

Love Story *Aaj Kal*

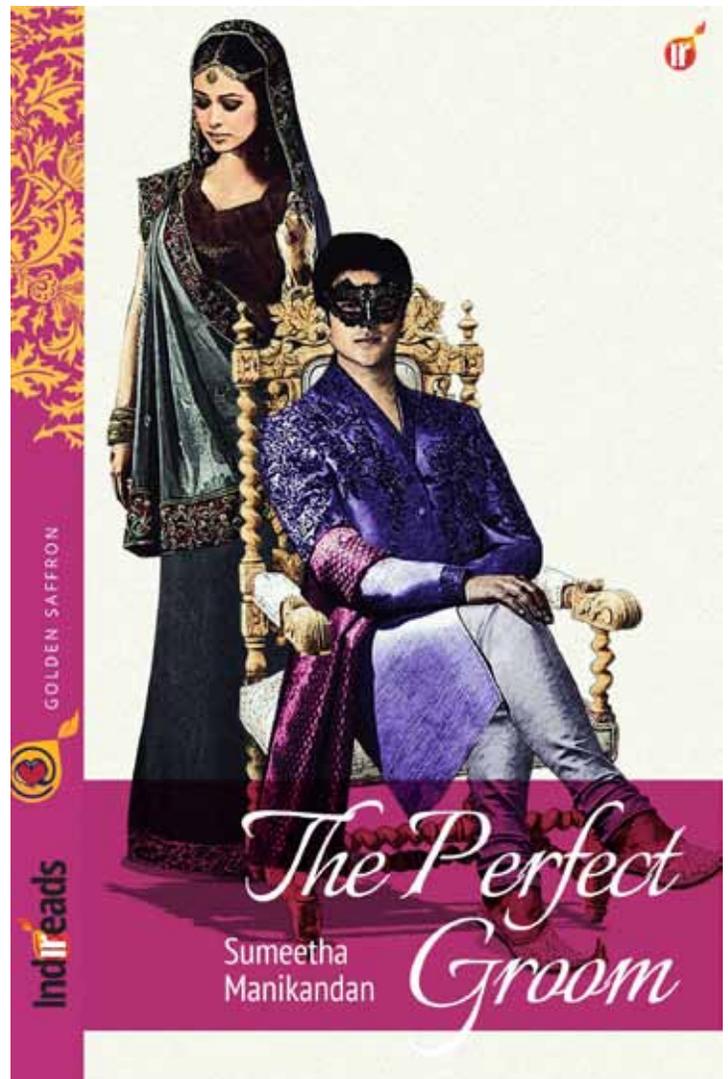
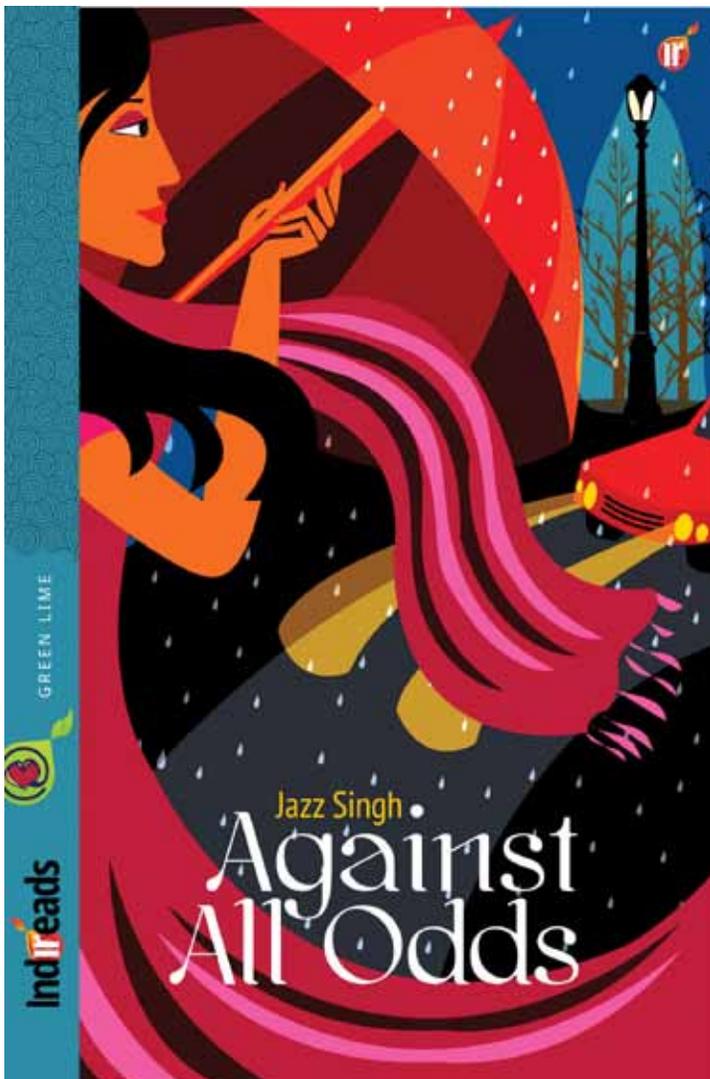
Hina Asar discovers Indireads, which is changing the way romantic fiction is recorded in the lands of Laila-Majnu and Devdas.

