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Fourth novel

Author **Kunal Basu** releases his fourth novel, *The Yellow Emperor's Cure*



Aparna Sen with Kunal Basu at the launch of *The Yellow Emperor's Cure*. Picture by Rashbehari Das

Kunal Basu's voice was fittingly poignant as he read an excerpt from his new book — "... a field of roses blinded him, as he tore open his father's tunic..." The description of Antonio Maria's distress at seeing his beloved father had the audience at the launch of *The Yellow Emperor's*

Cure enraptured.

The book, published by Picador India, an imprint of Pan MacMillan India, was released at The Park on Monday.

Basu, the author of three acclaimed novels — *The Miniaturist*, *The Opium Clerk*, *Racists* — and the short story collection *The Japanese Wife*, described his male protagonist Antonio Maria as "a brilliant doctor, incorrigible playboy, raised by his father. He's a man's man, an alpha male", before sharing the premise of his new novel.

The story, set in Portugal in the late 19th and early 20th century, finds Antonio's father dying from syphilis, compelling him to embark on a journey to China to find a cure. Once there, Antonio experiences love as never before, in the form of Fumi, and thereon the story takes a meandering route, punctuated by the Boxer Rebellion, to the end of the journey.

Aparna Sen, director of *The Japanese Wife*, who sat in conversation with Kunal Basu at the event, praised the author's style of writing before asking questions that seemed to be on everyone's mind at that point.

"Why syphilis of all the diseases? I was horrified and at the same time fascinated by the description," exclaimed Sen.

The author was candid in his reply and shared his story's take-off point — a Chinese museum showcasing the organs affected by different diseases and his vivid imagination of a young man standing naked in the middle of the Summer Palace, China.

But it is the romantic plot that captivated Sen. As she read an excerpt about Antonio and Fumi's first meeting she asked how the author managed to create such nuanced eroticism with words.

Erotica and sensuality is about minimalist writing, leaving a few clues and the rest is but the reader's imagination, said Basu.

He was peppered with questions from the audience about the research that the book required. "You go where your characters take you, and research that. There is not just background research, but also foreground research," replied the author.

Kalyan Ray, Goutam Ghose and actress Rachita were amongst the audience.

"I am looking forward to reading this book.... I remember him giving me *The Miniaturist* a long time back, and I loved it," said Ghose.

SREYOSHI DEY

