

The Pleasure Seekers of Tishani Doshi

In a moving tale laden with family drama and love, Doshi pays tribute to her identity and family

By Anushree Jonko

In *The Pleasure Seekers*, a generational tale, Tishani Doshi has woven a story of identity, a love that transcends complications, and identity. Due to the themes, she has dealt with, Doshi's book is reminiscent of Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie and Zadie Smith.

She weaves the two worlds of India and Wales in her debut novel, paying homage to her Welsh mother and Gujarati father. She raises a few important questions about identity. Babo Patel, who leaves Madras to study abroad, asks his father, "In England when people ask me what caste I am, what shall I tell them?" In just as much as an innocuous question as this, Doshi brings up how even at the face of considering identity to be set in stone, it is malleable at the end of the day. He forgoes his Jain upbringing and nosedives into everything Trishala (his mother) had prohibited - "meat, alcohol and women - just like that."

When Babo finally leaves for England, he meets the beautiful Welsh gap-toothed Sian Jones and falls in love with her and plans to marry her. But his family has other plans because they had already given their word to Falguni's parents when they were just children. However, they set a condition before Babo and Sian and they willingly but hesitantly settle for it. Through this, Doshi explores the identity crisis faced by Sian. "But there were so many new things to learn. How to wear a sari properly; how to cook and care for your clothes, jewels, skin; how to make sanitary napkins; how to serve the men first..." the list goes on. These racial difficulties, sound ominous but are somehow resolved through the good-natured and the shock-absorber of the family - Ba. The two, Babo and Sian later have two daughters who complete their little hybrid family and which also compresses four generations in the novel.

"Madras was alive, singing and dancing like the oil on the surface of the low-lying puddles, quivering with delicate rainbows." Doshi's language is symbolic, charming and poetic. Her sensuous writing is effortless and makes this 300-page novel a breezy one.

The characters are realistic and relatable in their own ways, although they somewhat run the risk of sounding stereotypical at times. Prem Kumar (the father) is the usual expectant Indian father who takes up the job of dreaming for his son and making his children a vehicle for their aspirations. Trishala is that doting mother who would come to confide in her son only when the father is not around. Ba, although a pleasant character, seemed like an omniscient character in Doshi's novel, "...look to the sky every day - for the sun and the moon signify eternal devotion of husband and wife; look to the sea - for love flows deep and you must be prepared to flow deeper; journey like the fish and the birds - because it is only those who agree to their own return who can participate in the divinity of the world." The characters of Babo and Sian, however, are quirky and they do have their own idiosyncrasies.

Doshi's novel is one that gives you a sense of déjà-vu in every chapter because although it might be biographical, she deals with themes in ways most writers would and have. The characters can be found in any film Dev Patel stars in. Nevertheless, her writing and language more than makes up for a read that will keep one thinking about the visuals long after finishing the book. "Madras looked overgrown, like an adult man insisting on wearing small-boy shorts." Or, "...the people pushing past the railings towards their unknowable futures might still smell of dust and tobacco, rosewater and jasmine; the air clinging to his clothes might still be as heavy as tar." Despite that, Doshi leaves the reader with the hope that desire and love are powerful.