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Interview with Rasana Atreya by A. B.

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Rasana Atreya is a mother of two living in Hyderabad, India. In 2001, she left her IT job to pursue her dream: writing. Her first novel, *Tell a Thousand Lies* was picked up by a large Indian publishing house, but she chose to self-publish instead. The novel was shortlisted for the 2012 Tibor Jones South Asia prize. Rasana is joining us at Underground Book Reviews today to tell us a little bit about her journey and her inspiration. Welcome, Rasana!

AB: I understand that you grew up in India, though you had a very different childhood than your protagonist. Can you tell us a little bit about your own upbringing?

Rasana: My upbringing was completely opposite to that of my uneducated voiceless protagonist.

Unlike what the movies and books tell you, there is no 'one' India. Not all of India is Slumdog poor (I hate that term, I should mention); there are plenty of people who are educated and affluent, and socially liberal, in that they are opposed to dowry, and believe that a woman should be able to go to college, should she choose to do so.

Having said that, there is quite a parity between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.' Women from socially conservative families are often denied even basic education because either their family thinks it is unnecessary, or because having an educated girl means that they'll need to find her an educated groom, and therefore pony up a bigger dowry. Yes, dowry is banned, and yes, it is still very common.

AB: Being a college-educated city girl, what inspired you to write about a poor, uneducated girl from the country?

Rasana: I haven't ever lived in a village, or been denied education or the right to make my own life choices, even though I come from a middle class background; my upbringing was so drastically different from that of many many women in India that I felt their story needed to be told.

AB: It is sad that skin color is given such merit in all parts of the world, and your novel brings to light some unsavory truths. What other social and cultural issues were you trying to bring to light when you wrote *Tell a Thousand Lies*?

Rasana: Dowry. Despite it being banned, it still happens, and quite openly, too. And, even in families where the woman is as educated as the man, if not more, I find that

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women don't have a say in anything to do with their own lives. A lot of them are expected to hand over their entire salary each month to their in-laws.

AB: After being accepted by a major Indian publishing house, what made you decide to self-publish? Are you happy with your decision?

Rasana: Indian publishers are still coming on-board, ebook-wise. I still see a lot of people confusing ebooks with paperbacks available for sale online. I wanted to see if I could do a good job marketing my own book without any in-your-face marketing or spamming.

My book hit the #1 position in my category (Eastern Drama) end of September 2012. Even since the time it was published (March 2012), it has remained in the top 3. I get a lot of fan mail, my reviews on Amazon and Goodreads have been many, and quite good (4.6 stars from 85 reviews on Amazon. Thank you, dear readers!)

If I had to do it again, I would still self-publish.

AB: What has been the hardest part of self-publishing? What has been the most rewarding?

Rasana: Marketing has to be the hardest part because I dislike spam and will not do it.

The most rewarding part has to be when a reader takes the time to track me down and tell me how much she (it is almost always a 'she') loved my book. I've had readers from the US and the UK, of course, but also from Mexico and Uruguay and Spain!

AB: Since you've quit working in IT, has it been hard to support yourself as a writer? What tips do you have for writers out there trying to make the leap from nine-to-five worker to author and writer?

Rasana: You might as well stick to your day job if you're in it for the money. In the initial stages, anyway. Because I self-published, I did have out-of-pocket expenses. I paid for my book cover, as well as an editor. It is only now, more than seven months later, that I am beginning to see steady income.

From a nine-to-five worker to being an author isn't the smoothest transition, unless you're exceptionally lucky. I went in knowing I was in it for the long haul. Be patient as you wait for your sales to pick up. In the meanwhile, work on your next book.

AB: I'm sure you have other projects brewing. Can you tell us what we can expect next?

Rasana: My next book is set partially in rural India, as well. And, like my first novel, this will have elements of tragedy, as well as comedy. That's what comes to me naturally, so that's how I choose to write about serious issues.

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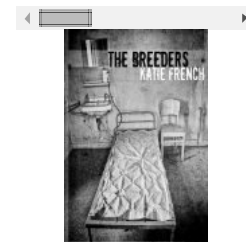
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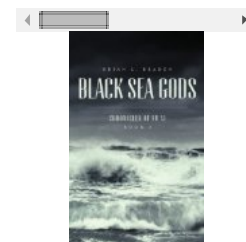
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