clearly there from the start.

Writing a good book no doubt involves plenty of hard work, sincerity and passion. How long did it take for you to write 'Saraswati Park'? And the writing journey itself - how was the experience?

It took a year and a half. I think being dogged was the most significant thing. I enjoyed the writing, and even the rewriting. It felt both private and sometimes alarmingly audacious.



How would you define your writing style? In other words, what's the sort of audience you have in mind when you write your books?

I try not to think about it. My ideal reader is someone a bit like my seventeen-year-old self, someone who reads a lot and prefers discovering things in a second-hand book shop or stall than being told what to read.

You have recently won the Betty Trask Award as well as the Desmond Elliott Prize for your debut novel. How does it feel? What do awards mean to you?

The book had been out for almost a year by then, and both happened in a week, so it was strange as well as wonderful. Awards like this make it possible to continue writing full time, and most of all, it is very heartening that people I didn't know at all read the book and warmed to it.

I am also interested in knowing your thoughts on writing non-fiction. Do you enjoy it? Are you planning to bring out a work of non-fiction anytime?

I write some journalism and book reviews, but not much else in the way of non-fiction. I've enjoyed writing the odd essay or critical piece, though non-fiction can make me feel furtive: it sometimes feels too openly assertive or as though it's trying to be more authoritative than I feel comfortable with.

Awards like this make it possible to continue writing full time, and most of all, it is very heartening that people I didn't know at all read the book and warmed to it.

Your journey as an author has begun with a book that has won accolades. What's the next one coming from Anjali Joseph?

I've been working on a novel about some people in their twenties. The central character, a woman, moves between Paris, London, and Bombay; it's about discovering some sense of self in early adulthood amid all the encounters that take place.



Author photograph : CJHumphries



THE BEAUTY OF THE INDIAN LANDSCAPE



TINCHA FALLS

- Located in Tincha
 Village, Indore District.
- Located at about 25 km from Indore, India.
- It's an ideal weekend getaway



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NILESH J. BHANGE







THE BEAUTY OF THE INDIAN LANDSCAPE



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NILESH J. BHANGE







THE BEAUTY OF THE INDIAN LANDSCAPE



NON-FICTION BY P.R.VISWANATHAN



Same time last year, P.R.Viswanathan conjured Mother India with his words. She had beamed with pride and had spoken at length about her centuries-old story and had talked in a beautifully nostalgic way about the many children she had nurtured on her soil.

This time, Mother India returns, springing to life with P.R.Viswanathan's words—only that this time, she is here to lament the way things have been with her soil and children in the last one year. Here's one piece you should read!



Do you understand what a mother feels? Have you heard of the man who killed his mother for some immediate material gain? He was walking towards the cremation ground carrying her on his head, when a sharp thorn pierced his foot. Involuntarily, he cried out in pain: "Oh mother!" The dead mother woke up and asked: "Yes son, are you hurt?" You have proba-

bly heard this story and may be, that is why, my children, you have been putting me through these tests of fire in recent months.

Only a year back, on August 15, 2010, I remember reviewing my life - not just the 63 years of independence that I had completed but as far back in time as memory could carry me. With all that I have suffered over the centuries and with all the problems that beset me, I still felt good and healthy and optimistic about the future. But now, suddenly, I feel old and tired and depressed. In these twelve months so much water has flown, muddy and murky, through my veins - down the Yamuna and Ganga all the way to the Cauvery. My children, you have let me down and how! So often in the past, I have chided some of you for giving into greed. You did not listen and I had begun to accept it as inevitable. Yet, I could not have imagined that greed would lead to corruption of such disastrous proportions. I had even learnt to accept this shameful phenomenon of money changing hands but I seem now to be suffering from a galloping cancer of corruption; all limits are being breached and new frontiers opened. My children speak not of crores but thousands of crores involved in scandal after scandal. It is not just the size of unaccounted money changing hands for the wrong reasons that worries me; all this is leading to the corruption of all the values I stand for, the corruption of my very soul.

There was a time when men and women cared for the environment. They were satisfied and grateful that there was the earth below and the sky above their heads. Now they see an opportunity to make money from both – earth and sky – land deals and sale of spectrum.

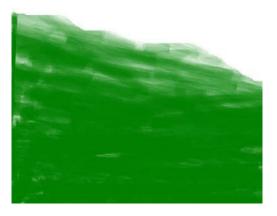
For centuries, for ages, my children worshipped me as Bharat Mata and my land as Bhoomi Devi. I yielded plenty and they cared for me in every way. They watered me, fed me with manure and they rested me; they let me lie fallow till I recouped. My poor sons and daughters were forced sometimes to part with their little holdings of me and they wept. And look at what have you done to me now, especially in the last one year!

The holy waters of the Ganga continue to be threatened.

It is shameful that you allowed one of my sons to fast unto his death for the sake of the Ganga, which all of you profess to hold sacred. I am beginning to lose my trust in most of you. For years now, since independence, I have observed and suffered this strange trait in most of you: you are content with making lofty statements; the persistent hard work that is required to realise the ideals you mouth so glibly is forgotten. You have carried on extensive indiscriminate mining. The rich thick foliage which covers me is peppered over with the dust of illegally mined mineral and the land at many places is withering fast. Is this is how you ravish me, your own mother? Being illegal activity, this mining yields no revenue to the government. And mining is only one example. In how many industries and activities are taxes paid properly? Why does India rank so poorly in the world in tax compliance? Is this is how you cheat me, your own mother? But you are not content with that. You trade in land amongst yourselves for big money benefiting always those of you who already have too much wealth. The government takes away vast swathes of land which give you all food to eat and you construct not roads or railway or bridges or canals but huge ugly high -rise buildings to house (and worse, to provide needless second and third homes to) a greedy middle-class. Is this how you buy and sell me, vour own mother?

In all the frenetic construction activity, where do my poor children figure? They continue to live in hovels – captive vote-banks for heartless politicians. There is always hope of course. Ratan of Nano fame has just announced that his group will construct small houses for the poor. I know they will be a lot better than those creaking leaking





holes in the wall that the government has come up with in Dharavi. Ratan! I expected nothing less from the house of Tatas. I only wish you had done this earlier and not put the car before the house.

Fortunately there are a few other streaks of silver like Ratan.

The press and the television channels have been doing a great job. Yes, they shout and scream and do tire me out by frequent high decibel repetition. Never mind! I owe them a great debt. Without them, there would be far less justice meted out to my underprivileged children. Jessica Lal and Arushi Talwar, Nitish Kataria and Ruchika Girhotra would all have gone unavenged.

Some of my valiant children have put up a fight, resisted the acquisitive and rapacious instincts of those in power – political and economic. How are they being treated?

The brave judges of the Supreme Court have done much - to safeguard the environment from the noxious fumes of vehicles, to provide for fair compensation to landowners, to free and to speed up the investigative agencies in performing their tasks and more. You burden them with work; you don't even appoint enough judges. And you accuse them of judicial overreach, judicial activism.

Anna Hazare first and later Swami Ramdev took up the issue of corruption. You – those in government and Parliament – did your best to discredit Anna and his team and create divisions among them. You questioned their right to make law – a task that you claimed is the duty of the elected representatives. You challenged them to get themselves elected and create laws they wanted. But they did do that; they elected you and you did nothing. Do they not then have a right and a duty to question and protest?

With Swami Ramdev who demanded return of the black money of Indians in banks abroad, you behaved even more shamelessly. The police descended on him and his followers at dead of night and forcibly evicted them from the Ramlila grounds. They even laid hands on the women and one of them is in hospital in a serious condition. You have of course done nothing on your own to bring back our national wealth. The Supreme Court stepped in and appointed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to go into the whole issue of black money. You cried foul. You said in open court that the order of the SC was based on

"certain concessions, admissions, submissions and acknowledgments" made by the Solicitor General who had left the service and that these "concessions" were not binding on the Government. Your response was, to say the least, incredible, a travesty of law and propriety.

What of my law-makers? It is not just the Lokpal bill over which you have created a record of sorts by dithering for 43 years and which has now become a byword for the unconscionable delays characteristic of Indian government. Scores of other bills have been held up in Parliament. In the states, numerous bills already passed await the assent of the governors.

What I have said should be enough for all of you to hang your heads in shame. Yet nowhere have you reached such an all-time low as in your handling internal security and foreign affairs. A fine upright government officer is burnt alive in Maharashtra by the oil mafia. A respected journalist is killed in broad daylight by the underworld. And that in Mumbai – my prime city, the beehive of commercial enterprise! Once again, Mumbai has been attacked by a bomb blast by enemies of the state. Once again, you seem to have been caught napping. Where are the CCTVs? Why were there not enough vehicles to transport the injured and the dead in a dignified manner?

What are you doing about Pakistan? I see the foreign secretaries of the two countries smiling before the cameras after meetings. What do you expect from these meetings? Haven't we had enough of them in the past? What good have they done? Those responsible for the tragedy of 26/11 are not just roaming free in that country but have once again, only last month, vowed to wage a jihad in Kashmir and all over India. What else do you expect when all you do is whine and grumble and do everything possible to show yourself up as a soft state? All investigative breakthroughs into the crimes committed on my soil seem to be coming from the U.S. You keep looking up to that country to act on your behalf. That is not all. The scion of the royal family thinks fit to tell the U.S Ambassador that the jihadis are not such a threat to our security as saffron terror.

These days, I don't even hear that routine clichéd statement that the government would normally make before every Indo-Pak talk: "Jammu & Kashmir is an integral part of India." That has been completely dropped from diplomatic discourse with Pakistan. What is the problem? Why are so many of you beset by doubt? Why are you apologetic? Kashmir is part of me, do you understand? It was always part of me and came to me legally and rightfully in partition. Remember I accepted partition because of the machinations of a few of my misguided and selfish Muslim children (they were the highly educated and affluent ones, mind you, not those honest-to-goodness commoners) backed by the evil British. I accepted partition but never the pernicious two-nation theory on which it was based. For if I were to accept that Hindus and Muslims are in essence two different peoples, representing two different cultures who cannot live together, then I would have had to send all my Muslim children packing to Pakistan. I would have had to negate everything I stood for through the centuries. So whence this hesitation? Why do you not assert yourself with Pakistan? Why do you let me down repeatedly?

