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Siddharth Arora lives an ordinary life in the New England suburb of South Haven, but his childhood comes to a grinding halt when his mother dies in a car accident. Siddharth soon gravitates toward a group of adolescent bullies, drinking and smoking instead of drawing and swimming. He takes great pains to care for his depressive father, Mohan Lal, an immigrant who finds solace in the hateful Hindu fundamentalism of his homeland and cheers on Indian fanatics who murder innocent Muslims.

When a new woman enters their lives, Siddharth and his father have a chance at a fresh start. They form a new family, hoping to leave their pain behind them.

South Haven is no simple coming-of-age tale or hero's journey, blurring the line between victim and victimizer and asking listeners to contend with the lies we tell ourselves as we grieve and survive.

Following in the tradition of narratives by Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz, Sawhney draws upon the measured lyricism of postcolonial writers like Michael Ondaatje but brings to his subjects distinctly American irreverence and humor.

South Haven Details

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Author : Hirsh Sawhney

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From Reader Review South Haven for online ebook

Margaret Patchkins says

Well-written, engaging book that draws you slowly. The characters were all heartbreakingly lost and sad and I connected with them, especially the young protagonist, Siddhartha. I think it's easy to see a little of yourself in all the main characters and thus feel invested in their success and happiness. Nice, short chapters that are easy to read and very cleverly titled. Have passed the book on to several of my book club members who have all enjoyed it. Recommend.

Cynthia says

Honestly, I had no affection for this book or it's characters. There wasn't a single person that was relateable or even remotely likeable. Siddarth came closest as the victim of his untenable childhood situation. thanks to library thing for the advance read.

Jen says

Siddharth is a tween boy growing up in Connecticut as the youngest son of a very intelligent, very conservative, very opinionated Indian immigrant father. When a tragedy strikes his family, the very difficult time of a non-white boy's adolescence in the US becomes even more difficult. Siddharth fluctuates between self-obsession with his place in the social heirarchy of middle school (including his vacillation between a friend who likes him for who he is and the "cool" kids who finally accept him but are way into the wrong things), his worry about his father's depression, his loneliness since his brother got into college, and his confusion about world issues he doesn't really understand.

This is a bit of an interesting, if sad, coming-of-age story, but it didn't feel like there was a real plot there. It was like reading a long blog of someone's day-to-day life and development...and it was an interesting life, but there wasn't a solid story arc. The father was particularly interesting - I have never in my life, among all the Indians and Indian descendants I've known, all of the Indian-perspective books I've read, heard someone who lived through Partition praise the British for their role, but this character does. Perhaps predictably, his older son takes the opposite position after going to college, and Siddharth doesn't know what to think (or why he should even care). Possible trigger warning: there is a crap-ton of racism and sexism in this book. The racism is among most of the characters, the brown ones and white ones alike. The sexism is the standard tween-boy-watching-porn-and-obsessed-with-sex/masturbating variety. None of it struck me as the perspective of the author, just part of the characters' ages, backgrounds, personalities, and/or sociopolitical beliefs, but if that's going to bother you...well, there you go.

Ming says

I felt this was a dull YA-type book. I didn't enjoy it. The writing is technically solid but the story and tone were juvenile and simplistic.

(And how can a book written in 2016 still use the outdated and offensive word "oriental" even when referring to the 1990's?!)

Emily Skiff says

This book packs a powerful punch. The characters felt incredibly real and authentic. Bullying is rarely handled well in fiction but this novel really delves deep into the psyche of the tormented and offers some insight into why people feel oppressed and angry. I was really moved by the ending, which wasn't for the light hearted but was honest and powerful. I am a highschool teacher and would highly recommend this book to my students and fellow teachers.

Mythili says

I really wanted to like this book-- it's ambitious in a lot of interesting ways-- but its casual misogyny really got under my skin. I realize that's part of the point-- Hirsh says the story was partly an exploration of what happens to the helpless men of a family when their grounding matriarch goes missing. Still, it drove me absolutely nuts.

Nicole Crowe says

Writing was great just not my kind of book other people would enjoy it

Maria says

....searching for solace in human relationships is fleeting...

