


NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020  
**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**AMNESTY**  
INTERNATIONAL   
**BOOK CLUB**  
**2020 READER'S  
CHOICE**



**SEVEN**  
BY FARZANA DOCTOR

2020 Reader's Choice Selection

# WELCOME

## AMNESTY BOOK CLUB MEMBERS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020  
DISCUSSION GUIDE

### We asked. You answered.

And with an overwhelming response (almost 14k!), Amnesty International Canada is happy to announce this year's readers choice winner, *Seven* by Farzana Doctor. A rich, soulfully written novel about inheritance and resistance that tests the balance between modern and traditional customs. *Seven* follows Sharifa, a teacher on sabbatical, who accompanies her husband and their second-grade child Zee, on a marriage-saving trip to India. She thinks that she's going to research her great-great-grandfather, a wealthy business leader and philanthropist. Yet, what captures her imagination is not his rags-to-riches story, but the mystery of his four wives, missing from the family lore. She ends up excavating much more than she had imagined.

Sharifa's trip coincides with a time of unrest within her insular and conservative religious community, and there is no escaping its politics. A group of feminists is speaking out against khatna, an age-old ritual they insist is female genital cutting. Sharifa's two favourite cousins are on opposite sides of the debate, and she seeks a middle ground. As the issue heats up, Sharifa discovers an unexpected truth and is forced to take a position.

*"Seven is a brave and thoughtful book about recovering from unearthed trauma, and the near impossible process of taking control to regain a feeling of safety. It celebrates the empowerment necessary to undo the slights of the past, and the vital work needed to prevent that harm from coming to others in the future. But more than all of that, this is a book about the fierce love between a mother and daughter, and how the protection of that love can overcome so much harm."*

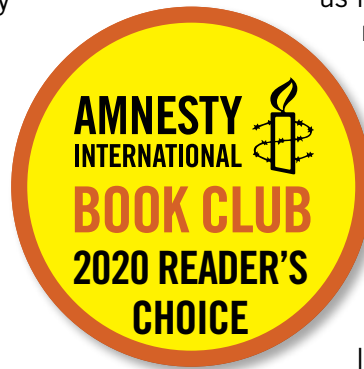
—Stacey May Fowles, *This Magazine*

Thank you to all that participated in the voting this year! We received a lot of great suggestions for books to focus on next year, and we cannot wait to get reading. We hope the 2020 Book Club selections conveyed the

urgency of our human rights work, but also provided a sense of connection as Manjushree Thapa shows us in *All of Us in Own Lives*, hope by way of resilience like in *Aria* by Nazanine Hozer, reflection of systemic racism by Alicia Elliott in *A Mind Spread on the Ground*, and the power found in activism like Joanne Vannicola in *All We Knew but Couldn't Say*.

2020 was not an easy year and the effects will continue as we move forward in 2021, but as we have learned in the lives of our beloved book club characters, the power of solidarity and action will always scream louder in the face of oppression, dissent, violence, racism, bigotry...

Individually we are powerful but together we are invincible.



### About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than seven million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit [www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca) or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.



## ABOUT THIS MONTH'S AUTHOR, **Farzana Doctor**

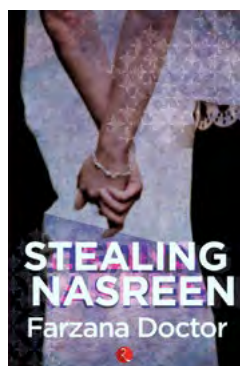


Farzana Doctor is a writer, activist, and psychotherapist. Her ancestry is Indian, and she was born in Zambia while her family was based there for five years, before immigrating to Canada in 1971.

She became interested in community organizing as a teen (primarily environmental issues, gender violence and LGBTTTIQ rights). From 2009-18, she curated the Brockton Writers Series and has been a volunteer with The Writers' Union of Canada and the Writers' Trust. She currently volunteers with WeSpeakOut, a global group that is working to ban female genital cutting in her Dawoodi Bohra community.

