

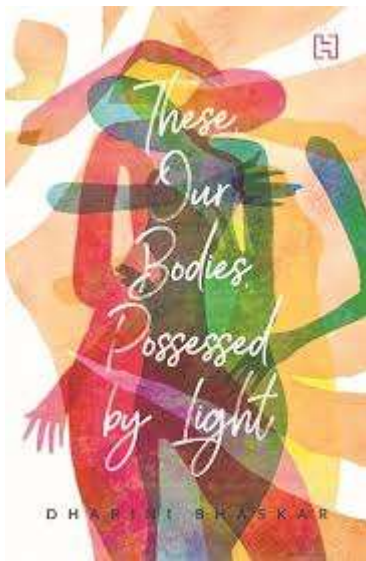
## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Book Review: A touching narrative about love, loss and grief

By [Amruta Prabhu](#)

**The prose is dense, lush with multi-hyphenated adjectives à la Arundhati Roy and peppered with quotable insights.**



In ‘These, Our Bodies, Possessed by Light’, debutant novelist Dharini Bhaskar tells the romantic story of the protagonist Deeya by linking it to the trials, rejections and deceptions of her mother and grandmother before her.

The prose is dense, lush with multi-hyphenated adjectives à la Arundhati Roy and peppered with quotable insights. It is a ‘show and tell’ style that relies on underlining plot events and teasing out their symbolic meaning.

Written entirely in the first person from Deeya’s point of view, this reminiscent, meaning-making approach can be justified: it tells us about the character and how she sees the world.

Often this approach gives us poignant moments where Deeya both sees the flaws in her mother while remaining curiously oblivious to the fact that she carries within her the same flaw, as in “I remember thinking — my mother can be startlingly self-obsessed.

I also remember thinking — I am alone in my misery.” Accounts of Greek myths are folded into the story, lyrical reminders that our personal struggles are interconnected and ultimately part of one big universal story.

Among the two foremothers of this character, we are given the most insight into the life of Deeya's grandmother, married off at a young age to an older man, who then goes on to reunite briefly with her childhood friend.

I enjoyed this character, Venu, the most, not least because he is one of the few male characters in the book who speaks in a voice of his own. The almost banal exchanges between these two characters in their letters also ring especially true for people of that time and social class.

(In one letter Ammama tells Venu, who has moved to England: "You'll even get used to not bathing every day once you find friends who do not bathe. this is not a joke." and I laughed out loud).

The mother's character, by contrast, is muted, seen by Deeya almost as a figment of her imagination: someone who retreats into denial and illusion the moment her husband leaves.

Perhaps Deeya's inability to see her mother as a real person is hampered by her mother's own inability to admit the truths of her life. We all have someone in our families whose self-erected barriers are hard to get through.

The novel is not heavy on plot; there are quite a few loopholes, anachronisms and hard-to-believe plot points. But the clues to the questions that may irk lie once again in the character of the protagonist.

Halfway through the novel, Deeya is asked "Do you believe everything Anne Carson says?", to which she replies: "I believe anything that's well-written."

These two lines reveal the Achilles' heel of this character, but are also a succinct description of the maxim that pervades the book, which is that humans can invent fiction, take refuge in lies, and carry on illusions for many a year as a defence mechanism: a way not to look directly at the harshness of reality.

Moments of female tenderness are especially striking, such as the implicit understanding of abandonment between two women: "He had gone – this my grandmother understood – and she embraced her daughter with her voice. "Have you eaten?" she asked."

Ultimately, *These, Our Bodies, Possessed by Light*, which takes its title from a Richard Silken poem, functions at the same level as poetry: it has moments of insight about love and marriage peeking through a larger narrative of loss and grief, of myths and the telling and retelling of destinies.