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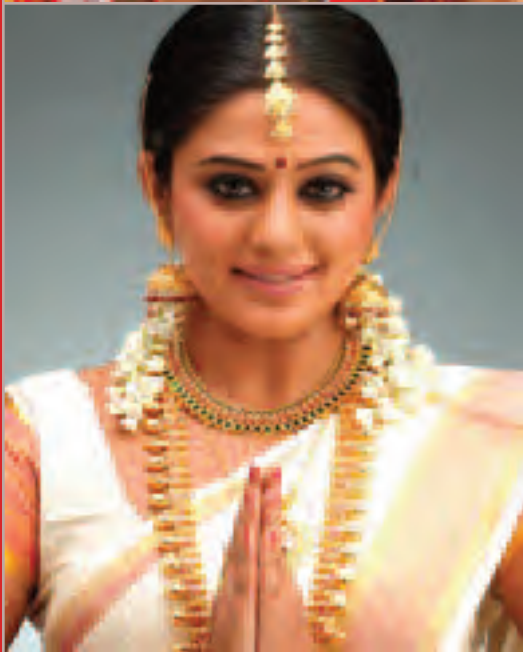
One People. One World

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INDIA'S DAUGHTERS IN THE CROSS HAIRS





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Face to Face with
JOYCE YARROW



Joyce Yarrow is the author of the Jo Epstein Mystery series: ASK THE DEAD (Martin Brown Publishers) and THE LAST MATRYOSHKA (Five Star Mysteries). She is a Pushcart Nominee whose stories have appeared in Inkwell Journal, Whistling Shade, Descant, Arabesques, and Weber: The Contemporary West.

BY BEYNAZ EDULJI

Your forthcoming book has already generated a lot of excitement and expectation. Tell us a little about it.

The novel, co-authored with Arindam Roy and set in India and North America, is a tale of love, crime, and intertwined destinies.

It all started with Arindam discussing how the lotus is rooted in the muck yet grows upward toward enlightenment. I wondered, “What if the Lotus were a character in a thriller? Who might her antagonist be?” We decided on the bestial Lion and voilà!, two of our main characters emerged—Padma (the Lotus), whose innate goodness is an active force and Narsimha (the Lion) who embodies the callousness developed by those who are abused and neglected. To balance Padma, we created her sister Leela, who learns through her mistakes.

The novel is unique in that it starts out as a family saga in the years before the sisters are born and builds to a thrilling climax 40 years later.

Have you always wanted to be a writer?

Describe your early years in the Bronx. My brother and I grew up in the South-east Bronx, in a neighbourhood we later learned had the highest crime rate in New York City. My local library served as a refuge from the perilous streets. Books miraculously opened a window to the outside world.

I wrote my first short story at the age of 12. It was about a group of children who transform a condemned building into a clubhouse. In the end their sanctuary is demolished and they go their separate ways.

I continued writing – mainly poetry, songs, and stories – until I reached the point where I needed a larger canvas. For my first book, I decided to write a mystery. The protagonist, Jo Epstein, has a dual identity as a private investigator and performance poet. Through Jo I explored both the creative and destructive aspects of big city life.

What made you want to collaborate with an Indian Author for Rivers Run Back? How did you meet him?

It still amazes me that Arindam Roy and I met quite by chance on Facebook. He is a veteran journalist with a global outlook, as well as strong roots in Bengali culture. My own roots are scattered and inaccessible, inspiring me at an early age to create my own reality through fiction. We knew right away that by blending our worldviews we could generate a powerful story.

Was it difficult to co-author a book with an Indian author? How did you manage to co-ordinate the story?

Like most collaborations, ours was contentious at times and the chat window in Facebook heated up with our discussions. Arindam’s commitment to newsroom accuracy made him resistant to the flights of fancy required by fiction. On the other hand, his years as a journalist gave him insight into the criminal mind that far surpassed my own.



My writing partner's understanding of the West was much deeper than my grasp of the East and this imbalance needed correcting. This is the main reason I travelled to India and visited many of the settings we used in our book.

Our in-person story conferences, held in Allahabad, were invaluable. Virtual collaboration definitely has its limits. At some point the parties need to breathe the same air!

Is this book very different from the ones that you have written before?

Yes. This was my first collaboration and my first time writing from several points of view in the same book.

Although there is a lot of action and conflict moving the story forward, there is also a depth of personal and cultural exploration we permitted ourselves that will hopefully make our 'romantic thriller' stand out from the crowd.

You have visited India many times now. What is your fondest recollection of India?

