



The Tiffin

Mahtab Narsimhan

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The "dabbawallas" of Mumbai deliver box lunches called "tiffins" to white collar workers all over the vast city. They are legendary for their near-perfect service: for every six million lunches sent, only one will fail to reach its intended destination. "The Tiffin" is about that one time in millions when a box goes astray, changing lives forever.

When a note placed in a tiffin is lost, a newborn Kunal is separated from his mother. Twelve years later, Kunal lives as a virtual slave under the thumb of his foster father, Seth. With danger and oppression making it impossible to stay where he is, Kunal asks his friend Vinayak, an aging dabbawalla, to help him find his birth mother. Vinayak introduces Kunal to the tiffin carriers, and a plan is hatched. Along the way, Kunal learns what it means to be part of a family.

The Tiffin Details

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Author : Mahtab Narsimhan

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From Reader Review The Tiffin for online ebook

Mobyskine says

I first saw this book on the shelf at Sun@Mag bookstore but was reluctant to pick it up. I went home and googled about it that later I came again and decided to buy it. This book reminds me of The Lunchbox film, well not that really but the part of dabbawalla got me interested.

The journey of Kunal was honestly depressing. Being left out to his mom's friend since baby and got himself worked as 'slave' at the dabba gave me heartache. That sweet 12 years old with green eyes-- the only thing he wanted just a family. And he searched crazily for it.

I love the friendship between all the dabbawallas, it was overwhelming to read about how they helped him with the notes. And Vinayak was so nice and having his own sad past tortured me a bit.

I knew that Kunal won't get what he wanted. All the negative remarks from Vinayak about him finding his mom was true-- if she wants him, she would come within that 12 years.

Story telling was good and plot was fast-paced. Kunal's character did annoy me a bit-- being all dramatic and impatient, that longing feeling and hope sometimes bothering me a lot. But knowing Kunal just a 12 years old boy and he needed to learn life the hard way like this, I digressed.

I enjoyed the read nevertheless. Love and friendship when you least expected. I was glad when Kunal decided to stay. He was all grown up at last.

Thanu says

This book was recommended by my 14 year old.

Writing style is really simple and realistic. You can relate to it quite easily. The start was good, giving a curiosity to find out what happened. Kunal's life seems so sad and heartbreaking. He could easily be one of the ubiquitous young boys you see working at most of the small eateries in the town. Your heart goes out to him and you are happy for him when circumstances change with Vinayak. His yearning to belong and to have a family to call his own is so strong. However, after a point, the progress of the story didn't tug at my heart like I expected it would. Not too bad but just not enough.

So I would say its enjoyable in most parts but not all.

Lisa Dalrymple says

There is a reason why The Tiffin has been listed as one of Quill & Quire's 15 "Books of the Year" for 2011. There is a reason why this book is receiving critical acclaim. And there is a reason why I absolutely loved it. Actually there are many reasons.

Narsimhan's story is crafted around the dabbawallas of modern-day Mumbai, the deliverymen who run hot boxed lunches, or tiffins, to office workers all over the city. This network of runners is so highly organized that only one in six million tiffins never makes its intended destination. However, to the young and pregnant Anahita, who slips a frantic note to her beloved into his daily tiffin, all that matters is that single delivery. And all that matters to young Kunal, 13 years later, is finding out what happened to his mother after it went astray.

Narsimhan writes as one who loves her setting of contemporary Mumbai and no sensory detail is spared. The reader is transported to India, enveloped in the smell of spices cooking in the street and the sensation of cotton clinging to Kunal's back in the muggy heat of the train station. As in the award-winning Tara Trilogy, Narsimhan has set her story in a faraway land but, this time, she has brought to Canadian children's fiction a relatively unexplored but very real setting, fostering an added element of cultural exploration and awareness.

Woven into this story is still the magical, mystical feel that Narsimhan's readers love. While Kunal lives in a very real, very gritty Mumbai, the reader can almost believe he has a fairy-godmother looking out for him. Indeed, maybe he does in the form of Vinayak, the old dabbawalla who takes him under his wing and helps him rediscover family.

In *The Tiffin*, Mahtab Narsimhan skilfully delivers a beautiful story with that fairy-tale shimmer in a gritty, contemporary setting.

Nicola Mansfield says

Reason for Reading: I am a fan of the author.

