



# This House of Clay and Water

*Faiqa Mansab*

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Set in Lahore, This House of Clay and Water explores the lives of two women. Nida, intelligent and lonely, has married into an affluent political family and is desperately searching for some meaning in her existence; and impulsive, lovely Sasha, from the ordinary middle-class, whose longing for designer labels and upmarket places is so frantic that she willingly consorts with rich men who can provide them. Nida and Sasha meet at the famous Daata Sahib dargah and connect-their need to understand why their worlds feel so alien and empty, bringing them together.

On her frequent visits to the dargah, Nida meets the gentle, flute-playing hijra Bhanggi, who sits under a bargadh tree and yearns for acceptance and affection, but is invariably shunned. A friendship-fragile, tentative and tender-develops between the two, both exiles within their own lives; but it flies in the face of all convention and cannot be allowed.

Faiqa Mansab's accomplished and dazzling debut novel explores the themes of love, betrayal and loss in the complex, changing world of today's Pakistan.

## This House of Clay and Water Details

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Author : Faiqa Mansab

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## **From Reader Review This House of Clay and Water for online ebook**

### **Dhanya Narayanan says**

“As a child, laughter is all you need as proof of happiness. As a child you don’t know there are so many different kinds of laughter—like different varieties of birds. Some are flightless.”

This debut novel, ‘This house of clay and water’ , by Faiqa Mansab, has many such original and intelligent remarks which would make you think and reflect deeply at the pathetic and real state of human minds.

#### **About the author:**

Faiqa Mansab is a Pakistani author who obtained MFA in creative writing from Kingston University, London. Her thesis, which was written for the course, formed the basis for this novel, which was initially rejected by many publishers in UK and USA before getting published finally by Penguin Random House. She currently teaches creative writing in Lahore and is working on her second novel.

#### **About the book:**

The story is about the lives of two women, Sasha and Nida, in the city of Lahore.

Sasha is a woman who takes pleasure in defying religion and patriarchy. In the beginning she is introduced as somebody who lives life on her own terms. But as the story progresses, we shockingly see a Sasha who changes and becomes religious and God fearing, resigning to her fate of being stuck with a ‘boring’ husband and feeling guilty for her past actions. Change in her personality happens after a personal tragedy strikes. Women, irrespective of whether they are in New Delhi or Lahore, are taught to feel guilty for living a life of their choice.

Nina, Sasha’s friend, is educated, philosophical but with orthodox beliefs somehow feels that Sasha should not be leading a ‘carefree’ life. But later you find Nida listening to her heart and ending up having a love affair with Bhanggi who is a person of third gender. As the story evolves we see the change in the attitude of these two women who are friends.

#### **Why I enjoyed this book:**

The foremost reason is that this book depicts the life of women in Lahore; the same city from where I have a new friend! (Of course I do it both ways: Sometimes I find a friend first and then try procuring books written by authors in that person’s country; sometimes I read books by authors from a different country and then try making friends from that country!) I am convinced that borders(at least the ones in your mind!) can be obliterated by books.

May be for a person from Lahore, this book could appear superfluous but for an outsider like me, this book provides a decent chance to ‘palpate’ the pulse of Lahore city.

Across borders, state, thoughts and aspirations of women remain pretty much the same.

In this era when many Indians yearn for a war to ‘teach’ Pakistani people a lesson, when a cricket match

between the two countries simulates a war like situation and when no scope exists for any dialogue between the two countries, I feel the only way to arrest the spread of malicious thoughts, is to promote cross-border literature and art. I still believe that writers and artists can do what rulers cannot.

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### **Tanveen Bhasin says**

I have changed my rating from 4 stars to 5 stars, after almost two months of reading this book. It is Beyond Beautiful!! This is some story which keeps coming back to you. As a debut, this is handsdown the best. The writing is ecstatic. The story is just so beautiful and raw and nothing like the modern shit that is being sold. I have found this book to be both simple and esoteric at the same time. Simply in love with it!!

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### **Vishy says**

One of the books I was eagerly looking forward to, this year, was Faiqa Mansab's 'This House of Clay and Water'. It was launched late last month and I got a copy and finished reading it yesterday. Here is what I think.

