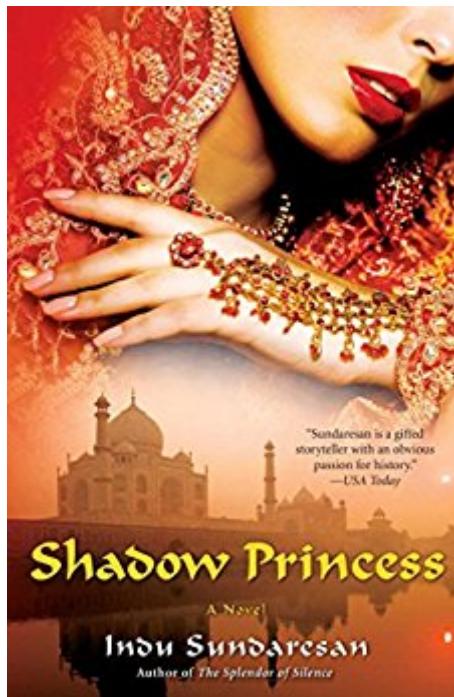


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Shadow Princess: A Novel



Synopsis

Critically acclaimed author Indu Sundaresan picks up where she left off in *The Twentieth Wife* and *The Feast of Roses*, returning to seventeenth-century India as two princesses struggle for supremacy of their father's kingdom. Trapped in the shadow of the magnificent tomb their grief-stricken father is building for his beloved deceased wife, the emperor's daughters compete for everything: control over the imperial harem, their father's affection, and the future of their country. They are forbidden to marry and instead choose to back different brothers in the fight for ultimate power over the throne. But only one of the sisters will succeed. With an enthusiasm for history and a flair for rich detail, Indu Sundaresan brings readers deep into the complicated lives of Indian women of the time period and highlights the profound history of one of the most celebrated works of architecture in the world, the Taj Mahal.

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Customer Reviews

Readers will find this a stylish novel, giving a fascinating description of how the Taj Mahal was built. Ms. Sundaresan cleverly fills her paragraphs with many vivid descriptions so that when you turn a page you will have experienced sights, smells, tastes, colors, sizzling heat and cooling breezes as

she takes you back in time. You are there. You see firsthand the bazaars, the cloistered zenana, the opulence of the palace the lifestyle and indulgence of the emperors. Her writing style is like a beautiful art piece. She "paints" with bold, confident strokes, pulling you in, so that you get the feeling that if you turn around you will be face to face with the characters, close enough to touch them. The story begins with the untimely death of Empress Arjumand leaving behind her young children and inconsolable husband, Emperor Shah Jahan. They had shared a deep bond of passionate love and after her death he was never the same. The death of the empress left a great deal of responsibility on her oldest daughter, Jahanara who was only nineteen. Princess Jahanara's character and the stresses of her life are well-developed and beautifully intertwined in the story. In fact, this is not revealed until after the first fifty pages or so, giving the reader plenty of time to get to know all the characters and their individual personalities. Ms. Sundaresan's writing is downright elegant; she has taken the time to carefully develop every single character and bring them to life - from the mighty emperors, the young princes and princesses right down to the humble servants who run to obey their every command. Each character in the book is impeccably and cleverly fleshed out so that you are given a look into their minds and hearts to discover who they really are.

The death of Mumtaz Muhal, Emperor Shah Jahan's Exalted One of the Palace, after the birth of her fourteenth child is the foundation for Sundaresan's beautifully crafted and detailed novel of the Mughal Empire in 1631. With attention to historical detail and compassion for those caught in the great drama of the succession, the author captures the emotional tenor of the aftermath of the death of the empress and the political machinations of the four sons who are heirs to the throne. The man who will eventually erect the Taj Mahal to honor his dead wife, ruthless though he may have been in gaining his throne, is devastated by the enormity of his loss. Suddenly plans to marry his favorite daughter, Jahanara to Mizra Najabat Khan are put on indefinite hold, although the younger sister, Roshanara, covets this particular man for herself. It is Jahanara who is the star of this piece, a young woman denied the man she loves to serve her father in his time of need. His need will absorb her future; Jahan pays a heavy price for accepting that burden, one she embraces with conviction. At odds with her older and more powerful sister, Roshanara slips easily into her role as Jahan's adversary, secretly aligning herself with a younger brother, Aurangzeb in lieu of the emperor's obvious choice for succession, Dara. While Dara takes his position and his place in his father's affections for granted, Aurangzeb nurtures his own ambitions, active where Dara is lazy and spoiled. Meanwhile, the emperor ignores affairs of state in his obsession with building a monument to his beloved wife.

For lovers of historical fiction, nothing is better than a book that has you immersed in the storyline and engages all of your five senses, so that when you look up from reading it takes you a couple of seconds to re-orient to your current surroundings. Shadow Princess by Indu Sundaresan was just that book for me. When Shadow Princess opens we are transported to 17th century India as the Mumtaz Muhal, the much beloved wife of the Emperor, is about to give birth to her 14th child. Also, in the room with her are her two teen-aged daughters, Jahanara(17) and Roshanara (14). As the birth process continues, it appears Mumtaz Muhal may not survive, and she reaches out for Jahanara, neglecting Roshanara, who also rushes to her mother's side. But, despite the best of care available, Mumtaz Muhal dies, leaving behind four sons, two older daughters, a newborn girl child, and an inconsolable husband. But when the Emperor is finally convinced to resume his morning appearances before the royalty, it obvious that he is in a very fragile state; for a show of unity, Jahanara thrusts her four brothers out into the balcony to stand by their father. At this moment, all four brothers, despite their young age, feel the surge of power of being Emperor and this becomes each of their goals. Roshanara, once again feeling left out, and in her bitterness wonders how to control her destiny in this male-dominated world. While this is the third book in the Sundaresan's trilogy on the Mughal Empire, it is not necessary to read the prior books to enjoy this storyline. Sundaresan's passion and research for this period of Indian history comes through in her exquisite writing and the decoding of the culture. This a tale of the lush life of the royalty and those favored by them.

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