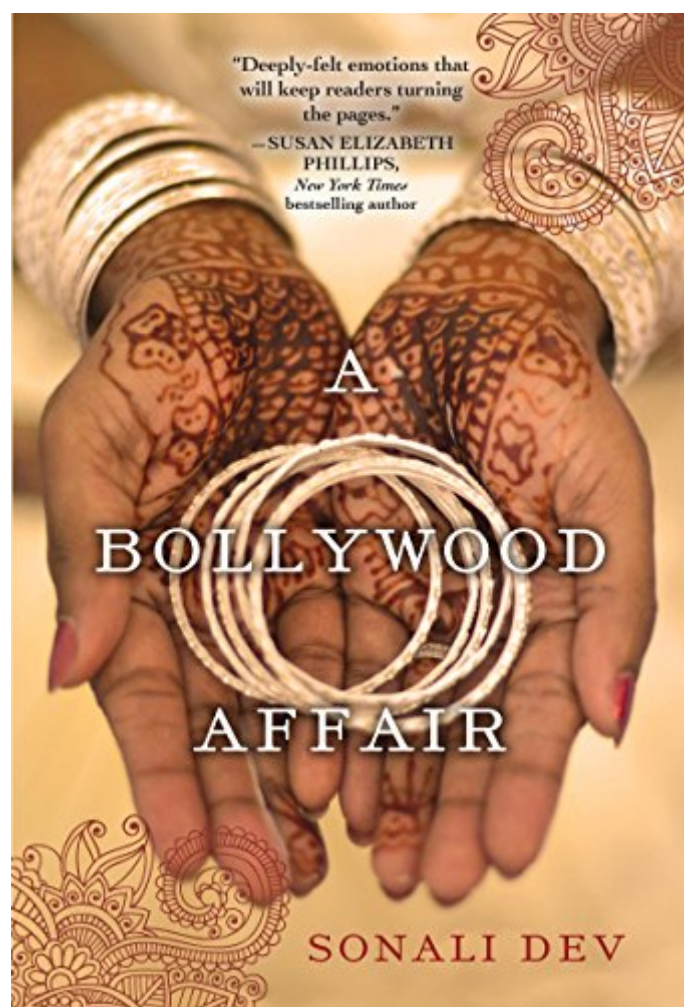


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A Bollywood Affair



Synopsis

“Deeply-felt emotions that will keep readers turning the pages.” --Susan Elizabeth Phillips, New York Times bestselling author
Mili Rathod hasn't seen her husband in twenty years—not since she was promised to him at the age of four. Yet marriage has allowed Mili a freedom rarely given to girls in her village. Her grandmother has even allowed her to leave India and study in America for eight months, all to make her the perfect modern wife. Which is exactly what Mili longs to be—if her husband would just come and claim her. Bollywood's favorite director, Samir Rathod, has come to Michigan to secure a divorce for his older brother. Persuading a naïve village girl to sign the papers should be easy for someone with Samir's tabloid-famous charm. But Mili is neither a fool nor a gold-digger. Open-hearted yet complex, she's trying to reconcile her independence with cherished traditions. And before he can stop himself, Samir is immersed in Mili's life—cooking her dal and rotis, escorting her to her roommate's elaborate Indian wedding, and wondering where his loyalties and happiness lie. Heartfelt, witty, and thoroughly engaging, Sonali Dev's debut is both a vivid exploration of modern India and a deeply honest story of love, in all its diversity. “A delightful debut packed with complex characters and deep emotions.” —Shobhan Bantwal, author of *The Dowry Bride* “Sonali Dev not only entertains but provides new insight into the human condition. A must-read.” —Mingmei Yip, author of *Peach Blossom Pavilion*

