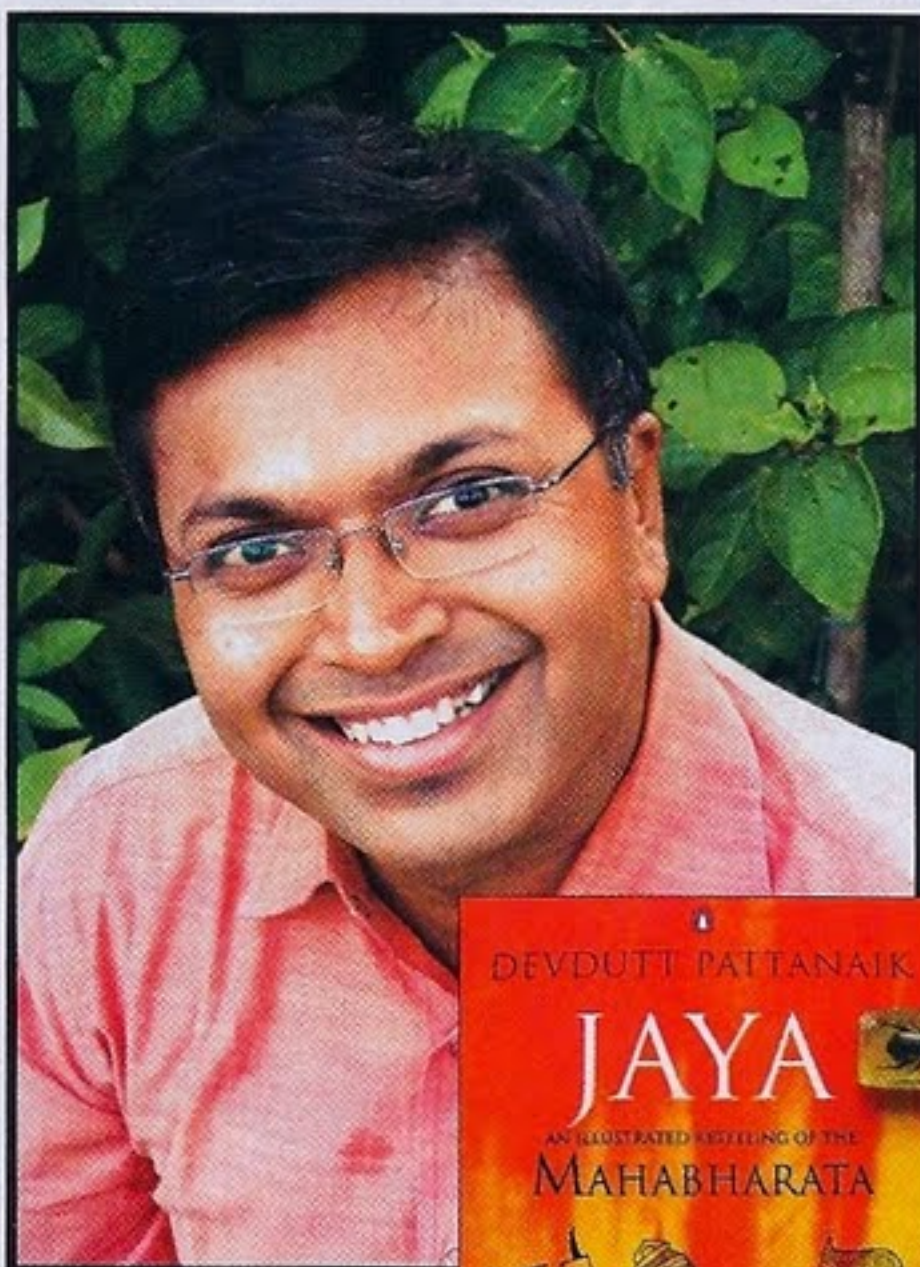


HISTORY RETOLD

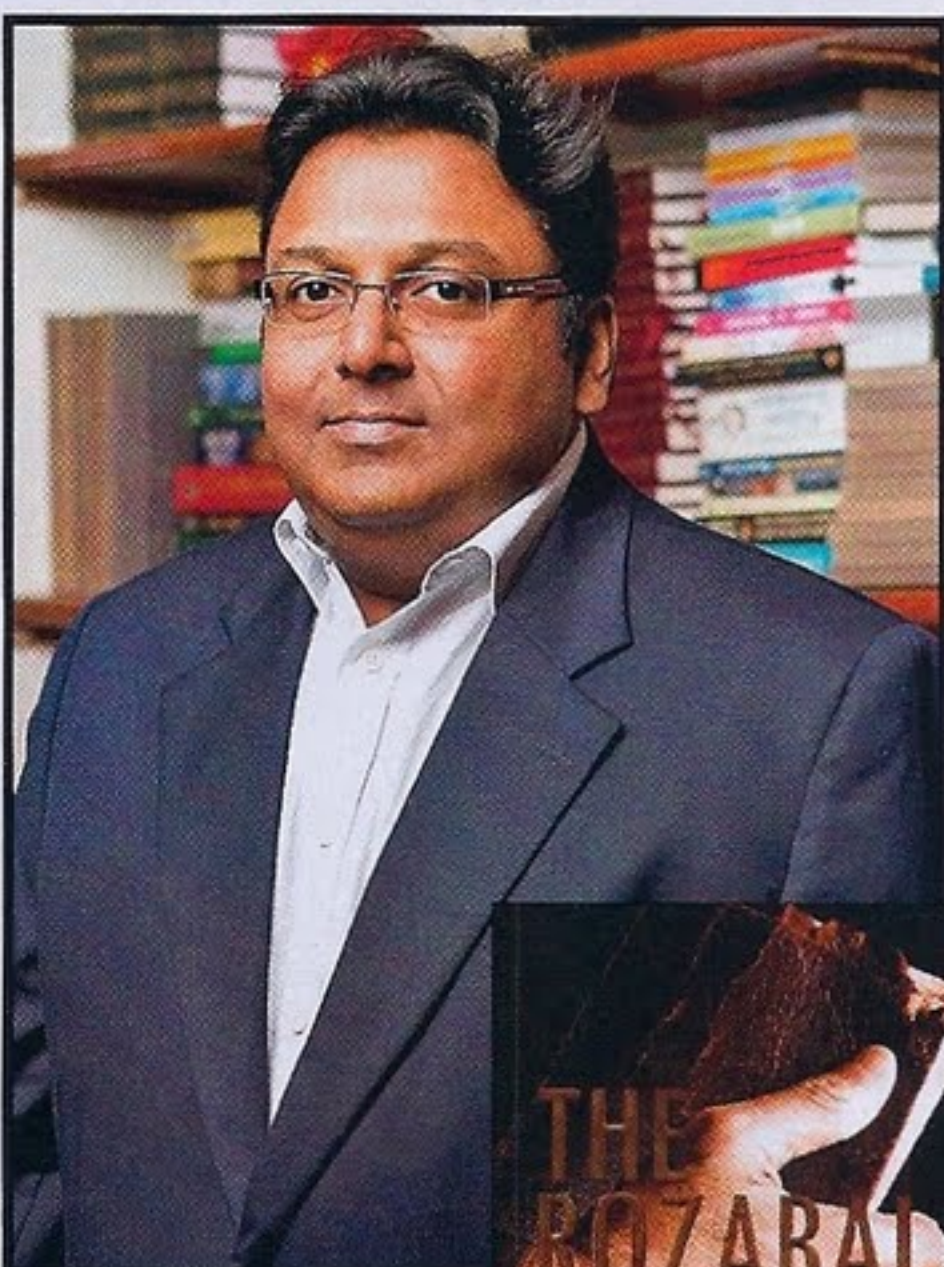
RETELLING INDIAN MYTHOLOGY WITH A TRENDY TWIST IS THE LATEST FLAVOUR ON HOME TURF. HELLO! SPEAKS TO SOME BESTSELLING AUTHORS



In a literary scenario where steamy sex and chiller thrillers have always enjoyed a longer shelf life, it is heartwarming to come across writers who are retelling tales of ancient civilizations with a contemporary spin. With India becoming more confident as a nation thanks to its growing success, an interest in our history and heritage has naturally been aroused.

The success of a panoply of books based on mythology – like *Immortals Of Meluha* by Amish Tripathi, *The Rozabal Line* by Ashwin Sanghi, *Slayer Of Kamsa* by Ashok Banker and *Jaya: Illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata* by Devdutt Pattanaik – proves that the Indian writing scene is in for a mythical makeover. Writers, historians and biographers have time and again reinterpreted ancient stories, but today's writers have reawakened our minds to these jewels by contemporising their magic. The protagonists in these books aren't venerable deities. They are humane, vulnerable and relatable on many levels.

