



## Land Where I Flee

*Prajwal Parajuly*

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To commemorate Chitrlekha Nepauney's Chaurasi – her landmark 84th birthday – Chitrlekha's grandchildren are travelling to Gangtok to pay their respects.

Agastaya is flying in from New York. Although a successful oncologist at only thirty-three he is dreading his family's inquisition into why he is not married, and terrified that the reason for his bachelordom will be discovered.

Joining him are Manasa and Bhagwati, coming from London and Colorado respectively. One the Oxford-educated achiever; the other the disgraced eloper – one moneyed but miserable; the other ostracized but optimistic.

All three harbour the same dual objective: to emerge from the celebrations with their grandmother's blessing and their nerves intact: a goal that will become increasingly impossible thanks to a mischievous maid and a fourth, uninvited guest.

Prajwal Parajuly - the son of an Indian father and a Nepalese mother - divides his time between New York and Oxford, but disappears to Gangtok, his hometown in the Indian Himalayas, at every opportunity. Land Where I Flee is his first novel.

## Land Where I Flee Details

Date : Published by Quercus (first published November 14th 2013)

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Author : Prajwal Parajuly

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# From Reader Review Land Where I Flee for online ebook

## Manjushree' says

I have mixed feelings about this book.

Overall, I did like the book, and loved the idea of a family reuniting after going through several issues that damaged their relationship with one another. The strained relationship between the characters were portrayed well. I enjoyed reading all the various conversations and banter between the characters. The characters were also developed nicely and I was able to get a good understanding of who they were.

However, I would have liked to see the characters confront the challenges and taboo topics a little more and would have liked to see how doing so would have changed them as well as their relationships. Several of these complex issues that damaged the relationships within this family seemed to have been put to rest in such a simple manner. I would have also liked to see more interaction between Chandralekha and her grandchildren.

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## Renita D'Silva says

Enjoyed this beautiful story of a family reunion. Loved Prashanti, what a character! However, the ending left me feeling unsatisfied - I wanted more. Perhaps this was the writer's intention.

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## Aastha Agarwal says

A great story. Binding and engrossing from the very first page, the story entertained me a lot. The character of prasanti was full of life. The family reunion ends with a hope of a better future for siblings and grand ma in the novel.

A wonderful piece of writing by author!

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## DubaiReader says

Family reunion.

I had expected to enjoy this book as I'm a great fan of Indian fiction, but unfortunately, I couldn't settle into the author's style and felt the book needed considerable editing.

Three of Chitrlekha's four grandchildren are flying in from overseas to celebrate her 84th birthday; a momentous occasion in Nepalese culture. With them they bring resentments, aspirations and family history. The elderly Chitrlekha was quite a character, but she didn't seem to really like any of her grandchildren, none of them was quite good enough for her. The only person she appeared to have any affection for was her maid, Prashanti, a eunuch with an interesting story.

I was very confused about the ethnicity of the characters and had to refer to Wikipedia to establish precisely where Gangtok was situated and how it was related to Bhutan and Nepal. As a Western reader I felt this was a missed opportunity for the author to educate his readers. There was background but it needed a clearer explanation.

There were also a lot of colloquialisms that needed translation and even some unnecessary language (Kindle loc 2298 and 2300 for example).

I finished the book but I was disappointed. I didn't much like any of the characters, all of whom were unbelievably self-centred. Not a book I'd recommend in spite of the high ratings of others.

I loved the cover though :)

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### **Booksbooksandebooks says**

I liked this novel even better than his first book. The writing just flows and the story is v gripping. Read this book for Prashanti, the eunuch character. The characters are phenomenally etched and the ending is beautiful and unexpected. Kudos to Parajuly.

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### **Shilpa says**

'Never judge a book by its cover' but for this one I did. And trust, the book is as captivating as the cover. This book is about grandchildren visiting their grandmother for a auspicious occasion in India, their homeland.

Beautifully knit chapters, simple language, thoughtful characters compell one to keep reading.

I'm actually looking forward for a sequel to this, to know what the grandchildren do given that Chitralkha is not well (read the book to know who she is?)

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### **Tripfiction says**

This is a debut novel from Prajwal Parajuly which brings several strands to the reader's attention. It is set in Gangtok, a Nepali-speaking area in the Himalaya of India – people originally ousted from Bhutan. The author's passion for this area of the country and its history is truly palpable.

Grandmother Chitralkha – Amaa to her grandchildren – is about to celebrate her landmark 84th birthday, the Chaurasi, and she awaits the arrival of 3 grandchildren. The fourth grandchild is not invited. This is very much a story about belonging, about resettlement and dislocation, and what it is like to live far away from indigenous and familiar country and culture. For granddaughter Bhagwati, caste issues have literally cast her out – she married her husband Ram in haste, who is a Damaai, an untouchable. In Boulder, Colorado where they have settled after several years in a refugee camp, they hardly give it a second thought, but it will be a huge factor when she re-enters her Grandmother's house; Agastaya is a doctor in New York and he is with Nicky, male, an unacceptable liaison in his Grandmother's small town; Manasa, foul-tempered and cutting, has despatched her husband and paraplegic father-in-law to a different location, whilst she endures the reunion. The interactions and dialogue amongst the characters are vivid, and one can almost hear them speaking to each other in vociferous and raucous chatter.

