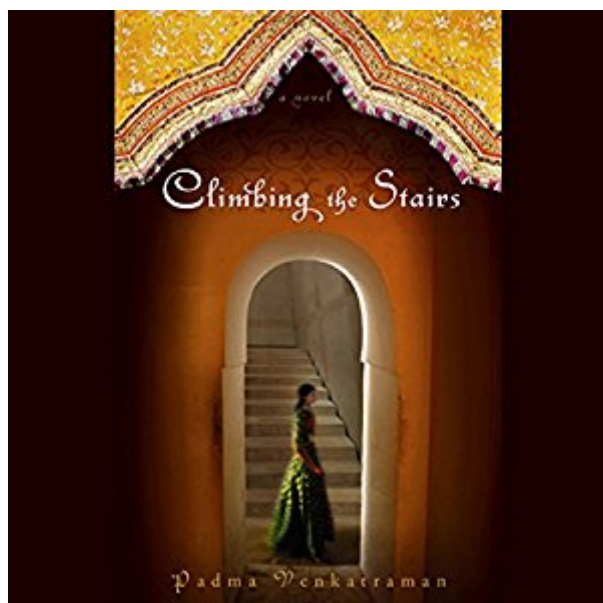


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# Climbing The Stairs



## Synopsis

A remarkable debut novel set in India that shows one girl's struggle for independence. During World War II and the last days of British occupation in India, fifteen-year-old Vidya dreams of attending college. But when her forward-thinking father is beaten senseless by the British police, she is forced to live with her grandfather's large traditional family, where the women live apart from the men and are meant to be married off as soon as possible. Vidya's only refuge becomes her grandfather's upstairs library, which is forbidden to women. There she meets Raman, a young man also living in the house who relishes her intellectual curiosity. But when Vidya's brother decides to fight with the hated British against the Nazis, and when Raman proposes marriage too soon, Vidya must question all she has believed in. Padma Venkatraman's debut novel poignantly shows a girl struggling to find her place in a mixed up world. *Climbing the Stairs* is a powerful story about love and loss set against a fascinating historical backdrop.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I read this very quickly, within just a couple of hours. The author very often sounds like they are trying to teach more than tell the story. While I enjoyed this aspect, it's not something that may have worked in a separate book or style. I really loved and related to Vidya and loved that she wasn't a perfect protagonist. She was rash and angry and entirely able to be so, even in a place and world that tried to deny her that anger. Her anger at Raman was refreshing, her relationship with her

brother a nice turnaround from the usual spoiled brother/abused daughter we usually see in books. Perhaps on the front of relationships, I would have loved to see more intersection between Vidya and Rifka. Maybe more letters, more time before hand? With so much anger towards the other women in her life, it would have been a good balance to have Rifka more prevalent. But my biggest complaint is honestly the way Vidya spoke of her father, even after her revelation at the end. She spoke of him as if he was dead, and Kitta is the only one to out and out challenge her and still she doesn't change her mind. Vidya's distance and disdain for her father's state is hurtful to read. That she referred to him as "the man/shell who was once her appa" and "dead" and even "idiot" and is ashamed of non-profit even in the end we don't see much reconciliation of this thread of the story. It really made me struggle to sympathize with one of the biggest struggles in the book. I heard Vidya say to others "he's not an idiot!" And thought "but he's dead to you, you call him an idiot yourself." It really muddled up that part of the storyline. It didn't read as her guilt making her feel that way. It read mostly as her being ashamed he was no longer the bright and shining doctor. It was unsettling that the author's treated him as dead. But I feel as if the rich exploration of Hinduism and their philosophies and the many ways that can be interpreted was just really amazing. Learning about the rituals and holidays and the different ways they prepare for things in such a natural and well told story was really a gift. If the author reads this, I would like to say: Thank you for writing this book. Despite my complaints, I enjoyed it immensely.

This book is awesome. It is one of those books which is not a dragger, but is also not so short as to leave you wondering, "Wait what, what just happened." Written in unique and captivating style of historical fictions, this book will surely bring back memories for people in that time. Climbing The Stairs is about a fifteen year old called Vidya. Vidya is having a happy life in Bombay, amidst World War II, and Indian Independence, when tragedy strikes. Vidya and her family are forced to leave their home and friends in Bombay, and head to Madras, to live with Vidya's extended family. Her unbearable Perriamma, and Perriappa, along with her cousin Malati, brag about Malati's marriage, her beauty, her skills, and order Vidya around. Then, her brother makes a serious decision, that Vidya hates. What will happen to Vidya? Read to find out more! Update after I reread and my opinions are more clear now. After reading this book once more, I found out some things put the book in a different light: 1. First of all, the book casts a negative image on being conservative, as it casts a bad look on arranged marriages and also marriage in itself. 2. The book also destroys the image of a joint family. Although it complains about the setbacks and strictness of a joint family, it never sheds light on the jolly aspects of it, such as celebrating festivals, weddings and more

together.<sup>3</sup> The book portrays segregation of men and women as a bad thing. Although it is not ideal in today's circumstances, this was approved of in that time period, and also, things like that made it easier for people to focus on their jobs and studies.<sup>4</sup> The book also portrays segregating the woman during her menstrual period as a bad thing. Women resting during that time is good for their own body, it was never meant to discriminate the woman.

I teach at an American curriculum high school in Cairo, Egypt. At my school, the 10th grade curriculum for English is geared toward world literature, but when I moved to Egypt I had never taught a course like this. Finding materials that were written by authors from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America was very difficult, and more importantly, finding texts that teenagers could relate to and critically read was even more difficult. This text is not only relevant to the Egyptian teenager, but it is relevant to all teenagers and asks the kind of questions that my students ask in their everyday lives. It was a pleasure to read as an adult, and the buy-in I observed in my classroom was well worth it.

This book is targeted at young adults, but I really enjoyed it as an adult reader. It took me back to a time when my parents would have been teens, pre-teens and really captured their daily life, as well as the larger arena of events. I was a teen nearly a half century after the protagonist Vidya was, but her situation, the choices she has to make and how differently the same events shape different members of her family and lead them down different paths was captured brilliantly. I enjoyed that Vidya was feisty, independent and even a bit feminist. Like most Indian novels, this one is wrapped around a family tragedy -- Usually, that would mean I'd pass on the book, but the very real, empathetic characterization pulls you in through to the end.

This book turned out to be better than I expected. I enjoyed the main character young adult telling a historic and personal story. For Americans an understanding of India's World War 2 time period is not often heard. The book blends well the Hindu culture and problems of extended family, a young adult maturing, the freedom fight, the British, the tragedy of her father and more to make an interesting tale. Vidya's refuge in the library as well her personal struggles are touching. Plus her connection to Raman develops in a very satisfying manner. Good read.

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