

# SCORCHING TITLES, TEPID PAGES

From autobiographies to explicit, tell-all narratives, the year 2014 saw the release of big-name books. Gargi Gupta leafs through the titles to spot the duds from the dudes

lections are good for the publishing business. And so, nearly every Indian publisher tried to make the most of the politically-charged atmosphere with 'memoirs' of politicians, journalists and bureaucrats that looked back on recent controversies and revealed 'explosive' new details. These did well, both in terms of sales and the media space they occupied. In other ways, too, 2014 has been the year when non-fiction titles have far overshadowed fiction, with one remarkable exception.

Sanjaya Baru's *The Accidental Prime Minister: The Making and Unmaking of Manmohan Singh* was the biggest book of the year. Its release, just as the first round of voting got under way in April, was timed just right to bump up curiosity and sales even though its revelations, that Sonia Gandhi kept tabs on Singh and government files, may not be something readers didn't know about or suspect.

Next came Nawar Singh's *One Life Is Not Enough* and readers, it seems, were ready to overlook the dreary style and the author's self-absorption for the tidbits on how it wasn't "the voice of conscience" that kept Sonia Gandhi from becoming PM in 2004, but something more prosaic — the advice, nay, warning of her son Rahul.

Vinod Rai's *Not Just an Accountant - A Diary of the Nation's Conscience Keeper*, the former CAG's account of his conduct in various scams that continue to hog headlines, added one more nail to the UPA coffin, seeming to indict the former PM himself of acts of omission in the coal scam. And now there's Rajdeep Sardesai's *2014: The Election That Changed India*, a bird's eye view of the rise of Narendra Modi.

Neel Mukherjee's *The Lives of Others* may have blown the dust at the Booker Prize sweepstakes, but it's definitely the most significant work of fiction in the English language to emerge from the subcontinent this year. It not just brings alive the Calcutta of the 1970s, but also shines a light on India's continued war against the Nazis.

The thespian can write as well. Naseeruddin Shah's autobiography was a refreshing change from the usual sad and cerebral books that celebrities come out. *And Then One Day* spared no one, least of all Shah himself, ripping off

the smiling, over made-up masks of some of the holiest cows of Indian cinema. Wish Dilip Kumar had shown traces of the same spirit in his autobiography. *The Substance and the Shadow*, which too came out this year.

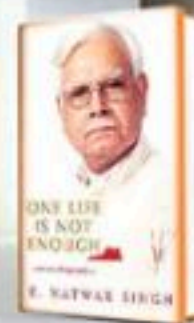
*Sahara: The Untold Story* by senior business journalist Tamaal Bandoopadhyay is one of the most important books of the year. And not because it is India's first serious book on corporate fraud, or because it lucidly explicates the very complicated financial web that Subroto Roy built over decades. The book's release was a landmark because the company had taken the publishers to court, alleging defamatory content and threatened to stop its publication; but then there was a settlement and the book came out, albeit with a "disclaimer" from Sahara on page one. This year has seen two other books in the genre, *Gus Wars: Crazy Capitalism and the Ambanis* and *The Descent of An India*, that expose and demystify the complex weave of corporate chicanery — but these were self-published by the authors as the traditional publishers they had given the books to, backed out under pressure.

Seen photographs of the long queues of people in West Bromwich waiting to get their copy of Sachin Tendulkar's *Playing It My Way* signed by the author? Tendulkar is god, and only carpers will point out that his autobiography only confirms his public image and does not give any insights into the murky goings-on inside the dressing room.

One is a best-selling American author whose books have sold more than 300 copies; the other is a best-selling India author who's often called the desi Don Brown. *Private India*, co-written by James Patterson and Ashwin Sanghi, is the latest book in the former's *Private* franchise and set in Mumbai. A unique experiment.

The centenary of World War I has been the occasion for several books on the Great War, especially the Indian contribution to Britain's war effort. As Vellira Karu's *If I Die Here, Who Will Remember Me? India and the World War One* reveals, as many as one million Indians from all over the subcontinent fought on various fronts. Many wrote letters home (David Omisai's *Indian Votes of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18*), which were poignant, and funny vividly evoking the world of the Western Front through the eyes of the 'subaltern' Indian. [gargigupta@rediffmail.com](mailto:gargigupta@rediffmail.com)

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FICTION FIX



**Blame It on Destiny**  
Sourina Desai

*Blame it on Destiny* is the story of a disturbed counselor who is caught up in a violent love triangle, a sculptress looking for an invisible God, a medium for spirits who wants to be loved, a real estate dealer who strives to be a good son and a writer penning an interesting plot are the five strangers in the novel who never come face to face. But their influence on one another's lives in a manner which alters their circumstances.



**Red Helmet**  
Deepika Shetty

A 23-year-old journalist has everything she can possible hope for — until love strikes. Set in the 1980s and early 1990s, *Red Helmet* is a tale about growing up in an uncertain time in an uncertain India and the journeys love compels us to make.





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[Gargi Gupta @togargi](#)

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Vinod Rai's *Not Just an Accountant* - A



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