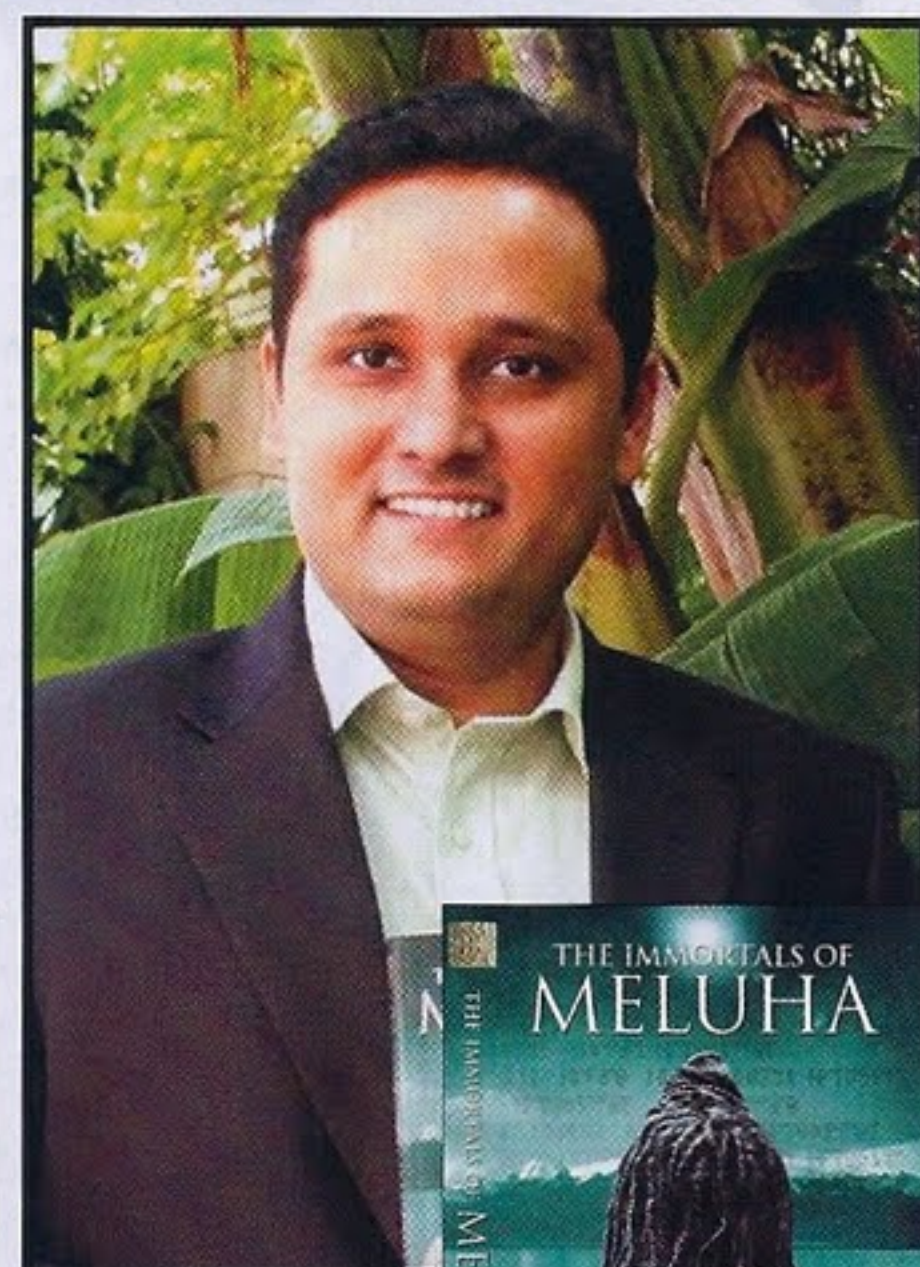
Immortals Of Meluha, which depicts the charismatic Hindu god Shiva as a warrior who jokes with his friends, treats his wife as an equal and loves his children, is a case in point. Shiva, in Amish's creation, is a virtuoso dancer and takes up for the downtrodden sections of society. "Earlier, we were either defensive or embarrassed of our past. Now we want to absorb our past with an open mind but we want to do it on our own terms. So a retelling of our myths, which reinforces the terrible



caste system based on birth, or revisiting the inferior status of women, is obviously not welcome. But the retelling of myths also shows the liberal nature and the grandeur of our past," says Amish.

Immortals Of Meluha is no flash in the pan. Other creations like *The Rozabal Line* draw from an array of mythological sources, to trace Jesus Christ's connection with Kashmir. Sanghi was fascinated by the idea that Buddhism could have influenced Christ and that he may have drawn much of his spiritual learning from India. He attributes the success of his book to the fact that Indian readers are increasingly looking for Indian authors as opposed to Western authors. "Publishers are increasingly willing to experiment with new stories and styles, which was certainly not the case 10 years ago. Young Indians (including the diaspora) are attempting to reconnect with their roots – Indian history, mythology and culture. Also, authors are getting off

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– Ashwin Sanghi



the literary bandwagon and are doggedly honing their skills in writing commercial fiction. They are writing with an Indian voice for Indian audiences without any lingering trace of the colonial legacy," says Sanghi.

The Rozabal Line and *Chanakya's Chant* – are replete with Indian history, but throb with relevance to today's quests and ideas. Another creation *Jaya: Illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata* by Devdutt Pattanaik, restructures the epic in 18 sections and 108 chapters to facilitate easy reading, including 250 line illustrations. This book has an ending that has never ever been told in any retelling of the *Mahabharata*. This ending is the reason the book was originally called *Jaya by Vyasa*. Devdutt shares, "We assume these things about gods. Indra is always portrayed as an insecure god who is cursed by sages, kicked around by demons, but he never learns his lesson. That is why he is a 'god' and not 'God'. I'm just re-telling what was always known before we chose to forget."

Pattanaik has just released three books for children, *Gauri and the Talking Cow*, *Indra finds Happiness* and *An Identity Card for Krishna*. Injecting a dose of vitality into our ancient myths, authors are presenting these sagas again with a dash of newness. Readers craving for riveting page-turners are in for a pleasant treat.

TEXT: MANISH MISHRA