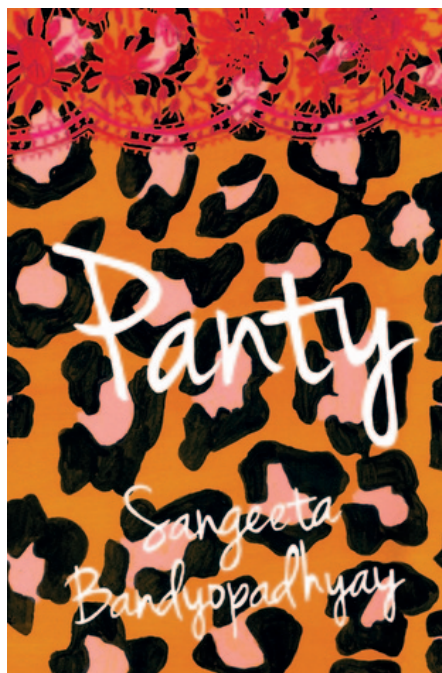




Panty

Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay , Arunava Sinha (Translator)

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Darkly glamorous and fiercely erotic heroines take centre stage in these two novellas.

In Panty, when a mysterious young woman arrives in Calcutta and moves into a guest house, she finds in an otherwise empty wardrobe a soft and silky panty in leopard-skin print. She thinks the woman who wore it must have possessed a wild sexual nature. A feeling of companionship envelops her; the sexual lives of the two women begin to mingle and blur.

In Hypnosis, another young woman-a TV journalist on perpetual night duty-has an unconsummated but passionate affair with a famous musician that leaves her shattered. In the nightmarish sequence of events that follows, she allows herself to be hypnotized and drugged to aid her search for love.

Exposing our darkest desires and deepest fears when it comes to love, the effect of Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay's ferocious storytelling is deliciously anarchic and deeply unsettling.

Panty Details

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Author : Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay , Arunava Sinha (Translator)

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Genre : Fiction, Cultural, India, Magical Realism

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From Reader Review Panty for online ebook

Katie says

Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay, 'the woman who reintroduced hardcore sexuality to Bengali literature.'

This was dark, explicit, and a bit weird (usually positive adjectives for me), however I'm not entirely convinced that the writing was up to par. However, I totally understand that this could be down to the translation and not Bandyopadhyay herself.

Emma Robertson says

This slight novel contains two stories within it's 122 pages.

The first is the main story Panty and is about a woman with no name, friends, family to mention of arriving and living in a new city in a flat owned by a man we don't know whilst she is awaiting an operation.

The book is based in Kolkata, India and at times as you are absorbed into the poetic prose, you can feel the heat emanating from the page.

The chapters are composed in a unique style out of sequence which give us moments of visceral beauty, tenderness and sexual individuality. In equal measure this small story had not only the depth and power to absorb you, it could also leave you feeling disarmed and disorientated.

Ultimately this book deals with a number of interesting questions being dealt with by Bengali and Indian women at the current time around feminism, ownership of their sexuality, their religion and their place within the nation's identity in such a poignant way it was a thoroughly enjoyable read.

The author Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay released this initially in Bengali now translated fantastically into English by Arunava Sinha and published for all to enjoy by Tilted/Axis press, I cannot wait to read her further translated works being released later in 2017.

Manasa says

Read more on my blog : <https://notchaitea.wordpress.com/>

Panty is originally written in Bengali by Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay (SB) and has been translated into English by Arunava Sinha. SB is described as "the woman who reintroduced hardcore sexuality into Bengali literature"[1] so I was both intrigued and bit wary of a Mills and Boon-esque horror awaiting me. Instead, I was met with a no-nonsense portrayal of contemporary Indian society, which explores female sexuality as only one of its themes. Among other things Panty deals with issues of nationhood, religion and questions what it means to be a feminist through a complicated relationship between the protagonist and her lover/boyfriend/partner? (we never find out).

