



The Lost Flamingoes of Bombay

Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi

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When photographer Karan Seth comes to Bombay intent on immortalizing a city charged by celebrity and sensation, he is instantly drawn in by its allure and cruelty. Along the way, he discovers unlikely allies: Samar, an eccentric pianist; Zaira, the reclusive queen of Bollywood; and Rhea, a married woman who seduces Karan into a tender but twisted affair. But when an unexpected tragedy strikes, the four lives are irreparably torn apart. Flung into a Fitzeraldian world of sex, crime and collusion, Karan learns that what the heart sees the mind's eye may never behold. Siddharth Dhanvant Shangvi's *The Lost Flamingoes of Bombay* is a razor sharp chronicle of four friends caught in modern India's tidal wave of uneven prosperity and political failure. It's also a profoundly moving meditation on love's betrayal and the redemptive powers of friendship.

The Lost Flamingoes of Bombay Details

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From Reader Review The Lost Flamingoes of Bombay for online ebook

Pooja says

It was a good storyline but overdose of tragedy and somehow even though what's happening in the book is sad you don't feel for the characters.. This is one of the could have been books..

Kristy says

Shanghvi's prose is so laden with adjectives and metaphors that it is actually quite a triumph that the characters and plot come through at all. His descriptions are generally awkward (sometimes cringingly so), but occasionally poetic and apt. The same goes for his dialogue -- most of the time leaden and implausible, but occasionally moving and heartfelt. The writing made me want to hate this book, but I found myself drawn to the characters despite myself. Still, not recommended unless you have a lot of patience or an unquenchable thirst for descriptions of Bombay.

Bethany says

Dark ending, but beautiful descriptions of Bombay.

Ruchita says

You've heard all too often about a young, lost, upper-middle class 20-something in love with Bombay: the 'city that never sleeps', a cliche outdone only with old favourite, 'the spirit of Mumbai.' However, that is not what this book is really about. It's about - well, I'm not really sure what it's about. It clearly revolves around the murder of a famous model shot in a bar, inspired by the real life story of Jessica Lal, who was shot down in a Mumbai bar years ago. But what purpose that sub-plot serves, is beyond me. By the time I finished the book, I wondered why the author had included that whole bit in, as it clearly didn't go anywhere.

There are lots of scenes that seem there to serve as pure shock value more than anything else; done once, it's okay, but as the book progresses on, it quickly gets annoying. This book has its moments with satire, but only in terms of smart-ass cynical quips and one-liners from the characters.

Maybe one star seems too harsh. But if I had to be honest with myself, I really cannot pretend that I didn't dislike this book. After I turned the last page, it left a bitter taste in my mouth, prompted by a sentiment of WTFness and anger that I had spent 500 rupees for this tosh. Darn it.

Dilesh Bansal says

I love reading Shanghi's elaborately picturesque prose.

I kind of like the way he forebodes important scenes with some metaphor mostly using some animal. Like an innocent sparrow dying by hitting into the courtroom fan just before the verdict.

It seems there are portions in the book when he is at his creative best, and there are portions where he gets engrossed in the plot and the prose becomes bland and dull.

Even if I can skim over the little too many sexual metaphors, one crib I have is there are portions in the book where i felt he crossed the limits of grossness (for my standards) and I had to skip these portions.

He certainly seems to express his anger against sections of society putting expletives in the mouth of his characters and the narrator.

The story is largely based on Jessica Lal murder case with some portions hinting of Divya Bharti murder, a drunk Salman Khan's driving over some homeless sleeping on the pavement, and references to Congress, Shiv sena and BJP, and so on...

Some interesting quotes :

Corruption is India (is) endemic. It is not the pollutant in the air. It is the air.

You've given me a friend I can believe in when everything around me is falling like a pack of cards.

Even if life would divide them, this night, its stillness and longing would remain unextinguished

Sundarraj Kaushik says

A book about a set of characters from the high-society in Bombay. The book revolves around the life of a gifted photographer, Karan, from Simla who has moved to Bombay to make his living. As an assignment he is asked to photograph a gay pianist who has stopped playing piano and is now living with his american boyfriend. Karan manages to take not so flattering photographs of the pianist and on the basis of these he manages to get a private photography session with the pianist. On the side Karan is also planning to document Bombay through a set of photographs.

