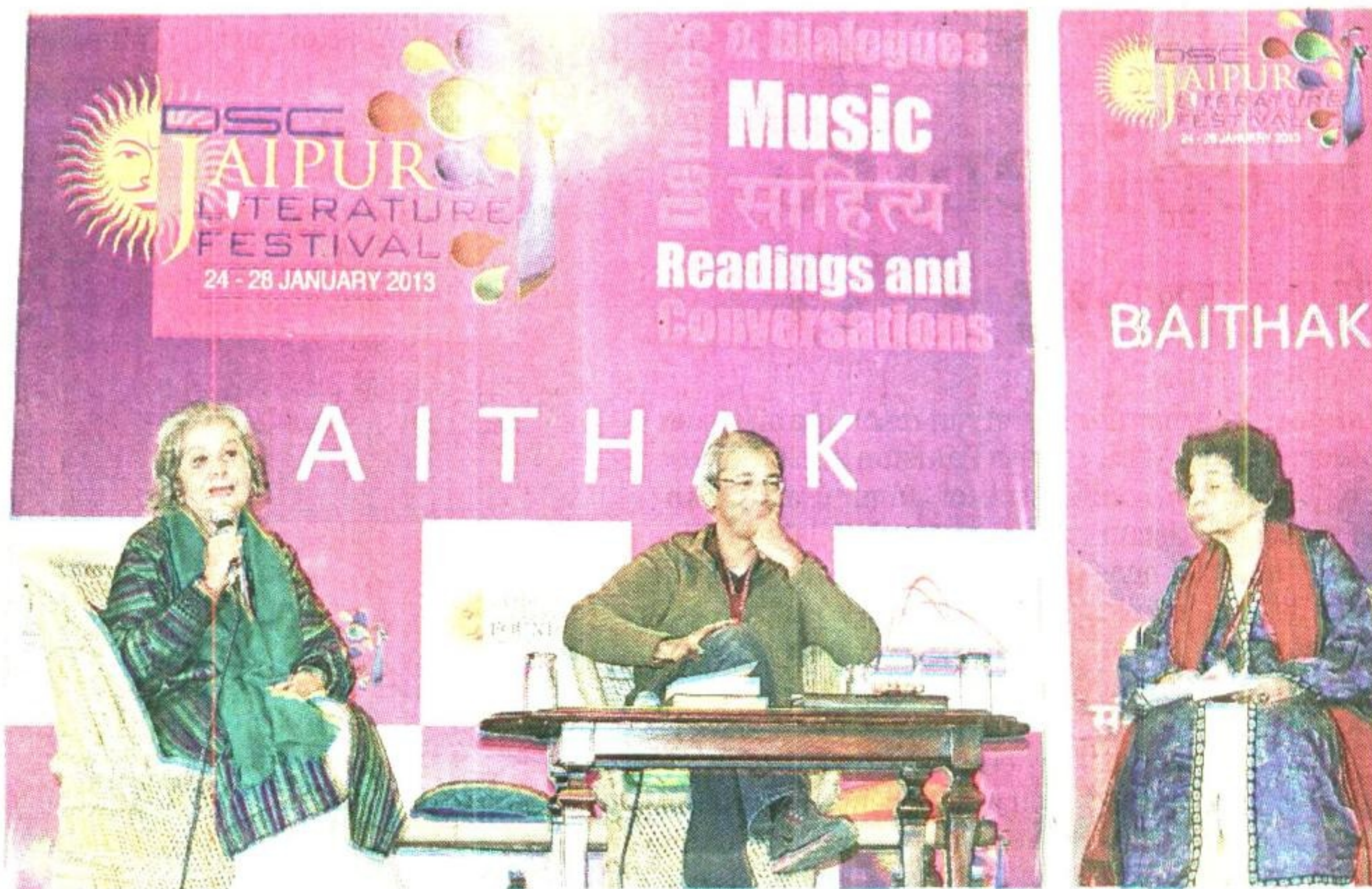
