

# AN EXPLORER OF SPIRITUAL SPACE

Writer and dancer **Tulsi Badrinath** is based in Chennai. Her first novel, *Meeting Lives*, was on the 2007 *Man Asian Literary Prize* longlist under a different title. She trained in *Bharat Natyam* from the age of eight and has performed widely in India and abroad. Her short stories have appeared in *Namaste* and Penguin's *First Proof* 3. Her second novel, now titled *Man of A Thousand Chances*, was also on the *Man Asian Literary Prize* longlist, in 2008, and is about to be released. In an interview with Books Editor **Yogesh Vajpeyi**, she talks about her twin loves.

After your MBA from Ohio University, you worked for four years at Stan-Chart bank. What prompted you to switch?

Though the experience of working in the corporate world was very interesting, I found I wanted to express myself creatively. I had learnt *Bharat Natyam* from the age of eight, around the same time I started writing poems, and increasingly wanted to devote myself to these areas of artistic expression. In-

identally, my literary career began in the pages of *Indian Express*, when, in the 80's, they carried a page called *Youthink* within the main newspaper, for literary efforts.

**How did you conceive your first novel, *Meeting Lives*?**

Having left the bank when my son was born, I found other women facing the same dilemma—whether to pursue a career or stay at home to raise their children. The book arose from my experiences of dealing with the new, often bewildering, experience of motherhood.

**Why did you intersperse your narrative with verses from the *Upanishads* and biographical texts of revered Vedantins?**

I wanted to invoke the philosophy and world-view of *Vedanta*, and to see how far we practice it in our daily lives. The protagonist, Aditi, realises that in becoming a mother, she has also shaped a tiny human form, a new garment for an ancient *atman*.

**Any continuity in *The Man of Thousand Chances*?**

In my writing, I want to map both the geographical space we live in

and the vertical spiritual space we occupy, to paraphrase Raja Rao, the writer-philosopher. The continuity in between my two novels is not so much in terms of theme, but in the exploration



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It required some very specific research relating to coins and numismatics, as I was looking for certain themes to write about and bring alive the character of the numismatist in my novel.

**Is there any special reason for setting the novel against the backdrop of a museum?**

Harihar, the protagonist, steals rare gold coin from the museum where he works. This allowed me to write about the beauty of Indian art and aesthetics.

**What does the protagonist Harihar signify?**

Harihar Arora is a second generation North Indian settled in Madras. I thought it would be interesting to write about his life in south India.

**Apart from storytelling, your fiction makes one think. Is this deliberate?**

Well, I have always wanted to write fiction that rewards the reader at multiple levels, and something that offers new insights each time one returns to the book.

**Writing and classical dance are your two passions. How do you integrate the two?**

These are two distinct ways in which I express myself. They are complementary to each other one using the body as an instrument of expression, and the other distilling thought in silence and near stillness.

**What are you planning to write next?**

A work of non-fiction

