

Getting personal with the last Maharaja of Purn

Multiple narrative voices, streams of consciousness and digressing nostalgia are fodder for diplomat and novelist NAVIT

Daniel Purkayastha

HE SAYS the desire to be a writer was always a part of him, even as Naval Sarin, former spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, met for the civil services exam. But on his uncle's advice, always, wanted to be a diplomat. "A person can want to be more than one thing," he smiles. "More so, but nobody does anymore, either with such persistence."

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Sarin's latest novel, *The Aisle*, is a historical novel based on the life of Dulab Shukla, the last Maharaja of Purn. While the narrative version, streams of consciousness, stretches of memory and digressing nostalgia are the novel from the point of historical fiction.

He says he began working on the novel back in 1992-93. "It is a story one has always seen circulating with some alterations. It's one those things that stay with you and don't let you sleep at night," he says about the story of SHUKLA and his teenage kid. "His story had not been told from an Indian point of view and it is needed to be done." As Sarin says in the author's note, "What ever his fault, it seemed to me, he deserved better."

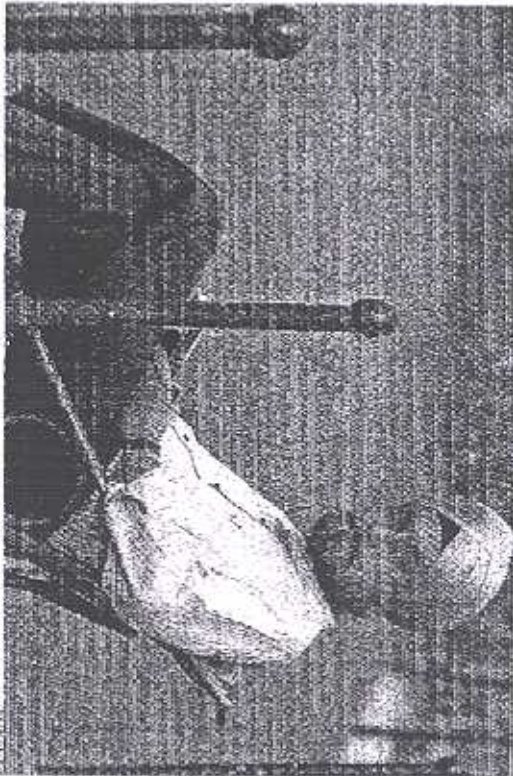


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in the Lahore court and using the fictional format was helpful in demystifying her characters — through her I could also write in a lot of languages," he explains.

Two years for two years. "I did freelance writing, gave a few talks, went to Harvard, writing like book reviews, then wrote short stories and then I wrote novels. It was a long journey of discovering technology," Sarin says. "I was looking for the idea that both the parents were writers. The results of our house were books."

Starting from diplomat to writer to has never been a goal for him. "The first recording to him is not have a long-term tension between the two roles. "No one in a demanding day job can afford to have a routine for writing. You reconcile to the fact that time has to be stolen, from sleep, on trains, on meetings, from family gatherings"