As he is photographing the pianist the leading Bollywood lady who is the pianist's close friend tumbles into the scene. She has just been harassed by a big-shot politician's son while her shooting for the latest film was going on. Karan exercises discretion and does not photograph the scenes between these two as it unveils before him. He is introduced to this lady and she becomes his friend too. He is also introduced to the pianist's boyfriend for whom he takes an instant dislike.

On learning that Karan wishes to document Bombay through his photographs the Bollywood actress suggests that he visit Chor Bazar for some interesting photographs and asks him to also look for what is known as Bombay Fornicator for her.

When he finally visits the Chor Bazar he meets up with a rich married lady, Mrs. Dalal an amateur potter, who shows him that the Bombay fornicator happens to be a chair of the colonial era which provides for easy fornication. When she learns that he is looking to documenting Bombay through his photographs and after looking at the quality of his photographs, she offers to drive him around Bombay to interesting places. One of the places she takes him to are the mudflats at Sewri which play a host to flamingos which come there during their migration. During the right season one can see thousands and thousands of flamingos roosting in these mudflats.

He also starts visiting her at her house. They end up discussing each other's life and he learns that her husband is away for most of the times in Singapore and that she had given up her budding career as a potter to get married to her husband who wooed her from even when they were teenagers. She also reveals that she has failed to conceive and this makes her husband distressed. One thing leads to another and they end up having an affair.

In the meantime as a part of promotion for an up coming film the Bollywood actress becomes a bar-tender for a night. On this fateful night the obsessed politician's son walks up to ask her for a drink after the bar has closed and she refuses to give him one as the bar has closed. The politico's son loses his head in the rage of being refused and shoots her dead. Both the pianist and Karan happen to be in the bar, but are not witness to this incident. They come only after the event has occurred.

A case is put against the politico's son. But the political bigwig pulls all strings and only Karan and the pianist end up deposing against this son. All others pretend they are unaware of the exact turn of events and due to the dilution of witnesses the politico's son goes scot-free angering both the pianist and Karan.

In the meantime the pianist's boy-friend who is a writer of some credibility wishes to write a book on the incident and the case, but the pianist appeals to him to not write anything and this starts the break between them. The boyfriend also realizes that he is suffering from AIDS. Karan and the pianist end up arguing and Karan asks the pianist "Ask your boyfriend where he got AIDS from?". This angers the pianist and he and his boyfriend end up heading to America.

He also ends up having an argument with Mrs. Dalal. She has also become pregnant. He ends up calling her up at odd times and in presence of her husband who has by now become suspicious, but when he realizes that she is pregnant he is very happy. She tries to lie to him that Karan is a telemarketeer who has been bothering her, but when one day Karan walks up to her house and confronts her in presence of her husband who ends up trashing him, she is forced to cook up another story which seems to satisfy her husband. They both move to Singapore and Karan who now no longer works the way he used to gets fired from his job. His mentor in the publication is torched during the Bombay riots of 1993.

He applies for a teaching job in UK and moves there for three years.

Mrs. Dalal comes back to Bombay for the child's delivery in the same hospital in which her husband was born. Mr. Dalal's happiness knows no bounds. One day before they are expected to go back to their home from the hospital after the delivery the nurse carrying the child is bitten by a monkey and the child falls down to its death. Mr. Dalal goes into a depression which leads to more arguments between him and Mrs. Dalal and in the process she blurts out her affair with Karan. Mr. Dalal disappears for good.

Karan has an affair with the mother of a child whom he has taught, but is not able to commit himself and comes back to Bombay. He tries his hand at teaching, but fails to get along with the principal of the school. He then takes up a job in a call center and works in the night shift.

The pianist comes back to Bombay after finding many of his friends in America dying. His boyfriend has moved to New York and is taking treatment and writing from there and their relationship is beyond repair.

He is suffering from AIDS and is moving towards his death.

