# On the Writer's Side

Writer's Side is India's first manuscript assessment service. It reads, critiques, edits and recommends manuscripts to publishers in India and overseas. It has contacts with several publishers and agents in the UK but the process of matching a recommendation with the right publisher is never-ending. In an interview with *The Star* Kanishka Gupta, founder of Writer's Side, talks about the venture.

**AHMEDE HUSSAIN**

**Do you think English writing has gained popularity in the South Asian sub-continent?**

Yes. In terms of a slushpile it has. I have been with Siyahi, a literary agency for more than six months and the number of submissions has skyrocketed. Nowadays everyone seems to be writing a novel. It's the in thing these days. However, it makes life for us very difficult because as much as we want to, we're still going to find that one publishable manuscript out of the 100 that we read.

Indians have also started writing books to climb up the social ladder. The very idea of immortality through the written word is catching up and is making life for agents and publishers very difficult. Being a writer myself, I have to be very careful in scrutinizing manuscripts because most of them are written very poorly. In fact, I've told my agency to vet manuscripts before sending them to me. Makes life a little easier.

**What do you think are the reasons behind this?**

The main reason is that success stories of South Asian writers have been few and far between after Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small things'. I think publishers in the West feel that time has come for another success story like that. The media hype and disproportionate advance money is another factor contributing to this interest.

My own experience of publishing in India is that it is far more trend-driven than talent-driven. A so-and-so book creates a trend and it becomes the moral responsibility of a publisher to take out 20 books similar to that book. This has given birth to genres and sub-genres that are distorting the very lens through which we view literature. If you have been in the Indian publishing industry for a year or two, you can almost second-guess a major publisher's catalogue one year in advance. Who is suffering? Really talented writers whether they have agents or not.

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