Ananta Pathak says

a good read exploring the political theme of both America and India in an intelligent way

Aditi says

"Don't grieve. Anything you lose comes round in another form."

----Jalaluddin Rumi

Hirsh Sawhney, an Indian-American author, has penned a heart touching family drama in his debut

contemporary fiction, *South Haven* that revolves around a fictional town about an Indian-American young boy trying to cope with the loss of his mother in a household that is going to hit the rock bottom pretty soon, if he doesn't take up the responsibilities, all the while keeping his feelings about growing up, religious extremism, teenage angst, friendships, peer pressure and relationships under control.

Synopsis:

Siddharth Arora lives an ordinary life in the New England suburb of South Haven, but his childhood comes to a grinding halt when his mother dies in a car accident. Siddharth soon gravitates toward a group of adolescent bullies, drinking and smoking instead of drawing and swimming. He takes great pains to care for his depressive father, Mohan Lal, an immigrant who finds solace in the hateful Hindu fundamentalism of his homeland and cheers on Indian fanatics who murder innocent Muslims. When a new woman enters their lives, Siddharth and his father have a chance at a fresh start. They form a new family, hoping to leave their pain behind them.

South Haven is no simple coming-of-age tale or hero's journey, blurring the line between victim and victimizer and asking readers to contend with the lies we tell ourselves as we grieve and survive. Following in the tradition of narratives by Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz, Sawhney draws upon the measured lyricism of postcolonial writers like Michael Ondaatje but brings to his subjects distinctly American irreverence and humor.

The book opens with the accidental death of Siddharth's mother that spins off the whole family from their normal track, as the father and the two sons struggle to cope with grief and loss in their own way. After his mother's death, Siddharth found himself caught between the divided and schismatic worlds of his morbid and constantly angry father, Mohan Lal and his way too liberal elder brother, Arjun, who went off to college right after the accident. So left with his father, who gradually found solace in the Hinduism extremist ideas that preached negative ideals about Muslims, Siddharth tries to hold his family together despite of his tender age and impressionistic mindset. Siddharth and Mohan Lal's lives take a 180 degree turn when Siddharth's school's guidance counselor Ms. Farber becomes a common household presence and eventually Siddharth too learns to trust this woman and his son, Marc, although Marc's influence on Siddharth is more on the negative side, amidst his teenage mistakes, bullying and angst.

The backdrop of the story line that is set against a fictional suburban town in New Haven, is flawlessly and vividly captured by the author. The readers can get an insight into the lives of such folks whose worlds from the outside looks squeaky clean yet from the inside looks extremely ripped apart. Considering his own experiences, the author has honestly portrayed the struggles and the challenges faced by an immigrant and their family in America. From the streets to the food habits to the life style, the author arrests every tiny details of a suburb town impeccably into the story line.

The author's writing style is brilliant, laced with dark humor in the eloquent prose of the story. The narrative is filled with hilarity and evocatively laced with sensitivity towards religious extremist ideals and the human relations and those connected emotions. The story line develops at almost snail's pace as the events occur at a gradual speed with, at times, unwanted details and descriptions that often make the story bit dull. Although the story telling is tastefully done by the author as the readers will be compelled to stay engaged into the very heart of the story line.

The characters are well developed, synced well with their realistic side, thereby making them look unique

and genuine in the eyes of the readers. The author has devised them with such deep emotions that their individual stories will make the readers comprehend with their pain and grief thoroughly. Siddharth is a young adult who behaves maturely unlike his age, and is a very serious young man who learns to cope with the adult world and adult emotions alongside his own dark feelings about the world. Mohan Lal is a careless man whose character develops a lot through the entire plot as he learns to take care of his responsibilities and his anger towards the Muslim society. Arjun, although he has very slight presence in the story, yet the author unfolded his character with utmost thoughtfulness. The rest of the characters from the book are extremely eccentric and interesting enough to etch out an impression onto the minds of its readers long after the story has ended.

In a nutshell, this is a captivating story about an immigrant family learning to cope with loss, pain and religious indifferences, all the while trying to adjust themselves among the life style of their town.

