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Techie creates a Magical Palace
By [Hitesh Shetty](#)

The booming IT industry has enabled many Techies to pursue their talents and passions. Meet Kunal Mukherjee who studied Physics at Birla Institute of Technology and Science followed by Research at IIT. This was followed by even more study in USA and then a successful career in technology – first as a Techie then a Manager. His book 'My Magical Palace' has been well received.

Techgoss (TG): Please share with us your academics and IT background?

Kunal Mukherjee: I have a Masters in Physics from the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani in Rajasthan, India. After that I did PhD research in Energy Studies (Solar Energy) for two years at the Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi. I also studied Mechanical Engineering at the University of Hawaii towards an MS degree. After finishing my stints at various universities, I became a developer/programmer, working in technology and then moved on to business and systems analysis and most recently I have been working as a Project and Program Manager in Technology and Business.

TG: You are a technology person. How did you inculcate interest in writing? Where did the initial motivation come from?

Kunal Mukherjee: I come from a family of writers, actors, singers and artists. I started reading books at a very young age, and started writing poetry when I was eight or nine. That would be the official start of my writing journey I guess. LOL.

My parents always encouraged me to read and write and my poems and essays were regularly published in the year book when I was in primary and secondary school. I never thought I would write a novel until later though.

Growing up I did not have too many options to select a career based on my passions. I could be an engineer or a doctor or a lawyer—the three respectable career for middle class Indians. LOL So I studied science, solar energy and technology. The passion for writing and other creative expressions has always been strong.

It so happened that I took a writing class in San Francisco, and as a class exercise I wrote an essay about a beautiful place I could never go back to. My teacher told me then that it was the blueprint for my first novel. I did not believe her then. A few years later, I had some time on my hands and decided to write my first novel and revisited the essay I had written. When I first started writing this book, it was a series of vignettes. These vignettes then evolved into chapters and stories and the manuscript went through several versions over the years. I had never planned to write this particular story with these characters. As the novel developed, all the themes that I really wanted to write about such as being different, being treated like an outcaste for not following social norms, punishment for forbidden love, care for the environment and living creatures, bullying in schools, parental expectations, tyranny of patriarchal societies, and more, emerged in the plot lines. The plot evolved as my characters got real and fleshed out. It is as if the story and all these characters were in my subconscious all along, but were waiting to come alive and all I did was channel them as I wrote.

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TG: Tell us about your experience in penning down 'My Magical Palace'? What is the central plot of the book? Do the characters in the book carry shades of the people working in the IT and BPO industry?

Kunal Mukherjee: I had no idea when I started writing My Magical Palace, about the journey I would travel, both in my external expression as a writer and my understanding of myself and my relationship to the world around me. I must say that the experience of writing a novel touched many areas. I learned that I had to have focus, dedication, determination, passion and be honest and vulnerable if I wanted to write something that others could relate and connect to.

The central plot revolves around the main character, Rahul, who is fictional like all the other characters. He is a typical middle class Indian man who has known since he was young that he is attracted to others of the same sex. He has also learned that his orientation is not something that anyone ever talks about except in the most disapproving and revolting way, implying that there is an inherent abnormality and sickness in the way he feels. He looks around for role models or any examples of same sex love and sees none. He does see the punishment for transgression. He shuts down due to his fear of disgrace and the shame it will bring to his family and moves faraway. It is not until his closeted relationship is on the rocks and that he is given an ultimatum that he is forced to deal with his sexuality as an adult and recognize the experience of loss and the impact it had on him and his peers and family. The fear of losing the true love of his life is the turning point.

Mint House did exist for several decades before being demolished. It was a beautiful building and rumoured to have been built for the Nizams. The Mint House of my novel is based on that very same Mint House that I grew up in and I embellished the original features, to create the magical palace the main character Rahul grows up in. The setting of San Francisco is real too.

I did not focus on the shades of people working in the IT industry in My Magical Palace. But my next book does deal with the industry, the economy and the resulting impact on those who are firmly entrenched in the corporate world of commercial technology.

TG: What were the factors that prompted you to base your book 'My Magical Palace' around a homosexual love story theme?

Kunal Mukherjee: I have always wanted to write a book about the human experience of love, loss, betrayal and the feeling of being an outsider.

I wrote to illustrate the impact of being different and being punished for daring to break the rules that society has created over the centuries. I also wrote about the process that every child goes through when he or she starts shutting down in order to conform and not be ostracized and bullied in school. About the loss of innocence when a child realizes that everything around him or her is not what it seemed but that people, even parents, are driven by fear—of social disgrace, gossip, loss of dignity and losing social standing among peers.

The loss of beautiful old buildings, trees, habitat for plants and animals are also important themes in the book.

To me, the greatest satisfaction as an author is when a reader reads my book and can say, "I can relate to that experience. I know what that feels like. I can empathize with the experience of this character."

TG: While the Western societies treat everyone including homosexuals as equal, When do you reckon, would such an open culture prevail in India?

Kunal Mukherjee: I think the book has dealt with homosexuality quite openly and frankly. Of course this is in the context of characters that I created, but the experience is universal. It shows the long term impact of living in the closet and hiding oneself. To borrow a phrase from Shakespeare, "To thine own self be true" is the message here. It applies to all those who hide themselves from the world, creating relationships full of lies and deceit, all of which contribute to so much sorrow in our societies and families.

Well, while it is true that Western societies treat homosexuals as equal, it is not always the case across all such societies and in all parts of those countries. The laws around gay rights vary from region to region and country to country.

I think India has evolved tremendously in the past few years as far as recognizing the existence and rights of gays, lesbians and transgendered people and having a dialogue around issues dealing with rights and protections. Pop culture and the media have made it more acceptable to mention the word "homosexual" or "gay" or "lesbian" in some urban circles. But it is not the same case in smaller towns.

Even today, most families raise their children with the unquestioning assumption that they will follow the traditional model of families. It is very difficult to come out even today due to the social and family pressures to conform. But these things take a lot of time. Let us face it, Article 377 was repealed just a few years ago. I think it will be a while before India can have the open culture you are referring to. But India is indeed off to a great start and the tremendous support for gay, lesbian and transgendered issues is a testament to the fact that India is on its way to being accepting of these diverse communities.

TG: Whats on the anvil now? Any project in mind yet?

Kunal Mukherjee: I am working on a second book currently set in Mumbai today with an unlikely cast of characters thrown together. I have a lot of interest in Bollywood and the world of movie making and the mafia world, so this book is written against that backdrop.

I would like My Magical Palace to be made into a film and also a stage musical. I am also interested in history and have a historical fiction idea I have been developing for yet another novel.

Techgoss note: More details of the book at this [link](#)

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