Title: 2007 Seattle Reads - Writing India in the Pacific Northwest

Speaker 1:

This is the Seattle Public Library podcast of Writing India in the Pacific Northwest, an April 25th program at the Central Library featuring local South Asian novelists, Bharti Kirchner and Indu Sundaresan. Ms. Sundaresan is the author of The Splendor of Silence, The Feast of Roses, and The Twentieth Wife for which she won the Washington State Book Award. Ms. Kirchner is the author of four cookbooks and four novels, including Pastries, Darjeeling, Sharmila's book, and Shiva Dancing. The moderator was Kellie Holzer from the University of Washington English Department. This program is part of the 2007 Seattle Reads The Namesake.

Kellie Holzer:

I'm really honored to be here tonight to chat with Indu and Bharti. Let me just briefly introduce them and then we'll just get on with that. Indu Sundaresan is the author of three beautifully detailed, rich, historical novels. Her debut was The Twentieth Wife, which was published in 2002, for which she was awarded the Washington State Book Award in 2003. And The Twentieth Wife is set in 17th century India, and it tells the story of Mehrunnisa and how she becomes a wife of Emperor Jahangir. And she's an unusually influential and powerful empress. Her second novel, The Feast of Roses, in 2003, continues the story of Mehrunnisa, sort of tells how she struggles to maintain power and eventually loses it, oddly.

And then her third most recent novel is The Splendor of Silence, and this came out fall of 2006. And in this novel, it's set in India during World War II during the Indian struggle for independence. And it tells the story of an American spy who has a love affair with an Indian woman who's engaged to someone else, and there's all kinds of intrigue in this novel. I wanted to say that for someone who claims to have been bored by history in school, I always find, when I read her work, that it's the historical detail that is so impressive and just lushly drawn. I really like that about her work. Indu was born in India. She lived in many different Indian Air Force bases as a child. She studied economics in school, and she came to the US to go to graduate school at the University of Delaware, and she credits her father's flare for the dramatic for her own storytelling abilities.

So let me introduce Bharti Kirchner. She is the author of four critically-acclaimed novels. Her debut was Shiva Dancing in 1998, and that is about a woman who's adopted by a wealthy American couple and goes back as an adult to India, to Rajasthan, to try and locate the man to whom she was married as a child. Sharmila's book is her second novel, and that tells the interesting story of a woman in her 30s, a second generation American, Indian born American, or excuse me, a second generation Indian American woman in her 30s who agrees to an arranged marriage to marry a man in India. So that's a

very interesting plot. Darjeeling, her third novel in 2002, is about a couple of sisters who have an ongoing sibling rivalry, and it's about their childhood on a tea plantation in Darjeeling, and then how they eventually migrate to Canada and the US and resolve their sibling rivalry.

And finally, her recent novel is called Pastries, and that is set in Wallingford, in our own Wallingford, in a bakery. And that is full of descriptions of yummy things, among other drama between various characters. Bharti's books have been translated widely into different languages, German and Dutch and Spanish and Thai. She's also an award-winning cook and the author of four popular cookbooks, including The Bold Vegetarian. And her short pieces have appeared in a number of different magazines and anthologies, and she's also a freelance book reviewer for The Seattle Times.

So thank you so much for being here, both of you. So maybe we should just get started with the Q&A. Let's see. So for both of you, this is a question about audience. When you write, what kind of audience do you imagine? Do you imagine more than one audience, Indian, Indian diasporic, or non-Indian, and how do you negotiate the needs of the different audiences that you imagine when you write? And then sort of a corollary, how has your work been received in the different sites in which it's been read in America, in India, for example? So this is for both of you.

Indu Sundaresan:

When I first start writing, I write for myself. I don't really write for an audience. The first draft is entirely for me. If I don't like it, if I don't like the way it's going, then the novel goes nowhere. It was easier when I wrote The Twentieth Wife and The Feast of Roses because I initially wrote both the novels as one long, 950-page novel. And when I finished writing it, I realized that nobody was going to publish something that was that long by somebody who had never been published before. And so I split the novel into two. And so it was really only with The Splendor of Silence that I actually became aware of an audience because it's been four years since The Feast of Roses came out and I've been hearing from people essentially all over the world and they have things to say about my work.

