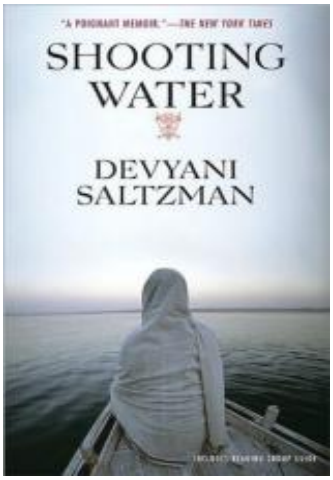
Shooting Water: A Memoir of Second Chances, Family, and Filmmaking

by Devyani Saltzman



About the Book

In **Shooting Water: A Memoir of Second Chances, Family and Filmmaking**, Devyani Saltzman details the parallel stories of working on one of her mother's films -- a production fraught with difficulty and danger -- as well as her efforts to rebuild the damaged relationship she shared with her mother.

At the age of 11, Saltzman's film-maker parents divorced and she was given the choice of which parent she wanted to live with. She chose her father and, as she says, her choice "has haunted me every day afterward." Years later, at age 19, she was invited to join the production crew of her mother's latest film, *Water*, which was shooting in India. Her mother, Deepa Mehta, desperately wanted to tell the heartbreaking true story of an invisible sect in Indian culture, the Hindu widow. For these women, their religion dictates that they must atone for their husband's death by living as "ascetics, wearing only white, the colour of mourning, shaving their heads to renounce vanity, and living in ashrams, or spiritual refuges." This custom of ascetic widowhood is still practiced today. Mehta's film was set in Benares, India in 1938, and told the story of three such widows.

When production began in Benares in 2000, it created a hue and cry, spawned riots and ultimately resulted in the film being shut down just one week into shooting. It wasn't until four years later that production resumed, this time in secret, in Sri Lanka. Devyani, now having finished college, once again flew to the set to join her mother and see her vision of *Water* come to life.

Shooting Water deftly chronicles the dual challenges of shooting a controversial movie and mending the strained relationship between Devyani and her mother. Through crafting a genuine portrait of the struggle for a mother and daughter to find common ground, Saltzman also illuminates a little-known part of Indian culture that will fascinate as well as educate readers everywhere.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the parallel struggles of making the film and the relationship between Devyani and her mother, Deepa. Can you relate to difficult parent/child dynamics in your own life?

2. When production began in Benares, riots erupted and protestors even burned Deepa's image in effigy. Can you remember any other films that have elicited such a fervent response?

3. Throughout the memoir, Devyani discusses her feelings of displacement, of being caught between two cultures, two households. Have you ever experienced anything like this in your own life? What are the pros and cons of being from a multi-cultural household? What do you think Devyani would say are the pros and cons?

4. The film *Water* details the experience of three Hindu widows in 1938 India --- women who after the deaths of their husbands must live a life of "ascetic" mourning. Had you ever heard of these practices prior to reading **Shooting Water**? Compare and contrast them to the Western rites of grieving.

5. Deepa struggles to get her film made, and Devyani struggles to win Vikram's love as well as repair relations with Deepa. How are these struggles alike? How are they different?

6. How would you characterize the relationship between Devyani and Vikram? Do you think her parents' painful divorce carries over into her personal relationships? In what ways?

7. Devyani writes, "Film was my second language, even before Hindi.... It was the common culture both my parents had raised me in, beyond being Jewish or Indian." What appeals to Devyani about the process and the world of filmmaking?

8. What do you think of Devyani's parents and how they handled their divorce, with regards to their daughter? Could the situation have been handled any differently? How so?

9. Have you ever seen an Indian film? Now that you've read a behind-the-scenes account of Water, would you like to see the finished film? Are you inspired to see other Indian films?

10. Saltzman quotes Pavan K.Varma with "All nations indulge in a bit of mythmaking to bind their people together." How does this relate to the production of *Water*? Do you think the same is true about the United States? Many successful Western films detail the oppression of a few by the many. Why do you think it's different in India?

11. The production of *Water* coincided with important elections in both India and Sri Lanka, and most of the problems the then ruling government had with the film was its depiction of a portion of Hindu life that went against their new platform and image of "India Shining." Do you think that films should depict life as it is or how it should be? Can films be used as a means of social change?

Author Bio

Devyani Saltzman received a degree in Human Sciences at Oxford University. She grew up on film and television sets, and was the recipient of the Young Professionals International Internship grant to work on a feature-length documentary in India. She works as a photojournalist and freelance writer, and is based in Toronto, Canada.

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