

BOOK CLUB KIT

DHEEPA R. MATURI



AUTHOR INTERVIEW

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What was your motivation for writing *108*?

I felt surrounded by dystopian stories about climate change—not only in fiction, but also in general news reporting. With so many stories treating total environmental destruction as a foregone conclusion, I began to wonder: What if those stories are impacting our culture? What if they are causing us to give up our efforts and give in to despair?

I wanted to send a different and more hopeful story into the world, about our intelligence and efforts being used to prevent climate catastrophe now, not just to survive it after the fact. I wanted to write a story showing that our individual actions matter, and our collective actions can have a positive impact at this critical moment in time.

Additionally, I was excited to feature a heroine who shared my background, ideals, and world view.

How would you describe the type of reader who would most enjoy *108*?

I believe that this reader:

- treasures the beauty and wonder of the natural world;
- cares about leaving future generations with a habitable and thriving planet;
- is interested in the wisdom of cultures around the world;
- enjoys stories with elements of magical realism and/or mysticism; and
- believes in the power of the individual, as well as the power of community.

Can you describe *108* in a “It’s this meets that” format?

Imagine the movie *Avatar* meeting Richard Powers’ *The Overstory* and a Dan Brown archaeological mystery. (This is an aspirational description, of course!)

What are some of your favorite environment-themed books?

Fiction:

- *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver
- *Migrations* by Charlotte McConaghy
- *The Great Transition* by Nick Fuller Googins

Nonfiction:

- *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *Rooted* by Lyanda Lynn Haupt
- *World of Wonders* by Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Prose & Poetry:

- *You Are Here: Poetry in the Natural World*, edited by Ada Limón
- *Sisters of the Earth*, edited by Lorraine Anderson
- *Earth Song*, edited by Sara Barkat

What makes *108* unique?

108 is an environmental thriller with a South Asian–American female protagonist who is a practitioner of yoga and meditation. The cultural elements, mythology, and legends make it different from a typical thriller!

What can readers expect from you in the future?

I am working on a collection of essays, as well as a sequel to *108*!

What was your favorite book as a child?

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle, as well as the next two books in that series, captured my imagination completely as a child. I loved the combination of adventure and mysticism, as well as the wonderful, heart-centered characters battling to become better people and, of course, to save the world.

Where can I learn more about *108s* subject matter?

Lynne McTaggart's book *The Intention Experiment* brings scientific methodology and analysis to matters often considered unquantifiable, such as thought, attention, and intention. Visit <https://lynnemctaggart.com/intention-experiments/the-intention-experiment/> for more information.

Fritjof Capra's textbook *The Systems View of Life* provides a vocabulary for the interconnectedness of nature within the framework of quantum physics and describes how that interconnectedness can inform human-made systems if we choose. Visit <https://www.capracourse.net/> for more information.

Your book resonated with me. How can I get involved?

While I've always been concerned about the effects of climate change globally, I'd never thought much about the impact upon soil. The more I learned, the more I realized the critical importance of soil health and the need to shore up its organic content. To learn more about the threat of soil extinction, I recommend starting with the Save Soil website (consciousplanet.org/en/save-soil/), which provides information, resources, and ideas for action.

Another direction is to get involved with tree-planting and park-upkeep efforts in your local community. I've learned that local park directors and staff possess a wealth of information and ideas!

108 BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The story of *108* takes place in the future. Did you find the future environment and descriptions of Bayla's day-to-day life intriguing, frightening, or something in between?
2. Though the story of *108* is fictional, environmental pollution is obviously real. How did the environmental theme make you feel—empowered, educated, frightened, inspired?
3. At the beginning of the novel, Bayla holds certain beliefs that influence her personality and behavior; for example, relationships only cause pain. What other beliefs does she hold? Why does she hold them? Which beliefs, if any, change by the end of the novel?
4. In what ways do they feel trapped by the losses, grief, and abandonment they've experienced? How do those traumas impact their ability to function in their day-to-day lives? By the end of the novel, do they overcome their traumas, and if so, to what extent? How does Zed's debilitating medical condition, as well as his emotional pain related to his brother and father, affect his philosophy of life?
5. At the midpoint of the story, Bayla is transported by van to the ZedChem facility—a pivotal moment for her personal journey. What realizations does she have in that moment, and how do they change her? What more does she need to learn before the end of the novel? Have you had similar moments of lucidity in your life that demarcate a significant change from your past behaviors and/or personality?
6. Bayla fears Zed because he threatens her safety and that of her family, but also because he willfully refuses to consider the long-term consequences of his actions and business policies upon the planet. Why does the latter inspire fear in Bayla?

