ANIL AGGRAWAL'S

Internet Journal of Book Reviews

A sister journal of AAIJFMT · Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology

VOL. 1, NO. 2 · JULY – DECEMBER 2002

Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-9674 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/br/vol_001_no_002/reviews/f_books/page001a.html

The Second Highest World War - The Rama Theatre

THE BOOK

Author	Anoop Chandola
Publisher	Authors Choice Press
Published	2002
Format	Paperback, 6" x 9"
Pages	237
ISBN-10	0-595-22229-3
Price	$14.95

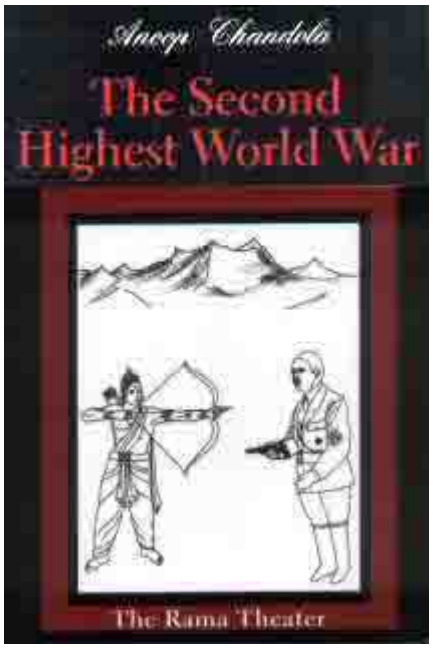
HOW TO CITE

Fernando R. Review of *The Second Highest World War - The Rama Theatre*, by Anoop Chandola. *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews*. 2002;1(2).

> *...FEATURED BOOK : REVIEWS [Review 1] [Main Page] [Review 2] [Interview with Anoop Chandola] WELL-WRITTEN AND ENJOYABLE ...This book, like 'To Kill A Mocking Bird', is a must for all pupils not only in India and the east but the western world as well. 'To Kill A Mocking Bird' is at present a reader for GCSE's (General Certificate of Secondary Education) here in Britain. Chandola's book is a much easier read and is suitable for a younger age group as well. This book should be translated into other languages, especially those of the Indian sub-continent...*

The Second Highest World War - The Rama Theatre *by* Anoop Chandola, Paperback, 6" x 9" Authors Choice Press, an imprint of iUniverse, Inc., 5220 S. 16th St., Suite 200, Lincoln, NE 68512. www.iuniverse.com: . Publication Date 2002. 237 pages, ISBN 0-595-22229-3. Price $14.95 US, $24.95 Canada, £12.99 UK, Category: Fiction

Buy this book from Amazon by clicking here



If a book should be judged first of all by its readability, Anoop Chandola's novel should receive top marks. Not only is this book very readable but also it is a very cleverly written social commentary with a lot of humour and sympathy. It is in a slightly unusual category but I loved reading it and enjoyed every word of it.

Written from a child's point of view it intertwines three separate themes. Village life and growing up in a remote village in northern India - The annual Rama lila or The Rama Drama festival - and finally the experiences of the Second World War and the events leading to India's bloody independence culminating in Gandhi's assassination.

It is essentially a charming and true to life account of a boy by the name of Chander, growing up in the Himalayan foot hills during the Second World War years. He was able to see the Himalayan Mountains every single day of his life. The natural beauty of his surroundings compensated for lack of creature comforts and enriched his life.

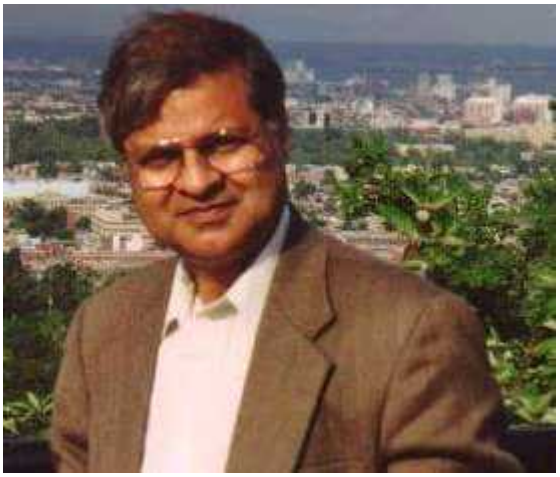
It is a powerful and moving account of a child's understanding or misunderstanding of society, how the ambiguous behaviour of the adults confused and affected him, how his friends suffered from child abuse, domestic violence, religious and caste discrimination, death, birth and marriage. Uncles are of the same age as nephews. These are few of the social issues he highlights through laughter and tears. The book has a lot of pearls - if humour through tears can be called pearls.

