

A woman in a floral dress stands with her back to the camera, looking out from a cave opening towards a bright, sunlit beach and ocean. The cave walls are dark and textured, while the light from the opening creates a strong contrast and silhouettes the woman.

THREE DAYS OF  
**CATHARSIS**

**ATRAYEE BHATTACHARYA**

## Three Days of Catharsis

Publishing-in-support-of,

# **EDUCREATION PUBLISHING**

RZ 94, Sector - 6, Dwarka, New Delhi - 110075  
Shubham Vihar, Mangla, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh - 495001

**Website:** *www.educreation.in*

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**ISBN:** 978-1-61813-356-4

**Price:** ₹ 350.00

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Printed in India

# *Three Days of Catharsis*

*A*trayee *B*hattacharya



**EDUCREATION PUBLISHING**

(Since 2011)

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## *About The Book*

The story revolves around the reminiscences of Katyayani Krishnan, an NRI girl from Singapore, who comes to IIM Kolkata on a student exchange program. She is born to a Bengali mother and a Tamil Iyer father. A sarcastic interactive session with two IIM officials needles her to start questioning her identity. Furthermore, when her maternal grandfather introduces her to the norms of a patriarchal society, she reminisces about several incidents where her parents pedantically make her understand that she is a cultural blend and unique. Her cathartic journey continues when she meets her gamophobic cousin, Thia. A series of conversations makes Katyayani to reveal the nitty-gritties of an intercultural family, her learning process to speak a multitude of languages, how God provided her a channel to start eating non-vegetarian food, and most importantly her fun-filled journey amidst the behavioral and cultural differences between her bloodlines.

The story continues with her past chequered love life with a Bengali cultural bigot, Sudhanshu, marking an attendance in her present. Amidst the god-fearing family members, Katyayani reveals her open relationship with God and her concept of spirituality to Thia. Even after knowing the

minutiae of her life when Thia still questions her identity, she finds her mind free from befuddlement. She defines the true meaning of culture to Thia, she declares her accomplishments as her virtue and she redefines her identity as an outcome of true love and a cultural blend. This book is an effort to bring about the monumental change in humanity to grow and survive as homo sapiens and not to cling on to a particular language or culture to define ourselves.



## *About The Author*

Atrayee Bhattacharya is a Microbiologist by qualification, an Educator by profession and a Writer by passion. She is a columnist in two reputed online magazines, [reviste.in](http://reviste.in) and [bkhush.com](http://bkhush.com).

She is also a regular contributor to e-Fiction India magazine. Currently she resides in Singapore with her husband and travels extensively between Singapore, Kolkata and Chennai. She is fond of writing about the myriad of emotions in tangled human relationships.







*Dedicated to all those  
humans who believe virtue  
lies in their accomplishments  
and not in their cultural and  
linguistic background*





# Acknowledgement

We all have hidden desires in life. In a competitive world, and in the constant battle for earning to make ends meet, those desires remain concealed. I am indeed a fortunate soul to have a bunch of friends and family, who encouraged me to pursue those hidden dreams of mine. I have penned this story largely out of my personal experiences with various people whom I have interacted with. But there are some people whom I must definitely thank for bringing this novel to the light of the day.

First and foremost, I am deeply indebted to my husband Dr. Harish Venkatakrisnan, for his undying support, encouragement and for meticulously improving my English. Huge thanks to Mahashweta Bhattacharya for her timely guidance, to Sushmita Prayaga, Rajnita Chatterjee and Manaswita Mukhaty for believing in me and a special mention to Krithika Rangarajan for bringing about a monumental difference in my life.

I hope this novel will spur me on to weave many more intricate tales around many more interesting characters. However, Kutu shall always remain close to my heart akin to a first born. *Three Days of Catharsis* is entirely fictitious. Every character in it is a product of my roving imagination

only. Though some characters may be familiar and recognizable to certain people, their lives certainly has no connection with reality.



# Chapter 1



“Madam, I think you have made a mistake. Please check the column of your mother tongue.” A semi bald man with a pencil moustache, who had tried his best to dye his remaining hair black, handed over my form back to me for correction. With a smirk on my face, I started observing him more carefully before I could clarify his doubt. That’s in my genes. Or, to be precise I got this habit from my mom. His pencil moustache reminded me of John Waters. The typical Bengali accent made me modify the alphabets in his words to match his accent. It was like *“Madaam, aai theenk you habh made a mistayke. Please cheyck the kaulaam of your maadar taang.”*

Before I could laugh out loud on my observation he reminded me of the much needed job to be done from my side.