It's a very short book (121 pages) but it took me a good 4 days to read because each chapter was so different

from the other that it took a while for me to digest. Each chapter is connected by but not exactly a continuation of the previous. The erotic, or more correctly, the sensual, is an interwoven part of the other themes explored. In short, if this book were an object it would be a patchwork quilt of emotions sown together with the thread of sensuality and love/lust. So I thought I would highlight some themes that stood out to me from the initial reading:

Female Sexuality

Fifty Shades and Co. should sit up and take notes. I hated fifty shades because 1. the hype around it was unnecessary and more importantly 2. it was so apologetic about female sexuality and also tried hard to justify – what to me at times was – a non-consensual relationship with a male lead and his ‘mommy issues’. Anastasia’s character despite being the protagonist was cast entirely through the male gaze of a ‘sexy sheepish librarian’ stereotype (although of course women can also want to be sexy librarians etc. etc.). All this and more is why I disagree with people that pulled out the feminist banner for E.L James.

There is none of this wishy-washyness with SB’s bold and cutting writing which presents an unabashed female gaze. [2] B’s interpretation of sexuality blurs the line between love, lust, the physical and the emotional (as Sinha’s note on the Bengali concept of Mon explains below) and will definitely make you question your comfort zone.

img_9024Feminisms and Relationships

I feel like a lot of talk around feminism has to do with declaring yourself to be a feminist – which is great because even in 2016 this needs to be reiterated till we dismantle the patriarchy for both men and women. However, there’s not enough discussion on how hard it is actually to live by the feminist principles we so boldly advocate. Apart from the oft quoted structural barriers[3] there are those social (dare I say ideological?!) barriers[4] that we can impose on our selves, from jobs we do, the things we buy and even to the relationships we seek out.

This is precisely what SB explores through her unnamed female protagonist and her messy relationship. It’s an unconventional and even disappointing love between two people that our protagonist is trying to figure out for herself. You vaguely get the sense that this is an illicit affair with a married or otherwise engaged man. It poses the question, how much of an independent woman are you really if your every move revolves around a relationship that is not even making you happy?

Religion, Otherness and social-inequality

Another short trippy chapter explores religion in contemporary India. Here our protagonist finds herself on a bus surrounded by religious men heading towards an unknown destination. I really connected with this because I worry about the hardline direction that so called ‘hindutva’ is introducing in India. I felt that this particular story highlighted how this increasing hardline trend is pushing out not only ethnic and religious minorities but also women from public spaces.

Panty also explores poverty in the urban metropolitan cities like Kolkatta. Unlike other romantic or self-orientalist versions of India, SB explores problems with its urban poor in a very constructive way. I like the way that she doesn’t go into any flowery language to describe the rich/poor juxtaposition that is rife in metropolitan Indian cities (or anywhere n the world really...). There is no sympathy, rather there is a conversation that is happening through our heroine’s encounters with the street dwellers outside her high rise Kolkatta apartment.

To me, Panty is a great blueprint for the kind of conversations we should be having in coffee shops, in our living rooms, on whatsapp etc. about the state of our feminisms, social-inequality in the urban cities, modern

loneliness and much more. Basically, I feel like she is saying I don't have the answers but here are the right questions, now own it and get on with it!

A bit of context:

Panty, written by Sangeeta Bandhopadhyay in Bengali and had been translated by Arunava Sinha. This particular copy is printed by Tilted Axis Press, a new not-for-profit publisher based in South London. Their mission is to tilt "the axis of world literature from the centre to the margins allowing us to challenge that very division." I think they've got off to a great start! I would really recommend checking out their website, I've already pre-ordered their next book! <http://www.tiltedaxispress.com/>

[1] <http://www.tiltedaxispress.com/panty/>

[2] Laura Mulvey's psychoanalytic film theory points out that the female character/body in most narratives are constructed through and for the 'male gaze' or the heterosexual man's pleasure. While this point is valid it doesn't leave much space for female agency or the possibility of expressing a female sexuality or gaze.

[3] To name one in a million, the gender pay gap in UK today is 18%, which widens for women with children! <https://www.theguardian.com/money/201...>

Jessica says

A solid 2.5 rounded up. I did enjoy this. Didn't really understand much of what was going on in your mind, but liked some parts all the same.

Priyanka Sofia says

3.5 stars.