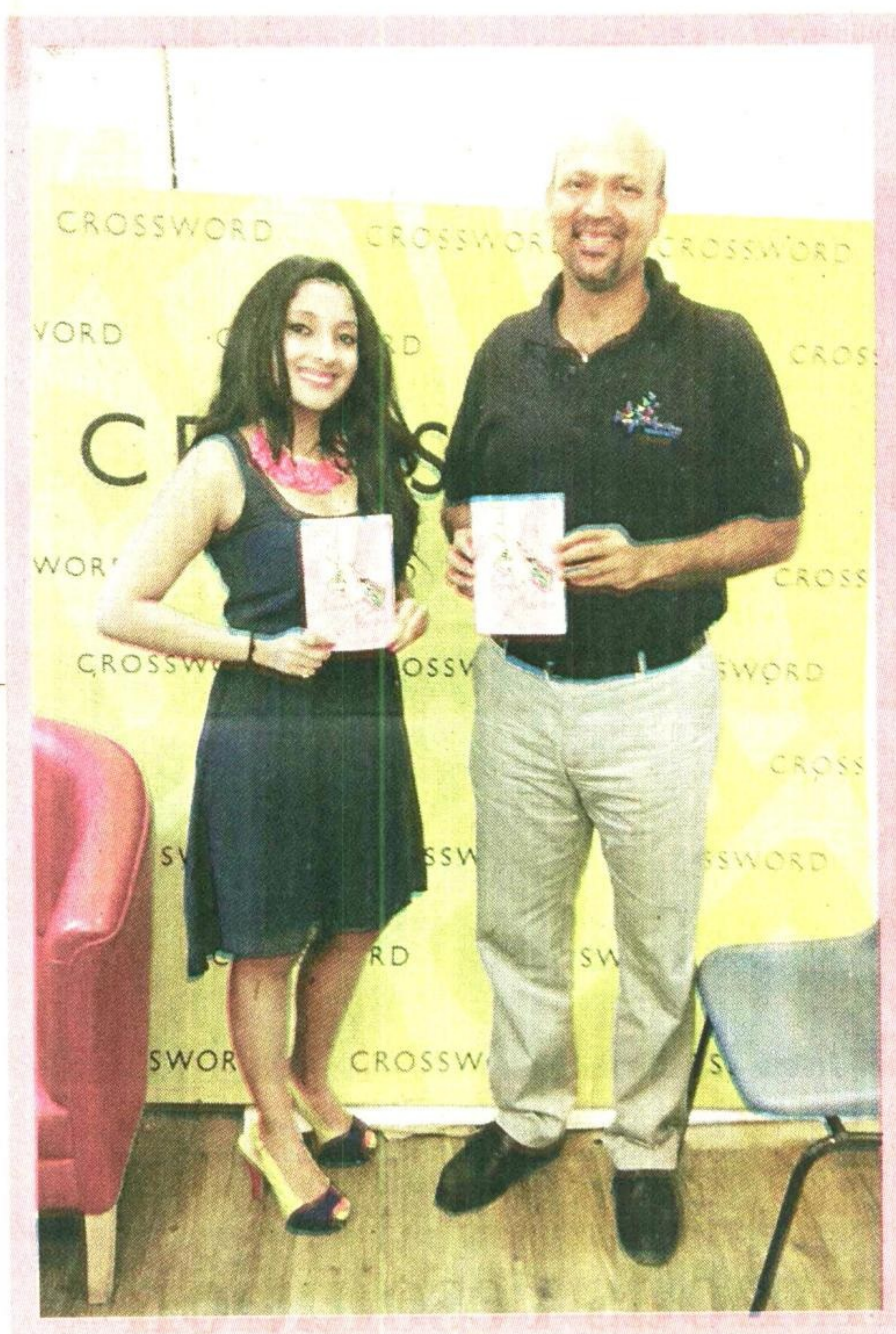


