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Burnt Bread and Chutney: Growing Up Between Cultures - A Memoir of an Indian Jewish Childhood (Ballantine Reader's Circle)

Carmit Delman

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“From the outside, no matter what the gradations of my mixed heritage, the shadow of Indian brown in my skin caused others to automatically perceive me as Hindu or Muslim. . . . Still, I trekked through life with the spirit of a Jew, fleshed out by the unique challenges and wonders of a combined brown and white tradition.”

In the politics of skin color, Carmit Delman is an ambassador from a world of which few are even aware. Her mother is a direct descendant of the Bene Israel, a tiny, ancient community of Jews thriving amidst the rich cultural tableau of Western India. Her father is American, a Jewish man of Eastern European descent. They met while working the land of a nascent Israeli state. Bound by love for each other and that newborn country, they hardly took notice of the interracial aspect of their union. But their daughter, Carmit, growing up in America, was well aware of her uncommon heritage.

Burnt Bread and Chutney is a remarkable synthesis of the universal and the exotic. Carmit Delman’s memories of the sometimes painful, sometimes pleasurable, often awkward moments of her adolescence juxtapose strikingly with mythic tales of her female ancestors living in the Indian-Jewish community. As rites and traditions, smells and textures intertwine, Carmit’s unique cultural identity evolves. It is a youth spent dancing on the roofs of bomb shelters on a kibbutz in Israel—and the knowledge of a heritage marked by arranged marriages and archaic rules and roles. It is coming of age in Jewish summer camps and at KISS concerts—and the inevitable combination of old and new: ancient customs and modern attitudes, Jewish, Indian, and American.

Carmit Delman’s journey through religious traditions, family tensions, and social tribulations to a healthy sense of wholeness and self is rendered with grace and an acute sense of depth. *Burnt Bread and Chutney* is a rich and innovative book that opens wide a previously unseen world.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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