



Press Note: Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival 2016 – Day 3

Event: In the World of Secrets and Lies
Book launch of 'The House of Hidden Mothers' by Meera Syal

Kolkata, 16th January, 2016: Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival 2016 hosted the launch of **Meera Syal's 'The House of Hidden Mothers'**, at the majestic façade of the Western Quadrangle inside the Victoria Memorial. The book was launched by Chief Guest **Anuradha Lohia**, Vice Chancellor of Presidency University. The launch was followed by a riveting conversation with columnist and novelist **Shobhaa De**.

Novelist, Actor, Playwright and social commentator Meera Syal's third novel '*The House of Hidden Mothers*' is different, more subtle and surefooted in its touch. The story centers on a very contemporary subject matter – commercial surrogacy and the situation of women in twenty-first century India. The novel is ambitious in its range and scope, attempting to offer a commentary on the state of India as a nation as well as on the position of women in the world as a whole.

In the novel, Syal has managed to maintain the sheer ease of her work, and the way it invites one to plunge headfirst into the story seems almost deceptively simple. However, with a plot that unravels, the book is anything but simple. At its heart lies the complicated and delicate web interspersed with themes of inter-racial surrogacy, aging, parenthood, and family. It is expansive and ambitious in its scope, and with every layer one peels off, and every page one turns, Syal opens doors that lead to more questions, and sometimes, to a few answers.

About Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival (AKLF 2016):

Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival (AKLF) is Kolkata's pioneering literary festival. Instituted in 2010 by the Apeejay Surrendra Group and its heritage Oxford Bookstore on Park Street, AKLF grew out of the bookstore's year round involvement with books, writers & publishers. In the seven years since Kolkata saw her first literary festival in AKLF, literary festivals have mushroomed across the country, but AKLF stands apart with its unique identity as the only one nearly 100 year-old bookstore as its nucleus. AKLF offers an atmosphere of warm, welcoming intimacy, favours depth over size, and includes a variety of subjects, from history to the environment. AKLF also celebrates Kolkata's magnificent public monuments and heritage sites as settings for Festival events, and eminent literati and cultural stalwarts from across India and overseas join the festival scheduled every year in the second week of January. In 2016 AKLF celebrates diverse themes encompassing books, theatre, the arts and cinema. AKLF's focus is on younger writers, newer voices and fresh audiences in its ongoing attempt to build an audience for books and reading. The 7th edition of AKLF is poised to scale new heights, with an outstanding and meticulously curated programme, bringing the world and the nation to Kolkata. Continuing to celebrate the city's magnificent public monuments and heritage sites the festival rediscovers the quaint and hidden charms of the city through heritage walks. AKLF highlights several unique concepts with a fresh approach that

reflects current concerns such as diversity, gender equality, continuities across borders and youth engagements, which are also broad themes running through the festival. AKLF signature heritage sites include Nandan, Town Hall steps, The Indian Museum, Presidency University, Tollygunge Club and Victoria Memorial. AKLF 2016 has participation from Australia, Israel, Scotland, Italy, Nigeria, Portugal as well as England, France, Germany, Pakistan, Bhutan and others. Some of the prominent personalities who will be part of the literary extravaganza are Ben Okri, Meera Syal, Christine Manfield, Ashis Nandy, Vir Sanghvi, Bharathi S Pradhan, Shatrughan Sinha, Shobhaa De and more. The four day long, multi-faceted event has several stimulating components designed to give visitors and the audience an enriching experience, with a great blend of literature, culture, art and heritage. And all of this is absolutely free for Kolkata and her culture-loving audience.

Note to Editors:

Meera Syal is a British comedian, writer, playwright, singer, journalist, producer and actress. She rose to prominence as one of the team that created Goodness Gracious Me and became one of the UK's best-known Indian personalities portraying Sanjeev's grandmother, Ummi, in *The Kumars at No. 42*. Meera Syal's childhood experiences of growing up in a small mining community provided the background to her first novel, *Anita and Me* (1996). The novel was shortlisted for the Guardian Fiction Prize and won a Betty Trask Award. She also won the 'Media Personality of the Year' award at the Commission for Racial Equality's annual 'Race in the Media' awards (2000), as well as the EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) for Media Personality of the Year in 2001. She was awarded the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) in 1997 for her services to drama. She was also appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2015 New Year Honours for services to drama and literature. She has also dabbled in scriptwriting, where she wrote the script for Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach*. She also works as a journalist and is a regular contributor to The Guardian

Shobhaa De is an Indian columnist and novelist. After making her name as a model, she began a career in journalism in 1970, during the course of which she founded and edited three magazines—Stardust, Society, and Celebrity. Shobhaa is an immensely popular columnist and runs four weekly columns in mainstream newspapers, including The Times of India and The Asian Age. Her Times of India Blog titled 'Politically Incorrect', where she takes on contemporary politics and current events in her typical sarcastic humour, has garnered a huge readership. She has been the writer of several popular soaps on television, including India's second daily serial, Swabhimaan. De has participated in several literary festivals, including the Writers' Festival in Melbourne. All her novels have been immensely popular and have been on various bestsellers' lists. Four of her novels have been included in the postgraduate popular culture curriculum in the University of London. Her most recent work Sethji has received popular and critical acclaim.

Anuradha Lohia, is a molecular parasitologist who has done extensive research in the field of infectious disease. She is a Senior Professor and former Chairperson of the Department of Biochemistry at the Bose Institute, Kolkata. Previously, she served as the founding Chief Executive Officer of the UK-India collaborative 'Wellcome Trust/ DBT India Alliance' - an organization that supports excellence in medical research. She received the National award for young women scientist from the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India. She is currently the Vice Chancellor of Presidency University, Kolkata.

AKLF 2016 Partners and Associations:

The AKLF 2016 edition has forged several new, prestigious associations, following its impressive collaborations in first year in 2010. We are proud to welcome on board both our new and regular partners including the Victoria Memorial Hall, Indian Museum, Australian High Commission,

Embassy of Italy in India, Bloody Scotland, British Council, Calcutta Debating Circle, Crime Writers Festival, Embassy of Israel in India, Alliance Française, Portugal Embassy, Presidency University, Jaipur Literary Festival, Yes Foundation, FACES, Open Doors, FREED, The Creative Arts, Poetry Paradigm, MAKAIAS, Tollygunge Club, Max Muller Bhavan - Goethe Institute, The Park, Modern High School for Girls, Rakshak Foundation, Aishee, Streets of Calcutta, Calcutta Instagrammers, Wikipedia, Caravan, BEE books, Gibl.in, Bulk Email SMS India, Presto, She and Griffith Review. We also have 91.9 friends FM as radio partner, The Times of India as Print Media Partner, Anderson as Printing Partner, Selvel as Outdoor Partner, Typhoo as Refreshment Partner, Mera Tiffin as Food Partner, Indismart and Anon Production as special partners. A wide cross section of publishers, which include Niyogi Publishers, Future Publishers, OM Books and others will showcase their authors at AKLF 2016. AKLF is proud of these associations and hope they keep growing year on year.

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For media related information, please contact: Perfect Relations

Priyanka 9830615322 | Sramana 9836496930 | Amrita 9836230760