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Customer Reviews

(Full disclosure: I received a free book for review through Goodreads's First Reads program. Also, there are clearly marked spoilers towards the end of this review. Trigger warning for rape and child abuse.) Like tens of millions of her peers, Malvika "Mili" Rathod is a child bride.* In a bargain struck by her grandmother and the groom's grandfather, Mili was married off at the age of four; she has spent the past twenty years waiting for her husband to return to Balpur and claim her. Unfortunately, hers was not a meeting of the minds, in even the loosest sense of the term: a year after the marriage, her betrothed's mother packed up Virat and his younger brother Samir and moved the family to Nagpur, away from the clutches of their abusive and controlling grandfather. Not long after, Lata sent notice to the Balpur village council to have the marriage annulled; unbeknownst to the Rathods, grandfather retracted the paperwork. For the next two decades, he led Mili and her naani on, milking them for her dowry in exchange for empty promises that this would be the year that Virat - now a Squad Leader in the Indian Air Force - would send for her. Grandfather passed away several years ago, and naani is starting to panic: when she's gone, who will care for her granddaughter? On the bright side, Mili is able to leverage her status as an officer's wife to pursue an education. ("I suppose an officer will want his wife to dress like a city girl. I suppose an officer will want his wife to read those books. I suppose an officer will want his wife to...") Though Mili bears the dubious distinction of being the youngest bride in her village, she also just might be the most well-educated. As a kid, she biked ten kilometers (each way!) to attend St.

There is nothing like the joy of reading a five star book and finding the words to share it with other readers. Mili Rathod could easily have been a Mary Sue, one of those good girls it is hard to relate to. Instead Ms. Dev has given us a heroine that is innocent, good to the bone, concerned for the welfare of others and trying to make a difference in her world. Mili was married at four years old to Virat Rathod. Mili's grandmother had raised her daughter and married her off when she lost her daughter and son-in-law and had to raise their daughter. She scraped together a dowry for Virat's grandfather and waited for them to take Mili. Virat joined the Air Force and annulled the marriage, but the grandfather stopped the paperwork and continued to run through all Mili's assets. At 24, she was still waiting for her husband to come get her while educating and preparing herself to be an officer's wife. She got a chance to study in the US and sells her dowry jewels to buy her plane ticket.

She lives in a ghetto and washes dishes in a Chinese restaurant to make money to send to her grandmother. Sounds depressing, but it is not. Mili is full of laughter and has accepted her lot in life. She is still trying to prove she is worthy of affection. Her room mate is a drama queen who is about to elope because her family wants her to marry a cardiologist and she is in love with a computer programmer grad student. Meantime, the grandmother has taken matters in her own hands and files a lawsuit to get her granddaughter a legal share of Virat's grandfather's estate and force him to come and get her. His wife is pregnant and his plane crashes. Virat learns that the marriage is legal and he will have to get an annulment to keep his upcoming child legitimate.

I love a story that takes me on a journey. Through the growth of its characters, through rich cultural diversity, and through a myriad of emotions. Sonali Dev's debut novel *A Bollywood Affair* was a heart warming story, filled with a cast of engaging characters, set against a backdrop of powerful and vibrant imagery and took me on that journey and stayed with me after i read the last page. It tells the story of Mili and Samir, two people who grew up in the same area in India, with the same cultural beliefs, yet ending up with different perspectives on those beliefs and traditions, one with a more western view and one more eastern. All Mili wanted to be was an irresistible wife to her husband and after an arranged marriage when she was 4 years old, she decides that she is going to do everything in her power to make that happen. Once she is old enough she decides to take off to America to educate herself and make herself worthy of her husband's stature. Even though she hasn't seen him for 20 years, she saw marriage as sacred and believed he would come for her one day. I instantly warmed to Mili and her innocence yet worldly knowledge charmed me. She had strong cultural beliefs instilled in her by her grandmother who had brought her up after the death of her parents. Her ties to her native traditions were strong, yet she melded them beautifully with the ways of her temporary home, America. I loved that she still retained her childlike wonder while demonstrating that she was mature beyond her years. Her humour, her clumsiness, her total immersion in her love of good food where endearing character traits and her fierce loyalty to her family and friends and, her generosity to strangers, were qualities that i admire. She really was a character that I connected to easily.

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