But I must be balanced. I must not allow the events of one year to overwhelm me. These events, as John Maynard Keynes said in a different context, are too close to be clearly visible. I must not lose my perspective. Let me think of the other difficult times that my children have put me through. I recall the long dark nights of the emergency and dictatorship in 1975-77, when the best of my sons and daughters were thrown in jail and there was a pall of gloom and despair. I came out of it with my fledgling democracy stronger and more mature. Then I remember 1990, when I had to pledge my stock of gold to borrow abroad for my basic requirements. That shame induced you all to introduce long-overdue reforms and today, I am regarded as an economic powerhouse. So this too shall pass — this inordinately long season of scams.

I am angry and sad and hurt but I am a mother after all. So this year too, on the 15th of August, when you unfurl the tricolor and shout "Bharat Mata Ki Jai", I will not remain unmoved. I will bless you all: the brave ones who are tirelessly fighting corruption and my poor, underprivileged and hapless children who are suffering it.

And I will also bless all those who have sinned against me. May the Gods steer you along the right path. Promise me a better year ahead. Jai Hind.



TAUTOLOGY (OR IS IT EXCESSIVE TAUTOLOGY?)

Many Indians speak English that reeks of Tautology or the excessive usage of words to convey the same meaning, says Yayaati Joshi, elaborating more on this not-so-good trend. While this is something laugh at, it's something to give some serious thought to, too. Read on.

I often come across people who try hard to intensify the severity of their thoughts, or accentuate the importance of their ponderings. Such intentions, noble though they might be, are the fodder for my self-indulgent amusement. This allows me to have special moments of lambent wit by acting as if I sincerely concur with the thoughts of the other person. What I actually do is to try hard to control my laughter. Not everyone is as gullible, though. Some really "get it". Not that it stops me from having some deliciously sinister fun.

Such obfuscated and redundant usage of words is called tautology. Indian English is full of tautology. Perhaps a study of the evolution of the language in India could tell us why. My guess is that tautology gives us a sense of being better speakers of the language. Another reason could be the blissful ignorance, in which we dwell so often.

Here are a few examples:

-It would be "more better" if you...the statement could end in many ways. For example, "It would be more better that you wear a pink shirt with lavender shoes", or "It would be more better if I do not take a gibe at others through my blog."

-Do not "repeat it again"...again, the statement could take various forms. For example, "You have made a mistake by trying to apply your non-existent creativity. Do not repeat the horrendous act again". Another one, "Ram Gopal Verma tortured us with Aag. Hope he does not repeat it again with Phoonk".

-My "future plan" is...this is usually the ambitious ramble of an upstart. I was under the impression that plans were meant for the past. Then someone made me realise my mistake,



TAUTOLOGY

The obfuscated and redundant usage of words is called Tautology.

Tauto is Greek for 'same'. Logos refers to 'explanation'.

Some instances:

- More better
- Repeat it again
- Future *plan*
- Lag behind
- Past experience
- Reply back
- Brief summary

by adding a prefix.

-I slept at 4 a.m. in the morning...Not that I prefer to know the sleeping habits (or lack thereof) of insomniacs, but I usually often get to know the precise time at which someone hits the sack. And this is precision exemplified. What if the person meant 4 a.m. in the evening? Don't we all know how easily interchangeable ante meridiem and post meridiem are?

-Completely filled...This is often used in the following ways-"The room was completely filled with litter..." or "Her plate was completely filled with prawns. My God! How much seafood can someone have?" I am completely filled with happiness for the easy availability of such humour!

-Lag behind...This one is the favourite of many teachers. "You will lag behind in studies if you don't work hard". Too bad I didn't pay heed!

-Past experience...In the absence of time machines, one cannot travel to the future or the past. Some people apparently want me to be aware of this, which is why, when they describe their experiences (work related or other) they make it a point to ensure that I understand the experience they gained was a result of events in the past.

-Reply back...Being the lazy fellow I am, I often get chided at for being ill mannered enough not to "reply back" to emails or phone calls. Despicable me!

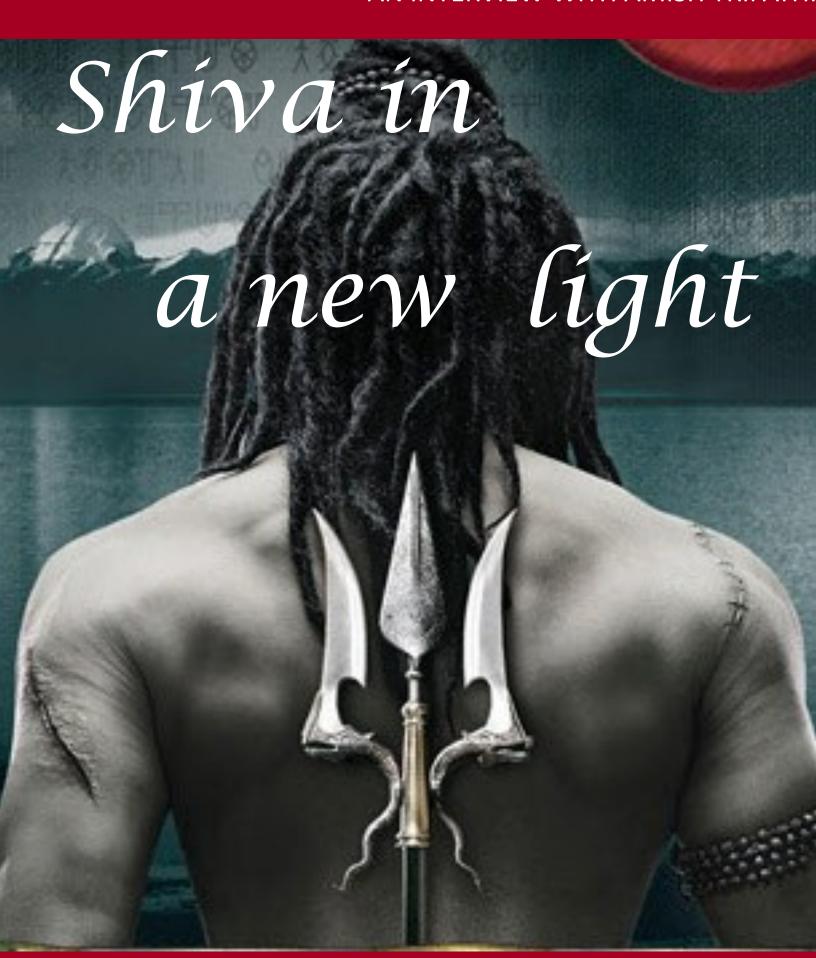
-Brief Summary...Maintaining the (boring) "Minutes of Meeting" is an awful job. How can Minutes of Meeting be described? It is a "brief summary" of what was discussed in the meeting (apart from the office rumours and gossips).

(Note: The list is not exhaustive)

The word tautology's roots are easy to find.

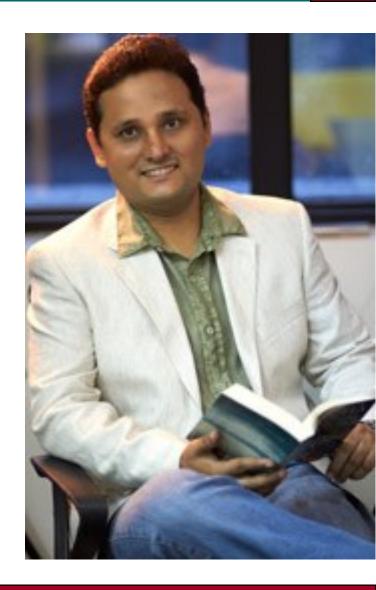
Tauto is Greek for 'same'. Logos refers to 'explanation'. The excessive usage of words to indicate the same thing is tautology.

The spoken and written iteration makes English for us what it was meant to be—"Adopt and Adapt". That it makes me laugh a lot, is a different matter altogether!



Amish Tripathi is a 36 year old, IIM (Kolkata) educated boring banker turned happy author. His debut book, 'The Immortals of Meluha' (Book 1 of the Shiva Trilogy) has been an outstanding success and has topped bestseller charts. Encouraged by this, Amish has given up a 14-year-old career in financial services to focus on writing. He is passionate about history, mythology and philosophy. 'The Secret of the Nagas', the second book of the Shiva Trilogy is set for a mid-August 2011 release. Amish is presently working on the third book of the Shiva Trilogy, 'The Oath of the Vayuputras'.

In an interview to Anupama
Krishnakumar, Amish Tripathi
demystifies everything about
'The Immortals of Meluha' from how the idea was born to
the actual writing to how he
smartly marketed his book.
And there's more too. It's an
interview you can't afford to
miss!



I understand that you discovered the writer in you quite accidentally. What made you gravitate towards writing suddenly?

Well, 'The Immortals of Meluha' actually started as a philosophy book about 7 to 8 years back. Before that, I had written absolutely no fiction – not even a short story in school. I had written a few poems and was the lead singer of a music band in IIM Kolkata. I didn't do anything else that you can call creative.

One day, my family and I were watching a historical programme on TV and we discovered something interesting. We all know that for ancient Indians, the Gods were called *Devas* and the demons were called Asuras. What we don't know is that for ancient Persians, Gods were called Ahuras and Demons were called Daevas. It was just the opposite. Then an interesting discussion happened - if ancient Indians and Persians met, they would probably be calling each other evil. So who would be right? The Indians or the Persians? The correct answer is neither! Which then brought up the next obvious question - what is evil? An answer occurred to me - as a philosophy. I discussed this with my family and they asked me to write it down. And when I did, it actually was more of a philosophy thesis than a book. But when I gave this book to my family, they said it was really boring. So, my brother and sister-in-law gave me some good advice and suggested that I should try and write it as a thriller, as an adventure and let the philosophy come along with that. And that's how the journey began.

