



The Hope Factory

Lavanya Sankaran

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With humor, intelligence, and masterly prose, Lavanya Sankaran's debut novel brilliantly captures the vitality and danger of a newly industrialized city and how it shapes the dreams and aspirations of two very different families.

Anand is a Bangalore success story: successful, well married, rich. At least, that's how he appears. But if his little factory is to grow, he needs land and money, and, in the New India, neither of these is easy to find.

Kamala, Anand's family's maid, lives perilously close to the edge of disaster. She and her clever teenage son have almost nothing, and their small hopes for self-betterment depend on the contentment of Anand's wife: a woman to whom whims come easily.

But Kamala's son keeps bad company, and Anand's marriage is in trouble. The murky world where crime and land and politics meet is a dangerous place for a good man, particularly one on whom the well-being of so many depends.

Rich with irony and compassion, Lavanya Sankaran's *The Hope Factory* affirms her gifts as a born storyteller with remarkable prowess, originality, and wisdom.

Praise for Lavanya Sankaran's *The Red Carpet*

"By the end of [the] very first story, people half a world away have been transformed into complete human beings, full of frailties and fragile self-regard, achingly sympathetic. That's why *The Red Carpet* reads like a revelation. . . . I recommend this book so highly!"—Carolyn See, *The Washington Post*

"Throughout these fine, articulate stories, Lavanya Sankaran brings to life the new and old social worlds of Bangalore. More important, she uses the quiet dignity of her characters to reveal what's universal in the wide rift between generations. It's an unusually elegant and nuanced portrait."—John Dalton, author of *The Inverted Forest*

"It's a pity there aren't more stories to be told in *Carpet*. They're so much fun."—*The Dallas Morning News*

"[An] animated debut . . . [These stories] are memorable for their subtle wit and convincing evocation of a dynamic world."—*Publishers Weekly*

The Hope Factory Details

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Author : Lavanya Sankaran

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From Reader Review The Hope Factory for online ebook

Maya M says

This is a book that smells and feels like Bangalore. It has texture and moves smoothly from the dark dealings of politicians, land mafia and businessmen to delicate romantic temptations. It walks the reader into the mind of the rich and the poor, harmonising subtly the bare bones of two narrators' journeys, and their brave and desperate struggles.

Although it does touch upon caste a little, it does so very lightly and lacks sensitivity to its actual complications. A religious elderly practicing brahmin man might not for example, be as ready to eat food cooked by his son's household staff as Shankaran suggests. Similarly although the book does effectively parody the upper classes, their pretentiousness and mindless spending, it does so with minimal nuance failing to distinguish between the snobbery of many generations of wealth as opposed other kinds of snobbery. It does the same with feminism, putting one woman on a pedestal and making the other impossible instead of humanising both.

Shankaran captures a lot of interesting and familiar detail and articulates it beautifully. Domestic pettiness and the complicated ecosystem within a household are laid out easily. The precariousness and herculean effort of holding a business together are also sketched out neatly. In many ways, the detail and texture of some parts of the book make the others look half-done. It is not clear why the lady of the house is so unforgivably awful - the author could have made an effort at drawing links between her bad behaviour and the overbearing father and the absent, patronising husband that make her feel like she lacks control of her life. Oddly, some characters in the book are treated with great empathy (and are personally bordering on saintly) while others are left to be evil with no explanation.

I look forward to Shankaran's next book. Hopefully the characters will be better researched but I'd be happy for the freshness and lovely familiar detail of the world they live to stay the same.

bookczuk says

Finally! A book about India that doesn't have to do with getting married or coming of age, or American-born-of Indian-heritage going back to India/dealing with being in the west/whatever. (That's a generalization, I know, but so many of the books I've come across run on that theme, usually with brightly colored saris or spices on the cover.)

The Hope Factory is a gently told novel that takes the time to craft characters, settings, and situations, all grounded in reality and believability. Two interwoven tales: the first is that of Anand, who simply wishes to expand his business, by expanding his factory. The second story centers on Kamala, one of the servants of Anand's family, a single mother, subsisting on a small income, trying to carve out a world for herself and her teenage son, who seems to be running with a bad crowd.

