



An Obedient Father

By Akhil Sharma

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“A powerful debut novel that establishes Sharma as a supreme storyteller.”?Philadelphia Inquirer

Ram Karan, a corrupt official in New Delhi, lives with his widowed daughter and his little granddaughter. Bumbling, sad, ironic, Ram is also a man corroded by a terrible secret. Taking the reader down into a world of feuding families and politics, *An Obedient Father* is a work of rare sensibilities that presents a character as formulated, funny, and morally ambiguous as any of Dostoevsky's antiheroes.

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An Obedient Father By Akhil Sharma Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #858801 in Books
- Published on: 2014-04-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.30" h x .70" w x 5.50" l, .50 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 288 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Readers opening this first novel from Akhil Sharma find themselves face to face with a wildly unappealing main character. Ram Karan is a corrupt civil servant, chubby and self-hating. "I had been Mr. Gupta's moneyman for a little less than a year and was no good." Ram has no illusions about his failings: "My panic in negotiations was so apparent that even people who were eager to bribe me became resentful." Things at home aren't so hot either: Ram's wife has recently died, as has his son-in-law, and so his daughter Anita and granddaughter, Asha, have moved in with him. The first chapter of *An Obedient Father* is lugubrious and oily and awkward, like its narrator; then suddenly the whole thing breaks wide open. Drunk one night, Ram touches Asha with his penis. Anita walks in, and the family's secret is out all at once, like a just-freed, very angry cat: Ram forced Anita to have sex with him repeatedly when she was 12.

Sharma, a Delhi-born New York investment banker, has written a novel that's satisfyingly ambitious and full of really lovely imagery (tulips, for instance, are "heavy-hearted"). He squares Ram's downfall in the context of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. As India descends into political turmoil, Ram is made accountable for corruption both at work and at home. What gives the book its engine is its even-tempered handling of Ram himself: he is always complex, never a moral lesson or a villain. By the time Anita exacts her quietly devilish revenge, we feel neither glee nor pity, just sadness. Sharma doesn't have perfect control of his material--the transitions between personal and political can be abrupt, the tension between father and daughter unravels sloppily. Still, this is a new voice of great subtlety and care. --*Claire Dederer*

From Publishers Weekly

A supernova in the galaxy of young, talented Indian writers, Sharma debuts with a bold and shocking novel that casts a mesmerizing spell. Ram Karan is a widower whose widowed daughter, Anita, and eight-year-old granddaughter, Asha, live with him in a tiny apartment in one of Delhi's poorer sections. Nominally a functionary in the physical education department of the city's schools, Ram is in fact "Mr. Gupta's moneyman"; that is, he coerces bribes for his boss, who funnels the money to the Congress Party. At first, Ram's candid admissions of "general incompetence and laziness" are perversely endearing, but when the real cause of his self-hatred comes to light, the reader's perceptions begin to change. In a moment of temptation, Ram commits a furtive sexual act with his unwitting granddaughter and his downfall begins. Twenty years ago, he had repeatedly raped Anita, who now becomes unhinged at the thought that her daughter may be in peril. Anita's bizarre revenge will result in Ram's complete degradation; ironically, the repercussions of her obsessive need for disclosure cause even more emotional damage to everyone involved. Concurrent with these personal tragedies and the breakdown of one family, Sharma draws an acid-etched picture of modern Indian society, in which the corrupt political system victimizes all citizens. When Rajiv Gandhi is assassinated during the 1991 parliamentary elections, Mr. Gupta switches his allegiance to the rival BJP party, commencing a dangerous political game that embroils Ram. Sharma's depiction of a society riddled with graft, violent religious prejudice, male chauvinism and bigoted cultural attitudes is a cautionary tale about what happens to the individual spirit when poverty, superstition, racial tension and general hopelessness are exacerbated by the absence of judicial morality. This caustic yet darkly comic story resonates powerfully, as the reader comes to sympathize with fallible human beings trapped in circumstances that corrupt the soul. (July)

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From Kirkus Reviews

Storywriter and investment banker Sharma's first novel is in equal parts squalid and compelling: the tale of a

corrupt civil servant in Delhi who ruins lives, his own included, by having seduced his own daughter. Ram Karan, 48 and obese, is moneyman for Mr. Roshan Gupta, education head. Karan's job, which he's very good at, is to keep the budget in operation by extorting money and collecting bribes for Mr. Gupta, which he does on a steeply increased scale when Mr. Gupta is put up as a political candidate and needs breathtakingly large amounts of money to campaign. As Karan gets drawn more deeply into the frightening criminality of political financing, he also relates the story of his life--love for his mother, his grief when she died in his childhood (and witnessed her cremation), his joyless marriage, the births of four children--and his unspeakable, repeated, compulsive seduction and rape of his second daughter, Anita, when she was 12. And now? Grown, Anita herself has a daughter who's 12, and, one night after Karan has had too much to drink, she walks in to find him touching the girl with his penis--with the result that the volcanic power of her previously repressed hatred and rage begins to emerge, to the point that her father may not--does not--survive it. The story is almost Aeschylean in the tumult of its misery--deaths, heart attacks, widowings, suicides, even murder--yet the plain, unstoried quality of life itself is never neglected by Sharma. The daily life of poverty-stricken Delhi is ever made real, and even the ruinously monstrous Karan--narrator of much of the book--consistently makes evident his intelligence, depth, and sensitivity as one who's light-years away from any sort of cardboard villain. So full it threatens sometimes to collapse or overflow; but a debut, on balance, that's pathetic, remorseless, and wrenching. -- Copyright © 2000 Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Tony Hill:

This An Obedient Father book is not really ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is usually information inside this reserve incredible fresh, you will get info which is getting deeper an individual read a lot of information you will get. This specific An Obedient Father without we realize teach the one who examining it become critical in contemplating and analyzing. Don't become worry An Obedient Father can bring when you are and not make your carrier space or bookshelves' become full because you can have it inside your lovely laptop even mobile phone. This An Obedient Father having fine arrangement in word and also layout, so you will not experience uninterested in reading.

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Kimberly Gomez:

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Mac Cutter:

Is it anyone who having spare time after that spend it whole day by watching television programs or just laying on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This An Obedient Father can be the response, oh how comes? A book you know. You are and so out of date, spending your extra time by reading in this new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these books have than the others?

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