

Novel idea

Local author explores South Asian heritage in fourth novel

By COREY BAUMER

It's not every day a local homemaker picks up a pen and gets her novels published, but that's what's happened to author Falguni Kothari.

Mumbai native and current Edgemont mother Kothari never dreamed of writing novels, let alone becoming an internationally published author. Toward the end of 2009, as her two children were getting older, one in middle school and one in high school, Kothari found herself with more free time during the day.

Her mother suggested picking up the educational path that she'd left off in India as a young bride.

Going back to school didn't exactly pique Kothari's interest, but the idea of classes enticed her enough to browse some online courses.

"It happened very accidentally," Kothari said of her writing career. "I stumbled onto [a class] called 'Romance Writing Secrets' and I just did it. It was a six-week online course and it was just fun to do. I don't know how it happened but once I finished that course I did not stop writing. I was writing every day until I finished [my first] manuscript."

After the shock of finishing a full manuscript wore off, Kothari began sharing her story with friends and local book clubs to which she belonged. The feedback she received gave her enough confidence and courage to pitch the book to publishers. With no real knowledge of the publishing industry, Kothari forged ahead, landing her first publishing deal in India.

Now a seasoned writer, Kothari continues to move up the literary ladder. Harlequin, a division of HarperCollins, is Kothari's most recent publisher. Harlequin India published her 2014 novel, "Bootie and the Beast," and its newest fiction imprint, Graydon House, is set to release her fourth and most recent novel, "My Last Love Story," on Jan. 23.

Her new novel tells the story of a wife who wishes to fulfill her dying husband's final two wishes — to have a child so a part of him will always live on and, more complexly, to repair a sullied friendship with their best friend, who also happens to be her old flame.

Kothari's story tackles themes of polyamory and truth in some of the most unexpected places. This is not Ko-

thari's first time confronting themes that might open a reader's eyes; she hails feminism as a catalyst and inspiration for her storytelling.

"My grandmother used to tell me stories and I didn't realize until much later when I was a teenager that she was telling me all of these classic Indian mythology tales and fairy tales with a very feminist bent," Kothari said. "She made them into women's stories as opposed to the more patriarchal stories you typically hear in India."

Kothari's female characters are intricate and complex and real. She continues to tell stories from the often unheard woman's point of view, just as her grandmother did for her.

Kothari's family and background have continued to impact and influence her writing. There is not one aspect of her life, she said, that has not affected her storytelling. Kothari, who grew up in Mumbai and lived there until moving to New York with her husband and children in 2001, bases all of her books in India or the Indian Diaspora.

"There's so much of India that hasn't been explored in the literary world," she said. "I don't think I'm going to run out of material anytime soon."

Kothari also credits family life and culture in India, as well as her role as a mother and wife, for much of her plot. She considers herself to truly be a South Asian writer.

Growing up, however, Western culture also had its influence on Kothari. At the time, Indian literature tended to

be very heavy reading; it wasn't geared toward teenagers or children. More lighthearted books and romances were not commonplace, but Kothari was, and remains, an avid reader. She took to Western romance and teenage literature. This norm has since changed, and the last several years have brought an onset of lighthearted romance novels to India's forefront, including Kothari's.

This wasn't the only impact Western society had on Kothari's writing.

"Quite honestly," Kothari said, "if I hadn't moved to New York, if I was still living in India or Mumbai, I don't think I would have become a writer. My life was completely different there."

Kothari's life in India was constantly busy, she said. Family life took up so much of her time, she doubts she would have found the time to discover her passion. She said she also found the quiet pace of the suburbs helped her find space for herself. Lastly, she credits New York for giving her the freedom to write.

"No matter how progressive India has become since my childhood," Kothari said, "it still is kind of stuck in the very patriarchal, very narrow-minded look on life. In New York, I found that people give you the freedom to think and behave as you want, without judgment."

Kothari will appear at Barnes and Noble, 680 White Plains Road, to launch her newest novel, "My Last Love Story," Saturday, Jan. 20, at 5 p.m. Kothari will speak at the event and complimentary launch cookies will be available.



Falguni Kothari

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