And all of a sudden you're aware that there are people out there who are reading your work and who have things to say about it. And it's very funny when someone comes out and says something. So you actually have to be very careful about not letting them look over your shoulder because you know, you are aware that they exist. Well, you hope that they will read what you next write. And I was at a Splendor of Silence book club a couple of weeks ago, end of March in La Jolla. And someone in the audience said to me, "So three people are bitten in the book." And you heard that right, it's biting. And they happen to be siblings and all three of them are bitten in the course of the novel and two of them are bitten as you would expect in the throes of passion. Third one is bitten because he engages in this brutal fight with another man and that man bites him and actually all three of them are bitten by men. And why was that? Why did you put that? Was it a conscious effort?

So when she came upon the third person who had been bitten, she was like, "There's something that is happening here." And for the life of me, I can't think of anything that was... It was never a conscious decision to have all three of them bitten. They happened to be bitten. And I'm going to be thinking about this now. When I write my next book, I'm going to be looking for things that happen in threes or happen by men or bitings or... So it is always difficult when someone comes and says something to you about your work. You do think about it and you have to not think about it.

As far as write, once that first draft is done, when I start revising, there are a lot of people I let into the process. There is my agent who always reads everything and wants to say stuff about it. There is my editor, obviously, who has the most to say about the work. And eventually at some point I do start thinking about the audience. I do write for an international audience and this is perhaps evidenced most by the fact that I provide a glossary when I use words that are not yet, even though they are Indian words that are perhaps part of the English language, not as familiar as it might be to all readers.

I try to use a map. I have done that with The Twentieth Wife and The Feast of Roses. I didn't do it with The Splendor of Silence because it is set in a fictional desert kingdom. So these are things that you are aware of. And I think the last part of the question was, how do your audiences react to it? It's been wonderful. The reaction in India has been mostly from people of my parents' generation. Splendor is still very new in the market, even in the Indian market. It only came out in February. So I haven't heard much from Indian Splendor readers other than family members. The reaction from India to The Twentieth Wife and the Feast of Roses has been from people who are from my parents' generation who come up to me and say things like, "I know this story. I've heard the story or I studied it in history." And as Kellie mentioned, I seem to have grown up singularly ignorant of my own country's history because I never paid attention in history class.

I thought it was boring. I daydreamed all through class. I got punished almost every class. And as punishment, they would haul you up to the front of the room and you're supposed to stand there as an example of what you're not supposed to be doing in history class. And so it's kind of amazing to me that people actually relate to the stories because they remember these stories or there are things that create a memory in them. And one of them is this little incident, which I'll tell you the story later, but there's a little incident in The Twentieth Wife where Jahangir, and he's Prince Salim at that time, he hands Mehrunnisa these two pigeons and he goes away to look at a rose or something. And he comes back and she's standing there holding just one pigeon and he says, "Where is the other pigeon?" And she says, "Your majesty, Your Highness, it flew away." And so he says, "How?" And she lets go of the other pigeon and says, "Well, like this."

And that's kind of the moment where he falls in love with her because she has this wit about her. And I had read this story as part of a myth that surrounded the love story behind them. And then when I was actually at the Simpson Center in January, I gave a talk at the Simpson Center at the University of Washington and is it Jalil, the professor of Urdu? He came up to me and he said that it actually is part of another fictional tale that was written in the 19th century in Urdu. And that has sort of become part of the myth and the legend around them. But the interesting thing is that people in India will come up to me and say, "We know that story. We've heard that story in relation to them." So it's kind of nice to go to India and talk about the book and have people come up to you and say things like that, which means something to them.

Bharti Kirchner:

Okay. Well, I write to reach people in general, but I'm always surprised by who's reading my books. And these readers are not all Indian Americans and they are not all women. Here in the US, I find at my readings, the people that come are mostly mainstream readers. And then when I'm invited to book groups, I find that they are reading mostly mainstream novels and mostly occasionally they'll be reading something else. But my emails tell me a different story. Recently, I got an email from an American

mother who has adopted an Indian child and she doesn't usually read books as such, but she picked up my novel just to get some ideas about India. Then a few days later, I got an email from an Indian American college student who was born and raised here in the US, but she says that she does not find too many books, too many novels where she sees herself.

Also, because my books are translated, I get emails from countries like Holland and Germany and Norway and Singapore, Thailand. And these are, for some reason, they're mostly men. So this is a very diverse group and you can't write for such a group and I don't even try. So when I'm doing a first draft, like Indu, I don't think about any audience. I'm in the flow with my characters and I'm happy to be there and I write to please myself. But when I begin to revise, then I look at every word, every sentence, every thought and I try to figure out if readers will have difficulty understanding any of it or not. But one thing I have found is that today's readers are fairly sophisticated. Many of them have traveled and regardless of where they're from, they seem to know a lot about other cultures.