Admit it now – as you read the latest Mills & Boon or Danielle Steele by flashlight under your blanket, didn't your teenage self long for a hot romance that was set in a recognisable cultural milieu? How nice it would have been if the TDHH (tall, dark and handsome hero) and the BSH (beautiful, spirited heroine) were romancing in India or Pakistan. If they had meddling aunts and fell in love after a rebellious arranged marriage, how

much closer to the Asian experience of the reader!

Well, those dreams are answered now. Thanks to an innovative idea that romantic fiction lovers Karachi-born Naheed Hassan and Indian Shanti Dominic nurtured, Asian fans of romantic fiction can now get their regular fix of love stories on their smart phones or iPads! They founded Indireads (<http://www.indireads.com>), a digital-only

publisher of original popular fiction, serving the South Asian market. The venture has 30 original novellas written by 25 new authors/voices from the region on its e-shelves; these are short, engaging ebooks, bought and read on a multitude of digital devices, including personal computers, smartphones and tablet devices. It is a platform for new, indigenous, authentic stories – told by new and fresh voices from the region.



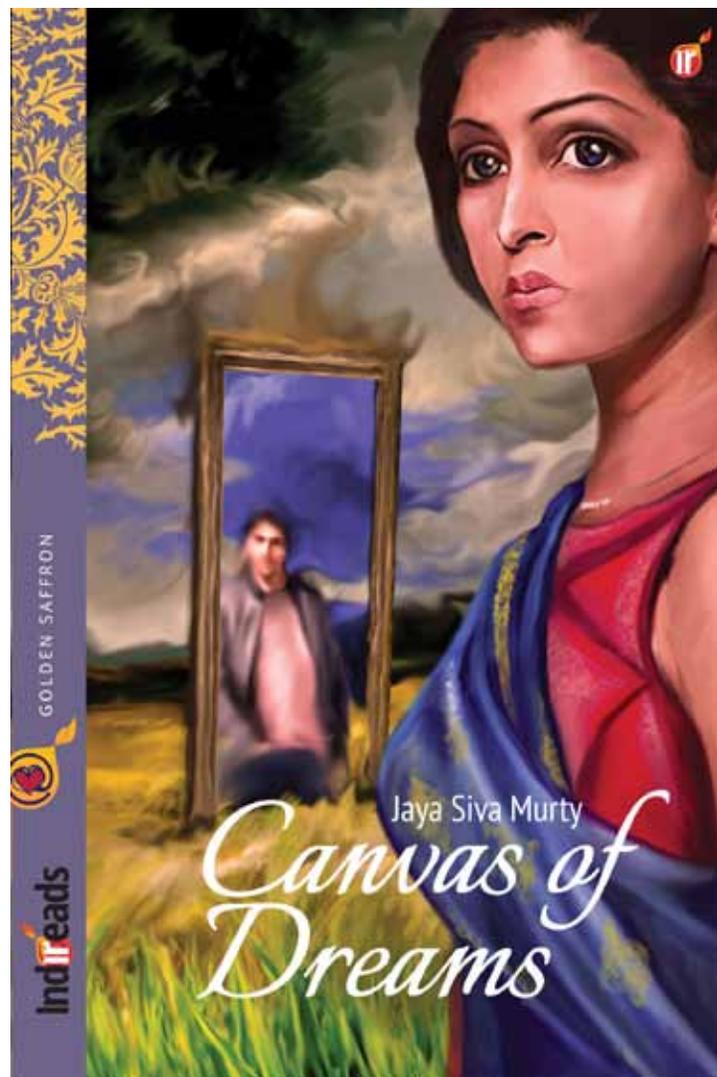
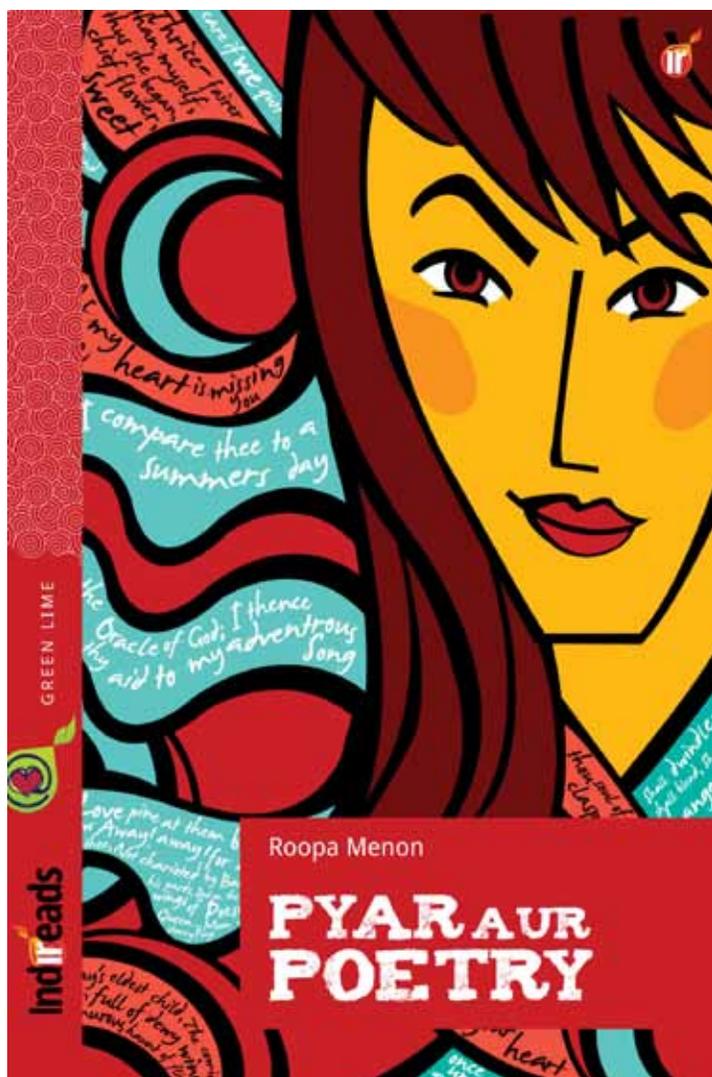
The thirty books that have been launched to date have been penned by 25 different authors, and interestingly, nearly 30% of them have lived in the Gulf at some stage of their life. Naheed concedes that to get the project up and running was a challenging experience. "The idea behind Indireads has resonated with each and every person I have spoken to, but the path to fruition has been difficult. I faced the traditional challenges that an entrepreneur faces – finding investors, getting operations started etc. In parallel, there was the challenge of reaching out to the global community of South Asian writers and bringing them on board to a new business model. Overall though, it was a fantastic learning experience".