THE WORDSMITH'S WORLD

A writer's life today is almost a social whirl. While hopping lit-fests, promoting their books, giving talks, attending book success parties, how do they find the solitude so necessary for nurturing the inner voice? **Renu Dhole** speaks to some well-known authors to find out how they make even the odds



Look at the literary world today and you know the image of the writer as a reclusive, brooding intellectual observing the world from a distance, is clearly an anachronism. The age of PR and marketing has swept the writers away from their solitary dens into the public eye. While readers certainly aren't complaining about this newfound immediacy with their favourite men and women of words, one wonders if this constant push to be 'out there' comes in the way of a writer's creativity — that wonderful beast which feeds on solitude, engages with the world on its own terms, and produces beauty the world can ill afford to lose.

Most writers agree it does. "Times have changed and unfortunately there is far more to a writer's life than solitude and exercise of the intellect. Yes, the writer has to attend lit fests, do book promotions and travel the country. Truth is that if I knew that writing today is all about promotions and constant public speaking, I might have

thought twice before taking up the profession. But that's how it is and one has to adjust," Deepak Dalal, the city-based, much-loved writer of children's books, admits.

So every author is, by default, forced to engage in marketing activities. "And the only thing in their control is the extent of their involvement," says Meghna Pant, author of the well-received *One and a Half Wife and Happy Birthday!*. There's little choice a writer has, she adds. "Do I enjoy marketing my own books? No. I'd rather spend that time creating a new story, something dazzling and unexpected. Do I have to do it? Yes. So much of my life and my dreams have gone into creating a novel; what is the point if no one even knows it exists?"

The key, for many, is in finding the balance between the 'inner' and 'outer' worlds. "The balance comes on its own. Sometimes, you refuse invitations. Or else, you cut down on daily, weekly socialising and go to the festivals and launches to catch up with friends. In any case, it is only a few, very successful

writers who are constantly in demand," poet and author Annie Zaidi says.

There's, however, a definite upside to this 'socialising' that few writers can deny. "Any activity organised around books puts me directly in touch with my reader, and it is really wonderful that they - in turn - can reach out to me," Meghna expresses. Annie thinks similarly. "Festivals etc are not just a social whirl. They also help us grow through exposure to other fantastic writers, or new voices. For a writer, it can be a peer camp of sorts. An event can be an 'inner' experience too."

The social network

Being connected to the larger literary community, for the private self of the writer, does come with its own benefits. Ashwin Sanghi, bestselling author of *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key*, amongst others, concedes its therapeutic value. "Writers are part of the creative industry and most creatives suffer from similar afflictions... insecurity, stress, creative block, and

peer pressure. Being part of a wider network is almost therapeutic... the equivalent of opening up to a shrink! But there are two sides of the story: Too much connectivity can also lead to reduced creativity. Balancing connectivity and creativity is the key," he feels.

Well-known writer Shobhaa De, however, doesn't think belonging to the writers' fraternity helps much. "It can demoralise you. Or make you an ego maniac. Writers can never be friends of other writers. That's a great big lie. Writers are insecure people. It's best to meet others of the same tribe during a Lit Fest... have a couple of glasses of wine together and say 'goodbye'," she feels.

Once the air-kissing and wine-drinking is over with, then, writers still get back to do what they need to — read, write and work hard.

When the party's over...

Behind all the fun, fashion and revelry that you might see writers indulging in at literary melas, writing still demands a writer's blood and sweat.

"I write almost every day, from 6 am until about 2 pm. And I read what I've written before I go to bed. I re-write a lot. If I'm writing a short post or an op-ed, I may do up to 15 drafts, but a book is often the result of more drafts than one can count. Talent is important, but not as much as hard work," underlines Sonia Faleiro, whose *Beautiful Thing: Inside the Secret World of Bombay's Dance Bars* has been published worldwide and translated into numerous languages.

A big part of a writer's life remains dedicated to books — not just their own. Says author, poet, journalist Jerry Pinto, "I spend a great deal of time reading. This is not because I have to do it but because I love reading. I am told there are several writers now who do not read much. I don't know why anyone would want to write who was not a reader. Readers know what pleasure the writing of others has given them and they want to extend that pleasure to others."

While they write to give pleasure, the process of creating a work of lit-

erature often is full of struggle, angst, great joys and disappointments. And the offshoot of creativity may be a life that isn't strait-jacketed by mainstream ideas of what's "normal".

"By its very nature, writing has to be about something different, something out of the ordinary. Being non-conformist, leading a kind of maverick lifestyle helps," feels Deepak.

It is hard to completely escape the problematic world we live in today, though. It is a constant attack on the senses, on the mind, on one's humanness...how does a writer keep his/her sensitivity, imagination alive?

"For me, one answer that immediately comes to mind is not to have any barrier between your responses to life and to art. Don't just keep the best, deepest, most sensitive parts of yourself for your reading and writing. Bring them out at all times if possible in your living too, in your responses to people and situations," Rajorshi Chakraborty, writer of *Balloonists* and *Lost Men*, thinks. It's not just their words we learn from, then, isn't it?

