



A Writer Talks: Aditya Kripalani

There was no real defining moment that prompted Aditya Kripalani to become a writer. Confused and uncertain of his direction in life, after attaining a commerce degree, he took to scriptwriting because of his “exposure to films.” He quickly went on to work with some of the best in the industry including Sudhir Mishra (*Chameli*) and Abhishek Kapoor (*Rock On!*). From then on, there was no looking back for Aditya. He became associated with a number of critically acclaimed scripts.

If you ask Kripalani what prompted him to move from screenplay writer to novelist, he has a simple answer, “Film-making as Orson Welles said is a ‘very expensive paintbrush’ and so it was difficult, almost impossible for me to be able to tell the stories I wanted to tell as a screenplay writer unless I took up direction, which is something I never wanted to do. So I decided to make my own product as a writer, i.e. a self published book.” This theory worked to his benefit and his debut novel, *Back Seat* has become a critically acclaimed book which is literally flying off the shelves. While the plot is based around a love story between a driver and his bosses’ bar dancing girlfriend, it also highlights the city of dreams, Mumbai, allowing readers to really feel the vibe that the city encompasses. “The book is set in Mumbai amongst real roads, restaurants, lanes, by-lanes – so there is a lovely mix of fiction and reality. Anyone who loves or hates Mumbai can relate to the book. And anyone who has been in love,” Aditya explains.

This sentiment is shared by reviewers and readers. “The novel gives even those who haven’t been to Mumbai an idea of the sweet mess that Mumbai

is,” claimed one, while another added, “Kripalani’s insights into individual dreams, intense loneliness, passionate romance and soul-searching bring the protagonists truly alive.” Reviewers also claimed that most of the characters in the novel possess dark grey shades to them. However, Aditya looks at this in a different light altogether. “They are real in the sense that there is almost no escapism in the book. As opposed to a Karan Johar film where money is never a problem, these characters – even in the midst of love, sex, *dhoka* (deceit) – have to bother all the time about even making a living, so if you want to escape, this might not be the book you’re looking at. That said, it does have its fair share of romanticism.”

Aditya’s writing style and characterization sets him apart from all his contemporaries but at heart, he believes he is still a screenplay writer. “I am a screenwriter. My training is to always go with a strong central conflict and to keep it lean. Things will keep happening every few pages in my work as opposed to long drawn out character descriptions which run into pages. So my work will occupy a space between pulp fiction and literary fiction which is neither something you can read in two hours nor as lyrical as Salman Rushdie’s stuff. “And while the likes of Rushdie will have renowned publishing houses to circulate their books, Kripalani decided to open up his own publishing company, Neurotic Ink. The writer believes that while he sees a future in the publishing industry for himself, ideally he would like to “pave the way for other authors to publish their novels with Neurotic Ink.”

The writer also believes that the book is not merely intended for local

Indian readers. In fact, non resident Indians too, will be able to take away just as much. “The frustration yet sheer *joie de vivre* of Mumbai, it being a sweet mess where you can come make your dreams come true but yet get completely bogged down with the magnitude and weight of sheer existence is also something anyone who’s ever been to Mumbai can relate to – and those who haven’t, can experience it through *Back Seat*. Of course, you can ramble through its streets curled up in bed instead of actually being amidst the smog and cement dust. So it’s a lovely way to feel Mumbai.”

If you’re looking for the Sindhi connect in *Back Seat*, it comes in the form of a Shikarpuri housewife who finds herself dealing with domestic issues vis-à-vis her mother-in-law. In fact, the writer himself has an interesting take on being Sindhi, “[It means] having the power to be put into a completely foreign situation and coming out tops.” Aditya also believes that it is up to Sindhi parents, who have made immense sacrifices, to help their children find their own unique vocations. “Don’t let their sacrifices go to waste. Don’t try and build on this empire, use this freedom from the economic burdens of the last generation and venture out to find your sound,” he states.

While a sequel to the *Back Seat* is being demanded by readers, Aditya is currently working on a new novel entitled, *Silence, Rolling!* And when he isn’t writing, he’s reading, travelling or playing the guitar.

— Roshni Mulchandani



Shamita Singha (anchor for Maximum Style, Zoom TV), author Aditya Kripalani and Suchitra Pillai (actress).