



Book Review of a Teaspoon of Earth and Sea

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BOOK DETAILS:

Title: *A Teaspoon of Earth and Sea*

Author: Dina Nayeri

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Genre: Fiction

Book Review

A Teaspoon of Earth and Sea is essentially the story of Saba Hafezi, daughter of an Iranian landlord, whose entire life revolves around the fate of her family and the imagined re-union with her long-lost twin sister, Mahtab. But reading between the lines, an intelligent reader is able to decipher a subdued hatred towards the transformation of an open-minded Iran to the Iran of 1990s with its imposition of

revolutionary rules and the dominance of the religious militia. The novel is a perfect blend of Eastern and Western forms of story-telling weaving fiction with facts into the very texture of the story. On the one hand there is Khanom Basir, a master story-teller in the traditional sense of the term—narrating stories of local legends like Laila and Majnu, King Xerxes, Rustom, djinns and witches, and on the other we have Saba, the story-teller of the



West with her straight forward narration of the mundane facts. For her, America is the land of her dreams— her El Dorado where she is sure to reunite with her mother and twin sister both of whom, according to her version, abandoned her on the airport and boarded the flight to New York. She churns out stories, one after the other, sometimes on her own behalf and sometimes on behalf of her sister Mahtab whom she imagines to be living the life of an independent American teenager, going to school and later to Harvard University. She imagines that Mahtab's life would be very different from her own life which is nothing but a life full of exploitation by her aged husband and dependent on men for her existence. The plot of the novel unveils itself like a slow moving river. The life of the main characters— Saba, Ponneh, Reza, Khanom Basir, Khanom Mansoori, Agha Hafezid— is revealed through the eyes of other characters who closely monitor the growth of each one of them.

Though the narration moves forward through the first person narrative of Saba Hafezi and Khanom Basir, at times the narration is a straight forward description of the political turmoil going on in Iran when the *Mullahs* dominated the country and the common man was at the mercy of the *pasdars* or moral police. Dina Nayeri writes in the typical tradition of the Garcian magic realism juxtaposing myth and reality, fact and fiction, truth and lies, to relieve the pain embedded deep in the heart of every liberal-minded Iranian. The language in the novel is a perfect blend of American English with authentic Persian words sprinkled here and there like hints of saffron on white polished Basmati rice. Although there is greater influence of Western music and movies on the writer which is quite evident in the novel which can be attributed to her American upbringing, there is no dearth of her Persian link and to the land of her birth. A must read for all lovers of modern fiction.