



KERALA'S  
TEMPLE  
OF GOLD

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Ajit Wadekar's beef  
with 'Tiger' Pataudi

# OUTLOOK

## THE NEW AAM JANATA WRITERS

*A new breed of young  
pros has broken into  
the elite club of writers,  
challenging the Literary  
Brahmins with their  
skills, stories and sales*



(From left) Ashwin  
Sanghi, Rashmi  
Bansal and Amish  
Tripathi





**Rashmi Bansal**  
*Stay Hungry, Stay Foolish*

"I'm on top of the bestseller list, same as Amitav Ghosh. But nobody is going to interview me as they do him. It doesn't bother me as long as I'm reaching real people."



**Ashwin Sanghi**  
Chhatrapati's Chant

"I'm not Amitabh Bachchan, and I have no pretensions to write like that. If someone told me after he read my book that he loved my writing style, I'd be seriously worried. What I'd love to hear is: I read your book in four hours and it was a bloody good story."

and stayed there, the very publishers who'd looked down their noses at him, went chasing after his clones. They signed on any old or one graduate who thought he had a book in him.

**E**XCEPT Amish Tripathi. He was from IIM alright—and a banker to boot—but his novel was anything but campus romance. In fact, it was set in 1900 BC—a fantasised story of a real man, a Tibetan tribesman who migrates

to ancient India and is recast as the god of gods, Shiva. Clueless about high literature, and a sports enthusiast in school and college, Amish threw in touches that nobody had tried before in mythological retellings: adventure, plot, romance and dialogues straight out of the campus novel everyone was publishing. The few publishers—out of the 20 he approached—who deigned to respond, told him to go back and write a campus novel, or one on office politics—anything but mythology.

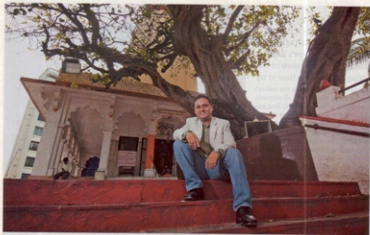
Amish didn't go to IIM for nothing: he pursued the project relentlessly. First, by getting it published by a small press, then taking over the marketing, and supervising the distribution. Clue-

less about how the books world operates, he decided to do it his way. "If the author doesn't push his book, who will?" With 11 years' experience as head of marketing in an insurance firm, Amish went at selling his book: he got a friend in the ad world to make a trailer of it—a film with a live model and sets with music—and loaded it on YouTube. He discovered that the cash counter was the heart of a bookshop, so he printed samples of the first chapter, bound them and persuaded the cashier to give it away free to customers. Sure enough, those who read the first chapter wanted to read more and placed pre-orders. Amish also spent hours on social media and in bookshops to ensure his book got noticed. It worked: within a week, *The Immortals of Meluha* hit the bestseller charts; within four months, it sold 45,000 copies; last month, it touched an astounding 1.25,000.

For Amish, the success of his book is a sign of a trend mainstream publishers have been slow to recognise. "I think India is changing, and people frankly don't care for the kind of books big publishers were coming out with—stories of the British Raj or the struggles of wars. After a century, India is rich again, and people want to hear stories about themselves—about our call centre generation, or a Punjabi marrying a Tamilian or our myths told in a modern way. A few of us have just been lucky

*"Indian readers don't want to read Salman Rushdie or Vikram Seth. Who likes to read books with a dictionary by their side! Aravind Adiga's books sold only because his language is normal."*

Jayanta Bose, Srianti publisher

**Amish Tripathi***The Immortals of Meluha*, Part One of his Shiva trilogy

"Before us, there were mostly stories of the British Raj or NRIs. Frankly, who cares? When I read about an NRI's struggle, I want to go: Dude, it's a foreign country. Get used to it, or come back."

His book, *Of Course I Love You...Till I Find Someone Better*, was out in four months in 2008, and hit the bestseller charts instantly. An embarrassed Durjoy, who had kept the book a secret from his family, was forced to confess his guilt when his face appeared in a national magazine.

Since then, writing books has become something of an addiction for him. He's written four already—*New That You're Rich* (2009), *She Broke Up, I Didn't* (2010) and *I am Single...I So Is My Girlfriend* (2011)—their combined sale is an astounding 7.5 lakh copies. The royalty from his books is more than his salary, but Durjoy isn't ready to quit his day job yet. "My books are entertainers, but it's an unpredictable business. Who knows how long I can keep belting out bestsellers?"

So what's the secret? Bose tries to unravel the mystery. Ever since he sensed a market in commercial fiction, he's followed the same strategy: Love sells, according to him, especially in small towns. And when you combine love with the anxiety that goes with growing up in the New India—coping with board exams, parental aspirations, girlfriend troubles, job stress—it sells lakhs of copies. The first commercial book he published,

*Anything for You, Ma'am—An Indian's Love Story* by Tushar Rabeja, began with a print run of 4,000 and ran out in 30 days. It has now crossed 2,00,000.

From the beginning, Sriшти has a few rules: be open to fresh, new voices (among his finds is 17-year-old schoolboy Ritwik Mallik, who has already written two bestsellers and is ready with his third, even as his 12th class board exams approach); keep it simple ("our books are in Hinglish, not literary English"); keep it short (manuscripts must not exceed 50,000 words so that books can be about 250 pages, with enough breathing space to make it easy reading); keep the overheads low (minimal staff, no fancy office, no book launch parties); price it at ₹100, have stories set in India and about Indians, preferably from small towns. It is here and in villages that his readership is, says Bose, with a new generation of English-educated readers who are devouring his books. He is also not burdened with a brand name associated with unreadable literary novels.

So is the new writer ending the decades-long dominance of the literary novel on the publishing scene? Only time—and the bestseller figures—will tell. ■