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## Of Hill-Stations and Royal Rice: A Review of Lalitha Rao's *Bougainvilla Magic*

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Lalitha Rao, *Bougainvilla Magic*, Surina Graphics, Mysore. May 2015. Pages: 160.

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Nostalgia is an indulgence difficult to give up. We long for the past; for a pleasanter period, that is apparently idyllic. But nostalgia is dangerous, as it might lure one to forget the present, worse reject it, in favour of the past. It is rare to find people who do not disregard the present and the future for the past. Lalitha Rao belongs to this rare class — as she manages to achieve this in her *Bougainvilla Magic*.

The title of the collection is, thus, revealing: *Bougainvilla Magic* is a reference to her present home, and not just a memory of long-past streets and places. While the pages are filled with vignettes of the past – of pickles and Akashvani and Ooty, never once does the author disdain the present, as she realizes the benefits of modernity along with the advantages of the present. The different places we live in, our associations with people and our experiences in general, shape us as people. This aspect comes through in this collection, which contains Rao's memories of her childhood, her stay in Muscat, the growing up of her children, and the different people who influenced her, among others.

The book is an anthology of her columns and articles that have appeared in national and regional newspapers over the last twenty years. It is divided into sections seeming arbitrarily; however, a closer look shows that even these titles are revealing of the overriding theme: Suggestive of tradition, culture, history, and nostalgia, while not missing out on how they are relevant in the present scenario. Titled variedly as "Mysore Magic", "Sweet Remembrances", "Tuning my Memory", "Travelling", "A Foodie's Journey", "Flower Power", "Net Profit", "Landmarks", and "The Literary Life", these sections are not fluffy flossy representatives of a dreamy past; but are reflections of the world that we are living in right here, right now — fickle probably, and swathed in freckles, yet still not feckless or unnecessarily fickle, and unfailingly fecund. These sections by and large deal with themes suggested by the title. Sometimes, there is an overlapping of themes; but this is natural: Just as in life, different experiences and settings act as a matrix to teach how life is varied and showcase its myriad hues.

The sketches by Pankaj Moghe, in the beginning of each section, add to the beauty of the collection. Overall, the anthology is worth reading, not once, but repeatedly, as the author speaks to you, with her refreshing sense of humour and uncanny knack of saying what all of us want to.

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