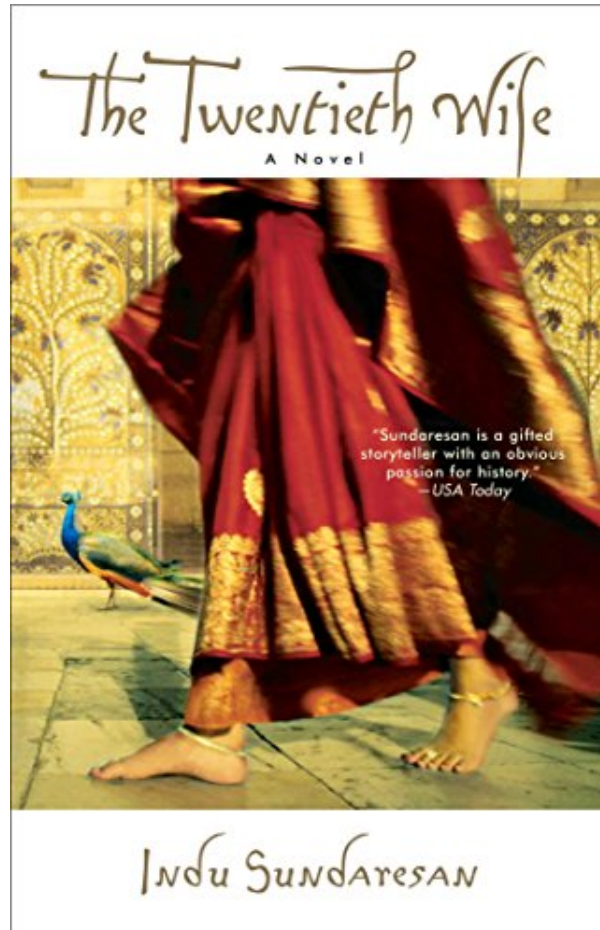


# THE TWENTIETH WIFE BY INDU SUNDARESAN

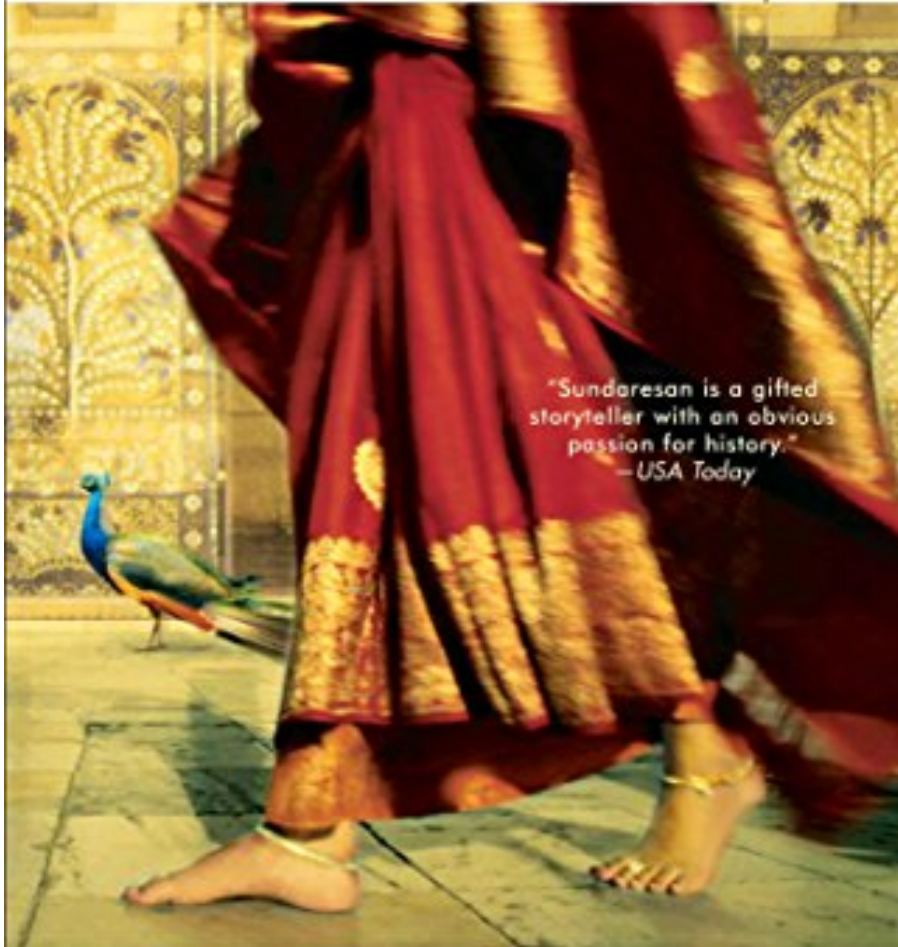


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# The Twentieth Wife

A Novel



Indu Sundaresan

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The story's gothic trappings have a basis in fact. As Sundaresan writes in her afterword, the historical Mehrunissa exercised far more power than was usually allotted to an empress, issuing coins in her own name, giving orders, trading, owning property, and patronizing the arts. (Curiously, the book ends just as Mehrunissa is ascending to the throne as empress, dwelling on her years of powerlessness and struggle rather than those of her enormous political influence.) Although the empress was fabled in her time, we know next to nothing about the woman herself. Unfortunately, Sundaresan does little to flesh out this intriguing figure. Despite the vivid historical detail, the reader remains more aware of the author's presence--and her own contemporary take on women's issues--than of her characters' inner lives. --Mary Park

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# THE TWENTIETH WIFE BY INDU SUNDARESAN PDF

An enchanting seventeenth-century epic of grand passion and adventure, this debut novel tells the captivating story of one of India's most legendary and controversial empresses -- a woman whose brilliance and determination trumped myriad obstacles, and whose love shaped the course of the Mughal empire.