Verdict: *This is an emotional joy ride of family drama where laughter and tears will greet the face of the readers.*

Courtesy: *Thanks to the author, Hirsh Sawhney and his publishers from Harper Collins India, for giving me an opportunity to read and review this book.*

lisa says

This book went up and down for me. I didn't like the beginning, some of the middle was ok, and I would have hated the ending if I had been at all invested in this book. Some have called this a coming of age story, but to me it was a pretty dull story of a boy and his father living a sort of depressing life somewhere in the suburbs of South Haven. It wasn't terribly interesting, and the one thing about the book that piqued my interest (Mohan Lal's increasingly disturbing interest in India's BJP party, and his hatred of Muslims) was brushed over fairly quickly. Since the story takes place in 1992, just months before the Hindu nationalists started bombing mosques in central India, and the Muslims retaliated by bombing Hindu temples, I was sure this book would touch on that, but it didn't. I wonder if the author had tried to include more of this in a rough draft only to be told by someone, "No one in the US knows about this, so who cares?" The book ends abruptly, and if I had liked it more, this would have ticked me off.

I probably won't recommend this for purchase for the library unless someone requests it. There are better so-called coming of age stories coming out every week.

Michael says

Siddharth is an intelligent middle aged kid who is attached to his mother. Despite the fact that she annoys him with her nagging ways, he much rather her company than his erratic father. Gifted with good brains, he does not have to try hard to excel in his academics. Yet his parents think that he is far from ordinary. While other kids his age spend time with their friends, he eavesdrops on his parents' conversations. Living in a full house with his dad's behavior is enough to drive him insane. After his mother tragically dies, he makes unwise choices.

Being understood is what he only wants, but now he must fight life alone without the presence of his mother. If only he can have his deceased mother back.. Then he wouldn't have to deal with his dad behavior or experience firsts with friends.

Touching, poignant and unforgettable is this novel! I really liked Siddharth, his personality shined all throughout this book. Not exactly consistent, it felt rushed towards the end, but the subject matter was rewarding!

Crystal Dawn Joseph says

I won this book on goodreads giveaways. This book is about a young boy, his older brother and father after losing their mother in a car accident. It is about how they try to move on with their lives after she dies. Death changes people sometimes for the good yet sometimes bad. Don't want to give away too much. This is a definite read.

Debbi DuBose says

I won the novel South Haven by Hirsch Sawhney through a Goodreads Giveaway in exchange for an honest interview. This novel is about a second generation Indian American family. South Haven shows us the struggles of a migrated people through the family in this book. They often have problems due to religious and cultural differences, language ability, and the residual political indoctrination of their old country. The differences become less as time goes on and younger children grow up; often helping their older family members to adjust. The Father, Mohan Lal, is a Professor with a harsh accent and extremely set in his ways. He is also still very involved with the politics in India. The older son, Arjan, resists the materialistic ways of Americans. He also has definite views on worldwide political situations; that are totally opposite of his Father's. The youngest son, Siddhartha, just wants to not be grouped with the loser students as he heads to Junior High School. The family also faced a tragic loss at the beginning of this story. The loss affects each person differently and they'll each react in their respective ways to fill this loss. Siddhartha finds a way to be more popular, but what will it cost him emotionally? The characters are so well written that I could put myself in their heads; understanding why each reacted the way they did. This is an emotional novel that made me laugh and cry. I am so glad that I was given the opportunity to read this novel! This book is a must read for everyone!

Maureen Grigsby says

I had the great fortune of hearing the author of this interesting immigrant tale, read out loud from his book while attending the Southern Festival of Books last month in Nashville. He was so expressive as he read in the voice of a 12 year old boy who has recently lost his mother and is so confused and lonely in the world without an entire family. His Dad, brother and uncle do their best to adjust to their new world, but the novel is told from the perspective of young Siddharth who struggles through every day. His brother Arjun goes off to college and his visits home seethe with the disdain of a young liberal. His father eventually gets a girlfriend, and she comes with her son who resents his mother's divorce. All in all, a very rich novel that was extremely well done.

