

Song of the Cuckoo Bird

Amulya Malladi

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Malladi's fourth novel transports readers on a cinematic journey through late-twentieth-century India as seen through the eyes of the inhabitants of Tella Meda, a religious community on the Bay of Bengal. Kokila comes to the ashram in 1961 as an 11-year-old orphan. She later renounces her arranged marriage to stay within Tella Meda's restrictive walls, a move she comes to regret. The ashram's guru attracts a cast of misfits from near and far--widows, abused wives and their neglected children, the daughter of a prostitute, a father guilty over his daughter's suicide--each illuminated by Malladi in her kaleidoscopic perusal of both the ills of India's caste system and the repercussions of rigid moral dicta. Running historical updates on India's wars, elections, and assassinations introduce each chapter. But the crux of the novel is how Malladi's female characters struggle with the stifling effects of caste and gradually respond to the movement for women's rights that surges as the century draws to a close. Deborah Donovan Copyright ? American Library Association. All rights reserved

Song of the Cuckoo Bird Details


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From Reader Review Song of the Cuckoo Bird for online ebook

Prital Nicholls says

All about the lives of women over the course of 50 odd years who live in an ashram in India. I love reading books about India and thus enjoyed it. A good insight into South Indian customs. I think more could have been made of the characters and some events in the story leave unanswered questions and don't add to it. All in all an enjoyable read but not a favourite.

Heather says

Well written, great story, with very personable characters and plot line. I liked the time lapse between chapters, and historical details woven in. It made the passage of ~50 years much easier to grasp and work with the story. The only issue I had was that some of the chapters re-summarized what happened in the chapter before to explain the actions of a character. This is somewhat repetitive since you read the actual details a few pages before. Other than that, I enjoyed the book.

Cas says

One of those unexpected finds that makes ploughing through all the other mediocre rubbish worthwhile. This novel is entirely original, touching and enlightening. At eleven years old, Kokila makes a decision that sets her aside from other girls and changes her life forever. This is about unconventional relationships, the role of women in society and the changing face of India. It is what it is like to be different, to choose a way of life that sets you apart. I found this totally engrossing.

Sangeetha says

This book had me captivated for a week. It reminded me of *God of Small Things*, the ease with which the storyline moves forward. There was no mystery, or conspiracy in the story nevertheless you wanted to continue reading. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it.

Aditi Varma says

After the previous 2 books that I read by the author, this book was a disappointment. It's not like I haven't ever read and liked some book set in a very different time or culture. But nothing about the setting, the characters, the storyline, enticed me about this book. I kept waiting for it to get better. But it didn't. It wasn't a pleasure to read. It had a proper ending, even if somewhat rushed. Highly unsatisfactory.

Baljit says

I would rate this 2.5 stars. It's a story of the people who by chance end up living in an ashram with one woman who has been given the status of a goddess. The dynamics between the characters is interesting and spans many decades, but it lacks some emotional depth, so it is not in the league of Indian writers like Mistry and Umigar. I would however, read other novels by this writer to see how her writing develops.

Katie M. says

I liked the idea of this book much more than the book itself - the prose is pretty painful, all tell and no show. But still, for the idea of it - and the potential of what this book could have been - it gets a dubious 3 stars.

Chahrazad says

This is the 3rd book I read by Malladi. She's an excellent writer and her prose is great but it's her characters that leave a significant impact on me. Her characters are so real, so complex yet so simple; they go about their daily lives without any fuss but the impact they leave is so pronounced. Kokila, Chetana, Charvi, Subhadra, and others will stay with me for a long time. I definitely recommend it.

?Ruth? says

Based in India during the second half of the twentieth century, this is the story of a house and the women who lived in it. I found myself experiencing a completely different culture and way of life through the lives of the protagonists. It was a fascinating and engrossing read - the characters lived and breathed for me and regardless of the difference in backgrounds, I could identify with their pain, their heartache and their joy. Naturally there were words and cultural references that I didn't understand but I found that it didn't really interfere with my enjoyment of the book.

Sujithra says

This book is tremendous. Though few stuffs seemed little difficult for me to accept to have happened in late 1900s, the book kept me anxious. I have always read thriller books with so much of interest wanting to know what happens next, but i never expected i will have a similar feel with this one. A well written, well depicted story that made me to stop and think about life for a while.

Simple loved it!!

This was the first book of Amulya's that I read. Planning to read her other writings too. Would definitely recommend for those who love Indian classics.

Gorab Jain says

Excellent read. When I think back on what was so good about it, there isn't anything particular. A story spanning across generations from 1960s, of inhabitants of Tella Meda, an unconventional ashram, also serving as an orphanage and an old age house.

Nothing exceptional about the plot, or the writing style, or the characters. Most of it is like a commentary on their day to day lives. But the way these characters blend and form that bonding is what makes it an interesting read.

Every chapter begins with a couple of major news headlines from that year. That makes it way easier to relate to the passage of time between chapters.

Amulya's mother, Lakshmi, helped her write this book. Their conversation about the characters of this book is added as a Reader's Guide in the end. That gives insight on how these characters were etched. Enjoyed reading that conversation very much.

Recommended: For folks who love to immerse themselves in day to day lives of their book characters, without bothering much about where or how the plot is moving.

Em*bedded-in-books* says

One of the best books I've read so far this year. I just loved this book from the first line to the end, though the end was a bit bizarre. I loved the house, the disjoint characters, the way they live together and help each other inspite of glaring differences between their temperaments and circumstances - I would like to reread this book and I would definitely recommend this to anyone and every one. These sort of stories are my forte - where nothing much happens, days pass by and people do the best to live and to learn. I felt very close with all people. It was as if I was an impartial observer living with them. Amulya Malladi is great.

Chandler says

My treasured mother recommended this book!!! There are so many things I love about this book the first of all that it is set in INDIA!!! Generally I find books set in India and written by Indian authors wonderful and this was no exception.

What else did I love? It is set in a Ashram with a female guru. The Ashram is run by the bizarre father of the guru and how he impacts each of the inhabitants is fascinating. Each woman is located at the ashram because of less than perfect circumstances and watching them grow as souls is delicious. I loved the depiction of Indian culture and relationships. The rich way the author describes all aspects of this book like feeling a complex fabric tapestry. Oh the depiction of different types of love soul opening!!

Reena says

The most heartbreaking thing about this book is the plot and characters have so much potential which I felt was not realized in the execution of the story. They were only tapped into in the most banal and contrived way that did not bring out the magic inherent in a story like this. In the way that Jhumpa Lahiri or Kiran Desai really understand how to deliver, Malladi does not.

Emily Crow says

Song of the Cuckoo Bird provides a glimpse into Indian daily life and social change, through the eyes of the women who inhabit Tella Meda, a house in a village by the Bay of Bengal. The story revolves around three women in particular: Kokila, an orphan; Chetana, a prostitute's daughter; and Charvi, believed by some to be a guru.

The history of Tella Meda begins when Ramanandam, a writer who is controversial for his views on women's equality, thinks he recognizes signs of holiness in one of his daughters, Charvi. At first, Charvi herself denies being a guru, but many people find comfort in her presence, and the house becomes an ashram and a sanctuary for the unwanted.

Song of the Cuckoo Bird was interesting, and it was easy to get into the story, but it never engaged me on an emotional level. Perhaps that was the result of the sheer scope of the story, a snapshot of so many characters taking place over several decades. I was most interested in Charvi, and why she kept playing the part of a guru when she never seemed to believe it, but the narrative only rested on her point of view occasionally. Even so, I would definitely recommend it.
