

The perfect union – A review of the novel ‘A Discerning Heart’

“An inner darkness is darker than an outer darkness.” - Ben Okri

Author Patty Lesser’s latest book ‘*A Discerning Heart*’ is a historical novel set in the late 1700’s. It takes place in a fictional coastal village where a vibrant fishing community thrives. The protagonist of the story is *Jim Moore*, aka *Dim Jim* whose life story forms the base for this novel. It is as much a story about a single man as it is a capsule history of our entire civilization. From the conceptualization of the first dream to achieve greatness to man’s voyage in search of it, his interaction with the natural elements and his opposite in the form of a woman; to his conquering and dominating behavior and the final realization of life truths are explored in a breezy and light-hearted manner.

Jim, pretty much like the story itself starts out as the pleasant loser, the underdog you want to root for. But he quickly transforms into a stereotype for the patriarchal image of ‘Man’ himself. The way he is introduced into the story guarantees that you will root for him until he commits his first act of transgression. The author alternates *Jim*’s social functioning in such a way that you will both love and hate him within a short period of time, although most might swing the latter way. His is an excellent character study into the mind of an average man born in any era. Stripped away of inheritances and bereft of skills to even challenge his contemporaries. These men often lead their lives indulging in wishful thinking. A few of them will set out to change their destiny. Of the few that succeed, some will never be able to handle the success that comes their way.

Power and authority when concentrated in the hands of those that doesn’t deserve it or haven’t worked for it, often results in hardship for the rest of the populace in the subject’s area of reign.

Merrow as the love interest to *Jim* often behaves true to her origin as a mermaid; staying true to the idiom – like a fish out of water. She is erratic, vain, childish and always pining for what she cannot attain. And like *Jim*, *Merrow* too makes for highly interesting reading. These two are highly flawed characters; they could never exist on their own within the framework of the two distinct societies they live in. So there’s nothing unnatural when these characters find love in each other and decide to stay together. They are selfish characters that do not even care about the heartbreak caused to their families. When they are that bad on their own, you would assume that their union too would fail miserably but somehow it works, Patty’s infusion of a love story between them somehow makes perfect sense. Not in the real sense of the word but perfect for these imperfect characters.

Patty deserves a lot of credit for writing an easy to read fictional story about a fisherman and a mermaid and then hiding beneath its surface, a superlative introspection into the human condition. And that she has used two flawed characters as her chief protagonists is a definite bold move.

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