We all know that for ancient Indians, the Gods were called Devas and the demons were called Asuras.

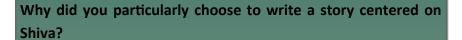
What we don't know is that for ancient Persians, Gods were called Ahuras and Demons were called Daevas. It was just the opposite.

Writing a mythology-centric novel is not an easy task and mythology is something that you cannot write without having an understanding of it. Also, there's a fair amount of history in the book. What's the sort of research that went into the book— from both the mythology and history point of view?

To be honest, there has been absolutely no research specifically for the book or looking at it another way, I have been doing the research for this for 25 years! I am a voracious reader. But I tend to read more non-fiction that fiction. And in non-fiction, I love to read history books and by that I mean books that most people would find really dry and boring. These are source material history books. I also enjoy reading books that talk about the history of civilization across the world. I have been reading such books all my life and all that

knowledge was there at the back of my head. So that explains the historical part.

As far as mythology is concerned, I was lucky to have been born into a very religious family with a lot of knowledge about mythology. My grandfather was a teacher and a Pandit at Benares. Both my parents are very religious. I was surrounded by a lot of religious people. The good thing for me was that they also had a liberal take on mythology. We used to have these normal everyday conversations when I was growing up — they used to talk about myths, various aspects of our philosophy; but I learnt all of it from a very liberal perspective. I was never taught things like one religion is better than another. I was lucky to be born into such a family and a lot of what I have written is what I have learnt from my family and interpretations of it.

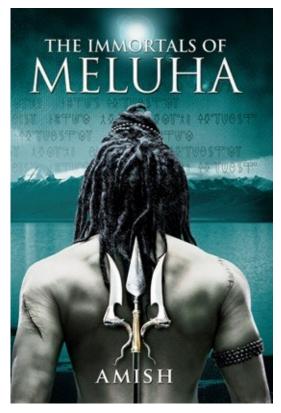


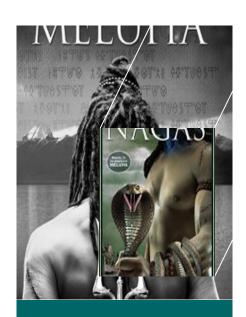
I know it may sound weird, but I don't think I chose the story, I think it's the story that chose me. Considering the fact that I had written absolutely nothing before this book, I believe from the bottom of my heart that it is a blessing from Lord Shiva. And looking at it another way, if I am going to write something on the theory of evil and it's destruction – who could be a better hero of that story than the destroyer of evil himself!

You have taken a mythological figure and projected him as a normal person with a life much like our own (especially with him saying 'shit' and grinning and all and falling in love!). How easy or difficult was it marrying myth and fiction?

The easiest thing in the world. If you have been lucky to be born in India or have spent many years here (including foreigners who have been here for long), I think you learn our ways. Honestly, if you actually go through our past, there's nothing new about what I have told.

If you see the Indian theory on Gods, there are various concepts





The Shiva Trilogy

- The Immortals of Meluha
- The Secret of the Nagas
- The Oath of the Vayuputras

various theories.

One of them is the Nirgun – Nirakaar God – which is the formless, generalized, One – you don't even call this God as 'He' since this God has no gender as well - which is the Paramatma. This is roughly similar to the modern Semitic concept of Gods.

Then there are the Aakar Gods, like Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva and so on — where God has taken a form. And why does God take a form? Because it is difficult for human beings, with our puny imaginations, to conceptualise a formless God. Who do we pray to? For our limited imagination, God has to take a form.

Then the third concept is the Avatar- which is about Gods



GOD

The Nirgun-Nirakaar God

The Aakar God

The Avatar

Man who becomes a God

coming down to Earth in human form and living as a human being through the cycle of birth, karma and death. This is like Lord Ram and Lord Krishna who are Avatars of Lord Vishnu.

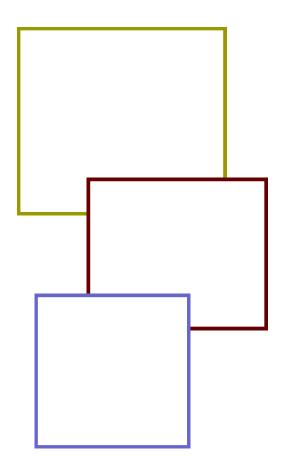
The fourth form is when a man or woman becomes a God or s/he discovers the God within him - the concept that God exists within every single human being, in fact everything in the world. So for example, Gautam Buddha was clearly a historical man — but if you ask all Buddhists or most Hindus, including me, we will say that Buddha is God. So, the concept of a man becoming a God is not unknown. It's been around for centuries and I am not doing anything new, frankly.

How long did it actually take for you to write the book?

I got the idea some seven to eight years back. The philosophy book took about a year or year and a half to write. Then, I started writing it as a thriller/adventure book, with the philosophy thrown in as a part of the story — which sort of got clogged up in a little more than a year. My wife helped me change my mindset and that's when the book started flowing. Then it took another year or thereabouts. So I would say from idea to completion it took about four to five years. Then it took another two years of struggle to get it published.

Did the story flow smoothly across as you wrote or were there breaks and you went and revised things again? I particularly ask this because readers have found the book un-putdown-able and a page-turner. Was plotting and executing it in terms of writing as smooth?

My wife said, 'Don't approach the book with the arrogance of a creator; approach it with a humility of a witness.'
And I started doing that; approaching it as a witness and then, the story started flowing in a torrent.



When I started writing the book, I had no idea how to write a novel. I did what we MBAs usually do when you have no idea what to do. Do some research and try and make some plan. There are selfhelp books which claim that they can make authors out of you. I actually read many of them. And most of them provide a standard plan on how to write a book. They ask you start with character sketches and then make a date plan of how you are going to write. After that, the advice is to write the summary of each chapter and then expand these to full chapters to bring out a book. So I actually made a plan on MS Excel – and I started writing that way – made character sketches and made a plan. The story, however, was coming in fits and starts – it wasn't really flowing and there was this one particular character whose fate I was very unhappy about and I wanted especially to change it. This particular character was a complete anti-thesis to his actual character sketch. No matter how hard I tried, I was unable to change his fate. Anything I tried seemed like a force fit. At one point, I actually stopped writing. I had given up. Then my wife gave me some good advice. She said you are doing your typical corporate thing again. She said: "You think you are in control of everything but this is not your team at your company, you can't snap your fingers and tell them to do what you want them to do. These characters have a mind of their own – so you are not in control of things. Your only job is entering their world and recording what they want you to do." She told me a line which is branded in my mind and I follow it: 'Don't approach the book with the arrogance of a creator; approach it with a humility of a witness.' I started doing that; approaching it as a witness and then, the story started flowing in a torrent. Initially, it wasn't supposed to be three books. But the story grew and grew and I broke it into three parts.

How was the experience of inhabiting the world you have created through your writing?

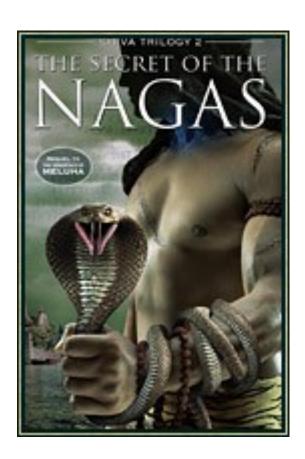
Absolutely lovely. I would cry with the characters and laugh with them. The book actually came to me like a movie and I have recorded what I saw. I absolutely love the world. Lord Shiva came alive for me. Completely.

According to you, why would you ask someone (particularly the young man/woman) to read/ and understand mythology? What do you think is the role understanding mythology will play in someone's life?

Let's look at it this way. Why is India one of the few countries or perhaps the only country in the world where 3000/4000/5000 or even earlier myths are still alive even today? We have a living mythology unlike Greek or Egyptian mythology for instance. No modern Greek believes in Zeus or no modern Egyptian believes in Amun Ra. For them, those myths are just stories. But in India, these are more than myths. For me, Lord Shiva is very real. He is not just a myth. And this is true for practically all Indians in their relationships with their Gods. Why are our myths alive today? I think it's because the myths tell us something for today's life. Why do they tell us that? It's because India has displayed this genius over centuries, modernising and localising our myths again and again. The Ramayan that is considered the official Ramayan in North India the Ramcharitmanas, is actually a 16th century modernisation of the original Ramayan. In the south, in Tamil Nadu, for instance, the Ramayan that is considered the official one is the Kamba Ramayanam, which actually has quite a few differences from the original Ramayan. There are Ramayans that show Ravan as pure evil; there are those that show Ravan as a good ruler, as an intellectual -- he was a Shiv Bakth and he composed the Tanday Stotra. So there are so many interpretations. In the Gond Ramayani, Sitaji is a warrior. But in Ramacharitamanas, she is a docile and dutiful wife. In the Adbhut Ramayan which is sometimes also attributed to Sage Valmiki (though most say that it was written in the 12th Century AD), Sitaji is an avatar of Devi Maha Kali. In this version, Lord Ram didn't kill Ravan. Sitaji killed Ravan. She is the warrior when she emerges in her Maha Kali form. Now, there are so many versions. And different people from various parts of India have different favourites. Why do Indians keep modernising and localising our myths? That's because we are making our myths relevant to our present day lives. And that attitude keeps our myths relevant & alive.

I think myths have something to teach us and that's perhaps something I am trying to do in some sense in my book - try to make statements about today. For example, I believe very strongly that the





caste system – a hierarchy system based on birth - is pure evil. So I have tried to make a statement on this in the book.

Another issue that I strongly feel about is how women are treated. In Book 2, for example, I have made some statements about honour killing. But it all comes across as a part of the story. If you make it a *gyaan* session, people will get bored. It has to come across as a part of an adventure.

It took you quite a while for your first book to be recognised and published. Was there this one moment when you wanted to leave it and get on with life?

I didn't want to leave it and get on with life. I was very, very clear that if the book wasn't picked up by a publisher, I would self-publish it. The book is a blessing to me. I feel it's my duty to share it. I had to at least try my best to get it into stores. After that, it would be up to the fate of the book.

