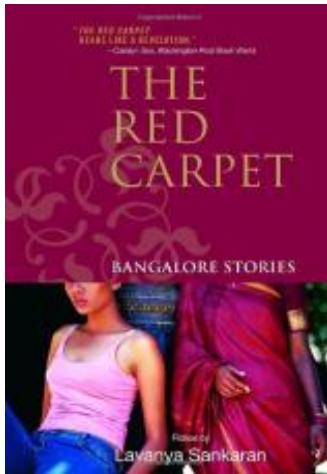


# The Red Carpet

by Lavanya Sankaran

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## About the Book

Wry humor and a delicious grasp of the friction between generations in Bangalore are the hallmarks of Lavanya Sankaran's fresh, deeply nuanced debut collection. "A potpourri of beggars and billionaires and determinedly laid-back ways," Bangalore, India's own Silicon Valley, is a crucible for prosperity, and at the chaotic crossroads between past and present. Here, American-trained professionals like Tara return to their old-fashioned families with heads full of Quentin Tarantino dialogue; a successful entrepreneur is shaken when his partner suddenly reneges on their plan to return to America; a traditional Indian mother slyly circumvents her Western-educated daughter's resistance to marriage; a neighborhood gossip is determined to discover what goes on behind the closed curtains of the hip young couple across the street; a chauffeur must reconcile his more orthodox credos with his employer's miniskirt lifestyle.

Witty, affectionate, and wonderfully wise, Lavanya Sankaran's first collection attests to her remarkable literary talent.

## Discussion Guide

1. What consistent themes recur in Lavanya Sankaran's collection? Discuss the diverse ways in which her characters react to these situations.
2. In "Bombay This," what causes Ramu to go from being annoyed by Ashwini to feeling attracted to her? What does this story illustrate about the nature of attraction in general?
3. What is the motivation behind Mr. D'Costa's inquiries and voyeurism in "Closed Curtains"? Is the presence of such a neighbor a nuisance, or does he provide a necessary sense of community to those around him?

4. What does the narrator of "Two Four Six Eight" discover about true power? What does Mary gain from being abusive?
5. In the title story, what spurs Raju-once-Rangappa to reveal so much about his private life to May-dum? Why does she venture to his home, and to his daughter's school?
6. In "Alphabet Soup," how does Priya's view of her ancestry shift? Have you ever made a similar journey to an ancestral homeland? If so, did it change your perception of your family legacy?
7. "Mysore Coffee" features a vibrant spectrum of women. What impressions do they make on Sita? How is she affected by memories of her father? In the end, how does she choose to define herself?
8. Tara in "Birdie Num-Num" quotes Peter Sellers and introduces her mother to "Pulp Fiction." What role does American pop culture play in her life, and in the lives of the other characters in this collection? Is pop culture itself a liberator?
9. As Murthy and Swamy navigate their dreams in "Apple Pie, One by Two," how do they balance their emotional and financial health? What universal dilemmas are captured in this story? How do Murthy and Swamy resolve them?
10. Discuss the cultural distinctions illustrated by this collection? distinctions between East and West, men and women, elders and youngsters, tradition and innovation. What predictions can you make about these distinctions in the lives of future generations? Is globalism a positive trend?
11. The author has previously worked in investment banking, an industry that makes cameo appearances in her fiction. In what ways do commerce and economics form an undercurrent throughout this collection? How does the contemporary corporate world affect the characters on a local level?
12. How would you characterize Lavanya Sankaran's writing style? What techniques and qualities enable her to bring each scene so vividly to life? What unique traits distinguish her fiction from that of other acclaimed authors with Indian ancestry, such as Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Divakaruni? In your opinion, what qualities should good storytellers possess in general?
13. If you were to read *The Red Carpet* as one continuous story line (almost as a novel-in-stories) would you say it is propelled by any particular heroes and heroines? How would you describe the collection's narrative thread?
14. What contrasts did you detect between British and American influence in the lives of Lavanya Sankaran's characters? Has the United States replaced Great Britain as a "colonizer" in the Far East?
15. Were you familiar with Bangalore before reading *The Red Carpet*? What travelogue experiences did you have through these stories? What did you discover about cuisine, religion, social classes, and other aspects of life there? Is Bangalore a microcosm of contemporary life throughout the world, or is it a city at a singular turning point?

## Author Bio

LAVANYA SANKARAN'S work has been published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Wall Street Journal*. She attended

Bryn Mawr College and has worked in investment banking in New York and consulting in India. She lives in Bangalore, where she is currently at work on her first novel.

## Critical Praise

"By the end of this very first story, people half a world away have been transformed into complete human beings, full of frailties and fragile self-regard, achingly sympathetic. That's why THE RED CARPET reads like a revelation.... I recommend this book so highly!"

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### **The Red Carpet**

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