

Fiction for self-help

IN MUMBAI'S GOOD BOOKS

Piyush Jha

Recently, at a party, I bumped into an old friend. He had been through a period of depression, but now, it seemed as if he was back into the swing of things. We got chatting and he told me how he had been moved by a book he happened to read. It made him take stock of his life and change it for the better. He offered to give me a copy of the book. I'm only half interested in self-help books, so I hummed and hawed. But then, he left the party for a few minutes and returned with a brand new copy of the book. He gifted it to me saying that he had many copies of the book in his car. He carried them around and gifted a copy to whoever he thought might benefit from it. To my surprise, the book was not a self-help paperback, but the great classic, *The Old Man And The Sea*, by Ernest Hemingway. I shouldn't have been surprised since research has proven that reading fiction can result in higher levels of self-esteem and improve social interaction.



The Old Man And The Sea

Reading fiction for pleasure actually increases one's capacity to understand the world better. Unlike self-help books that hand out tips and homilies, fiction delves into the psychology of characters and their relationships. The characters often challenge a reader's expectations, going in directions that are unexplored. Most importantly, they expose one to the importance of

empathising with those who are different from oneself, and perhaps enabling them to discover aspects of life they had been unaware of. Fictional stories are by far the most compelling tools to understand the reality and come to grips with it.

Apart from all of the above, I believe that my friend's gesture was the most interesting and charming way to share one's life experience. I couldn't help but imagine a scenario where book lovers across the country gift a fiction book to someone, which moves them enough to better themselves. The recipient could be a book lover or better still, someone who doesn't read fiction often or at all. The idea is to get good fiction books into the hands of the scores of people who haven't yet discovered that fiction can not only be a great antidote but sometimes an important map to finding their own selves.

Piyush Jha is a contemporary storyteller who practises his craft by directing films and writing books.

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I want to highlight and offer solutions to contemporary issues: Monisha

Anjali Shetty

Author Monisha Gumber doesn't recall being inclined towards writing as a young student. However, as time passed, she turned into an avid reader and even started maintaining a diary towards the end of school. She had also developed a knack for explaining academic answers in a structured, logical but narrative format. This was also reflected in her corporate career while making proposals or presentations.

Monisha says, "I always wanted to keep it engaging, even if the subject matter was technical. But I had never given writing a very serious thought, though my husband tried convincing me to write a book."

It is by chance that the author read Jeff Kenney's *Wimpy Kids* from her daughter's book collection. It was a turning point when she realised that she could write something similar. "Perhaps, it was in 2014, that I had started working on the script of *Sick Of Being Healthy*, a graphic novel. Although, inspired by *Wimpy Kids*, it is not merely a children's tale. It has an extremely mature take."



relationships and communication gaps within families."

Monisha doesn't write anything she cannot relate to or doesn't see or face in her everyday life. For her, the word interesting does not necessarily mean preposterous or over-the-top.

"For instance, my third book is on the tumultuous life of an immigrant woman in the Middle East and how she is able to overcome the

traumas of her past to make a new beginning. Having lived in The Gulf for almost fourteen years, I am aware of what I am talking. My books are fictional, but they also reflect a social message."

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Monisha's latest book, Bahir

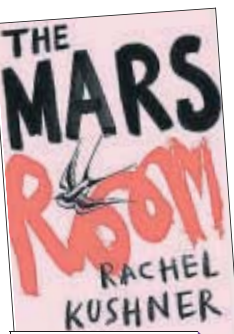
SPOTLIGHT: LITERARY HEROINES OF THE WORLD



With International Women's Day approaching, we take a look at few women authors who spoke of power imbalance and gender discrimination

Ahana Datta Chaudhury

From the first Muslim fictional superhero in Marvel comics, Kamala Khan, to Romy Hall, who is a stripper in San Francisco, USA, and is subject to prison abuse, in Rachel Kushner's novel, *The Mars Room*. We bring compile some of the best works by women authors to mark The International Women's Day which falls on March 8. The characters in these works have marvellously narrated the struggles of being a woman in this world and have garnered acclaim.

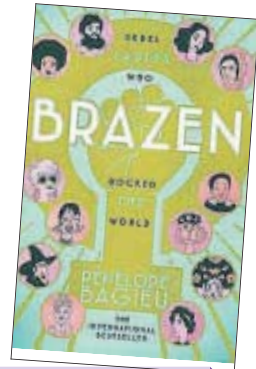


THE MARS ROOM- RACHEL KUSHNER, 2018

Kushner's protagonist in her third novel is Romy Hall, who has been convicted of murder at a strip club in San Francisco and is serving two consecutive life sentences at Stanville Women's Correctional Facility in California. Through her character, Kushner gives us a detailed note of life and the tortures one faces in prison. She also speaks of Romy's troubled adolescence, young adulthood, the rules and brutal hierarchies that provide structure and base to the monotony of "life in a concrete slot". In the novel, Kushner portrays the women at Stanville to be representative of Americans, who are the victims of a culture that tolerates poverty and state violence which compels many of them to take up a life of crime.

