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VINAY KOLHATKAR

The Frankenstein Candidate

REVIEWED BY SUKRIT SABHLOK

Well-written fiction books are a pleasure to read. The good ones are full of plot twists, suspense, passion and can be life changing – or at least thought-provoking. They can make you laugh, cry and perhaps even become angry. Really good ones can capture the imagination of an entire generation, or are adapted to hit the movie screens. To use a recent and well known example, consider how much different the world would be without Harry Potter!

The Frankenstein Candidate is intellectually heavier than your average J.K. Rowling. In designing the plot, Kolhatkar seems to have set out with a clear purpose: to present a specific set of ideas about government and society. It's a book that features jargon such as 'Keynesianism', 'economies of scale' and 'inflation'.

The world Kolhatkar constructs is based around a US election where two of the leading candidates are Senator Olivia Allen and the wildcard billionaire Frank Stein. We are taken on a journey where Olivia and Frank, running on different policy platforms, find that they are more similar than they first thought. Stein is spending his fortune on a quixotic and straight-talking campaign for president, and in many ways reminds me of US Congressman Ron Paul's most recent bid for the presidency.

Along the way, various shenanigans inspire interest in the characters' personal stories. It's here that Kolhatkar is at his best. For example, when he delves into the psyche of Olivia in a scene where she is consulting her psychologist about her 'imposter syndrome' (a condition that makes it difficult for her to believe in her own self-worth) the reader feels genuine empathy for her high pressure lifestyle and most people would be able to relate to some degree.

Kolhatkar is a believer in free-markets and libertarianism and the dialogue is written with this strong philosophical undercurrent subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, in mind. Lead characters are in the mould of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* – intelligent, principled and determined. Stein, for instance, is the type of person who'd say 'I'd rather be right than be President'.

Where the book might fall short, at least according to mainstream populist standards, is in its focus on technical economic subject matter. Certain passages read like a business article rather than a fiction novel, but this is probably unavoidable given the context in which the story is being told.

Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that this is a novel that will leave readers intrigued. It certainly delivers what it promises: a fast-paced plot packed full of twists and turns that should cement Kolhatkar's place as an original writer.

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