#### #TheStory

The first thing I want to say about the book is that I love that gorgeous cover! It is so beautiful! Now about the book itself. The story is set in Lahore and it starts with the story of Nida. Nida is married and her husband and in-laws are well off. On the surface, life seems to be comfortable and nice, but there seems to be an emptiness in Nida's life. The story goes back and forth in time, as we find out more about Nida's past and try to discover clues to find out why she feels the way she does. Nida goes to the Daata Sahib Dargah sometimes, to calm her spirit, and there, one day, she meets Sasha. Sasha is a free spirit and though she is married and has two young daughters, she rebels against the confines of marriage and goes out with different men who make her feel special. Nida and Sasha meet Bhanggi, in the dargah. Bhanggi is a hijra, a hermaphrodite. His life in the past has been hard, but these days he sits under the banyan tree and plays the flute. People assemble to listen to him and they also come to pray for and receive his blessings, because he is regarded as a qalandar, a Sufi saint. A beautiful friendship blossoms between Nida and Bhanggi and it looks like it would flower into something more. The rest of the story is about how the friendship between Nida and Bhanggi and Nida and Sasha evolve and what happens between them and their families. Well, I am not going to tell you more. You should read the book for yourself and find out what happens next.

#### #Thoughts

I loved many of the characters in the story, especially Nida, Bhanggi and Zoya, Sasha's daughter. Sasha was also quite fascinating - flawed and imperfect and complex. The story is mostly told from the point of view of Nida, Bhanggi and Sasha, but occasionally others join in - Zoya and for a brief while, Saqib, Nida's husband. The novel's depiction of contemporary Pakistani families - the relationship between men and women, parents and children, women and their in-laws - is very beautifully done. I also loved the novel's depiction of contemporary Pakistani society - the contradictory pictures of the city, the elegance and the poverty, the position of the haves and the have-nots. The life of a hijra and a hijra's role in culture and society is also depicted very insightfully. I also loved the novel's depiction of the city of Lahore - the sights, the smells, the

noise, the dust, the traffic, the monuments, the beautiful architecture, the history, the contradictions, the poverty, the elegance, the music, the food, the celebrations - the novel takes the reader into the middle of this beautiful city and leaves them there.

## #Quotes

I loved Faiqa Mansab's beautiful, gorgeous prose - there were many beautiful lines and insightful passages throughout the book. Here are some of my favourites.

"I was an utterance in absentia. I was a forgotten word, uttered and mislaid long ago. I was the word that existed because there was another word that was my opposite, and without it I was nothing. I gained meaning only by acknowledging that possible other."

"It is not often that I have two options to choose from. It is nice to be compelled towards something, otherwise one drifts through life unimpeded."

"I'd morphed, altered, nipped and tucked away bits of my personality for so long, I no longer recognized myself. I feared that one day, even if I wanted to, I wouldn't be able to identify myself. I'd be forever trapped in an image of another's making, and there would be no escape because I would have forgotten to want to escape."

"When death becomes an escape, when it becomes attractive, the purpose of life is fulfilled. To teach one it's futility, it's worthlessness, that is the purpose of life. Incongruously, its value lies in having imparted that lesson."

"In the nights though, I couldn't help but weave the golden cloth of my dreams. Each stitch from heart to thought, and thought to heart, was painful to bear, even if it was joyous at times. Because each thread was fraught with the fears of being broken midway, lost and never found again."

"I had never said those words because there were no words left. My beloved and I were both exiles from language. Our love couldn't be expressed in words. Our love had been woven into the melodies rendered by his flute, and it was subsumed in the atoms of the air we breathed. It had been consecrated in this shrine. It had never been named. It was an unnamed thing that had remained unspoken, unuttered, unsaid. I did not need to name it when he could already hear it."

## #FinalThoughts

I loved 'This House of Clay and Water'. It is a beautiful, unconventional, unique love story, a spiritual love story. It is also a story about families and human relationships. It is a brilliant, debut novel and Faiqa Mansab is a fresh, new, exciting voice in Pakistani literary fiction. It is one of my favourite books of the year and I can't wait to find out what she comes up with next.

