Anila's Journey

Set in the late 1700s, this account of a young half-Indian girl and her voyage up the Ganges is clearly written with love both for India and for Anila herself, the spirited heroine of the story. Left on her own after her mother dies and her Irish father has disappeared, Anila by sheer good fortune ends up in the care of a saintly Scottish naturalist, out in India to record as many of its fabulous birds as he can find. Drawing on Anila's talents as an artist, the two go through many adventures, not all of them pleasant. During all this time, their narrative is shared with an older story, recounting Anila's childhood and the life of her beautiful mother, forced to live as a concubine to an official of the East India Company after she has apparently been deserted by the man she truly loves. Anila herself is almost too good to be true, and her happy ending is stretched out longer than is really necessary. But the real hero of this story is India itself, described in all its bewildering mixture of beauty and squalor. Mary Finn is a new writer, and on this evidence already an accomplished one. Her novel, based on research, is in fact a glorious romance that deserves to be enjoyed.

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