



STARMARK BOOKSTORE FORAYS INTO PUBLISHING WITH KUNAL AND SUSMITA BASU'S BOOK MOVEABLE FEASTS AND AN ENGAGING CONVERSATION AT TOLLY CLUB

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astronomic memories, wanderlust and cultural interchange were the G hallmarks of Kunal Basu and Susmita Basu's literary session at Yule Hall, Tollygunge Club on May 1. The husband-wife duo were present to talk about their new book -- Moveable Feasts -- an ode to food and feasting, that is inextricably tied to the arts and history imbibed by the Basus on their numerous travels abroad

"I did not write this book suddenly," said Basu of his conceptualisation of the work. "Susmita (Basu's wife and coauthor of Moveable Feasts) and I planned this book four years back; it was four years in the works, interspersed with my novels and Susmita's ceramic work." The author of novels like *The Yellow Emperor's Cure* and *The Miniaturist* also clarified that his newest work was not strictly a culinary novel or a cookbook. "This is a book about food, about travel, history, films, literature, theatre, visual art and also about stories of people we have met on our journeys. So we did not want to write and have not written a conventional cookbook, even though there are many recipes in the book, nor is it merely a travel book or an album of photographs. It's a combination of all of these things." Published by Starmark, *Moveable Feasts* is Basu's first collaborative work. "It was a wonderful experience," he said of this venture. "I have never worked on a book with anybody else before, and this is the very first time that I collaborated, and what better collaborator could I find than Susmita? Our sensibilities, with respect to the topics covered in the book, are very similar and we both cook together. So the experience of writing this whole thing down was actually amazing." In conversation with moderator Rita Bhimani, the duo reminisced about the recipes compiled in *Feasts* and the memories that went into their making. From the spooky chicken unspeakable (so named because the recipe was credited to a long dead Rajasthani queen, who if named would show up in her spectral form) to the mouth-watering Dormar Tempura -- a fusion of the Japanese tempura and the Bengali potoler dorma -- to the macabre goat heads they had to face whilst horse-riding in Mongolia, the Basus' stories about meals delicious and bizarre had the audience in splits. The most hilarious tale, perhaps, was that of the Curse of Kanan Bala: a recipe for prawn curry inspired by the time when Kunal Basu's mother (author and actress Chabi Basu) was so engrossed in telling stories to Susmita about the vintage Bengali film actress while cooking, that she accidentally ended up cooking the curry with Isabgol instead of mustard! "We didn't know of course," laughed Susmita, recalling the disastrous dinner. "When the guests arrived we served them, and were expecting a positive reaction, but one of our Canadian friends tasted it and she exclaimed: "Oh, it's godawful!" We were so confused because it was my mother-in-law's signature dish. We only came to know about it later, and now we call every disaster in our kitchen the Curse of Kanan Bala." After the conversation, there was an interactive Q&A session with members of the audience. While some shared snippets of their personal culinary adventures, others were interested in asking the Basus questions related to the book itself -- in response to one such query, Kunal Basu clarified that while not many of the dishes mentioned in the book are explicitly Bengali in style, the work is still a tribute to Bengali culture and sensibility -- "Bengalis are obsessed with food; we talk about food even with a full stomach, while we are eating we are talking about the next meal! The excitement and curiosity about food, the willingness to share recipes and talk about food is something very Bengali, and we hope it comes across in this book." The evening ended with the authors signing copies of their book. "This is a book that hits the sweet spot because most people in the world are excited by food and travel, and all the different kinds of art and storytelling," said Kunal Basu, postevent. "We expected our audience to be engaged, for them to laugh, for them to share their experiences and to carry on the conversation even after the

session has ended. And on all these counts, we found our Tolly Club session to be a great success." Sritama Sen (t2 intern) Picture: B. Halder