Have you read 'This House of Clay and Water'? What do you think about it?

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## **Sara Naveed says**

I'd always believed Faiqa would have penned down a masterpiece the moment she told me about her debut

book being published by PRH this summer.

Only after reading this book, my trust in her work turned real. She has written this book with sheer conviction and has won over my heart in a true sense.

This book is a heart-wrenching story about love, loss, abandonment, betrayal, and so many other human emotions. I could not stop wondering how well the emotions laid out in this book reflected upon my own personality.

Not only it talks about the vibrancy of the Lahore city but also explores the depth of its characters. I was equally amazed by every character. The bond between Bhanggi and Nida made me awestruck and teary-eyed at the same time.

With her quirky, fiery, and sparkling persona, I couldn't stop liking Sasha towards the end of the book by putting my own judgments about her as a person at a side.

All in all, This House of Clay and Water is a thought-provoking book, a sure-shot eye-opener that makes us reflect upon our deeds as a human being without having a myopic attitude towards life.

Well done, Faiqa. I'm so proud of you.

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### **Rachna says**

Everything from the covers to the words in between them are beautifully expressed. It was a breeze to read through although there were times when you need to stop and face the harsh realities she talks about.

The status of women, the unsafe children, the segregation, and the claim for the moral high ground. It is all relatable and is our thoughts put into words.

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### **Pia says**

Having fallen upon This House of Clay and Water by chance in an airport, I looked forward to my initiation into Pakistani writing and a novel that promised to address questions of womanhood, sexuality, religion, society and their numerous intersections in the context of South Asia. I'm afraid that though undoubtedly with good intentions, the book sorely lacks subtlety. Its characters are near-unidimensional and reduce human interaction to paltry single layers, the writing is uncomfortably awkward and misplaced, and the author seems to insert sentences intended to have depth and profound meaning where they have no place and only seem forced and cliché.

That said, the themes that are attempted to be addressed are important, and the choice of context (Lahore) makes for an interesting setting. The omnipresence of religion is sometimes well expressed, and a few descriptions evoke some feeling in the reader.

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### **Jazz Singh says**

With many layers to it, This House of Clay and Water by Faiqa Mansab takes you to the heart of Lahore. Through the lives of its protagonists, one gets a bird's eye view of attitudes, marriage, society, interactions between men and women, love and desire and the politics of power in an ancient city that has seen it all and has a place for all. Nida and Sasha deal with their respective situations in ways that go against the prescribed wisdom in a conservative society. Bhangi, born neither man nor woman, touches their lives with love and Sufi philosophy. As this finely nuanced story unfolds to its unexpected end, you are forced to step back and reflect on the best and worst of what human beings are capable of.

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## Noor ul Ain says

Let's start with the one good thing-the book did keep me guessing till the very end- I wasn't sure what would become of Zoya. Other than that, this book was a complete failure in so many ways. The element of 'Lahore' was added just to make gullible people like me (who love it as their hometown) buy the book. There are so many elements of the book which just do not go together! It is difficult for me to say this, but the author just took the hot issues like how transsexuals are treated, child abuse, and the sometimes questionable motives behind women wearing hijab- and put them all in one book to create a sizzling hit. At least that's how I felt; it seemed like a TV drama which is made as filler. Opinions will vary, but I believe that these subjects need to be tackled with a lot more respect and attention. We blame west for stereotyping us and then we do the same thing-all the mother-in-laws are not evil, every gardener/driver is not a child molester, every women wearing hijab is not wearing it for 'power', not every marriage is an unhappy one etc etc. The basic problem is that there is no balance in the book- there is just the worst side of Lahore/ Pakistan shown which might be true but where is the good side shown? And yes, it does have a good side. All in all, a complete and utter disappointment.

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## Seemita says

**Forbidden Love** – A diktat in itself, unleashed on unsuspecting hearts like an ouroboros where *forbidden* swallows *love* and yet appears whole, showing no signs of damage. No one knows the pain except the latter that is now usurped by the former. But it is when the opposite happens, that the tale transcends its meagre form and turns one for the generations.