Indireads has also given a lease of life to budding authors who do not have the time or resources to approach publishing houses to have their work vetted. Rizwan Tufail of Indireads reveals, "We welcome submissions from all across the globe. The only criterion we have is for the story to be original and engaging. We publish manuscripts ranging from 20,000 – 30,000 words in the romance, chick-lit, suspense and mystery genres. These novellas are available as e-books (in PDF, ePub and Mobi format, so available for reading on a PC, laptop, Kindle, iPad or any smartphone). There is an option to make a selection of these books available in the printed form too".

Roopa Menon, currently a resident



Karachi-born Naheed Hassan - co-founder of Indireads





Roopa Menon

of Dubai, shared her experience of getting her first book, *'Pyaar Aur Poetry'* published on the site. "The initial hook for me was that they were looking for first time writers. And I was one, if you discount the writing I dabbled at in college! Like what happens with most people, it got left behind and I was restless to re-ignite that interest. As a South Asian, I have always craved to read stories closer to home and dealt with experiences I could relate to. And my book is a fun, frisky read (it is a college romance) which I have tried to keep current by using phrases which are commonly used in college. However, I was pleasantly surprised to note that a majority of my readers who enjoyed the book were in the age category of 50 and above. I guess nostalgia is one powerful, undeniable emotion that speaks to one and all!"

