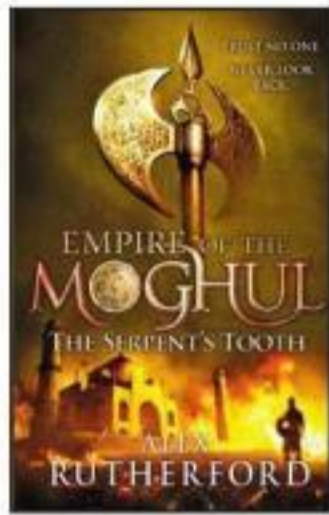


# Between the covers, a Mughlai masala

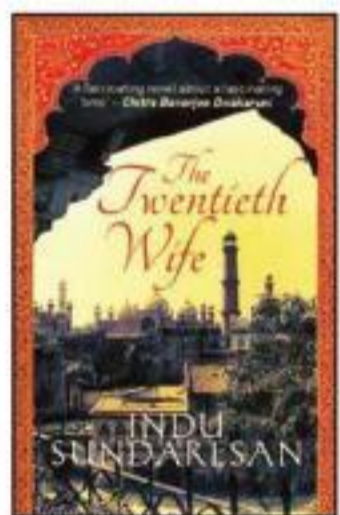
*Kolkata's lapping up this flavour... book, line and sinker!*

**Shounak Ghosal | TNN**

In a city where “thought for food” is more biryani than continental, this was bound to happen. The city’s collective “food for thought” has also gone the same direction, and for bibliophiles, the flavour of the season is — you guessed it right — Mughlai.



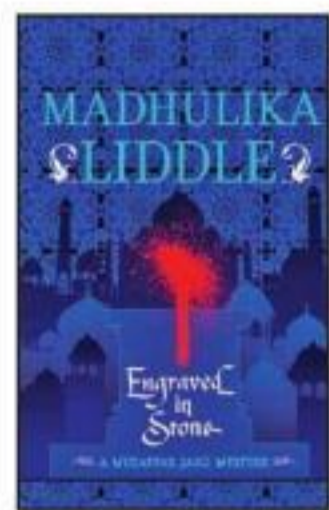
Romance, crime drama, thriller — all set in the grandiose era — has caught Kolkata’s fancy and how! Alex Rutherford’s ‘Empire of the Moghul’ series is among the hottest hits in town. Rutherford’s latest, the recently launched ‘The Serpent’s Tooth’, is a fictional chronicle of the gem-loving Shah Jahan. Madhulika Liddle, in her ‘Muzaffar Jang’ series, depicts a noble detective investigating corruption and murder cases in Shah Jahan’s Delhi.



Indu Sundaresan’s Taj trilogy — ‘The Twentieth Wife’, ‘Feast of Roses’ and ‘Shadow Princess’ — chronicles the role of the zenana and the women in power in running the vast empire.

Sunderesan’s first two books describe the story of Mehrunnisa, Jahangir’s 20th wife, who waited for three decades to unite with Jahangir and ran the empire from the harem, accompanying the emperor to public ‘jharokas’ and even minting coins in her name.

The last book of the trilogy is about Jahanara, the eldest daughter of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal, who is caught between her feuding brothers. Sunderesan’s latest, ‘Mountain of Light’, is on the legend of the Kohinoor.



In Manreet Sodhi Someshwar’s ‘Taj Conspiracy’, Mughal scholar Mehrunnisa discovers a plot to destroy the seventh wonder of the

world. Ashwin Sanghi’s ‘Krishna Key’ links the Shivlinga to the Taj, and theorizes that the Shivlinga is a symbol... for a nuclear reactor!

Liddle decided when she started writing the ‘Jang’ series that she’d set the stories primarily in Delhi, though her brand new ‘Engraved in Stone’ takes the aristocratic sleuth to Agra. “I find Shah Jahan’s reign an especially interesting one, because it was so colourful and eventful — the perfect period for a story,” she says.

As to Alex Rutherford, there’s a history even behind the name. It’s a pseudonym for Diana and her husband Michael Preston. Diana’s research for her ‘A Teardrop on the Cheek of Time’ led them to explore the early history of the Mughals.



**INDU SUNDARESAN**



**MADHULIKA LIDDLE**

“Kolkatans are extremely well-read and aware. Mughal-era fiction just clicks with them,” says Crossword MD Siddharth Pansari. Liddle has a theory as to why her Mughal-edged fiction clicks in Kolkata: “The adventures of Jang should appeal to Bengalis because firstly, they’re detective stories — Feluda and Byomkesh fans should like it. And from what I’ve seen and read of Bengal, there’s a pride in history — and not merely mythology. The books are fictional, but they’re set in a very meticulously researched historical period. Most of the details are a result of research, not a figment of my imagination.”

As a reader sums it up: “To us, the Mughal age is the height of grandeur and romanticism. The same people, with different personalities and in different plots — this has a certain charm, like movies with our favourite actors. And oh! How we look forward to them.”