



## Starcursed

*Nandini Bajpai*

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In the ancient city of Ujjayani, the planets align to decide the fate of two starcursed lovers. Born under the curse of Mars, brilliant and beautiful Leelavati, daughter of the famed astronomer Bhaskarya Acharya of Ujjayani, knows she can never wed. But when her childhood playmate, the handsome and rich Rahul Nagarseth, returns from sea, their attraction is rekindled under stormy monsoon skies. As Leela, forced by fate to relinquish Rahul, tries to find solace in teaching at her fathers observatory, a fleeting alignment of the stars is discovered that can help overcome her curse. But Rahul is called away on a war to defend his kingdom. Can he return in time or will she lose him forever to the will of the planets?

Set in turbulent twelfth century India, against the backdrop of the savage wars waged by Muhammad of Ghor and his band of Turkis, Starcursed is a sweeping tale of science, romance and adventure that will transport its readers to another world.

## Starcursed Details

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Author : Nandini Bajpai

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## From Reader Review Starcursed for online ebook

### **Bookish Indulgences with b00k r3vi3ws says**

Leelavati, the daughter of the famed astronomer Bhaskarya Acharya of Ujjaini, is a beautiful woman with a thirst for knowledge and a bad birth chart when it comes to marital options. She is nurtured and encouraged to learn by her parents and her father allows her to teach at the observatory. Bhaskarya Acharya, worried for his daughter, builds a water clock so as to ascertain and auspicious moment that would allow his daughter to get married. But due to an accident, the clock stops working and the moment passes by without anyone being any wiser. On the other hand we have our hero, the rich and handsome and brave Rahul, who is prepared to marry her irrespective of her birth charts. But Leelavati is in two minds... will these star-cursed lovers ever find their happily ever after?

Leelavati is an adorable character who shows strength and vulnerability at the same time. Rahul is also up to his part of a leading character. I liked Leelavati's father a lot. He is progressive and really loves his daughter. The other supporting characters are also all very well placed and developed. The storyline is not something outstandingly good, but it exceeded my expectations from the book - especially with the twist at the end. The only thing that I can think of that needs a bit improvement is the narration style which is about average and slows down the pace a bit.

The highlight of the book is the way that the author has managed to portray the lives of people in Ujjaini during that period. The caste systems and the status of women in those days are portrayed very well.

Overall I enjoyed reading this book and would definitely recommend it to people looking for some quality IWE books.

<http://www.b00kr3vi3ws.in/2014/03/Sta...>

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### **ananya ranjan says**

Absolutely lovely book. It had that unique charm that I can rarely find and I keep coming back to it. I generally don't reread a book until at least a year after I've read it before, but I've gone through this one so many times I have it practically memorized. Definitely recommended.

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### **RunedNephilumGirl says**

As a fan of YA, I wasn't really sure when I picked up Red Turban White Horse. That surprised me, because I really liked it, so I started to read this. I managed to finish it, and I also liked some parts, but it was a snoozefest. A huge snoozefest. Backwardness, superstitions... O.K. plot, wasn't really my taste. Too cliché, and in the legend, this isn't what actually happens, so well. I didn't like it that much.

Sorry, this book just wasn't my cup of tea....

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## Medha says

### A clean and engaging historical fiction

The writer has very beautifully narrated a 12th century story in all its intricacies from a 15 year old girl's eyes. This is not a regular steamy nor dreamy romance, it captures scientific details in a very engaging way while taking us through a decent heart warming story.

I loved the way historical events are woven together in a trade background. This will make a beautiful movie.

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## Nicole Hewitt says

This review and many others can be found on my blog - Feed Your Fiction Addiction

*Starcursed* is a sweet YA historical romance that captured my heart. A story of truly star-crossed lovers.

### The negatives:

The cover.

While I love the background with the moon and stars and a distant city, the illustrators managed to make the beautiful Leela look downright ugly. It's a shame, since I love to see a little diversity on my covers!

### What I loved:

The setting.

I don't read historical fiction very often (unless it's with my kids for homeschooling), but this book almost sounded like it could pass for fantasy with the focus on Leela being *Starcursed*. I'm so glad that I gave it a try. Really plenty of fantasy authors could almost have based their societies on 12th century India. The culture and setting are rich in magnificent details - the monsoon season, and what it means to the people; gender roles and arranged marriages; a war with the Turkis; a smallpox outbreak; the belief in astrology - add in a little bit of magic and it could easily pass for fantasy. Which is why I enjoyed it so much. I LOVED that I got all of this rich worldbuilding - but with the knowledge that this was a real historical culture that I was learning about. This added an extra layer of interest!

