ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

SHORT STORIES

Women of Substance
Sukumar Chatterjee
AuthorHouse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

A calm, reserved voice and reliable structure act as the foundation to the urgent and emotionally driven stories of seven women.

Women of Substance, by Sukumar Chatterjee, is an enlightening collection of stories about women in India who overcome societal adversity and even physical danger to attain the depth of character the title suggests.

Seven women are the focus of four stories that bear their names: “Kavita, Pushpa and Poonam,” “Deepa,” “Charu,” and “Aru and Madhuri.” The women face challenges common to females all over the world, such as pregnancy, divorce, and sexual harassment, but the unique threads of Indian society and the caste system add gravity to the hardships these women face. When the stories’ main challenges are listed one after the other, as they are in the back-panel copy, issues seem heaped upon the characters to make a point, which could yield a trite result. But these stories are not trivial, and they feel much more realistic than fabricated.

Chatterjee’s storytelling is calm and reserved. While the pacing of each piece is not particularly varied, this does not create a monotony that dulls. The lack of flatness is largely due to the seriousness of the characters’ circumstances and the urgency created by the clearly rendered, close-to-the-action perspectives of the characters.

The third-person-limited point of view employed here allows readers to identify with the father’s desire, in “Kavita, Pushpa and Poonam,” to get his daughters well matched and cared for. Likewise, Deepa’s young, in-love voice resonates: “Her single-minded perseverance to overcome all hurdles, and insistence on marrying Rahul—and only Rahul—had paid off!” The stories have positive endings with ample resolution, but they’re not quite the picture-perfect, fairy-tale endings that would negate the hardships explored in the narratives.

The dialogue is realistic and compelling, its formality varying appropriately between conversations of confidantes and negotiations with parents. The sketched drawings at the

beginning of each chapter, however, are very basic and reproduced in gray boxes that keep the few details present in the sketches from standing out.

The bio page states that Chatterjee is “a scientist, an academician, a sportsperson, an actor, a writer, and a story teller.” His identity as a well-rounded Renaissance man appears to drive him to celebrate those qualities in others. Readers will likely find it refreshing to read stories written by a man that exalts positive character traits in women beyond the stereotypical.

Women of Substance is a celebration of triumphs that will resonate with women—and men—around the world.

Melissa Wuske