“Sir, my mother tongue is Bengali, rather Bangla.”

“But you have written Krishnan as your surname.” He continued. “There must be a cohesion madam. It is India, not Singapore.”

“Then what shall I write sir? My mother is a Bengali. So my mother tongue remains Bangla irrespective of my surname.”

“Oh.” There was a prolonged silence from his side. “So you know Bangla? Thank you. *Ingreji te katha bolte boro daate byatha hochilo*. I mean why to speak in a foreign language if you know my mother tongue.” He meant it was painful to speak in English. But along with that candid confession, Bangla no longer remained just a language of communication. It became HIS mother tongue. He became more comfortable in handling the documents for my student exchange program trimester in IIM, Kolkata. He spoke uninterruptedly about Bengal, *maacher jol*, *Rabindrasangeet*, all prominent features of Bengali culture and eminent Bengali personalities. There was a sort of pride while he introduced me to one of his colleagues. His pride was supplemented with the fact that my surname and mother tongue didn’t have the much needed cohesion.

My file was transferred to the next step of the ladder. In the last one week I realized something extremely important about India. There are thousands of interconnected ladders which you must climb before you start thinking about your ladder of success. I was asked to wait for a few hours in the waiting hall. Few more students were waiting for their turn. I exchanged courteous smiles with all of them. They resembled the “good students” category of Mom which I do not belong to. According to Mom, I am a

good student but I don't *look* the part of a "good student." It seems she was also like this during her college days. The unnecessarily long discussion over my Bong connection had made me a bit thirsty. As I moved towards the water dispenser, a guy approached me asking whether I was joining in the student exchange programme. While he tried to start a full-fledged conversation, I put all my efforts into drinking water rather than converse with him. This was something strange for I never do this usually. His efforts weren't futile as I finally paid attention to what all he was asking. We exchanged our basic details and I comprehended that he accepted me as a complete South Indian.

"So, where do you belong to?"

"India." I smiled

"No. I mean, which country do you reside in?"

"Okay! My upbringing was in Singapore."

"Your parents are still there? I mean, do you have plans to go back?"

"I am a very poor planner. I have not yet planned for my interaction with Mr. Gurunathan." I smiled and ransacked the whole area for anyone calling out my name.

"Why should you plan for him? He is 'your people' only." A statement like this from a MBA student and a future entrepreneur sounded ridiculous to me.

"My people! *Maane*? What does that mean?"

“Wait a second. What did you say? *Maane*. Do you know Bengali?” The CAT cleared IIT graduate found the most inopportune moment to reveal his jurisprudence in logic and basic aptitude.

“It is not Bengali. The language is Bangla. And yes, I do know Bangla as it is my mother tongue.”

He peeped into my visit pass and read it aloud, KATYAYINI KRISHNAN.

“That’s a SOUTH INDIAN name and your mother tongue is Bengali, I mean Bangla?”

There I was dragged into the tagline of being South Indian again. If a Bengali is not an East Indian then why does a Tamilian become South Indian? My MNC job aspirant friend didn’t realise the most important thing. It was the surname that sounded South Indian, not my name. My name was from the pages of the Vedas which any Hindu can use all over the globe.

“My name is Katyayini, which is another name of Durga. It appears even in the *Lokhir Pachali* what Bengali women read every Thursday. Yes, you can raise your eyebrows on my surname as it doesn’t sound Bengali. My father is a Tamil *Iyer* and my mom is a Bengali Brahmin. And, I can speak both Tamil and Bangla along with Hindi and English and of course French which I learnt as a foreign language. One more thing, I am not a South Indian. I consider myself as an Indian and documents stamp me as an NRI.”

He was left speechless for a few seconds due to my mini lecture on linguistics and being Indian.

“Are you alright?” I asked.

“No. I mean Yes, I am fine. Just that I was a bit out of the way.”