She studied social work in the early nineties and has been a social worker ever since. She worked in a variety of community agencies and a hospital before starting part-time private practice, where she sees individuals and couples.

She has been writing all of her life but it became a more regular practice around 2000, when she began writing her first novel, *Stealing Nasreen*, which was published by Inanna in 2007. Her second novel, *Six Metres of Pavement*, won a 2012 Lambda Literary Award and was short-listed for the 2012 Toronto Book Award. In 2017 it was voted the One Book One Brampton 2017 winner. Her third novel, *All Inclusive* was a Kobo 2015 and National Post Best Book of the Year.



While all her books are distinct from one another, some common themes include loss, relationships, community, healing, racism, LGBT rights, diasporic identity and feminism. She seamlessly blends strong stories with social justice issues. Her genre so far has been contemporary literary fiction, but here is usually a hint of magic realism in her stories.



She's just completed a novel, *Seven* (August 2020, Dundurn), and a poetry collection. *You Still Look the Same*. She is currently at work on a YA novel. Farzana was recently named one of CBC Books' "100 Writers in Canada You Need To Know Now".

She's an amateur Tarot card reader and has a love of spirituality, energy psychology, hypnosis and neuroscience.

She lives with her partner and dog near the lake in Etobicoke, the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinabek and Huron-Wendat peoples.

To keep up to date with Farzana and her other bodies of work, check out: [farzanadoctor.com](http://farzanadoctor.com)



## ABOUT: **Amnesty International Book Club Reader's Choice**

Every year we ask fellow book club members to put forward suggestions for books they have loved throughout the year, that they'd like to see Amnesty Canada cover. We later compile these selections and members are able to vote on the top three.

This year, our shortlisted titles included *From the Ashes* by Jesse Thistle and *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood.

Be sure to keep an eye out for next year's call to vote, in October 2021.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



*"I am not interested in self-destruction or challenges or obstacles. I am in India, on a long-awaited work break with my family. I want to sleep, to dream pleasant things, to vacation. And yet I can't shake the nightmare."*

—Seven, Farzana Doctor

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL BOOK CLUB

1. What did you think of *Seven*? Which aspects did you appreciate, and which aspects were most challenging?
2. What do you think is the symbolism behind Sharifa's dream in chapter nineteen?
3. As Sharifa learns more about her family and their stories, she says, "It's like peeling a boiled egg, only to find its yellow yolk soft and runny on the inside." What do you think this means? Can you point to other parts in the book when she uncovers a 'runny yolk'?
4. Discuss the different roles of the characters as the story develops. Why do you think Farzana Doctor portrayed them this way and how do you think it contributed to the overall conversation on khatna?
5. We often attribute activism to public, outward, displays of resistance, but as we've learned in *Seven*, sometimes the work comes within our own personal circles, which can often be more challenging. Can you remember a time when you needed to have a difficult conversation with your family/close friend? How did you approach it? What advice would you give to someone that would like to do the same?
6. Khatna is a form of female genital mutilation (FGM), which violates the human right to bodily autonomy. All women have the right to bodily autonomy, including full autonomy over their lives, bodies, sexuality, and gender identity and expression. FGM must be addressed alongside other forms of gender-based discrimination and violence, to work towards gender equality. In *Seven*, Abbas Kaaka says "... Now we know better. Now we change things." What actions can you take to change things and promote gender equality?
7. On one of Farzana's blog posts, titled *A Letter to Seven's Readers*, Farzana writes, "Sexuality is a porthole into understanding khatna, and that's why I wanted to explore Shari's and Murti's sex life." What do you think she means by this? How did those moments in the book, ultimately tie into the overall conversation?

## Stay tuned for the first book selection for 2021!

Check in to [amnestybookclub.ca](https://amnestybookclub.ca) for the announcement. The discussion guide will be sent out January 2021. In the meantime, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).

