



Kalyana

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Growing up in the Fiji Islands in the late 1960s, Kalyana Mani Seth is an impressionable, plump young girl suited to the meaning of her name: blissful, blessed, the auspicious one. Her mother educates Kalyana about her Indian heritage, vividly telling tales of mischievous Krishna and powerful Mother Kali, and recounting her grandparents' migration to the tiny, British colony.

While the island nation celebrates its recently granted independence, new stories of the feminist revolution in America are carried over the waves of the Pacific to Kalyana's ears: stories of women who live with men who are not their husbands, who burn their bras, who are free to do as they please. Strange as all this sounds, Kalyana hopes that she will be blessed with a husband who allows her a similar sense of liberty.

But nothing prepares her for the trauma of womanhood and the cultural ramifications of silence and shame, as her mother tells her there are some family stories that should never be told.

Kalyana Details

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From Reader Review Kalyana for online ebook

Melody says

I came across this book quite by accident. I work at a library and we often times get free books so it was just laying on the table and I picked it up thinking it looked like a good read. It definitely was! I really enjoyed the story. Years ago, I got into a phase where I was reading a lot of novels where the setting was in India, and this was a very similar book only the setting was in Fiji. I have never read a book set in Fiji so it was cool to read about a different culture. The second half of the book takes place in Canada. It's the kind of book that really makes you think about mothers and daughters as well as the empowerment of women. So if you like those kinds of books you'll probably enjoy this one too.

Michelle says

Kalyana's life was definitely touched by many people. Some in bad ways but mostly good ones. Her family really loved her and in the long run she learned just how much. That is the way things happen though. We reflect on things and see things differently or learn another piece of the puzzle that was missing and suddenly understand. A good read in many ways but one of them definitely being able to see another culture's upbringing and way of life. No matter where we come from - we either like where we are or seek to escape.

K. says

This is the first book I've ever read that's set in Fiji, which feels like a massive oversight considering my parents lived in Fiji for four years before I was born, and most of their close friends are people that they met while living in Fiji. So basically, from the time I was born, Fiji has been this weird constant presence in my life.

So I think part of why I loved this so much was to do with that. Another part was how much it deals with the expat experience in the last third of the book. Having grown up in multiple countries (including Canada), having had my grandmother come and stay for a month a year, there was so much about Kalyana's experience in Canada that I related to.

But the most wonderful thing about this book for me? Was the discussion of female empowerment and the mother/daughter relationships. There were so many incredibly poignant moments and wonderful lines about the importance of women's education, and I absolutely loved it.

Kelsi H says

Please read all of my reviews at <http://ultraviolentlit.blogspot.ca>!

Kalyana is an impressionable young girl growing up in the Fiji Islands in the late 1960s. The recent political independence of the island nation brought with it the news of the feminist revolution in America – stories of

independent women who burn their bras and scorn marriage. Kalyana's mother and her sister Manjula read these stories with excitement for the future of women's freedom.

Aunt Manjula walks with a visible limp, which prevents her from marriage – because she has no opportunity for real romance, she ravenously reads trashy novels in the bedroom that she shares with Kalyana. When she feels trapped at home, Manjula teaches herself to drive a car and becomes a spectacle in their conservative community. Manjula's independence, although it was not her choice, becomes an inspiration for Kalyana – and she was easily my favourite character in the novel.

Kalyana is a quirky child who is as precocious as she is endearing. When she makes friends with a boy at school, she has no idea that it will result in a life-long friendship and eventually marriage. Kirtan always saw Kalyana as more than just a girl, and their marriage provides her with the freedom she imagined as a child. When the two immigrate to Canada, Kalyana leaves Fiji – and their former way of life – behind.

The move to Canada also severs Kalyana's relationship with her mother, which was strained already. Kalyana is haunted by a childhood incident of sexual assault and the shameful silence that followed it. Her mother convinced her to keep quiet about the experience, and Kalyana has suffered ever since, blaming her for her own destroyed self-confidence – until she realizes that her mother may have been speaking from her own experiences. Kalyana's trauma is part of a cycle of abuse, made more shameful by her time and place – but still a universal problem for women.

This novel is about female empowerment and the importance of education for girls and women. Kalyana's mother weaves Indian mythology into their everyday lives, including the importance of Kalyana's name, which means blessed and auspicious – although she does not always feel that way. Kalyana resents the fact that her mother didn't prepare her for the modern world, but eventually she realizes that she cannot be free until she deals with the weight of the past.