This one has me stumped. On the one hand, so wonderfully atmospheric – I love Kolkata and its vast magnificence with old buildings, memorials, the Hooghly river, Park Street (and I did feel as though I was stuck in a flat observing the city from my balcony while I read this). I also liked the section on secularism and the frank exploration of female sexuality. On the other hand, the dream like structure of the vignettes was disorientating; this deserves a reread. I am interested to read her novel *Abandon*, also published by Tilted Axis Press.

Robert says

Every year I try to read a few translated novels in order to vary my reading but I always end up being dissatisfied. *Panty* was no exception.

A lady moves into a flat and finds a used panty in a wardrobe. When she puts it on, she begins to imagine the previous owner who wore it. This leads to a tale fusing sexuality and religion. Eventually the previous owner's life is fused with the current owner until the truth comes out and the offending underwear has to be disposed of.

I didn't mind the translation and it is an original story but I had trouble connecting with the book, the writing and the characters were not fully fleshed. I appreciate the inner message about suffering and sexuality but I felt there could have been more depth.

I'm sure that fans of translated fiction will love this but it left me a bit cold.

Alisa says

Kind of a weird reading experience. This is actually 2 novellas, but the jacket description on my copy doesn't mention that, and only describes the 2nd story. So I'm reading and it keeps not matching what I expect it to be about. As it turns out, I actually enjoyed the first novella more. Both pieces had surreal aspects, but I found more to engage with in the character in the first, maybe because her details were just a little more colored in. Definitely a book with interesting things to think about for a long while after. I'm glad I read it.

Paul says

This consists of a novella, Panty and a short story Sahana or Shamim. They address love, longing and sexual desire and the working out thereof. Bandyopadhyay describes the genesis of the novel thus:

"If, confined by three or four days of constant, torrential rain, someone were to discover Jack Kerouac beneath the pillow, Milan Kundera and Sylvia Plath on a chair in the veranda, the poet Jibanananda Das on the water-filter, and Salvador Dali and James Joyce when chasing a rat into the larder, and if, on top of all this, that someone were to be a Bengali writer, especially a woman writer, would the awakening of her reckless impulse to write a novel like Panty not seem as natural as the stormy winds that accompany rain?" The author has been described as "the woman who reintroduced hardcore sexuality into Bengali literature", and there is indeed a great deal of eroticism in the novel, the juxtapositions are sometimes surreal and always interesting. An unnamed woman moves into an apartment in Kolkata. She has no luggage and seems to be waiting for surgery which may or may not happen and is sometimes in pain. She discovers a discarded pair of leopard print panties in the wardrobe and starts to think about the other woman who once owned them: "I picked it up. Imported. Soft. Leopard print. At once I wanted to know who the owner was. Many years ago I had found a blue bangle in a bedside drawer in a hotel room. When I took it in my hand it seemed to be dripping blue water. That day, too, I'd felt an urge to find out who the owner was."

"I slipped into the panty.

What I did not know was that I had actually stepped into a woman.

I slipped into her womanhood.

Her sexuality, her love.

I slipped into her desire, her sinful adultery, her humiliation and sorrow, her shame and loathing. I had entered her life, though I didn't know it."

The lives of the two women begin to intertwine and it becomes quite difficult to work out which chapter relates to which woman; assuming of course there are two women; there are no easy answers:

"I found myself standing before a mirror stretching across the wall. The reflection didn't seem to be mine, exactly, but of another, shadowy figure. I touched my hair. Eerily, the reflection did not"

Bandyopadhyay weaves sexuality seamlessly into the rest of life and the issues covered include poverty, homelessness, religion, Kashmir, terrorism, class, marriage and death. Opposite the apartment lives a homeless family and they figure in a number of chapters providing a contrast with the relative wealth of the woman.

The woman witnesses a suicide, someone jumps from a building:

“At once I made the death my own. “This is my death,” I said. I seemed to have rid myself of a weight I had borne some seven or eight months, and the foot I set down on the pavement felt completely new.”