The city of Bombay, India has a 150 year old tradition of delivering hot lunches to business workers in metal tins called tiffins. This is a complicated business and yet it has a reputation of losing only one box per every six million. The opening chapter is a flashback to a story of one such lost box and the rest of the book comes back to the present to show the consequences that lost lunch had for one person. Kunal, who was left with the Seths as a baby, has been raised as their slave working in their restaurant with no wages, beat by the owner and shown no love by either him or his wife. He has one customer, an old man, who is in charge of the tiffin business at the nearby rail station who eventually takes him in and gets him a job at a nice restaurant. Now Kunal makes some friends and can devote his time to finding his real mother and finding out why she never came back for him.

Beautifully written book, with a easy going third person narrative that catches your attention right away. The story takes one down into the underbelly of Indian life where the poor, the orphaned, the down-on-their-luck work and survive and where the mean, nasty and or criminal prey upon them. At times I thought I was reading about Victorian life, but no I had to remind myself this was life today for the poor and just getting by in Bombay today. The story is full of pathos, Kunal has been dealt a hard life and he lives on dreams for a brighter future, for a family. As he goes looking for that family he ends up finding it in the least likely of places.

Not only a wonderful, heart-wrenching story but also one with plenty of insight into Indian daily life and culture. I found it very interesting and entertaining. I loved Kunal as a character and rooted for him right from the beginning, hoping for the ending that eventually came to pass. I still find the idea of the tiffins

strange. Maybe 150 years ago it was a good idea, but now? It seems a pretty complicated way to get a hot lunch. They must have thermoses and microwaves in business districts in India. Why can't people take their lunch to work with them like the rest of us? If they want it hot, put it in a thermos or microwave it. Tiffins are a very strange concept to this Canadian! A great read and certainly both unique and different from the usual fare available for juvenile readers these days. Well done. Recommended!

Jenny Martin says

I read this book because it's the pick this month for my bookshop's children's book club, which I will be running tomorrow. Unfortunately, it left a bit to be desired. It was well-written, and there were some touching moments, but for the most part I felt quite frustrated at the lack of real story going on, and sometimes even a little bored. Although you feel sorry for Kunal, the main character, his dramatic behaviour was tiring at times. These letdowns with the plot are a shame, because as mentioned, the writing is lovely and the description of Kunal's life in Bombay/Mumbai is vivid and eye-opening.

Ms. Yingling says

Kunal was abandoned by his mother as a baby, and has lived and worked with the Seths, who run a restaurant. They are not particularly nice to him, and the customers also given him grief. He finds friendship with a dabbawalla (delivery man) who brings tiffins to the restaurant to be filled up before being delivered to office buildings. Vinayak has his own reasons for befriending Kunal, and after Kunal is beaten and runs away, he opens up his modest home to him. Kunal thinks that working as a dabbawalla would be much more interesting than the work he has been doing, especially once he comes up with the idea of finding his birth mother, who worked in the financial district, by putting notes in tiffins asking her to contact him. Being a dabbawalla is harder than Kunal thinks, and he runs into many problems and dangers along the way. In the end, he realizes that sometimes the family you need is already in place.

Strengths: This was extremely interesting, and a fast paced, informative read. Narsimhan writing has a lot of dramatic tension with the fights and dangers that Kunal can't seem to avoid. I learned a lot about a topic which was completely unfamiliar to me!

Weaknesses: This might be hard for readers who haven't read as much fiction set in India as I have to understand.

What I really think: I would love to see this edited slightly to explain some of the unfamiliar aspects to North American audiences.

Mar says

Okay YA read. Makes one aware of poverty experienced in India and how there is more to relationships than biological connections.

Matthew Huang says

The Tiffin is about when a note placed inside a tiffin goes missing and changes one's life. 12 year old Kunal was separated from his mother from birth. He works as a slave at his foster father's restaurant. Being treated very badly and having danger on deliveries, it is impossible for Kunal to stay here. He turns to his kind Dabbawalla friend, Vinayak to help him locate his mother. Vinayak introduces him to his Dabbawalla friends, and came up with a brilliant plan. During the process Kunal learns the true meaning of having a family.

I picked up this book because the story line was very interesting. Also because it reminded me of the book Home Truth, Kunal was abused by his foster father Seth and Vinayak was abused by his father Floyd. This book wasn't as good as I thought it would be. I guess I expected more action to take place in the book. The reason I finished the book was just simply because it was too good and impossible to put down after page 100.

I would recommend this book to anyone that enjoyed Home Truths, since they are somewhat related. I would also recommend this book to Husayn because he was the one who introduced me to Home Truths, also I know he will like this awesome book.

