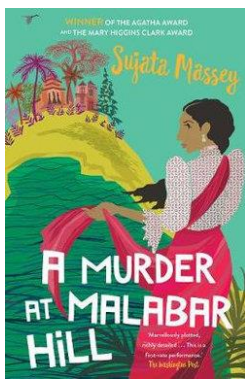


A murder at Malabar Hill by Sujata Massey

Reviewed by Donna



A murder at Malabar Hill is set in 1920s Bombay and is the first in this historical mystery series. Oxford educated Perveen Mistry is the first female lawyer practising in Bombay.

“As the only female lawyer in Bombay, you hold a power that nobody else has”, a British government official tells Perveen – a power that allows Perveen access to places forbidden to men.

Perveen’s female status means that she is as yet unable to be admitted to the Bar and instead works in her father’s well-respected legal firm, Mistry Law.

She is appointed to execute the will of a wealthy Muslim mill owner, Mr Omar Farid. Mr Farid has three widows, all of whom appear to have signed over their full inheritances to charity, leaving them with no means of financial support.

Perveen’s suspicions are aroused and she uncovers corruption and a murder plot.

The legal status of women, particularly those in full purdah and the abuse of power are sub-plots explored in the novel, but with a light touch. Perveen herself has a tragic backstory, which is gradually revealed, giving her character added depth.

What I most enjoyed was the social and cultural detail throughout. The customs of Zoroastrian society, their food and clothing, the restrictions placed on women and the historical setting in Bombay were all fascinating.

This is classified as a “cosy” mystery, which I don’t normally read, but I’m glad I stumbled across this one. (It has won a stack of awards which is why I tracked it down). It is also called The Widows of Malabar Hill and was inspired by India’s first female attorney.

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