I thought I had spoken more than required for a five minute interaction so I smiled at him to make him feel comfortable. Somehow, the last few days in India were beginning to leave a bitter taste in my mouth. I was getting tired of clarifying my mere existence as just another girl.

“So, where were we? Yeah. Gurunathan is South Indian. I mean Tamilian. So he won’t be a trouble maker. You will be benefitted by a swift approval.”

That was another thing I got to know after coming here. There is a symbiotic relationship between people belonging to the same caste and creed. Work is done smoothly if the official belongs to your community. To be honest, I experienced the benefits just half an hour ago. After an hour’s discussion over literature, history, politics etcetera, I got a break to ask the guy’s name.

“Oh. My name is Sandeep Banerjee. Fully Bengali.” He smiled and left me with a raised eyebrow on “fully Bengali.”

I kept waiting while gulping down a few more glasses of water. My Titan Raga watch was ticking towards 11.30 A.M. and the breakfast’s *aaloo parantha* was fully digested. Diya, my maternal

grandma, intended to give me a packed lunch which I fervently denied. I was feeling famished when all of a sudden a dark thin man appeared with his tremulous voice. “Madam, *aapko sir bulata.*” I stood up holding my Prada handbag and walked towards Mr. Gurunathans’s room while my stilettos clacked on the marble flooring.

“May I come in Sir?”

“Please come in Miss. Krishnan. *Ukkarungo.*” An old man, probably in his last year of service, invited me with a broad smile on his face. As I approached my chair, I realized that the man I was facing was a staunch Tamil Brahmin. His *Brahminism* was certified by his forehead fully smeared with *pattai vibhuti* and a round dark *kumkum*. He was fair, quite contrary to the preconceived notion about *Madrasis*. Wearing a beige colour shirt and black colour formal pant, he forced himself to get away from his comfort zone of *veshti*. He pored over my documents through his gold-rimmed spectacles while I was busy observing his facial features to predict a resemblance with some of my paternal side relatives. In the midst of my observation, I realized that my endeavour was baseless as this man had a thick mop of hair which most of my paternal side lacked, for that matter, majority of the *TamBrahms*.

“Okay. So, Miss Krishnan, There won’t be much of a problem from our side. A lot of NRI candidates pursue higher studies in India these days. After all,

India is progressing. Our education system is at par with the international standards. What do you think?"

A sudden outpour of flawless English in Kolkata took my breath away. I was feeling a bit more comfortable. Though I speak four other languages I feel contented while conversing in English, thanks to my Singapore schooling, my mom's tendency to converse in English while discussing serious issues and of course my father being a *TamBrahm*, whose mother tongue is actually English in disguise. Yes, I do accept the valuable contributions of my dad towards my stock of English words.

"Yes." Before I could utter anything else, Mr. Gurunathan continued his veneration towards IIM.

"You know Miss Krishnan, IIMC was the first institute of India for pursuing post graduate degree of Management. It is one of the finest business schools in Asia, and I believe, in coming years it will definitely raise to the next level. What do you say?"

This time I didn't give him enough chance to continue further. "Yes, of course. I was really very excited when I got to know IIMC provides student exchange with NUS. I mean National University Singapore. You won't believe this sir but I joined NUS for this particular reason."

He smirked as he realized my flattering words were going over the top. "Kolkata is a nice place to live in. When I came some twenty years back it was Calcutta. Now it is Kolkata. Very nice place. Very nice people. Bengali people accept everybody. They

are very sweet. Don't worry about food as there are plenty of South Indian restaurants available nearby. But *thayir sadam konjam problem*. Curd is very sweet here. Even the sour curd is a bit sweet. My family was very worried when I first stepped out of Tamilnadu. Now, they are used to it."

"*Thayir sadam*, you mean curd rice. Oh. That's not a problem. I don't like it." I gave my childish smile. Mr. Gurunathan's questioning look reminded me of Thatha (my paternal grandfather).

"*Thayir sadam vendaam ah!*" (You don't want curd rice!)

"No. I don't like it. I don't like the taste and appearance of curd rice."

Probably he didn't like me telling that. His disappointment diverted him towards his paper work. Finally, I got my documents signed. Before I could let a breath of relief, he uttered few words in Tamil which I failed to hear.

"Sorry. I couldn't hear." Oh my god! Why did I ask that? My paper work was all done, why couldn't I keep my mouth shut?

