

Kiran Desai



"Writing, for me, means humility," the Indian-born novelist Kiran Desai told an interviewer. "It's a process that involves fear and doubt, especially if you're writing honestly." Such doubt and humility not withstanding, Desai—the daughter of the noted writer Anita Desai—has won a great deal of praise for her two novels. The first, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), drew comparisons to the work of her fellow Indian-born writer Salman Rushdie, for the richness of her writing, characters, and multiple plots, and she won Britain's Man Booker Prize for her 2006 novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, a multigenerational story set in India and New York.

Kiran Desai was born on September 3, 1971 in New Delhi, India, one of the four children of Anita Desai, whose novels include *Voices in the City* (1965), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), and Baumgartner's *Bombay* (2000), and Ashvin Desai, a businessman. Anita Desai's mother was German, her father a refugee from what later became Bangladesh; Ashvin Desai's parents were from the western Indian region of Gujarat. Kiran Desai was raised in India, sometimes living outside New Delhi and sometimes in Kalimpong, in the Himalayas, where her family had a house "that was named Chomiomi after a snow mountain in Tibet." She had a happy childhood.

Desai received part of her education at St. Joseph's Convent in Kalimpong and then, when she was 15, moved to England to continue her schooling. After a year in England, Desai moved to the United States. She attended high school in Massachusetts before enrolling at Bennington College, in Bennington, Vermont. She studied for a time at the writing program at Hollins University, in Roanoke, Virginia, and later went to Columbia University, in New York City, where she obtained an M.F.A. degree.

It was at Hollins that Desai began writing her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, published in 1998. In an interview for the Random House online publication *Bold Type* (May 1999), Desai revealed that she had got the idea for the novel after reading an account in an Indian newspaper of a hermit who lived for many years, until his death, in a tree. "So I began to wonder about what it was about someone like this who would do something as extreme as to spend his life in a tree," Desai said. "So it started really with that character, and then the story built up around it." She began writing, she added, with "no idea what the story would be" and "no idea of the plot. It sort of gathered momentum and drew me along. It was an incredibly messy process." *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* tells the story of Sampath, a misfit young man in an Indian village whose life lacks direction until he becomes a tree-dwelling guru, attracting followers from far and near. Sampath's traditionalist father, disconcerted at first by his son's actions, is ultimately not above making profits from the sale and resale of objects of devotion that are to be placed at the foot of the tree; the novel follows many others among Sampath's family members and fellow village dwellers, as well.

For her first novel, Desai was presented with the Betty Trask Award, given by the Society of Authors, a British organization.

Contd.

Cultural Calendar for April 2007

April 9

"Isai Vadya Pravagam" – An instrumental & vocal music recital by the staff members of Pragadeeshwaralaya Academy of Fine Arts, directed by Mrs. Pragatha Thillainadaraja, Principal of Pragadeeshwaralaya Academy of Fine Arts

Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

April 11

"Guru Upahara" – A programme dedicated to Sangeeth Visharadha Sunil Shantha by his senior pupils. Lyrics of Sunil Shantha will be sung & played

Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

April 18

Film: Do Bigha Zamin (with English subtitles)
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Bimal Roy
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs

April 20

Film: Ankur (with English subtitles)
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Shyam Benegal
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs

April 27

Film: 36 Chowringhee Lane (with English subtitles)
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Aparna Sen
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs

(Admission to all programmes is free on first come first served basis)

"If *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* established Desai as an expert storyteller, *The Inheritance of Loss*," Desai's 2006 novel, "distinguishes her as a writer of note," Jennifer Berman commented in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* (January 22, 2006). Set mainly in Kalimpong, where Desai spent much of her childhood, *The Inheritance of Loss* follows the lives of a retired, English-educated judge, whose time abroad has caused him to feel permanently out of place in his homeland; the judge's granddaughter, Sai, an orphaned teenager who lives with him; the judge's cook, who dotes on Sai; the cook's son, Biju, who earns subsistence wages as a cook in New York; and Sai's tutor and romantic interest, Gyan, an ethnic Nepalese who become involved with a rebel group and thereafter rejects what he sees as Sai's bourgeois lifestyle.

Although it focuses on the fate of a few powerless individuals, Kiran Desai's extraordinary new novel manages to explore, with intimacy and insight, just about every contemporary international issue: globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence," Pankaj Mishra wrote in an assessment of *The Inheritance of Loss* for the *New York Times Book Review* (February 12, 2006).

In 2006 Desai won the Man Booker Prize, awarded to writers who are British or Commonwealth citizens, for *The Inheritance of Loss*, becoming the youngest woman ever to receive the prize.

Kiran Desai lives in Brooklyn, New York. Each year she visits India, where much of her immediate family live.

