Appendix A

Author Interview: Nikita Lalwani

1. Why did you start writing? What role, if any, did being a daughter of Indian immigrants in Britain play in your desire to be an author?

   I think my father was always hoarding material with a view to writing a novel one day, and it is possibly that I absorbed this desire to document our experience as an immigrant family in the UK, as a matter of course. He was always taking photographs, keeping ticket stubs, exercise books, notes, audio. And it seemed natural to me that all of this should be cut and pasted into a collage at some point, a collage of the life one is leading, but also the life one could have lead, the lives led by other people – I guess some of it found its way into Gifted.

2. Diasporic literature is as much an exercise to remember the past by writing down the memories of homeland as it as an attempt to understand the transformation of the immigrant in the new environment. Do you agree?
3. **How much of your work is based on real-life experiences?**

   I think it’s fifty-fifty really, in a fluid sense, from chapter to chapter, scene to scene – sometimes more then sometimes less. The emotional landscape is often real, the characters are usually mash ups of real and invented people, the dialogue is usually invented, the dramatic moments are sometimes based entirely in reality, sometimes fully fabricated. The moral question at the heart of the book is usually ‘true’, one that is troubling me and to which there is no clear answer at the outset of writing the novel.

4. **Gifted is based on the real-life story of Sufiah Yusof which had a significant press coverage when it was taking place. How did Sufiah react to her story being fictionalized?**

   In the Philip Roth sense of writers being ‘liars and con-men’ who ‘confess to crimes they haven’t committed’, Gifted is based partly on my own life (I wanted to be a maths prodigy and did not follow that trajectory, but it is interesting to excavate the aspiration), and partly on research into several ‘prodigies’ from muslim and jewish backgrounds in the UK.

5. **Gifted pits a child’s dream against a parent’s. Especially relevant for Indian immigrants who push their children to fulfil the parents’ thwarted dreams of Ivy League colleges and white-collared jobs. Rumi neither fulfils her father’s hopes nor her mother’s of being a feminine girl well-versed with the rules of Indian culture. She learns to hate her gift and squanders it away. The novel acts a cautionary tale for thousands of ambitious Indian parents. What made you take up such a controversial topic for your first novel?**

   I was interested in the nature/nurture argument regarding genius – can you cultivate a prodigy, and then name her as magical in some way? Also, I was interested in the first/second generation immigrant experience, and the idea that you need to be better than someone from the host nation, if you don’t want to be invisible.
6. An immigrant narrative often brings with it a strong sense of *deja vue*. For example, traditional parents, cultural conflicts, arranged marriages, grand weddings, feasts, funerals, symbolic and actual journeys to homeland, aromatic spices and colourful fabrics often provide clichéd backdrops for immigrant stories. How would you like to position your novels in this space? What is the way forward for diasporic writers?

I think diasporic novels have moved on quite a lot – Gifted was written a decade ago.

7. As a writer do labels confine you? British Asian narratives still have a limited audience and are hardly ever listed in mainstream. Do you agree/disagree?

Yes labels can be a problem – but we’ve got a lot happening now, with diasporic writers. The word ‘British-Asian’ feels like it is used less.

8. Men and women tell different stories of the same experience. How is this particularly relevant to diasporic narratives?

I guess you are referring to the idea of public/private or the domestic? It’s a big question.

9. How do you navigate through the multiple facets of your identity?

Luckily, I don’t have to navigate any more, plurality seems to be the norm.

10. As a second generation immigrant writer, what does India mean to you, personally and as an author?

I had a lot of inherited nostalgia for India, for a long time, and used to visit regularly with a kind of hunger for affection from the place. Being published and received well in India was very important to me and probably a ground-breaking moment that released me of that particular dynamic.

11. The West has been attempting to find the ‘real’ India for centuries. India is always painted in exotic extremes, either India of the slums or India of the palaces and jewels.
Your second novel, The Village also attempts to find the ‘real’ India. Does Roy Bhullar’s confusion with the conflicting sides of India and her divided loyalties between her Indian origin and western gaze mirror yours as a second generation immigrant?

I don’t think it mirrors my gaze, but I was definitely interested in the objectification / poverty-porn aspect of that kind of search for ‘authentic India’.

12. In your narrative on India why did you choose Ashwer, a rural prison camp to be the setting for your novel in The Village?

Ashwer is modelled on Sanganer, a real life prison camp, which I first visited about fifteen years ago, as a fledgling documentary maker for the BBC. The place was and still is fascinating to me, and very little has been written about it.