So in the beginning of a book, you have to lure the people into your story, but once they are there, the readers seem to be able to figure things out pretty good. So even though I have to explain a little bit more in the beginning of the book, as pages go on, I don't explain quite as much. Now, the second part of the question is how the books are being received. My books are available in India. My publisher makes them available and one of them, Shiva Dancing, has been translated in Marathi language. And my first novel, Shiva Dancing, also got into one of the bestseller lists in one of the newspapers. So that was nice. And occasionally, I get email from Indian readers also, but I don't really concern myself with how my books are selling and so forth because if I did, I'd be writing different kinds of books. So at the end of the day, I'm just happy to be writing.

Kellie Holzer:

Thank you. So this question is for Indu. All three of your novels are historical. What is your understanding of history and how does a South Asian American writer negotiate or reinterpret Indian history?

Indu Sundaresan:

So it is very interesting for me to be sitting here talking about historical novels because I was an indifferent student of history. And the way it happened is that I, and a few of you must have heard the story before, but I was studying economics and operations research at the University of Delaware. I have graduate degrees in that. And I was homesick one day and I decided to go to the university library and find books about India. And the only way to do that was to subtype India into the subject keyword. And I went to this section that housed books in India, came back home with this whole armload full of books. And one of them was a novel, was actually a nonfiction book based on Mughal harems. And until that time, I hadn't realized that women in Mughal India had any sort of power at all.

I thought of them as these faceless, voiceless people who lived behind the harem walls and didn't have much say in the running of the government, which I know is untrue. I mean, I grew up in India. I see the kind of power that women wield, even if it is behind closed doors. I mean, I see it in my aunt and my mother and other women that I know. And the other thing about learning history in India is that, when you go to school in India, you start with the Indus Valley Civilization, which is 2500 BC. So you're

covering ground from 2500 BC all the way until typically 1947, which was Indian independence. That's a lot of years to cover in start history at fifth grade, so all the way till 12th grade, seven years, you have to cover that much of history.

So when they got to the Mughal period, which is 1526 to 1858, when India became part of the British crown, it became an official colony and became a colony of Queen Victoria's Empire. When they get to the Mughal period, they just zipped through the six main Mughal emperors, the first six. And after that, they don't pay very much attention to Mughal history at all. And they rarely mention the women. And if they do mention the women, it's only because they were the mothers of the heirs. And it is, if you think about it, these emperors married many women. There's a reason why the first novel is called The Twentieth Wife because she was the twentieth wife of the emperor. So it's a little difficult to talk about the history of every single wife. And so you usually just concentrate upon the wife who was the mother of the heir. Nur Jahan, however, does get Mehrunnisa, and she's known as Nur Jahan today. However, it does get mentioned all through most historical accounts, but you have no sense of how powerful she was, why she was as powerful as she was.

What gave her that power? Who gave her that power? Her husband did. And it is because there's a love story behind it. I mean, he loved her deeply, so he gave her the power. And you have to understand that in 17th century India, a woman's value came because she had a pretty face or because she bore a son. And Nur Jahan did have a pretty face, according to most accounts, but she bore no heir for the empire. She was 34 when she married Emperor Jahangir. She'd already been married once before. She had a child from that marriage. Just before he married her, her father tried to embezzle 50,000 rupees from the Imperial Treasury, and this was a big no-no because he was treasurer of the empire at that time. You'd think he wouldn't want to do that. Her brother attempted to assassinate Emperor Jahangir and her husband killed one of his favorites.

So I mean, there were all these things that went against her, any plausible relationship. Why would a man want to marry a woman whose family had essentially done all of these things? But he marries her, he makes her powerful. I had no idea. I had no idea until I went back home that day and read this book on Mughal harems. That sparked my interest in Indian history. And then we moved to the Seattle area. I wrote two other historical novels, actually, believe it or not. And it's very interesting because I've been combating this categorization as a historical novelist. I don't want to be called one because I want to have the ability at some point in the future to write something that's contemporary. But then my first two novels, which are unpublishable and nobody has seen except for me, are historical novels. The Twentieth Wife was my third novel, The Feast of Roses, and The Splendor of Silence, although it's set in May of 1942, is considered a historical novel. What is the second part of your question? What cover everything?

