

Chasing dreams

With the Tiger

by Inez Baranay. HarperCollins. Pages 105. Rs 295.

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HAVING loved and lost, is it really better than not having loved at all? Everyone would have a different take on this one. But one thing that everyone would agree to is the distress that unrequited love can cause. Your days with a person you feel can give you a better life than with the person who you really love depends on how you define happiness. And then again, there could be any amount of argument on the viability of loving someone of your own sex. But love is not always about right and wrong; who you love and why could have any number of reasons or none at all. Trying to find reason in love is futile.

Inez Baranay has authored *The Edge of Bali*, *Sheila Power*, *Neem Dreams*, *The Saddest Pleasure*, *Rascal Rain: A Year in Papua New Guinea* and *Sun Square Moon: Writings on Yoga and Writing* among the nine books that she has published. She has based her novel on the 1944 novel by Somerset Maugham, *The Razor's Edge*. She has followed the exact structure of Maugh-

am's novel and even named her characters for his. The difference being that her novel depicts Australians and is set in 1979, while the older novel was set in 1919 and revolved around Americans in Europe. She even goes on to name the gay playwright narrator of her novel after Maugham in this wonderful tribute.

The story revolves around Larry, a dynamic young man who inherits a lot of money and even then decides to forego it all in his eternal pursuit of the ultimate truth. His preoccupation with Hindu mythology and Indian ashrams elicits a variety of responses from the people around him. Though the narrator feels at one point that it is fashionable psychobabble, he realises that Larry's yearnings are deeper. It is also the story of his sweetheart, Isabel who fails to see reason behind his ramblings, egged on by external pressure and her desire to have a certain position in society. She is depicted as a lovesick girl who decides to marry for all the riches that marriage would assure her and even then craves for the only man who she truly loved. She is jealous to the extent of meddling and trying to botch up any plans of his settling down with anyone else.

The characters are portrayed true to life and at one point of time or the other in the novel, you identify with some character. Elliot, the narrator's friend, is well depicted as a giving person who asks for nothing but respect in return from the very people who use him as a ladder to reach their height in the profession where half the battle is won when you gain a foothold. As soon as he is past his prime and it is evident that he can not further anyone's cause, these very people ignore him and consider it below their dignity to even acknowledge him. The battle that he fights within himself, coming to terms with the harsh reality is the truth that faces the growing number of split-second celebrities who are thrust upon us from the multitude of the media.

Though the narrator has no relation to these people, he finds himself inescapably involved in their lives. He concludes justly that friendships that stay on through thick and thin and last so long are bound by invisible threads of affinity. He muses about the idea of being alive when surrounded by the truth and inevitability of death and sums up discussions about love in one sentence: "When you tell someone about love you are telling yourself".

The novel doesn't bind into categories love as heterosexual and homosexual, rising above the classifications and not making it out to be an anomaly. The narrator is intrigued by Larry's ways and sees himself in him. But in spite of their closeness, they share a space that keeps them from overwhelming each other's lives. Since the author doesn't give an ending with specifics about what happens to each of the characters, the story becomes even more endearing and open to interpretation.