Prasanti, (originally Prasant) the eunuch who tends Grandmother, is always present and always good for an invidious jibe or some histrionics. To all intents and purposes, she is treated as the true granddaughter.

This is a book full of Indian experience, colour and observation, it is full of vernacular, Manas sharply correcting Nicky that it is not Diwali for the Nepali speaking people, but Tihaar. There are lots of colloquial words punctuating the prose with the intention, I believe, to make the story feel more authentic. But it has the opposite effect, it starts to alienate because there is no glossary to assist. This, no doubt, serves to mirror the experience of dislocation that perhaps Bhagwati and Ram experience in Boulder as refugees.

Parajuly has is an original voice but in this novel he has struggled to keep the story cohesive. Is this a story about a family reunion, or is the story of Prasanti the overriding focus? Are the politics of the region – and the region itself – what truly motivate the author? The focus is loose, the squabbling amongst the family becomes enervating and depressing at times, and the opportunity is lost to really aid understanding of the history of this small part of India; and yet.. it is a very interesting novel that insightfully transports the reader to a little known area of India.

And what an eye-catching cover! Really drew our eye to it, colour, exoticism and travel captured in one photo!

This review first appeared on our blog, together with a further 4 chosen titles to take the reader to INDIA <http://www.tripfiction.com/novel-set-...>

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## **Liz Barnsley says**

My grateful thanks to Quercus for the lovely review copy.

To commemorate Chitralekha Nepauney's Chaurasi – her landmark 84th birthday – Chitralekha's grandchildren are travelling to Gangtok to pay their respects. All three harbour the same dual objective: to emerge from the celebrations with their grandmother's blessing and their nerves intact: a goal that will become increasingly impossible thanks to a mischievous maid and a fourth, uninvited guest.

So I really enjoy a good bit of family drama, especially when it is well formed and often hilarious as is the case right here.

An eclectic mix of brilliantly portrayed characters come together and over the course of a funny, insightful and often emotional story we learn more about them and where they have come from.

It is a cultural soundbite about an area and a people I know little about -or knew little about until I read this book - the background is fascinating, covering many little rituals and observations on life that are endlessly intriguing. Set against the backdrop of the Gorkhaland movement I learned a lot as I went.

My favourite character was Prashanti, without a doubt, but they are all marvellous people to reside with for a while, some of them formidable indeed.

An absolutely captivating tale. Recommended.

Happy Reading Folks!

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## **Leah (Books Speak Volumes) says**

o celebrate Chitralekha's landmark 84th birthday, her three Westernized grandchildren travel to Gangtok to be reunited for the first time in decades. Flying in from New York is Agastaya, a successful oncologist dreading the inquiries into why he isn't married — and terrified that people will find out the real reason. Manasa is coming from London, where despite living a life of wealth, she is the miserable caretaker of her wheelchair-bound father-in-law. And Bhagwati, fearful of her reception nearly twenty years after eloping with a man from a much lower caste, is joining them from Colorado. Adding to this cast of characters are Chitralekha's servant Prasanti (a female eunuch or "hijra") and two unexpected guests who turn the party upside down.

I really loved the cultural perspective of this book; it is set in a Indian town nestled between the borders of Nepal and Bhutan, and it deals with everything from caste and social status, to gender and sexuality, to national identity and refugee life. Prasanti's story, in particular, sent me down a Wikipedia black hole — and I love it when a book sparks that kind of curiosity. I also can't resist a good dysfunctional family reunion novel, and this family has long-simmering grudges and misconceptions out the wazoo. However, I had a hard time really caring about or feeling interested in most of the characters, and the lack of development made Land Where I Flee fall a bit flat.

(Originally reviewed on Books Speak Volumes.)

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## **Rishabh Kapur says**

This is truly a work of art. Clearly a lot of effort has gone into writing this. This is one of the better books I have read in the recent past. The way the story flows and keeps you gripped till the last page is commendable.

With so much of info being provided about the happenings in our Northeastern states and the neighboring land-locked countries, this masterpiece ensures that the spotlight doesn't escape the various aspects of putting up with a dysfunctional family and how people struggle to deal with what life throws at them almost on an everyday basis. It talks about a lot about how easy it can be to blame the situation, the people around us and the current vicious circumstances.

It is almost magical how the author has tried conveying the message of being comfortable in one's skin(both with one's past and also with one's demeanor towards people and life in general). It is truly only when we accept our limitations and decide to learn and unlearn on an everyday basis without putting ourselves on the moral high pedestal riddled with superiority complexes and a fair bit of condensation and haughtiness, can we become more patient and more accepting as far as people around us and their circumstances are concerned.

