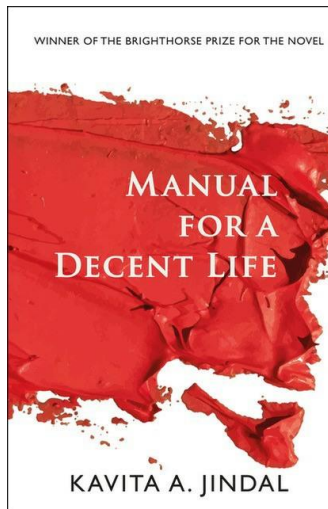


Review of *Manual for a Decent Life* in The Literary Pig



I confess to knowing nothing about life or politics in India in the late 1990s, but that made the whole reading experience of 'Manual for a decent life' by Kavita A. Jindal all the more intriguing and sweeter. Within pages I cared about Waheeda, her aspirations and dreams, and was quickly immersed in her world. Social constraints have Waheeda trapped in a marriage where her husband no longer wants her in his life, yet they have a daughter, precious to both of them, and cannot separate formally. Pushed into a new political role where she finds herself a candidate in the local elections, Waheeda finds her private life on display at all times and governed by the strict rules of her society and culture. Amidst this scrutiny she risks everything by falling for Monish, a younger Hindu man from a wealthy and influential family, and has to hide their passionate relationship with constant lies and secrecy. We see how complex and dangerous political canvassing is for a female candidate, yet Waheeda bravely embraces the challenge and uses her influence to improve the lives for school-age girls. The final outcome is tragic and heart-breaking as Waheeda's family is once again ripped apart by violence.

I enjoyed the rich details of Waheeda's world in this novel and found it an absorbing story of two people who really should be together but because of social, family and religious rules have to deceive everyone around them for any chance of love. What surprised me was how both men and women are constrained by rigid social rules, neither can find true freedom to simply be themselves or follow their dreams. Lyrical prose and great characters kept me hooked to the end.

The Literary Pig, Monday 2 November 2020

Read an interview with The Literary Pig at <http://tracyfells.blogspot.com/2020/11/manual-for-decent-life-novel-by-kavita.html>