

BOOK REVIEW

Brown Like Dosas, Samosas, and Sticky Chikki

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Author: Rebecca Manari

Illustrator: Heetal Dattani Joshi

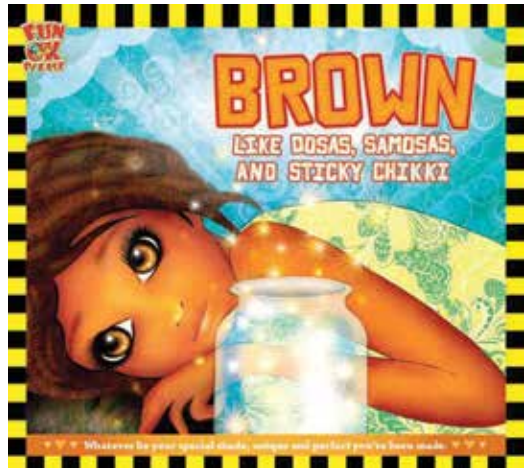
Age: 4 years and up

Price: ₹ 167

Publisher: Fun OK Please

Year of Publication: 2014

Penned down by Rebecca Manari, an author and teacher from Goa and illustrated by Heetal Dattani Joshi, an illustrator, designer, and storyteller from Bombay, the picture book, *Brown Like Dosas, Samosas, and Sticky Chikki* is a story of a young, chocolate-brown skin tone girl named Samaira who love colours. In the vibrant realm of children's literature that celebrates diversity, this story emerges as a heartwarming ode to cultural pride, identity, and the simplicity of childhood joys. With its infectious charm, the book engages readers, young and old, inviting them to delve into a world rich in tradition, colour, and flavor.



Set in the backdrop of a close-knit Indian community, the story begins on a fine day when Samaira receives a jar full of light. When she opens the lid, she is transported into another world. She meets Anahi, a purple skin tone lady, who offers to lighten Samaira's chocolate-brown skin "into a shade of white" in exchange for the shining jar. Samaira who is confident and bold enough, declines the offer saying, "I love my coffee brown cheeks

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and arms of chocolate brown". The lady still tries to persuade her into making her "fair from every finger to every toe" to which Samaira replies, "I am a girl, not a snowflake, If I were pale and as white as snow, I just wouldn't be the Samaira you know!" She politely refuses, remembering how her mother always said that there are many colours—some like sweet, earthy potatoes, others like sand and cinnamon—and that the world would be a dull place if everyone was the same colour. As Anahi comes up with more silly requests and absurd ideas which can be equated with the fairness cream commercials coaxing deep-skinned people into 'whiteness', Samaira resolutely reminds her that she is comfortable in her complexion and "quite happy to be her!"

Colours play an important role in the book. Not only the story starts with Samaira describing her love for painting but also it has various colours in it like purple, white, brown, orange, green, blue etc. Interestingly, the story also doesn't conform to any rules, for example, in another world, the river is green in colour, rose is turquoise and the crow is orange.

Illustrations done by Heetal Dattani Joshi makes the characters look like the Indian version of Disney princesses. Samaira has big, melting brown eyes, while Anahi looks similar to Anna from the Disney movie, Frozen. She has similar hair and white skin with magical elements attached to her personality. The book has a pull-out picture frame in the end

that delivers the message, "Whatever be your special shade; unique and perfect you've been made!"

Rebecca Manari's storyline is charming, brimming with some fun local food metaphors, such as skin "the delicious colour of black forest cake" and "brown like dosas, samosas and sticky chikki". The colour brown is seen throughout the story in food metaphors like tea, coffee, chocolate milk shake, coconut, cinnamon, murukku. Food descriptions are a sensory delight. From the golden-brown hue of dosas to the rich texture of chikki, the book celebrates not just the visual but the tactile, aromatic, and gustatory wonders of Indian cuisine.

This vivid imagery serves as a gateway to understanding and appreciating the broader tapestry of Indian culture. Rebecca's writing style is refreshingly lucid, ensuring that young readers remain captivated and wanting for more. The narrative flows smoothly, maintaining a pace that keeps the young audience engaged while allowing them to savor the rich details.

Her storytelling shines in its simplicity and genuineness. Through the eyes of Samaira, the narrative captures the wonder of a child's perspective, making the ordinary seem extraordinary. The effortless weaving of cultural elements with universal childhood experiences ensures that the book resonates with a broad audience.

The story challenges and debunks the discriminatory idea of "fair is beautiful" which is still prevalent in Indian society. The book becomes relevant because today children are adversely affected by various advertisements which promote white/light skin tone. Body image has become an important topic as a part of their identity for them and it's stressful to witness how they discriminate against people with deeper complexion. It encourages young readers to find beauty in their uniqueness and to draw pride from their heritage. Furthermore, the book beautifully touches upon the universality of childhood experiences, bridging cultural gaps.

The story makes Samaira embark on a delightful journey of self-discovery, as she joyously observes the shades of brown in her everyday life, from delicious dosas and crispy samosas to the sweet allure of sticky chikki. Through these

discoveries, she learns to embrace her skin colour, correlating it with the beloved items and experiences that bring her happiness and comfort.

Samaira is the epitome of innocence and curiosity. Her journey of correlating the beauty in her skin tone with her favorite foods offers an authentic portrayal of a child's process of understanding and embracing their identity. The supporting characters, from her family to friends, reinforce the theme of acceptance and pride in one's roots. Both the illustrator and the writer leave a personalised message to their readers in the end too saying that "you are your words, ideas, actions, thoughts, creations, emotions, decisions, fears, dislike more than just your skin and body".

This book is a must read not only for children to get inspiration from Samaira but also for teachers and parents too in order to teach children moral lessons like self love and self acceptance but also, life skills.