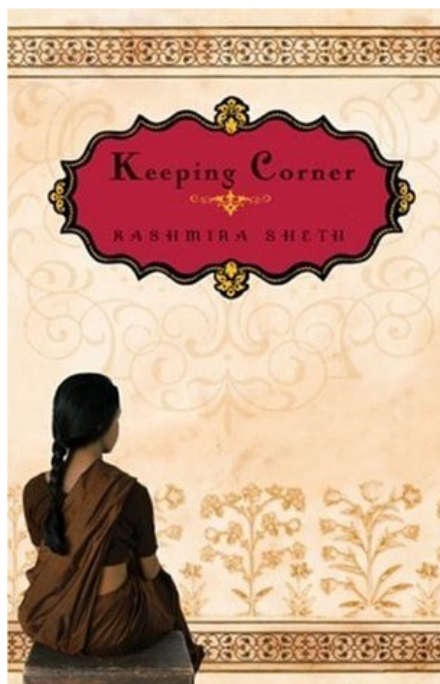




Keeping Corner

Kashmira Sheth

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"As in *Koyal Dark*, *Mango Sweet* (Hyperion, 2006), Sheth provides a first-person narrative with a strong protagonist and rich sense of place, with the added bonus of an unusual historical perspective," *School Library Journal*, **STARRED REVIEW**

Pretty as a peacock, twelve-year-old Leela has been spoiled all her life. She doesn't care for school and barely marks the growing unrest between the British colonists and her own countrymen. Why should she? Her future has been planned since her engagement at two and marriage at nine.

Leela's whole life changes, though, when her husband dies. She's now expected to behave like a proper widow: shaving her head and trading her jewel-toned saris for rough, earth-colored ones. Leela is considered unlucky now, and will have to stay confined to her house for a year—keep corner—in preparation for a life of mourning a boy she barely knew.

When her schoolteacher hears of her fate, she offers Leela lessons at home. For the first time, despite her confinement, Leela opens her eyes to the changing world around her. India is suffering from a severe drought, and farmers are unable to pay taxes to the British. She learns about a new leader of the people, a man named Gandhi, who starts a political movement and practices satyagraha—non-violent protest against the colonists as well as the caste system. The quiet strength of satyagraha may liberate her country. Could she use the same path to liberate herself?

Keeping Corner Details

Date : Published October 30th 2007 by Hyperion Books for Children

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Author : Kashmira Sheth

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Crystal says

Crystal Hansen LS 583. Sheth, K. (2007). Keeping corner. New York: Hyperion Books for Children. Genre: Multicultural. Format: print book. Selected from: Cooperative Children's Book Center 30 Multicultural Books Every Teen Should Know. Highly Recommend

Keeping Corner is set in India in the early twentieth century. It is the story of a twelve-year-old girl named Leelah, who is already married per the customs of the day. She still lives with her doting parents, but is anticipating a time in the near future when she will go to live with her husband and his family. Leelah is vivacious, and adored by her loved ones; her life has been fortunate up to this point, but in one ill-fated day, that all changes. The young bride's husband is bitten by a venomous snake. He is killed and she is left a child widow.

While these events are sad, Leelah's grief is compounded by the fact that she must follow the tradition of "keeping corner." This means that she cannot leave her house for a year after the day of her husband's death. Furthermore, she must keep her head shaved, wear only the plainest of clothes and never remarry (although widowed men are allowed to marry again and are not ostracized). Female widows in India who live this way are shunned and marginalized for the rest of their lives. Leelah has been vaguely aware of this, having known of widows in her community, but she doesn't know the full reality of this unjust existence until it is forced upon her.

In the beginning, Leelah is grief stricken and bitter, but loyal friends and family members help ease the pain. Her brother, a man with modern ideals who lives in a nearby city, arranges for a teacher to come to Leelah and give her lessons. At first, she doesn't see the point, but in the end, learning is what saves her. In her year of keeping corner, Leelah learns much about the world through studying and reading the newspaper every day. She learns about Ghandi and his work to promote equality among social classes and men and women through non-violence. His work has a large impact on India, and it is providing hope for Leelah who dares to dream of higher education and a life in which she can become more than a widow.

Nandini Menon says

I really enjoyed this book. And, honestly, that was extremely surprising. With its underwhelming cover and weirdly-spaced text, I thought there was no way that I could ever enjoy this book. But, I needed some light reading and this is all that I had so I thought I should give it a shot and started to read.

