



EFFECTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE ON A COMMON MAN IN MODERN INDIA, IN ANJALI JOSEPH'S 'SARASWATI PARK'

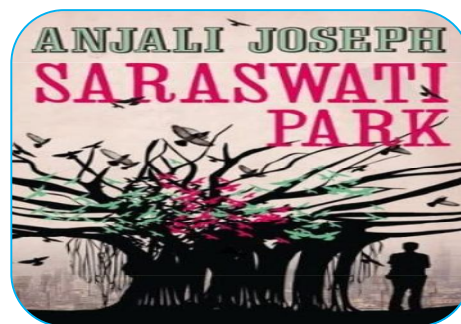
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ABSTRACT:

Anjali Joseph was born in Mumbai in 1978. Her family moved to England in 1985 and She, later studied English at Trinity college, Cambridge. She graduated in creative writing at the university of East Anglia in 2008.

Her first novel 'Saraswati Park' (2010), the story of letter writer, his wife and their nephew, set in Mumbai, is the debut novel, for which she was awarded the Betty Trask prize (2011). Desmond Elliott Prize (2011) and a Vodafone Crossword Book Award. The Royal Society Prize Nominee (2011). The Hindu Literary Prize Nominee (2010).



KEY WORDS: Social Change on Common Man, Anjali Joseph's Saraswati park.

INTRODUCTION

Her second Novel *Another Country* was longlisted for the 2012 Asian Literary Prize, and her third novel *The Living* was short listed for the DSC prize for South Asian Literature. Her latest novel *Keeping in Touch* is due to be issued in the UK in June 2022 by Scribe.

Saraswati Park by Anjali Joseph, is a case in point, while firmly evoking the smells and sounds of Mumbai. Joseph's focus is on issues with which it's easy to engage: the small frustrations of family life and the hopes and disappointments of relationships. *Saraswati Park* is a fascinating story about a simple family who lives in a suburban place named *Saraswati Park* in Mumbai. The novel has a vivid description of the city and the lives that are entwined within it.

The story is about Mohan Karekar, by profession a letter writer, who sits outside the General post office (GPO) in Mumbai, and helps to put other people's thoughts and feelings into words day on day.

The protagonists of the '*Saraswati Park*' are married couple, Lakshmi and Mohan Karekar who live in a quiet suburb area of *Saraswati Park* in Mumbai. All around them they see change as Mumbai transforms itself into an economic power house. Mohan is a part of the city's past, one of the few remaining professional 'letter writers' in a world that is fast embracing electronic communication.

Mohan spends his days under a tree near the post office where he writes letters for those who never learned to read or write. He once had ambitions of being a different kind of writer, one whose words would be published in a book form, but he had accepted that it is never going to happen. His children have left home, his marriage to Lakshmi has become dull and he seeks respite in collecting books and dreaming of a day when he can write his own book based on the stories that come to him in

his sleep. He derives small pleasure by visiting the street vendors, who sell second hand books at Fountain area.

His habit of buying these books is a source of much irritation for his wife. He is also a closet writer who also loves to read. Residing in a quiet suburban colony with his wife, Lakshmi, his life is a pretty and ordinary. Soon they are joined by Ashish a nineteen years old nephew who is studying English literature. The book then takes us on a journey of these three different individuals, who are deeply unsettled with their existence and are constantly striving to better it but are unable to do so.

Mohan spends his time in reading his books or attempts to write ignoring the tensions in his own marriage and Ashish, who is coming to terms with his own problems. Though Mohan and Lakshmi are battling their personal demons, they intentionally or unintentionally end up being a support system for each other. When Lakshmi loses her only brother, she decides to leave Mumbai under the pretext of helping an ailing relative, to mourn not only the death of a sibling but also the vital force of her marriage. Mohan finally realises the cracks in her marriage which he had been ignoring all along when there is no sign of Lakshmi's returning. He finally manages to take a few decisive steps to salvage it. Meanwhile Ashish befriends Sundar, his classmate and develops an unusual intimacy with him and ultimately practices sodomy. He is continuous to have such relationship with Professor Narayan. But Ashish's failed relationship with Sundar and Professor Narayan ends up breaking his heart but it also helps him find his peace. At last Ashish moves to abroad to pursue his higher studies. Mohan's dream of turning into a writer also soon starts taking shape.

'*Saraswati Park*' is about how the three main characters, Mohan, Lakshmi, and Ashish shared lives for a year. It talks about the adjustment they make, the roles they play, the food they eat, the journeys they make in the city, the love they secretly feel, the anger, the hurt, the joy the betrayal, etc. Ashish has two affairs with Sundar and Narayan and finally learns how complex love is. Mohan was busy reading books, and taking notes in their margins, Lakshmi goes from feeling merely tolerant of her marriage. The writer's success lies in the life, she breathes into these three characters.

Ashish is the catalyst for the narrative development. He is the instigator of Mohan's first effort to become a writer and the outlet for his aunt's affection and his presence that sustains Mohan through the troubled months when he fears Lakshmi has left him.

'*Saraswati Park*' is an endearing portrait of these three ordinary people. But there is a fourth equally important character in this novel. Vibrant, chaotic, full of sound and movement, yet capable of delivering moments of unexpected tranquillity. It is the product of Anjali Joseph's personal knowledge of the city, where she was born. She combines this with the objectivity of being able to view her home nation from a distance. Joseph moved to England with her family, at the age of seven though has regularly returned to Mumbai.

Mohan's desire to write and publish his books makes Lakshmi frustrated, because she feels that, his dreams make him distant from her, so she seeks company in television world. Lakshmi's frustration with their emotional detachment is beautifully portrayed by Anjali Joseph.

The sense of place which Joseph has created here, is wonderful, from the outset, one can feel the constant buzz and heat of Bombay and the always moving stream of people which fills its streets and alleyways.

The novel is also highly evocative of its characters. We are aware of Mohan and Lakshmi, their motivations, and their relationship with one another from very early on. Ashish too, is presented as a day dreamer, rather vague and unable to stick to one path. We come to know about the past lives of each of the characters in turn which gives them more solidity.

Joseph is aware of old and new Bombay and the sense of tradition and change within the city. She writes, for instance, "A hundred and fifty years earlier this had been the beach, before the land reclamations.... the rumble of the red buses, the taxi horns, the metallic steps of each person hurrying through the fort."

Lakshmi is frequently referred to as His wife (Mohan's wife) rather than by her name. This clearly represents the distance between the couple. In fact, when she leaves Mohan to visit her family,

her presence house seems to be adequately replaced by her cardigan, hanging over the back of the chair.

The novels consists of the minor domestic dramas, that we all live through. Joseph contrasts the inner and outer lives of her characters and the uneasy friction between new and old cultures with. All the wit and delicacy.

The strength of the novel is its everyday observations of Couple approaching their twilight years of a youngster just starting to find his feet in this world and discovering a city that is home to at least 14 million people expand to accommodate thousands more every day.

The novel is an elegantly realized portrait of unquitedlove, frustrate aspirations and the unspoken compromises of marriage and family. Joseph. neatly weaves the elements of the rapid Social change occurring in the ever expanding city but her principal concern is the more complex process of personal change, development and its butter sweet effects. Married life, in particular is often punctuated with unspoken silences which characterize unspoken compromises to sustain the existential pleasure and predicament as well.

Saraswati Park is a lovely piece of escapist fiction and with the richpicture, Joseph creates life in modern a India, it would be the perfect choice for even the most discerning armchair traveller.

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