

A Love Soaked Science Fiction

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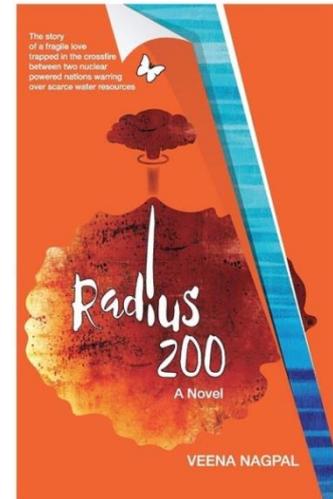
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Author-Veena Nagpal



Love as the music of soul, divinely entwines two into one and transports the lovers into a state of mystic trance. The undying spirit of love permeates the entire cosmos, and also manifests itself in huge dollops in “Radius 200”, an engaging book by Veena Nagpal. She is an Indian author of great prominence, who has made a significant contribution to the society by penning down variety of books of mega acclaim. As the ardent readers traverse along the pages of Radius 200, the characters come alive, one after another and keep them mesmerised by a remarkably poignant, sombre yet evocative story. The readers remain enthralled and spellbound, engrossed by the author’s vivid and lucid account of love in its purest form of sacrifice and hope, and in its blemished form of green-eyed monster of jealousy. She has spanned an intriguing and fascinating tale, in the backdrop of a ghastly and chilling aftermath of nuclear explosion, unleashed on humanity. One can remember very well how the talks or the literary layouts of any explosion remains fresh in our minds, especially when we take the Hiroshima and the Nagasaki incidents and the bombing of the Pearl Harbour into consideration. This book also highlights the extensive quest for water, which is life in itself and lays paramount emphasis on the dire need of conservation of water bodies in the wake of country’s burgeoning population and its depleting treasure house of resources. In fact, the constant emphasis on the output of saline and potable water, and the ideas of mass population striving thirsty, are some of the most burning social issues which the author has skilfully highlighted.

The story is a captivating depiction of a love triangle among the childhood friends, Kyra, the protagonist and daughter of General Pandit, Arjun Sharma, the scientist and Colonel Om Prakash. Both men are caught enamoured with the same woman, Kyra. Gayatri, the seductive singing sensation and adopted daughter of General Fernandez who is infatuated with Om succeeds to whisk him away from Kyra, in the event of nuclear explosion by China on Fatehpur, to exclusion zone, which is stamped as such by a radius of two hundred kilometers from Fatehpur. Kyra loses her only love in life, yet her hope lives on, for it is like a candle flame, standing unwavering in a windless room.



This gives us a glimpse of love in its ethereal form, whereby Kyra never enters into wedlock and keeps aflame her hope that Om is still alive. Gayatri, on the other hand, seething with jealousy and rejection, stoops low to steal Om from the face of civilization, although, she does take care of his immobile self with full devotion. Neither is Arjun able to marry the girl of his dreams, nor Kyra and Om succeeding to tie the nuptial knot. Thus we embark on the journey of a poignant tale, where love often evades lives of people.

The Author plants the seeds of few more characters in the exclusion zone. With the passage of time they sprout into the shape of Jiji, Gayatri herself, her two sons, the benevolent Chief, loved and admired by all in the clan and jealous cunning hunchback Clubfoot, Mina his wife who secretly nurtures love and passion for the Chief, their sons Gogi and Murli, who follow Clubfoot everywhere to and fro. Om lay disfigured, motionless, and unable to even voice his thoughts in a rusted cot. Life in exclusive zone is hard, land scorched, infested with lizards and ants. Daily needs are met with only two glasses of water per head coupled with frugal food of roasted ants, lizards, rats, green vegetation every day. As time elapses, food and water became scarce, and if no alternative sources are unearthed, people will have to stare into the face of death. This becomes all-pervasive here as relationships are pitted against death in all possible means. The novel is not just a celebration of life, but with lines, instances of personal conflicts and the overall ideas of narrative potentiality, the book aims at creating a specific place in the domain of Indian writing.

