SEARCH IN WWW.TECHGOSS.COM Go

Tuesday, July 8, 2014 | 10:41:07 PM

Home | About Us | Privacy Policy | Editorial | Contact Us | Feedback | Anonymous Tip | Advertise | In The Press | RSS

or 250-word news items, photos. Anonymity Guaranteed. Email Editor.
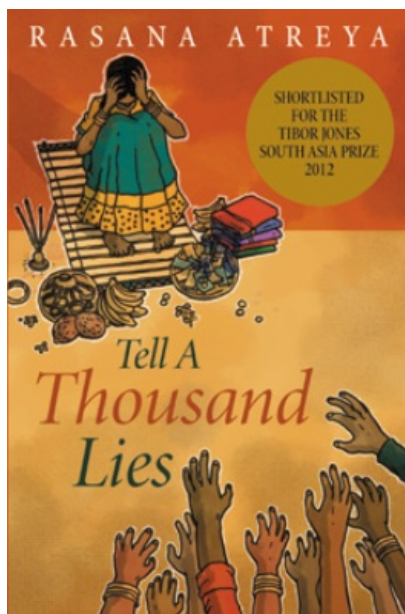
BPO/KPO Services

Comment |

Techie pens 'Tell a Thousand Lies'
By **Hitesh Shetty**

She worked as a Unix Systems Admin and is now a successful writer. Meet Rasana Atreya who self deprecatingly describes herself as 'leaving a comfortable job in IT because she thought roughing it out as a penniless writer was romantic'. Her writing has won critical acclaim and her novel 'Tell A Thousand Lies' was short listed for the prestigious Tibor Jones South Asia prize.

Techgoss (TG): Please share with us your educational and IT work background?
Rasana Atreya: I'm almost hesitant to give you my educational background, mainly because it is so clichéd. I have a Masters degree in computer engineering. I worked as a technical support engineer, and a Unix systems administrator for a few years.

TG: When and how you got interested in writing? Tell us about one major factor that attracted you so much towards writing, that you became a full time writer leaving behind your regular job?
Rasana Atreya: There's never been a time in my life when I didn't write. In fact, when I worked as an engineer, I was often complimented for the manuals / technical how-tos I wrote!

Having our first child was such a life changing event for us that my husband and I decided to each make a major change that affected our lives in a positive way. I chose writing (or, writing chose me.) It wasn't an easy decision, but in the long run it turned out to be the right one for me. I didn't start writing novels right away. I started with technical writing, then moved on to freelancing for newspapers. The moderator of a yahoo group I was part of happened to assign us fiction writing based on certain key words. The resulting story was pathetic, but I'd found my passion.

TG: What is 'Tell a Thousand Lies' your debut novel all about?
Rasana Atreya: 'Tell A Thousand Lies' (TATL) is about a few different things – about relationships between women, about the racism inherent in our country, about political corruption, about superstition.

If you've lived in India for any length of time, you have to have seen advertisements from the manufacturers of skin lightening creams, called fairness creams. These promise everything from good grades to nirvana, if only you use their particular brand of product. This offended me enough that I wrote a tagline, then a whole novel, with this as the theme.

The tagline in question - Fairness Cream: Finding Solutions to Life's Vexing Problems, One Application at a Time

TG: What all went into you towards its creation? How much time did it take to complete the book?
Rasana Atreya: You had to ask! I wanted to write something that spoke to me, yet was outside my comfort zone. So I placed a young girl in rural Andhra Pradesh. A not-very-educated girl. Now, I've never lived in a village. And I have a college degree. And my family is not superstitious, or racist or anything else. But I decided to place my character bang in the midst of all these. I added greed and jealousy and corruption, and I was on a roll.

Techgoss Team

Editor: DJ Varma
Email | MSN Messenger

Reporters:
Bala Shah,Nitin Paul,Yasmin Ahmed

Anonymous Tip: Email

Feedback Letters: Email

I wrote a couple of chapters. I decided my character needed a friend. So I went back and found all the places I could add the friend. Then I decided she needed a grandma, so I went back and did the same. Then I decided my character could do with a couple of sisters, so--you got it--I went and inserted appropriate references. Then I realized that the character wasn't comfortable in her skin; the third person narrative just wasn't cutting it.

So I hemmed and hawed, agonized, bit my nails, and generally drove myself and my long-suffering husband crazy, before deciding that the character needed to tell her story in first person. So I went through the darned manuscript, did a global search for my character's name (Pullamma) and replaced it with 'I'. Because this was first person, right?

It didn't take me very long to see the folly of it--when you're writing in the first person, you have to write only from the point of view of the character. That means you can see/write/talk about only what the character can see/write/talk about. That was quite a revelation and of course required a major rewrite. I never do things by halves, you see.

This went on (more off than on, actually) for three years. The rest of the time I was working on snippets about a man and his wacky eccentric grandparents. I wrote it episodically, and didn't quite have the skill to sew into a book, so I set it aside and went back to TATL.

Tip for newbie writers: don't follow the path detailed above. There are easier ways to do this, believe me. (hint: plotting)

TG: Why did you decide to self-publish your book? What are the pros and cons of self publishing compared to traditional publishing?
Rasana Atreya: A lot of books are published each year, many of them by very good writers. Yet, a lot of them sink without trace. If you're traditionally published and your book doesn't get the chance to make it, chances are your second book will not be published. Also, with promotion budgets shrinking, a lot of publishers are requiring that mid-list (and first time) authors do their own promotion. I figured if I was going to do this anyway, might as well go all out.

Pros: you set the price, you get up to 70% royalties, you can see exactly how many books you sell each day (each hour, if you want), you decide the cover, you pick the editor you're comfortable with. In short, the buck stops with you.

Cons: It is hard work. You, the author, are responsible for absolutely everything – the editing, the cover designing, the print book formatting, the ebook formatting, and of course the marketing. For the first three, I hired professionals. The ebook formatting I did myself. And all the marketing and promotion.

Another con - a lot of awards (though not all) will not consider self-published authors at all.

TG: Does your book 'Tell a Thousand Lies' draw on any people / incidents during your time in the IT industry?
Rasana Atreya: Actually, 'Tell A Thousand Lies' is about as far as you can get from the IT industry. Nothing in common at all.

TG: 'Tell a Thousand Lies' in its first week was downloaded by 17K+ people with 900 odd copies being sold on Amazon. Your manuscript has also been short listed for the 2012 Tibor Jones South Asia Prize. Is this a satisfying reward for the exhaustive effort you put towards self-publishing your book?
Rasana Atreya: Very much so. To see all I've accomplished is a reward in itself. If I had to do it over – I'd do the exact same thing.

TG: What is the next book idea you are working on?
Rasana Atreya: My next book is tentatively titled 'Half A House.' It is about a man working in IT, and his madcap grandparents. And a few other things (read the book to find out J). I hope to have it out in the next few months.

Thank you for having me here!

(12/18/2012)

Print   E-Mail   Discuss   Digg   Facebook   Save   Write to Editor