

BOOKS

THE PAULS, LED BY 'DOLL' UMA KISMAT, HAD QUITE A DAY OUT ON THE SIDELINES OF PRITI'S ABC DESI LAUNCH. t2 TURNS THE PAGE



Uma Kismat Paul, all of six months, the special guest at the launch of *ABC Desi*, an alphabet book by Priti Paul, was one cuddly bundle, chilling with dad Karan Paul and mom Indrani Dasgupta. The launch on Sunday afternoon was part of Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival 2017, at St. Paul's Cathedral. "Being a daddy is the most amazing feeling in the world. Absolute joy!" said Karan. He had two thumbs up for sister Priti, an Apeejay Surrendra Group director. "I think my sister has done an amazing job. She's hit a spot where nobody is at. The graphics and the presentation are beautifully done. I think it's the only book of its kind in India, of this kind of quality... I am so pleased to just see Uma up there and doing this with Indrani... very sweet," he smiled.



Uma, cradled by mom Indrani, launched the book with Sister Cyril for company. "Karan and I both thought of the name 'Uma'. We had also liked 'Kismat' and we wanted to have a middle name... so Uma Kismat, our goddess of destiny... So proud of Priti for making this book, it's absolutely gorgeous and it is perfectly timed for Uma! We are hoping that she is going to start reading very soon, especially t2! We are excited about Uma's adventures with the alphabet," said Indrani. Priti "dedicated" the afternoon to Uma. "She is our little Lakshmi goddess. It is such an important thing that she is here... that the book is dedicated to her and that she was able to unveil it with Sister Cyril, because it makes it that much more meaningful. She is going to grow up looking at the pages... right now she's just the doll! This year we hope we have hit the magic idea... the Oxford Junior Literary Festival and the birth of Uma. It seemed appropriate. I said she has to be there to inaugurate ever year so we know how old the festival is by how old she is! She performed quite well... cool and relaxed," Priti later told t2 with a laugh. Priti's son Jai (extreme left) and Priya's son Vir (extreme right) joined Sister Cyril, Priti, Indrani and Uma on stage to release balloons.



Uma with aunt Priya.



Uma with grandmother Shirin and cousins Jai and Vir.

The family cheered on. Priti's son Jai (left), Priya's son Vir (centre) with Paul matriarch Shirin (right) and Priya's husband Sethu Vaidyanathan (second row, with family friend Madhu Neotia)

PRITI'S PIE CHART

60-70 per cent: Business
25 per cent: Oxford Bookstore
Rest: Other interests. Right now I am learning French and trying to read my first novel in French of which I understand not a word! This is the year I want to do some creative projects for myself.

DID YOU KNOW?

Priti buys books every day!

Though Priti Paul divides her time between Morocco, London and Delhi mostly, for the Apeejay Surrendra Group director, it was "meaningful" to launch her first book *ABC Desi* in Calcutta because "home is here". The multitasker settled down for a chat with t2 soon after the book launch.

Jad (left) and Kais in *ABC Desi* illustrations

Looking at you and the book, you love colours, right?

Yeah! Well, it's definitely an Indian moment, a make-in-India book and it should have a lot of colour, exuberance and a lot of joy in just the visuals and even in the movement of the images, what we chose, like it's P for parrot, but also P for parrot green or Q for the Rani of Jhansi, but make that rani pink.

When did you start on the book?

Truthfully, I started 10 years ago when my kids were born. But I actually started on the book four years ago. The reason it took so long was because I was having babies (sons Jad, Kais and Jai) and travelling different countries and they were learning and reading. It wasn't such a serious thing in the beginning. I was reading books to my kids and teaching them the alphabets. The English books still had images of what I had studied. Like C for cottage but a thatched-roof cottage from somewhere in England as opposed to C for the cow, which we see around us.

We played with the colours and the objects we see around us and is part of our collective memory, part of growing up in India and what Indian kids could associate with that particular alphabet.

I have been looking at three-four children's books a day for the last 12 years. I have looked at African, Arabic, French and Taiwanese children's books.

The kids books made for kids in India are really not well-produced and printed and quite difficult for kids. I used my kids as guinea pigs. I asked them what they thought the painting was. Sometimes the answers they gave were different from what it actually was. Like the doll which is an Indian Barbie, they said was dance, which is also a D! So, that worked. (Laughs) They didn't know what *damru* was, so they said drums.

It is for kids who are growing up with different languages to be able to learn the English alphabet but also associate with things that they know. It's for Indian kids who are learning English now, 60 years since Independence. It is also a book aimed at the Indian diaspora. My kids were learning English the same time they were learning Arabic, French and Hindi.

Your youngest son Jai is on the cover...

Jai is six. Obviously you see how long it's taken me to finish the book! When he was painted, he was one or two. (Laughs) He was really kicked when I took the book to his school!



Jad, Kais are also in the book...

Kais is playing cricket. He has very long hair and the first painting which was fabulous was with him in long hair. But he said he looked like a girl! So, he had big tears and refused to let the book go to print until there was another painting done of him with short hair. Jad, the one with the X-ray, didn't care about his hair. He also has huge curly hair, but the designers said no Indian kid is allowed to go to school like this. So, we cut off the hair for the picture. I tried to include as many people as I could. I have nephew Vir (sister Priya's son). His name is on the kite.

Don't you think Rs 6,000 as the book price might be a deterrent?

The book has been made all over India. I found a Chinese printer who does fantastic Indian children's books and it would have been at one-third the cost. But then I wouldn't be true to the fact that we can produce a high-quality picture book. The cover is in canvas. When kids are born nowadays, people give big presents and expensive clothes, big huge toys.... Let this be a gift book, highly produced, printed in India. We have printed a couple of thousand. We are selling it now at all Oxford Bookstores, Amazon, Flipkart and now it's going to be distributed in bookshops internationally. It's going to go to Jaipur (Literature Festival) and The London Book Fair.

You have been selling books so far. What has your stint as an author taught you?

After being in the business of selling books for so long and promoting so many writers, I wanted to be on the other side of the fence. I had also told my kids that I would write a book for them. It would either have been an autobiography which would have taken me 20 years. What could be easier than an ABCD book? (Laughs) But yes, writing the book is more difficult. Organising and managing comes naturally to me. For writing, you actually will have to carve out time.

Finally, the inevitable book question in Calcutta: will you be revamping Oxford Bookstore?

Only the people from Calcutta want a revamp. All the foreigners and everyone who comes from outside says don't touch a single thing! I know that there are areas that could be better. We could spruce up. No one wants to be in a swanky new-looking bookstores anymore. All those formats have died.

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