"*Tamizh teriyadha?* I mean don't you know Tamil?"

"I know. I mean, I can speak, understand but can't write. Why?"

"*Seri*. It happens with NRI kids. Sad. Very sad." He smiled with a slight sarcasm.

“Hmm.” I had nothing else to say. I wanted to stop the conversation and grab some chicken nuggets in the nearby KFC. My hunger had reached its peak and I was envisioning some flying plates loaded with lip-smacking foods. I swallowed my saliva few times but didn’t know why all my exertions went overlooked.

“Where are your parents from?” He moved his chair a bit backward, put his right leg on top of his left leg and started playing with an eye-catching paper weight. Somehow I dragged my attention away from the paper weight and replied “My dad is from Chennai and Mom from Kolkata.” I paused and then clarified, “Oh! I forgot. Dad’s side is basically from Trichy.”

I didn’t know why I was indulging myself into some preventable conversations. Probably, I was confused with so many unwanted questions. I grew up in a country where people speak only when there is an utmost need, and now, suddenly I am in a place where anyone can peep into your life anytime. Few hours back, the man I met was happy to know that I could speak in Bangla and now this man is upset as I don’t like curd rice. Why do these people take everything so personally? I couldn’t talk to myself further as I found him checking my papers all over again. I got a bit pissed off. I was all set to raise my temper but all of a sudden I visualised Dad asking me to be calm. My heaving body came down to its normal pose with a fake smile on my face.

“Any problem Sir?”

“No. Not as such. I thought you are a Tamilian. But, unfortunately you are not.”

“I am half Tamilian and half Bengali Sir. What is so unfortunate about it? And I always knew myself as an Indian.”

“That is true. But still...” He trailed off and sighed.

His sigh irked me and I couldn't keep my head calm. But, before I could say anything further, he continued the unwanted discussion.

“Don't you put *vibhuti*, *kumkum* and *bindi*? I know few NRIs, I mean Tamilian NRIs who maintain their tradition.”

“No. I don't put.”

“Do you eat fish?” His eyebrows arched towards the heavens expectantly waiting for an answer which his expression betrayed that he already knew what was coming.

“Yes. I am a non-vegetarian.”

“That's why.” He sighed.

Fifty percent of my genes which I inherited from Dad were asking me to make some excuse and go out of the room but, the remaining fifty percent which was from my Bengali mother was asking me to conclude the conversation.

“Sir, I think you are going a bit towards my personal life.” I disguised my anguish with my evergreen smile.

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# THREE DAYS OF CATHARSIS

Katyayini Krishnan, also known as Kutu, is an NRI girl born out of an intercultural marriage between a Bengali mother and an Iyer father. She comes to India on a trimester exchange program in IIM Kolkata but gets tangled in a series of events that force her to seek her own identity. Ostensive thoughts of officials, needling words of her Dadu and a series of events with her gamophobic cousin Thia, force Kutu to revisit her tumultuous past, desperate to unearth the veracity of her life. She traverses through the pages of her chequered love life, the mutinous thoughts of self-proclaimed 'close relatives' and her inbuilt dilemma regarding her existence in today's multi-cultural world. The three days preceding the start of her trimester do not remain an assortment of hours in her life but prove to be three whole days of a cathartic journey towards self-realization. The story revolves around her life's predicaments, the existential prejudiced mentality of Indian society, her battle with a myriad of emotions and how she finally justifies her evolution as a cultural hybrid.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Atrayee Bhattacharya is a Microbiologist by qualification, an Educator by profession and a Writer by passion. She is a columnist in two reputed online magazines, *reviste.in* and *bkhush.com*. She is also a regular contributor to *e-Fiction India* magazine. Currently she resides in Singapore with her husband and travels extensively between Singapore, Kolkata and Chennai. She is fond of writing about the myriad of emotions in tangled human relationships.



You may reach the author at:

✉ [atrayeebhattacharya@educreation.in](mailto:atrayeebhattacharya@educreation.in)

↓ Also available as an eBook

FICTION

ISBN 978-1-61813-356-4



9 781618 133564 >



**EDUCREATION**

PUBLISHING (Delhi)

[www.educreation.in](http://www.educreation.in)