
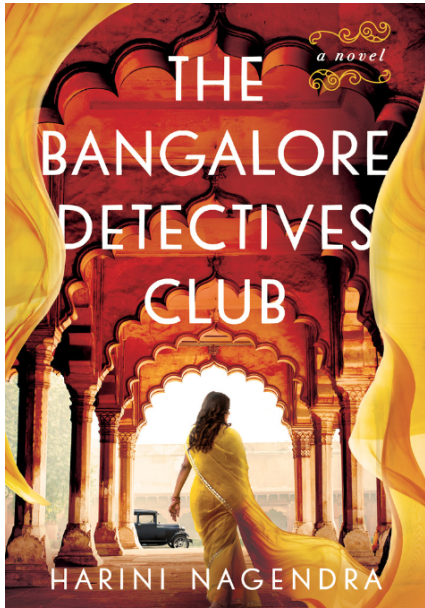


The Bangalore Detectives Club: Interview With Author Harini Nagendra

As Kaveri gets pulled into investigating yet another murder, will she be able to mend the fractured relationship with her mother-in-law? Or will the tension between the women only increase as Kaveri asserts her independence?

 by Surabhi Kaushik
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Credit: Harini Nagendra

Harini Nagendra is a professor of sustainability at the Azim Premji University, Bangalore. Her non-fiction books include *Cities and Canopies* and *Nature in the City*. *The Bangalore Detectives Club* is her debut novel. Set in the 1920's Bangalore, the mystery-thriller features saree-wearing detective Kaveri and her husband Ramu. In this interview with India Currents, Harini Nagendra shares her writing journey.

IC: What inspired you to write this book?

HN: I was steeped in research on the history of Bangalore for an academic project on the ecological history of the city—a project that later became my first non-fiction book, *Nature in the City: Bengaluru in the Past, Present and Future*.

Sometime in 2007, the main protagonist in my book, Kaveri—a young woman with a strong independent spark—parachuted into my head, and I knew I had to write a story about her.

IC: How did research shape the storyline?

HN: Thanks to my non-fiction research, I already had a lot of material. Old maps, paintings and photographs gave me a bird's-eye view of different parts of the city—the British Cantonment and the Indian or “native” parts of the city—looked in the 1920s.

Biographies, letters and diaries helped me understand aspects of the lives of the more prominent Indian residents, while administrative reports, gazettes and bureaucratic ledgers gave me insights into how British bureaucracy functioned, and provided historical snippets on the main historical significance, such as an impending visit of British royalty, or a local workers' strike.

IC: Since you have already published two non-fiction books, did you face any challenges in writing fiction?

HN: Writing non-fiction was a plus in many ways. I plan and stick to my writing schedule, and am fairly organized about finding time for writing alongside my other responsibilities. I am a writer who likes and values editorial and reader feedback, and the process of taking a book from

draft to the final publication was something I was already familiar with.

I did however have to figure out how to make the transition from non-fiction, especially a science writer's voice—which must necessarily be careful not to exceed a predefined word count, and mindful to avoid using a complex word where a simple one will do—to a fiction writer where the beauty of the language itself needs to shine through, and where it is critical for different character voices to come through.

IC: Are any of your characters based on real life?

HN: Not really, no. At least not consciously so. My main protagonist, Kaveri, dropped into my head as a fully developed character. So did her husband Ramu. Some aspects of Kaveri were influenced by real stories of women I knew.

My husband's aunt, who swam in a sari in the 1930s Madras, was the inspiration for Kaveri's interest in swimming. Other characters, like the elderly neighbour Uma aunty, were an amalgam of so many women I know, intelligent and active older women, ignored and dismissed by "housewives," seeking avenues to fulfil themselves.

Some characters—like Inspector Ismail and Mala—were not originally part of the book. They found their way into a scene, and I thought they would play only a small part, but they went on to take up major roles.

IC: Are there any specific childhood memories that helped shape the writing of this book?

HN: When I wrote the setting of old Bangalore, many parts were inspired by childhood experiences. The bylanes of Ulsoor that I describe, or a woman making cow-dung cakes by throwing balls of dung onto a large boulder at the boundary of Ulsoor lake, is something I remember from my visits in the 1980s. Similarly, Kaveri and Ramu's visit to Lal Bagh, and the dining hall in Cubbon Park, are drawn from childhood memories.

IC: Talk to us about the sequel to this book.

HN: *[Murder Under a Red Moon](#)*, the next book in the Kaveri and Ramu series, will be out in March 2023.

In this book, Bhargavi, Kaveri's acerbic and disapproving mother-in-law, plays a more prominent role. As Kaveri gets pulled into investigating another murder, will she be able to mend the fractured relationship with her mother-in-law? Or will the tension between the women only intensify? Will Kaveri assert her independence?

Set against the backdrop of the growing call for Indian independence from British dominance, at a time when the international women's suffrage movement has also reached across India, the book describes a time of great opportunity for women in colonial Bangalore, alongside forewarnings of danger and distress.