Leela.

I absolutely adored Leela. She was everything I love in a heroine - incredibly intelligent (her genius truly saves the day at one point in this book), yet caring and compassionate. She is strong-willed, but she doesn't throw her family's reputation and culture aside for her own desires. She respects them and wants to please them (though she sometimes breaks the mold anyway). Leela wrestles with the astrological beliefs of her society. On the one hand, her father, the man she respects more than anyone in the world, has taught her that the stars can truly affect her destiny. On the other hand, she doesn't feel like the horrible person her astrological reading insists she should be. This doubt brings her hope - hope that perhaps she can truly overcome her destiny - but it doesn't erase her fear.

Rahul.

Again, pretty much the perfect leading man. Rahul is intelligent, but not prideful, strong and capable in

battle, but he doesn't have a warrior's spirit. He understand Leela in a way that no one else ever really can. And though there are many obstacles that stand in their way (religion, caste, the stars), Rahul and Leela seem meant for one another.

The story. I found myself captivated by this story in so many ways. I didn't know how the romance between Leela and Rahul would work itself out (or if it would - the legend that's told at the beginning of the book didn't have a happy ending, and I wasn't sure if the book would either), so I was definitely waiting with bated breath to find out how it would all play out!

I highly recommend this book to YA readers who enjoy historical romance (or even fantasy!) I give it 5/5 stars.

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*\*\*\*Disclosure: This book was provided to me by the author in exchange for an honest review. No other compensation was given. All opinions are my own\*\*\**

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## Ally says

I won a copy from Goodreads First Reads.

Starcursed is such an adorable book. I wanted to awe all over it (without drooling). It's so cute with these two starcrossed lovers. I love the twists in this book, each one bringing the book closer and closer to its end. I didn't want to stop reading it, but alas all good things come to an end. It's simply the way of the world.

Starcursed is an spectacular book. It makes my eyes so starry-eyed. I fell in love with the book around the third chapter. It took awhile for me to adjust to the language, but overall it's amazing. I love everything about it (well, mostly). I love how it was written.

The plot is not exactly up to my standards, but it's good enough. There's a good plot twist at the end, which is probably the best part of the book. The beginning annoyed me slightly because it wasn't going fast enough. Also, the synopsis isn't written up correctly. The point of the synopsis is to not tell what happens in the middle of the story. And yet it did. (I guess I'm a hypocrite now. Never mind, this is just one thing I'm complaining about).

The writing didn't suck me in. It wasn't what draw me into the story. (Okay, what draw me in was the romance and Rahul and Leelavati). Anyway, I wish the writing was more compelling, although I did love the touch of humor, especially towards the end of the book.

Next up is... Rahul, no, the pacing. Once again, I have to say this: The pacing is a little too slow. Okay, now I'm going to move one. Rahul is one hottie. (Total LOL moment). He's a total warrior, and his royal friend is totally the best. One thing to say about Rahul is that he totally picks the right people as friends and family.

Leela, a totally idiot at certain times, has dry humor, but is true at heart. I love how complicated she can get; Rahul and Leela are truly a good match (too good, in my opinion, but this is a novel so it's not a big problem. If it is a series, then it is).

Rating: Four out of Five

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## Maniparna Sengupta majumder says

<http://maniparna5002.wordpress.com/>

It's not an easy task to weave historical facts with imagination to build up a story . Often the venture on the part of the author goes awry. But Nandini Bajpai 's Starcursed is an exception. Set on the backdrop of twelfth-century India it is a story where historical facts get mingled flawlessly with imagination giving rise to a sweeping tale , the tale of a girl who has that intelligence and knowledge to challenge and change the age old dogmas and doctrines .

Bhashkaracharya was a renowned Indian astronomer and mathematician who authored a book named Siddhanta Shiromoni . The book has four parts of which the arithmetic portion is said to be named after his daughter Leelavati . According to the legend Leelavati was extremely talented and grew up to be a beautiful maiden but according to her birth-chart , she was a Mangalik ( assignment of Mars in a wrong place which could lead to a disastrous married life ) and so was left unwed . However Bhashkaracharya , after much calculation precised a moment which could evade that curse of the star and wanted her daughter to get married on that precious moment. But Leelavati , being curious leant over the water clock made by her father to remind them of that rare moment and one pearl from her necklace fell into it making a blockage. The auspicious moment passed without being noticed and she was left unwed for her life .Taking cue from this story , Nandini Bajpai has created the character of Leelavati in her novel Starcursed.

