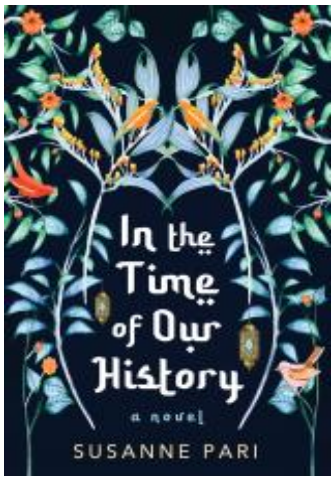
In the Time of Our History

by Susanne Pari



About the Book

Inspired by her own family?s experiences following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Susanne Pari explores the entangled lives within an Iranian American family grappling with generational culture clashes, the roles imposed on women, and a tragic accident that forces them to reconcile their guilt or forfeit their already tenuous bonds. Set between San Francisco and New Jersey in the late 1990s, IN THE TIME OF OUR HISTORY is a story about the universal longing to create a home in this world --- and what happens when we let go of how we?ve always been told it should look.

Twelve months after her younger sister Anahita?s death, Mitra Jahani reluctantly returns to her parents? home in suburban New Jersey to observe the Iranian custom of ?The One Year.? Ana is always in Mitra?s heart, though they chose very different paths. While Ana, sweet and dutiful, bowed to their domineering father?s demands and married, Mitra rebelled and was banished.

Caught in the middle is their mother, Shireen, torn between her fierce love for her surviving daughter and her loyalty to her husband. Yet his callousness even amid shattering loss has compelled her to rethink her own decades of submission. And when Mitra is suddenly forced to confront hard truths about her sister?s life, and the secrets each of them hid to protect others, mother and daughter reach a new understanding --- and forge an unexpected path forward.

Alive with the tensions, sacrifices and joys that thrum within the heart of every family, IN THE TIME OF OUR HISTORY is also laced with the richness of ancient and modern Persian culture and politics, in a tale that is both timeless and profoundly relevant.

Discussion Guide

1. Mitra and Anahita are first generation Americans, while the rest of the Jahanis are immigrants. What are some of the

ways the sisters are different from the others, and do you think the presence of the extended family in their lives influenced their personalities and choices?

2. IN THE TIME OF OUR HISTORY tells the story of a secular and educated immigrant family, most of whose members have resettled in the United States because of a Revolution that gave rise to a brutal regime in Iran. Can you imagine yourself in a similar situation? How do you think you would cope with exile and migration to a foreign country? Many of the Jahanis cling to old traditions in order to retain a sense of belonging. Which beliefs and norms would you try to preserve?

3. Mitra and Anahita?s childhood relationship was strained, as many sibling relationships are. As adults, however, they have a strong and loving bond. Do you think this would have been the case if Mitra had not discovered Kareem molesting Anahita?

4. Revelation and growth is a theme for many of this novel?s characters. Could you relate to Shireen?s journey away from stalwart wife toward independent woman? If Anahita and the children hadn?t died, do you think Shireen would have taken this path?

5. The romance between Mitra and Julian is complex. While their devotion to each other may run true and deep, there are obstacles that stand in the way of a future for them together. Do you think these obstacles could have been overcome?

6. Yusef is depicted mostly as a ruthless and narcissistic patriarch, not to mention a cold and unfaithful husband. And yet, he also has a traumatic history. Did this history of trauma excuse any of his behavior? And does he achieve some redemption in your mind in the end?

7. Both Salimeh and Zoya are refugees. How are they similar? How are they different? If they wound up on your doorstep, would you help one or both, or neither?

8. Do you think Kareem was let off too easily? If so, how do you think he should have paid for his actions?

9. What was your reaction to this sentence at the beginning of Part 3? "He understood that in all but a few earthly societies, rebellion in women is the same as insanity."

10. Child sexual abuse in families is widespread across ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic lines. Each incident is unique, and each victim is affected uniquely. In what ways do you think Anahita?s trauma played a role in her decision to pursue a relationship with Aden? How do you think the story would have been different if Anahita hadn?t kept so many secrets from Mitra?

11. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the US Embassy Hostage Crisis, Iran and its society have been closed to most Americans. IN THE TIME OF OUR HISTORY gives us a peek into that world through several characters? eyes. Were you surprised by the unconventional shape of Olga?s life? Were you sympathetic to Zoya?s plight? Could you relate to Golnaz?s discomfort in visiting her birth country? Did reading IN THE TIME OF OUR HISTORY alter your view of Iran and/or Iranians?

12. Autocracies survive when they can control the substance and flow of information to their citizens. This requires a

ruthless vigilance to silence intellectuals and creatives. Have you ever been in a situation where you were afraid of writing or saying something you believed?

Author Bio

Susanne Pari is a novelist, journalist, essayist, book reviewer and author interviewer whose writing focuses on stories of displacement and belonging, of identity and assimilation, of trauma and resilience. Born in New Jersey to an Iranian father and an American mother, she grew up both in the United States and Iran until the 1979 Islamic Revolution forced her family into permanent exile. Her first novel, THE FORTUNE CATCHER, has been translated into six languages, and her nonfiction writing has appeared in *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Boston Globe* and National Public Radio. She divides her time between Northern California and New York.

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