Karan happens to read about his presence in a Newspaper and comes to meet him. They end up as friends and Karan spends time with the pianist during the last stages of his life. After his death Karan gets back to photographing and publishes a book on Bombay as he had planned earlier. Mrs. Dalal, now living alone, sees this book and buys it. One fine day they bump into each other and end up sitting in a bench sponsored by Karan in memory of the pianist. They discuss their current life and try to forgive each other for what happened in the past. But that is their last meeting as Karan reveals his plan to go back to his hometown Simla.

One can find many incidents that have happened in real-life India being weaved into the book. This will provide a *deja-vu* reading for the reader familiar with the incidents.

Dulce says

Não conhecia o autor (nem sequer consigo pronunciar o seu nome) e nunca ouvira falar deste livro, mas o título despertou-me curiosidade e a sinopse na contracapa fez o resto. E que livro, este! Um romance que nos transporta até à exótica e vibrante Bombaim (hoje, Mumbai) e que nos revela uma Índia cosmopolita, cuja sociedade se rende e se prostra perante Bollywood e as suas vedetas. Ao longo das páginas encontramos belas passagens sobre amor, amizade e tudo aquilo a que ambos resistem, mas a história centra-se sobretudo num acontecimento trágico que altera de forma indelével a vida de todas as personagens: o homicídio de uma estrela de cinema, Zaira.

Embora o autor faça questão de, numa nota introdutória, esclarecer que o livro é ficção, reconhece ali que foi «inspirado por uma série de acontecimentos amplamente discutidos nos órgãos de comunicação social, em filmes e na televisão». Finda a leitura e depois de alguma pesquisa, percebi que se refere ao caso Jessica Lall, modelo indiana assassinada em Nova Deli no ano de 1999, por Manu Sharma, filho de um então ministro do Governo indiano. E com base nesta história verídica o autor tece de forma subtil, uma feroz crítica social, entrelaçada com outras histórias que nos levam a reflectir sobre temas omnipresentes nos romances, desde amor, amizade, fidelidade, etc. Há ainda um enorme foco no mundo da fotografia e na forma como ela pode influenciar o nosso olhar sobre as coisas, sobre o mundo. E também um olhar límpido sobre a homossexualidade e como esta é encarada na sociedade indiana.

Num todo, o livro oferece não só uma visão muito interessante sobre a maior cidade da Índia, mas também um olhar perscrutante sobre a sociedade contemporânea e a teia volátil na qual se move, seja aqui, seja em Bombaim.

"

- Devíamos sair.

- Posso olhar para as tuas mãos antes de o fazermos?

Ela estendeu-lhas.

Ele estudou as veias, o elegante entrecruzar nos seus pulsos.

Rhea susteve a respiração.

Quando Karan lhas soltou, ela sentiu-se uma âncora a cair no leito do mar. "Quero que o amor me deixe em paz durante algum tempo".

- Não sei se vou ficar muito tempo em Bombaim - disse ele, avançando com a sua indisponibilidade geográfica. - Posso mudar-me. Viajar. Bombaim perdeu-me, Rhea.

- Presumo que o brilho se gaste.

- Não há espaços abertos. Há edifícios por todo o lado. Não sei para onde olhar, excepto para o céu.

Ela estava espantada; há alguns anos o mesmo homem esperara no fim da sua rua para captar um vislumbre dela, lutara com o seu marido no seu território, e ali estava ele hoje, à procura de caminhos de saída. Aquilo que atraía um homem podia acabar por repugná-lo; ela sabia isso de uma experiência que não se restringia a Karan.

"

Ashley says

The book was very poetic and descriptive. It was fraught with emotion: love, sorrow, and happiness. The book was well written and very enjoyable.

Kaia says

Great sense of place.

Siria says

I couldn't manage to finish this book. The prose is terrible, full of sexual metaphors so appallingly awful that it seemed as if the book had been written by an immature 12 year old desperate for attention. Feeling wary after the first chapter, I flipped forward through the book to find: "Glee dripped out of Natasha like precum"; "smugness blasted out of her face like a fart"; "Priya had a crusty librarian's voice, one that could only be relieved by a dildo." All are phrases that certainly got my attention, but only by pointing towards the author's lack of talent, sexism, and transphobia (there's a line about a drag queen that just... ugh). Avoid.

