



The Best Seller

Arunabha Sengupta

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Sandeep Gupta—as befits the popular image of a writer—has held a variety of jobs, the most recent being the ghost blogger for a multinational bank’s vice president. He lives in Amsterdam, studies and practices tai chi for stress relief, and as a budding novelist, is trying to goad his procrastinating publisher into getting his first novel printed and distributed.

While pondering the direction his life should take—corporate drone or starving artist—he returns to India to renew his work visa, meets a very interesting woman named Shruti, heeds his tai chi teacher’s words of wisdom, impersonates his friend Pritam Mitra at a business conference, and falls in love.

HMH Bank employee Simon van der Wiel provides a cyber-narrative in his *Simple Simon* blog of the goings-on during Sandeep’s imposture of his friend. Sandeep-as-Pritam improvises a presentation based on the *Bhagavad Gita* at the conference and finds himself on the rise as an innovative thinker on economics. Pritam, meanwhile, is taking a tour of Europe with the latest object of his affections and figuratively stumbles on a new job and outlook on life. As if that weren’t enough, Sandeep acquires a cyber-stalker.

Sandeep is a *very* busy man.

The *bons mots* fly thick and fast through the pages of this contemporary novel, which pokes loving fun at corporate culture, techno-gadgets in daily life, romance, traditional Indian customs, geekdom, and a handful of other themes. The wonder of it all is that Sengupta keeps all the threads interwoven in a densely attractive word tapestry which is also very, very funny. Logophiles will be snickering at all the literary in-jokes as well as the pop-culture references.

At 681 pages, *The Best Seller* is certainly a hefty tome, but the book’s size should in no way intimidate the interested reader. Sengupta has delivered a finely tempered blade of a book that takes artful slices at several pretentious elements of modern life. In its scope and length, it’s reminiscent of Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash*, another excellent novel. *The Best Seller* deserves the attention to match its title.

J. G. STINSON (January 7, 2011)

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