You have been a banker for many years and are an MBA from IIM, Kolkata. It appears that you used your professional expertise in doing up a marketing plan for your first book. How exactly did you go about it?

I believe that when you are writing the book, you should be absolutely true to the book. But once you are through with the book, you should actually be practical. Put your marketing hat on.

In my case, I should say that I have been lucky that I have worked in the marketing field for many years. I had made a lot of good friends, people who understand marketing well. So I got some very good advice and I think I was smart enough to listen to them. We did some pretty innovative marketing activities and by God's grace they worked.

To begin with, I was an absolute nobody and my agent went ahead and published my book because every other publisher rejected it. And the agreement with my agent was that I would invest in and do my own marketing. Now the first task was to make the book visible in a bookstore, right? Normally a debut author's book is a well-kept secret in the book store. It remains hidden in some tenth-eleventh row somewhere that nobody even knows that this book has been published. My wife gave me an idea. She suggested that we could print the first chapter of the book with a proper cover (and we actually carried the cover that's there in the final book!) and just distribute it free of cost at the cash counters of the all the major chains. She said that if people liked it, they would come back and buy the main book. We did this some three weeks before the book was slated to release, and what happened was, many people read the first chapter, and started

coming back and asking: 'Where's the book?' So, the book chains became confident and they placed bigger orders than what they would have normally done. So this really worked for us.

Additionally, we made a trailer film and put it on YouTube. We got a lot of hits. I was also very active on Facebook and Twitter, which allowed us to reach out to lot of people.

The second book of this trilogy is releasing in August 2011. Have you already started working on your third one? When is it likely to be published?

Yes, I am working on the third book right now. But, I still haven't announced its release date.

Once the trilogy is done, what are you planning to work on? Will that too be in the lines of mythology?

There are various other ideas I have. I have an idea of my interpretation of the Mahabharat, my interpretation of the Ramayan, the story of Lord Rudra, a story on Egyptian mythology, a story on Akbar and if all goes well, I will write all of them.

Do you see your books being turned to films? Would you like that?

There are some discussions on. But it's too early to say anything. I would love it if it gets turned into a film.

Finally, any message for aspiring writers?

I am not big enough to be giving any message. But, I would say this: when you are writing a book, understand the point that this is a blessing (particularly if you are writing a fiction book). So be true to that blessing. When you are writing, don't think of what critics will say or whether it is saleable or not; don't pander to a particular customer segment that you think will buy it. Be true to the blessing. Write the book with conviction. You should be confident

OF 'THE
IMMORTALS
OF MELUHA'

"I believe that when you are writing the book, you should be absolutely true to the book. But once you are through with the book, you should actually be practical. Put your marketing hat on."

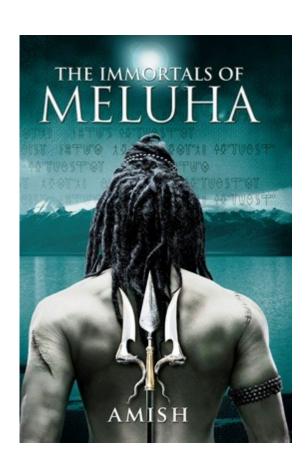
- **AMISH** PRINTED THE **FIRST** CHAPTER OF HIS BOOK, 'THE IMMORTALS OF MELUHA' ALONG WITH THE COVER THAT EXISTS IN THE FINAL BOOK AND DISTRIBUTED IT FREE OF COST AT THE CASH COUNTERS OF ALL MAJOR CHAINS. THIS WAS DONE THREE WEEKS BEFORE THE BOOK RELEASED AND PEOPLE ACTUALLY CAME BACK AND ASKED FOR THE BOOK ONCE IT WAS PUBLISHED.
- HE ALSO MADE A TRAILER FILM AND LOADED IT ON YOUTUBE TO MARKET HIS BOOK.
- HE ACTIVELY USED HIS FACEBOOK AND TWITTER ACCOUNTS TO PROMOTE THE BOOK.

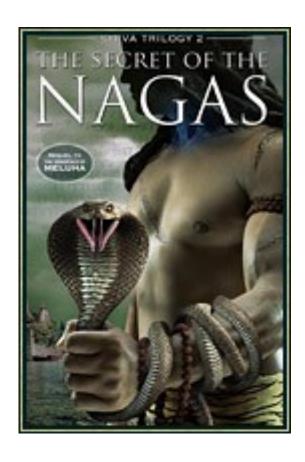
that this is how I want my story to come out.

Once you have written the book, be practical. How do you market the book? How do you ensure that the book sells? How do you position the book? You have to be hardworking, you have to be persistent and if a publisher doesn't back you, you can self-publish it. There's nothing wrong with that. We live in a free country. It's not just our right, but our duty to make our voice heard.

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The Shiva Trilogy Website







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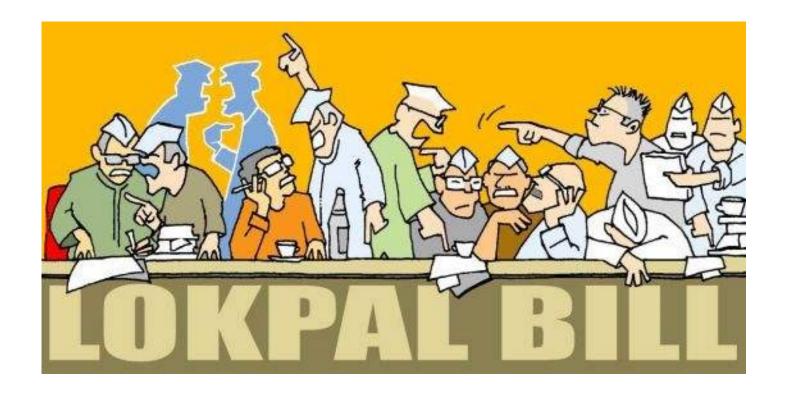
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DECODING LOKPAL



Jan Lokpal. Corruption. Anna Hazare. If you are in India, then there is absolutely no chance that you wouldn't have run into these words. The media has dissected this issue enough – but the irony is that the pro-Jan Lokpal team is yet to realize its demands. Bijesh Krishnadas shares his thoughts on this muchdiscussed topic in India today and tells you why Jan Lokpal is needed despite the many questions raised about the possibility of the body ridding the Indian system of corruption. Read on.

NON-FICTION BY
BIJESH KRISHNADAS

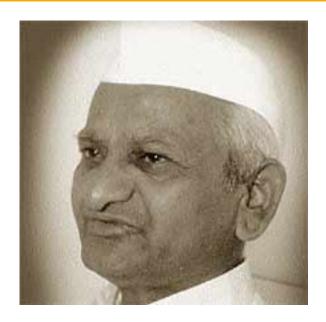
Hearing the phrase "Jan Lokpal"

- perhaps the most heard these
days as far as Indian current
affairs are concerned – appears
to bring extreme reactions
amongst people in India. There is

the "for"-camp that thinks of this as a revolution of sorts resembling the protests that took the Middle-East/Mediterranean region by storm. This side of the argument appears to be staunchly supported by those in the limelight — actors, artists, etc., and techies that have taken to social networking in a big way. On the other side is the "against"-camp that considers the Lokpal a parallel government that would steamroll parliamentary democracy. I have noticed that the against-side appears to be composed of non-conformists and surprisingly, the ones that are disgruntled with the system. Yes, the same ones that crib about the system are now up in arms against change to that system.

The revolution comparison is a bit far-fetched, in my opinion. The ground reality in India is that things are not as bleak as in countries like Egypt and Tunisia. Those countries were suffering under tyrannical hands and it was almost a do-ordie for the citizens. India, on the other hand, in spite of all its flaws, is a democracy and a pretty well-guarded democracy at that. There isn't enough motivation yet for the twitterati to leave their cushy abodes and camp out in a suitable Tahrir Square.

There is no denying the fact that this movement of sorts, particularly after Anna Hazare shot to limelight with his fast, did bring together — for a brief period of time — a very large section of the Indian population and allowed them to voice their dissent and anger at the corruption prevalent in our bureaucracy. In doing so, it has shown



that if push comes to shove, there is a way to mobilise and coordinate a more involved "movement". Yet, it comes nowhere close to becoming a revolution or an uprising. For most of the participating middle class, it was a case of mass hysteria than a commitment to change.

All the same, revolution or not, my support does lie with those working towards the Jan Lokpal. Not because I think it will cure India of all its ills, but because it can impose a certain amount of accountability on the bureaucracy. I agree that corruption is not limited to the politicians and extends to the civil society as well. However, that doesn't take away from the fact that a start has to be made – and where better to start than at the top? After all, aren't the government and the bureaucracy responsible for running the country?

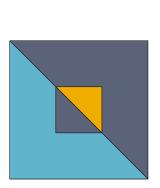
I am yet to fully understand the arguments that the "against"-camp puts forward. On one hand, most of them have always lamented the rampant corruption. On the other, they don't favour the installation of an independent body with powers to stop corruption! Some of them also hold to the pessimistic view that introducing the LokPal will change nothing and that India is beyond redemption. Even so, how would we know what

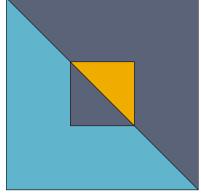
changes the body will bring unless we give it a chance?

This camp uses such phrases as "undemocratic" and "dictatorship" to describe the Jan Lokpal. Yes, the Jan Lokpal – as envisioned by the civil version – has unprecedented authority to investigate individuals but who can deny the fact that ultimately, the power to convict or not still lies with the Justice system. How can then the Lokpal be called undemocratic? What is so wrong in holding elected representatives responsible and accountable for their own actions? Even the constitution does not provide politicians immunity from the law, then what exactly is the issue here?

One of the commonly used arguments against the Lokpal is that it will not solve the problem of corruption but will only serve to push it underground. This is the same old il-logic applied to restrictions on drug use. Keeping aside all the issues of choice, hasn't making drugs illegal kept it out of many hands? Of course, it is a given that the Lokpal is not a fix-all but it is a start. Yet, by pushing corruption underground, it will also make it that much more difficult. Politicians and bureaucrats will think twice before soliciting a bribe.

