

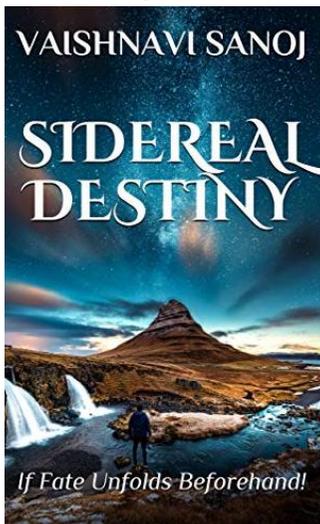
## Book Review on Vaishnavi Sanoj's 'Sidereal Destiny'

Devika Babu

*Lecturer, Poet & Critic*

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'Sidereal Destiny', the debut novel by Vaishnavi Sanoj, is a romantic thriller that hauls the reader through a mirage of emotions. As one reads, one passes through realities that seem impossible to conquer. The narrative unfurls the ordeals Arpitha and Vivek go through for they belong to a community that is ruled by stars. Do the stars come to their aid?



### Title and Cover Image

The cover image of the book is indeed captivating. The enthralling sky, a lone man near a river, added with the subtitle 'If fate Unfolds Beforehand' intrigues the bibliophiles. The image turns out to be more meaningful after one reads the novel. The title

'Sidereal Destiny', as the name explicitly connotes, can either be taken as destiny controlled by the stars. On the contrary, the fact that Sidereal calculations are based on a typical assumption implies that when the perspective changes life can change. The second interpretation seems to be apt as the writer herself hints in the lines "Perspective is everything!"

## **Plot and Characterisation**

The plot chosen by the author is particular to the Indian community. The central theme of the story revolves around the impact of belief-systems, traditions, caste and class system in typical Indian families. The writer has successfully woven these ideas through the fabric of romance.

At the same time, the novel does not showcase the typical flamboyant romance that is expected of the genre. Nevertheless, the subtle love sketched by the author is novel and graceful. The book has less of the 'falling in love' aspect and more of the 'journey of love to marriage'. Not much has been elaborated on how the couple meet and fall in love, but, there are enough donnies to spark the readers' imagination. The two central couples: Arpitha and Aarush; Rashmi and Vivek, are sketched in a way that while one enjoys a smooth relationship, the other travels a rocky road. This juxtaposition yields momentum to the progress of the novel.

Further, sibling love, between Arpitha and Anand, is another predominant theme of the book. Everything

expected of a brother-sister relationship has been etched well by the author. There is sibling rivalry, fun, typical Indian brother's over-protectiveness, and the strong support they provide to each other. The depth of their bond is often portrayed by the use of mirroring thoughts and dialogues. The characterisation of these siblings definitely evokes empathy in the readers, especially the portrayal of Anand. Among all the other characters, Anand is certainly the most skillfully crafted one.

Then comes the marital love and parental affection displayed through: Latha and Krishnan who are Arpitha's parents; and Shekar and Ambika who are Rashmi's parents. Though both of these couples are carved out from the real-life Indian characters, the author seems to have focused more on the former. The mirthless relationship between Latha and Krishnan serves as a justifying ground for the actions of their children. While Latha is vociferous right from the beginning, Krishnan serves as a silent, sober backdrop which lets every event unfold. On the other hand, Shekar and Ambika, showcase an ideal husband-wife relationship of the yesteryears. Shekar, a simpleton and Ambika, a subservient wife and a gentle mother. These characters, save Shekar, do not undergo many changes, superficially. However, close observation reveals the inconspicuous vicissitudes that occur to them as the story ends.

The two other interesting characters in the novel are the astrologers: Laxman and Vishwanathan Nair. Again they are characters who display obvious contrary features,

which are essential to the theme and plot. The portrayal of Vishwanathan is explicit and does not require in-depth analysis, but, comparatively, Laxman is a character with more depth. His role in the life of the lovers, his “smile that had layers of meaning” while convincing Latha, the short pause he makes, “...but in this case...I...” while answering Latha’s question on Arpitha’s marriage compatibility with Aarush and his own story, adds slight mystery to his actions.

Apart from these, there are a handful of supporting characters who make the story functional, and at times entertaining too. A remarkable one among them is Shruthi. Shruthi, the siblings’ cousin plays a dominant part in the second half and acts as a link between many other characters. Towards the denouement, this character, along with Arpitha, serves as the reader’s voice in sorting out the missing piece of puzzles and renders a clear understanding of the intended message of the novel. Another notable character in the story is Kritika. Although she appears in very few chapters, the character supports and strengthens the central theme of the story.

Though the plot and the characters created by the author are drenched in Indianness, the myriad forms of emotions depicted through it, have a universal flavour.

## **Language and Narration**

The story begins in a cliché Indian cinema style, in which the heroine is locked in to prevent a potential elopement, however, soon, the tone shifts into the stream that befits

the theme of the book. Though most of the novel is presented in third person perspective, frequent sneak-peek into the thought process of the characters and the conversational style used gives authenticity.

A relatively large part of the fiction uses simple language, yet certain scenes and descriptions are refreshingly literary. The pathetic fallacy used in foreshadowing the events and depicting the mental state of the characters is commendable.

Then entered, into nature's grand stage, the monsoon clouds. Like the elephants of Poomam (festival of Kerala) that walk holding in its majestic head, the gold-clad idols of Gods, the dark clouds, brimming with life, filled the sky. And they broke down with the magical touch of the south-west winds.

The first monsoon rain.

The sensible use of deviation from grammatical rules in a few chapters seems to have served the purpose of adding emphasis and authentic voice. Other than these, there are some powerful sentence fragments that are thought-provoking and they help in emphasizing the mood of the respective scenes.

*The air inside Naimisham came to a still.*

*Lord Krishna in the courtyard seemed to smile--the 'Mona Lisa smile.'*

*Arpitha's ring lay at his feet.*

*Like an offering.*

*Like a prayer.*

Another, unique feature of Sidereal Destiny is the occasional touch of humour. Even amidst the tension-filled scenes, the author has employed humour in the right blend. These realistic humour are sure to make the readers smile.

The style of narration that involves a side by side depiction of two love stories is interesting and sets a fast pace. The timeline of the story, however, keeps leaping and demands the reader to stretch one's imagination frequently. Towards the end, the story takes the reader through the conflicting emotions of the characters, and at times even succeeds in inflicting a moral dilemma in the readers' minds. Though predictable, the 'how and why' of the climax undoubtedly keeps the reader hooked till the end. The climax along with denouement leaves the reader pondering about the importance and intensity of the forces that shape our fate.

### **What the Reader Can Expect!**

In total, the author has captured a unique theme and brought it out through the story of two young couples. Despite, the fact that at the outset the story seems to be nothing more than ordinary, the author's unique narration, style, and characterisation, together with a profound concluding message makes Sidereal Destiny an interesting piece of literature. There is humour, romance, familial love, satire and some wise takeaway. This novel is undoubtedly a package that will please the readers.

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Author: Vaishnavi Sanoj

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### About the Author

**Vaishnavi Sanoj**, a post graduate in English Literature, is a qualified teacher. In 2011, her debut book, *The Wife, the Mother and the Man in Between* was published by Pustak Mahal. In 2019, *Sidereal Destiny*, was published by Notion Press. She has also published a short story titled *Mystic Reflections*. Her works are noted for the social satire and the thought-provoking message. Currently she lives in Qatar.

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### About the Reviewer

**Devika Babu** is a Guest Lecturer at Sree Narayana College, Kollam. Her poems and articles have been published in various magazines.



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