

After author Kunal Basu's anthology *The Japanese Wife* was published, its title story was turned into a film by Aparna Sen. It starred Rahul Bose and Raima Sen in the lead apart from the Japanese actor Chigusa Takaku. His latest anthology, *Filmi Stories*, has generated a similar interest among filmmakers, including Srijit Mukherji, who expressed his praise for the first story *Ok Tata* at the launch of Basu's book at Trincas. Post the launch we caught up with Basu to know more about *Filmi Stories*. Excerpts:

At the launch, Srijit Mukherji complemented your stories for being extremely cinematic. How has your craft evolved over the years?

My writing has always been image-driven. Right from my first novel, *The Opium Clerk*, published in 2001, to the latest book *Filmi Stories*, I have painted with words. I am visually driven in my approach to writing, guided by how an event unfolds in my mind's eye. So, there is a natural connection between my writing and the medium of cinema. I do agree with Srijit in this regard, not simply for this book, but for the entire range of my novels and short stories.

The *Japanese Wife* was adapted for cinema. How rewarding is it to see your stories transcend boundaries and get adapted from book to screen?

It is a huge excitement to see the characters that I have written come alive on screen. The locations, the acting, the ambient sound and the music lend an added dimension to my imagination as an author. Although I have written the story, its transformation into cinema fills me with wonder. It is an extension of my imagination. While I write primarily for my readers, the journey into cinema is certainly an added bonus.

Are all the stories products of the lockdown?

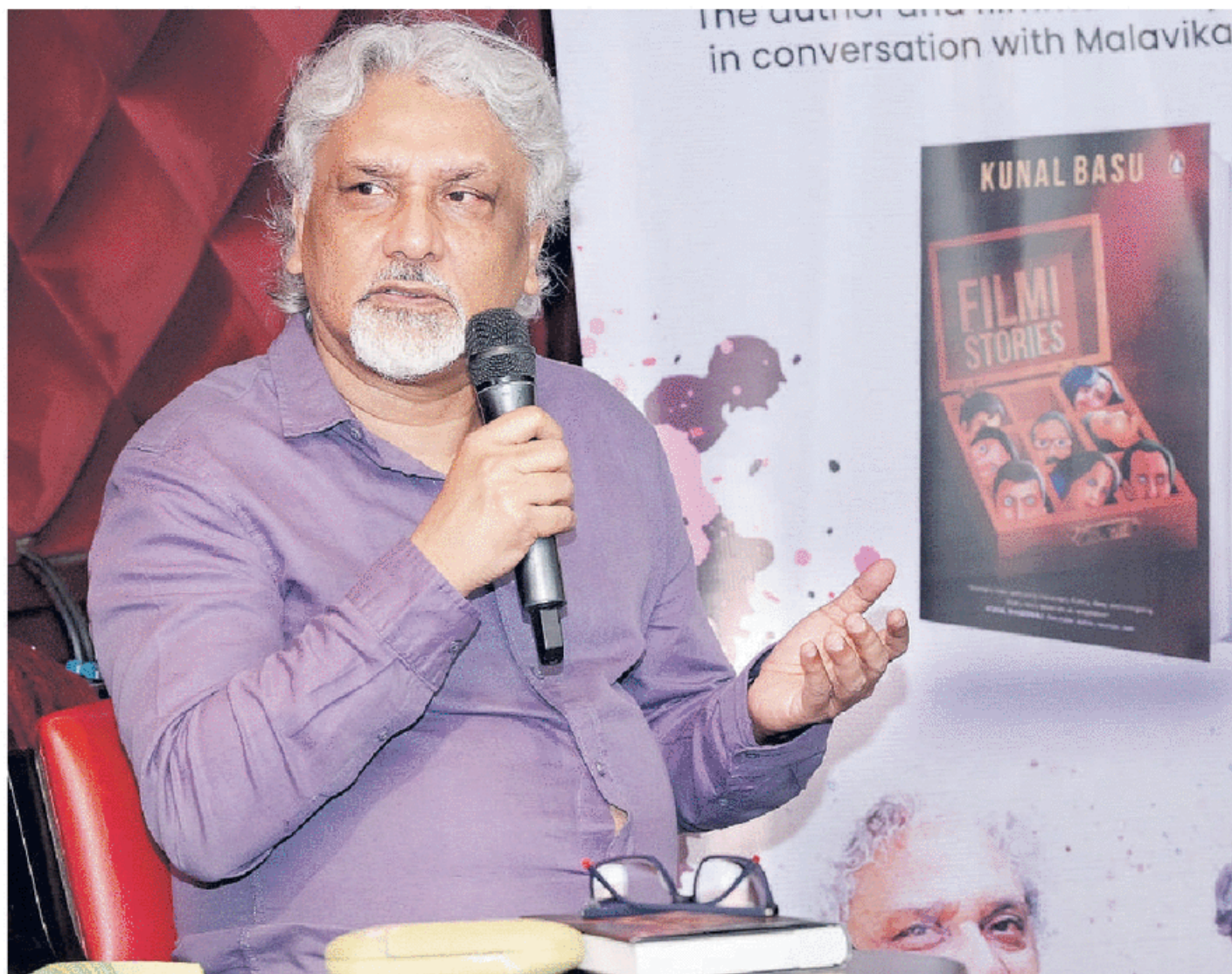
Barring two of the eight stories, the rest were written during the lockdown period.

Which one among the eight stories was challenging and which one was effortless?

It's hard for me to answer this question. I don't think of a story as a challenge, which implies a problem. Writing stories is exciting to me, and there's not one more exciting than the others. Now, each story warrants a different approach to researching and understanding the context within which the imagined events unfold. In *Ok Tata*, for example, it called for extensive interviews with inter-state truck drivers. Whereas, for *Fake*, I spent a good deal of time reading up on certain nefarious practices prevalent in the art world.

Tell us about your writing process.

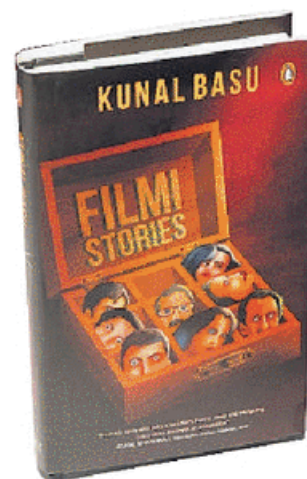
Stories come out of my journey through life. I try to place myself in



BOOKS

PAINTING WITH WORDS

Author Kunal Basu's latest anthology, *Filmi Stories*, generates interest among filmmakers



While *Filmi Stories* are not exactly short stories, most of your other works have been in the longer format. Are there any challenges in writing stories as opposed to novels?

Not any more than writing in the long form. Gabriel Garcia Marquez once said that the task of bringing a story to fruition is pretty much the same in both forms, with some technicalities different between the two of them. In a shorter story, one needs to introduce the key characters and the setting very quickly and lead the reader into the narrative at a faster pace than in a novel. But in terms of building up the events, crafting characters, setting texture and voice, there isn't

any fundamental difference.

Which one do you enjoy more?

I like both. The choice of writing a novel or a short story depends on the idea that has appeared in my mind. Every story conveys a sense of breadth — how broad is the canvas and the time span? Does it happen over a few days or over a longer period? Does it involve one or multiple locations? Does it have a substantial cast or a limited number of focal actors? Such considerations usually dictate whether I want to write it as a novel or a short story.

What are you working on next?

I am considering various ideas at the moment. Something will emerge very soon, I sense.

Farah Khatoun
Pictures: Pabitra Das

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