The Lokayukta office in Karnataka is a shining preview of what can be achieved through a Lokpal organisation – the only grudge that remains is that it could be given more power. The Lokayuk-





Of course, it is a given that the Lokpal is not a fix-all but it is a start. Yet, by pushing corruption underground, it will also make it that much more difficult. Politicians and bureaucrats will think twice before soliciting a bribe.

ta's helpline is a boon to the common man. A simple threat to involve the Lokayukta has helped many avoid paying hefty bribes to get things done. On a larger scale, although the Lokayukta has submitted reams and reams of well-investigated and well-substantiated reports on corruption in the bureaucracy, the state government has not taken any action against the guilty. Inspite of the evidence against them, the corrupt still walk free.

This being the case, the Jan Lokpal, if it becomes a reality, will be a Lokpal without a handicap and more power — an investigation agency that can initiate investigations without requiring permission to do so from the government - an agency that can file cases against the suspect, if it has enough evidence. Not a dictatorship, not a juggernaut. Whether it will see the light of the day, one will have to only wait and watch.

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow — ANCIENT INDIA AND ITS MARTIAL LEGACY

India has for many years been known as the land that discovered many things, the land of many firsts. Did you know that India is also the the land which gave the world the mother of all martial arts — Kalaripayattu? Varsha Sreenivasan tells you more about this martial art that is India's pride.

The land that discovered zero, the digit the world cannot do without. The land that developed the most sophisticated science of medicine. The land that nurtured and developed indige-

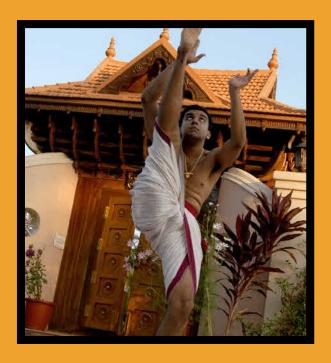
nous cultures to mind-boggling dimensions. India or Bharatvarsh is known for all these and more. Yet, it amazes me to no end when I come across yet another aspect of this country we call our own, that I hadn't known before. For instance, that India is also the land which gave the world the mother of all martial arts — Kalaripayattu.

If you're wondering how it is the mother of all martial arts, it has been noted that Kung Fu, Chinese Shaolin and all related martial arts which have ancient origins are all derived from Kalaripayattu and that Indian masters who travelled to these far-off lands were the first martial teachers.

Kalari refers to an arena of specific dimensions and payattu refers to the art that is practiced. Foot-hand co-ordination, supreme flexibility, dexterity, strength and balance characterise the art of Kalari. Art it is, irrespective of the fact that it is martial in nature, for the sheer pleasure it gives to one who has the fortune of watching the practice sessions. Sweeping dance like movements, smooth pivots in mid-air, cat-like agility are all hallmarks of this martial tradition. In fact, traditional Indian dances like Bharatanatyam have also derived from this art and to this day, dancers with a knowledge of Kalari are known to have an edge over their counterparts.

Yet, all was never rosy for the masters of this lineage. Like the country of its origin, the art went through several periods of deep turmoil. From the time of its origins prior to the middle ages and its development as an advanced system of warfare between Dravidian Kings to its decline





Picture courtesy: Indian School of Martial Arts

KALARIPAYATTU STUDENTS PRACTISING THE MARTIAL ART THAT NEEDS DEDICATED PRACTICE.

during the British invasion and colonial rule of India, Kalari has come a long way. And all thanks to the undying spirit of the practitioners and masters of this lineage, who in spite of several adversities including the British banning of any form of martial practice, have kept the tradition alive teaching their offsprings and all those students brave enough to resist the shackling chains of a regime that could defeat the courageous warriors only with the use of gun-power.

But, that is not all Kalari masters deserve credit for. Along with the art of offence and defense, they have also perfected and preserved probably the most advanced system of medicine and treatment known to mankind. For, how else can one describe a medical practice that without an X -ray or MRI, blood test or intruding scope, can tell accurately and better, the state of one's skeletal, muscular, nervous and organ systems? This medicare system known as Marma Chikitsa or

Marma treatment to this day is preferred by those who know of its existence as well as by those who prefer the holistic treatment and cure of their ailments from just one doctor, to the rigours of frequenting several specialists and departments at a major hospital.

There are certain vital points in the human body called 'Marmas', which if hit can cause disability or even death. It involves systematic application of pressure and therapeutic massage with herbal preparations and medicinal oils to stimulate complete health and fitness. The treatment also improves muscle tone, flexibility, strength, balance and can also cure orthopedic injuries and nerve related problems. Only devoted and faithful disciples are taught about them and their positions.

How did they perfect this art of medical care? Like most discoveries and inventions, necessity was the mother here too. Practising and training in Kalari requires the use of sticks, swords, shields, daggers, spears, clubs, you name it. To attend to any injuries in the process, it was imperative for the masters to come up with an all-encompassing system of treatment and cure to ensure the well -being of the generations that would keep the tradition alive.

Though practised mostly in the state of Kerala, Kalari masters have spread out across the country, not just cross-



ing boundaries of states but religions and communities as well. It is not unusual to find them teaching ancient methods of fitness to our fast-food generation, in a manner that gives better and more lasting returns than a gym or aerobics class can ever hope to achieve. It is not unusual to find a student of Kalari who has the supreme balance of mind-body fitness and discipline.

But it sure is surprising to see the trend of foreigners queuing up to learn and perfect the most advanced martial art and combat system most Indians are ignorant of.

Since the theme this month is 'India Decoded,' let me end with the coding considered most Indian and most ancient – our shastras.

Harinaapi Harenaapi Brahmaapi Surairapi|

| lalata likhitha rekha parimaarshtum nasakyathe

- which means:

"Even if the Supreme Nurturer Lord Vishnu wishes, even if the Lord of Lords Shiva wishes, even if the Supreme Creator Lord Brahma wishes, even if the crores of Gods wish; the Destiny of an entity cannot be altered even a bit."

If it has survived through the ages of intense stress and upheaval, it will survive through this age of sedantary and unhealthy lifestyles too. To me, Kalaripayattu, born from India's womb and rooted firmly in Indian soil, looks set to take on the world, destined to outlive yet another generation all over again.

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LIFE IS WHAT

you MAKE IT

An Interview with Preeti Shenoy

Preeti Shenoy is the bestselling author of 'Life is What you Make it' and '34 Bubble Gums and Candies', both published by Srishti Publishers. Just as the tagline in her blog 'Just a Mother of Two' goes, Preeti is an author, poet, artist and a mom! To know more about Preeti and her work, visit her website.

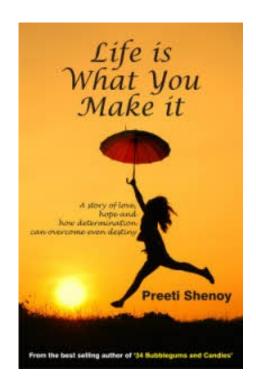
In an interview to Anupama Krishnakumar, Preeti Shenoy gets talking about both her books, their
roaring success, her blog and of
course what she is most popular
for among her readers, her
thoughts on life! Catch the interesting conversation here!



Congratulations on the roaring success of your second book, 'Life is What you Make it', Preeti! How do you feel? Did you see it coming?

Thank you very much. It is indeed great to see the effort I have put in to writing this book paying dividends. Frankly, this was a story that I felt was very inspirational and had to be told. 'Life is What you Make it' (LIWYMI) is now a National Bestseller and is also the topping the list of books on Flipkart, Landmark and India Today top 20 Fiction books. However, success to me is not just about the number of copies that the book sells or it reaching the top of the list. Many, many readers have written to me after reading the book, about how touched they were. They have showered me with their love and affection and some have even narrated their own personal lives which are similar to Ankita's story. When I receive such mails and when someone tells me it has left an imprint on their lives, I feel very satisfied and that is true success to me. LIWYMI took a lot of hard work, intense emotion and a whole lot of research to write and the whole process did initially leave me very drained out physically and emotionally. Now it feels great that people are enjoying it and it is making an impact on hundreds of people.





You have chosen to focus on Bipolar Disorder in your second book. What made you decide on taking up this theme?

The focus of the book is not Bipolar Disorder. Instead, it is around an individual, who had Bipolar Disorder, and rather than sit back and accept it, she decided to change her own destiny and make life what she wanted it to be. Bipolar Disorder is slowly gaining awareness in India but continues to be treated as somewhat of a taboo topic in most households. The book is based on a true story and when I first heard the story, it moved me so much that I decided it had to be written and shared with the world. The real life Ankita is a very inspirational person and since she had Bipolar Disorder, I had to do quite a lot of research on the disorder to be able to put myself in her shoes and write her story in a realistic fashion. This could happen to any of us and her courage and attitude is definitely worth emulating and hence LIWYMI.

You must have done a lot of research on this topic. How did you go about it?

Months of effort! It took me two years to write this book. I spent a lot of time researching on the Internet and read a number of books and articles written on this topic. In addition, I spoke to a number of doctors to get a better understanding of the subject, symptoms and treatments. I also visited a few treatment centres where I got a first-hand experience of seeing what Bipolar Disorder is all about, understanding the treatment conducted and getting a feel of what Ankita must have gone through. Since I was based in the U.K. at the time, I had access to a whole lot of organisations and support groups. In U.K., there is even a Bipolar Artists organisation and some of their work is amazing. My respect for Ankita went up threefold, when I comprehended what a person with Bipolar Disorder goes through and how much of a struggle it truly is to lead a 'normal' life.

What do you think are some of the reasons for the popularity that 'Life is What you Make it' is enjoying among readers?

It is a story that could have happened to anybody. It is a story of courage in the starkest of circumstances. My writing style has always been very down to earth and simple and I write from the heart. The amount of research that I did before I wrote the book helped tremendously in portraying the characters in the book and bringing their emotions alive. A number of people ask me if it is my story and that is when I feel that my effort, research and work have paid off, since only if you actually get into the skin of someone who has gone through something like this, would it turn out so well. The real life Ankita loves the book. I also find that there are so many readers who have gone through life facing similar challenges and this formed an instant connect with the book.