Give this a shot and you will come out a wiser and a more broad minded individual!!

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## **Pankaj Giri says**

Finally, I've completed Prajwal Parajuly Daju's book. Okay, so here goes the review.

I am totally amazed by the writing style. Brilliant is the only word that comes to mind. The manner in which he constructs sentences is admirable - magnificent. No wonder he used to teach creative writing lessons abroad. Its such a unique style that you can only applaud, not emulate. He plays with words so wonderfully.

However, I must say that his language borders towards flowery in many places - like showing off your vocabulary. But the impeccable writing style somewhat compensates for the unnecessary usage of big words. I know, comment on flowery language coming from someone who has done the same in his debut book is not warranted, but I've learned my lesson now, so maybe its justified.

The setting and plot is unique. The characters are peculiar, and sometimes I felt too screwed up. It might be possible, but for everyone to be psychos like that in a single family is a bit too far fetched in real life, I think. I felt Bhagwati was the only one for whom I felt for a bit, but the heinous thing she does in the end spoiled it. The ending is decent but still not satisfactory. Prajwal Daju could have done a better job. Yet, the few surprises were good. Agastya's behavior after meeting the girl was kind of sick though.

I didn't like the usage of Nepali words, especially in dialogues without explanation of its meaning. At least it should be explained once. If the novel is solely meant for Nepali's, then it's okay, but other readers will never understand those words, and thus, the dialogues (sometimes, maybe, from the context they might be able to guess, but not always). Also, the usage of foul words so many times (especially by Prasanti - the Nepali word for buttocks and men's pissing pipe) truly disgusted me. Perhaps, it's because of my nature, but I still feel it was cheap to use such words in an international novel.

Ruthwa urinating in the basin was another nauseating scene which could have easily been avoided. One thing is undeniable; this novel should be rated 'A - Adult'. There are so many sexual references and lewd jokes that children, or even early teenagers, should be kept far away from it.

One more thing that I wish to say is this novel lacked emotional depth. Not one of the scenes moved me. The jokes were forced, too. You smile at the witty writing sometimes, but there are no laugh-out-loud moments anywhere. The writing style amazed me, but I never felt deep emotion (happiness, sadness) anywhere. However, I did feel irritated occasionally because of the vile nature of most of the characters.

On the other hand, the characterization was superb. Despite none of them being likable, they were well etched out (good back stories). Everyone was given closure. Me, being a Nepali, loved the Nepali flavor of the novel. In short, this novel already is critically acclaimed and loved by Nepali speaking people throughout the world which is very natural. I just feel Prajwal Daju should create a next novel which international people will be able to understand without difficulty.

3.9 stars from a debut author to my accomplished and supremely talented senior hailing from the beautiful town of Gangtok, Sikkim and also from the same school - Tashi Namgyal Academy.

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### **Pragyan Thapa says**

Prajwal has sharpness for details. He carries the story with swiftness as well as with a method of sincerity. The Nepali readers will connect greatly, although at times the characters and events try to cover everything from closeted homosexuals to the Gorkhaland movement, arranged marriage and to untouchability, which stiffens the narrative.

It's a daring debut from Prajwal, whom I consider far ahead in producing a captivating read than other Nepali writers like Samrat Upadhyay and Manjushree Thapa.

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### **Claire says**

I liked this book for the interesting family dynamics. Parts of it enthralled me, particularly Bhagwati and Prashanti's stories. However, I felt that I like to read to see into different worlds and societies, and while this was interesting and different, it felt like hard work being involved in this world. I would recommend to those who have travelled to India, Nepal or near-by countries as that element is intriguing but this book is not for everyone.

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### **Anup Joshi says**

The characters Parajuly picked for this novel are really wonderful. Each character with their own vice and virtue. An old stubborn working granny Chitralekha, a grandson Agastya who is homosexual and can't disclose his identity truly to family, another grandson Ruthwa who wrote about rape of his own granny perturbing her. Two granddaughters; Bhagwati who eloped with a man from low caste, Manasa living as a caretaker for her father-in-law in spite of her extravagant Oxford degrees. And Prashanti, the eunuch servant who has a lot to offer. All reunited after 18 years for the chaurasi of the Granny, indulge in tough family discourses and at the end everything turns timid and serene in the family, the tension clearing as if it was never there. I loved each character for their own virtue and charm, though they appear tough at beginning-exhibit their immeasurable virtue at the end. But yet Prashanti, Manashi and Bhagwati are more appealing to heart.

Extraordinarily written in delightful language with so much description about the family, culture, life and the tension between two different generations. A realistic family novel....interposed between the life of Kalimpong, Gangtok, Kathmandu, Bhutan, USA and London....Enjoyed reading...I can't help but praise for the author for this extravagant story he brings...

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### **Ming says**

This was a quick read. I had hoped that it would provide one glimpse, possibly, of Nepal. I found that it was overall quite plain-spoken and simple but also very catty. A level of hostility and contempt seemed to permeate almost all the relationships among the characters. That became tiresome and toxic.

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