

'Outsiders too want to belong' – Kunal Basu

By **Indrani Mukherjee** - November 30, 2015

[box]

STRANGERS IN THE CITY

Away from the familiar, the novel Kalkatta explores the world of the dispossessed a

Academics are fond of trying to evaluate whether the voice in any fiction is sufficiently 'polyphonic'. This seemingly innocuous concept, suggesting plurality and diversity of points of view, is by no means an easy feat to achieve. Especially when a writer, hailing from the crème de la crème intelligentsia of a city, that dunks theories into their morning cup of tea, prepares to get into the shoes of an immigrant gigolo. Kunal Basu's *Kalkatta*, however, delves deep into the underbelly of Kolkata to remind us that it is much more than being simply Bengali, that it is a diverse landscape of demographic fauna, each of them striving to make the city their own.



PICADOR INDIA | KU

As if joining dots, Basu brings together divergent locales: the claustrophobic, bedraggled ghetto-like existence in Number 14, Zakaria Street; the candlelit, incense laden massage rooms of Champaka; the plush the filthy rich in Alipore; the warm homestead of the poetic Mandira and her ailing s Jamshed or Jami, who illegally immigrated to Kalkatta with his parents and polio-affl Miri, is brought up with the credo of trying to fit in the social space of the city and m respectable Kalkatta-wala.

But it is in the dilemma of what a proper Kalkatta-wala qualifies as and moreover, ha the most underprivileged strata, how he can aspire to be one, that Jami loses his wa the button he kicks aimlessly along the road, allowing it to dictate his route, Jami m through Rakib and his gang of offenders, the capitalist Uncle Mushtak's failed commi the erudite Ani whose head is too full of ideas and theories to be of any practical use housewives seeking comfort in his body and the city's detective squad that uses him

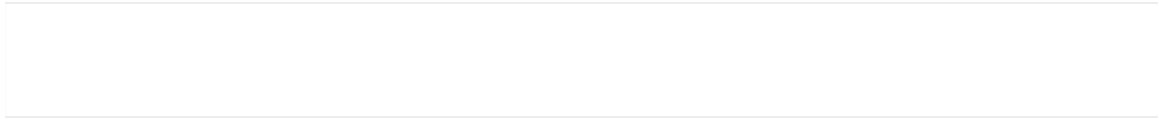
It is only through his selfless service to young Pablo, dying of leukaemia, that Jami f in all his dignity and humanity. Basu's flowing narrative with glimpses of poetic strai narrow moral compassing of right and wrong, fair and unfair. He captures all his cha nuances intact, hurtling towards their destinies as, Job Charnock, the city's alleged a

watches the city unfold around him.

[/box]

indrani@tehelka.com

< 1 2



Indrani Mukherjee
<http://www.tehelkahindi.com>