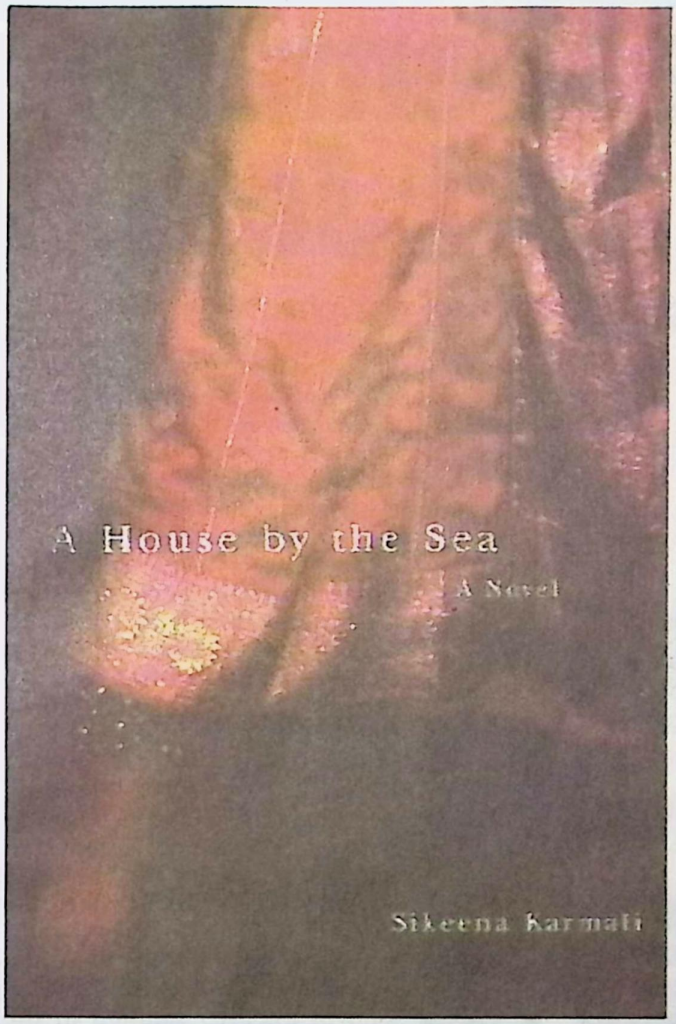


The desire here is to imbue English, the coloniser's language with the indigenous languages that have suffered under its shadow, specifically regional dialects whose usage and longevity is threatened such as Kutchi and Gujrati.

read "GATHIA". The same is true for Ghulshan, had you studied Urdu literature at a North American university and not a South Asian one, you would find for example Iqbal's Ghul-shan-i Raz-i-Jadeed as the Urdu/Persian letter "G" which does not occur in Arabic is transliterated as "Gh" so as not to confuse it with the Arabic letter 'ghain. Others are intentional but have been misplaced by a publisher who is unfamiliar with the terms and replaces a "khatak" that alludes to the gunshot sound of the kathak taal: tha thai thai thet, for all the "kathaks" that occur in the manuscript.

The desire here is to imbue English, the coloniser's language with the indigenous languages that have suffered under its shadow, specifically regional dialects whose usage and longevity is threatened such as Kutchi and Gujrati.

How do you see English in South Asia, a place where the language has once been forced upon its people?

I do believe that English has become a part of the South Asian linguistic identity in that South Asians have very much taken the language and made it theirs so that today, the English of South Asia has its own distinct identity much as American, British or Australian English. I also think that English has given South Asia an advantage in the international arena over other Asian nations such as China for example, particularly on the business and economic front.

Does South Asian fiction really exist as a genre or is it merely the place and people one is writing about that defines it?

That is an interesting question. I think that South Asian fiction is very much defined by the place and people one is writing about, which includes a common heritage, a shared history, cultures which are cognisant and engaged with each other, a common set of ethics and values, aesthetic sensibilities which mirror and cross refer. This very characteristic is what defines the genre of South Asian fiction. It is a genre delineated by content rather than form, encapsulating a broad diversity of writing much as mystery or science fiction writing shares certain common characteristics, which are expressed in a myriad of styles and forms. What I find particularly compelling about South Asian fiction is that much of it ultimately is an endeavour to distinguish and express a complex socio-cultural and historical identity.

How free do you feel as a woman and a writer?

I would love to answer this question by saying that one is as free as one allows themselves to be; however my human rights experience, specifically my work with Freedom of Expression, has taught me that there are specific political and social forces that curtail the freedom of women and of writers. Notwithstanding this, I do believe that many people accept shackles and restrictions that have been prescribed by society, convention, family etc. and very often choose to live their lives bound by these restrictions. To break free of these shackles requires courage and enormous leap of faith, which then leads to a journey of self-realisation. As Hussein says to Zahra in their hotel room in Cairo, quoting Rumi "Why do you stay in prison when the door is so wide open?" ■