? Maryam ? says

It's Bombay 1982, Anahita, without any telephone service and a strict mother, is forced to depend on the tiffin carriers to deliver a note to her boyfriend, that she is with child. She relies on the tiffin carriers, after all, only one tiffin in 6 million doesn't reach its destination. Only one.

The Tiffin, by Mahtab Narsimhan, follows the story of a 12 year old boy named Kunal, working in the dilapidated dhaba of his foster father, Seth, in Bombay India.

Kunal is very mistreated, he works tirelessly at day and yearns for his mother at night, a mother who left him with nothing when he was still a baby. No matter what he does, he is never appreciated, when things get unbearable and his only friend leaves, he decides to run. The only place he can think of is Vinayak's. An old man, frequent customer at the dhaba and always kind to Kunal. With no children of his own, Vinayak accepts Kunal like a father, and introduces him to the world of the dabbawallas - delivery men who help boxed lunches reach their specific workers on time, all over Bombay. Kunal is fascinated by the dabbawallas, and desperately wants to be one, because the tiffin carriers have given him an idea of how to reach his mother, and finally belong to a family.

The Tiffin is an amazing realistic fiction book. Mahtab Narsimhan has peeled off layers of Mumbai and revealed the secret world underneath, a world where even kids as young as Kunal have to work in order to stay alive and where poverty lingers in every alleyway.

Readers will fall in love with Kunal immediately. He is a very humble and kind person and he understands the value of friends and family. Kunal's determination and good nature is also what makes him a very likable protagonist.

Narsimhan writes in somewhat choppy sentences at times, sentences that might seem awkward and childish, but add to the effect of the book. It makes you feel as if Kunal himself is the one writing the story. For example : " The footsteps reached the top of the stairs. It could be no other than Sethji." And she describes

the setting, Mumbai, in such a detailed and animated way, you feel as if you are being transported there. Overall, *The Tiffin* is a very great literary work.

However, personally, *The Tiffin* didn't strike me as a 'great' book. One of the reasons why, was that the book didn't keep me hooked all the way through. At some points it got dull and I felt like taking a break. There were places that Narsimhan could have used the situation to her advantage and created a very exciting chapter, but I felt as if some events in the book were not portrayed as exciting or sad or happy as they could have.

Still, I think reading *The Tiffin* was a good choice, it revealed to me the flavorful city of Mumbai. Narsimhan has made me realize that everyone has a story to tell and that in one city (especially one as big as Mumbai) there are so many things going on just under the surface. And no matter how young or old, poor or rich, anything is possible with hard work, determination and belief in one's dreams. This book is a must-read for Realistic Fiction lovers.

Sibella says

Find this review and others here: [Introduction](#)

Benson Fisher is wishing to get away from his life as a foster child. When he gets accepted to Maxfield Academy he couldn't be more thrilled to finally have a chance to have friends and settle into a place for more than a few months at a time. Once arriving he finds out that the school is blocked by a wall, and separated by miles of forest from any sign of civilization. That's not all. No phones, Internet access, or adults. You get no contact with anybody outside of the school. Even though there are no adults, there are still rules and still punishments. The biggest rules are, no sex, no violent fights, No refusing punishments, and trying to escape. if you break any of those four rules you end up in detention. Those who go to detention don't come back. After hearing all of this though, all that is on Benson's mind is escaping this weird school. No matter how many people try to convince Benson that it is was a lot worse before the students spit up into gangs. The society, the people that want to be follow the rules, Havoc, the people that want to cause trouble, and Variant or the V's. They are the people that hate the school and want to escape, but generally follow the rules. Benson joins the V's. He makes friends and fits in fine. He even grows close to a girl in his gang named Jane. he even finds himself having fun. Until, finding out a secret that the school had kept hidden since it was built. Now that he knows the secret he has no doubt in his mind that he has to get out of the school.

Cover

The cover to variant is a boy and a girl walking in the woods. The boy has his back turned, but girl is looking backwards. Most of the cover is sort of blurred out. I liked this cover a lot because it the way the cover is blurred out is mysterious just like the story is.

Characters/Relationships

In the book you learn about many members of all the different gangs. Mainly the people in the V's. Benson himself is a little stubborn and rebellious at times. He was a pretty believable character. Two of my favorite characters in the book were Lily and Curtis. Lily has only been at the school for a few months and is also very content about leaving. She wasn't in the book a whole lot when she is it is mostly when they are playing paintball. My other favorite character was Curtis. He always helped Benson and always forgave Benson when he had done something stupid to jeopardize the safety of the gang.