Unfortunately for each, life can become complex and difficult. In Anand's case, politics and conflicting loyalties move in to muck up the land sale. (Having experienced India politics through family who lives there, I can attest to the good job done in the depiction.) For Kamala, the precarious balance of her world and economics is threatened by changes in her rent, and in the needs of her son.

This is a story of real people, with real needs, worries, hopes, and concerns. The characters come across as such. I found the second half of the novel moved more quickly, but that the first half needed the pace it did to

set the stage and create the world. The end was a bit abrupt, but true to life. We rarely wrap episodes of our existence up into neat little packages, but they tend to slide, with hope, into the next day, the next challenge, the next phase of life. And sometimes, the next adventure.

I received this book via the Early Reviewers program of LibraryThing. Many thanks to LT and to the publishers for letting me into the Bangalore of Anand and Kamala.

Prathima Deepak says

Just a random book from the library and of-course not a bad read.

The novel portrays the struggling days of the 'Developing India' when one had to fight the corruptions and the bad politics to grow economically. Anand's and Kamala's stories go in parallel and both are extremely good in their own ways.

I am not sure why but the characters in this book got really close to me and that was the only reason for me to reach the last page. Among all others, I liked Valmika (Anand's daughter) for her innocence and maturity. The link between Kavika and Anand is abrupt and was really unnecessary. The story highlights the bad part of those olden days while the much more positive side has been masked.

Jennifer says

I'm smitten with tales set in India. I'm besotted by convincing characters. I'm crazy about skillful prose. The Hope Factory contains everything on my literary wish list.

This is the tale of two families. Anand and his family seem to have it all. Kamala and her son live on the very edge of poverty. In reality both families are dealing with matters that could send them over the brink to ruin.

This novel is populated with corrupt politicians, shady coworkers, and unseemly friends. Anand and Kamala even have to be cautious of their own family members who don't have their best interests at heart.

At the core of The Hope Factory is the desire that Anand and Kamala have to be good parents. I was especially struck by the struggle that Kamala goes through to make sure that her son is educated and able to rise above their current station.

The desire for a better and secure future is something we can all understand. Lavanya Sankaran uses that theme to write an outstanding story.

Julie Round says

An intriguing story, beautifully written. I really felt sympathy with the troubles of the two main characters. It also felt as if we were getting some insight into life in India.

Bookish Indulgences with b00k r3vi3ws says

At a glance this novel is made of two parallel stories. One where a family that seemingly has it all and wants more. In the other where a family has virtually nothing and wants more. Their entwined lives tell a fascinating story.

First is the story of Anand, a successful businessman. His wife is a typical socialite, whose wants are never ending. Anand plans to expand his business and for that he needs land and money. Even with help, Anand is facing difficulty to go ahead with his plan because his ideals are extinct in today's competitive market. The second story is that of Kamala, one of many domestic help that Anand's wife employs. As a widow, Kamala's hopes and dreams revolve around her son Narayan. She wants to give him a good education so that 'he can learn English and get a job with computer'. Narayan, barely a teenager, on the other hand skips school regularly to hang out with the rowdy crowd. But at the same time, he also works to earn what little money he can for his small family. The common thread among these two distinctive families from separate classes is need.

Lavanya Sankaran has woven a mesmerising story to include drama, politics, love and deceit. For me, the only drawback was its pace. Slow start and slow to progress – the plot could have really done with a bit of fast-tracking, but the language and the narration more than makes up for it. There is only one way to describe her language and writing style - beautiful. It was an awesome experience to read such classy prose with the dialogues delivered just right. The complexity of each character is striking and they felt very real. These distinctive characters actually come together very well. I liked Anand who is loveable, generous and principled. Vidya comparatively is shallow and lives on impractical whims. Kamala is strong and wilful.

The highlight of the novel is its plot. I loved the way has brought together two very different point-of-views of the same thing. The extremities and the complexities of lives of two families from different social ladders, with their similar challenges made for an interesting read. Real life, real emotions and real problems of life mixed together to create a work of fiction that could very well be facts representing many families of our country.

A fascinating piece from Lavanya Sankaran that can and will touch lives – give it a chance.

Chaitra says

Well, I've finished reading it. It didn't take me a lot of time, which is basically the only good thing I can think of for this book. I think as an Indian myself, whatever this book tries to say is not new, not original and towards the end too idealistic and wrapped with a neat bow tie. I can't even see this book as tackling a (surprising number of) serious issue(s) with the seriousness it deserves.