Each chapter provides a sketch of a situation or incident. The chapter numbers are not sequential. There are twenty-one chapters numbered between one and thirty. There may be a meaning or code there, but if there was I didn't spot it! This may sound a little surreal or ethereal but it is grounded in the physicality of sex and the female body and the descriptions are frank. Bandyopadhyay said in an interview:

“I had talked openly about orgasms — one of my woman characters says, “I can feel it” — and people told me, “How can you be so open? There are some things that you can't be so open about.” But I don't think you have much control over what you write. It flows.”

This is an exploration of female sexuality, with and without men and the two (like the women you could argue as well that there is only one man) nameless men take varying active and passive roles.

Sahana or Shamim, the short story at the end is about a married woman who eats fish behind the back of her vegetarian husband knowing that if he finds out it will end their relationship. It is surprisingly visceral with an interesting twist.

I've read some awfully bad erotica in my time. This is not in that category. It is many layered and grounded, if somewhat surreal

Vivek Tejuja says

I had a lot of eyes staring at the cover of this book as I was reading it, and me being me, I could not care less. That is all there is to it in our society I think. A word or a picture that titillates to get people to stare and perhaps even pass judgment. “Panty” also did that in a quiet way and I knew I would get the stares as I would remove it from my bag in public and read it with great delight and joy. To me the book was all about shedding inhibitions and being the person you are – or rather trying to find who you are.

“Panty” by Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay is a collection of two novellas – Hypnosis and Panty and each of them is all about love, longing and sexual desire that runs deeper than we know or care to admit. The two novellas shook me for a long time after I finished the book. It was not like the way I felt when I finished reading “Abandon” by the same author, but it was bittersweet and I loved the feeling that came over me. I cannot explain it but I will try – the feeling of melancholy, of utter hopelessness and yet so much hope and positivity lined with it. That is what great books do to you.

Hypnosis is about a woman trying to reach into her past, to confront her doomed love affair with a well-known musician by undergoing hypnosis. In Panty, we meet a woman who has moved into a guest house and finds a panty there – it is soft and silky in leopard-skin print (this is the cover of the book – though it is not soft or silky as I would have liked it to be). She starts imagining the life of the woman who must have worn it and suddenly their lives intermingle and reality blurs from fiction.

Bandyopadhyay's voice is bold. It is unique. It is also raw. It is also a whole lot of other adjectives that people might use for it, but for me it was just honest. It comes from a place that does not believe in hiding. The writing makes you keep turning the pages for sure, but it also makes you pause and think about life in general and also about it – when it falls in love, when it is lusting for a body and when it wants to be consumed, no matter what. I think the book stops being about gender and just is about human experiences.

Arunava Sinha's translation only makes it possible for readers in English to experience this rich and almost lush piece of Bengali literature. It is for such translations and more, that publishers should take more efforts in bringing this to readers the world over. “Panty” is a book which should be read without fear of being judged or being made fun of. It is most beautiful and stupendous work of Indian literature I have come across

in recent times.

enricocioni says

A woman steps into an apartment in Kolkata. It's nighttime, and none of the light switches work. She finds a mirror, but when she touches her hair her reflection does not replicate the gesture. She showers, and as she's showering she can hear a phone ringing. The next morning, she finds a stained, abandoned pair of women's leopard-print underwear at the bottom of a wardrobe. And later that day, a menstrual emergency forces her to replace her own underwear with the leopard-print pair. But as she slips it on, she also steps into the previous owner's life and mind. The rest of the novella switches between the two women, mixing dreams and childhood memories, strange adventures and sexual encounters, thoughts and body parts.

Panty is the sort of book that presents readers with one mystery after the next, inviting us to read it over and over again in order to "solve" it. Why are the chapter numbers not in the correct order, and why are some numbers missing? When are we reading about the underwear's previous owner, and when are we reading about its current wearer? What does it mean that religion is "a memory of the dream of past lives"? Why did the translator leave a brief note at the beginning calling attention to the South Asian concept of mon, which includes both "heart" and "mind"? What is the relationship, if any, between Panty and the short story included at the end of the book, Sahana, or Samim, about a woman's complex relationship with a husband who is both a devout Muslim and violently repulsed by the eating of fish?