Twelfth century was a turbulent period as the country was facing the war threat of Muhammad of Ghor and his band of Turkis . Muhammad of Ghor came victorious in many battles and stories of his violence and brutality has made him an infamous character in history. It was this time when Leelavati was born to Bhashkaracharya and his wife . Leelavati's talent was recognized immediately by her father who taught her along with his other students and she proved her superiority in no time. Bhashkarcharya was the head of the observatory of Ujjayini and so Leela grew up to be proficient not only in Mathematics but also astrology . She was aware of her horoscope and so when she got attracted to her childhood playmate and classmate Rahul Nagarseth , she was determined not to reveal her true feelings in front of Rahul . Rahul , a Jain by religion fell in love with Leela but when he expressed his love to her , it remained unrequited which hurt him. Rahul was not aware of Leela being a Mangalik so he failed to fathom the reason behind Leela's silence. Meanwhile , Rahul's step-mother ,the Sethani , arranged his engagement with Roopmati , the beautiful daughter of the Oswal 's , another big business family who was equally rich and famous like the Jagatseths .

Incidents began to happen fast as Leelavati and her family returned to Ujjayini from Anhilwara.

Bhaskaracharya allowed Leela to teach students in his school and Leela eventually became more proficient in every field of Ganit , Falit Ganit and Jyotish . She even learnt Chinese so that she could decipher the Chinese manuscripts on astrology. Rahul , on the other hand , was busy to train a band of warriors under Prince Subhrata of Malwa so that they would be competent enough to stand against Muhammad of Ghor and his forces . As Rahul returned to Ujjayini , Leela again found herself deeply in love with him and finally she explained everything to Rahul ....that being herself a Mangalik she never wanted to bring ill fate on the person she loved most . Rahul accepted the fact with an open mind and logically inferred that nothing in life actually depended on the alignment of stars . Their love was true and pure and that it had the power to conquer everything , even ill fate.

But to a society , conservative and cautious , it was a blasphemy. Bhashkaracharya , in the meantime , found out an auspicious moment to join Leelavati with a suitable young man in the holy wedlock . Rahul was defending his kingdom far away against the Turks . Would it be possible for him to return in time to save her beloved from getting married to a wrong person ? Would the society and their family permit such an inter-

religion marriage ? And Leelavati ? how should she react against her family ? against the stars ? The book is not only a love story , it's a story about racing against Time , it's the fight of Leela to stop time for her. The narration is a proof that the author has studied extensively before writing this book. Different astronomical terms of ancient India , quotes from the Leelavati section of Siddhanta Shiromoni have been used to make the narration realistic to the twelfth century .

The condition of society at that time , the narrow mindedness and beliefs of the high society that they should even avoid the shadows of the people of lower classes to retain their sanctity , the class-conscious attitude of the Brahmins , the shrewd nature of eminent scholars and the chicanery they used to play to prove their supremacy , everything has been depicted impeccably and the readers find themselves almost transported to a time long past .

Coming to characterization , the protagonist Leelavati has been depicted as an intelligent , learned and compassionate woman. She has all those qualities to be an obedient daughter , a serious teacher , a notable orator , a beloved friend and a good wife . The pivotal character of Rahul Nagarseth has been delineated to complement that of Leela . But even the other characters like Sethani , the astrologer across the river , Bittan,Mahendra , Lokasamudra and Bhaskaracharya and Leela's mother , have been portrayed painstakingly with minute details.

The language is like a smooth flowing stream devoid of any bombastic effect . The author has succeeded to hold up the pace and tension till the end of the story and there lies her credit .

Things I don't like

The cover : It looks like some children fairly-tale as we see a dark-complexioned lady is sitting on a crescent moon under a sky-full of stars .Though it's not fair to judge a book by it's cover but people who do that might become disinterested to dig through .

The engagement between Rahul and Roopmati was terminated without any fuss . Was it really possible in those days to do such thing so easily ? more so when two big business houses were involved in the matter ? Small pox scars were big things at that time. It was not possible to erase the scar marks so easily once one became a victim of the dreadful disease.

The book is , otherwise , really enjoyable and gives a feel-good sensation once you finished reading . I recommend it for all readers .

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## Kjui 81 says

This book is about the enigmatic Leelavati, after whom the great mathematician and astronomer Bhaskaracharya named his book on arithmetic. The book Leelavati is a part of Siddhanth Shiromani, The Crest Jewel of Astronomy. Many of the verses in the book are addressed to Leelavati who according to legend, was Bhaskaracharya's daughter. Due to a short coming in her birth chart, Leelavati was destined to remain unwed. However, her father calculated an auspicious moment for her to wed and built a water clock that would determine the exact time for her to marry. Leelavati looked into the water clock and a jewel fell from her head blocking the clock and thus the auspicious moment passed by without anyone realizing it.

