

Short stories about the longings and frustrated desires of women who hope for a great deal out of life but end up confronting dysfunctions

Memories weighed down by grief

ANJANA BASU

Her *Muzzafur Jung* murders set a kind of expectation flowing. Madhulika Liddle established herself as an expert in describing the city of Shah Jehan and the fabric of the time. Since then she has also written two collections of short stories. *Woman to Woman*, her latest, is exactly that, a collection of the longings and frustrated desires of women who hope for a great deal out of life but who find themselves confronting dysfunctionality in one way or another. Whether it is through bride trafficking or the encounter between a nun and a prostitute on a bus who find that they have a great deal in common, or the story of Laxmi who seems to have emerged from Tagore's *Manihara*, unable to let her jewellery go till the bitter end.

Liddle's gift of observation combined with sensitivity and her fondness for history allows her to inhabit the different dimensions

of femininity. She is at her strongest in the longer stories where she allows her characters and the situation room to develop. 'Two Doors' stands out with its slow unfolding of frustrated motherhood and the suppressed bitterness of a marriage that has outlived its days of passion. 'Maplewood' is an exploration of loneliness in a world where the young have no time to spare for the old and where the crowded lives of those who live in villages, though Liddle hints that sometimes, in old creepy bungalows, that might always have been the case.

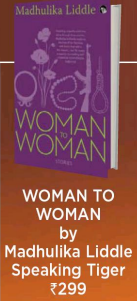
It is an easy read because of Liddle's polished language with cliff like 'morels' in a Kashmir valley where blood competes with the poppies and descriptions of bygone jewellery and saris. Her storytelling technique is the good old fashion

ed style which ends with a twist in the tale. She balances it with layered nuances, leaving much unsaid. In the end it is a book about memories weighed down heavily by grief. There are few happy voices — perhaps this is a world where the woman's lot is destined to remain unhappy. For some, growing accustomed to unhappiness is a way of life, for others getting the better of a situation is a triumph. The victories and the defeats are mainly small ones, expressed in the way that women do, except for one or two who find their own dramatic roads to vengeance or escape. Even then, they are told subtly, so subtly that sometimes the reader has to read it again to take in the full effect. *Woman to Woman* will certainly give its readers ample scope to ponder on the way women in this country live and have lived their lives.



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Anjana Basu is the author of *Rhythms of Darkness*



WOMAN TO WOMAN by Madhulika Liddle Speaking Tiger ₹299

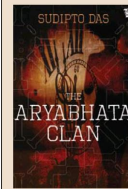


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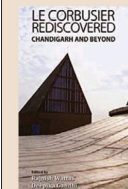
THE WIZARDS OF ONCE
By Cressida Cowell, Hachette India, ₹399, pp. 388

The book revolves around a young boy Wizard, Xar, and a young girl Warrior, Wish, who have been taught since birth to hate each other. It tells a thrilling tale of what happens when their worlds collide. Xar and Wish must forget their differences if they are going to make it to the dungeons at Warrior Fort.



THE ARYABHATA CLAN
By Sudipto Das, Niyogi Books, ₹595, pp. 475

The Islamic State has spread its tentacles in India, penetrating stealthily into the academia, media and politics. The mastermind is a physicist from Bangladesh. To destabilise India, he wants to create a sort of apocalypse, which the 21-year-old Kubha must prevent at any cost. In a brazen attempt at legitimising the demolition of one of the most prominent historical structures in India, someone resorts to a big deceit.



LE CORBUSIER REDISCOVERED — CHANDIGARH AND BEYOND
Edited by Rainish Wattas and Deepika Gandhi, Niyogi Books ₹3,000, pp 260

With the recent recognition of Chandigarh's Capitol Complex as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the spotlight on its creator, Le Corbusier, considered the 20th century's greatest architect-planner, attains a more illustrious glow. Against this backdrop, this book weaves together an anthology of inspired essays by eminent, global experts on Corbusier's life, ideas and work, both in Chandigarh and at other places.

ART AND SCIENCE OF COOKING UP NEW IDEAS

DYUTI BASU

Nandita Iyer may have come a long way from her original profession in the field of medicine, but the Saffron Trails food blogger feels that her training has helped her in discerning several myths about food. A certified nutritionist, she has now come up with a book — *The Everyday Healthy Vegetarian* — where she busts food myths, gives the reader a low-down on nutritional values of food, and shares 100 of her new recipes.

For her recipes, Nandita finds inspiration all around her — whether it is from an ingredient

itself or a dish tried somewhere. "Sometimes, I do my own version of a dish that I may have had at a café, or restaurant. Other times, I think of the recipes completely on my own, right from scratch," she explains.

Cooking is often thought to be the perfect blend of art and science. Nandita, who studied medicine, believes that the science part of the culinary arts has helped her in her journey. "I took up medicine because, at the time, there weren't a lot of career options and medicine seemed like a stable choice. However, I soon left the clinical



side of medicine and was enjoying a career as a full-time nutritionist. I had to deal closely with food, so I became interested in each ingredient and how to marry them together in a dish — hence the food blog," she says. "Even now, when I look at a recipe analytically, or read medical journals that use heavy jargon when describing nutritional values of an ingredient, I make use of the education I had."

It is this analytical quality to her dietary plans that helps Nandita bust some popular myths around food. "For instance, common foods like

potatoes and bananas are often thought of as unhealthy foods to be avoided without understanding that eaten in the right way they bring a lot of health benefits. It's mostly not the ingredient that is unhealthy but how it is prepared, excluding processed ingredients and sugar of course," she elaborates.

Nandita is back to her ever-popular blog for now, but ideas for more books are already cooking in her head. "Blogging is for my day-to-day writing, but I want to write a number of other books. I hope this is the start of that part of my career," she smiles.

