

# Sold on West Asia

## IREAD/ATUL PUNJ

Atul Punj, who runs the \$2-billion Punj Lloyd Group, has a lot of business interests in West Asia.

So he is very well read indeed on the region, rattling off fascinating stories from Kurdistan to Libya. He reads on Kindle as well as physical format and is also a convert to the audio book format.

“For a long time I stopped reading because I would not stop until I finished the whole book,” he confesses. “And I would go on till 4 a.m. and the next day was shot to bits.”

Punj reads when he travels. What else do you do on your own Gulf-stream jet?

### Which is the last book you read on Kindle?

The Wonga Coup, which is about the failed coup in Equatorial Guinea by a bunch of mercenaries – a coup in which Mark Thatcher was rumoured to have a connection as well.

Now, I have downloaded again for old times’ sake Ayn Rand’s Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged, which I read in school, but wanted to read again.

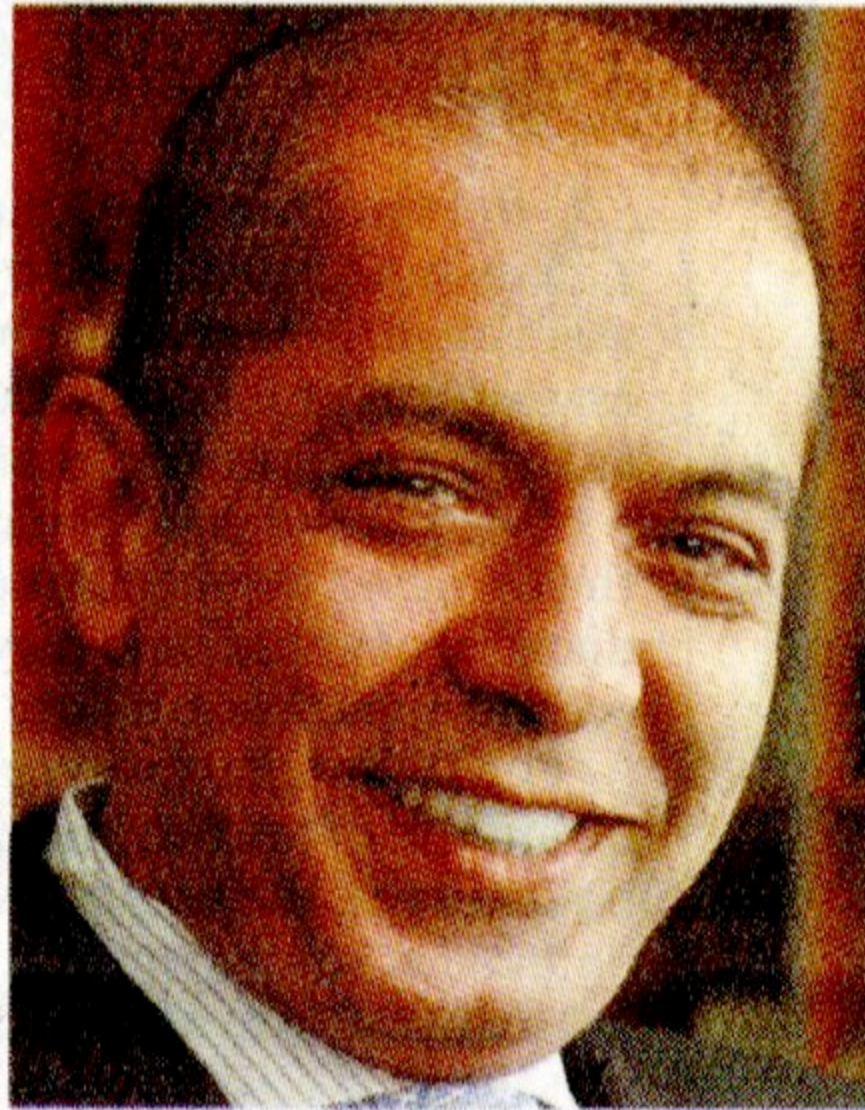
### And in physical form?

The Adventures of Amir Hamza, which is a fascinating kaleidoscope of this mythical character. Nobody really knows who the original author of this epic tale is.

It is an oral narrative passed down through ages. I am reading the English translation.

But I read about two chapters and forget about it for months. And then pick it up again.

It’s not one of those books that



**Mr Atul Punj**, Chairman, Punj Lloyd Group

you have to read from start to finish.

### The worst book you have read

I only buy on recommendation of people, I rarely go into book stores and browse and pick up. Of course, I was disappointed by Leon Uris’ later books when he started getting into Ireland. I liked his books when they were about the Jews. When he got into the Irish story I lost him.

### Any book that you have recommended to friends

Daniel Yergin’s The Prize, which is on the history of the quest for oil. However, I must say, it did not turn out to be so accurate post facto. The history part was great. But what he predicted would happen has not happened.

### What about management books?

I am not into reading management books. I get gifted many by

every consultant who walks into my door, but I don’t read them.

### Most expensive book

Nothing that I can recall. Well, I have been gifted an expensive book – the history of civilizations, done in calligraphy form, by a Czech partner, who had it developed for a Japanese partner of his. That came in a beautiful wooden box. For that book I would get an easel made, and put it up on that for people to admire – that has to be the most expensive book I own.

### Most Impactful book

There is no one book that has really made a significant difference, really. Though one interesting book is the Siege of Mecca, which is about the 1979 takeover of Mecca and Medina.

What I read are biographies, histories, geopolitical books, like the ones by Robert Baer, the author of Sleeping with the Devil.

I have read two of his books and they are pretty interesting to understand the Iranian role in politics. If you are less engaged with Iran, you can never have peace in the Middle East. That’s the relevance of the book

The entire history of the Kurdish region, the whole Shia influence, Iranian, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi situations – all those interest me.

### When are you writing your own book?

No, no, I am not going to do that. Though if decide to write, it will be a book on the other side of my life, that will be far more interesting. Not how I got my break, etc.

*(As told to Chitra Narayanan)*