"A number of people ask me if it is my story and that is when I feel that my effort, research and work have paid off, since only if you actually get into the skin of someone who has gone through something like this, would it turn out so well."

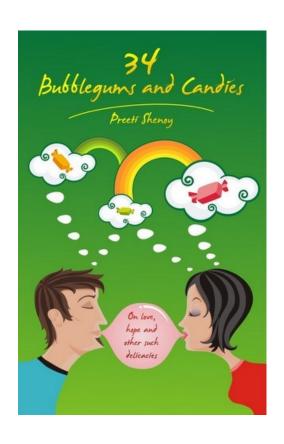




It would be interesting to know how different your experiences were in writing fiction and non-fiction (your first book '34 Bubblegums and Candies').

Very, very different. It is like comparing apples and oranges. As mentioned earlier, the common theme about the two books was that it came straight from the heart.

'34 Bubblegums and Candies' was at a time when I was trying to get over the grief of losing my Dad and had started blogging. The response I received on my blog (Justamotheroftwo.blogspot.com) was like an inverted pyramid! It saw a sudden explosion in readership, with a number of readers relating to my posts as incidents that I wrote about had happened to them too. Quite a few readers kept asking me to put it all in a book and '34 Bubblegums and Candies' was the outcome. LIWYMI on the other hand, was an outcome of my meeting up with the real life Ankita, hearing her story and then being deeply inspired by it. The genre for both is different. There are a number of readers who like both and on the other hand, some who prefer one or the other. Both experiences have been extremely satisfying and have taken a lot of effort.





PREETI'S BLOG

"My blog is now amongst the top 10k blogs in the world and I will always have that connect with my readers and am thankful to all of them for motivating and encouraging me when I had started off and continuing to be with me on my blog."

You have been blogging for quite some time now. How much of a role has your blog and its readers played in shaping your writing career?

Blogging was what I started off with. It connected me to people and the responses I received from various people motivated me to write more and more. Writing regularly has paid rich dividends when my books were published, since it was my writing over a period of time that helped evolve my own, personal style of writing. My blog is now amongst the top 10k blogs in the world and I will always have that connect with my readers and am thankful to all of them for motivating and encouraging me when I had started off and continuing to be with me on my blog.

Is your third book going to be a second jar of bubblegums and candies? Or is it going to be another work of fiction? Tell us about it.

I am working on second full length fiction.

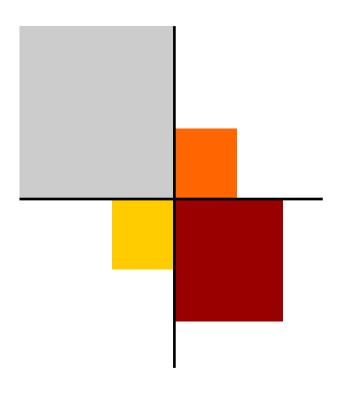
I cannot disclose more details about it at the moment! Am also working on a 4th book which will be a second jar of bubblegums and candies, based on popular demand.

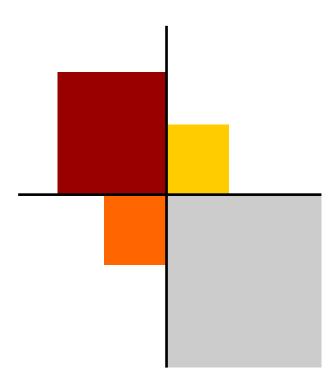
Your writing revolves a lot around life and its beauty, the challenges and the aspect of facing them. If I were to ask you to tell us five things you would tell anybody to live life like it should be lived, what would they be?

I think my post, '<u>It's all okay really</u>' answers that question.

If you were to ask me to list five things that I believe in and follow. It would be

- 1. Chase your dreams—never give up on them.
- 2. Laugh a lot.
- 3. Tell the people who are closest to you, how much they mean to you. Cherish the time you spend with them. Life is so uncertain and so short.
- 4. Stand by your words. Keep up your promises and do not let people down. Be true to yourself and to others.
- 5. LIVE! (not just exist)

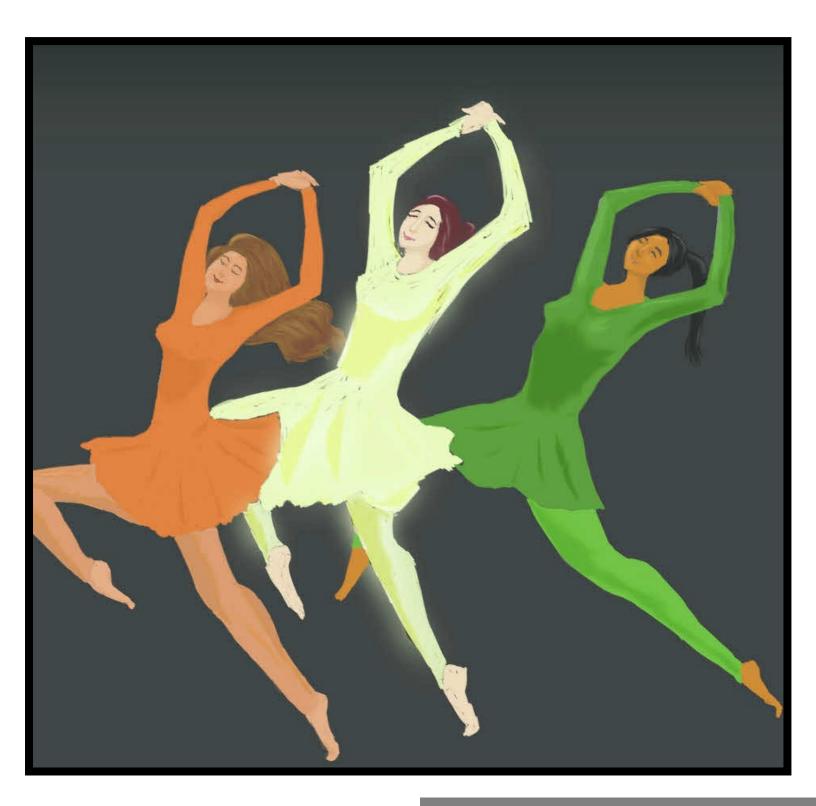




Lastly, there are many bloggers out there who are aspiring to get their work published. What would you say to them?

A lot of people think that by writing a few blog posts you could easily become an author. Becoming a published author and that too a successful one, is not as easy a task as most people normally perceive. There is a lot of back breaking hard work involved. You need to breathe, dream, and think about it. You need to write, write and write more. In addition, read a lot. All this will help you define your own writing style, improve your writing skills and will help you succeed. There is no short cut involved and this will take a lot of time and effort. I have spent hours writing late in to the night and not sleeping properly for days on end since there were so many things that needed to be done simultaneously including managing a family. Initially you could feel disheartened and want to give it all up, but stick to it. And finally, when it does happen it is exhilarating and completely worth it.

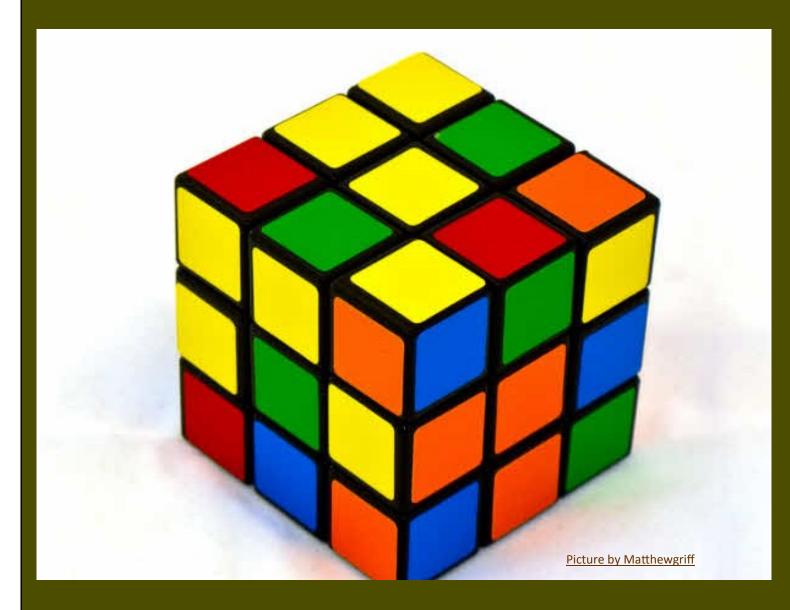
THE MANY HUES OF THE INDIAN WOMAN



ART BY AMRITA
SARKAR

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A CASE STUDY OF CONTRADICTIONS





There was a song that used to be very popular in the late 1990s —it had Shah Rukh Khan singing "Hum logon ko Samajh sako to Samjho Dilbar Jaani, Jitna bhi samjhoge tum utni hogi hairani". The song challenges people to try and understand Indians, saying "The more you try to understand us the more surprised you would be." I wouldn't agree more.

A country where wealth and education are personified as female deities and worshipped, is also one where many girls are denied education and women any claim over wealth! A country where there are four female chief ministers and which had a very charismatic female Prime Minister is also the place where there are violent crimes against women.

I have been trying to unravel this mystery that goes by the name of India! And I must say -- I am still trying!

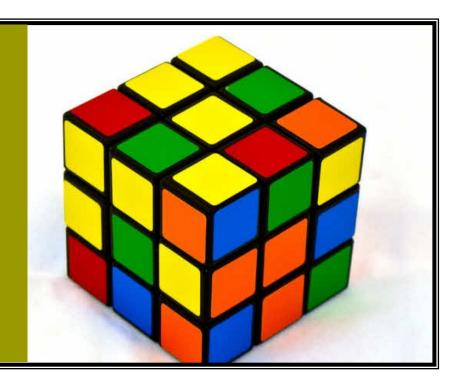
I remember a friend from Australia who once told me about how we Indians take "history for granted"! I was taking her around the Chidambaram Temple in Tamil Nadu and she was very surprised by my "very casual" attitude towards all the wonderful architecture around. When we came out, she was shocked to find posters of political parties stuck on to the outer temple walls and as we turned the corner we actually found a man urinating against the temple wall in the dark! We saw the same man subsequently wash his feet (and hopefully his hands) at a tap just inside the main *gopuram* and head for his *darshan* of the dancing God!