Kellie Holzer:

How do you reinterpret history? But I think you've been sort of talking-

Indu Sundaresan:

I think I've answered that. Yeah.

Kellie Holzer:

Well.

Indu Sundaresan:

Talked for a long time.

Kellie Holzer:

It's an answer. So Bharti, let me ask you, food is a persistent presence and symbol in your novels. Beyond your own interest in cooking and in authoring cookbooks, what is the significance of representing culture through food?

Bharti Kirchner:

Okay. Well, writing fiction for me is really mostly a subconscious process. So I don't often know why am I doing something only later I figure out why I did this and that. So that happens quite a bit with food for me. Food is not just a cultural note or seduction, does many different things for me. And I'll give you an example from my novel, Darjeeling. And this is a story, it's a family story, a family that owns a tea plantation in Darjeeling, India. There is actually a town, a lot of times people are surprised to hear that there's actually a town called Darjeeling and it's filled with tea plantation. There are about 90 or so plantations there. So this family has two daughters and their mother is dead and father is dead. And their grandmother, who's the matriarch, runs the plantations. Now, these two daughters now live in New York and Canada, and they have been called home by their grandmother for their grandmother's 80th birthday.

So I have a scene in the book in which the two daughters, the two sisters actually are cooking together. The older sister is really the cook and she's directing the whole thing and they're making a dessert called Chanar Payesh. And it's actually a very tasty dessert. You don't find that in restaurants here, but it's really good. And it's a multi-stage process. So the older sister already has done part of it and asking the younger sister to do something. And that involves cooking the milk down. It takes a long time, so the milk gets reduced and becomes like half of its volume. So the older sister asked the younger sister to keep an eye on the milk as it's cooking over the stove. And as they're chit-chatting, they have never got along very well, these two sisters. At one time, they were in love with the same man and neither of them are sure who's going to run the tea plantation once grandmother dies.

And there are many other issues between them. So as things are progressing, the younger sister is starting to bring up the differences between them and they're going at each other quite a bit. And what happens is that the younger sister loses her attention and the milk starts to boil over and it burns and it smells bad. And the older sister say, "What did you do? You just spoiled the whole thing I have planned here." And not only that, they're accusing each other and all the issues they have between them now start to come out. And in the meantime, the grandmother comes in, she smells something, she says, "What's going on here?" So there's quite a bit of chaos, but in the meantime, as they're talking, they realize how much they have hurt each other and how long they have been really distant from each other.

So this particular scene really revolves around food and cooking. Now, if I put them say, in a living room and had them discuss all these things, I don't think this would have been as effective. So this is one case where food served yet another purpose for me.

Kellie Holzer:

Thank you. I know I've done that to milk before. I'll admit that. So I have a question for both of you. Both of you write women-centered novels. Would you consider yourselves feminist writers? And if so, can you say something about what is your feminist philosophy?

Indu Sundaresan:

I don't think I consider myself a feminist writer. When you write a novel, at least the first one, about women who live in a harem and a woman who's somebody's twentieth wife, and of course she becomes powerful after that, but she has to use her face and her physical charms to achieve part of it, anyway. It's really difficult to think about... I didn't set out to write a novel that was feminist, but I am told by many people after reading both The Twentieth Wife and The Feast of Roses that there is a certain strain of feminism in that. And given the circumstances, given the society, Mehrunnisa comes across as being feminist. I don't know that I have a feminist philosophy other than I think women are right more times than not. And my husband will agree with that because I tell him to. So I don't think I have one, seriously, not to talk about, anyway.

Bharti Kirchner:

Okay. I am a writer and I don't like to put another label on top of that. And besides, feminism is a really a broad term. It could mean political movement, it could mean consciousness raising, and I'm not really writing about those issues, but my work does support the fundamental belief of feminism, which is equality. My protagonists are strong, independent women, and they make their own choices and they try to find their places in life. They don't see themselves as victims of circumstances, and they also choose men for whom feminism will not be an issue. For example, Darjeeling, the novel I was talking about. The two sisters and in love with that man, one man, and this man ultimately ends up losing both the women, both the sisters, because he is not ready to accept either one of them as equal. But in my novels, I have also shown feminist characters from earlier generations.