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7. Much of ZedChem's work is designed to drive sales while disregarding the impact of its products upon the environment. Should ZedChem have to consider its impact on human beings or the planet itself? In a capitalist society, is it possible to factor in the needs of the environment? What would conscious capitalism, which takes the needs of people and planet into account, look like?
8. Daksha is a powerful character operating outside typical social structures. Aatmanji has difficulty describing her and the source of her power, stating that she is "of Earth." What does it mean to be so deeply identified with the planet? In what ways does Daksha resemble Bayla, and in what ways do they differ?
9. Motherhood and mothering are complex topics in the novel. Bayla feels mothered by the Tulā School community and indeed, by the forest itself. On the other hand, she doesn't experience Daksha as a mother while growing up, but she does feel mothering energy when they are reunited. What actions constitute mothering? Can mothering occur outside a one-on-one human relationship? Can one mother a landscape? A community? A planet? What is the source of mothering energy, and what does it represent?
10. The author deliberately uses recurring events—Aanvi's interventions, Kaali's actions at the temples, the firebombing of the Tulā School area, Bayla's multiple kidnappings—to evoke a sense of karma: actions repeating until true resolution occurs. What other recurring incidents can you identify in the novel? Which characters are able to find resolution to the repeating issues in their lives, and which are not? Can you identify recurring incidents in your own life that need attention or resolution? Do you feel there are lessons embedded within that repetition?
11. The heart of *108* reckons with ecological grief—mourning the loss of habitats, species, and ways of life due to climate change. How has the natural world changed where you live? How do you feel about those changes? Have you experienced ecological grief?

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12. Honoring the earth is inherent in certain cultural and spiritual traditions. What is the importance of ritual in this context—for example, Bayla’s utterance of an “Earth mantra” before stepping on the ground in the morning? Do you have a ritual related to the natural world—for example, walking in a particular park or speaking to the plants in your garden? If not, how would you design your own earth ritual?
13. The novel discusses the interconnectedness of natural systems, particularly trees, topsoil, and rivers. Have you observed the interconnectedness of other systems in nature? Where do you see principles of interconnectedness at play in the world around you, either with respect to nature or to human systems such as health care, law, and education?
14. In the novel, members of a group are connected to one another via “threads of light” resembling root and fungal systems in the forest. Have you ever felt connected to another person across space and time? Have you and a friend or loved one ever simultaneously experienced the same thought or taken the same action? How did you explain those incidents to yourself?
15. Collective intention is a central concept in the novel. Have you experienced a feeling of collective energy when attending a concert, sports event, or other group activity? What was the source of that energy? What feelings did it inspire in you—excitement, fear, upliftment, awe? Did you ever think that your collective intention or energy could impact the events transpiring around you?
16. What happens to human beings who don’t feel connected to others? How has Bayla’s presence and personality changed since childhood, when she was living in a community? Does Bayla find community by the end of the novel?

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17. Several myths—the Seven Sages, the First Yogi, etc.—are central to this novel and also inform its cultural context. Are there myths and stories that are part of your own life and that influence your way of seeing the world?
18. The principle of the divine feminine is mentioned at the end of the novel: when one possesses enough for one's own survival, one can concentrate on living fully and thriving. How does this principle illustrate the concept of balance? How can this principle be applied to planetary sustainability? Does the sacred feminine or divine feminine exist in your own cultural and/or spiritual background? What does it mean to you?

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How can readers learn more about *108* and you as the author?

You can learn more about me and my work at my website, www.DheepaRMaturi.com. Feel free to drop me a note through the contact form or visit me in person at one of the events listed. You can also send me a message on Instagram (@dheepamaturi) or Substack (<https://piecesoflightbydheepa.substack.com/>). I love to communicate with readers!

