

[PDF] The Twentieth Wife: A Novel

Indu Sundaresan - pdf download free book

Books Details:

Title: The Twentieth Wife: A Novel

Author: Indu Sundaresan

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Description:

In *The Twentieth Wife*, first-time novelist Indu Sundaresan introduces readers to life inside a bejeweled, dazzling birdcage--the world of the Mughal Court's *zenana*, or imperial harem. Her heroine exercises power in the only way available to a woman in 17th-century India: from behind the veil. At the age of 8, Mehrunissa (the name means "Sun of Women") has already settled on her life's goal. After just one glimpse of his face, she wants to marry the Crown Prince Salim. And marry him she does, albeit some 26 years later, after overcoming the opposition of her family, an ill-starred early marriage, numerous miscarriages, and the scheming of other wives.

The story's gothic trappings have a basis in fact. As Sundaresan writes in her afterword, the historical Mehrunissa exercised far more power than was usually allotted to an empress, issuing coins in her own name, giving orders, trading, owning property, and patronizing the arts. (Curiously, the book ends just as Mehrunissa is ascending to the throne as empress, dwelling on her years of

powerlessness and struggle rather than those of her enormous political influence.) Although the empress was fabled in her time, we know next to nothing about the woman herself. Unfortunately, Sundaresan does little to flesh out this intriguing figure. Despite the vivid historical detail, the reader remains more aware of the author's presence--and her own contemporary take on women's issues--than of her characters' inner lives. --*Mary Park* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Publishers Weekly Sundaresan's debut is a sweeping, carefully researched tale of desire, sexual mores and political treachery set against the backdrop of 16th- and 17th-century India. It centers on the rise to prominence of Mehrunnisa, the beautiful, intellectually astute daughter of a Persian courtier to the Mughal emperor, Akbar. Mehrunnisa falls in love with Akbar's heir apparent, Salim (who later becomes Emperor Jahangir), in her childhood; although Jahangir comes to share her passion, fate and the dictates of his royal station keep them apart for much of the novel. It isn't until Mehrunnisa has weathered a disastrous, loveless marriage to the brutal soldier Ali Quli, several miscarriages and the jealous plotting of Jahangir's chief wife, Jagat Gosini, that she gets the chance to defy the male-dominated Mughal culture and become a savvy, powerful empress. Like most historical fiction, Sundaresan's novel takes its fair share of liberties with plot and characterization, but still endeavors to be factually accurate as much as possible. Sundaresan charts the chronology of the Mughal Empire, describing life in the royal court in convincing detail and employing authentic period terms throughout. Despite its descriptive strengths, however, the work doesn't quite convince as creative fiction. So much plot is squeezed into the novel that there's little time for character development. Mehrunnisa and Jahangir are wooden and one-dimensional creations, and matters aren't helped by the often stilted prose ("restlessness rose over her like tide on a beach"). Regardless of the wealth of edifying historical detail, this tale of palace intrigue is less than intriguing. 5-city West Coast author tour.

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