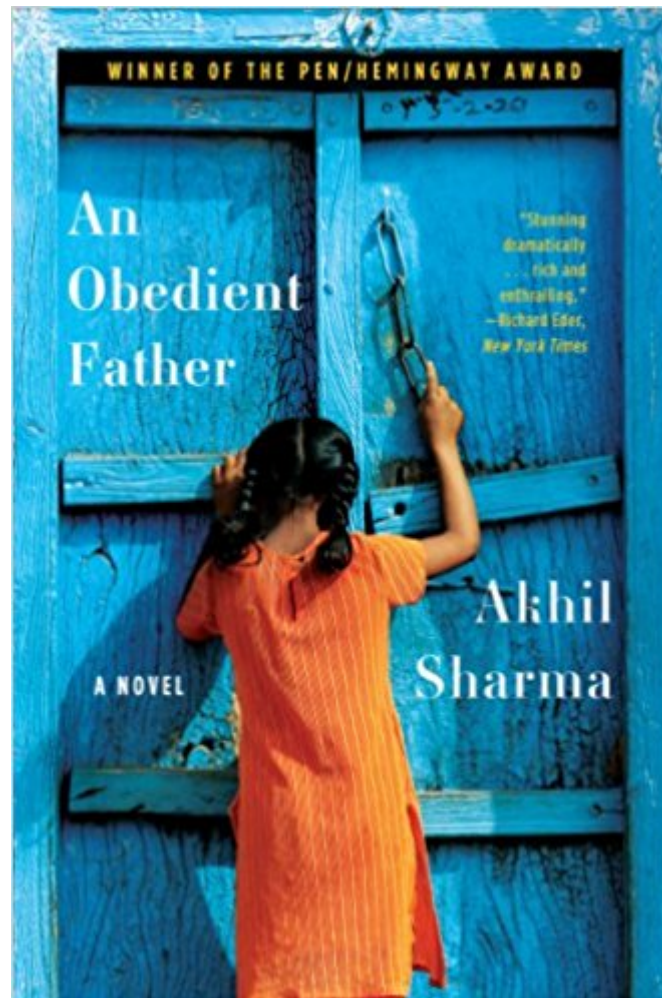


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An Obedient Father



Synopsis

“A powerful debut novel that establishes Sharma as a supreme storyteller.” Philadelphia Inquirer Ram Karan, a corrupt official in New Delhi, lives with his widowed daughter and his little granddaughter. Bumbling, sad, ironic, Ram is also a man corroded by a terrible secret. Taking the reader down into a world of feuding families and politics, *An Obedient Father* is a work of rare sensibilities that presents a character as formulated, funny, and morally ambiguous as any of Dostoevsky’s antiheroes.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A spectacular work. An incredible character study. Hard to read. Hard to put down. It is not about India. It is not about incest. India and incest are but metaphors. The theme is universal: corruption, betrayal, guilt, and revenge. It is not about love, remorse, or forgiveness. Rather, it is about the inability to love, the inability to feel remorse, and the inability to forgive. As I said, a hard read. By telling this tale from the father’s perspective, Sharma makes him hard to dismiss. Everyday evil is mundane, private, familiar. It is committed by people we recognize, people who are petty, weak, and self-absorbed. It is as basic as the blow of a rock and as ugly as incest. It is committed by people who should know better. It is committed by people who are not that different than we are. It destroys everyone involved. Again, this is a spectacular book.

I am not going to argue that this book is pleasant to read, because it is not. But I will argue that it is worth reading-- perhaps would go so far as to say that it should be read, despite the unpleasant

subject matter. And I suppose that it is worth warning that the subject matter *is* unpleasant. It has fairly explicit descriptions of violence, incest, and poverty. People who are very reactive to these issues, probably want to find a different book. So often when a writer tackles issues like these, they lose all objective perspective. Somehow Sharma takes some of the most loaded topics imaginable and still places them in a landscape of moral ambiguity. While Mr. Karan (the father) commits acts that seem to put him beyond the pale, it is hard not to feel yourself sliding into sympathy for him. And while you want to like Anita because of what happens to her, it is awfully hard to do. Meanwhile, the landscape of Indian politics around them (which is a bit hard on the reader, since it assumes that you know something about it) also seems to imply a decided lack of ethical clarity. I think that it is a very strong book, extremely well written. Recommended for people who like books that are thought provoking, if not necessarily uplifting.

I have to say, this book left me feeling empty. Which is pretty powerful, because it was strong feeling. I cannot help but feel that my fellow Indians are so negatively inclined towards the book because it casts India in a negative light. This is real, and it does happen in India. So for all you Indians who feel so negatively about the book and have a burning desire to criticize those who have been educated in the west, it is simple. Stay with what you are comfortable with. This book, clearly, is not comfortable.

Don't enter into Akhil Sharma's *AN OBEDIENT FATHER* expecting the romantic exoticism of many of today's Indian writers. His India is not mystical or lush or dream-like but instead peels away exterior layers to show what lies beneath. This is a story of corruption, both moral and political. Ram Karan is a self-pitying hedonist, and he knows it, even hates himself for it. Others think even less of him. When his daughter confronts him with their shared secret he hopes she had forgotten, two days after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, both Karan and India face an uncertain future. To Sharma's credit, he allows the reader deep enough into Karan's psyche to elevate him from despicable to pathetic, and yes, you do start to feel for this man, however guiltily. Sharma's greatest strength here is his characterizations, from Karan to Anita to the corrupt bureaucrats who work with Karan to his extended family. If you are just now sampling the range of Indian fiction available in the United States, this is a good place to start. If you are familiar with the wider range of voices, Akhil Sharma's adds a nice balance to the rest, perhaps more American than most but still in his heart Indian.

I don't know where this book came from or how a first-time novelist managed to produce it, other than to say that it came from the same source of all great art. The book is infused with feeling, fully-realized characters, stinging insights and observations, a compelling if repulsive protagonist, and the textures, smells, and temperatures of the characters and their city. Told in first person, it feels at times like one has stumbled on to a diary written by a figure who is an updated Raskolnikov. David Sedaris said on NPR that one of the reasons he feels life is worth living is the hope that Sharma will write a second novel. I was very curious to see what kind of book could live up to that praise. The answer is, this kind of book, a great novel, that deals with ugly, unpleasant specifics and tacitly forces the reader to confront his or her own failings, sins, crimes large and small, immoralities, and humanity. As for the negative reviews on this site, readers shouldn't blame the mirror for providing an accurate reflection.

An extraordinary story of moral, physical and political corruption. The protagonist is in almost all ways despicable and weak, yet at times I found myself sympathising with him, and I was always riveted by his unhappy predicament. This is a horrifying and fascinating story, and, unlike one of your other reviewers, at no point did I feel the author was muckraking unfairly. He has written a brave and intelligent book.

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