

What inspired your story? What was the writing process like? Why do you think the subject matter is relevant? And how is the story applicable to you (as a writer and as a human being)? What do you hope readers take away from your story?

The first time I heard the term “charua” was during a conversation with the wife of a landless farmer in a village in Bangladesh. I was there as part of a research team. I don’t remember her exact comment, but I do remember the intense contempt she poured into the word.

The term refers to the people who settled the *char* areas, the riverine landmasses that surface and disappear periodically. These landmasses are unstable and volatile – and the charuas reportedly take on those characteristics as well. At least that is what common knowledge holds. Whatever else they are, the charuas are among the most vulnerable people in this land – economically and socially.

The woman I was talking to was categorized in our survey as a respondent belonging to a “vulnerable, marginalized” group. She was uneducated, her children were barely literate, they had no assets, no fixed income, were materially deprived. And she spoke of the poverty and the ignorance of the charuas with such contempt.

It made me think about

I’ve been told by readers that *Ishwari’s Children* ambushes them. That they read it through thinking of the grandfather as a kindly old man, until they get to the scene where he takes away the charua woman’s livelihood (the only rooster she owns) and a child is hurt – though not seriously – through his actions. The readers told me that they had to turn back the pages to see what they had missed. And when they reread, it becomes quite clear what game the grandfather was actually playing.

For me it was a difficult balance to achieve. I wanted some foreshadowing of the menace that the grandfather represented, but didn’t want to give away too much at first. I wanted

the reader to be shocked when s/he finally realized who the grandfather was. But I also didn't want the story to hinge on its shock value, by making him do something too awful or violent. I wanted to elicit a response, of course, but I didn't want the response to be cheated out of the reader.

The whole story, thus, has a muted feel to it. The dialogue between the grandfather and the charua woman is constructed carefully, there are undercurrents to everything they say and do – his words and action filled with dark peril, belying his smiling, benevolent exterior, hers gradually working towards a stern defiance underneath the apparent humility.

It was this dynamic that developed between these two characters that made me feel that this story was appropriate for One World. To me, the Third World is not simply underdeveloped nations across the world. To me, the Third World is the power dynamic created between the powerful and the weak.

This imbalance can be contextualized through geography, class, caste, gender, etc. But the underlying politics of it is the same, as is the impulse toward resistance, even among the very powerless. There is nothing the charua woman can do against the aggression represented by the grandfather, but the manner in which she accepts the aggression turns the boards – instead of being an affirmation of her (and her people's) vulnerability, it becomes a quiet affront to the old man's innate sense of superiority and possession. While the woman's subtle defiance gives rise to renewed hostility within the old man, the child narrator of the story is left with a lingering sense of unease. Which makes him look back at that afternoon to try and make sense of it.

Is it a story of hopelessness or hope? What does the reader take away from the story? Perhaps a lingering sense of unease, perhaps more.