This is a love story set in 12th century India. Leelavati is depicted as a strong woman who is intelligent and interested in learning all that her father has to offer. Her father recognizing her talent, allows her to teach at his observatory which is considered forward for a woman in those times. Leelavati's parents foster her love for learning as they feel that it would be in her best interest to have that avenue open as her marital prospects do not look promising due to her birth chart.

Leelavati is in love with her childhood friend, the son of the Nagarseth and she does not want to put his life in jeopardy by marrying him. He is eager to marry her inspite of her birth chart but she is in a dilemma

regarding how much weightage should she lay on her birth chart and whether to go ahead with his proposal.

Bajpai has created a delightful young lady in Leelavati - charming, witty, smart, adventurous and full of joie de vivre. The book takes the reader to Ujjayani, the city Leelavati is from and gives a glimpse into the lives of the people in those times - the pronounced caste system, the sharp distinction between men and women's roles, the societal practices and much more. The love story is narrated with great sensitivity and stirs the reader. The book is filled with excitement all throughout and there is never a dull moment. Bajpai does a great job in arousing the reader's curiosity regarding whether fate will allow the young hearts to unite. This YA book is written in simple, mellifluous language which makes it a pleasure to read.

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### **Maith says**

Growing up, Rosemary Sutcliff was one of my favorite authors - her weaving of daily life into "History" was so masterful, it felt like one was there. Nandini achieves the same effect with Starcursed. Bhaskaracharya and Lilavati is a story that makes me sad, but Starcursed changed that for the better beautifully. I should mention, I bought the book for my 12-year old daughter, who refused to let me at it for over 2 weeks, as she read and re-read it constantly!

I love capable heroines, and Leela was no exception - and in a non-anachronistic way too. Her doubts about the path she wanted to take rang true. Leela's family was lovingly drawn, and it was beautiful to see a father-daughter relationship portrayed so well. Rahul was appropriately drool-worthy as the hero! The portrayal of caste and religious taboos rings very true (to even today, sadly), even while I got a chuckle over Jainism being seen as so different from Hinduism, which of course, it was to start with. Loved the social commentary that was sprinkled through the book - without being heavy handed at all, various accepted practices and prejudices are called out gently and make the reader think.

One character I really liked in the book was the Sethani, Rahul's stepmother - a multi-dimensional woman, I found myself wanting to know more about her.

Overall, a recommend, especially for the 11-14 year audience. A note: while I am no fan of dividing books by gender, this is very much the sort of story that appeals to girls. My teen son will read most books, including girls' school stories and all the Sutcliffs we own, but he didn't like this - the love-story was front and center and it put him off. (yeah, he's still a young teen :))

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### **Sam Musher says**

It took me a little bit to get into this, I think because light historical YA romance is not my usual genre. But the characters and unusual setting pulled me through, and the second half of the book shifted enough from the predictable parental-disapproval romance form that I zipped through it in a single afternoon at Walden Pond.

I particularly appreciate that Bajpai didn't tie herself in knots over-explaining her 12th century Indian world.

If you don't know that astrology is crucial to making marriage matches, you'll figure it out. Don't know about the caste system, scientific or mathematical theories of the time, or what a Seth is? You'll get enough to follow along, and the important parts of the story are always clear. (Though I could've used a map. I could always use a map.) I loved being slightly confused by a story when I was a young reader; it hinted at a wider world with more to learn. The sort of reader who will love this book will either feel the same, or will be a-ok with skipping unfamiliar words to get to the romance. Which is absolutely delicious!

Also delicious: the *cover*! That gorgeous purple and turquoise, the shimmery silver accents, the allusion to the 900-year-old setting while still seeming fresh. It stands the hell out and I adore it. Can't wait to see what my students think.

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### **Janhvi says**

#### **3.5 stars**

I haven't read that many young adult historicals yet so I was pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed reading *Starcursed*. *Starcursed* is the story of two star crossed lovers Leelavati and Rahul. Leela is the daughter of Bhaskarya Acharya of Ujjayani who was a scholar and an astronomer. There is actually a note in history which says that Leelavati was cursed by the stars for love. I found it all very intriguing.

In the book, Leelavati as a character was lovely. She was a sweet and intelligent girl. The way women were treated in those times was shown really well. Leela just wanted her freedom. I also found all the other astrology theories which were shown really interesting. Leela's love for Rahul was also really sweet and pure and she just wanted the best for him even if it meant denying herself.

We don't get to see that much of Rahul in the book but he does play a pivotal role. I liked how determined Rahul was. His devotion never once wavered from Leela and the bond they shared. He was ready to do anything for his love despite the differences in their castes and their astrological chart.

