

## HYDERABAD IS TALKING ABOUT

Pics: T. Malikarjun

# THE THOUGHT OF GOING BACK TO A 9 TO 5 JOB SCARES ME

Hyderabad Times caught up with poet, novelist and musician Jeet Thayil. Excerpts:

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**J**eet Thayil is every bit of all the labels that precede his name on any generic bio — a poet, a novelist, a musician. The man might have turned into a recognisable name outside the bibliophile circles due to his 2012 Man Booker nomination for *Narcopolis*, but Jeet is a poet who speaks, exudes and lives poetry, that is admittedly "obscure and insane".

He was in the city on an "ambitious" project that involved 50 poets across different languages, translating each others' work. At the end of it all Jeet looked exhausted. "It's been crazy. I quit working 9 to 5 in 2003, so this is the first time I felt like I am back to working in an office..." he says.

Reliving that memory of his office-going years makes Jeet, who generally looks unperturbed, squeamish. "The last 9-5 job I had messed me up so bad, that I thought I'd rather be broke!" says the writer.

But there was only one thing that made this Hyderabad visit bearable — the poetry. "The way it looks on the page, the way it sounds and feels in your mouth..."

## THAYIL ONCE HAD A REVELATORY AFTERNOON IN A HYDERABAD BAR

**F**or those who savoured the single sentence prologue of *Narcopolis*, Jeet's ode to Bombay makes you want to dig for a *Narcopolis*-like description of your own city. And what he had to offer on Hyderabad was a goosebump-inducing experience of an afternoon in the city. "We went to a bar to take some pho-



Jeet Thayil

### PASSING THROUGH

I am happy with the outcome," he says.

One can't help but get carried away by the poetic quality in his speech. To him, even a conversation is poetry. "Poetry is not some cerebral exercise," he says. But growing up as a poet wasn't easy. "Back then, to identify yourself as a poet was seen as masochism, perversion, a hunger for the oblivious, thirst for obscurity, a death wish..." But things are changing, he says. "I have started noticing something very strange. I see a lot of people reading poetry, certainly more than when I was young. I see people tweeting poems, or snapshots of poems. People are talking about it like something that matters. For a poet, it's a very

emotional thing."

That said, Jeet never made headlines for his poetry. Even as he works on another novel, he is aware that he might have to "get a real job soon". "If I do not finish this book by the end of the year, I am going to get back to a job. The thought of it depresses me — to go to a crappy job with a horrible boss," he shares, adding, "You see, I live in a rented house in the most polluted city in the world (Delhi). I'm 56 and I don't have a family. I am pretty much single. I had one book that made a bit of money and it's gone. I don't even think happiness is possible, joy might be possible but it is fleeting," he signs off, leaving you with an absurd Kafka-esque vein.

tos, in Krishnanagar! It wasn't even a bar or a wine shop, it was like a room. There was this bunch of people there, some who worked in the film industry, a fabricator, a couple of hardcore alcoholics. After an hour, we knew the life stories of everyone there. And it occurred to me that this kind of thing would never happen

elsewhere. The last thing we do is get into a conversation with the person on the table next to you. We are much too sophisticated to do that, aren't we? This was a revelatory afternoon, amidst the absolutely working class in a busted bar on some nondescript street, in a part of Hyderabad," he narrates.