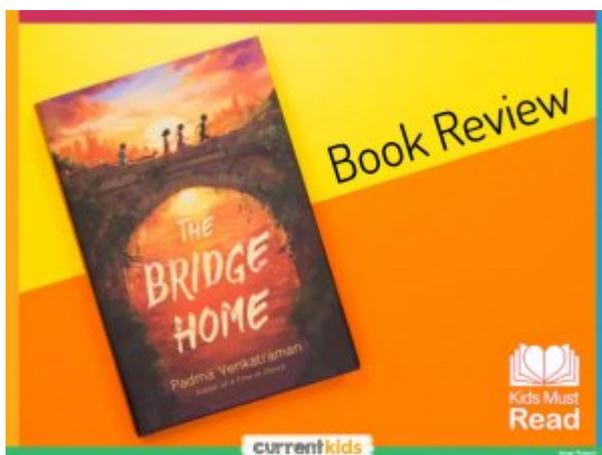


KidsMustRead.com's Book Review: The Bridge Home



'The Bridge Home' by Padma Venkatraman is the beautiful story of eleven-year-old Viji and her sister, Rukku who run away to the city of Chennai to escape an angry, alcoholic father. Viji is aware that her younger sister, Rukku, is a child with special needs and is dependent on her. She feels the need to protect Rukku from harm and the ridicule of others. Adrift in a city that is dangerous for children, the two sisters find comfort, and a family of sorts when they befriend Muthi and Arul, orphaned street-smart kids who share their rudimentary shelter on an abandoned bridge with the sisters. The boys teach Viji and Rukku the basics of survival; food is scarce and the job's not great but the children love the freedom of being financially independent. Things come to a head when a fellow street dweller reveals a clue to their shelter to a man who displays an unhealthy curiosity about the

girls. The children know that they have to be alert for danger. Can the children escape from the man? How can Viji, who is a child herself, protect Rukku? How can she fulfil the dream of a better life? Read the book to find out.

While the vulnerability of runaway children, where they could fall prey to violence or abuse is not denied or ignored, the book touches on these issues with a gentle hand. The Tamil words used in the story are not over-explained but instead, the author invites the reader to arrive at their own conclusions as to their meaning. Padma Venkatraman's writing is peppered with poetic similes that add to the flavour of the book. ("His words felt like a warm ray of sunshine slipping through a rain-soaked sky."). Interestingly, the book is written in a frame narrative where one sister addresses the other directly, foretelling the possible unfolding of events. One will feel empathy for the plight of children who readers probably see through the partition of glass windows while sitting in their air-conditioned cars. It's a great book to discuss and understand why some children enjoy privileges while others don't. *'The Bridge Home'* is a book that tells the story of resilience and survival and will inspire readers that however bad the circumstances, one can always dream and plan for a better tomorrow.



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