Anand is an idealistic and successful factory owner trying to expand his factory. He finds the only non-crook land broker to find him the land he needs, but gets caught among land-mafia and dirty politicians all instigated by an irritating and self-important father-in-law. How does he get out of this? He finds the only non-crook politician to help him at the absolute last minute and all the corrupt crooks back off. This is

supposed to be India. I love my country to bits, but Indian politicians don't give a damn as to what scandals are brewing in their party. They walk with a straight back to jail, and will contest an election and even win it from within. This has happened and will continue to happen. I can't help but think Lavanya Sankaran just tailored this idealistic politician and his scared cronies for non-Indian audiences.

Before I can even move on, Anand has other troubles. He has married a social butterfly, way beyond his league. He also has the hots for her unattached (and idealistic, let's not forget) friend. He has problems with his father-in-law, he also has problems with his ultra-conservative and oblivious father. Nothing happens with the friend, he's still married to the social butterfly with her still uninterested in what's happening with him. The father-in-law is impressed that he's close to the politician guy and all is forgiven (even though all the problems were the father-in-law's fault), and the father just miraculously decides he actually likes what's going on with his son and his daughter-in-law. As compensation though, Anand has the cutest and wisest little children. All right.

If this bundle of problems was not enough, there's a parallel story of his maid, Kamala. She's struggling for money, working for an unpredictable mistress, among other maids that hate her guts. Her smart son is in bad company (obviously), but he's not at all like them (also obviously). She has a good for nothing brother who makes trouble for her by besmirching her character to make himself seem better. She gets into a situation where money is needed, is predictably falsely accused. Her bundle of woes only lacks a husband who beats her, but her hated co-worker has that trouble. But never worry, she reconciles with Anand, and he helps her get another job and the good man continues sponsoring her son's education. She's in a better position at the end of the book than she is in the beginning, but not too much better.

Nothing actually goes wrong. Not one relationship is irredeemably lost (which seems likely when the stakes are supposedly so high), not one person understands the other better at the end either. There's no real reason to be worried - the land broker Anand deals with is clean, so there's no question of him going to jail; Kamala's son is a good boy even though he hangs out with the bad crowd, so there's no real reason to suspect him of stealing a necklace; Anand loves his kids, so he will not even think about his interest for the like minded Kavika beyond the first half of the book when the story is still building up to the end; the good politician is a really good guy and helped Anand when what Anand was doing was a kind of reverse blackmail - hey, the people who will be voting for you will not like to know what happens in your party. What's the point of this book really?

It bugged me no end as a native Kannada speaker that the few words of Kannada in the book are all, without exception, wrong. Please, it's not that hard. Bangalore is a melting pot, so it's not hard to make your protagonist talk a different language. What's the point of this half hearted attempt? Did the author not expect Bangaloreans to read the book? In that case, I'm sorry to have read and poked at it. 2 stars, and I'm being generous.

*** *I received a copy of this book for review via NetGalley* ***

Betsy McTiernan says

Every novel about India I have ever read has me afraid to turn the next page, anticipating the disaster that will befall the characters. This was no exception. The story revolves around the fate of two characters in Bangalore: Anand, a factory owner--part of the prosperous business class of the emerging India--and Kamala, one of the three maids in his household. Everyone in the novel is depending on Anand's success--his

employees, his wife, and his maids. And Anand is a good man. He believes his prosperity should be spread around, though his wife seems to be spending profits as fast as they materialize. Anand wants to buy some land, so he can expand and the trouble starts--shady deals, weird landbrokers, political shenanigans, etc. Meanwhile, Kamala struggles to get her son a proper education and hold on to her home, such as it is. Sankaran writes beautifully and keeps the tension high until the end. She is certainly a writer to watch.

Alesa says

I would have given this 4.5 stars if possible, because the book had so many strengths. It is a set of twin stories, concerning an Indian man who owns a small factory that is expanding, and his maid. He needs to buy land for his new factory, in order to get large Japanese client. She wants to avoid eviction from her slum room, and to find a better life for her son.

* The dual viewpoints (lower class woman, upper-middle class man, with the former working for the latter) were very interesting, and added great contrast to the plot

* I learned a lot about the corruption involved in seemingly ordinary Indian life, something I had not been exposed to before. Who would have thought so many pay-offs would be necessary for a simple transaction like buying a piece of land.