Kalyana feels very much like a memoir, with its first-person narration and very personal, relatable issues. The political issues between the native Fijians and the Indian nationals living on the island were intriguing as well, and I knew very little about it beforehand. The disturbing content is authentic and believable, and it was fascinating to witness Kalyana's growth into the woman she dreamed of being as a child in Fiji.

I received this book from Second Story Press and the author in exchange for an honest review.

Fiona says

Enjoyable read.

Kalyana is an Indian-Fijian growing up in 1960's Fiji. She had a blissful and beautiful life there. Hers was a traditional home where a woman's role is to marry and serve her husband. Her mother, though, believed that education was the key for women. Kalyana, on the other hand, saw marriage as her key to get out of Fiji just like her auntie Manjula. While a young girl, her uncle sexually assaulted her and her mother wanted her to be quiet about the entire shameful situation. Kalyana was tormented but with help from a spiritual healer she recovered. Eventually she married her long time friend and moved to Canada where they had a baby girl. She loves her new life but she misses the sound of the ocean and the smell of the Fijian flowers.

I never knew that there were political coups in Fiji in the 1980's. It seems like it has always been a paradise. It's because of the political instability that Kalyana and many others of Indian ancestry left Fiji for a peaceful life. I really didn't consider that Fiji's population included others who were not Fijian. When does an Indian-Fijian become a true Fijian?

I enjoyed the storytelling from Kalyana's mother. She told the traditional stories of the Indian people and Hindi gods. In the good times, Kalyana had the four Indian spirit women in the room with her protecting her. On her mother's deathbed, she asked her mother to continue telling her the stories. This is a good story of the trials and tribulation and the bond between mother and daughter.

Enjoyable.

Snehal says

The book transported me to the Fiji Islands and I felt like I was right there with the characters! Please see my full review on my blog Desi Lekh

<http://indianfictionforyou.blogspot.c...>

Maggie says

Just wait for the end... So seamlessly it wove together. One of the most beautiful, haunting, and true endings I've ever felt. My tears flowed, relating to a woman who, while so different from me, shared a journey so many women face. Wonderful, wonderful book.

wellreadtraveler says

Let me start by saying the beautiful cover of this book had me drawn in from the start, and the beginning pages of the detailed description of the Fiji Islands had me on vacation in my dreams. The story is about Kalyana, and begins when she is a very young girl, and follows her all the way into adulthood. We learn about her family, how Kalyana doesn't really feel she fits in and goes into great description of each member of her family. The close relationship she has with her father, and the tight sisterhood amongst her mother and aunt.

The author teaches us about the politics and issues in Fiji in the 1960's, and about the Fiji and Indian people who reside there. Kalyana suffers a great personal tragedy, that ultimately is life changing, for herself and her relationship with her mother.

I enjoyed reading the story, and enjoyed the way the story closes, with Kalyana moving away from Fiji to start new, finding a close female friend she can trust, marriage to her childhood friend, and a daughter of her own. Most importantly, coming to terms with what happened to her as a child, and making amends with her mother.

Nic nittle says

Goodreads win

This was an interesting and pretty good read. I will admit to not knowing much about this culture. I learned some things while read this book. It was a quick read. I had times throughout the book that made it hard to set it down. I would definitely recommend this book to friends.

Fancy: says

Everyone in this world is granted one beginning and one ending, Kalyana. Life is made up of what is in between: the connections, the discoveries, the triumphs, and the losses. Some of these inspire us, some mold us, and some destroy us. But remember that no experience leaves our spirits untouched.

"Fiji - the way the world should be."

- Pope John Paul

This is a very female-centric book. It resonates on every page. Some may enjoy that, some may not. It just is what it is. This is possibly the first and only book I've read set in Fiji with an Indo-Fijian narrator, and while the story was generally interesting, I just couldn't bring myself to care about the woman telling it. Where the other characters were complex and made things happen, it seemed like Kalyana was just someone that things happened TO.

What I like about this book:

* I learned a thing or two about Fiji, like its history of political and ethnic tension leading to coups and martial law, and also about Indian culture. I will likely never get to experience a traditional Indian wedding, but it was a joy to read about.

* All the relationships were dynamic and, in spite of our cultural differences, very familiar. Mother and daughter, father and daughter, brother and sister, sister and sister, husband and wife, teacher and student, neighbors... It touched on them all.

* The author's portrayal of (view spoiler)

What I didn't like about this book:

* Women's empowerment is obviously something I'm for, but this book laid it on THICK and not at all subtly.

* My eyes began glazing over in the middle and I rushed the ending. I saw everything coming anyway.

