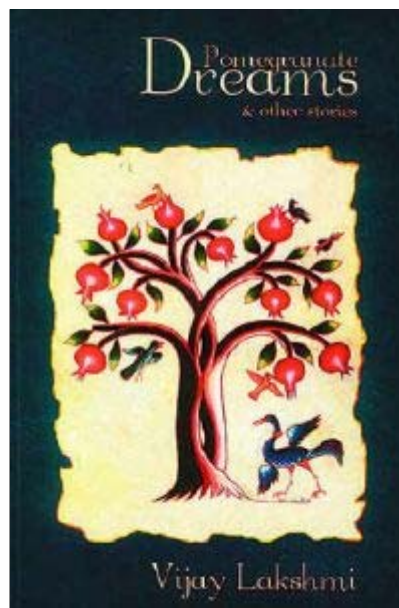


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Love in words

In "Pomegranate Dreams", debutante novelist Vijay Lakshmi recounts stories of alienation, longing and divided loyalties. RANA SIDDIQUI speaks to the author.



WHEN NOSTALGIA triggers a dream, a dream in which snapshots of long lost blood ties float before the eyes, when a feeling of alienation in a foreign country leaves one longing for the homeland, when the fragrance of the flowers like bela and juhi are unknown in a distant land, a collection like "Pomegranate Dreams and other stories" is born.

Ornamented with beautiful similes and metaphors, the book is a reflection of how the author, Vijay Lakshmi - a teacher, critic and commentator - came to terms with a foreign abode that has given her shelter and means of livelihood.

This debut novella and short stories brought out by Indialog Publications, attempt to give voice to the thoughts of those Indians who go abroad, especially to Europe or the Far East for economic reasons. She feels their chances of resentment are less, since economic motives are paramount. "But, there is always a sense of displacement, especially for the first-generation migrants," admits the author as honestly as she pens this 231-page book.

She cites an example from "Touchline", a beautiful story of a lonely mother whose U.S.-based daughter comes to see her in India and has to leave soon. She wants her mother to accompany her but the mother refuses, for she feels she can only preserve all her memories - her late husband, her other children settled abroad - by remaining in her homeland.

"When I read this story in a library in Philadelphia, a huge, burly, tough-looking elderly man came to me with tears dropping from his eyes. He said, 'I never cried in my life, but you

reminded me of my mother'," says the author who finds it the best ever compliment for her book. She also bagged the Editor's Award from Orbis (U.K.) for this story.

"It started as a young girl's perspective of a foreign nation," says Vijay Lakshmi. "A part of the novella is intensely autobiographical, for instance, Grandpa and Grandma Miller are the real characters, the essence of the U.S.'s elderly generation."

A book, written in lyrical language, is a fresh change for many readers tired of reading of India "confined in pictures of rajas, maharajas and palaces or of poverty and corruption. People abroad don't know if our grandmothers spun cotton, the life of the clay and mud, the doll's wedding and all," bemoans the author. That's why R.K. Narayan, Arundhati Roy, Bharti Mukherjee and Raja Rao's works are quite popular there for they don't draw stereotypes.

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