For example, the grandmother in Darjeeling, she's a matriarch and she runs the tea plantation on her own and she comes from a very humble background, but she has risen to that level and she's her own person. So my characters live their feminism quietly. One reader told me that this is how he described one of my female characters, that she's a Nike feminist. She does not talk feminism, she just does it. So I think that probably describes it.

Kellie Holzer:

Thank you. You've already talked about this a little bit when you answered the audience question, but can you describe for us what's unique about your writing process or sort of what you go through from the conception of an idea for a story to publication, choosing the book cover, for example, how is your process?

Indu Sundaresan:

So this is the nitty-gritty of it. Well, one of the things that mean the most to me, and if you have read The Twentieth Wife and The Feast of Roses, and if you've read The Splendor of Silence, especially is a sense of place. And I have a little anecdote about why The Splendor of Silence is set in this fictional desert kingdom in Northwestern India. I begin writing my novels in my head about five years before I actually put anything down, or sometimes I put stuff down on paper, and I had done this with Splendor over the last five, six years, about 150 pages written, which I threw away, which didn't make any sense to me, but they were just a process of trying to figure out where the story was going. And it was January of 2005. The novel is interspersed, the main narrative of the novel, which takes place in May of 1942, is interspersed with nine what I call Burma scenes.

And these are scenes that take place in Burma when Sam Hawthorne, this American spy, is in Burma, sent in there to bring out an American missionary who refuses to leave when the Japanese invade Burma. And so they take place on scene and are interspersed through the main narrator and they take place a month before the main narrator, April of 1942. I started writing these Burma scenes first because I knew that they were going to fit into the main story, but I was so vague about the main story at that time that I didn't know where it was going to take place.

So in January of 2005, I began writing the Burma scenes. The monsoon has just begun, the summer monsoon, so it's wet and it's damp and there are leeches and Sam and his two companions are fleeing back to India through the jungles of Burma, and this is what I'm writing about. And I had some vague idea, and partly is going to get a kick out of this, but I had some vague idea that the main narrator was going to take place in a tea plantation, believe it or not. So I was, at that time, researching tea, how it's grown, I had the idea that Mila, the woman whom Sam falls in love with, her father would own a tea estate somewhere in the foothills of the Himalayas, somewhere in Northeastern India.

I was beginning to research that. I don't know if you remember this, but the first 10 days or so of January in 2005, the temperatures plunged down to the teens and they never went up about 18 degrees from the second or third of January till the 14th or 15th of January. Now, here I was writing the Burma scenes, which were cold, not very cold, but wet and damp. And then I was researching tea plantation on the foothills of the Himalayas and these cool, gentle mists and the weather, the cool weather that was necessary for the growing of tea. And I would look out of the window and everything was frozen. I could not go on. So I moved the entire coordinates of the novel during those 10 days in January from Northeastern India to the desert in Northwestern India to a fictional princely state called Rudrakot, and where the temperatures in May of 1942 during those four days would have been 120 degrees in the shade.

And when you finish writing the novel, Publishers Weekly, which is a trade publication, comes out with its reviews. And you always wait with a little bit of trepidation for these reviews. And they had some things to say about Splendor, which we will not dwell upon here. But the nicest thing they said, and I'm quoting them, "Is Sundaresan renders Rudrakot vividly?" And I thought, boy, if only they realized that Sundaresan renders Rudrakot vividly because Seattle had really cold weather.

I mean, essentially it was that... In some ways, when you look back upon it, it was that ephemeral thought that made me move the entire novel from one place to another, but all sorts of things fell into place. The novel just wasn't moving until then. I got to introduce Jai, who's the prince of Rudrakot. I got

to figure out why Sam would come all the way to Rudrakot. I introduced his brother. I brought in new characters and all of a sudden the novel just took flight and I managed to complete it.

Bharti Kirchner:

Okay. I'll try to give you an idea of how I start a story because once I find that if I have started it right, then the writing goes really well. So I usually start a story with a character in a certain situation, usually in a difficult situation at a certain place. And this is how it happens to me. Almost always I get either a sentence that comes to me or some kind of an image. For example, my second novel, Sharmila's Book, and I had just finished my first novel, sent it out to my publisher and I had a two-book contract and I had a second novel due. So I said, "What am I going to do now? What am I going to write about?" And then this sentence came to me. "I still can't believe I agreed to an arranged marriage." And with that, as I thought, I began to see a young woman standing at the New Delhi International Airport as though she's waiting for someone.

