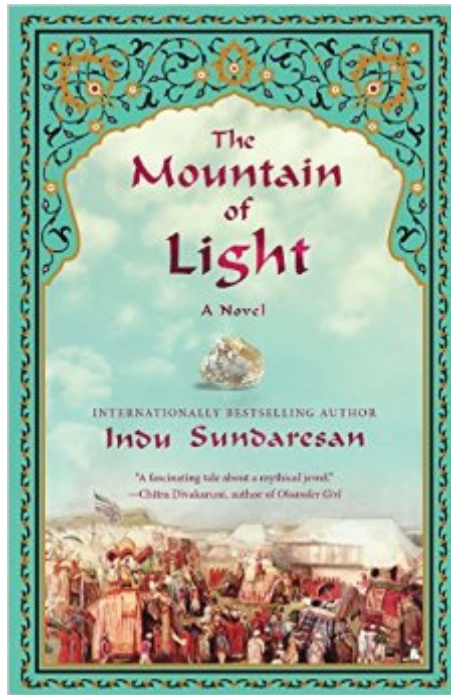


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The Mountain Of Light: A Novel



Synopsis

From the internationally bestselling author of *The Twentieth Wife*, a novel based on the tumultuous history of a legendary 186-carat diamond "originating in India" and the men and women who possessed it. As empires rose and fell and mighty kings jostled for power, its glittering radiance never dimmed. It is the "Mountain of Light" the Kohinoor diamond and its facets reflect a sweeping story of love, adventure, conquest, and betrayal. Its origins are the stuff of myth, but for centuries this spectacular gem changes hands from one ruler to another in India, Persia, and Afghanistan. In 1850, the ancient stone is sent halfway around the world where it will play a pivotal role in the intertwined destinies of a boy-king of India and a young queen of England "a queen who claims the Mountain of Light and India itself for her own burgeoning empire, the most brilliant jewels in her imperial crown. The Mountain of Light is a magnificent story of loss and recovery, sweeping change and enduring truth, wrapped around the glowing heart of one of the world's most famous diamonds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This well-conceived and well-executed piece of historical fiction plots the twists and turns of the Kohinoor diamond through paths of conquest and intrigue, beginning in the Mughal Empire in 1526 and ending in England, where Queen Victoria, portrayed as a caring polite lady, receives the Kohinoor, the Mountain of Light, as a "gift." The diamond has a much longer history to it than that portrayed here but the author has segmented her story to the nineteenth century. We first encounter the diamond in 1817 in the Shalimar Gardens, where the deposed Emperor of Afghanistan, Shah

Shuja, is being held with his wife, Wafa Begam, by the wily Punjab ruler Maharajah Ranjit Singh. The Maharajah has allegedly cut a deal to help restore the Shah to his throne if he hands over the Kohinoor. The Kohinoor then becomes the focus of the rest of this story. The Kohinoor's history is a vehicle for the author to give a fine portrayal of how the East India Company became stronger and stronger throughout India until it annexed the Punjab and India itself. We also are treated to excellent characterizations of Maharajah Dalip Singh, the last Indian owner of the Kohinoor; the kind-hearted Henry Lawrence, Resident and protector of the then 8-year-old Maharajah Dalip Singh; the bumbling Lord Auckland, Governor-General of India and representative of the Crown and the East India Company; and Lord Dalhousie, Auckland's replacement who would carry out the annexation of the Punjab and relentlessly acquire India's labor and wealth, including the Kohinoor, for the British Empire and his Queen. Rather than retell this story, I would just let you know that I was drawn into it quickly.

Mesmerising detail, pictorial language, excellent period description This tale sweeps from 1809 to 1893 with a revolving set of players: English, Afghani, Indian, each of whom harbours and then passes on the mythical diamond, the Koh-I-Noor. Each player's voice is distinct and appears true to the culture and of the period. Sundaresan makes you feel the heat of the dusty land, the opulent life lived in tents by the British for years, and the sparkle of jewels that are given away indiscriminately by the Sikh Maharaja, Ranjit Singh. One wonders whether if the mighty Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab gave as much thought and planning to maintain unity in his wider family and to appoint and train a successor, as he did to giving lavish gifts to the British, whether Punjab wouldn't have been as easily annexed. But then his was the lone Indian kingdom unoccupied by the British, on which both the East India Company and the British monarchy had their eyes. I found all the characters in this tale of many Acts and Scenes believable, their tales fascinating. The book read like a play, some characters pitiable, others well-intentioned but ultimately playing only for their own gain. The Koh-I-Noor had the least part, the others all vying for her like buyers at an auction, eventually only the sword-wielder taking her as his spoils. In the story, the Koh-I-Noor was to me an emblem of India: a gleaming, one-of-a-kind gem, treated badly by all made spellbound by her beauty. Like India, the Koh-I-Noor was tossed from one hand to another as if it were a plaything, annexed, cut down to size: to lose its original size and lustre; and retaliating only with curses that are ultimately hollow.

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