

‘To Me this Came as a Calling’

Priti Paul, director of Apeejay Surrendar Group who recently launched **ABC Desi—An Illustrated Art Book** talks to Ayesha Singh about bringing back the drama, beauty and creativity of Indian billboard artists. Excerpts:

I believe the book was born out of watching your children grow. I searched in every bookstore and every city, for the best books for my son, Jad, who was born 10 years ago. When Kais was born a quick 15 months later, I persisted with my search. I perceived the dearth of illustrated children’s book with an Indian background and cultural references. *ABC Desi*—an illustrated art book—is my endeavour to conceptualise and give form to an alphabet book where English alphabet and Indian imagery converge.

We see a sundry of vibrant visuals inspired by the fading art of billboard



Priti Paul

ABC Desi

By: Priti Paul

Publisher: Apeejay Press

Pages: 53; Price: ₹5,999

AMARJEET KUMAR SINGH

painting. Why was representing it important?

With the hope that readers will appreciate the drama, beauty and creativity of Indian billboard artists. To me it came as my calling, as well as a conscious decision, to make an effort to expose the beauty, uniqueness and the feel of this art form. Once a flourishing medium deeply connected with popular Indian culture, today it battles extinction with the onslaught of New Age technologies. Across the country, artists used to paint huge billboards by hand. I wanted to bring forth the works of these artists because of their cultural impact, their appealing graphics and their boundless colour palettes which serve as a window to fantasy and escapist entertainment for children and adults.

What makes the book a potent learning medium for children?

The book is not just Indian icons representing alphabet but icons in a uniquely Indian vocabulary dealing with

imagery. There are many direct and indirect Indian references in *ABC Desi*, for instance, G stands for Gandhi, Y is for Yoga, C is for car with the image of an Indian Ambassador car, T for tiger is represented by our very own Royal Bengal Tiger. Children can also explore their own imagination with drawing and sketching their own stories and characters representing the alphabet in the book.

In what other ways can the book be useful?

The book with its vibrant use of colours and bold typography has a coffee table/art version which is an exclusive collector’s item. It’s a precious read for those who love all things Indian. A smaller version is available for ₹150, which can find place in the school curriculum and libraries. It’s also a great cultural reference for both children and adults.

What after this?

I am toying with the idea of creating products and merchandise around the book. These can include flash cards, an *ABC Desi* calendar etc.