I was pleasantly surprised.

With its rich and ripping narrative, Keeping Corner tells the tale of a twelve-year old girl named Leela. Destined to marry a boy she that she never really knew, Leela thinks that her life has been set in stone. However, tragedy strikes when Leela's fiancée is bitten by a snake. Now a widow, Leela must keep to her house (hence the title Keeping Corner) for one year and is forbidden to leave. However, this is also the time of Ghadiji's revolution and there is unrest in the streets and room for new ideas. So, headstong Leela resumes her studies and in this her life is changed forever.

Keeping Corner was rich in its narrative with compelling three-dimensional characters. It realistically portrays

how much unrest there was and the character Masi realistically depicts the prejudice facing Leela as she tries to start a new life, not wanting to be confined to mourning for the rest of her life. I cannot tell you how amazing this book was for me, keeping me extremely captivated the entire time that I was reading. Leela grows and matures during the book, starting off not caring about the more important issues that faced India, preoccupied by her bangles and finery. However, as she is forced to shave her head and give up all of this finery she realizes that there is an entire world out there for her to explore and her views are further enforced by Dandiyo a book recommended by her teacher, Saviban by the author Narmand. All of this makes it an extremely captivating book.

However, there are some drawbacks. Here is the major one : the constant use of Hindi. Yes, I am Hindu and can understand most of the phrases used but I can understand how this can put off some readers, as you have to keep flipping from the glossary to the front back and forth. So annoying. But other than that, this is really a book that you should give a chance. I can almost guarantee you will like it as much as I have.

Zp88 says

A “corner” stone of modern Indian-American literature.

But haha. I kid myself. Let’s get down to business.

As long time readers may know, when it comes to the lovely Mrs. Kashmira Sheth I am not a true fanatic. Though I was introduced to her vast extended universe of prose and poetry in 2013’s *Tiger In My Soup* (and am anxiously anticipating the 2020 release of the sequel, *Tiger in My Pants*), I was more than disappointed by her 2004 debut *Blue Jasmine* (which was adapted into the Oscar-winning film of the same name by world renowned humanitarian Woody Allen). But I digress. Or rather, I’m done (isn’t this ever the dilemma of the intellectual).

Farewell for now

and

Faithfully yours,

Gavin

Wendy says

I really liked this book. It is about a young girl in India during some revolutionary times, with Ghandi and the war. It is a story about the struggle between tradition and change. Even though it is fiction, it really helped me learn more about Indian people and culture, a thing I know very little about. I recommend this book!

Valentina says

I love this book. It is very informational, however it tells you the life of a fictional character. This is the type

of book that at first you might not like. However, after a few pages it gets really interesting. If you want to learn a little about Indian culture than this is the book for you.

Sovotchka says

"Keeping Corner" tells the story of a child widow in India in Ghandis' time.

Kashmira Sheth is brilliant in writing the point of view of a rather young person - her protagonist and storyteller Leela is not even 13, and yet the story feels real. No difficult words, no overlong sentences, and as a bonus for non-Indian readers short explanations of customs and traditions that go naturally with the text.

The story itself is about Leela's year of mourning - called keeping corner - after the death of her "husband". Her anger when she is forced to give up her jewellery, her colourful clothes and even her hair; her sadness when she sees happy couples, or even a widower who, unlike her, will be allowed to remarry; and her tough way back to fighting are told extremely well, never rushed, and always believable.

When we hear about Ghandi's work now, it seems like a linear progression to us. First he did that, then he marched to, and finally he said ... In setting the story in a small village near Ghandi's hometown, Kashmira Sheth can show us the impact of his ideas and his actions on a normal Indian community. Over the course of a year, the men in the village debate about following Gandhi, oppose the British rule and experience the consequences of doing so. The newspapers are telling about similar things happening all over the country. This gives a wonderful sense of perspective and shows a lot, even if you already know about Gandhi's life. Even though Gandhi never appears in the novel, you can imagine the amount of work he had to put in to gain at least some small sort of reaction.

What I love about Kashmira Sheth's books is that they talk about young people coming to terms with the situation they're in, and then making the best of it. No one is miraculously saved but rather, after a period of growing, the characters save themselves. They tell young people not to give up, and to fight for what they want, and I know I'll be re-reading this one often and can even keep it for when I have my own kids to give it to them.

This makes 4.5 of 5 stars, rounded down because I have decided to be bitchy about the highest rating ;).

