

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

IN WOMEN WE TRUST

N.H. Sakhia

Acrobat Books (383 pp.)

ISBN: 978-1-73545-350-7

BOOK REVIEW

A teenager's indiscretion becomes a family tragedy and threatens to become a national scandal in this Pakistan-set drama.

Gul is the 15-year-old son of poor people who work for Sardar Timur, a wealthy and powerful man in Hayatabad, Pakistan. He's suddenly pulled into a brief sexual encounter with Timur's daughter, Farah, on whom he had a longtime crush, and the two are discovered in an unlucky moment that has extraordinary reverberations. Furious at what he feels is his mortification, Timur calls for a Panchayat, an "informal justice system" that empowers a council of locals to mete out determinations of guilt and innocence. Author Sakhia astutely captures the nature of these easily corruptible proceedings, which are officially illegal but largely ignored by the police. For Gul and his family, the stakes couldn't be higher; he could be castrated or killed, and his relations could also suffer gruesome fates. Meanwhile, a French journalist, Arlette Baudis, who has accused the prime minister of Pakistan of sexual harassment, attempts to make the Panchayat fiasco into an issue of international interest—not only to highlight the nation's corruption, but also to challenge its sexist view of women. Over the course of this novel, the author presents a tale that is sinewy and rich, deftly depicting a traditional system of justice as a thinly disguised one of oppression. Sakhia's sparse, straightforward prose is quietly moving, as when Baudis, in a fit of exasperated anger about the prime minister's popular election, rages, "How stupid are you people? Where the damn hell is the moral compass?" Sakhia also manages, with great authorial restraint, to refrain from sacrificing the artistic elements of the story to a sententious lesson.

A captivating drama in pursuit of dramatic truth.

EXCERPTING POLICIES

Please review Kirkus Media's excerpting policies before publishing any portion of this review online or in print for any use. To learn about proper attribution and to ensure your use is in compliance with our guidelines, we invite you to visit <http://www.kirkusreviews.com/indieexcerpts>.