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Recommended for 13-18 year olds

Sister of the Bollywood Bride

Nandini Bajpai

Summary

Mini's big sister is getting married. Their mom passed away seven years ago and between Dad's new start-up and Vinnie's medical residency, there's no one but Mini to plan the wedding. Dad raised her to know more about computers, calculus and cars than desi weddings but from the moment Mini held the jewellery Mom left them, she wanted her sister to have the wedding Mom would've planned.

Now Mini has only two months to get it done and she's not going to let anything distract her, not even the persistent, mysterious and smoking-hot Vir Mirchandani. Flower garlands, decorations, music, even a white wedding horse – everything is in place.

That is, until a monster cyclone heads for Boston that could ruin everything. Will Mini come through as sister of the bride and save the day?

Author Style

Nandini Bajpai is a welcome addition to the growing pool of South Asian writers. Her characters are funny, likeable and very relatable as they straddle the intricacies of holding a 'traditional Indian' wedding in contemporary suburban Massachusetts.

From the first page we know we are in for a fascinating meshing of cultures when Mini, the book's narrator, compares her situation entering a Bank of America vault with a heist movie, while at the same time feeling her heart 'pounding like a Punjabi dhol'. (page 1).

The book's characters come alive largely through the skilful use of dialogue, and some lovely turns of phrase — Mini, delighted by what she finds in the bank's vault, exclaims, 'Oh. My. Three hundred and thirty million gods.' (page 2).

Details are always given in an entertaining way in this book, with fascinating information about Indian culture, history and food all tied closely to the characters and the plot, thereby adding to the story rather than taking the reader on a diversion.

Yet, *Sister of the Bollywood Bride* is also the very universal story of a loving family coming together to celebrate a wedding and rejoice in being together.

Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

Before reading

Before reading write down answers to the following questions:

- What sort of character might you expect a 'Bollywood Bride' to be?
- What sort of wedding might they have?
- Where would you expect the wedding to take place?
- What sort of relationship might a bride have with her sister?
- What sort of conflicts and obstacles might arise before the bride and groom wed?
- What will happen at the end of the story?

After reading

After reading *Sister of the Bollywood Bride* revisit your answers and compare what you expected with the actual story. Where did you guess correctly and where did Nandini Bajpai surprise you?

Shared values

I smiled back and wondered if she'd bring up region, caste, or marital prospects.

'You're Gujarati?' she asked. There it was. (page 5)

- What did you learn about the shared values, beliefs and norms of the people around Mini in Chapter One?

Across cultures

The book's author, Nandini Bajpai, says, 'I've always been interested in how the children of immigrants view their parents' traditions. What they leave behind, what they change, and what they choose to carry on'.

- To what extent do you think Mini, who has lived her whole life in the US, accepts or rejects the shared values, beliefs and norms of her family?
- Why do you think so much emphasis is placed on weddings in almost every culture?

- Consider this extract from the text:

'Most Indians here like to spend on two things, David,' Shoma Moorty said with confidence. 'Education and weddings. They may cut corners on everything else, but you won't find them letting their kids take out massive student loans or have slipshod weddings. Indian weddings are big business.' (page 36)

Why do you think Indians who have emigrated out of India might put so much emphasis on education and weddings? Do you think parents spending vast sums of money are thinking about what the bride and groom want or about something else? Do you think this is unique to Indian immigrants? How does it compare with the dominant concept of weddings in Australia today? Given the choice, would you want to have a wedding as big as Vinnie's?

- Write a description for each of the following:

- lehenga
- sari
- mehendi
- mandap
- baraat

- In the extracts below, how does Nandini Bajpai explore the idea of multiple types of discrimination within Mini's Indian community?

'They're, uh...Tamil?' I said, trying to remember what Shoma Moorty had said. 'His name is Manish Iyer.'

'Iyer!' she said, her facing clearing, 'Yes, they're Tamil. TamBrahms.'

I probably looked confused because she added, 'It's short for Tamil Brahmins.' (page 57)

'My Hindi sounds funny too sometimes,' I said. 'It's because we grew up here.' She probably got it worse because she was biracial. There was definitely discrimination within our own culture sometimes. (page 282)

- Although Mini does everything she can to organise a traditional desi wedding she does make exceptions because of circumstances, such as using her father's car for the groom's arrival. Can you name any other times where she finds a modern Western alternative to a cultural tradition?
- Other than how to plan a desi wedding, what do you think Mini learnt about herself during the course of the novel?

Cover reimaged

- Make a collage of images to create an alternate cover for *Sister of the Bollywood Bride* that captures all the energy and joy of the novel.

About the author

Nandini grew up in New Delhi, India, one of four sisters and many cousins, in a family that liked to read. After moving to Australia in the nineties, she lived in Melbourne and Brisbane for several years. Though no cyclone threatened her own Brisbane-based Indian wedding, there was plenty of help from family and friends to make sure everything went off without a hitch. Although she has dabbled in corporate finance, business analysis, and fostering shelter animals, her first love is writing. She now lives in Boston, USA, with her family and a fluctuating number and variety of pets.

In the author's own words

'The inspiration for this book was actually a real-life hurricane wedding in the family when Hurricane Irene hit Boston on the day of my sister-in-law's wedding. When we were trying to deal with it I kept thinking that this needs to be in a book because you can't make something like this up! Another inspiration was my own wedding (way back when!) in Brisbane, when all three of my sisters, plus the whole family, had to pitch in to help us organise an Indian wedding outside India at a time before Facebook or Zoom!

'I try to write first for myself and those close to me, including the many young people in my life. I want them to be able to see themselves and their cultural experience mirrored in a book in a fun and entertaining but authentic way. But also, for those for who the book could be a window into another culture that they may not know much about.

'I've always been interested in how the children of immigrants view their parents' traditions. What they leave behind, what they change, and what they choose to carry on. This is even more poignant for milestone events like weddings, especially when a child loses a parent early, like Mini and her sister. Another theme I enjoy exploring is community, both old and new, and how people can come together to support young people and how cultural roots can grow deep even in new soil.'

– Nandini Bajpai