



## Leela's Book

*Alice Albinia*

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## Leela's Book Alice Albinia

Bold and entertaining, *Leela's Book* weaves a tale of contemporary Delhi that crosses religious and social boundaries. Leela—alluring, taciturn, haunted—is moving from New York back to Delhi, where her return will unsettle precariously balanced lives. Twenty-five years earlier, her sister was seduced by the egotistical Vyasa. Now an eminent Sanskrit scholar, Vyasa is preparing for his son's marriage. But when Leela arrives, she disrupts the careful choreography of the wedding, with its myriad attendees and their conflicting desires. Gleefully presiding over the drama is Ganesh—divine, elephant-headed scribe of the Mahabharata, India's great epic. The family may think they have arranged the wedding for their own selfish ends, but according to Ganesh it is he who is directing events—in a bid to save Leela, his beloved heroine, from Vyasa.

## Leela's Book Details

Date : Published January 9th 2012 by W. W. Norton Company (first published January 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9780393082708

Author : Alice Albinia

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Genre : Fiction, Cultural, India

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## From Reader Review Leela's Book for online ebook

### Alexa says

In the beginning, I wasn't sure how I was going to feel about this book. After all, it's no mind-blowing fantasy or thrilling mystery. However, the characters and the story really grew on me, and I loved seeing so many aspects of Indian culture through the author's narrative. The story took me on a journey with many different characters and layers, and even threw in some fantastical elements just to keep it fun. I'd highly recommend giving this book a go. Even though its length might deter some, it was actually a fairly easy read.

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### Rana Ansari says

The most accurate and candid depiction of the elite, the bourgeoisie, and the impoverished of India, through its labyrinthine and cavernous tales involving innumerable characters. (This is, The Grand Budapest Hotel times three, serious!)

What more, the use of colonial English, typical of the Indian stilted speech, sprinkled with words like learnt (instead of learned), and smelt (instead of smelled), gives an authentic air to the story.

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### Priya says

I started *Leela's Book* unimpressed; having recently finished reading Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* and Seth's *Unsuitable Boy*, the familiarity of premise and theme failed to flatter what I was reading of Albinia's text. I surmised that she, too, must have read these two renown novels prior to writing this particular novel. Then she redeemed herself.

*Leela's Book* is an intelligent treatise juxtaposing epic, myth, religion and politics (as we come to expect with Indian-themed novels, I guess) however she tickles the reader in a very good way with her very personable characters. The many levels of narrative make for an immensely enjoyable read, and yet the language Albinia uses and ideas she weaves into the story make the whole novel come together quite lip-smacking satisfactorily. The last couple of chapters in fact make the whole endeavour of reading the novel more than worth it.

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### Natalia Cc says

Muy interesante la historia y una forma de escribir diferente. Me entretuve bastante y sentí que la autora innovó en su relato. Tal vez merezca 4 estrellitas pero no me decido...

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### Jennie says

When I won this on Goodreads I was pretty thrilled. It sounds like a story I would love – epic tales, love, deception, and secrets kept over generations. I really, really wanted to love it and I tried very hard to do just that. About halfway through I decided that I wanted to like it (giving up on loving it) but when I finished the last page it was not meant to be.

Part of my issues with the story is how it was narrated. The story starts normal enough but then a few chapters in suddenly the narrator is revealed to be one of the gods in the legends/myths at play within the story. This could have been a really creative narration, but as a reader I felt lost when this wasn't setup from the beginning. Or maybe it was but I just missed it because I wasn't connected with the story/characters. I'm not sure.

The characters were interesting but with so many storylines the individual characters were sometimes lost on the page which partially kept me from connecting with them. One of the aspects of the story is that the characters' lives are intertwined in ways they didn't know. This added a lot of suspense to the story, but also added a lot of confusion. At times it was hard to keep straight their names and which dad or mom a character was referencing.

The ending was perfect for the story. I enjoyed the way the characters and plot all came crashing together in godlike proportion. I just wish the ending would have been a bit more detailed. There were 400 pages of the story but the conclusion was only 20-30 pages. I am generally not a fan of these quick endings so this is probably a specific issue with me.

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### **Ellison says**

This is novel about modern India and the force that the past exerts on it. The prose is beautiful and a joy to read. The plot, though far fetched (there is a god who narrates small portions of the book), is very entertaining. I found the ending perfectly crafted.

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### **Daren says**

\*\*Note: Some spoilers are mixed in below, so if you don't like them, or are likely to read this in the near future, I suggest you don't read on.\*\*

This was an interesting concept. This novel plays on the history of the Mahabharata, and the theory that the 'Gahesha as a scribe' content was a later addition to the original writing. Ganesha becomes a character/narrator, who plays a role explaining a second layer of background to the novel.

The primary story revolves around Leela, returning to Delhi after years in New York, to attend the wedding of her husband's niece, but is forced to face up to her past - including the death of her poet sister, her sister's husband Vyasa, and her niece & nephew. This plays out to a complex Indian family drama, with many characters, and some twists and turns. It addresses such themes as inter-religious relationships, same sex relationships, politics and academia, and the juxtaposition of ancient religious rites and internet chatrooms.

For me it was a successful concept, but I found it led to far too much foreshadowing of the story - it made it fairly easy to predict some of the larger outcomes by halfway through the book.