* I never did find out if (view spoiler)

Missy J says

3.5*

"For there were two kinds of people in this world: those who knew how to give and receive love honestly and courageously, and those who did not. To go through life without learning how to love was the greatest tragedy of all."

Kalyana is a 3rd generation Fijian-Indian and much of the story is about her life and the community she grew up with. Prior to reading this book, I've already heard that Fiji has a huge Indian population and that the country is very corrupt. In Kalyana's story, we can see how the Indian community preserves their culture (story-telling, marrying only Indians, having their own schools...). It was a light and pleasant read, although the turning point of the book was somewhat predictable. The aspect I enjoyed the most of this story was the mother-daughter relationship and the different stages of their relationship. It was well-written. Part of the novel is also about immigration and the decision to let go or cling to tradition. This part was somewhat shallow, Canada was paradise and the author didn't delve much in the challenges she faced trying to adjust to a completely new environment. Perhaps the narrator was so adamant to leave Fiji that she simply overlooked whatever challenges she faced. All in all, am glad to have finally visited Fiji in my literary journey.

Laurie says

This is an interesting and entertaining story of an Indo-Fijian girl growing up in the 1960s and 70s in Fiji. I know very little about Fiji except that it is a beautiful island in the South Pacific. I had no idea that it has such a large Indian population as a result of a large wave of immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to work the sugar plantations.

Kalyana, the main character, is a 3rd generation Indian among a large, traditional Indian population. Kalyana lives what is probably a very average life among her family, classmates, and neighbors who are all Indian. But all is not perfect in this beautiful setting. The biggest lessons that Kalyana learns from her mother are tales about Hindu gods and goddesses and that females must shoulder burdens in life that may not be spoken of. She learns these lessons well but they don't always help her in times of trouble, and she must learn to make her own way through the hard parts of her life.

Anggun P.W says

With Manjula's words came a sudden realization that my mother had been right: Education was the key to a woman's freedom. Knowledge opened doors, broadened minds, and attracted opportunities—especially for a woman.

Setelah membaca buku ini, saya bertanya tanya ini beneran fiksi kan? Ini fiksi kan? Karena ceritanya begitu menyentuh, humoris, sangat mengedukasi, dan seperti melihat kisah hidup penulisnya sendiri.

Yang menarik adalah buku ini berlatar belakang di Fiji, sebelum jaman kemerdekaannya hingga waktu skrg. Jika kalian melihat sejarah, pasti tahu bahwa Fiji merupakan salah satu negara yang terlambat merebut kebebasannya dari jajahan Inggris. Mereka baru mendapat kemerdekaan pada tahun 1970, dan sebagai informasi populasi di negara Fiji 49% penduduk adalah suku asli Fiji, 49% adalah Fiji-India, 2% adalah lain2.

For mankind he said, but this was hard to imagine. The American man—my mother didn't remember his name—had traveled to the moon, and here we were, still fighting for independence from British rule.

Buku ini mengambil sudut pandang dari Kalyana, Fiji keturunan India. Banyak hal yang saya pelajari dari buku ini, ttg keindahan , geografis, politik, dan kehidupan di negara Fiji, ttg bagaimana kehidupan antara native Fijian and Fijian Indian yang tak pernah bisa hidup berdampingan, dan ttg org Fijian Indian yang ternyata masih sangat mengikuti tradisi leluhur India mereka, banyak sekali istilah bahasa india yang saya temukan dalam buku ini, dan beberapa kisah Rama, Shinta dan beberapa dewa dewi India lain.

Bagus pokoknya!!!wajib baca!

Karakter favorit saya dibuku ini adalah Manjula!!

Vinaka vaka levu, or thank you in Fijian

Sandra Walsh says

Loved this book. Disturbing, yet somehow endearing. I learned a lot.

Lata says

The story is told through Kalyana who is the narrator here. She starts from her life as a 5 year old in the 1970s right upto most recent times when her daughter is 11 years old. The book has very few characters. The main ones are Kalyana herself who narrates the story. Then it is her mother Sumitri who has accepted her fate as a woman should but has dreams and desires of her own which she would like to fulfill through her daughter. Manjula is Sumitri's sister who lives with Kalyana's family. She has a limp and so is unmarried.

The narration touches your heart. One can easily relate with the relationships between mother and daughter, brother and sister, father and daughter, even between two friends who are as close as sisters. I was also surprised by the mythological stories which Kalyana's mother tells her. It makes you feel their Indianness. They are a people who belong nowhere because surely the Indians will look upon them as foreigners and the Fijians look upon them as Indians. It did feel like I am reading a 'Sue Monk Kidd' book.
