

Interview: Anuradha Vijayakrishnan

on '*Narayani's Journey*' [A Short Story]

You create a poignant atmosphere around the idea of 'home'. Can you tell us a bit about what the idea of 'home' means for you and what inspired the theme of the story?

The idea of 'home' is obviously many things to many people. It could be the last stop in all the backward journeys we imagine. It could be the bed of loose sand just an inch below the point where our roots stop as we float our way through life. There is 'a home' and 'home', right? In this story, home for Narayani is where she thinks her journey ought to end. It starts off by being a simple destination. And this woman has travelled far, like so many others.

There is a playful irony in Narayani's journey when she becomes stranded at the train station. Can you talk a bit about both the physical and the emotional journey that she is taken on?

Journeys are full of surprises, even if it takes the shape of the price of tea at a wayside teashop. Her coming home is not entirely a sentimental thing, for she is coming back in triumph. Triumph over the harshness of birth and thereafter. When she gets there, maybe she expects applause too...The physical journey almost becomes immaterial...and then she is stuck...but travelling is not just about moving physically...

Do you think that Narayani's journey home is going to satisfy her sense of longing?

It can't be as simple as that, right? Where the written story ends, Narayani's journey is more than just a 'going home'. There is fear, there is the realisation of the immenseness of what she has taken on, there is the clinging on to all that she has left behind and there is simple stoicism too. Whatever happens next to her will be what happens next, that kind of thing. She is watching the rain, she is not really thinking because there is so little to think with! It is for the reader to take her forward.

I enjoyed the relationship between Narayani and the coolie and the shifting balance of power between the two. Can you tell us about how you saw the relationship?

The coolie is the mascot of Indian railway platform. But here, the coolie is not just a luggage-carrying, 'rate'-haggling figure, he is a man to Narayani's woman. He could also be son-protector to this woman who is travelling alone. Narayani's past could have elements in it which direct her response to the presence of a man in a certain way. Their relationship could become anything or nothing.

Your story offers a genuine sense of place as you describe the climate, the people, etc. How do you about creating that kind of world?

It sort of creates itself because it is there, it comes with the characters and what they relate to. We notice things around us all the time, they travel with us, don't they? The places have no names but they don't need names. As far as I am concerned, the characters come enmeshed with their world and its tiny highlights.

Which writers do you draw inspiration from?

While writing, no one. As a reader, I admire many. Writers in my mother tongue of Malayalam, almost-contemporary Indian writers who write in English and other Indian languages, plenty of others from around the world. There are so very many great story tellers and poets!

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION: *All the materials on these pages are free for you to download and copy for educational use only. You may not redistribute, sell or place these materials on any other web site without written permission from the British Council.*