Notwithstanding this, the characters were interesting and amusing, there were lots of them, but they played their role and then faded into the background (although were somewhat unresolved due to this).

Without the second layer of depth, I suspect the story would probably have been insufficient to carry interest. As it was, despite the early give-away - it was an enjoyable enough read for 4 stars. But then, I am a bit of a sucker for epic Indian novels!

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### **Barbara Pohland says**

I guess I liked it... but there was a little strangeness to it.

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### **Sherri Huntley says**

Leela's Book is a wonderful story of families which intertwines Indian mythology and the modern day complexities of life in Delhi. The tale of Leela and her sister Meera weaves through time until their final story is told. Throughout the novel, Albinia provides a detailed background of India, from the gritty slums and open sewers to the intoxicating smells of the gardens and family celebration of the upper class. She does an amazing job of drawing the reader into the story of two sisters, one adopted, whose youthful indiscretion so impacts their lives and their families twenty years later. This is truly one of the best books I have read in a long time. I am so glad that I won it from Goodreads; I would hate to have overlooked it and not gotten the opportunity to read it. I highly recommend it.

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### **Leslie Ross says**

A book with all the complexities of modern India, and Ganesh is the narrator. Love it!

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### **Leah says**

This book is an intricately woven tale that spans continents, cultures, and lifetimes. The characters are so enmeshed in each others' lives that not even reincarnation can separate them for long. Leela Sharma finds that out when she finds herself returning to India after decades away, decades of avoiding the memories of Meera, her dead poet sister; Vyasa, her arrogant manipulator of a brother-in-law; or twins Bharati and Ash, the niece and nephew she hasn't seen since they were babies.

But just because Leela is drawn back by Vyasa for a family wedding (between his son and Leela's husband's niece), it doesn't mean that the past is going to repeat itself. Ganesh, blue elephant-headed god and scribe of the *Mahabharata*, isn't going to let Vyasa have things all his own way. Ganesh acts as more than a scribe; he writes his own stories as well, and he's writing one for Leela and those who surround her. Families intertwine in unexpected ways, and whether noted professor, impoverished servant girl, or newlywed liar, everyone feels the effects of what's happening.

Alice Albinia has created a book of rich texture and experience. Literature, history, religion, and fascinating characters are put together so well that *Leela's Book* is a book I didn't want to put down. It shows great depth and the plot has a sophisticated complexity full of lush detail and the human experience.

**Joe says**

I initially didn't like this book, but as the story developed it became much more interesting and entertaining. I'm not sure if I agree that the characters in the story were strong or had many attributes that were worth emulating, but the twists were somewhat surprising and I enjoyed it at the end. I do think the author managed to capture a few of the aspects of inter-religious conflict and interaction that seems to pervade South Asia, as well as the rest of the world.

**Vania Stoyanova says**

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<http://knijensviat.wordpress.com/2014...>

**Ruth says**

This is the story of two families who are about to be joined in marriage. It is a love match vs. an arranged marriage and the events are carefully planned and the guests chosen from the finest of their friends and colleagues. Leela left India for New York City years before never returning. It was her one request of her husband and he has honored it until this wedding. He tells Leela that it is time to return to Delhi for the festivities and reluctantly she agrees.

The story combines the story of the God, Ganesh with the modern day characters leading to a very surprising climax. The setting is an important part of the story and the descriptions of the neighborhoods, the smells, the foods, the birds - makes you feel as though you have been there yourself.

I should add that I found the beginning of the book hard to read and enjoy. After the first 100 pages, I admit that I was ready to return the book to the library and end my pain. I was thinking that what I had read would receive a two star rating at the most. Luckily, the storyline began to change and the interest level rose. Albinia was able to hook me right before I was going to shut the book for the final time. Readers beware and if you have the same feeling in the opening chapters, use your best Evelyn Wood speed reading techniques for the first part and then take your time and enjoy the rich story that unfolds.

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## Sonia says

*Cuando los dioses escriben el libro del destino* es uno de esos libros con tantas pretensiones que se queda en un intento de muchas cosas sin llegar a ser un logro de ninguna de ellas. Todavía me estoy preguntando qué nos quería contar la autora.

La novela está escrita por una enamorada de la India que supongo pretende hacernos llegar una parte de su cultura y de su propia fascinación. Así entremezcla en la narración dioses de la épica india y algunas de sus leyendas pero lo hace en un batiburrillo tal que los occidentales, ajenos a esa cultura, no podemos encontrar tierra firme dónde asentarnos y acabamos perdidos en una narración embarullanda. El libro además está lleno de palabras en hindi o bengalí, imposible saberlo, que se supone debemos ir consultando en un glosario que se encuentra al final de la novela. Obligar al lector a semejante ejercicio hace la lectura aún más tediosa.

Junto a las referencias mitológicas, la obra narra la historia de dos familias que se verán unidas gracias a un matrimonio. Nos habla de los problemas y desavenencias de los diferentes personajes, de su pasado y como este se entrelaza con su presente actual. Pero la narradora no sabe cerrar la historia, deja todos los hilos sueltos dejando al lector con una sensación de inconsistencia.

En conjunto el libro resulta mediocre, aburrido, lejano. Una novela en la que no merece la pena embarcarse a no ser que tú también ames la cultura india y conozcas mucho más que yo sobre el Mahabharata, Ganesh y los idiomas de ese país. Yo, sin embargo, me he aburrido muchísimo entre sus páginas.

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