Nida comes from a sophisticated family of high-ranking politicians and is married too, to one from this fraternity, but none of that sophistication and power has healed her wounds inflicted by her little daughter's death.

*Life is exacting and cruel. Death is calm oblivion. Life betrays everyone while death, without fail, always finds us.*

Sasha is trying hard to break the shackles of her middle class drudgery by seeking out pleasures outside her marriage, even as she protects her pretty daughter, Alina, from the preying eyes of the society and dismisses the state of her other daughter, Zoya, who thankfully is too plain to draw any attention.

*Morality, especially with regards to sex, was just primitive. No one had morals these days, it was far too inconvenient. It was like carrying liquids in your handbag at airport security-checks. One simply knew not to have them.*

Bhanggi is an outcast hijra (eunuch) who, sitting under a tree in the Daata Sahab mosque, blesses and prays for worshippers at one hand, and is constantly at war with self and Allah, on the other.

*I cannot rid myself of the affliction called hope. I scoop up its broken shards within the cups of my hands. I hold it fast to my heart every time it shatters against the monolithic reality that looms at every turn, in every human eye.*

When these three imperfect and burdened souls cross each other's paths, nothing ever remains the same.

This is a tale of merging and separating, stereotyping and rebelling, patriarchy and equality, suppression and freedom, violation and redemption, cowardice and courage. But above all, this is a tale of love - A love that blooms at an unconventional junction and between two people who are far, far removed from each other when it comes to their past experiences.

Does a love without proximity carry the curse of disintegration? Or the curse of disintegration is a must as eternity is simply a mirage? Who decides the forbidden line when every heart is tainted? Can't love simply be, without the prying eyes of society labelling it legitimate or not? Does such a label add gravitas to the love or crush it under its weight?

Mansab extends the sprawling sky of Lahore, across crimson days and indigo nights, and nurtures the love of her protagonists with tenderness and purity, subtlety and sincerity. Her lovers are not the typical rebels or self-discoverers who make up their minds and go for the kill; they are the little children who retreat to their shelters when the rain falls hard and yet, they venture out again when it subsides, on slippery grounds, to collect its wet elixir on their souls. They step out and step in, forever toying with the line, not knowing when to cross and when to contain, but always knowing, to not malign the other's heart. While the author does beautiful justice in sculpting the interlocked arms of ambition and failure, keeping the backdrop authentic and non-intrusive, it is her love story that brings a staggering element of poignancy, bordering on being impregnable.

Upon reading the final line, I felt a prick in my heart. No, I didn't know either of the lovers. However, they paraded in my world for three full days and their sharp, passionate pleas punctured my heart. But I didn't bleed. Instead, I breathed in long, content breaths, as if a window of my heart was suddenly opened and a fresh breeze came rushing in from a land that invalidated '*forbidden love*'.

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*Also on my blog.*

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### **Hina Tabassum says**

Review to follow soon. Till that time the rating should speak for it.

### **Update as on 23.08.2017**

Finally gotten around to write a review and it could be read on **Hina Loves To Read**

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### **Awais Khan says**

Pakistani literature has so much more to offer than stories of carnage and assault, something Faiqa Mansab proves in her debut novel 'This House of Clay and Water'. There was tremendous buzz surrounding the release of this book, how it traversed boundaries that no other writer had dared approach in the past, how it painted a vivid, eye-opening picture of modern Pakistan. Naturally, I was very curious to read this, and

therefore, as soon as word got out that it had arrived in bookstores, I was one of the first people in line to get my copy. As Mansab's Lahore pulled me in, the Lahore around me sort of blurred for a few days, making me lose myself in Mansab's delightful world of forbidden love, deceit, betrayal and loss.

The novel is told from multiple points of view. Starting with Nida, a bored housewife, who spends her days hidden from the elite circle in a famous dargah of Lahore, watching life move on without her. Overweight and exhausted, she has given up on life – almost. The dargah is the last place she expects to find friendship and yet it is in this place that she encounters bold and reckless Sasha and the eccentric Bhanggi, a hijra in modern Lahore. Thus begins a story of friendship and loss where these characters are tested to their very limits.