13. You are a master of subverting perspectives. The notions of justice, authority and freedom seem to run in both Gifted and The Village. How do you think diaspora and your own life experiences have made you more sensitive to multiple points of view?

Your question has made me think about it! I think all novelists need to have this ability to take on multiple points of view, even if the book is written from one point of view. It’s a mandatory part of the process of writing fiction – to empathise, imagine yourself in the shoes of another. In my case it stems back to the same curiosity and slightly intrusive aspect of myself that led me to the field of observational documentary-making. I am always trying to get in close enough to observe that which might go unobserved, in the hope that I can uncover the ‘truth’, which of course, is something that is different depending on the lens.


I’m currently writing a novel set in London.
Appendix B

Author Interview: Preethi Nair

1. Why did you start writing? What role did being a daughter of Indian immigrants in Britain play in your desire to be an author?

I can’t remember a time when I didn’t write so it wasn’t really a decision. Huge. I had a desire to understand and express the contrast of the two cultures.

2. Second/third generation immigrant or ‘native’ British? Which label would describe the feisty young women of your novels the most?

I don’t like labels but if I had to say: Second generation immigrant. British/Asian.

3. As an immigrant exposed to different sets of values you must have questioned the values of your homeland more often than not. How did you reconcile them to your identity?

I didn’t. For a long time, I learned to be chameleon like and switch identities depending on the context. I have assimilated and appreciated them more as I have gotten older.

4. Gypsy Masala must have taken a lot of courage to write and then a lot of grit and determination to go ahead and publish. Can you please share a bit about your experience and what gave you the courage to persist?
The whole story is narrated in great detail on the blog.

http://www.preethinair.com/site/2015/09/28/making-up-the-rules/

I had too much to lose if I failed. I had lied, pretended to be someone else, invested a lot of time and money etc.

5. The Colour of Love pits a child’s dream against a parent’s. Especially relevant for Indian immigrants who push their children to fulfil the parents’ thwarted dreams of Ivy League colleges and white-collared jobs. Though written in a light-hearted manner it acts as a cautionary tale for Indian parents. But unlike many diasporic tales which end in bitterness and alienation from the parents Colour of Love is a tale of hope. In the end there is a space for reconciliation. Based on your first-hand experience what would you like to share with the new generation of second/third generation immigrants growing up in conservative ethnic families in England?

Understand where your parents are coming from e.g. the need to protect you, the need for security and for you to have security. Equally, if you are passionate about something, be who you are and not the version your parents would like you to be. Cross the bridge through conversation.

6. An immigrant narrative often brings with it a strong sense of deja vue. For example, traditional parents, cultural conflicts, arranged marriages, grand weddings, feasts, funerals, symbolic and actual journeys to homeland, aromatic spices and colourful fabrics often provide clichéd backdrops for immigrant stories. How would you like to position your novels in this space? What is the way forward for diasporic writers?

I have never thought about this. I have written about my experiences and it is very clichéd but true!
7. As a writer do labels confine you? British Asian narratives still have a limited audience and are hardly ever listed in mainstream. Do you agree/disagree?

I don’t really work with labels. People can put labels on me but I don’t put them on myself this way there is fluidity to move in any direction.

8. Men and women tell different stories of the same experience. How is this particularly relevant to diasporic narratives?

Not sure how to answer this one!

9. Hundred Shades of White is a celebration of the bond between mothers and daughters. The conflicts as well as the love between strong women. Is this novel inspired by your real life experiences?

To some degree. I think the mother daughter relationship is a very complex one and I wanted to explore this further.

10. Celebration of sisterhood or the bond between women is a recurrent theme even in The Colour of Love. Can you share with us how you got interested in writing about women? Was this a conscious decision?

It wasn’t. I was just writing about what I knew. I wish more thought goes into my work but it doesn’t. I have a desire to tell stories and that is the only decision that is consciously made.

11. After finishing the three-book contract with Harper Collins you have moved on to various other things like writing plays and doing corporate storytelling events. Do you see yourself as writing another novel in the near future?

Perhaps. Again for me it is all about fluidity. I am a storyteller so I am not fixed to a particular medium.
12. Would you like to share a few anecdotes about your plays? How did they come about?

    Again, please read the blog.


13. Anything else you would like to share about your writing process?

    I am not disciplined. I just write when a story follows me around and does not let me go!