She came into the world in the year 1577, to the howling accompaniment of a ferocious winter storm. As the daughter of starving refugees fleeing violent persecution in Persia, her fateful birth in a roadside tent sparked a miraculous reversal of family fortune, culminating in her father's introduction to the court of Emperor Akbar. She is called Mehrunnisa, the Sun of Women. This is her story.

Growing up on the fringes of Emperor Akbar's opulent palace grounds, Mehrunnisa blossoms into a sapphire-eyed child blessed with a precocious intelligence, luminous beauty, and a powerful ambition far surpassing the bounds of her family's station. Mehrunnisa first encounters young Prince Salim on his wedding day. In that instant, even as a royal gala swirls around her in celebration of the future emperor's first marriage, Mehrunnisa foresees the path of her own destiny. One day, she decides with uncompromising surety, she too will become Salim's wife. She is all of eight years old -- and wholly unaware of the great price she and her family will pay for this dream.

Skillfully blending the textures of historical reality with the rich and sensuous imaginings of a timeless fairy tale, *The Twentieth Wife* sweeps readers up in the emotional pageant of Salim and Mehrunnisa's embattled love. First-time novelist Indu Sundaresan charts her heroine's enthralling journey across the years, from an ill-fated first marriage through motherhood and into a dangerous maze of power struggles and political machinations. Through it all, Mehrunnisa and Salim long with fiery intensity for the true, redemptive love they've never known -- and their mutual quest ultimately takes them, and the vast empire that hangs in the balance, to places they never dreamed possible.

Shot through with wonder and suspense, *The Twentieth Wife* is at once a fascinating portrait of one woman's convention-defying life behind the veil and a transporting saga of the astonishing potency of love.

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Most helpful customer reviews

49 of 51 people found the following review helpful.

Splendor and love and plain old fashioned storytelling! I loved it!

By Linda Linguvic

This historical novel is based on facts of the late 16th and early 17th century rule of the Mughal Empire in

India. The main character, Mahrunnisa, was real - a woman who married the Emperor when she was no longer young, and who then ruled the Empire with him. The story is sweeping and romantic.

To be honest, I read the first 50 pages of the book and decided not to read any more. It seemed formulaic at first. And I also have a politically correct streak in me about books always being written about empires rather than common people. And so I put the book in my give-away pile. Then I went to sleep and when I woke up I was thinking about the story. And so, I raced home that evening, picked up the book, and read another 150 pages at once, gobbling the book up in big chunks until I had thoroughly read and enjoyed all 396 pages.

What a book! What a story! What an interesting history lesson!

The Mughal Empire was so vast and so rich that it was inevitable that there would be lots of in-fighting for the throne. The Empire had a harem but only one of his sons could be Emperor. Competition was ugly. Wars were fought. Lives were lost. There was splendor and love and plain old fashioned good storytelling with the violence real but understated, as was the romance. I was totally captivated.

I loved it the book so much I am ordering the sequel. Can't wait to read it.

20 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

The Power of Love

By Victoria

Sundaresan's novel draws a vivid and colorful picture of 17th century India under the Mughal rule. The underlying theme of the seemingly faceless, mute and therefore mysterious mughal women wielding power over the monarchy by the force of their love provides an enthralling story line. The descriptions of the Mina Bazar, a market solely for the women belonging to the Royal harem to be able to move freely without being veiled, drives home the extremely cloistered life these women lived, where once they enter the zenana, neither do they see any man other than the king for the rest of their lives, nor does any male not of immediate family ever catch a glimpse of them. The wealth of detailed descriptions of the lifestyle, locale and time, helps provide a fertile imagination with a clear picture of life in India during the 17th century. This story about Mehrunissa, who broke all the established customs of that time, who, at the age of 34 (when women were discarded as old and useless) managed to capture the King's fancy to the extent that he married her as his twentieth wife holds the reader enthralled until the finale. Though this book is a fictionalized version of Indian history in the 17th century, most events are accurately recorded, showing that the author has done her homework! A must-read gripping tale of love and hate, desire and ambition, treachery and debauchery.

37 of 43 people found the following review helpful.

Just okay...

By I. Ali

as an avid reader of historical fiction, I can honestly say this is not the worst book I have read. However, the author's many mistakes really make this hard to read- for example, I have never heard of the word "Bapa" being used to address one's father (I grew up speaking Urdu)- and the author refers to the maternal grandfather as "Dada"- when the word is Nana. Mughal women did not wear "ghagara"s (loose skirts); rather they wore "gharaara"s, a sort of split skirt with embroidery and embellishments. And Muslims don't greet each other with "InshaAllah"- which means, God Willing- the author uses this phrase numerous times as a greeting or salutation. If you are familiar with the culture and language, it is annoying to read these mistakes.

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