Mansab paints a distressing picture of Lahore, drawing attention to issues that are all around us, but to which we turn a blind eye everyday. She tells of the plight of the hijras in Lahore, a hated and repressed part of Lahori society, beaten and shamed their entire lives. She explores themes of abuse and forbidden love, both of which are taboo subjects in Lahore, and which naturally make the book all the more interesting to read.

It was such a treat to read about a world that I could strongly relate to, characters I felt deeply for and a storyline that reaches in to grab the heart and refuses to let go. If you're looking to be shocked, entertained and shaken in equal measure, head over to your nearest bookstore now and pick up this stunning debut. Highly recommended!

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### **Muhammad Umar says**

A lot of things attracted me towards this book and then all those things faded somewhere as the book finished. First and foremost, it was Lahore. But then, Lahore, a city am totally biased towards, is also a city that perhaps Miss Mansab doesn't like that much. Too much negativity there. Secondly, Data Darbar. I love that place and mysticism that surrounds it. I must say that this shrine isn't projected upto its might. Thirdly, qalandars. I love sufism and believe that one's journey towards it beyond life. It is unimaginable and yet achievable. Mansab wanted to bring that hint of journey but I guess she was never there. Other than that, I guess it is a nice read on exploring double faces of our society and a life that lies under the blanket of night.

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### **Privy Trifles says**

For me, this book has to be one of the most awaited books in 2017. Everything from the title to the cover spelled elegance for me and attracted me to the book till I finally bought it for myself on my birthday last month. And then started the roller coaster ride of emotions for me!

In her debut novel set in Pakistan Faiqa Mansab captures the beauty of human relationships very well with its intricacies and fragility intact. Her words are more like lyrical prose, the power of the lucid narrative equally engrossing for a reader.

Read whole review here: <http://www.privytrifles.co.in/2017/07...>

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## Falguni Kothari says

Lyrical in presentation, peppered with arresting turns of phrase, THoCaW opens a window into the dichotomy of modern day Pakistan through its many protagonists. Each chapter, in turn, bears witness to the struggles of Nida, Bhanngi, Sasha, Zoya, Saqib and to a lesser extent Faheen, their existence trapped between the clash of conservatism and modernization, elitism and poverty, the male and the female, between Sufism and Islam, the self and the psyche.

It's a heavy book to read, and I set it down several times, letting days go by between chapters. (Not my usual modus operandi while reading.) But once I was invested in Nida and Bhanngi's story, I couldn't put it down.

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## Aditi says

*"But you can only lie about who you are for so long without going crazy."*

----Ellen Wittlinger

Faiqa Mansab, a Pakistani author, has penned an extremely evocative contemporary fiction called, *This House of Clay and Water* that revolves around two women and one transgender searching for love, freedom and identity, set against the repressed yet exquisite backdrop of the city of gardens, Lahore. One is chained and married to a man of extreme political power in a loveless marriage, while the other is a feminist and is destined to be with a man with whom she can't explore her sexual desires and passion and then there's this transgender who knows that God almighty has made him the way he is destined to be and that he must find his love in Allah only, but their lives forever changes when they meet at a dargah (Mosque) and gradually a forbidden relationship begins to blossom under the holy roofs of that dargah.

### Synopsis:

*Set in Lahore, This House of Clay and Water explores the lives of two women. Nida, intelligent and lonely, has married into an affluent political family and is desperately searching for some meaning in her existence; and impulsive, lovely Sasha, from the ordinary middle-class, whose longing for designer labels and upmarket places is so frantic that she willingly consorts with rich men who can provide them. Nida and Sasha meet at the famous Daata Sahib dargah and connect-their need to understand why their worlds feel so alien and empty, bringing them together.*

*On her frequent visits to the dargah, Nida meets the gentle, flute-playing hijra Bhanggi, who sits under a bargadh tree and yearns for acceptance and affection, but is invariably shunned. A friendship-fragile, tentative and tender-develops between the two, both exiles within their own lives; but it flies in the face of all convention and cannot be allowed.*

