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Famous Names, Famous Reads: The Year in Reading

Prerna Mittra | News18.com

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We asked some particularly avid readers of an eclectic mix, the books that kept them company in 2016.

As celebrated Japanese author Haruki Murakami wrote in his book *Norwegian Wood*, "If you only read the books that everyone else is reading, you can only think what everyone else is thinking." We asked some particularly avid readers of an eclectic mix, the books that kept them company in 2016, and their "reviews" of each.



Chitra Divakaruni

The three books I read and enjoyed in 2016 were

1. *The Round House* by the Native American writer Louise Erdrich. I loved this novel for the gripping plot and the secret which we discover only at the end, the unique setting on an American Indian reservation, and the powerful creation of narrative voice, in this case a teenage boy. Her dialogues gave me a sense of life on the reservation and its challenges.
2. I re-read Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, a novel about the opium trade in India. He paints an epic canvas and has such a deep understanding of historical forces and how they can destroy or at least hugely change people's lives and dreams. It's a book that stays in your mind.
3. And finally, *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*, by Devdutt Pattanaik. I really enjoyed its unique yet thought-provoking interpretation of Sita's character that gave me many things to think about, as I am writing my own novel on her.

—Indian-American author



Kalki Koechlin

1. Three books of the Karl Ove Knausgaard autobiographical series
2. *Hologram for the King* (by Dave Eggers)
3. Raghu Karnad's *Farthest Field*
4. And now, I am reading *India Becoming* by Akash Kapur

—Actress



Ashwin Sanghi

Some of the books that I read this year include:

The Emergency: A Personal History by Coomi Kapoor. I was all of six when the Emergency happened but have vivid memories of the sense of fear that had gripped the people around me. This book was a poignant reminder of that terrible time. *Half-Lion: How PV Narasimha Rao Transformed India* by Vinay Sitapati was also brilliant. Both these books succeed in reminding us of the pitfalls of family dynasties and the danger of totalitarianism in the guise of democracy.

Another book that I enjoyed reading was *The Secret Diary of Kasturba* by Neelima Dalmia Adhar. Although the author says it is a work of fiction, it has definitely been influenced by facts and real opinions. How difficult it is to be the wife of someone the world considers to be a Mahatma!

And finally, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India* by Shashi Tharoor was incredible and easily one of my best reads of this year. I had loved the speech that he had delivered during the Oxford debate, but this book allowed him to actually examine each of those points in substantive detail.

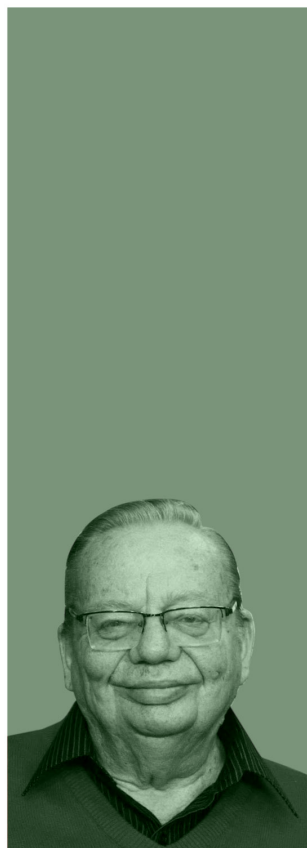
— Author



Prahlad Kakkar

I read Wilbur Smith; he's written a new series on Egypt. The books are interesting because it is the continuation of the history of Egypt and its invasion. The central character is a warrior eunuch named Taita, who is instrumental in supporting the family of the Pharaoh.

My reading also revolves around the likes of J.M. Auel, who has written a series of books on a heroine who breaks all taboos, travels across Europe to find a tribe, because her tribe has abandoned her after a lion attack; she is left in a crevice, wounded. She is adopted by a different tribe which is hairy and Neanderthal. And she is different-looking — blue eyed and blonde. She learns to hunt because she is ostracized from the tribe. She also learns how to ride a horse, tames





Adil Hussain

Mostly I had been reading scripts, which occupied a major chunk of my free days when I was not shooting. But when I am not busy, I enjoy reading non-fiction. My favourite genre would be mysticism. I have read a lot of books in my life, but the one that changed my view, my idea and orientation of the India culture and understanding of mysticism, is *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. I have also read a lot of Shri Aurobindo.

One book that I absolutely loved reading is called, *The Elephant Whisperer* by Lawrence Anthony.