As I said before Benson gets quite close to Jane and at one point takes her to a dance. The relationship didn't

last long at all though. Other than Benson and Jane, Curtis and another girl in the V's named Carrie are also dating. You don't hear much about this couple but Benson always sees the holding hands and walking together

Conclusion

Variant was an amazing book that kept me interested to the very last page. The characters were believable and very easy to connect to. I highly recommend this book.

Introduction

In Bombay, a pregnant teenager is forced to rely on tiffins (Lunch boxes with warm food inside) and dabbawallas (The people that deliver the tiffins) to get a very important letter to her boyfriend. She trusts that the letter, tucked inside tiffin will reach him. After all, a tiffin rarely gets lost.

The story centers around a twelve year old orphan boy named Kunal. He works as a slave for Mrs. Seth and Sethji. Each day one thing puts a smile on his face. Seeing an old dabbawalla named Vinayak. Vinayak understands what Kunal is going through and offers Kunal a place to stay if things ever get too bad. Kunal quickly takes him up on his offer. Before leaving though, Mrs. Seth gives him one piece of information: His mother is alive and is living in Bombay. Now Kunal only has one thing on his mind. Finding his mother. First, he needs a job. Vinayak is trying his hardest to get Kunal a job as a dabbawalla but in the meantime he is stuck with a job at another restaurant. He soon figures out a plan. All he needs to do is send a note in every tiffin asking to meet his mother. Now all he has to do is get a job as a dabbawalla. Unfortunately, Vinayak is unable to get Kunal a job due to his family situation. Just as Kunal has lost all hope, the dabbawalla leaders agree that although they can't let Kunal become a dabbawalla, they can send some notes in the tiffins. A small glimmer of hope lives inside Kunal once again. But now the only thing he can do is hope for a reply.

Characters/Relationships

Kunal at some points was a little unrealistic about finding his mother. Luckily he has Vinayak to keep him from getting his hopes up too much. I have say that throughout the whole book, Vinayak was my favorite character. He cares about Kunal a lot more that Kunal actually realizes. Vinayak can seem kind of mean sometimes but everything he does is for Kunal's own good in the end.

No love story involved in this book. And no past relationships with anybody mentioned.

Conclusion

Overall, this book was alright. I probably won't pick up this book for a second read. I was able to stick with it to the end, but it just wasn't as promising as I thought it was going to be. Boys and girls could read this book, either gender could enjoy it

Keon Safaai says

I basically bought this book out of me missing the lands of masala. It's a story abt an underaged, overworked waiter in a dhaba at Mumbai. Though short, I liked the plot twist at the end and the messages it brought.

Emma says

Review by Beth

The Tiffin by Mahtab Narsimhan is for younger readers and I think it introduces some interesting and important ideas, perhaps for the first time to readers aged between 9 and 12. The relationships between the characters are extremely complex and the setting, Mumbai is also a key character, giving younger readers insight into a city which probably seems as otherworldly as Narnia to many.

The Tiffin shows us how important those small food carriers could be and when the message goes missing everything changes forever. We switch between an ominous beginning in the 1980s to present day Mumbai and 12 year old Kunal as our protagonist.

Consistently mistreated and overworked by his foster father he struggles and continues to pine for the mother he never knew. His life is more difficult than any 12 year olds should be and when he runs away Kunal too comes into close contact with the tiffin culture, through entering the world of the dabbawallas, tiffin delivery men.

Narsimhan's language is rich and creates a real sense of India. When describing the tiffins and their contents it's hard not to imagine the pungent aromas. The novel gives readers a chance to understand the underworld of Mumbai and how many workers in service are buzzing away below the surface that we usually see. I was fascinated to find out so much about Mumbai from a young readers novel and got a real sense of the poverty that may not always be seen.

The plot of the novel is its only downfall as I didn't feel compelled to keep reading at all times, I found myself drifting away and wanting more. For all the wonderful descriptions and scenery, there probably needed to be a little more strength in the plot. That being said I found Narsimhan's Mumbai fascinating.

Danielle says

[Imagine wondering about your mother for years, and then finding a way to find her, putting every single ounce of hope into finding her, and then when you finally meet her..(at least you think)...she doesn't want to take you home. (hide spoiler)]

Louise Bradford says

This book kept me riveted until the end. The characters and setting are vivid and I found myself wondering about how it would all work out as I went about my weekend activities. I learned a lot, too. Great quick read. Highly recommend for young people and adults alike.

Lyazzat says

sometimes all what you are treasure just by your side...

