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BA Economics 2003 - 2006

Crime, she wrote

Nish Amarnath's new book, based on real incidents, gives you the chills, showing how crime can unfold in both lethal and cosy set-ups



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What do people with special needs, electric violet teddy bears, a sex racket and a children's home have in common? Nothing reassuring, that's for sure, and since the process of uncovering it nearly cost the protagonist of *Victims For Sale* (Harper Collins) her life, we're not going to give you any spoilers.

Nish Amarnath's debut in crime fiction is based on real incidents, witnessed by the author-journalist over the course of her career spanning about a decade. "I started writing the book way back in 2006," says Amarnath, who has worked as a reporter for multiple publications and media houses. The book explores the dangers of trafficking, abuse and neglect of the vulnerable in cold dark alleys and warm, well-lit households alike.

Inspired by the past

Set in London, the book tells the story of a student in London School of Economics – Amarnath's alma mater. She attempts to understand the murky goings-on in her outwardly normal neighbourhood. What begins as a tragic household issue spirals into something bigger, leaving deaths, car crashes and potential breaking news exposes. While there is plenty of intrigue and drama built in, the book addresses realistic issues.

"As I grew as a writer, as a jour-



Thrill of a ride Nish Amarnath
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

nalist, I incorporated perspectives from the field," says Amarnath, adding, "The essence of the story and the voice of the characters have remained the same over time, but the rest expanded with my experience.

Besides what she saw first-hand, a lot of first-hand research went into the book as well. She spoke with victim support officials, people from Scotland Yard, and a host of journalistic contacts "to keep it real".

She also made it a point to ensure that London's famous Blackfriars bridge has a median, before using that as a plot point, in what she terms "a critical component in a scene of action and dramatic tension" in her book. Her research took her to the Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court of England and Wales, which approved her request to sit in on a murder trial.

Amarnath says she has been writing as long as she can remember, from her days as a student in Stella Maris, Chennai. With degrees from LSE and the Columbia School of Journalism under her belt, she has two non-fiction publications to boast of.

Writing *Victims For Sale* was a challenge because she had to balance a fictional narrative with harsh realities. It took her around 12 years to finish the book, and lot changed in that span of time. For instance, "The BBC has shifted operations to another location in London since then. But I couldn't change the location in my novel, or the whole plot would have gone for a toss. Plus, WhatsApp was not that big when I started writing. And nobody uses floppy disks anymore; people use pen drives."

What hasn't changed, is the idea – as she describes in separate chapters – that the dawn can dance on the edge of a knife blade as well as by a cosy bedside.

Victims For Sale will be launched on Friday, February 9 at *Odyssey, Gandhi Nagar*, at 5 pm. The author will be present at the launch, along with a host of dignitaries.