I have never understood the way we behave in public with least consideration for others – jumping queues, pushing our way into a bus or train uncaring of whether we are giving way to elders and children. Yet, our hospitality can really be "over the top" to the point of embarrassment. So what is it that transforms this brash inconsiderate fellow commuter into a very considerate host when someone visits him?

I remember travelling from Montreal to Chennai via London. The Montreal–London sector was very uneventful; we got our food served quietly, the crew was most helpful in opening and closing the luggage compartments above for short people like me and everyone actually waited for their turn outside the toilets! The London–Chennai sector was a different experience altogether, even though it was the same airline that I travelled in. People rushed into the aircraft without any heed to the seating announcements, started yelling for food and tried to push each other while trying to use the toilet (which was stinking within an hour of take off). The crew on their part tried to maintain

Talk of India and one bizarrely apparent truth that makes itself heard is that India is a bundle of contradictions - contradictions in terms of beliefs, actions and attitudes. In these times, when we are supposed to be making progress, the big question that looms ahead of us is 'Is this development wholesome?'. The unfortunate answer would be 'No.' Meera Sundararajan feels that we acknowledge unless hyprocrisy, which makes India a case study of contradictions, our development is going to be all but shallow.

Somehow, one can view such development as only a shallow one because unless we acknowledge our hypocrisy, which makes India a bundle of contradictions, and try to deal with issues in a straight forward manner, India will not develop in the truest sense.



order, shouting at unruly passengers and ignoring the quiet ones. It was one occasion when I realized that we Indians as a group probably bring out the worst in anyone!

India as a country today is really confusing. We have discovered consumerism with a bang! Go to any mall in any of the metro cities and you will know why I feel this way! A mall is a Mecca for the lonely souls in these cities. You can window shop or watch a movie and get a meal! There was a time when it was considered very bad to buy things that one does not need. Today we find excuses to get things we do not need. During our childhood, we never stepped out of the house without a bottle of boiled water in our bags. Today water, a natural resource, has become a packaged readymade commodity that we can buy across the counter! But our concern for hygiene stops with that. We throw out these empty water bottles carelessly around!

We pray to various plants like the *Tulsi*, *Pipal* and yet have no concern about conserving our natural biodiversity. Why, natural biodiversity, we do not seem to be worried about food production either, as acres and acres of paddy fields are getting

converted into housing plots across the outskirts of all small towns!

In fact, even role models today seem to be different. One can see that in the movies that are being released. The hero at one time took on the "bad guys" but today the hero himself is the "bad guy". The "vamp" has been put out of job by the heroines. This is very interesting because it points to our reality orientation — we see and accept shades of grey and women's sexuality is being openly expressed.

It is believed that these are the indicators of a society in transition when it moves from being "under developed" to developed. Somehow, one can view such development as only a shallow one because unless we acknowledge our hypocrisy, which makes India a bundle of contradictions, and try to deal with issues in a straight forward manner, India will not develop in the truest sense. It is not enough to join the crusades against "corruption"— what really will make a difference is deeply understanding what it is as a society, and as a country that we need to change, and then acting upon the issues.



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"Kartik Iyengar, author of 'Horn OK Please' - HOPping to Conclusions', in addition to being a successful corporate professional, dabbles in a multitude of areas. He is an avid blogger, a self-proclaimed moron, an unlucky Las Vegas loser, a compulsive road-hog, a Red Bull addict and an adrenaline junkie who has tried everything from scuba diving to bungee jumping. A cockroachloving heavy metal maniac, Kartik has thousands of hyper-active fans on his Facebook fan page, who live his journeys vicariously with him. His fans call themselves HOPpers. In fact, many of them have actually changed their middle name to include "Hopper" as a mark of belonging to this social-media cult.

HORN OK PLEASE

Want to have a good laugh and giggle a bit? Then all you got to do is to read this interview! And when you are done, you will realize that there's a smile or a grin on your face! There's lot of humour, a little bit of thought and tons of attitude waiting for your out there! Just go and grab it! Kartik lyengar answers Anupama Krishnakumar's questions in the same jolly-good feel that his first book bursts with!

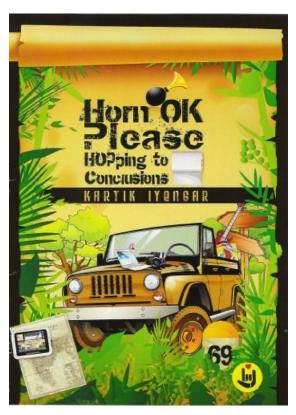
'Horn Ok Please'. That's quite a title - I mean who would have imagined that something one usually sees behind a lorry becomes the title of a book! What was the intention behind the title? Sure, there's some philosophy waiting to be told to the world?

'Horn OK Please'. I chose this title for it's a philosophy that runs deep in us Indians and I'm a very deep person — well, at least as deep as a bedpan. It's an urban philosophy, where we drive like crazy with absolutely zero civic sense and loads of attitude. It also reflects a deeprooted Indian disregard for anything that binds us such as rules, laws and progress. It's the very philosophy that our leaders today teach us to survive in India. We learn how to pillage, loot and live in an utter state of lawlessness, and honk with no regard to others, at anyone. I just made all this up right now just to sound deep and intelligent. No. There is no philosophy.

You say 'You do not read, you decided to write.' What a reason! What's the motive behind the inclination to turn the more intelligent ones into morons too? ;-). And, how did it all begin?

Spot on! It's better to be self-deprecating than give others a chance to voice their opinions. After all, a wise man once said, "Opinions are like ass-holes, everybody's got one." In our lives, while there are always a bunch of detractors in no matter what we choose to do, not everybody chooses to follow their dreams. In India, especially, we do have a bunch of educated illiterates who like to run down the efforts of others simply because they could never rise above mediocrity -I've seen that many times. Anyone beyond mediocrity runs the risk of being called a maverick or a moron. If you succeed, you're an awesome planner but if you fail, you'd face the wrath. So, why not call yourself a moron and try to beat mediocrity in your own terms? Why not try to make others go your way?





When I began reading the book, I tried too much to find out where it was heading and then I realized I should just stop thinking! And then it all started to make sense! :-D. From your POV, what made you believe that the book will keep the reader hooked inspite of the fact that "one could choose to read the book from front to back or in reverse and still be assured it wouldn't make any sense."?

That's the whole point. We're so attuned to 'thinking', being 'logical', that we forget to dream. While dreams shape imagination, thoughts are merely the speed-breakers in execution. In a journey called life, if everybody decided to follow a set path laid out by the dream 'thinkers', who would ever dare to 'dream'? Why give something that is expected? Why should we not try to break the mould with utter stupidity? Wasn't Forrest Gump stupid?

It appears that you believe in seeing the humour behind situations so much so that you have a comic point to make from everything to the road to the hospital to the corporate world. Has that made your life any easier, at least your life on Bangalore roads?

I believe there are two ways to approach anything – the right way and the wrong way. With 'Horn OK Please', I want people to realize that we believe we have the right of way and hence we honk like crazy. If I could make light of any situation – my passion for the road is just one such – It makes me keep my sanity and leaves the hair on my head intact. More so, there is absolutely no need for youth to take everything

so seriously, we'll all turn out just fine. If we can be a bit more chilled out in life, the constipation of daily existence would never tie us down and we can dream on to make a better world.

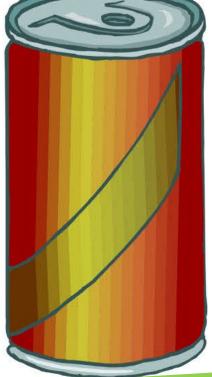
After reading this book, I am curious to know how you will define these:

Indian Roads: Similar to our anatomy. For, what goes in through arterial roads (small intestine) or the national highways (Large Intestines) comes out like shit. That's a feeling one gets after stepping out of one's SUV after a drive in India.

Beer: Beverage for the King-pisser.

Swear Words: That's the worst fucking habit. Go wash your mouth with soap. If you're mute – then go wash your hands after swearing.

Roadie life: It's my way 'AND' the highway. There's nothing 'OR' about my life.



Logic: My ass.

Indian Politics: The National septic tank where goons in night-gowns are born.

India, the good: An educated, progressive nation that can get over a colonial hangover of the past and realise that India resides in cities, not villages. Bring voting to Facebook and I'll be your next President.

India, the bad: A nation of very selfish individuals who do not care.

India 2.0: A 100% literate society that respects what Mahatma Gandhi really fought for and makes him proud. A nation that will make education free and compulsory for the girl child till the age of 18, a nation where rapists will be swiftly given capital punishment.

I ask you this again: why did you write this book? (well, if you still haven't got it, here we go: I would like you to also add this portion on to your response - 'on a more serious note....' and tell us the serious bit too...please! :-))

On a serious note? Here's my best shot — We all have something special about us. We need to use that to do something good for the society, make it a better world for children. I can pretend to write while I sell thousands of copies while you pretend to be a reader and buy

many copies. The money goes to the Tibetan Children's Village in Ladakh & to the Mahesh Memorial Foundation in Chennai. So I write like crazy.

You have been mesmerising people into changing their middle names to 'HOPper', thanks to your book and of course, HOP's FB page! What would life have been without Facebook? :-)

I love my fans and there are many of them for probably we are all birds of a feather and we flock together at www.facebook.com/hopfans. There are more than 100,000 visits to the page every day and every post of mine gets 10,000 views on an average. What it means is that I've barely scratched the surface. Name change or no name change, I love each one of them and try to be as close to them as possible for that's what the Dalai Lama taught me — "Pride, not arrogance".

