

RENU MEHTA

Toronto

She's loves fantasy, adventure and action and has translated all three into a trilogy. Mahtab Narsimhan, an Indian Canadian living in Toronto, is the author of three books. The first book is called The Third Eye which won the Silver Birch Fiction award in 2009 and is now a bestseller in Canada. Her second book is The Silver Anklet and the third - the Deadly Conch - will be out in 2011. In a fan's words, "If J.K. Rowling had written a series on India, this is what she would have written about."

In an exclusive interview with The Indian Express, the Mumbai born author speaks of how she came to be an author, her books, her dreams and her inspiration.

Being an author was not your first choice and you pursued many career paths before finding the one you were really passionate about. Tell us about that.

You are right...this is my fourth career. I have always been an avid reader, but being a writer was not an aspiration. My fondest memories of school include the library where I spent many hours reading and cajoling the librarians to let me borrow more than three books at a time, which was the norm. After completing my Bachelor of Commerce degree, I decided to pursue a career in the hospitality industry which brought me to Delhi and the Oberoi School of Hotel Management. But very quickly, I realized that being on the other side of the counter in a hotel was no fun at all. I then joined the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank in their newly launched credit card division as

# An Interview with Mahtab Narsimhan

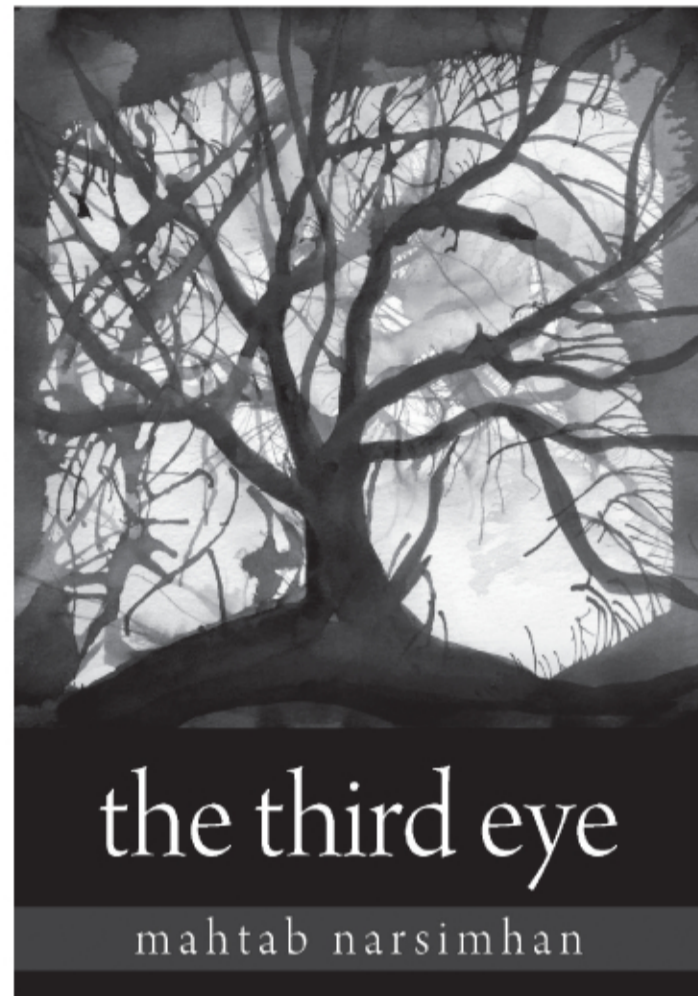


Mahtab Narsimhan, Author

a Sales Executive and interacted with various retailers around Bombay. Marriage took me to Delhi and after that we lived in Dubai, Bahrain and Oman where I worked as a Sales Executive in a Recruitment Agency. That was my third career.

**How did you get inspired to write books?**

My inspiration to write books on fantasy came out of tragedy. When my father passed away



in 2003, I was devastated and immersed myself in books as a means of escape. I loved fantasy and adventure and read Enid Blyton, C.S. Lewis and Harry Potter extensively. With a fascination for Indian mythology, I decided to capture all the memories of my life back in India. These morphed into the idea of writing a children's book. I began by jotting notes and those few notes soon became a notebook and four years later, The Third Eye was born. I have finally recognized my true calling in life; to be a writer. And it only took half a lifetime to find it!

**Tell us about your first book. What is it about?**

In the first book in the series, The Third Eye, Tara has to save her village from an evil healer, Zarku, and find her mother and grandfather who had disappeared without any explanation. Readers see Tara's support system gradually stripped away due to exciting yet dangerous events. When her brother disappears, Tara is alone, scared, and ready to give up on life itself. In despair she looks inward and finds the strength to go on, to avenge the loss of a loved one. During the journey, Tara has to endure a lot of hardships but at the end she realizes it was worth it. She finds that she is able to face the challenge of the unknown with a lot more courage and a lot less fear.

On a deeper level, this story deals with the issue of belief in oneself through the character of Tara. She is deathly afraid of the unknown and of coping with drastic changes in her life. With change comes uncertainty and fear. What if I can't do it? What if I fail? Readers the world over will identify with Tara as she struggles to cope with the challenges that life throws at her, and to keep going despite initial failure. An analogy within the narrative of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, demonstrates that obstacles and hardships are necessary if a child is to develop character and self-confidence.

**Your first novel also won an award?**

Yes, my debut novel went on to win the Sil-

ver Birch Fiction award in 2009. This is a reading program organized by the Ontario Library Association and is now a bestseller in Canada. The film rights of this novel have also been sold.

**Was it difficult to get your first book published?**

It took me a long time to publish my first book. I did get an agent initially, but she was unable to get me a publisher. So I decided to find a publisher on my own and after many attempts was able to get my first book published. I now have two books published with the third book coming out early next year and my fourth book is coming out in the Fall of 2011. I am currently working on my fifth book.

**What is your fourth book about that will be coming out in the Fall of 2011?**

THE TIFFIN is a Young Adult novel set

in the vibrant city of Mumbai with its ubiquitous dabbawallas; men who deliver home-cooked food to the millions of white-collar workers throughout the city. This hundred and fifty year-old service is unique to Mumbai and is an integral part of the plot. The illiterate tiffin-carriers use a primitive alpha-numeric code for deliveries, and yet achieve 99 per cent accuracy. This story is a result of that one error in a hundred.

A tiffin-box containing an important message goes astray, irrevocably changing the life of a young woman, her lover and their son, Kunal. Years later, abandoned and alone, 14 year old Kunal leads a wretched existence, believing he is an orphan. An almost fatal incident leads him to discover he has a mother after all and he is compelled to search for her in a city of millions. Kunal finally tracks her down only to realize that he had already found his real family; one based on respect and friendship, rather than blood.

**Have you achieved your dream?**

Yes and no. Yes, because I finally know what I want to do for the rest of my life. And no because this is just the beginning. I want to be able to write better with each novel that I publish and in my mind, this is a life-long endeavour.

**Any message you would like to give to other aspiring writers?**

For one; read a lot in the genre for which you are writing as well as books in other genres. It will give you a very good idea of excellent writing as well as not so good writing. The only other thing I will say is that all writing takes practice. The more you do it the better you get.

**How can readers get more information about your books?**

By visiting my website [www.mahtabnarsimhan.com](http://www.mahtabnarsimhan.com) or blog

<http://mahtabnarsimhan.blogspot.com/> or through [@MahtabNarsimhan](https://twitter.com/MahtabNarsimhan)

