

Blue-Skinned Gods

SJ Sindu

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In SJ Sindu's novel *Blue-Skinned Gods*, a child groomed into godhood grows to be a young man whose faith in himself and in others is questioned.

The story of Kalki's godhood was always the same: his blue skin signifies his ability to heal people as an incarnation of the Hindu god Krishna, and his birth was prophesied to his barren mother. Kalki's destiny begins with three trials that he must pass to prove his abilities, but passing those trials is not what Kalki had imagined it would be. Everybody is lying to Kalki—his ayya, who controls everything from Kalki's daily schedule to Kalki's perception of himself and the world; his amma, who coddles him and shields him, but whose mental health deteriorates; the people at the ashram; and the visitors whom Kalki befriends. The lies unravel as more people leave Kalki or are taken away from him. Eventually, Kalki finds himself in New York City on a healing world tour that brings the truth to him: he has been manipulated and used by people who claimed that they love him. He reaches a breaking point.

Narrated by Kalki himself, *Blue-Skinned Gods* is a story about the exploitation of people who are eager to connect and believe. Doubts about Kalki's godhood are sprinkled throughout the book, but are perceived through the eyes of a child who cannot grasp them; they are summarized by the cynic whom Kalki grows up to be. At the center of it all stands the question of what it means to be godly and what it means to be human. The book offers no decisive answers, and it criticizes those who pretend to have them.

Blue-Skinned Gods is a thoughtful exploration of contemporary religion and the relations between modern culture and tradition.

MICHAEL ELIAS (November / December 2021)

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