

BOOK REVIEW

***NIVARA S SEARCH FOR AN UNKNOWN HORIZON: A STORY OF GRIT,
GUMPTION AND ASPIRATION***

Reviewed By Manzar Imam

From family to society to relationship, women often bear the brunt. Surprisingly, it is not always men who use women for their advantage, even women exploit other women. The novel *Beyond The Horizon* laments the defeat of feminine cause not only at the hands of men but also by the cruelty of women. Nivara's fight against this malpractice is yet another reminder that a woman's struggle for equal space is an ongoing one. However, the silver lining in this ugly battle is that she can withstand the odds and turn out triumphant at the end if she has the willpower.

Beyond the Horizon

Samrudhi Dash, Authors Press, 2017

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Amidst claims of women having been empowered exists the bitter truth, so hushed up and silenced. It is felt within the home and society. Despite increasing success at various fronts; from acquiring higher education to landing good paying job, they must follow the strict social obligations to be the coy, shy, demure and well-clad daughters and wives.

Twenty-one-year-old Nivara Desai's story is the reflection of this dark social truth how she liberates herself from social hypocrisy and rises above the tragedy of fate.

Divided into three parts, Samrudhi Dash's debut novel is a story of ambition, dream, grit, hope, love, loneliness, longing, loss, success, betrayal with a mysterious end. The enigma exists but the message is loud and clear: that no matter how hard life may be, a woman with a willpower can do whatever she desires and prove women are no less qualified than men are.

The young town girl lives her life to the fullest, follows the call of her heart and most importantly does not believe in the so-called ideals of ethics, manners and perfectionism that society imposes.

The story begins on 18th of July. Nivara was unusually upset when she went to a cousin's wedding as if she was forced to attend it. Even after returning she remains gloomy until the news comes that she has made it to her dream university. Her happiness knows no boundary. She joins JNU.

She comes with flying colours in her first and second semester. However, fate strikes her as she is diagnosed with hypochromic anaemia in her third semester. But her best friend stands by her. Finally, when the final semester result comes, Nivara scores a remarkable 6.8 CGPA out of 9. With this her two year stint at the university also comes to an end.

Part two is where Nivara confronts the realities of life and is shattered when she realizes that the choices she had made of love and trust should have been made after weighing the pros and cons. She learns that what one considers love, might actually be a mere pursuit of pleasure which, when denied, brings the truth out in the open. Nivara thought that her love with Aryan was pure and sincere but Aryan on the other hand nurtured a different desire which discloses only after he is hitched up with another girl during a short two week break when she visits her home following her grandfather's death.

During those two weeks she senses danger as Aryan neither calls her nor leaves her any message. Sensing the danger she hurries back to Delhi and, her fears only grow stronger when Aryan does not come to receive her at the airport. She receives the shock of her life when Aryan sends her a message in response to her incessant query about his health and well-being: "Don't be so hyper. I am completely fine. Stop acting like we are in love or something." A shocked Nivara just types, "Okay". Then, a trail of pain and memories begins as she struggles with the thought of living without the person whom she loved so much. She gets into smoking and takes pills to fall asleep. This goes on for months.

It is not just her breakup that haunts Nivara, she is also afraid of what her parents will say if they come to know that their daughter had a boyfriend. In this state of disappointment and confusion, her emotions find outlet in the form of poetry. After one night she pops up several pills hoping that the effect will make her fall asleep forever but call it a miracle, she wakes up and, when she looks out of the window, a torn paper from someone's diary lands near her which has three words, "Live, Hope, Believe."

Nirvana mourns the fragility of human relationships and thinks that even parental love is based on holding on to the so-called social norms without giving the slightest thought whether such norms are justified or being forced on an unwilling soul. For Nirvana, her parents had sought to make her perfect not because it would make her future extraordinary, but because in her perfection lay their greatness. Her fears came true when she told her parents about her breakup, especially her mom, who never knew about their relationship. In an instant she turned stranger. Not only her mother but all those she cared for did not bother to miss her:

"Now she understood that it was she who had been making one-sided efforts all the time. And it pained her all the more to think that those whom she once loved and adored so very much, didn't even miss her. Such is the appalling state of human affairs in this 21st century; our linkages have now become restricted to one word texts on Whatsapp or posts on Facebook!"

Betrayal, pain and imposed social norms had forced her to make hard decisions, as hard as trying to end her life. However, destiny made her survive and thus she put her emotions in poetry which became hugely successful as the collection of her poetry got selected by a famous publisher and it was published by the name "Beyond the Horizon". The publishers even organized "Meet the Poet" programme to honour her. Meanwhile she also received a letter to have a full scholarship for a Doctorate in English literature from King's College, London.

Although she was preparing for Civil Services, she decided to join King's College to study literature. With the success of her anthology, people sent her congratulatory notes and her social

sites pages were full with messages applauding her for success. Despite betrayal and social taunts, she had proved that she could dare to take bold steps and succeed:

“Today, her actual purpose in life was accomplished – she had proved beyond doubt that it was possible to traverse the winding crisscross roads of existence alone, unaided; that a woman too was capable of existing, thriving, and flourishing in a patriarchal perverted society;”

Everything was going perfectly according to the plan. Her father called her on the morning of her departure to London, but there was no answer. There was no clue where Nivara had disappeared. When her parents visited Delhi, everything in her room was neat and clean. Everything was there: her visa, passport, purse, clothes, except Nivara. She was reported missing. Everyone was in negation that she might have ended her life. It was strange that when everyone wanted to revel in her success, she made a silent exit to an unknown horizon.

According to the author’s own admission, *Beyond the Horizon* is a “philosophical novel” about realities of modern society, exposing the “hollowness of human relationships”. There are aesthetic aspects of her claim in the novel in selection of expressions of both pain and pleasure and in her relating them to fate.

The way Nivara allows the gloomy chaos to pester her body and soul goes against modern-day realities of relationships. Yet, the story is so riveting one would hardly notice it. It remains dedicated to those courageous women who dare to dream despite obstacles. Whether or not her claim to ‘change society’s perception of the real strength of a woman who dares to dream’ holds true is left to the reader but as the author herself has put it, “Success” is not counted by the numbers or the ranks, rather it is “measured by our capacity to rise again and again, after each fall” and she has proved it through her protagonist.

The enigma with which Nivara exits from public space makes it a perfect suspense leaving the reader to ask for a sequel. But that doesn’t make *Beyond the Horizon* any less worthy to prove the main theme that women are as capable to excel and prove their worthiness as men are. If she can devote her life to the happiness of others, she can live with it too.

Bio

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