



Saraswati Park

By Anjali Joseph

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Saraswati Park By Anjali Joseph

A tremendous first novel from an exciting young author.

Feted for its electric chaos, the city of Bombay also accommodates pockets of calm. In one such enclave, Mohan, a middle-aged letter writer – the last of a dying profession – sits under a banyan tree in Fort, furnishing missives for village migrants, disenchanted lovers, and when pickings are slim, filling in money order forms. But Mohan's true passion is collecting second-hand books; he's particularly attached to novels with marginal annotations. So when the pavement booksellers of Fort are summarily evicted, Mohan's life starts to lose some of its animating lustre. At this tenuous moment Mohan – and his wife, Lakshmi – are joined in Saraswati Park, a suburban housing colony, by their nephew, Ashish, a diffident, sexually uncertain 19-year-old who has to repeat his final year in college.

As Saraswati Park unfolds, the lives of each of the three characters are thrown into sharp relief by the comical frustrations of family life: annoying relatives, unspoken yearnings and unheard grievances. When Lakshmi loses her only brother, she leaves Bombay for a relative's home to mourn not only the death of a sibling but also the vital force of her marriage. Ashish, meanwhile, embarks on an affair with a much richer boy in his college; it ends abruptly. Not long afterwards, he succumbs to the overtures of his English tutor, Narayan.

As Mohan scribbles away in the sort of books he secretly hopes to write one day, he worries about whether his wife will return, what will become of Ashish's life, and if he himself will ever find his own voice to write from the margins about the centre of which he will never be a part. Elliptical and enigmatic, but beautifully rendered and wonderfully involving, Saraswati Park is a book about love and loss and the noise in our heads – and how, in spite of everything, life, both lived and imagined, continues.

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Saraswati Park By Anjali Joseph Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

Winner of the Desmond Elliott Prize Winner of the Betty Trask Prize Shortlisted for the Ondaatje Award Shortlisted for the Hindu Best Fiction Award Shortlisted for a Commonwealth Writers' Prize 'Joseph contrasts the inner and outer lives of her characters, and the uneasy friction between new and old cultures, with all the wit and delicacy of a latter-day Mrs Gaskell' The Times 'Joseph writes beautifully about quietness and stillness...this is a quiet, restrained novel but a great deal is going on beneath the surface' Sunday Times 'Anjali Joseph's debut novel is replete with evocative images of Bombay...but the book's greatest strength lies in its delicate portrayal of a young man's desperation for intimate connection, and a couple's acceptance of a marriage that has failed' Financial Times 'An elegantly realised portrait of unrequited love, frustrated aspirations and the unspoken compromises of marriage and family. Joseph neatly weaves in elements of the rapid social change occurring in the ever-expanding city but her principal concern is the more complex process of personal change and development and its bittersweet effects: the nerves, hang-ups and pains of youth and the regrets, pleasures and fulfilment of old age' Observer 'How true to life it seems - the background of disconsolate rains and chattering mynah birds entirely Bombay, the preoccupations universal ... a generous book where absolutes are neither sought nor found.' Guardian 'The frustrations of middle-class family life are the focus of Bombay-set Saraswati Park ... each character quickly feels like a familiar face, making this like The Corrections, but set in India...a treat' ELLE 'An unhurried, quietly heartbreaking study of a lower middle-class Bombay family's disintegration and renewal...Joseph's skill is finding the poetry inside modest dreams, small tragedies and disappointments' Metro 'A beautiful novel that personifies the new India from the inside out' Literary Review

About the Author

Anjali Joseph was born in Bombay in 1978. She read English at Trinity College, Cambridge, and has taught English at the Sorbonne. More recently she has written for the Times of India in Bombay and been a Commissioning Editor for ELLE (India). She graduated from the MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia with distinction in 2008. Saraswati Park is her first novel.

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