

India inspires Canadian author Merlaine Hemstraat's debut novel

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NEW DELHI: [Canadian author Merlaine Hemstraat](#) has a strong India connection - she studied the country's metaphysical traditions, her debut novel is named after our national bird and one of the main characters in her book is a doctor from Kashmir.

She says several factors led to the spark of the idea for her book "Peacocks among the Tamarind Trees".

"My extensive use of research prompted me to develop the idea to set my book in Africa and India. As I have studied India's metaphysical traditions, it seemed like a perfect fit," Hemstraat told PTI.

"Peacocks among the Tamarind Trees, published by Palimpsest, is about a group of medical professionals embarking on an experience of a lifetime.

According to the author, it has most of the elements of life: love, extreme joy, birth, mortality, personal challenges, fear, the need for acceptance and forgiveness, the fickleness of human nature, and specifically it has the mystery, the urgency and the nearly insurmountable challenge of saving the life of one of the main male characters, Dr [Aditya Raina](#), who had contracted a rare terminal disease.

"Although initially the story is set at a hospital in Dar-es Salam in Tanzania, it quickly moves to a remote medical clinic in Tanzania near the Serengeti Plains before concluding in India. Each of the medical professionals has an appointment with destiny. The main female character Dr. [Faith Valencia](#), a doctor from [Canada](#), initially falls in love with a French doctor of internal medicine. However, before long her heart leads her to true love with Dr. Raina, a surgeon recently transferred from New Delhi," Hemstraat says.

Events and characters in the story twist and turn leading the reader through a myriad of metaphorical tunnels, plateaus and mazes in the book, concluding the story in New Delhi where Dr. Raina comes face to face with an astounding secret from his past.

The author says she chose a Kashmiri character as she felt the region is extremely beautiful and "it symbolised my character: robust, breathtakingly beautiful and yet resplendent of contrasts".

Although she wanted to showcase the Indian nation, its people and its incredible beauty, she says her book is "for everyone, as beauty lives in us all".



Hemstraat chose "Peacocks among the Tamarind Trees" as the title for her debut novel because it "captured some of the essence" of India.

"The peacock is the national bird of India and the tamarind tree bean pods form part of the staple diet of India. The name felt poetic like a beautiful Indian raga, with the fire and passion of the ancient musical genre," she says.

According to the author, although her characters were not created with anyone specific in mind, she believes that each of them "represents a part of us all".