* The portrayal of a marriage during upward social mobility was fascinating, although I felt that the wife was too one-dimensional and not sympathetic enough.

* The plot sashayed elegantly between hope and disaster and back again, leaving the reader in the grips of anticipation.

* Many of the secondary characters were delightful in their own right, such as Anand's co-workers, the lower-class son tempted by hooligans, and a pious father ranting about his pet peeves.

This was a very skillfully done novel. I continued reading it despite the depressing nature of some of the content, and my irritation with the shallowness of Anand's wife.

Deepak says

3.5*

Sowmya says

The hero is not a hero. The heroine is not a heroine. The upper middle class family man does not try very hard to stand up for his bullying father-in-law. He does not ponder enough about his attraction to his wife's friend nor does he go ahead and cheat on his wife. The wife does not try hard to break norms by caring for her hard working maids nor does she stand up for herself and her husband.

This story is about middle grounds, similar to real Indian life - at least a majority of them. The emotions run

as high as calling people fucker, blighter, chuth, behenchuth but nothing drastic is done about them except the age-old Indian tradition of "grin-and-bear-it".

The characters do not have deep convictions except perhaps the maid, Kamala. Her struggle and life are narrated well from the perspective of a single widowed mother who wants to raise a son that is honest and successful while leading by example despite poverty and abuse.

If I had one take-away from this book it would be the common Indian doctrine of "Everyone is abused but that is the way of life"

Abhilash Ruhela says

I am done reading this 350-pages novel "The Hope Factory" by the authoress- Lavanya Sankaran. The book is being published by Tinder Press and has a very beautiful cover page. The greenish effect and a poor child splashing water over himself speaks a lot about what the story would be. It already reflects that it's a tale about India and its poverty in its main segment of people.

Lavanya Sankaran is the author of The Red Carpet, the bestselling, critically acclaimed debut collection selected for Poets and Writers magazine's Best First Fiction Award, Barnes & Noble Discover New Writers, and Borders Original Voices. The tile story was first published in the Atlantic Monthly. Her work has also been features in the Wall Street Journal, the Times of India and Outlook among other publications in America, India, Italy and France, as well as in numerous television appearances in a social and political commentator. Lavanya studied at Bryn Mawr College and lives in Bangalore with her husband and daughter.

The synopsis of the book says:-

An international event: a remarkable first novel of modern India, weaving together a rich tapestry of social manners and mores, ambition, greed, and love, which will establish Lavanya Sankaran as one of the most gifted and original writers of fiction today.

Bangalore: where innocence, deceit and love collide

Anand is a Bangalore success story: successful, well-married, rich. At least, that's how he appears. But if his little factory is to grow, he needs land and money and, in the New India, neither of these is easy to find.

Kamala, Anand's family's maid, lives perilously close to the edge of disaster. She and her clever teenage son have almost nothing, and their small hopes for self-betterment depend on the contentment of Anand's wife: a woman to whom whims come easily.

But Kamala's son keeps bad company. Anand's marriage is in trouble. And the murky world where crime and land and politics meet is a dangerous place for a good man, particularly one on whom the wellbeing of so many depends.

Lavanya Sankaran has a very good command over the language. After a long time I got to read a book by an Indian author written in a way that it seems as if its by an English author. He has given full justice to the

story she has picked up. She has tried to express her views on the problems that a class of people in India suffers with. She has not tried to show an industrialist, entrepreneur or a working class person based in abroad and returning India to see how problems cover him from all the 4 sides. In fact, the story is kept quite realistic.

I loved the way both the stories goes simultaneously. Its about two families and I love how a same scenario is being showcased from both the point of views. It is quite visible that not only a servant is dealing with poverty and crisis but the situation of the boss is no less than that. I loved how every character is being built that we get attached with them. We know the characteristics of each of them. The dialogues are so deeply written that some of them made me remember some days of my struggle and pain. The second half of the book is amazingly written and every thing that this book should be complimented for is in its second half.

Coming to the drawbacks of the book, first is the slow pace and no suddenness in the plot initially. Secondly, I would say that according to an Indian audience, the cost of book- Rs. 550 is too highly kept. The similar names of the character becomes confusing at times- Anand and Anantmurthy. Also as there are many characters in the book, it's better to write them on a piece of paper and then read. In all, I would give this book 3.5/5.