Facing the imminent death due to the dearth of water, both brothers go in their separate directions in their quest. After many days, Chief returns empty handed, still people shower loads of respect and affection on him. This ignites the flames of jealousy in Club foot, and inspite of his abortive attempt once, again he decides to surrender his little son Gogi at the sacrificial altar to invoke the rain gods. Club foot who is never able to accept the sense of awe and admiration people hold for his brother, ultimately stabs him to death. Nonetheless, fate has other plans, as one day he too succumbs to death. The law of karma catches up with every one eventually.

Here, the author denigrates the people afflicted with the malaise of superstition even in modern era. The specifications of the events in exclusive zone are sketched out so realistically that the plot appears harmoniously knitted into a perfect unit. The indomitable will to survive in most hostile situation also calls for wholehearted mention.

Further, the author presents again a realistic depiction of Indo–China strained relations and the role played by the Defence, their challenges, disposition and allegiance. Back in civilisation, the search for river Saraswati, which has hibernated herself in subterranean layers of earth ensures itself, due to depleting water levels of Ganga and Yamuna, and diversion of water of river Brahmaputra by China. The interesting characters come into play as General Fernandez, the then GOC in C Eastern Command of the Indian Army, in an attempt to prevent neighbouring China from ‘stealing’ an entire river, blows up the largest dam ever conceived. “A new dam - the world’s largest hydroelectric facility - come up just five years later and the Brahmaputra is diverted anyway by China. To the utter dismay of

Kyra, rumours make rounds, branding Om a traitor and deserter; he is alleged of passing sensitive information to the Chinese. This part obviously shows the novelist's reading of the current international situation, a keen and precise journalistic output and the

As the events unfold the world inside and outside the exclusion zone, finds itself entangled in perilous situation of water crisis, where death looms large on their heads.

Om miraculously, by a bolt of lightning, gains his lost old memories. Thereon he recollects how Curly D Souza accesses this laptop and leaks all the important information to China. He is also reminded of how he is made a part of Jaldhara operation to blow the dam and how he escapes to foist Kyra's wedding to Arjun as he reveals all the secrets to General Pandit. Kyra, on the other hand attends the water conservation conference and painstakingly gains permission to enter the exclusive zone to search Om. The book becomes almost a living social document of all the pervasive and socially impervasive forces that coalesce to allow man to see how fate, chance and metaphysical coincidence mix and create a living zone for them.

By a stroke of luck, river Saraswati, seeing the wails and distress of her people, decides to gush forward through the crack caused by an earthquake in exclusion zone and saves both the worlds. Kyra, takes back Om and few others to Delhi. However, her meeting with her beloved is short-lived as he breathes his last on the way. Having known all about the innocence of Om, kya, as a remarkable woman, bestows the sublime virtue of forgiveness on Arjun.

Though, it also needs to be stated that the love scenes could have been made a little more sensuous and passionate with few truckloads of emotions. They appear blander and rather quick. Secondly, compared to other arenas touched, the fragrance and flavour of love could have been further bloomed if projected in a little more detailed manner. Eventually, after so many years of patient waiting Kyra does find her love, but, the ecstasy of this out of world meeting is cut short by the sudden demise of Om on his way back to New Delhi. Om's death is a major turning point in enhancing the intensity of the climax in the book, and this comes out as a major revelation to the readers. This is the part where the writer becomes silent and each and every poignant portion of death-afflicted near and dear ones are enumerated with boldness, ideas of depth and remembrance of the loved one.

In a nutshell, the story keeps the readers glued to the pages of the book, as they peel away layers of the tale with much anticipation. The author tries to send two most powerful messages, one being, without proper preservation of natural resources, there will be destruction of the environmental harmony and everything will be out of gear and in doldrums. Undoubtedly, science is sometimes a bane rather than a boon. Nuclear weapons are of no good besides causing mass destruction of human lives and making the world inhabitable.