

From law to fiction: The double life of an LSE alumnus

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LSE alumnus Vinod Joseph describes how his time at the School inspired him to moonlight as a novelist.

I arrived in London in 2002 to do a master's degree in Corporate and Commercial Law at LSE. A few months after starting my LLM, I also commenced working on my first novel, "Hitchhiker". Before arriving at the School, I had been working as a corporate lawyer in Mumbai for more than four years and was used to working 16-hour-long days, six days a week. Although the LLM was demanding (since it was an inter-collegiate course, I enrolled in courses at both LSE and King's), I found myself looking for something 'more' to keep me constantly occupied. Fiction writing proved surprisingly relaxing, and by the time I graduated and started working at a law firm across the road from the School, I had completed the first draft of "Hitchhiker".

Writing a novel is the easy part; getting it published calls for persistence and, more importantly, luck. The rejections from publishers poured in. My dream of receiving a publishing deal and hefty advance quickly evaporated. But my perseverance eventually paid off. A Bangalore-based [publisher](#) agreed to publish "Hitchhiker", which enjoyed moderate success.

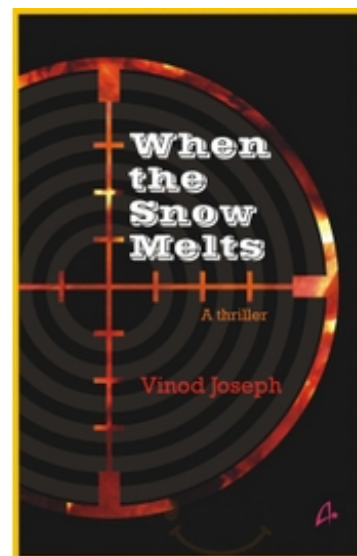
By that time, I was living in Basingstoke, where my wife worked, and commuting to central London every day. The commute turned out to be the best time to write. I completed [short stories](#) and [book reviews](#) for e-magazines, and later for my [own blog](#). I soon started a second novel, which I tentatively titled "The Prime Minister of Tawa" (Tawa is a small, entirely fictional island off the coast of south India). The novel's protagonist is the son of Tawa's deposed prime minister, who returns to his native island after spending most of his youth as an exile in London. Dissatisfied by the draft, I set it aside and moved on.

In 2008, I decided to try my luck with a spy novel. Like many people, I have read a number of spy stories and used to be a big fan of Alistair Mclean and Frederick Forsyth. However, I wasn't confident that I could write one myself—a thriller revolves around its plot; a thriller must thrill. Period. You can write a thriller in the finest literary style, but if the plot creaks, the novel is doomed. But I did not want to write something that would be pure pulp fiction, all action and adrenaline requiring little thought; instead, I wanted to take my readers inside the mind of a spy, revealing how, in a given situation, a spy would think and act.

I decided to set my novel in London, a city I was by then planning to leave for Mumbai, but which will always be my favourite city in the world. As I commuted from Basingstoke to London Waterloo and back via South West Trains, I finalised the plot over several months in jottings on a piece of paper. After mulling over what I had written, I often crossed everything out and started all over again. Once the plot was ready, I wrote vigorously without making too many further revisions. "[When the Snow Melts](#)" was published recently.

People often ask me if my legal training has helped me write fiction. To a certain extent, it has. Studying law and working as a lawyer gives one the discipline to write and to make time even when there are a million things to be done. On the other hand, the regular drafting of legal documents, especially corporate legal documents, infuses one's language with a lot of jargon, which threatens to cramp one's writing style. Ultimately, fiction writing requires creativity, which cannot be cultivated beyond a point.

I don't see myself ever ceasing to be a writer, just as I don't think I would ever give up the law—I enjoy them both equally. My days are incredibly crowded as a result and I tend to sacrifice a number of other things, but I wouldn't have it any other way.



Vinod Joseph completed his Masters in Law at LSE in 2002-2003. He is currently a partner at a Mumbai-based corporate law firm.

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