

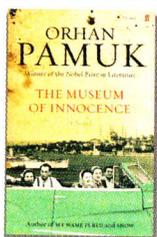
Hajratwala

ugh the family's fluctuating times. The lack of records frustrates her. The curious connections between legends and history fascinate her. If there is one thing that Hajratwala's family has in spades, it's determination. Their beginnings are humble but they resolutely struggle for a better life, always finding out new opportunities and holding on to their sense of family identity.

Old with a researcher's objectivity, the episodes that make up the larger Hajratwala story are always pleasant. Children are loved, wives are ignored, people suffer miserably. But there are also tales as well, like that of the father's smuggled paintings that drove his mother into a rage because she thought they were illegitimate. Hajratwala tries to distance herself out of the narrative at the end but her own story, full of anecdotes about how she was full of smelling like curry, the complexities of meeting her parents' expectations and being a lesbian, are a wonderful read. *Leaving* is a welcome and much-needed addition to the diaspora literature shelf. *Deepanjana Pal*

The Museum of Innocence Orhan Pamuk

Faber and Faber Rs 599



The idea of a writer's museum is far from absurd. That's what Kemal Basmaci insists near the end of *The Museum of Innocence*.

Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Nabokov, Pirandello, Poe, Proust, Spinoza, Strindberg, Tagore – all of them have museums (or homes converted), he notes. This often-claustrophobic tale of unrequited love is Basmaci's story, which he narrates in the first person, beginning in the newly fashionable and chaotic air of Istanbul in the mid-1970s, and ending in the present.

Basmaci is the 30-year-old scion of a business family who's indifferent about his father's company which he's forced into. Shortly before his engagement to a woman named Sibel, Basmaci runs into Füsün Keskin, a distant cousin who's grown into a ravishing teenager since she was sidelined in the family for taking part in a children's pageant. Memories of their shared childhood lead to a torrid

afternoon of lovemaking. Keskin, nevertheless, marries another man, forcing a heartbroken Basmaci to call off his own betrothal and resign himself to alcohol. His sole preoccupation turns to obsessing over the trinkets and whatnots that he either pinched, or snuck away from Keskin's presence, to amass his personal museum of love. All the while, he lapses into deliriously graphic accounts of those past amorous encounters.

As Basmaci's reminiscing of perspiring skin, aching necks and mouthfuls of breast turns repetitive, the atmosphere that Pamuk presents distinguishes his newest work. Teeming with effendis on streets like the Sanzelize (a transliteration of the Parisian avenue), in apartments named Inayet (benevolence), Hürriyet (freedom) and Merhamet (mercy), this is the Istanbul you expect to read about from Pamuk. Then, inexplicably, the writer introduces himself in the third person – as “the esteemed Orhan Pamuk”, who once danced with Keskin, and recalls it as vividly as Basmaci. That passage alone renders this novel far less memorable than any of Pamuk's earlier work. *Jaideep Sen*

land or some place like that,”
Naresh Fernandes

Should the world be inter-
in Indonesia?

often forget that Indonesia
world's largest

**Why should India care about
Indonesia?**

What's going on there is not just political but largely cultural. The culture that's being paved over is an Indic culture. It's a deeply

Indicised form of Islam –

Americans, and has been given complete political cover. They've done a very good job of tracking down people behind terror acts and foiling several others. But it's much harder when it comes to the fuzziest issues that are rooted in religion.