The romance was really sweet mixed in with some angst. You know Leela and Rahul are destined to be together but there are just so many things standing in their way. I liked how it was shown that some things we can leave up to fate but we do have the power to change our fate as well.

Nandini Bajpai is a really good author. I think it may be a little hard for others to understand how the times were in twelfth century India with all the traditions and stuff but I enjoyed reading about it. *Starcursed* made for a good read.

\*Note: A copy of this book was provided by the author in exchange for an honest review. We thank them.

Find more of my reviews at The Readdicts- <http://thereaddicts.blogspot.in/>

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### **Shrewsbury Public Library says**

I enjoy historical fiction so I liked this story set in twelfth century India. Weaving the history and legend associated with Bhaskara Acharya, the mathematician, and his daughter Leelavati, the author has deftly

created a story that would appeal to tweens and teens. The question, "Can we shape our own fate or are we helpless victims of destiny?", that has boggled philosophers and thinkers, is tackled by Bajpai through the actions of the main characters. Read the book to find the answer!

Posted by Priya Rathnam

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### **A. says**

So impressed by the amount of research that must have gone into this. Wonderful.

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### **Stephanie says**

What if your destiny was written in the stars? What if it wasn't good?

This is the reality for Leelavati in the twelfth-century, India. Her star-chart says that she is a Manglik and if she weds, her husband will die within the year. Leela has grown up knowing that fact and has focused instead on her education. Her father, an astronomer has given her the opportunity to learn mathematics, languages and of course, astronomy. Now that Leela is older, she even teaches some younger students; a privilege most women of the time do not enjoy. However, when Leela's childhood friend, Rahul returns from a long voyage their eyes are set for one another and Leela will go to great lengths to save Rahul from the fate written in her stars.

I loved this sweet love story! Though *Starcursed* is set in a time period long ago, Leela's voice transcends time and is easily relatable to any woman in any place at any time. Leela is a strong character that desperately wants to overcome her fate, but does not want to risk Rahul's life to see if she is correct. I liked that Leela just didn't throw herself at Rahul or put herself in his path, she does everything to stay out of his way. Although, I did find myself smiling throughout every scene where Rahul and Leela interact. Nandini Bajpai has brought 12th century India to life in this book. I enjoyed reading about a time, place and culture that I did not know a lot about. Here is one of my favorite quotes about the setting:

"It was a day of sun and shadow. That rarest of monsoon days when sunshine could suddenly streak through the mass of dark clouds to dance on the hills and rivers below. A day for surprises."

The swayamvara ceremony was interesting to learn about, I had no idea that a woman would be allowed to pick from a line up a suitors at that time. Also, the war of Muhammed of Ghor and the Turkis was a new one for me, so I'll have to do some research into that. The science and math throughout was engaging as well, the debate scene was eye-opening into scientific theories and math at the time

Another interesting note, there really was a man named Bhaskara Acharya, who in this story is Leela's father. Bhaskara Acharya wrote *The Crest Jewel of Astronomy*. The first chapter of the book deals with arithmetic and is named Leelavati.

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### **Nikita (NjKinny's World of Books & Stuff) says**

<http://njkinnny.blogspot.in/2014/05/bl...>

Set in twelfth century India, *Starcursed* narrates the poignant love story of two people separated by the

unfavorable alignment of the stars. Leela was born in such an alignment and so she is cursed. Rahul loved Leela and wants her despite this. ***But can they ever be together?***

The first thing that attracted me to this book was the beautiful cover. Eye catching, the cover art is noteworthy and instantly piques our interest. The title is also very unusual which further adds to the allure of the book.

I love historical stories that give me a feel of the bygone times. Here too Nandini expertly sets her story in an era of wars, caste system and gender inequality. The scenes, people and land settings are noteworthy. The narration is crisp but lags at some points in the book. The language is simple and keeps our interest till the end.

The characterization is admirable and I could connect with Leela and Rahul. I could empathize with Leela's parents who want to give their daughter everything in their power to compensate for something that has been decided by destiny for her! Leela's father allows her to work alongside him and ignores all the talk from people. In an era where women were not allowed a status equivalent to men, this step is noteworthy. The emotional quotient is high and is bound to affect you while you pine for a love that is denied and too far away!

Packed with some surprises and unexpected twists and turns, I enjoyed reading *Starcursed* and recommend it to everyone. A **4 out of 5** to *Starcursed* from me, I look forward to reading more from Nandini Bajpai in the future.

I received the book from the author and the tour organizers and I am very thankful to them. The above review is my honest and unbiased opinion and in no way influenced.

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