The author mentions that his village is in the mountainous region where Jim Corbett once hunted man-eating tigers. He tells the story of how a tiger killed his school friend and how the tiger was finally shot dead! The account of the reaction of the dead child's grieving mother when shown the dead tiger is graphic and has been written with a lot of emotion.

India is one of the most fascinating countries in the world. There is no doubt that the author has managed to graphically highlight this fact. I wished he had written more about the food of that region and in particular the way the food was prepared because the general public of the western world are mostly ignorant on such matters.

Rama lila - the Annual Dramatisation of the epic Ramayana, which threads through the whole novel is one of the major themes. The dramatisation of this epic lasted ten days! Just imagine going to the open-air theatre every night for ten nights just to see the end of the story!

Anoop Chandola



Anoop Chandola, born in India, is a professor of East Asian Studies at teh University of Arizona. his degrees in linguistics include an M.A. from the University of California (Berkeley) and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He is the author of 10 books including a novel, *Discovering Brides*

My only regret is that when he incorporated the Ramayana into his book he did not stress the point that the first ever mention of a flying machine in the world literature (The Dandu Monara Yanthraya in my language) was in the Ramayana. As the Ramayana goes in to considerable detail on this fascinating machine I wish the author had spared a few paragraphs in his book as well.

This book is Social Commentary as well. That mankind's worst enemy is man himself is made obvious. How religious intolerance led to division of India and how caste differences fragmented his (canders) own community and led to violence is very well illustrated in a very sympathetic and philosophical manner. It is generally agreed that Mahatma Gandhi was the 'Greatest Leader of the Twentieth Century'. Chander describes Gandhi's influence on his northern community and describes with great understanding how Independence and Gandhi's assassination affected people of all walks of life. Many young men of the British Empire fought alongside British Troops during the WW II and many lost their lives. They were volunteers in that there were no conscripts from Asia. My own late father saw brief but violent action in the one-day-war for Srilanka (when the Japanese attacked Trincomalee) and survived to tell the tale. Chandola renews the record for the benefit of the new generation: The part that "Indians" played in a "foreign war".

This book, like 'To Kill A Mocking Bird', is a must for all pupils not only in India and the east but the western world as well. 'To Kill A Mocking Bird' is at present a reader for GCSE's (General Certificate of Secondary Education) here in Britain. Chandola's book is a much easier read and is suitable for a younger age group as well.

This book should be translated into other languages, especially those of the Indian sub-continent.

-Ranji Fernando

And here is the review by Gyan

RAMAYANA....THE GREAT SANSKRIT POEM OF INDIA

The book by Chandola makes references to the Great Indian Epic time and again. The reader would find the book much more rewarding if he knew something about this. For readers who only have a vague idea about this epic poem, our first reviewer Ranji has written this short note about the epic..

RAMAYANA one of the longest epic poems in world literature was written more than 2000 years ago.in 300 b.c. But it is thought that the oral tradition of Ramayana goes back a few more centuries to about 600 to 700 b.c. Valmiki wrote it in Sanskrit and it consists of six books of 24000 verses (slokas). The story of Rama has fascinated generations of mankind and to this day it is dramatised in many different forms in many Asian cultures.

King Dasaratha ruled the Kingdom of Kosala. The capital of Kosala was Ayodhya. The king had three wives and four sons. The eldest was Rama. Rama was the reincarnation of god Vishnu. Bharatha and the twins Lakshmana and Sathrughna were the younger brothers. Rama and Lakshmana were inseparable even as children and Lakshmana was seen with Rama at all times.

King Dasaratha's second wife tricked him into giving the kingdom to her son Bharatha and banishing Rama into Exile for fourteen years. Rama's beautiful wife Sita and Lakshmana refused to let him go alone and accompanied him into the forest. They lived in exile, a simple life of austerity among the holy men, hermits and sages and of course the wild animals of the forest.

Ravana the Demon (Asura) king of Lanka had a machine capable of air travel, which was called a VIMANA (Dandu Monara Yanthraya - in Sinhala). Ramayana describes the Vimana as a Double Decker operated by a complex control system capable of very fast air travel. Ravana used it to abduct Sita and carry her off to Lanka. She was held prisoner in Lanka. Ravana constantly tried to make Sita accept him as her husband, but Sita loved Rama and knew that he will some day come in search of her and fight to death to rescue her. She was strong in her refusal of Ravana

Rama's forces consisted of monkeys, bears and humans. Lacking air power, Hanuman the monkey commander and his army built a bridge to Lanka. (There is a string of small islands linking SriLanka and India and now known as Adam's Bridge) Finally Lanka was destroyed and Ravana was killed and Sita was rescued.

