



Whispers of Sahra: A Tale of Two Girls

By Akhil Vishnu Muraleedharan

Publisher: Story Mirror Infotech Pvt. Ltd

Reviewed By Mohanan Bhaskaran Pillai

Akhil Vishnu Muralidharan's novel 'Whispers of Sahra' offers a unique reading experience. The work of Akhil, a newcomer in the world of literature, unfolds in the fictional land of Sahra. It tells the tale of a girl who is the head of the tribe, striving to protect the uniqueness and pride of her land. This narrative also encompasses another girl who joins her from a foreign land. Set against neoliberal globalisation, Akhil narrates the story of those threatened with losing their identity and their courageous struggle to protect it. Viewed thus, it is not just the story of two girls. In 'Whispers of Sahra' are Riya, Amal, and the baby Vihaan. In a way, they all serve as victims of neoliberal subjugation.

The story of Vihaan depicts a young child growing up in the digital age, where young couples rush through life with little time for anything, particularly for their children. Their parents were different; they lived to create a better future for their offspring. Now, Vihaan is leaving school. Wandering with nowhere to go, he reaches Sahra. His parents, who arrived in Sahra searching for Vihaan, found themselves enticed and transformed by the lush green surroundings. An astonishing shift occurred at their level of consciousness. The people of Sahra live in harmony with nature.

In Sahra, there is no conflict between humans and animals. Outsiders who come here experience a unique rapport with nature. Akhil, the storyteller, presents a vision of life based on Indianness as an alternative to the negativities of market-prompted globalisation. This innovative eco-feminist perspective shines through in Sahra, where people coexist in perfect harmony with nature. This portrayal is particularly inspiring at a time when the entire Western Ghats region grapples with human-animal conflict. The people of Sahra serve as a powerful example of living in

equilibrium with nature.

Similarly, Akhil introduces a distinct brand of feminism, as evidenced by the discussions in the Sahra Council regarding the election of the chief. This perspective carries a touch of Indianness. Our women advocates, often captivated by feminist theories imported from Western cultural backgrounds, must heed this part of the discussion at the Sahra Council: "Your mother raised six unintelligent and undisciplined children and turned them into wise and disciplined men. This is not just her story; it is the story of every mother. If she can transform children into warriors, why do you believe a woman cannot lead a group of wise, experienced men?" "We need a leader. The most important consideration is choosing the right person to lead us. Gender, age, or faith should not divide us."

The Council's discussion concluded with Adrija, a teenager, being chosen as Sahra's chief. Adrija was able to subdue Malik, who had come to capture Sahra, using her leadership qualities despite her youth. Moreover, Adrija, affectionately called Adi, is imparting leadership skills to Ana, a foreigner who arrived in Sahra. Ana is confident she can return and liberate her motherland from Malik's control. Hopefully, she will save her family and her homeland, Amar, through her leadership acumen. Thus, the story of a tribal chief striving to protect the uniqueness and pride of her homeland mirrors the story of another girl who has come from a distant land.

Akhil's narrative is a mesmerising journey along the fine line between reality and fantasy. The journey of the Sahrans from the beautiful coast to Kirtimukha Mountain is enticing.

Through his novel, Akhil demonstrates that alternatives exist for the ordinary individual caught in the competitive trap of neoliberal capitalism, which prioritises profit. Sahra has impacted everyone who has had the opportunity to traverse its mysterious and mystical terrain. Akhil, the narrator, has infused Sahra's charm into the hearts of readers. Whispers of Sahra is not an ordinary novel but a gripping tale of courage and resilience in a world ravaged by forces of darkness and despair. It is a rare work that arises from the confluence of reality and fantasy. Ultimately, it is the story of a resilient girl who courageously leads her people to victory against wretched forces.