I'm glad you asked this question – although it is very difficult to choose the fondest memory. Sitting here at my desk in Seattle, when I close my eyes what I see is the sunrise over the Ganges in Varanasi – the feeling of peace that calmed my restless soul and made me feel I had truly arrived in India.

As an American author, do you think

Indian readers will be able to relate to the characters in your book?

Without a doubt. The American and Canadian characters are interwoven with their Indian counterparts in such a way that their relationships make the book work. True, there is a huge difference between the Eastern and Western philosophies of life, for example the differing concepts of good and evil – but by exploring these differences we also discovered many commonalities. In the end, it is our shared humanity that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries.

Can you describe one of your favourite characters in the novel?

One of my favourite characters is Dusty, aka Dushyanta Sharma. He is an East Vancouver street person with his own type of wisdom—and isn't shy about sharing it.

Dusty becomes Padma's friend and protector when her community activism threatens to dismantle Narsimha's criminal enterprise.

Her Radiance is what I called her, never failed to make her laugh no matter how much trouble we were in, and there was plenty. Can't remember a time without knowing her. Crazy huh? How can you rub out thirty plus years of no-good living in a single minute? But that's what Padma did. Made me new, made me whole.

You have many other interests and music is your passion too. How do

you find the time to perform on stage and write so prolifically?

Music has always fed my soul and given me the energy to do other things.

While writing is a solitary occupation, music involves social interaction. I was introverted as a child and singing drew me out of my shell. Musicians communicate on a deep level when they play together. Now that I think of it, my enjoyment of this process may have opened the way for my eventual writing collaboration with Arindam Roy.

How involved is your family with your writing?

Both my husband and son are extremely supportive of my work. When I struggle with plot points or recalcitrant characters, they are accustomed to seeing me walk around the house with a dazed look on my face. Several years ago, my son—who was 16 at the time—accompanied me on a book-research trip to Russia. He was not too thrilled when we visited Vladimir Central Prison and the doors clanged shut behind us but he knew how much I needed to see this dismal place for myself. In return, I made sure he had time to play pool and hang out with his friend in Moscow.

They say that an author is always thinking of his or her new story. What is your next work of writing?

Yes, there is something in the works. Without saying too much, I can share that the new book involves a mystery spanning several centuries.

RIVERS RUN BACK

BY BEYNAZ EDULJI



Rivers Run Back is a most compelling story with complex characters. The settings are exotic: India, Dubai, Canada and USA. The authors have researched the places and the characters so well that the story surges forth like a river in spate, carrying its readers along swiftly until the riveting conclusion.

The reader soon gets caught up with the life of the characters that are as diverse as the setting of this thriller. Narsimha, a Brahmin outcast obsesses over money and power maybe in part to compensate for his troubled childhood when he was humiliated time and again by his grandmother, artistic but bi-polar Marilyn from New York who marries Shankar, a Bengali anthropologist from Allahabad and their two daughters Padma a traditional Hindu and her sister Leela who thinks of herself as a Westerner. Rustom Framjee, the Parsi CBI Inspector is perhaps the most interesting character in the book. Parsi traditions are beautifully shown in this narrative. Dusty an American 'expat' and street person as well as Gargi, the traditionalist both shine in their cameo roles in the book.

Dubai in the 1990's is showcased wonderfully. Antique smuggling, dealing in drugs and committing murder all add to the disquieting story-line. Cross-cultural issues, The Great American Dream, the difficulties of raising Indian children abroad while

getting them to connect with their Indian roots are all incorporated so seamlessly in this engrossing book.

This book has all the elements of a great bestseller.

About the Authors:

Joyce Yarrow is the author of the Jo Epstein Mystery series: ASK THE DEAD (Martin Brown Publishers) and THE LAST MATRYOSHKA (Five Star Mysteries). She is a Pushcart Nominee whose stories have appeared in Inkwell Journal, Whistling Shade, Descant, Arabesques, and Weber: The Contemporary West. Ms. Yarrow recently lectured on The Place of Place in Mystery Writing at the University of Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, India. Raised in the Southeast Bronx, she lives in Seattle, Washington.

Arindam Roy's career in journalism spans 30 years. As a reporter and bureau chief, he has written extensively for the Times of India, Associated Press and multiple news outlets. Mr. Roy is the co-author of Confluence of Faith, (a coffee table book published in 2013 by the Times of India), Allahabad: Where The Rivers Meet (Marg, Mumbai), and Kumbha Mela: Pellgrinaggio Indiano, in Italian, with three French writers and two Italian photographers. He lives in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh.

The book launch was at American Centre, New Delhi on 6th January.