



BOOK REVIEW: KARMA AND OTHER STORIES

By K. A. Patel

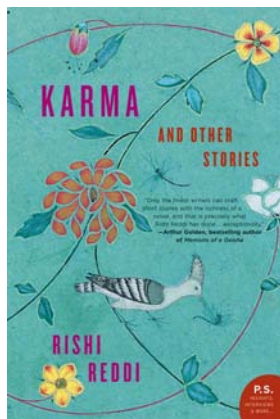
I recently went to an Ethnic Writers' Workshop and had the good fortune to meet a very talented, up-and-coming writer named Rishi Reddi. Her wonderful book, entitled *Karma and Other Stories*, is a collection of short stories about Indian Americans and their struggles with balancing their Eastern culture and background with their Western lives. She has gotten much praise for this debut collection of stories and has even won the prestigious 2008 L. L. Winship-PEN/New England award.

The book includes 7 short stories with characters that many in the Indian community will find familiar and be able to identify with. *The Validity of Love* and *Devadasi*, both about young women who struggle between traditional expectations and their own modern way of thinking, stand out as stories that most young Indian women growing up in America can relate to. *Lord Krishna*, a story about a boy that is singled in his high school because of his distinctly different name and culture, will also be familiar to many of us.

I think the stories that I found the most surprising and touching, however, were actually the ones about older characters, characters similar to many of the parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents we see in our Indian community. Rarely do we step out of ourselves and imagine how hard life must be for them, adjusting to a new culture and trying to find a way to reconcile the differences. *Justice Shiva Ram Murthy* and *Bangles* both have elderly characters, while *Lakshmi and the Librarian* and *Karma* have middle-aged characters.

I think my favorite stories were probably *Justice Shiva Ram Murthy*, which was about an ornery, old retired judge who is struggling to maintain his former dignity in the face of declining

health and having to adjust to living in America, where he is not as respected as in his native land, and also *Karma*, which is about a man who decides to move to the United States to live with his very successful younger brother but finds himself kicked out and having to make a start on his own when he doesn't meet his brother's expectations. All the stories were moving in their own way, and very enjoyable to read.



Rishi is very busy, but was able to answer a few questions for me. Check it out:

Q: *Why do you write?*

A: I write because I want to answer some questions for myself--I think I'm basically writing to the 20 year old woman that I was, explaining life, as I understand it, to her.

Q: *How did you get the idea for your book?*

A: There were certain circumstances that I wanted to explore--each of them became the main plot event for a story in the book.

Q: *What is the writing process like for you?*

A: It always seems like painful work in the beginning, then once the early drafts are done, it's far more fun.

Q: *Do you plot out your story or just see where your*

characters go?

A: I usually have a combination of both in mind: an interesting character and a main climactic event that I want to have happen.

Q: *Tell us a little about your next project.*

A: It's about the early South Asian immigrants who came to California in the 1910s and 1920s and settled down as farmers in the Imperial Valley.

For more information about Rishi Reddi and her debut novel, please check out her website <http://rishireddi.net>.

Top Bollywood Mothers

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Neetu Singh Kapoor

Neetu Singh starred with every top actor in the industry in her time and eventually married the cutest of the lot, Rishi Kapoor. She made no bones about giving up her acting career, a custom in the Kapoor family, claiming it was her personal choice only to manage her household and raise her children. She quickly became the foundation of the family and till date is known as the favorite Kapoor daughter-in-law. As a mother, son Ranbir Kapoor claims she has been ever doting and supportive of every choice he chose to make. By the same token, Neetu Singh openly admits to being her son's biggest fan, watching all his films and being a part of his career in any way that she can. Neetu Singh is also extremely attached to her only daughter, Riddhima who is now married and settled in Delhi.

Jaya Bachchan

Jaya Bachchan may be small in size, but the actress has lived life large and how. After marrying Amitabh Bachchan and being a part

of the blockbuster hit *Sholay*, she gave up acting to raise her children Shweta and Abhishek. Putting her husband on the backburner and focusing completely on her children, Jaya played an essential role in aiding Abhishek's entry into films. And in turn, Abhishek seeks the approval of his "Maa" in every major decision, professionally and otherwise. It was only when Jaya approved of Aishwarya Rai that he finally proposed to her and married her in an extravagant celebration.

Bollywood mothers have pretty much done it all on and off screen. And it doesn't look like they are about to give up anytime soon. The veteran actresses are ready to rock-n-roll into the new decade giving not only their children a run for their money but the younger actors too. On the occasion of Mother's Day, we salute all the mothers in the world—Bollywood and otherwise; for their sacrifices, their unconditional love and support; for just being Maa.