

Courtesy: Anupama Chandra, The Free Press Journal.



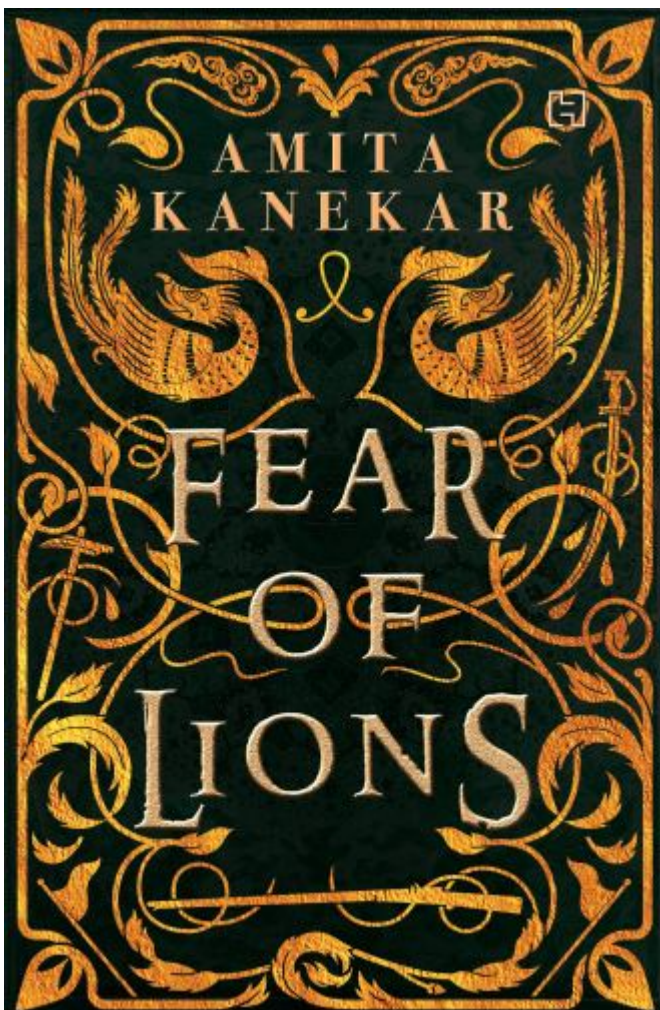
Review: Fear of Lions

It's important to have a periodic relook at history, even if it's through fictional accounts. And additionally, to observe it from the point of view of the marginalised makes the retelling even more relevant.

Fear of Lion, a historical fiction by Amita Kanekar is set in the time of Emperor Aurangzeb's rule and discusses various social, economic and cultural aspects with the backdrop of the Satnami rebellion of 1673.

The rebellion is name after the community which led the movement. The earliest Satnamis (seekers/followers of truth) were a sect of mendicants and householders and the sect had been founded by Barbhani in Narnaul in Punjab, not far from the seat of imperial power in Delhi, in 1657.

In 1673, the sect defied Aurangzeb and was subsequently crushed by his army. The novel is extremely relevant in today's times since the author sets out to showcase how even failed protests/rebellions can have a lasting effect and shouldn't be termed failures just because they couldn't achieve the goal they set out for.



The protests that are making headlines and those that aren't, but may not be getting the results they want to achieve are not inconsequential/ineffective.

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The author wants to reassure that even doomed rebellions have a significance that may be lost in the immediate present. Amita while showcasing the Satnami uprising also presents another rebellion - an individual one.

This too is doomed and is the tale of a daughter of a high-ranking Mughal noble. She is running away from an arranged marriage to join her Rajput lover, who is in Narnaul. And that is how the two rebellions cross paths.

Another key character in the novel is Sant Kabir. But it's best to understand how this 'lion' fits in here on your own.

The author infuses her work with historical tidbits that spice up the work and keep the readers engrossed. It presents various aspects of the time, like the succession wars that led to Aurangzeb coming to power, the marginalised position of women, the social structure of ear, and more. The author also beautifully brings to life the clothing, cuisine and architecture of the time.

It is an interesting, though somewhat heavy, read and requires concentration on the part of the reader. But the reward is being introduced to characters and situations that elucidate an era and open our eyes to a reality that's still relevant.



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