Forgotten No More

A new anthology on AIDS in India

January 1, 2009 By James Wortman

Despite the fact that 3 million people in India are living with HIV, their voices are seldom heard. In the anthology *AIDS Sutra: Untold Stories From India* (Anchor Books, $13.95), 16 of India's most celebrated writers share stories of positive people they met throughout the country—sex workers, wives, gay men and transgendered individuals—to provide a diverse look at their homeland's AIDS crisis. *POZ* spoke with the book's editor, Negar Akhavi, who is also the program officer for Avahan, the India AIDS Initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

What inspired you to take part in this project?
I worked for Avahan for two years and saw how stigma and apathy surround AIDS in India. The inspiration behind the book was [the result of] working in the field and thinking of interesting ways to challenge the misconceptions about the epidemic and [trying to find a way] to get people to speak more openly about it.

What does "AIDS Sutra" mean?
"Sutra" in Sanskrit means "a string, something holding things together." This collection brings together several seemingly unrelated communities, traditions and legal issues—all of which are related because of their ties to AIDS.

In your opinion, how is the AIDS epidemic in India unique?
Unlike Africa, where the disease is a general population issue, [in India] it's more concentrated among high-risk groups—sex workers, clients of sex workers, MSM and injecting drug users. Generally these groups don't have the same voice or access that the general population or more affluent groups have.

What do you hope readers take away from this book?
A better understanding of what the Indian epidemic is about, whom it's affecting and why and how it's happening. I also hope people will think twice before passing judgment about marginalized communities in general.

Proceeds from the sales of the book go to a fund for children living with or affected by HIV/AIDS in India. Learn more at gatesfoundation.org.

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