Source : Web



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SANDESH

The monthly newsletter of the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo

Inaugurating a new section on
Modern Indian writing in English
at ICC Library

April 2007

Santosh Verma, Kaleidoscope, 2006

Past Events

2nd February

Bharatha Natyam Recital
by Ms. Prakruthi Kolay



Ms. Prakruthi Kolay, from India mesmerized the audience at the Centre with her beautiful performances. Ms. Prakruthi is a disciple of Smt. Revathy Narasimhan. Among the items she performed was a Keerthanam in praise of Lord Shiva.

28th February

Hindustani Vocal Music Recital
by Ms. Chamila Edwards



Ms. Chamila Edwards presented a captivating Hindustani vocal music recital at the Centre. She commenced with raag Gorakh kalyaan and continued with Daadra & a Krishna Bhajan.

23rd February

Violin & Tabla Recital by Ms. E.M. Indrani Edirisooriya & Mr. Chandralal Amarakoon



Ms. E.M. Indrani Edirisooriya & Mr. Chandralal Amarakoon presented an instrumental recital on 23rd February at the Centre. Ms. Indrani commenced the recital with a violin solo in which she played raag Purvi in Vilambith ek taal, Madhyalaya teen taal & Druthalaya teen taal. Mr. Chandralal continued the programme with a Tabla solo.

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LIBRARY

The Indian Cultural Centre is starting a new section on Modern Indian Writing in English
Modern Indian writing in English is a vibrant voice in English fiction which has won a huge readership worldwide. English language publishing has been energized by the works of these writers who have enriched and indeed changed the style of writing in English prose. We are beginning a collection of the works of these writers at the ICC which will be added to regularly.

Kiran Desai

[Winner of Man Booker Prize 2006]
The Inheritance of Loss
Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard

V.S. Naipaul

[Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature]
Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey
Half a Life
A House for Mr. Biswas
Magic Seeds
Guerrillas
The Middle Passage
India

Arundhati Roy

[Winner of the 1997 Booker Prize]
God of small things by

Amitav Ghosh

[Hutch Crossword Book Award]
The Glass Palace
The circle of Reason
The Hungry Tide

Vikram Chandra

[Commonwealth Prize for Best Book]
Love and Longing in Bombay
Sacred Games y
Red earth and pouring rain

Rohinton Mistry

[Short listed for the 2002 Man Booker Prize]
A fine balance
Such a long journey
Family Matters
Tales from Firozsha Baag

Mukul Kesavan

Secular Common Sense

Vikram Seth

Beastly Tales: From here and there
Two Lives
The Golden Gate
An Equal Music
A Suitable Boy

Salman Rushdie

The Moor's Last Sigh
Shalimar the Clown
The Ground beneath her feet
Shame
Midnight's Children

Manjula Padmanabhan

Unprincess
Double Talk
Kleptomania: Ten Stories

Anita Nair

The Better Man
Mistress
Ladies Coupe
Satyr of the subway
Living next door to Alise

Shashi Tharoor

Riot: a novel
The Great Indian Novel
Bookless in Baghdad
India

Manju Kapur

A Married Woman
Home
Difficult Daughters

Irwin Allan Sealy

Red
The Everest Hotel

Githa Hariharan

The Ghost of Vasu Master
The thousand faces of night

Amitav Ghosh

The Calcutta Chromosome by
Countdown

Films in April

Do Bigha Zamin (with English subtitles)



Shambhu (Balraj Sahni) celebrates the arrival of rains, after two years of drought with his son Kanhaiya and wife Parvati (Nirupa Roy). His joy is short lived, as the zamindar wants Shambhu's land for putting up a factory. The zamindar manipulates and bribes the local officials into declaring Shambhu a defaulter, for not having repaid loans taken from the zamindar. The film poignantly details the efforts of Shambhu to regain his land. A film by Bimal Roy which won the 1953 Fimfare awards for the Best Film & Best Director.

Language: Hindi - **Starring:** Balraj Sahni, Nirupa Roy, Ratan Kumar, Murad, Nana Palsikar & Nazir Husein - **Directed by:** Bimal Roy

Ankur (with English subtitles)



The debut directorial film from Shyam Benegal, deals with social disparities and exploitation. This film focuses on power and privilege with careful thought and acute perception. This film won the award as second best feature film in 1974.

Language: Hindi - **Starring:** Anant Nag, Shabana Azmi, Priya, Tendulkar, Sadhu Meher, Kadar Ali Beg & Agha Mohammed Hussain - **Directed by:** Shyam Benegal

36 Chowringhee Lane (with English subtitles)



In post-independent India a teacher, Violet Stoneham (Jennifer Kendal), lives a quiet and uneventful life at 36 Chowringhee Lane in Kolkata. Alone after the marriage of her daughter, her only joy in life is teaching Shakespeare despite the lack of interest from her students. When a former student, Nandita pays a visit with her author-boyfriend Samaresh, Violet is delighted, particularly when Samaresh decides that he would like to work on a novel in her apartment. This film won the

awards for Best Director, Best Cinematographer & Best Regional Film in 1981.
Language: Hindi - **Starring:** Jennifer Kapoor, Debashree Roy & Soni Razdhan - **Directed by:** Aparna Sen