And I said, "Who is she? Why is she there? Who is she waiting for?" And a little at a time, the story came to me. Now, for my novel, Pastries, that I have mentioned, that came to me in a totally different way. I happened to be traveling through Japan and I was staying in a hotel outside of Tokyo and in the morning when I wake up, I see that they have a beautiful garden and I walk through the garden and then I see that there is a little bakery. The hotel has a bakery. So I walk into the bakery and I expect to see some Japanese pastries, but instead the showcase was filled with French pastries, beautiful, beautifully done perfect. So I began to wonder, I said, "Who is this Japanese baker who makes these French pastries?" And I never met that man if this was a man, I never met.

And I forgot, I came back home to Seattle and I was writing another book, so I forgot all about this incident. Then many years later, when again, I have finished a novel and I need to start something else, that image came back to me, but the story did not really start in Japan. It started, it just so happened it started in Seattle. So I start writing from that little hint that I get and I write the book in the same way the reader reads. I know it a little at a time as to what's going on. And I don't know the ending until I'm maybe two thirds of the way through that I begin to see the ending, but I don't know how am I going to get there because there may be there are many pages in between and I may have more minor characters come in, more subplots, so I don't really know in between how am I going to get to the end.

Also, one of the joys of writing for me is really, really the music of the language. So I spend a good bit of time once I have gotten the first draft done, is getting the voice right and the language right. And like Indu, the place is very important to me. Once I'm, unlike her, I can't move my characters from one place to another, even though sometimes that'd be more convenient for me. If I could do that, it'd be a lot easier for me, but I can't do that. They wouldn't go. Now, a musician once said that you have the territory, then you have the adventure, and that's how it really works out for me.

Kellie Holzer:

Thank you. Do we have time for one more? So the final question for both of you is, what are some of the challenges and/or opportunities that South Asian American writers face?

Indu Sundaresan:

Actually, there's been a proliferation of South Asian writing. In the US, in the '70s, there was Partha Mukherjee who wrote a good number of really good novels. And then of course, Rashi has been everywhere. And I remember Bharti, when she first got published, and I remember going to listen to her at, I think, it was a Seattle Writers Association meeting, she keynoted there. I remember meeting you there. I don't think she remembers meeting me though because-

Bharti Kirchner:

I did remember you.

Indu Sundaresan:

No, no, no, no, no. I'm sure she doesn't because somebody who was in my writing group went up to her and introduced me to her as Mehrunnisa, because for some reason they used to identify me with the main character of my book at that time. So I remember meeting her there and Chitra Divakaruni. And now all of a sudden there's just been so many, so many writers. And I think it's wonderful because we all have a place. There is a place for all of us. We write about different things. There are a lot of writers who write about the diaspora, diasporic life. There are writers who write about life in India, and then there are people like me who go back more into the past and recreate an entire world there. So I think there's a place for all of us because we all have a story to tell in varying degrees. And I think it's wonderful. I don't know whether Indian fiction, South Asian fiction is going to become mainstream enough that everybody will read us. Perhaps, one day. Why not? But we're definitely on the way there.

Bharti Kirchner:

I think South Asian writing that we have seen so far is really the tip of the iceberg. There's much more going to come, many more genre, and not only from South Asian writers living in US or UK, but also people living in the Indian subcontinent. I should point out here though that I, as a writer, I'm not totally India centric. I live here in the Pacific Northwest, but I write globally. Let me explain that a little bit. In my novel, Pastries, the main character is a young American baker and the novel is set in Seattle and Japan. And one reviewer described this book like this. "This book explores such cross-cultural issues as the Seattle WTO, riots, Wasabi cheesecake, and Zen in the workplace." So you can see the varieties of things I'm dealing with in each novel. And why did I write about Japan?

Because I'm interested in Japan and I admired the culture, I've studied the language a little bit and that interest combined with my interest in baking and surprisingly a novel came out of that. So you might say that I write about what I'm interested in, not just what I know, which means that I have to do a lot of research and it takes me a long time to write a book. My main characters so far have been Indian Americans, but she's usually restless and she's all over the place, sort of like me. And the novel I'm currently working on also doesn't have much to do with India. Now, some people are saying that India is a fad and Indian writing is a fad and it'll go away, but I really don't worry about that. There's a saying in the publishing industry that good writing will always prevail. And I believe that, and I think good writing will always prevail whether it's writing about India or some other place.

Kellie Holzer: Thank you.