I started reading a controversial book that I am yet to complete; it is called *Inventing the AIDS Virus* by Peter Duesberg. Apart from this, world politics interest me a lot, and of course, books on acting.

—Indian Stage, Film and Television actor

a lion, which becomes her companion. She has lovers across many tribes. She finally reaches her tribe, which is that of mammoth hunters. It is fascinating — the kind of research that has gone into these books. It starts with *The Clan of the Cave Bear*, *The Valley of the Horses*, *The Plains of Passage*, and so on. And the central character is a woman living in those times.

I have many favourite authors. I have read Tom Clancy. He writes realistic scenarios, because he is a military tactician. The probability of the fiction reads like facts.

Then, I read Peter O'Donnell. He wrote a series on a female heroine, called *Modesty Blaise*. Now, to me, he is among my favourite authors. Modesty Blaise is the ultimate modern heroine. She runs a gang and is neither legal nor illegal; a very interesting character.

I also read a lot of Robert Ludlum. For light reading, I read an author called Louis L'Amour. I have got 120 books of his that I have collected over a period of time.

I find that my tendency is to read authors, who base their fiction on facts. And they research so well that you can actually go to these places and see the locations, and they are very accurate.

—Indian Ad Filmmaker

Ruskin Bond

I am always reading the *Oxford English Dictionary*. I dip into it from time to time. I love discovering new words, and finding the meaning and origin of old words. In books, I enjoy reading detective fiction — the intellectual kind, without much blood and gore. There is a very good Canadian writer called Louise Penny, whose books *How the Light Gets In* and *A Long Way Home* I really liked. These books also qualify as serious novels as they go a little beyond crime.

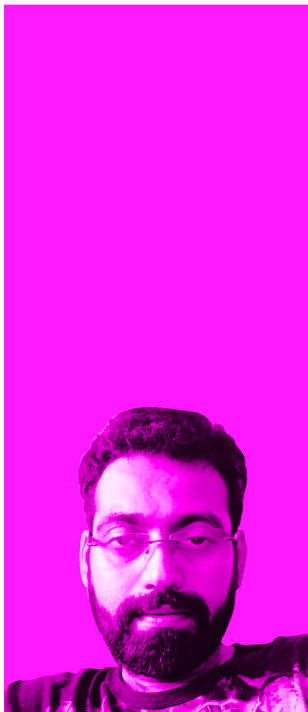
I like biographies. Just this year, I read one of Roald Dahl's. I also like going back to old favourites. I have been reading Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, which is an 18th century novel.

Then, I've also been reading Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*. And a great old favourite of mine that I often go back to is *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte.

I also read Patrick French's biography of *Younghusband*. It was an interesting read.

And, I have just started reading *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty that won the Man Booker Prize in 2016.

—Indian author



Niraj Shukla

This year, I read a novel called *Snow*, written by Orhan Pamuk. I was blown away by the style of writing.

I also read *City of Djinns* by William Dalrymple. It is one of the finest books that launches a historical quest. William paints a new image of Delhi, a great narrative based on history, tied in with contemporary events.

Then, I re-read *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga. It was a delight.

And finally, *Father and Sons* by Ivan Turgenev — an all time classic from Russia.

—Scriptwriter



Siddhartha Basu

This year's been a case of Tsundoku — buying books, but letting them pile up unread; with very few exceptions. I am slowly digesting Siddhartha Mukherjee's *Gene*, on Kindle, and an advance copy of *Kohinoor* by [Anita] Anand & [William] Dalrymple

—Television producer/director



Tom Alter

I got many lovely books for Christmas, of which two I have been reading simultaneously. One is on the very famous Olympic runner from Czechoslovakia called Emil Zatopek. So, the book is called *The Rise and Fall of Emil Zatopek*. The other very interesting book is called *(One Summer) America 1927* (Bill Bryson) — it's a look at USA in the year of 1927.

This year, I also re-read — probably for the 25th time — Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Then, I read a very interesting new novel, by a new writer. Her name is Veena Rao; she's written a book called *Charlotte's End*.

And I was just reading a book in a Mussoorie library, called *After Nehru, Who?* (Welles Hagen). This is a book written in 1962. This was written before Nehru ji even died.

Then, I read another interesting book called *Dozakhnama* (Rabisankar Bal). It is a book about Mirza Ghalib and Manto meeting in hell and having a conversation. It's a fantastic book!

—Indian actor

2016

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books

celebrities