Judy says

I picked this book up looking for a glimpse into the Indian caste system. It was in the YA section of my library which I believe is incorrect. If this is a YA book, it is a young YA book as it reads more like an older child's book. However, none of that really matters because it was an excellent choice for my first learn-about-the-caste-system book. There is a nice look at the Brahmin caste. The story starts with Leela as a pre-teen engaged to be married to Ramanlal a boy she likes very much. A few days before the official wedding is to take place, Ramanlal dies from a snake bite leaving Leela a *widow*, even though they have never lived under the same roof. What follows serves to enlighten the reader of many Indian customs of the day and the role of the widow in Indian society. The title itself, *The Keeping Corner*, refers to the tradition that when a woman is widowed she is to keep inside and be subdued for one year. The book takes place during Ghandi(ji)'s sit-ins and passive resistance movement which members of Leela's immediate family support. I found it a good source of light history and Brahmin culture.

To be featured on my **May 13th blog**.

J.Elle says

Although fiction, the jacket said this was based on a true story. It was actually very compelling and a good account of what happens in Indian culture when a woman's husband dies. Unfortunately for the woman, she was actually a child and it was her fiance who died, but the rules and customs were the same. This book was intriguing.

Jumana says

I thought this book was very interesting because I had a chance to learn someone else's culture. I also learned a few Hindi words. But other than that the book was really good.

Seher_E1 says

Keeping Corner by the amazing Kashmira Sheth really is an open door for outsiders to see what an amazing life of a young Indian girl is and how the life of a young Indian girl can turn into a horrid devastating tale. This book really just made me think about how a beautiful blooming flower could lose all its petals and beauty and that's just the end of its life, no one cares about it and no one stops to admire it anymore. This is exactly what happened to twelve-year-old Leela. Pretty as a peacock, at a young age Leela gets engaged to an amazing handsome boy, it seems like her dream has come true like she's living in a fairy tale, but can anything go wrong? YES! Leela's husband dies and Leela's life ends at a young age, for young widows in India are looked down upon and are not cared for by society. As Leela keeps corner for a year she studies so very hard to pass her exams she thinks girls can become teachers too, so with the help of her guru she is able to overcome her keeping corner and break free. This really connects with me because firstly in the most amazing times bad can happen and in those bad times you just have to make it work and that work means something and can make a change. Interested about the lives of young girls in India? This book is perfect!

Anna Ganey says

The concept of the book was fascinating, and I wish we could have heard stories from other widows. I found the multiple Hindi words per page slightly annoying. I get it, it's about Indian culture, but it was disruptive to constantly be looking back and forth from the glossary. As others have said, it is a slow book, but I enjoyed being inside Leela's head during this time. My favorite line in the book was: I wanted to ask Ba why sometimes I was treated like a child and other times I was expected to behave like a mature woman. If I was too young to be trusted with everyday information, I was too young to be a widow; but if I was old enough to live like a widow, then I must be grown up.

Littlecloud says

I read this book in 6th grade... I was 11, and still am. Anyway, it's pretty good!

Monique says

Unlike money, knowledge increases many folds when you part with it” (pg. 170)

“Don’t forget that sense arrives before beauty. God gives sense at sixteen and beauty at twenty for some reason.” (pg 65)

So- took a foray into a new culture and one of our library’s more diverse books—an Indian novel set in 1918 about a thirteen-year old widow. So Leela our protagonist has been engaged since three and married since nine only she has not yet moved in with her betrothed. She lives at home with her parents, uncle and aunt and their animal helper with her other aunt living close by. Leela is beautiful and rich with her family belonging to the highest caste of society and everything she wants she gets and her relationship with her fiancée and his family is going well and her future seems perfect—until her fiancée gets bit by a snake and dies.

In this country and time period women who become widows must become shadows of themselves, cut off all their hair, are forbidden from wearing any color or participating in any holidays and “keep corner” in their house away from the world for a year. It is a cruel fate and punishment and she laments the unfairness of her situation often.....Everyone pities her and after Leela’s head is shaved, all the joy is sucked from her and her family’s life, she is house bound and shunned by her community..Now this is the essential story as Leela uses education to free herself from her fate and mark as an unlucky widow unable to have a life; however the novel is also heavily accented with Indian terms and vocabulary, lots and lots of vocabulary and descriptions –so much so that you find yourself frequently using the convenient glossary in the back of the book..there are also discussion questions, lots of accolades and reviews that make this an ideal book for book clubs and school reads—only it was a little boring and overly complicated..Weaving in and out of the plight of Leela and her widowhood is Gandhi’s fight for freedom in the country and the quiet nonviolence of unity in a parallel to the situation for women widows versus men widows..I struggled to keep interest in this one at times but learned a lot but think focusing on one storyline would have been more powerful and concise as I can not see this as a young adult read students will rush out to read and I can see many of them struggling with the language and content..overall I am glad I did read this as I see it interesting a few avid readers I know as it was educational and a great introduction to the Indian culture, beliefs, food and traditions..

