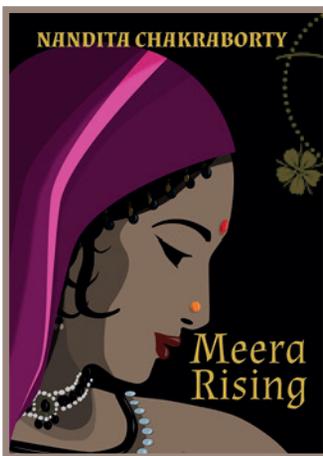




lessons in fortitude

Life knocked down Australian author Nandita Chakraborty multiple times, each time harder than before. However, she channelled all her grief into writing, and her new book *Meera Rising* is inspired by her life. Here, she pens an inspiring piece on how she battled the odds and won.

“It’s not about what others want you to be—it’s about you. Finding your ‘how’ becomes easy when you know your ‘why’, and your purpose becomes clearer. And you learn to love yourself.”



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As the saying goes ‘When life gives you lemons, make lemonade’, but what price does one pay for them? You can cry, scream, even be philosophical. But where will that get you?

I’ve tried all of these over the past decade. First, when I was about 25—fiercely independent and building a business in Melbourne. I didn’t have time for love, but love found me. Initially, he was just a distraction, but soon, this adoration from an older man got me attention, not just from him but also from society. So, I signed the bond of marriage. But, the problem was that I had mistaken friendship for love, and this marriage was just the beginning of my path to self-destruction.

It didn’t take long for our 30-year age difference to create a rift between us. Suddenly, I was 32 and divorced. I began to jump into other relationships to make myself feel better, but I only felt worse. Soon, I found myself in the arms of an abuser and caught up in his attempted blackmail.

Eventually in 2010, in the serenity of Lord Krishna in Vrindhavan, I began to forgive myself. I returned to Australia happy, but there was another vital lesson for me to learn, the most important one—to love myself. In November 2011, I had a horrific rock climbing accident, which left me with brain injury. I still remember to this day, lying in that hospital bed, fighting with myself. Had the universe conspired against me when it felt I didn’t love myself?

My recovery was slow but steady, but life wasn’t going to make it easy. Five years later, I found myself standing in the middle of a Melbourne street staring blankly at my phone—

not knowing who or where I was. Shortly after, I was diagnosed with a cognitive disability. And then came the death of my father. I was most helpless when I lost my father. That was a serious loss... a loss of love.

After my father’s death, for a while, I felt like my life completely stopped. How do you recover from something like this? How do you pick up the pieces and move on? I did it by accepting love from the people around me and I picked up the pen. I learned to accept horrible truths about myself and surrender myself to change. It wasn’t easy. Sitting in my shrink’s office, I was angry, listening to him talk about the silver lining. But the truth is that you really have to fail in life to succeed. We all have the same goal—to be happy, loved and accepted. So, it all came down to allowing myself to see that love starts first with me.

So, what if I hadn’t had that perfect love or perfect life? I still had the perfect gift—the gift of storytelling. You can turn your hand to anything that will help you to make a change. It could be cooking and feeling deeply positive when you see people enjoy your food. Maybe you can find joy in decorating your home or using your creative flair to decorate others’ homes. Or maybe you can be happy just dedicating yourself to the service of others. Just remember that it’s not about what others want you to be—it’s about you. Finding your ‘how’ becomes easy when you know your ‘why’, and your purpose becomes clearer. And you learn to love yourself.

I took the perfect revenge on all my failures by accepting who I am. And life, indeed, turned out to be a tall, cool drink of lemonade. ■