



Being and Becoming

Phalgun Prativadi

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This surprising and satisfying thriller blends philosophy, politics, medicine, and danger.

Phalgun Prativadi's *Being and Becoming* is an ambitious and sophisticated medical thriller with a social conscience.

Arya Krish is a brilliant and thoughtful physician. At the age of thirty-six, he is the head of Beacon Medical Institute, which created the first human organs grown in laboratories for transplantation into specific individuals. The small group of physicians who created Beacon, including Krish's father, did so with the money they made working for a shadowy corporation known as A1 Group. Krish's father died under mysterious circumstances before A1 Group met its own demise.

The story begins as Arya Krish, seeing a way to avenge his father's death and check malevolent power, signs a contract to join Beacon Medical Institute with Alpha Corp. Alpha Corp is the new incarnation of A1 Group, which has grown to become an octopus of the health care industry, its tentacles wrapped around research, pharmaceuticals, insurance, hospitals, and Congress.

The novel is intricate and briskly paced. Narration is sometimes fast and suspenseful and at other times is unexpectedly quiet and contemplative, though it remains engaging throughout. Krish examines his principles when tempted by Faustian bargains. Do the ends truly justify the means? How far can he go in pursuit of altruistic outcomes?

The liberal use of flashbacks proves to be an effective technique for conveying an atmosphere of ominous foreboding. Scenes set in Krish's ancestral India are absorbing and enlightening, whether they take place in the airport at Bengaluru or at a construction site for one of his humanitarian projects in a rural village.

Dialogue is crisp and pithy, as when Krish parries with his best friend Jay Asher, an Army trauma surgeon, about the wisdom of joining forces with Alpha Corp:

"It sounds like you plan on slaying a monster."

"Do you have to become a monster to slay a monster?"

"The wise have always said you must know your enemy to defeat them."

"Maybe knowing is becoming."

"Takes one to know one, perhaps."

The cast of characters is small but diverse, including worldly American doctors, provincial Indian municipal bureaucrats, corporate espionage agents, and desperate family members of the Beacon Medical Institute's deathly ill patients. Krish and Asher are complex characters with satisfactory backstories and motivations.

The antagonists are not as well developed and don't possess backstories that help explain their motivations. As a result, the reasons for their vicious actions remain a mystery, though they fit well within the thriller genre.

Being and Becoming is a surprising and satisfying novel that blends philosophy, politics, medicine, and danger.

MICHELLE NEWBY (September 7, 2016)

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