Thanks.

ABHILASH RUHELA - VEERU!!!

Betty says

India - a country with extreme wealth and extreme poverty.
Bangalore - occupations are outsourcing and manufacturing.

The author, Sankaran, lives in Bangalore. She writes of what she knows and brings it close to us. Her book focuses on two main characters and their vastly different lives.

Anand K. Murthy owns Cauvery Auto, a factory that makes auto parts. He is preparing for an important meeting with international buyers; if his factory wins the order, everyone's lives will be transformed.

Kamala is a maid who is in Anand's family. She has never been in a car but watches proudly when the owner drives by. Kamala lived in a very dusty construction site with her young son, Narayan. When Narayan was two-and-a-half, Kamala gave him his first full body bath, bathed herself, and got a job as a maid. Her goal is for Narayan to have a good education, learn English, and have an office job with a computer. Narayan, now age 12, has found a way to earn as much money as she does each month.

The writing is lovely; the characters are well described. This is a book about India which does not focus on arranged marriages or Americans coming back home to India.

I had to write down the names of the characters, however, beginning with Anand K. Murthy and Mr. Ananthamurthy, the operations manager of his factory. It did become confusing with other similar names. I recommend you do the same.

Riya says

My Rating: **3.5** out of 5 stars.

I initially requested this book from Netgalley because I am utterly fascinated with India and all things Indian. I am in awe of the size of this country and the hundreds of languages its people speak. I adore Indian food and am saddened by the huge divide between this nation's rich and poor people. The rapid industrialization that is currently happening in India is quickly changing the country in both good ways and bad ones. Traditional values and villages are torn apart, replaced by huge cities, companies, and Westernized ways; however, corruption is still prevalent and sometimes almost impossible to overcome. If these issues sound interesting to you, then I suggest reading this book.

There are two different main characters and two different stories in this book, but they are interrelated. The first one deals with a successful, fairly wealthy, factory owner Anand. This is a good man that has risen from humble beginnings and became rich through hard work and perseverance. He is unhappy in his marriage but he doesn't do much about it. His main concern is to expand the factory and in order to do that he has to buy 15 acres of land, a deal that proves itself to be much more difficult than he could've imagined. There are bribes to pay, people to coax into selling their land, a trustworthy land broker to find, and government corruption to avoid. This is a very delicate matter. Here is my favorite quote from this book that describes Anand and his dilemma:

Like those pioneers, he had survived an unimaginably hostile world. A world where everything had to be fought for, every detail planned. Things that could go wrong, would. Things that shouldn't go wrong, did. Add to that the Indian government, a strange, cavernous beast that lay hidden in grottoes and leaped out, tentacles flailing, suckers greedy for bribes.

The second story deals with Kamala - Anand's impoverished housekeeper that has more troubles than she can keep up with. Kamala is constantly in fear of losing her job; Anand's wife is cruel and treats her bad, while the other coworkers are jealous, vindictive, or have their own problems to deal with. Kamala's son Narayan is hanging out with a bad crowd and not focusing on his studies which is the only way a boy like him can escape poverty. Then there is the Kamala's landlady that hearing a false rumor about Kamala might unjustifiably raise the rent, which will plunge the small family into even more destitution.

The Hope Factory is a good book and I definitely want to encourage anyone that has an interest in modern India to read this. A word of caution: the plot is a bit slow moving for the first 100 pages or so but if you stick with it, you will see that reading this book will be a very rewardable experience. There is also the issue of a lot of names sounding the same. For example, there are many names starting with V: Vidya, Vyasa, Valmika, etc. I suggest writing every character's name down in the beginning, along with a brief description of who they are - it will make understanding who everyone is a lot easier.

Mechele McDaniel Rose says

I sooo wanted to love this book. It seemed to have all the promise of being a book that would draw me in, hold my attention & keep me up late at night just to see what would happen next. I am sorry to say none of

that happened. To be fair I abandoned this book after 100 or so pages in. Maybe I didn't give it enough of a chance. Lifes to short & there are too many great books out there waiting to be read. Someday I may pick this book up again & give it another try. Thanks to Random House & Goodreads for the opportunity to read this book but it's just not for me.