Read the rest of my review over at my blog, Strange Bookfellows: [https://strangebookfellowsblog.wordpress...](https://strangebookfellowsblog.wordpress.com)

Tonymess says

She "who had no name, no identity, no family, no city or village, no property or assets" arrives in the city in the middle of the night and is put up in a large dark apartment by a mysterious man. The only thing left in the apartment (there is no light, our narrator is in darkness metaphorically and physically), is a pair of stained leopard skin panties. Due to the onset of our protagonist's period and with no other clothes our mystery woman puts in the panties;

I slipped into the panty.

What I did not know was that I had actually stepped into a woman.

I slipped into her womanhood.

Her sexuality, her love.

I slipped into her desire, her sinful adultery, her humiliation and sorrow, her shame and loathing. I had entered her life, though I didn't know it. I even slipped into her defeat and her withdrawal. I slipped into her nation too, in that moment. Trite thoughts about her world passed through my mind. How fine the material was, I reflected. Soft. A perfect fit. As though tailored especially for me. After putting it on, I was no longer repulsed. I lay down, spreading my hair out on the pillow. Although I do not admit that I fell asleep, it is undeniable that I was woken up by a series of sounds in the room.

Chapter numbers are random (or are they) starting at Chapter 29, moving to 15, then 11, back to 18 etc. with not all numbers covered this is very much a fractured tale of a fractured nation, India. Whilst fractured this book is also, very much like the Tilted Axis agenda, a work that plays with "spaces". Opening with a definition from the translator of the Bangla word "m?n";

In the ontology that English-reading people have acquired through their books, the heart and the mind are binary – neither word can be used to refer to the other. In Indian languages, however, this word (m?n in Bangla, man in Hindi) represents neither the heart nor the mind exclusively. It takes a position, contextually to the rest of the text, on a continuum between the heart and the mind, between emotion and reason, between feeling and knowing.”

- Arunava Sinha

For my full review go to <http://messybooker.blogspot.com.au/20...>

Viv JM says

I'm not quite sure how to rate this book...I liked the dark, feverish, surreal nature of it but I did feel that most of the time I had no clue at all what it was about!! Maybe it's a book that demands a re-read. In any case, I'm leaving it unrated for now.

Tommie says

The Tilted Axis cover of this book is infinitely better. I can't imagine a piece of experimental fiction written by a man would get this corny a cover. but ignore it because: this prose poem of a book is a series of shuffled, surreal, bruising vignettes. It's provocative and unusual and definitely worthwhile.

Daria says

Incomprehensible, which made this unpleasant reading. Although I did notice as I got to the end that the chapters are misnumbered: I wonder what would have happened if I had read them in the designated number order, rather than in a traditional left to right fashion. That's an interesting idea - a book that can be read in more than one direction - though unfortunately this wasn't the sort of book that inspired any desire for a re-read.

Kell says

This thin book manages to do many things, though many of them only partially. It's written in short chapters, most between 1 and 5 pages long, and numbered non-chronologically (I believe the numbers correspond to a timeline but the timeline is disjointed and out of order... and I didn't look too closely to see if my theory is right). There is an "I," a "she," and a "you" character; the first two generally appear in mutually exclusive chapters, while the "you" owns the central apartment, and carries into both. Not much is given on any of the subjects, and "she" and "I" overlap so that it becomes unclear where difference and sameness are/end (or rather, whether we are supposed to read different identities - I kept wondering what the book was asking of me and whether I was receiving it well, or at all). There are themes of isolation, lonely womanhood specifically; anonymity in a city; aspects of religion, culture, morality, relationship, love and abuse.

With so little given, and such a format that the story doesn't really unfold or reveal itself over time, I found it difficult to understand what was meant by what I read. At times, I wondered if the way the book read was

due to Bandyopadhyay's writing or due to the translation, if it holds together in a more coherent way in Bengali than English. I read, I took pleasure and found areas of insight in Bandyopadhyay's ideas and creation as a whole - but as I mentioned, I felt I was missing something, perhaps the key piece to feeling that I understood and could be satisfied with my reading.

There's a second story in the book, titled *Sahana, or Shamim*. It is about an unhealthily dependent relationship and I neither enjoyed it nor found it terribly clever.
