

The Book



Ayesha's Rainbow by Rabina Khan is about a young and angelic seven year old Bangladeshi girl, growing up in an inner-London City borough, who meets her elderly neighbour. Mrs. Peters, a white woman has lived in the East End all of her life. She is lonely and averse to change, especially towards accepting people of a different culture from her own. A most unlikely, yet beautiful friendship develops between them, bringing their two contrasting families together, crossing religious, cultural and racial barriers. Only Graham Peters, the youngest sibling, wants to take a different path, with a view to joining a racist political party. When Mrs. Peters is attacked in her home, a chain of emotions unfolds, affecting both families and the rest of the community. A time for questioning loyalties, divisions, prejudices and friendship begins, in order to discover what really happened to Mrs. Peters and more importantly, why?

The book portrays the many issues that affect both Bangladeshi and white working class families living in inner London, such as the closure of the docks, 'the end of an era' for generations of many East End families as well as early Bangladeshi migrant workers. Mrs. Peters' late husband worked on the docks and like many East Enders, Mrs. Peters saw the stark differences between the rich and the poor. It was so shamelessly flaunted in front of them but they failed to see the Bangladeshis were in the same boat as themselves. Poverty and deprivation often made people blind to the truth. The beautiful, modern apartments built in the docklands were only affordable to those who were earning a fortune. The jobs were only for those who had a "City-look" and who spoke with a "posh" accent. But Mrs. Peters is proud of her daughter Vivien, who becomes very successful in the City - against the odds that she faced in her male dominated career.

Other, issues such as overcrowded homes are touched upon as Mrs. Peters realizes that "Over-crowded situations was certainly not a thing of the past. Families just had to cope with what they had and make what they could of their lives. It was as simple as that.' Through her memories of the East End, struggling to raise her family and a husband who worked hard in the docks evokes memories of the East End 'good old days' when 'Sanitation had been so difficult during those times, with toilets outside and tin baths in the kitchen in front of the fire. People

were much less private in those days, but it made up for the fact that they felt bonded together to support one another. '

For the Bangladeshi family, they too had to struggle for recognition though the ugliness of racism, prejudice and stereotypes, like the time Hamza Ali was racially abused by a Council caretaker for playing football," You ain't getting the ball back. Don't you get it; footballs a white man's sport. Go and play cricket, that's what you Indians are good at. Be like that Imran Khan." The family is unsure how to make friends with their elderly neighbour, assuming from past experiences that 'she probably had her prejudices about them,' and 'knowing the white elderly people from previous experiences, it was probably going to be noise pollution. If she was really unpleasant, she might probably say that his wife's cooking smells were affecting her asthma and causing breathing difficulties.'

However it is Ayesha who makes the first step to make friends with her neighbour and it is through her that the two families learn about each other so that various myths are made clear and they realize they share many common views. As the character Shazia Ali puts it, "a good bitch about someone or something united people. It overcame their differences as they found something in common that they agreed or disagreed upon."

Reviews

Ayesha's Rainbow is currently being reviewed by...

- Rageh Omar: BBC
- Anila Baige: The Sun
- Simon Hattenstone: The Guardian
- Roberta Taylor: The Bill
- Emdad Rahman: Euro Bangla

Malik Al Nasir, Fore-Word's chief executive said "Rabina's new novel 'Ayesha's Rainbow' though a work of fiction, resonates true with the controversial subject matter that Rabina addresses. Set in Tower Hamlets in the East End of London during times of racial tension a little Asian girl befriends the mother of neo fascist living next door and a whole plethora of intrigue, plots and tragedy ensues. Racism, deceit, trauma and a glimmer of hope are among the elements portrayed in a masterful and potent work, which will challenge both British and Asian readers to take a long hard look at themselves in the new millennium".

The Author

Ayesha's Rainbow: By Rabina Khan

Written by Emdad Rahman
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