 **Amnesty International Book Club**

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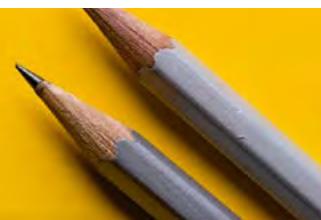
**WRITE  
FOR  
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



**WRITE FOR RIGHTS**

Write a Letter. Change a Life.



**“Write for Rights made a huge difference to the way I see my activism. It boosts me to believe more in myself. I have realized that, indeed, there is power in numbers.”**

**—Marinel Sumook Ubaldo**



Climate change activist Marinel Sumook Ubaldo, was featured in Write for Rights 2019. Marinel testified at an inquiry launched by a human rights body which eventually declared that fossil fuel companies could be held responsible for human rights harms linked to climate change – a world first.

## You're invited to a global celebration of human rights

Every year around December 10, Amnesty supporters send letters on behalf of people they've never met. Our messages help convince government officials to release people imprisoned for expressing their opinion, stop the use of torture, and end other human rights abuses. Letter writing has always been at the heart of Amnesty International's work, and 59 years of activism shows us that **words have power**.

Every year, Amnesty International identifies people and communities at risk of human rights abuses worldwide who urgently seek solidarity and justice. This year we've picked 10 cases where Canada-wide and global activism can make a huge difference, right now. Check out this year's cases found here:

**<https://writeathon.ca/resources/#cases>**

## Join us!

In a typical year, people across Canada and around the world gather in groups large and small, in living rooms, in cafés, and in auditoriums, to celebrate Write for Rights.



Unfortunately, with COVID-19's impact on all of our lives, this also includes how we organize Write for Rights. Amnesty International strongly encourages you to follow all the public health guidelines in your area. Learn more about how you can host a virtual event or events with your own household/bubble by using our Resource Guide found here: [writeathon.ca/resources](https://www.writeathon.ca/resources).

We'll also be hosting our first-ever-all-day virtual Write for Rights marathon! Have the opportunity to join us any time all day to connect with others across the country and for exclusive Write for Rights content.

Register now at [www.writeathon.ca/sign-up](https://www.writeathon.ca/sign-up) and stay tuned for more details!

## REGISTER NOW FOR WRITE FOR RIGHTS!

Visit [www.writeathon.ca](https://www.writeathon.ca) to sign-up, email us at [writeathon@amnesty.ca](mailto:writeathon@amnesty.ca) or phone **1-800-266-3789** and find out more about how to get involved.

## Meet our 2020 cases at [writeathon.ca](https://www.writeathon.ca)







PAING PHYTO MIN, MYANMAR

**LOCKED UP FOR SLAMMING  
THE MILITARY WITH POETRY**



IDRIS KHATTAK, PAKISTAN

**ABDUCTED FOR EXPOSING  
DISAPPEARANCES**



NASSIMA AL-SADA, SAUDI ARABIA

**LOCKED UP  
FOR DEMANDING  
WOMEN'S RIGHTS**



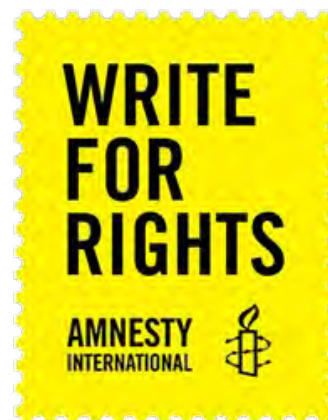
METU PRIDE DEFENDERS, TURKEY

**PROSECUTED  
FOR CELEBRATING  
LGBTI RIGHTS**



POPI QWABE & BONGEKA PHUNGULA, SOUTH AFRICA

**THEIR KILLERS MUST BE  
BROUGHT TO JUSTICE**



[www.writeathon.ca](http://www.writeathon.ca)  
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