Roopa is all praise for the personalized support she got from Nahed Hassan and her editor Sabahat Mohammed. The vibrant and eye-catching cover was also conceptualized and designed by Indireads. With the success of her first venture, she is now looking at other genres as well. "I am a voracious reader and read anything and everything, from R.K.Narayan and Amitav Ghosh

to P.G.Wodehouse, J.K.Rowling and I recently discovered Cormac McCarthy. I am a closet romantic, in denial most of the time. I never thought of writing a romantic novella, until I saw the Indireads ad. So yes, I had to don a romantic avatar to write *'Pyaar Aur Poetry'* which I quite enjoyed.

She added, "Moving to the UAE has been good for my writing. Dubai, being cosmopolitan, exposes you to so many nationalities, cultures and stories - something every writer craves. I have friends who come from different countries which has given me an intimate insight to different cultures and influenced my writing. I have been reading a lot of thrillers and mysteries and someday hope to explore this genre too".

Exposure to an international milieu is a great advantage for Gulf writers, according to first time writer, Adiana Ray, an ex-resident of Dubai.

"My novel is named *'Rapid Fall'* and revolves around the life of two professionals in an urban setting. This is something that a lot of people can identify with as it epitomizes the dreams that brought them to the city, the problems they faced and how the experiences molded them into what they are today. Even though the rest of the world categorizes us as South Asian, we know that the people of each country bring their very own diverse standards to the table. In the Gulf countries, you get to see this at close quarters. However, you also see how alike we are in terms of our family values, ethics, approach to education, religion etc. We have all come here to make our careers, and being far away from home we learn to rely on and help each other. My characters are based on such a populace - who leave their native place and go find a life elsewhere to fulfill their aspirations". Adiana reads a lot, and once she starts on a book, she has to finish it before she gets up, just to find out how it ended even if the story is not so interesting! Some of her favorite authors are John Grisham, Deon Meyer, Celia Friedman, Daphne Du Maurier and Ann Mather. She enjoys writing, but at the same

time feels that if one has a clear idea of whom one is writing for, the storytelling can be more entertaining. "I am not a romantic in real life but a believer in love. Love is something which is deep and can take many forms. You can have the crazy romantic sort or a powerful sexual attraction or yet again the calm, placid love that develops as two people get to know each other, to name just a few of its avatars. So I write about love between two people and add the romantic element for entertainment".

The Indireads team is also looking to convert some of the lively stories into Bollywood movies - the ultimate compliment to a romantic fiction writer. Meanwhile, in keeping with its civic



Adiana Ray

responsibility of promoting peace and friendship between India and Pakistan, Indireads plans to release a collection of short stories about human relationships across the border. The anthology will be released on the midnight of 14 August. Rizwan reveals, "These are original works of fiction by Indian and Pakistani writers celebrating the similarity between the people across borders and the kind of connections that can be created. The collection is being made available free of

cost in the interest of promoting cross-border understanding and dialogue”.

As far as the regular fictional works are concerned, readers can get their choice at very nominal rates. There is no charge for being a member of the site. Anyone can register to preview the books, read the first few chapters and then decide whether they want to

buy or not. Most books are available at the 2.50 \$ mark, so even if one buys a couple of them, it would not break the bank. “We see Indireads as a platform to nurture new writers and voices”, Rizwan adds. “We launched the service with 25 authors – 20 of whom had not been published before. There are many talented writers and story-tellers out

there who are looking for an opportunity to showcase their skills to global south Asian audiences. We also made some changes based on reader feedback and the response has been very encouraging. Buyers have contacted us from all across the globe and a steady and loyal social media following has ensured that we reach out to maximum people”.

salaam society

Ladies enjoy fashion & friendship at BBS Ghabga



Serving up inspiration and warmth at the table



Vicki and Rima



Aziza Salman and friend



Harsha Bhatia (right) and family



Hala, Fatma and Fowzia



Meera and Shanthini



Dana and Samya



A pretty pose for the press..

The theme of this year's Bahrain Businesswomen's Society ghabga was Indo-Bahrain relations and President Ahlam Janahi and Social Secretary Vicki Mouwad persuaded member Harsha Bhatia to put up a beautiful fashion show of Indian clothes for guests led by Shaikha Thajba. The Sofitel provided excellent menu and it was a very enjoyable evening.