Charles Chettiar says

good. dazzling

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

Do I like the cover?: Not really. It feels like a throwaway. As Karan's photography is the focus of the novel, I would have loved a black and white photo of Bombay instead.

Review: This novel is a bit like a tabloid-tell-all, set in Bombay, and I mean that in the best way. A reclusive pianist, a Bollywood star, a repressed artist, a Nick Carraway-ish photographer: the cast is appropriately superficial and self-destructive and yet, as we -- and Karan Seth, the outsider-turned-insider -- discover, there's depth and passion and fear.

I wasn't sure what I was getting into as the jacket blurb is fairly vague (but mentions Fitzgerald, which caught my interest). There is a sort of Fitzgerald feel to the novel -- the glitzy tragedy of those who invite heartbreak and disaster -- but Shanghvi managed to make (most) of the characters real enough that I still felt for them. A kind of frenetic sadness infuses the story, which is part bildungsroman, part crime thriller, part celebrity exposé.

There's a real crudity in the writing but I found it emphasized the frenzy of celebrity, the repressed sexual nature of the characters and the world they lived in. Sensitive readers will likely be turned off by the language and at times it felt nearly misogynistic but isn't entirely out-of-place given the tone of the novel.

Whereas Shanghvi's narrative prose had me in swoons, I found his dialogue stiff, stilted, and unbelievable. I think the attempt was to make the characters sound superficial but it read, for me, inauthentic and archaic. (Shanghvi has the characters using some very odd, dated slang and I kept flipping to the front of the book to see if this was a problem with translation.) Honestly, it felt like two different people were at work in this book.

At times, the novel felt a little long: enormous day-to-day detail around some events and then a leap of four years or ten years. The expansion and growth of the characters was appealing, but for me, the story would have had more *oomph* if it stopped sooner. In this case, the pathetic ends weren't poignant or moving, but simply sad, draining the tension that had been so deliciously built up.

Neha says

Siddharth Dhanwant Sanghvi warmed my heart with his first book 'The Last Song of the Dusk'. I wanted more of him but was scared what if it fails to recreate the same magic. Then I read that he only wrote one book post that and has now retired from the writing world. I wondered what could be the reason for such a talented and soulful writer that some negative criticism would lead to him giving up the love of his life – WRITING. Surely I had to read the book.

To read more:

<http://storywala.blogspot.in/2011/09/...>

Sreesha Divakaran says

This review originally appeared on Rain and a Book

The Lost Flamingoes of Bombay is a book that you don't really need to read. Think of all the crimes committed by celebrities/politicians/sons-of-the-baap-in-tu-jaanta-hai-mera-baap-kaun-hai, blend in a little bit of this, a cupful of that, and you have a mishmash of a "novel", allegedly "fictional", that gives the tabloid treatment to serious issues.

Let me begin by saying how smitten I was by Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi's first novel, *The Last Song of Dusk*. Set during the pre-independence era, that melancholy novel with its palaces and magical realism, tragedies and romances enthralled me. Maybe it's just grown grander in memory. Maybe if I go back to it, I'll read it without the rose-tinted glasses. Or maybe, it really was as good as I remember it to be.

If his name wasn't on the cover in big bold letters, I wouldn't have believed it was the same author that wrote both these books. Why, Shanghvi, why? How, Shanghvi, how?!

For the rest of this review, please visit Rain and a Book

Caroline says

A photographer looking to capture the hidden beauty and truth of Bombay, a semi-retired pianist and his American writer boyfriend, a beautiful Bollywood actress, a married woman who sacrificed her pottery ambitions for her husband and a politician. On the surface, the book is about how their lives intersect and what they do for love, the love of a friend, the love of a soul-mate, the love in a torrid affair and the love (or guilt) of a parent.

But look deeper and we're treated to the dirty inside scoop to Indian political corruption at its best, and how even a murder committed in plain sight of 200 people can be covered up, if one only has the power to bribe and threaten everyone involved.

The complexities of human relationships are also placed under the microscope and what motivates people into making certain decisions.

I wasn't bowled over by it, but neither did I detest it. I think it makes a fun beach read.