You have been doing wonders with your FB page - one that has 20k+ followers (and not to mention..counting!) and who played a big role in the book taking shape. And now, I want to torture you with my questions! :-)



1) Was the FB page a completely planned move or it happened just like that?

The best things in life happen in a heartbeat and then we try to find reasons for their success. Truth is – I started it one insane night, I live it and it's now become a cult thanks to every HOPper out there.

2) The book and the page have become so popular today. And am sure you are delighted. What is the reason you think these clicked in such a big way?

Wrong question to ask me, I do not 'think'. I'm just delighted for 'The Reason' is just a song by an awesome band called 'Hoobastank'.

3) The HOPpers, I think, have done quite a bit of work for this book. What are some of the things that they did?

We all designed the cover, decided what would go inside the book, how much it would be priced for and which charitable causes I would embrace with the book. In short, it is the 'Holy Blook' (Best –loo Book) written by 100,000 people. It is 'OUR' book and the second one's coming out this Christmas.

4) You met some of these HOPpers during the road trip. How was the experience?

It's been awesome and I meet them all the time. Some of them have been awesome and others, well – I cannot kiss and tell. Maybe, I'll write another book called 'Porn OK Please' and you can pick up a copy.

5) What role is the page going to play in your forth-coming books? (see...I know you can count only till five..!)

Thank you for respecting the fact that I cannot count beyond five. You can look forward to live vicariously with the main characters of the book. With Chief, Goose, Derek and Hound, the next trip to Ladakh is now being planned for this September, with our lives being beamed out live, Scottie. The role of the page in the forthcoming books will be the same as the first book. Just stay tuned!



HOP—THE SOCIAL MEDIA CULT

KARTIK STARTED THE HOP FACEBOOK PAGE ONE INSANE NIGHT.

MOST HORN OK PLEASE (HOP) FANS CHANGE THEIR MIDDLE NAMES TO 'HOP'PER.

THERE ARE MORE THAN 100,000 VISITS TO THE PAGE EVERY DAY AND EVERY POST GETS 10,000 VIEWS ON AN AVERAGE.

BLOOK MEANS BEST LOO BOOK.

THE HOPPERS DECIDED THE COVER, THE PRICE AND THE CHARITABLE CAUSES THAT KARTIK WOULD EMBRACE THROUGH THE BOOK, HORN OK PLEASE.

KARTIK MET SOME OF THE HOPPERS DURING HIS ROAD TRIP.

Talking of the highlight of your trip, you met The DalaiLama. How was the experience?

The best I could describe in words has been done so in the book. These are probably the only sane chapters in the book. The pictures are on the page and let me just say this – It's a spiritual feeling that will change you as a person. You run the risk of turning into a human being after that experience.

Lastly, tell us how you are going to bug the lives out of people through the rest of this Blook series!:-)

You've read the first book. If not, just buy it off Flipkart today. The second Blook titled 'The SCROTUM Scrolls' is set to release this December. The next ones will be released in quick succession. With these five books in the 'frivology' of books, you can expect your IQ to drop sharply till 69. I promise to provide my fans a lust for life, a zest for the living and a zing with humour as I will interact even more intensely via the Facebook page and personal meetings. I'm also planning to get a bigger backseat for ourselves in our beast of a ride called 'Motormouth'. India 2.0 HOPs. Stay cool and buckle up for a heal ride! You'll never know what's coming!

HOP on Facebook



CRITTERS IN OUR INDIAN LIVES



What do you think of when you hear 'India'? If you felt like being important, you'd have thought about economic growth, inequality, inflation. If you felt like sounding intelligent without having an opinion,

you'd talk about corruption and the like. If you felt like drowning in self-praise, you'd talk about our rich culture, Bollywood, etc. If you felt angry, you'd talk about social inequality, women's rights, etc. For the last seven years, conveniently sitting outside India, I used to talk at length about all of the above. But now that I'm back, I want to devote some space to things that barely catch our attention, but that knowingly or unknowingly, form a major part of our lives in India.

Our friends on the roads, in the skies.

Let me stop you right there if you think I'm going to rant about Haha-there-are-cows-on-the-road. Yes, there is a bit of that, but this is much more than that.

God decided dogs are man's best friends, and nowhere has it been that sincerely practised as in India. We love them so much that we allow them to freely roam the roads, even at risk to our lives. No, really, I'm not being sarcastic here. All it would take is a van to come and cull these dogs, but we let them be; as much as we hate their howling at night, as much as we hate the fighting match they begin with our domesticated dogs, as much as we hate jumping in and out of their pools of poo in the road, life wouldn't be the same without those golden brown or black mongrels weaving their way through our paths. Who would we lovingly leave some lefto-

Have you ever thought about the connection between India and animals? Here's some sort of an observation, comparison - call it whatever you want. The bottom line is all about what animals have meant to the Indian way of life. Vani

Viswanathan writes.

ver rice and curd for? Incidentally, my friends in Singapore were surprised we feed our dogs curd rice — dogs are lactose intolerant, apparently — but I wonder what our vegetarian-family-owned dogs would have done — and they didn't die, did they? I rest my case. We exemplify man's friendship with dogs.

Moving on to other critters. Pigeons, for example. There used to be hordes of pigeons near my apartment block in Singapore. They outnumbered tourists in beautiful locales in Greece and Istanbul. But pigeons there were extremely well-behaved and toilet-trained. Nowhere would I see a whole patch of white bird excreta, and boy, not once did I face the unfortunate situation of a bird doing its business and receiving a bit of it. They were clean, organised – and you know, very un-bird-like. Contrast with Mumbai.

Within a month of arriving here, I was 'blessed' by a bird that flew in to a sort of closed space I was sitting in, did its business and flew out. Now that's what birds should be like – free to do what they want, behave like animals. And I love that they have this freedom in India.

Cows, how can I forget cows. We worship them. Some of us eat them. We are ridiculous to the extent of having laws that tell us not to kill them. We let them eat the posters off our wall and the tiny grass that sprout around the trees of our roads, and drink the milk they give once they've digested these things. We stop our cars to let them cross, and the older, more religious among us touch their tails as they pass, for that's where Lakshmi, our goddess of wealth, resides. We paint their horns, tie bells, let them fight, let them kill us in those fights. Our cows look like they've seen life. A rough life. Not easy-peasy, like the fat cows in Switzerland or something, which only have to eat healthy green grass and give foamy healthy milk. Like the very essence of our country, our cows go through grave difficulties and (yes, admittedly, only some of them) survive to tell the tale.

I can go on and on. About how we pick up stray cats and dogs, feed them till they display their strayness and run away again. How we religiously lay a feast for crows during Pongal, full of coloured balls of rice. How we marry a donkey and a monkey (or a donkey and a human too, sometimes), to pray for general well-being, to get rain, etc. About how we draw kolam patterns with rice flour so ants can eat them (yes, we might draw lines with Lakshman Rekha to kill them inside the house - but who asked them to come inside now?) About how we stare with some morbid glee at the crow pecking on the dead rat's brains. We in India have a weird relationship with our animals. We love them, and that's why we torture them. We love them, and that's why we worship them. We love them, and that's why we let them be on the roads. This, to me, is quintessentially Indian. More than the growth, shining stories, inequality and everything. There are some things that pervade the Indian classes, go beyond money. Be it a Mercedes S-class or a Piaggio truck, we all stop for the cows.







India and India Only!

E/CTION

The best way to explain India is through its fragments—in lovely little bits and pieces. Anupama Krishnakumar attempts just that in these five little stories—ones that count up to exactly 100 words each. Catch a glimpse of the Indian man, Indian woman, the Indian thought, the Indian good, the Indian bad—in essence the Indian way of life.

#1

He stands wearing a shirt, half tucked in, only two buttons on – the other button holes left wondering about their partners. He holds a stick almost half his height, his hair is surprisingly tidy. He sports a big grin, perhaps his only asset. He poses perfectly and the camera captures both him and the big, brown-green polka dots on a pristine white wall. A neat array of cow dung balls that flatten miraculously on hitting the white surface. The uniformity is stunning, the spacing professional. Our young man is the expert, the artist of a certain Indian village art form.

#2

She sits in stunned silence. Will you marry me, Yaazhini, I ask her again, gently holding her hand. She doesn't seem to mind but she is conscious. After all, this is at a restaurant with people moving about us. 'Mike,' she hesitates, 'This can't work. I mean, I can't imagine taking home a foreigner and telling my parents I want to marry him. They mean the world to me. And oh, my relatives!' She sighs. 'But don't you love me?' I whisper. She nods and there are tears. She struggles like a trapped butterfly. She, my sweet and gentle, would-be-Indian bride.

#3 Samarth holds a banner. He walks alone to give a voice. He was patriotic alright, but what was it that tugged at his heart to break free from the warm confines of his home? Nidhi's face - what else? The face of his bleeding neighbour friend – bruised physically and battered emotionally. Those rogues who had teased her – if only he could suck the lives out of them? But this isn't what Gandhiji taught. 'Men, fight eve teasing!' says the banner. He turns to see five young men behind him. More voices for justice, he thinks, and a fine ray of hope. Medha loved numbers. She had loved them from when she was three. Not surprising then that she majored with an Honours in Mathematics. And now, she worked with a top MNC in its research wing - only two levels short of heading the department. She could make 25-year-olds go green with envy - the miss-have-it-all - name, fame, beauty, brains and money. Above all, she lived her passion -Math! But true callings in life dawn as epiphanies. Like the moment she saw a young rag picker running his fingers over weird numbers on a urinated compound wall. Suddenly, her numbers found their purpose. #5 The first thing Saras did after he came out of the Chennai airport was to sneeze. 'What Mr.NRI'? his dad teased while his children and wife giggled from the back seat. 'Come on, dad! Not any more!' he added with a flush. How he wished he could get to Anna flyover now and near Sapphire – to see the film billboards! He looked at the roads earnestly. Yellow autos. Pallavan buses. Sweltering heat. Nose rings and sarees and jasmine. Cows chewing film posters. Filter coffee. Thatha, patti. Madras. Home. India - the place you belong. And he was back, for good.