



Meet Aditya Kripalani

Writing from the Back Seat

by Roshni Mulchandani



There are a number of well-known Indian writers that are globally recognized, acknowledged and awarded with a number of high honors. To this list, you can add a new and promising name: Aditya Kripalani. Take a trip down his resume and you will be surprised to hear of his accomplishments that range far and wide. Kripalani has previously taken on the role of script consultant for a number of critically acclaimed films including Santosh Sivan's **Tahaan** and has worked closely with Sudhir Mishra (**Chameli**) and Abhishek Kapoor (**Rock On!**). However, besides being an obviously accomplished screenplay writer, he also takes innate pleasure in penning fiction. His first novel, **Back Seat** became a topic of discussion as the book almost immediately gained critical acclaim and is in the process of becoming a feature film.

The Back Seat is a love story about an out of work bar dancer, who becomes the keep of a spoilt, rich, heroin addict 22 year old and his driver in the city of dreams, Mumbai. Speaking to the writer, his entrance into the world of writing came at a time when it was pretty much impossible to pitch any new ideas to directors in India. "Film making as Orson Welles said is a 'very expensive paintbrush' and so it was difficult, almost impossible, for me to be able to tell the stories I wanted to tell as a screenplay writer unless I took up direction, which is something I never wanted to do. So I decided to make my own product as a writer i.e. a self published book. And **Back Seat** is the first book to be at all major book store chains which is self published," he explains. Kripalani describes himself as a "regular commerce graduate" who was lost. It was because of his keen interest in films that he finally indulged in film-writing.

The most interesting part, however, is the amount of recognition the **Back Seat** has received post its publication. "I honestly anticipate even more interest as time goes by. A book, work of art is as strong as the person standing behind it. By itself even the finest work doesn't stand much of a chance. And I intend to stand behind this one for a long period of time," the honest writer claims. At the book launch, the likes of Suchitra Pillai, Abhishek Kapoor and Anita Dongre were all seen praising the novel nonstop.

Ask him to describe the book in a few sentences, "The book is set in Mumbai amongst *real* roads, restaurants, lanes, by-lanes so there is a lovely mix of fiction and reality. Anyone who loves or hates Mumbai can relate to the book. And anyone who has been in love." The dark characters have come under immense scrutiny and have been pointed out by all who have critiqued the book. Kripalani instantly defends his characters, "They are real in the sense that there is almost no escapism in the book. As opposed to a Karan Johar film where money is never a problem, these characters even in the midst of love, sex, *dhoka* have to bother all the time about even making a living and so on. If you want an escape, this might not be the book you're looking at. That said it does have its fair share of romanticism."

The **Back Seat** is on its way to becoming available at Barnes and Nobles and Borders very soon. However, the book is more directed

at local Indians but Aditya claims otherwise. "Indo American readers would relate to the outsider's view of Mumbai which Vijay [the protagonist] portrays. The frustration yet sheer *joie de vivre* of Mumbai, it being a sweet mess where you can come make your dreams come true but yet get completely bogged down with the magnitude and weight of sheer existence is also something anyone who has ever been to Mumbai can relate to and those who haven't can experience through **Back Seat**. Of course you can ramble through its streets curled up in bed instead of actually being amidst the smog and cement dust. So it's a lovely way to feel Mumbai."

While he has only published his own book through his publishing company, Neurotic Ink, Aditya is on the lookout for new talent regularly. For now though, his book is gaining ground and critics in India have given the book great comments with one claiming, "Kripalani's insights into individual dreams, intense loneliness, passionate romance and soul-searching bring the protagonists truly alive." This probably explains the book's sellout and is the reason as to why replenished stocks seem to be flying off the shelf almost without delay.

If you're looking for an honest read, the **Back Seat** is your best bet. The romantic realism is interesting and gripping making the **Back Seat** a book you won't be able to put down. "My training is to always go with a strong central conflict and to keep it lean. So things will keep happening every few pages in my work as opposed to long drawn out character descriptions which run into pages. My work will occupy a space between pulp fiction and literary fiction which is neither something you can read in two hours nor as lyrical as Salman Rushdie's stuff," summarizes the writer. And before he signs off, no pun intended here, is there a sequel on the horizon? "Never thought of it but many readers seem to want one."

The Back Seat is available at Amazon.com, Flipkart.com, [Barnes and Nobles](http://BarnesandNobles.com) and [Borders](http://Borders.com).