ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

LITERARY

Slow
Digonta Bordoloi
Digonta Bordoloi
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Five Stars (out of Five)

The careful narrative pace allows for an exploration of the secrets of life and death, as perceived by a young Indian boy.

"I took my time to come to your world." This sentence begins the rich and hypnotic story of Baba, which unfolds at a pace that is as placid and peaceful as the protagonist himself.

Perspectives in *Slow* alternate between Baba, his father, mother, and brother, and later Baba's friend Neloy, create a dynamic and intriguing pace that paints a complete picture of Baba's childhood in India. Author Digonta Bordoloi conveys the family relationships, school life, and festivals that shape the family's beliefs and practices, such as when Baba is allowed to walk to school alone when he turns nine because, according to Baba's father, "In numerology, nine is the strongest digit, a good age to start the boys on their path towards manhood."

Just as Baba takes the time to notice and experience the world around him, observing ants at work and communicating with nature, the narrative unhurriedly reveals the rich details of the Indian culture and landscape with sensual descriptions that highlight the exotic setting and portray Baba as a humane, spiritual, and tranquil being. He is concerned with offering peace to all beings, as seen by his resourcefulness in finding a bullet so a pig may be slaughtered more humanely than by using the traditional form of a hot iron rod through the rectum.

The narrative flows with fresh and descriptive language. When Baba observes an "unbeating heart", he describes it as "shaped like a fat banana bud, yet to flower." Baba's acute observations also effectively mirror the perspective of a young child, as when he combines the physical appearance and metaphorical symbolism of the Ganga River: "Ganga was considered the holiest of holy rivers, but it looked very filthy. Clearly the task of washing away the combined sins of eight hundred million people was way too much for a single river to absorb."

When tragedy strikes, the narrative takes on a parable-like tone as the omniscient narrator recounts how Baba's peaceful and contemplative nature continues to be paramount in

guiding those around him toward finding happiness—especially his friend Neloy, who becomes so obsessed with being successful that he sacrifices his happiness.

Baba's enlightening observations center on the themes of life and death and the thin line between the two as he notes, "What's so bad about death? … It's not a full stop, merely a comma and an interesting one at that." Equally engaging is the ironic and telling observations in the scene in which a procession carries a corpse wrapped from head to toe in a saffron silk cloth toward the Ganga: "A woman they passed in tatters could only dream of wrapping her living body in a sari of silk."

Slow is a luxuriously sensual and provocative journey through life and death that examines the beauty and irony in the world around us.

Maya Fleischmann