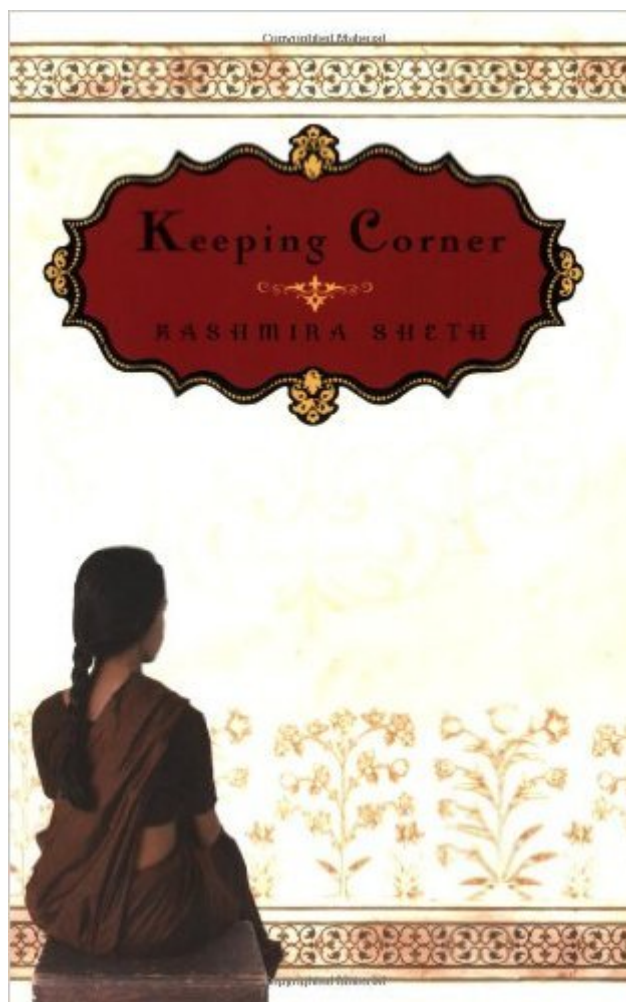


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# Keeping Corner



## Synopsis

Ba slipped the gold bangles from my wrists. The gold ones were plain so I didn't mind taking them off, but I loved wearing my milk-glass bangles and the lakkh bracelets. "A widow can't wear bangles," she said. "They are signs of a woman's good fortune. When your husband dies it's over." "What if my good fortune comes back?" "It doesn't." Pretty as a peacock, twelve-year-old Leela had been spoiled all her life. She doesn't care for school and barely marks the growing unrest between the British colonists and her own countrymen. Why should she? Her future has been planned since her engagement at two and marriage at nine. Leela's whole life changes, though, when her husband dies. She's now expected to behave like a proper widow: shaving her head and trading her jewel-toned saris for rough, earth-colored ones. Leela is considered unlucky now, and will have to stay confined to her house for a year-keep corner-in preparation for a life of mourning for a boy she barely knew. When her schoolteacher hears of her fate, she offers Leela lessons at home. For the first time, despite her confinement, Leela opens her eyes to the changing world around her. India is suffering from a severe drought, and farmers are unable to pay taxes to the British. She learns about a new leader of the people, a man named Gandhi, who starts a political movement and practices satyagraha-non-violent protest against the colonists as well as the caste system. The quiet strength of satyagraha may liberate her country. Could she use the same path to liberate herself?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a member of the Brahman caste, the highest, twelve-year-old Leela doesn't notice the hardships