Cinnapatty says

This was an interesting book. It contains a lot of factual information woven into a fictional story. If you read the author's note at the end you can learn what prompted this story.

Lots of Indian vocabulary that usually is explained right after it is written, but there is also a glossary at the end of the book containing all the words used in the story.

This culture is completely foreign to me and my heart ached for Leela. Cultural tradition is a hard one to break through. This was inspirational and eye opening at the same time.

The analogies used in the book were so vivid and flowing.

Overall a great read, even if it did make my heart hurt at times.

Kim says

Keeping Corner is the story of a young girl in India who is betrothed at age 2, married at age 9, and before she goes to live with her husband (after her "anu") her husband is killed by a snake bite and she becomes a 12 year old widow. Widows in her caste are never allowed to marry again and are forced to live in the shadows of society. It is based on the life of the author's aunt and takes place in 1918. Keeping Corner is the ritual where a widow does not leave her home for a year after her husband's death. The book takes place over the year of Leela keeping corner. The backdrop of Leela's life is the time of Gandhi. It was fascinating to learn more about Indian culture and some of the things that Gandhi did for his country. There is significant growth in Leela over the course of the year, and it is a good reminder that although we do not always get to choose our circumstances, we can choose how we react to those circumstances. It is inspiring to see the difference that can occur in a society when people have the courage to stand up to injustice.

sarafem says

It's only February and I have discovered several outstanding children's books this year, I feel very lucky. This is a wonderful introduction to Indian culture (the good, the bad, the beautiful, the ugly), the teachings of Gandhi, and women's rights. Really an inspiration to girls to better themselves. Another one up there with Stargirl.

Pooja Dimba says

This book was very well written and amazingly pure. Leela a girl who was engaged when she was two, married when she was nine and widowed when she was thirteen, is a very brave girl who has lots of courage. Leela is forced to shave her head and give up all her pretty jewellery and clothes and keep away in a corner for a year.

She is treated very badly, and when her principle from her old school comes and offers to educate her, her mother and father accept. She learns about how Gandhi is doing something called Satyagraha which is really just non-violence. She is amazed by this and new ideas that men and woman are equal and wants to become a teacher or doctor. In 1918 (when this story takes place) many Indians believed these were "a man's job" To learn more you just have to read the book.

Megan Vosk says

A quiet, but powerful tale about a women's struggle for basic rights and freedoms during turn of the century India. This is the tale of a child bride who finds herself cruelly widowed at the age of 13, a fate that normally resulted in a life of isolation and ostracism. Her quest for fair treatment under the circumstances is quite compelling. Teenage girls in our modern world of today will naturally find themselves comparing their lives with that of the main character. Feminism has come a long way since then.

Kiran Galsinh says

Leela, a twelve year old girl who lives in India, has grown up to be a very spoiled girl. She has never cared for school or the outside world. Leela got engaged when she was two and was married at the age of nine. She was supposed to be sent off to her in laws house but a few weeks before her husband Ramanlal dies of a snake bite. He leaves her to live the rest of her life as a widow. After shaving her silky hair and taking all her jewelry Leela has to keep corner for a year and not step out of the house. Her school teacher hears of her unlucky fate and offers to come to Leela's home to teach her. Leela's eyes are finally opened to all the things happening like the drought and the how the raise of taxes has left farmers unable to pay them. Gandhi Ji creates a political protest that refuses to pay any taxes. Day by day things get taken away from the farmers families. Leela starts to wonder if this could liberate her country can she liberate her own fate.

I recommend this book to readers who love historical fiction, young adult, cultural, fiction, and historical.

Stephany says

This book is about a girl named Leela who is living in Ghandi-era India. When Leela's husband dies, she is subjected to live the life of a widow, having to shave her head and "keep corner" in her house for a full year, even though she only is 12. Leela learns to appreciate the world around her and find the good in bad situations during her year of keeping corner, and she finds that sometimes tradition needs to be broken so that new ideas can improve life.
