

Sunaparanta Goa Centre of Arts will play host to an author who rekindles Indian Mythology in the minds of contemporary Indians by bringing back to life favourite mythological characters in their 21st century avatars. Bestselling author of 'Rosabal Line' and 'Chanakya's Chant' speaks to NT BUZZ on his latest release, 'The Krishna Key' and the mythology fever that has captivated India's popular fiction world

BY POORVI SARDAR | NT BUZZ

What can your fans expect from 'The Krishna Key'?

After writing 'Chanakya's Chant', I was looking for a story I could sink my teeth into. At a friend's house, someone mentioned to me that the prophesised appearance of the tenth avatar of Vishnu—Kalki—was very similar to the apocalyptic prophecies of the Book of Revelation in the Bible. That got my brain into overdrive. I spent a week reading the Kalki Purana and there was no looking back. I have always been fascinated by the Mahabharata period. What excites me is not the mythology but the possibility that the epic may be based on historical truths. 'The Krishna Key' is my quest to provide an entertaining read while attempting to nudge the character of Krishna from the mythology section of the library into the history section.

What is this infatuation with Indian Mythology? What is it about mythology and theology that inspires you to retell them?

It is often said that a myth is a lie that conceals a deeper truth. For most of us, this means that a myth usually contains a message such as

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the victory of good over evil or the triumph of dharma. But what if we were to interpret this sentence more literally? What if we were to peel away the layers of myth and find that the myth in question was actually based upon a historical event or character? Wouldn't it be exciting if we could go back in time and find out that the mythological persona of Rama or Krishna was based on real historical characters that lived and walked the very same earth? That thought is what gets my adrenaline pumping.

Is retelling Indian mythology the new success formula in popular fiction?

It's simply a reflection of the coming of age of a new generation. This is a readership that has not been conditioned by colonial legacies or the shackles of western ideals. This constituency wants to reconnect with ancient Indian history and mythology but wants it served up in a fashion that is palatable. I would hope that this is not just a passing fad.

Have lit fests in India opened new avenues for potential writers and given the needed rejuvenation to India's literature environment?

Yes and no. Yes—there are a lot more festivals happening and hence the greater the possibility of newer authors being given a platform. No—because the multiplicity of platforms means that they run the risk of a shakeout. In a literary marketplace where one festival looks identical to the other I would expect this consolidation to happen sooner rather than later.

To what extent has the Indian English writer/novelist evolved?

For most of my growing up years I can't remember reading books by Indian authors. I was brought up on a diet of commercial fiction and thrillers: Jeffrey Archer, Sidney Sheldon, Robert Ludlum, Frederick Forsyth, Irving Wallace, Jack Higgins, Tom Clancy, Ken Follett, and Arthur Hailey. In the past decade, Dan Brown, John Grisham, Stieg Larsson, Ian Rankin and countless others were added to my list. For the longest time, Indians were expected to write literary fiction, not commercial fiction such as murder mysteries, spy thrillers, action adventures or juicy whodunits. This has changed dramatically in the last decade. Give it another decade and we will have an explosion in Indian writing. You will see a greater variety of stories as well as more matured writing.

What next after 'The Krishna Key'?

Actually, I had started working on a manuscript before commencing work on 'The Krishna Key'. It was a story that revolved around an incident that happened in 1948—immediately after Indian independence. It was a business story, something that I have wanted to do for the longest time ever. But destiny had other plans in store for me. I had to put the business story on the backburner to write 'The Krishna Key'. I now plan to finish that story over the next one year.

(Ashwin Sanghi will be interacting with Anil Dharker at 7 p.m. today at Sunaparanta)