*Faiqa Mansab's accomplished and dazzling debut novel explores the themes of love, betrayal and loss in the complex, changing world of today's Pakistan.*

Nida, the calm, sharp and unloved housewife to a powerful politician in Lahore, is leading a sad, monotonous and often painful married life since the death of her little girl, until she meets Sasha. Sasha, the impetuous and gorgeous housewife to a considerate and understanding businessman, is leading a boring and sex-less marriage with two daughters, but she knows how to quench the thirst for her sexual hunger but once she meets Nida, she questions her infidel and sinful actions to make herself happy. And under the roofs of dargah where these two polar opposite ladies meet for the first time, a bond of friendship and sister hood is immediately formed. Until Nida meets and falls for the homeless transgender, Bhanggi. Bhanggi, an outcast transgender of the society, sits under a tree in the dargah and plays his flute to lure the kind souls, while questioning Allah's ways of showing love to his loyal followers like him, until he meets and falls for Nida. A friendship is immediately struck between the two, followed by their intimate and soulful connection, that develop into something deeper and beautiful, away from the prying and questioning eyes of the judgmental society. Can the friendship survive between Nida and Bhanggi? And what role does Sasha plays in the life of these two? Grab a copy of this book now to find out more.

One of the best books I have read that is written by a Pakistani author till date and trust me, this story is going to stay with me for a very, very long time. This is the kind of story that makes an impact and long after the story has ended, it will hit you right in your head and heart when you're sitting idle and thinking nothing objective. But I wouldn't compare this to Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, as this doesn't have those important and right elements to be an extraordinary book like Hosseini's. nevertheless, this story has apt amount of layers and elements to be a very redolent story about friendship and love beyond labels and society's definitions.

The writing style of the author is coherent, laced with deep, moving emotions, that is bound to captivate the readers with the story line. The narrative style of the story line is beautiful, thought provoking and extremely compelling enough to keep the readers glued to the pages of this book. Not only that, the dialogues are heavily layered with myriad of emotions that will sometimes make the readers feel joyous or sad depending upon the characters' plight. The pacing is quite swift, as the story turns a heart breaking and unforeseeable climax through unpredictable twists and turns.

The description of Lahore, the city of gardens, is vividly done by the author. The author has successfully painted the true portrait of a contemporary Lahore, which may look very modern from the outside, but from the inside, it is still holding tightly on to its narrow minded society dominated ideals and customs. The essence of Lahore is heavily felt through the pages of this book, as the author strikingly projects the daily hum drum and the lives of the common folks of Lahore, through their routines, customs, religion, job, desires, dreams, ambitions, and their general lifestyle and their outlook towards life. The author has bring alive this garden city through her elegant and exquisite words rich with Urdu proverbs. The author has not only portrayed the beauty of Lahore, but has also shed light on the darker aspects of a so-called progressive society, that still keeps their women behind the veil. Also religion plays an important role in this book in a very positive manner.

The characters are simply fantastic, in just one word, I have never met anyone like them in real life, but I'm sure that characters like Nida, Sasha and Bhanggi exists in the daily life whose simple, down-to-earth and eccentric faces are hidden in the crowd. All three of the characters is far beyond perfection, heavily flawed, make mistakes, keep secrets, break laws and rules and are courageous. Only thing that makes them different is that they are brave enough to run after their heart's desires even in a society that has shunned hermaphrodites (a hijra) and considered them to be a curse of the society. The love story between Nida and Bhanggi is not profound, according to me, its highly liberating and profound and will give hope to those who think that they don't deserve love since they are different and an outcast in a society. The relationship between the three is so much enriching that it is bound to enlighten souls beyond borders and religious

indifferences. The three protagonists' approach towards life is worth a read for one and all.

Overcoming fear is one thing, but overcoming the facades of societal duties and labels to find the true happiness and love is perfectly depicted by the author in this book. Highly recommended for the contemporary and literary fiction fans.

**Verdict:** *A highly emotional and engrossing read!*

**Courtesy:** *Thanks to my friend, Deepti for the book.*

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