THAT is not the end of the story, because Sita lived in Ravana's court for some time she had to prove that she remained faithful to Rama! She proved her chastity and purity by stepping into a fire. Sita's purity was such that the fire did not burn her.....Eventually when the banishment period was over Rama and Sita returned to Ayodhya and ruled as rightful King and Queen.

The first mention in world literature of a flying machine owned by an earth dweller was in Ramayana. MAHABHARATHA and other ancient texts mention flying machines used by GODS in terrible warfare.

-Compiled From various sources by Ranji Fernando

This is a work of fiction and it is one of those well-written, enjoyable, rather quaint and Colonial type of book that emerges from the Indian sub-continent on a regular basis. That is the impression that one gets at first glance. The book is not from India except that the author was born in India but now resides in America (The author, Anoop Chandola is Indian born but one suspects has spent a good part of his life outside India.)

As one would expect from a book from the Indian sub-continent it is not a glitzy, trashy, pulp story. In fact there is hardly any sex in it! Not of the graphic kind anyway.

The book is a rather unusual work with a rather unusual plot. There are three themes running through the book. They are separate in their own way but at the same time twisted and plaited around one another in a harmonious manner rather like the plaited hair of an Indian girl. Interwoven but orderly.

The three themes are discussed on the previous page in my wife Ranji's review and I do not propose to repeat them or go into the social commentary aspect of the book.

A young child's perspective of life is fascinating. There is no cynicism or jaded views that colour one's thinking in later life. Your thoughts are pure and innocent. You are unassuming and naïve. In fact you are "childish"! Perception and retention is however another thing. Childhood memories never go away. Good or bad.

Brought up as a Catholic in the 1950s and 60's in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) my own Rama theatre as a young boy was the church and the church school.

I can still remember the school "concerts" that we watched in fascination or the "Passion Plays" on Good Friday. The open-air theatres with natural lighting provided by the setting tropical sun with a little bit of help from Petromax lamps. The smells.!

Memories of my own childhood were jogged by Anoop's book, particularly by the references to Petromax lamps and Mohammad Rafi! I didn't shed any tears though, having been through the mill myself.

Chandola's story is set in the 1940s and the background events of the Second World War disturb the tranquillity of a Himalayan village. The village is the type of village that one recognises from the books of that Great White Hunter: Jim Corbett.

Life is tough but is bearable because of the Rama Theatre. In growing up in the Himalayan foothills in the bleak war years, as one would expect the only entertainment available to a young boy was the open-air theatre. Men Behaving Badly! A serial film. Early Bollywood!

There are a number of memorable and humorous lines in the book including the following:

"No wonder the English occupied India so fast. They ate big sandwiches, while we ate rotis in small pieces."

"The daughter, Ratna, was born the day he retired as a forest ranger. Local folks called her "Retirement"".

"Ravana has been born again. His name is Hitler."

"Religious people are gullible. Even if a fakir farts, they hear or smell spirituality in it."

"That was the day when I learned that there were Englishmen, and then there were Englishmen. We must learn our own history from them".

Childhood memories can be painful and the scars remain but the funny side of life tempers them. Comedy follows Tragedy, or the other way around depending on your perspective of life.

There are tragedies: Deaths in the family, tiger attacks, war casualties and road accidents.

There are of course loads of amusing incidents, which very quickly erase the tragedies: A drunk gulping down a bottle of Kerosene oil, drunken actors forgetting the plot and improvising in a manner that only drunks could (especially when dressed in a monkey suit), clan warfare threatening to topple an acrobat dangerously perched on a tall bamboo.

The style of writing is Anglo-Indian but readable, although readers not acquainted with the Ramayana or familiar with a Sanskrit based language might find the going rough. The grammar is perfect but as one would expect the spelling is American.

There is a slight hint of Rudyard Kipling. It would of course be difficult for anybody from the sub-continent to write English without sub-consciously falling back on Kipling, Corbett or John Masters ("Bhowani Junction"). I suspect that the book is semi-autobiographical with a slight warping of the time period.

I haven't read the author's previous work "Discovering Brides" but hope to track down a copy soon.

-Gyan Fernando



-Ranji and Gyan Fernando
Ranji and Gyan Fernando are a wife and husband team. Both were born in 1949 in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) but now reside in Devon, England. Although married for 28 years they still entertain different views on life. Both enjoy reading and in particular books from the Indian sub-continent ranging from Rudyard Kipling to Arundhati Roy. Both insist that for the first time in their married life of 28 yrs they had finally more or less agreed on something!

Order this Book by clicking here.

Interview with Chandola.

Contact Anoop Chandola, the author of this book by clicking here.

-Editor-in-Chief