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The write connection

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Writer Saskya at Indiranagar Max Mueller Bhavan. Photo: G P Sampath Kumar

Saskya Jain and Chistopher Kloeble talk about their writing and how it binds them

Perched at the edge of her chair, she smiles and gesticulates animatedly the tiny diamond in her nose gleaming as she moves her head. He lounges languidly besides her, long legs stretched out, amused fondness writ large across his face.

Meet Saskya Jain and Chistopher Kloeble, two young German writers who are in the city as part of the Lekhana Literary Festival held at Jagriti from January 18 to 20, this year. The couple are currently Writers-in-Residence at Jagriti and will be reading out from their books at Lekhana.

Saskya was born in India to a German mother and Indian father and grew up in Delhi. She then did her undergraduate in Berlin and an MFA in fiction from Columbia University. “It is the standard degree for writers in the States. I have written several short stories and essays and am putting the finishing touches to my first novel,” she adds. She also works as an editor and translator at Berlin.

Christopher, her husband is from Bavaria “a place where every cliché of Germany holds true”. He is also an MFA from Columbia and has just finished his third novel. He has written plays and even a movie script that he confesses is “a lot more lucrative than novels.”

“I started writing in the third grade,” states Christopher. “My father was my most encouraging reader and that made it fun to keep on writing. I don’t think anyone can write unless you have that — you want to be read, you want to be loved.”

Saskya confesses she was always a little shy of her writing. “I began identifying myself as a writer fairly recently — perhaps in my late teens and early 20’s”

And yet it is the writing that brought them together in the first place. “We met in New York in 2011 when his agent asked me to translate his latest novel.” smiles Saskya. “When I read the book, I loved it and soon that grew into something more. Being in a relationship with a writer means also having one with his writing and we influence each others’ work.”

“We discuss ideas, criticise each others work, even fight over it,” says Christopher. “She is my first reader and that

helps me understand if I have communicated what I want to say effectively. It is good to have an in-house critic.”

When asked where they get their stories from, Christopher laughs, “I wonder if any writer knew the answer to that. My stories are derived from a mosaic of incidents. I don’t always know where my story is headed, I like surprising myself.”

Saskya says that for her writing is also an act of translation helping create explanations for both other people and herself. “Growing up as I did, I always had to balance two distinct identities, at times I felt like a split personality.”

Her novel is about three young people and is set in the city of her childhood-Delhi. “I think that people of my generation have witnessed a large number of changes, very quickly. I have seen the old Nehruvian Delhi evolve into a more glitzy, glamorous version of itself and I think at an abstract level this book is about Delhi and how it has changed with me.”

Family appears to be the theme of most of Christopher’s novels.

He laughs again. “I can’t think of any novel in which family is not the theme though the focus may vary from book to book. It is the family that forges us that makes us who we are.”

As far as future plans go, Saskya says: “Since I’ve come so far, another novel. “I will keep writing of course,” adds Christopher. “This time I’d like to set at least a part of my next novel in India.”

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