BRAZEN: REBEL LADIES WHO ROCKED THE WORLD- PENELOPE BAGIEU, 2018

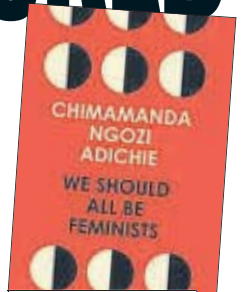
This graphic novel is about the stories of some of history's unsung heroines. The writer uses drawings and humour as narrative tools to make the reader understand the story better. The novel,



with its illustrations of the myriad characters ranging from the Apache warrior to three rebel sisters who escape fascist regime to a resistant fighter, gives a strong voice to those who had been never talked of in mainstream literature. The facts that little girls could dream of growing up to be witches and not princesses was a revolutionary take in the genre of graphic novels.

THE COLOUR PURPLE- ALICE WALKER, 1982

The *Colour Purple* is an epistolary novel by American author Alice Walker which was later adapted into an Academy Award nominated film by Steven Spielberg. Through Celie's character, the author portrays the oppression of women's rights in a patriarchal society, the horrors of physical abuse of women, as well as the eternal struggle to overcome these societal injustices. With the backdrop of a male dominant society of 1900s, where the fight for women's rights seemed fatal, Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* manages to establish a critical view of the capabilities and responsibilities of women.



WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS- CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE, 2014

Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a definition of feminism for the 21st century in her book long essay, which is adapted from her 2012 TEDx talk of the same name. In her book, she provides several personal experiences that transcend social and racial boundaries to magnify the sufferings of African women. The essay is also critical of the way masculinity is constructed since birth and what we perceive of it.



KAMALA KHAN- G WILLOW WILSON, SANA AMANAT, ADRIAN ALPHONA, 2013

Kamala Khan is Marvel's first Muslim character to headline her own comic book. She is a Pakistani American teenager from New Jersey, USA, who has shape shifting abilities. Muslim women, for the longest time, have not found proper representation in American cinema. This effort paved way for Khan to break every stereotype associated with a superhero or being a Muslim woman.

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN- VIRGINIA WOOLF, 1929

This work is an extended essay by Virginia Woolf, first published in September 1929. Woolf during a lecture



in Cambridge, introduced the idea that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction", which became the name of her book. She asserts the fact that women have been barred from writing profusely for ages because of the constraints they face and their relative poverty. The essay also examines if women are capable of producing quality work like William Shakespeare did.



Billionaire to fund the Booker Prize

Silicon Valley billionaire Michael Moritz, and his wife, Harriet Heyman's charitable foundation, Crankstart, will be the new supporter of the Booker Prize, its trustees announced recently.

The announcement came a month after the Man Group said it was ending its sponsorship of the prestigious award for literary fiction. The new arrangement will begin on June 1, after the 2019 Man Booker International Prize winner announcement, which will also mark the conclusion of 18 years of sponsorship by Man Group, the Booker Prize Foundation said.

Thereafter, the original prize will once again be known as The Booker Prize, while the prize for literature in translation will become The International Booker Prize. "We are thrilled that The Booker Prizes have found such marvellous philanthropic supporters in

Neither of us can imagine a day where we don't spend time reading a book. MICHAEL MORITZ, BUSINESSMAN

Crankstart, whose founders share our vision and values. With its support, we look forward to developing initiatives for The Booker to reach new audiences of every generation," Helena Kennedy, Chair of the Trustees of the Booker Prize Foundation said in a statement.

"Neither of us can imagine a day where we don't spend time reading a book. The Booker Prizes are a way of spreading the word about the insights, discoveries, pleasures and joy that spring from great fiction," said Moritz, a British venture capitalist and author, born in Wales. Crankstart has been organising and supporting scholarship funds for students from low-income households at the University of Oxford and the University of Chicago, among others. The 50,000 pound award is

among the most coveted literary honours. Apart from the global recognition that the winning novels get, the Prize also boosts its sales manifold. In the week following the 2017 winner announcement, for instance, the sales of *Lincoln In The Bardo* by George Saunders increased by 1,227%.

Its list of winners includes many literary giants of the last five decades, from Salman Rushdie to Margaret Atwood, Iris Murdoch to JM Coetzee. The prize has also recognised many authors early in their careers, including Eleanor Catton, Aravind Adiga and Ben Okri.

The prize has also been instrumental in providing international recognition to prominent Indian novelists such as Arundhati Roy (winner for *The God Of Small Things*; 1997), Kiran Desai (winner for *The Inheritance Of Loss*; 2006), Aravind Adiga (winner for *The White Tiger*; 2009), along with Amitav Ghosh, Anuradha Roy and Jeet Thayil, whose novels have been shortlisted in the past.



(From top) Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga are few of the previous winners of the Booker Prize



Michael Moritz

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