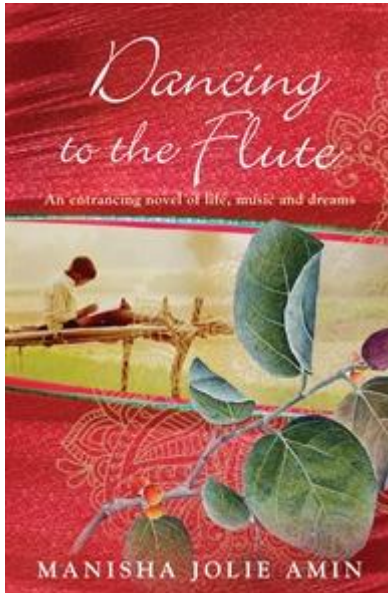


**REVIEW – Dancing to the Flute**


Manisha Amin’s first novel, *Dancing to the Flute*, is as vibrant, joyful and complex as the characters within. Kalu is a lively young Indian boy that few people around take the time to get to know or care for, as he is a worthless street urchin in their eyes. He begins his journey when a healer discovers his musical ability and leads him towards a fulfilling life of intense learning and playing music. The people who become his friends and makeshift family are memorable, fascinating characters who stay in the mind long after reading the novel, especially his close friend Malti and his teachers Guruji and Vaid Dada. Amin’s sensory descriptions mean that the place itself, a village in Gujarat, India, becomes an important character. We become familiar with many of the landmarks, including the Banyan tree and river where the women wash clothes, but more importantly we get a real sense of what it is like both to live there and to leave the village.

The plot and pace of the novel is rhythmic and inherently musical. Amin’s great knowledge of, and love for, music is evident. The novel not only captures the beauty, understanding and healing that audiences can find in music, but shows us what it is like to be lost in playing music. The musical scenes have a spiritual and emotional side and reveal the power that music has to work through grief and loss. Amin flawlessly ties together history, legends, musical theory and spirituality in the plot.

As writers we can learn valuable lessons from *Dancing to the Flute*. Kalu is taught that there are many steps to success and that failure is one of them. As his teacher tells him, “If I had given up every time I failed I would never have become a musician.” Before Kalu can even begin to be taught to play the flute, there are so many practical things he has to learn first – proper breathing and strength from yoga, as well as how to read and write. From this he learns patience and persistence, which are crucial to creative or artistic pursuits.

The book is a journey through the lives of the characters over almost a decade, as they experience love and sorrow, growth and loss. It is a wonderful read that takes you into another world and leaves you reluctant to leave again at the end.