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# A motherhood quest in the City of Joy

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4-5 minutes

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Calcutta (Kolkata, if you must) is a crucible of tales of happiness, melancholy, tragedy, deception, history and culture — it's the city where oceans meet as well as drift apart.

Through 'Sarojini's Mother', Kunal Basu scripts a heartwarming, 'naked-truth' fiction whose parallel, in reality, haunts the City of Joy itself.

Saz (Sarojini), an Indian-born Brit, has stepped on to the land where she was born, to venture out into her unknown 'home' where she is searching for the woman who passed on an X chromosome to her. In her quest, Chiru Sen (Calcutta's Elvis) is her saviour, lighthouse and the window to us readers.

On her journey, Sarojini (the lotus in a lake) finds a sense of belonging in both the turbulent, yet calming waters of Jamuna and in a waft of glorious yet strong winds in which Urvashi drifts. Her choice is to either fight the snakes and float on the Jamuna or be carried away in the wind by Urvashi. Sarojini grows to bloom and takes in the love showered upon, fades but never withers; but when the perpetual darkness of the moment-to-choose dawns, she picks the tool that will tell her where the nourishing ground lies — a DNA test.

Basu avoids dealing with the underlying emotions and deep layers within which Sarojini's heart lies by choosing Chiru as the voice and eyes of his book, seeing a complex story through the open window of a body— here, the protagonist, in effect, talking volumes about Chiru's character and humours him to be the spotlight on Saz in the backdrop of Kolkata.

Basu is at his best when he describes the various settings in Kolkata, bringing alive a vivid scenery of the multifaceted city, which is also the backdrop of his earlier book 'Kalkatta'. His style is just like the cover of the book — eerie and easy, at the same time.

He also sprinkles the tragedies of the reality that dogs our world like the deaths due to hooch consumption and the burden that each slum dwellers carries — a label of harbouring a criminal mind.

The story treads on the lines of a Bollywood movie — for example, Chiru saves Saz from being harassed at a dance bar — and takes inspiration from reports where Indian-born foreigners have found their biological parents entrenched deep in poverty and residing in slums. However, it never falters despite clinging to cliches. Instead, it manages to add drama to the predictable suspense, which when revealed will make you sigh, knowing it was anticipated and easing the transition with the thoughts and introspection of Chiru on Saz's minds and the situation ahead. The author also adds humour crafted in such a fashion that forces one to think of the possibilities and get further involved in the life of the protagonist.

In the supporting characters too, Basu infuses life and brings out the essence of Kolkata's society. Chiru's circle of musician friends are unveiled like an onion through the book. Then there is Suleiman who evinces wisdom and Jamuna moulded as an archetypal Indian

woman and others who show the diversity of the human personality while also forming the bedrock of Basu's book. Each of them can be a standalone story too, which readers ought to ask Basu to write about.

He puts in a message in each of the book's residents — Lily and Poly are the incorruptible twins whose profession is to match DNA strands; the twins stand for each of the DNA strands put together in a double helix. In effect, they bring out the truth and represent life.

Like them, others have their own story to tell and they leave a mark of their own on this tale, which brings together different worlds in an alloy that hits you hard with its simple language.