

## **Wanderers All: A Tale of Eternal Dream-Chasers**

**Zahir Zakaria**

### **Wanderers, All**

**Janhavi Acharekar**  
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It is indeed a rare thing in literature when the ingredient for a successful mix that produces a fascinating tale is mixed just perfectly in the crucible of creativity. Most try. Janhavi Acharekar succeeds. And very well, one might add. Her novel, *Wanderers, All*, is a perfect blend of a number of narrative genres—history, biography and fiction. But what it is above all is a tale told with an immense amount of control of narration and style. In Acharekar’s novel, you have the right mix of conversational tone, the touches of occasional incoherence that befuddle the mind of the narrator, and you have a moving braid of two parallel stories, each told without a semblance of coarseness—all of it making the novel a compelling work of art.

Kinara, the 35 year old protagonist is on a journey. A wanderer, she is admittedly “never anywhere forever.” She begins it all during a curious phase of her life - she’s single, unemployed and evidently without an idea of where she is headed to or why. Her father gives her a roll of maps which she looks at only a good one month later. When she does, out comes a whole world before her, the story of her ancestors, a group of goldsmiths who fled fifteenth century Goa during the Portuguese heyday there.

Two parallel tales emerge, as said before, in the body of the novel. One of Kinara on her wanderings, and the other of Murli, one of Kinara’s ancestors. The narrative begins with the exodus of Kinara’s ancestors from Goa and their eventual settlement in the quiet, out of the way village of Khed in Maharashtra. They are a group of goldsmiths who flee their hearths in Portuguese Goa for fear of persecution. Then it is the turn of the next wanderer, Narayansheth, to quit the comfort of a settled living in Khed and opt for a taste of the bustling, growing city of Bombay. His son Ganjan finds that theatre lures him more than anything and he ventures into a journey of his own. His son Murli finds the excitement of the *akhada* more tempting than the comforts of a clerical post and dabbles between the two choices before finally settling for what he considers his calling.

*Wanderers, All* quite inevitably reminds you of the well crafted, much researched, thoroughly networked fiction of Amitav Ghosh. The huge labour invested in quality research leaves its stamp throughout the novel. You get a vivid picture of

the life and times of the people of the colonial Bombay along with a deep insight into the workings of intergenerational memory, if one can call it that. Injecting a gripping story into the veins of such detailed history telling was no easy task, one can imagine. But Acharekar manages it with élan. The novel is a commendable example on narrative technique. There is hardly a loose end, hardly a redundant link, or a strand of description that fails to keep the reader's attention arrested from the very beginning to the end. The world of *Wanderers, All* is bustling with characters, all alive and throbbing. The biographical element of the novel never submerges the art for the artist and survives quietly, lending another dimension to the many sources from which Acharekar culls this immensely readable piece of writing.

Is the book worth a read? If the two penny worth of wisdom this amateur connoisseur is trying to speak from is anything to go by, it is certainly not worth just a read. It is a must-read, especially for those who seek to find a flavour of this country and its people, and the deep networking of remembrance, forgetting, memory and history that has shaped the numerous phases in its existence. Usually unless you happen to be reading *Midnight's Children* or *The Hungry Tide*, and this is entirely a personal opinion, any India talk in novels written, sadly, in the country itself, (and I am not even talking of how the other half writes) is often accompanied with a significant streak of stiffness that is way too far removed from what may be described as spontaneous. Acharekar manages to handle on this vital aspect without even apparently trying to achieve spontaneity. The land, its people with all their specialty and idiosyncrasies, all their faults, follies and frailties and all that is beautiful, and not beautiful, about this land and its people is hardly better portrayed elsewhere in recently published Indian English fiction as has been achieved here by Acharekar.