of lower castes. Engaged at two and married at nine, Leela is soon to have her "anu," when she will move into the home of her husband. In the interim, she enjoys the life of a loved, petted member of her household which consists of her parents, her aunt and uncle, her older brother (away at school,) and Lakha, the man who takes care of their animals. Before the much anticipated anu, her husband is bitten by a venomous snake and dies. As a widow, Leela must have her head shaved, wear dull brown saris, and spend an entire year "keeping corner." She can't leave the house for an entire year. Only gradually does formerly light-hearted Leela come to understand the magnitude of the calamity that has befallen her. Set in India during the time that Gandhi is leading non-violent protests against the caste system and the British colonists, Leela's story exposes enormous gender inequalities as well. This novel follows Leela's inner growth during the year. She is tutored by her former principal, and she begins to read newspapers voraciously, equating the injustices suffered by Indians under British colonial rule with the injustices inflicted on her. Coming to appreciate education as her only hope, Leela endures the year of keeping corner, studying, until she ultimately triumphs. With first-rate prose, this work of fiction, based on the life of the author's great-aunt, is exciting and compelling within unusual confines.

I was amazed at the way this is written. I have been looking for books that my middle years students could read in their lit circles and just happened to stumble on this at my local library. Finding a book that is real literature, shows another culture, is a finger-licking page-racing novel that even reluctant readers will enjoy is close to a miracle. It is all that! Plus it is a novel about women without being a chick book. Why didn't this book turn up in all the searches I've done on the site?

This is one of the best books I've read this year! I loved Kashmira's descriptive writing. This story keeps you on the edge of your seat to find out what happens to Leela after her husband's death and keeping corner for a year.

There has been some comparison to the book *Climbing the Stairs*. While both are set in India during World War II, they are different books. I felt that *Keeping Corner* had more detail about Indian culture and I came away with a better understanding of a young woman's plight not so very long ago. In *Keeping Corner* we have twelve year old Leela who has been married at a very young age. Leela is your typical girl, and that's what I love about her. She isn't bookish and she really doesn't care about politics. She is interested in looking nice and wearing pretty clothes and jewelry. That is the extent of her life, and I think that makes her so much more interesting as a character. I mean

what young adult doesn't like those things? Leela's life is turned upside down when her fiancé dies. Now she is a widow at a very young age and must "keep corner." She has to shave her head; lose her pretty clothes and jewelry. The community views her as bad luck. Leela is trapped inside her house for an entire year. While she is in mourning Leela's schoolteacher comes and helps her with her lessons. Leela doesn't want to be taught anything. She dislikes school. Yet, as time goes on Leela becomes more interested in her studies and she enjoys hearing about Gandhi. She grows as a character and realizes there maybe something out there for her. Maybe she can change how people view women. Keeping Corner is an excellent story that has a lot of great details about the era and the plight of women. There is also an index in the back (something Climbing the Stairs didn't have). I think students who are interested in historical fiction will enjoy this novel as well as students who enjoy reading about other cultures. There is no romance in this novel however, so that may turn some teens away from the book. However, I strongly encourage people to read this novel.

I loved "Keeping Corner" by Kashmira Sheth. The only thing that kept it from getting a 5 rating was that it was a little flat emotionally. But the author really gets the voice of a twelve year old girl down pat. This is a fictional story that was inspired by the aunt's life as a widow. There are contrasts between Leela's life before and after she had to keep corner. Her mother, Ba loved her so much and indulged her in buying bangles and sweets more than her other relatives thought were necessary. But Leela was betrothed and married as a child as was the custom in 1918. When her husband was bitten by a poisonous snake and died, she has to go through a year of "Keeping Corner". Keeping corner entails wearing plain coarse clothes, no jewelry except for some plain brown beads, never marrying again, keeping her head shaved and being confined to her home and backyard. There was also great social stigma to being a widow. It was considered bad luck for a widow to be around the newly married and also there were bad names for widows. Most of the story concerns her year of "keeping corner", this would have been totally depressing except that her former principal, Sabiben comes to continue Leela's education and teach her about Gandhi's life and philosophy of nonviolent civil disobedience. Leela learns of Gandhi (this was during 1918) and his political movement and she grows and learns to hope. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the cultural history of India and the effects of Gandhi's teachings. Despite the flatness of the emotional tone, I am eager to read more books by Rashmira Sheth.

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