

# The longer tale

**BOOKMARK** Lavanya Sankaran's Hope Factory spins a tale of innocence and deceit and love

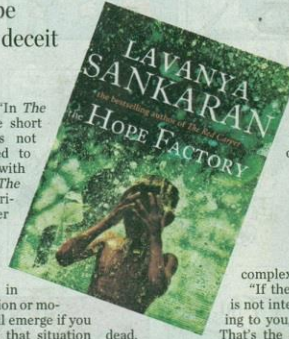
Lavanya Sankaran has flair with characters. She brings them to life in the creases that mar their forehead or by the flowers in their hair. A nervous tic, an unexplained initial in his name, a sudden death - she throws them in between the devil and the deep sea, allows them to flounder with all the flaws of a human being until their feet touch land. And they dig their finger into the sand, praying it will hold but the water washes in and off they go again to be tossed around till they find a rock to hold on to.

The Bangalore-based novelist began her writing career in the U.S.A. where she played an investment banker. With the release of *The Red Carpet* her future was sealed. "I share a romantic relationship with words," says the author in an interview in Bangalore before she went overseas for the promotion of her book

*The Hope Factory*. "In *The Red Carpet* I wrote short stories and it was not something I wanted to recreate. I was done with that journey - *The Hope Factory* is a variation of other experiences."

And when she writes, it could be the story of an interesting character in an interesting situation or moment, "The story will emerge if you throw yourself into that situation and explore it well." The situation is resolved, there is another, and another, and we find a journey - *The Hope Factory* took her six years to complete, a story of socio-political and economic class,

It captures the mood of India in an urban story. For the writer to enjoy that journey, they will need to be in love with their character. "You have to have a character that will last you and possesses



complexity." "If the idea is not interesting to you, it is That's the madness, for six years you engage with a world that nobody can see, you interact with these characters, and it is a constant presence that is chewing on your brain," she explains.

Bangalorean by nature, the book has been set in home ground, Lavanya says. "Life is not easy in these cities and for every opportunity there are ten obstacles whether it is the government, or family, or poverty. India's *Hope Factory* questions what is going to win eventually for each individual?"

Lavanya is ritualistic about her writing. "It is not about time or number of words.. When I wake up there are certain rituals before I sit down to write. I do some reading, nothing in particular. It could be anything, just to get the words flowing, and then by mid day I go to a coffee shop and sit around people with my music and I write."

But she is careful to differentiate from formulaic. "Nothing worthwhile can be formulaic. There is a huge element of craft and you need to master it. It takes big creative leaps, supported by your craft before you can call yourself artist." And between novels and short stories she is not going to make a choice. "I'm going to keep doing both, it is what I live, eat and breathe - writing that is - I don't have a choice."

CATHERINE RHEA ROY



THROW YOURSELF Into a situation