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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Murmur of the Lonely Brook

Debashis Dey
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In the hilly green pastures of Himachal, India, lies the Himalayan village of Rakcham, a land where tribal nomads, their lives steeped in the rituals of ancient Hindu tradition, face the difficult changes that modernity and urban development bring into their quiet lives. In this village nestled near the Tibetan border lives Diwakar, a young man with aspirations of joining the army. His dream is put on hold after he fails the written entrance exam and must return, with no source of income, to his village, to a struggling farm, and to aging, labor-stricken parents desperate to support their growing family.

In its simplest form, *Murmur of the Lonely Brook* is the story of a family; their daily lives—the ordinary things they do to stay alive and stay together—form the plot of the novel. Through this rich platform, author Debashis Dey intertwines themes of forbidden love (Diwakar's unrequited love for his brother's wife, Nisha), urban infringement (the loss of young laborers like Diwakar's brother Pravin to urban centers), and complex cultural issues that complicate the lives of a very traditional family. Told through the viewpoints of each of the six members of Diwakar's family, several storylines intersect to create a vivid, detailed portrait of modern rural life in a distinct part of India.

Dey's prose style is fluid, the story told in a natural voice that lends itself well to telling tales of the everyday. However, it also skims the surface and states the obvious, rarely allowing characters to offer anything of real depth. For example, upon Diwakar's return to his village from the city, the author writes, "Life in the city came with a lot of noise and limited his ability to think inwardly. Here it was different. Here there was silence and he could listen to himself." The result is a stilted rhythm where the voice sounds unnatural and forced.

Many of the extended moments in this novel are detailed pastoral scenes that aim to create a visual image of an almost utopian landscape. In moderation, these are effective in creating setting, but on the whole, they seem to appear too often and with little purpose. Combined with the relentless chronological narration of daily activities, this excessive amount of detail burdens and stifles the narrative. Though each character has the potential to be captivating, the novel trips over the surface of the characters, never plunging deep enough to offer real, believable insight into their hearts and minds.

Murmur of the Lonely Brook is an incredibly ambitious cultural portrait that humanizes a world little known to contemporary readers. However, the novel needs to be reshaped and thoroughly edited to give it the central, driving force and depth that would allow it to have a meaningful impact on readers.
SHOILEE KHAN (September 5, 2012)

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