



# Idris : Keeper of the Light

*Anita Nair*

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## **Idris : Keeper of the Light** Anita Nair

A powerful historical novel from a well-loved and celebrated author.

The year is 1659. Idris, a Somalian trader, is in Kerala to attend the Mamangam festivities. By a strange twist of fate, he meets his nine-year-old son whose existence he had been unaware of. In an attempt to keep his son close to him, he embarks with him on a voyage that ends in the diamond mines of Golconda. Packed with passion, adventure and fascinating aspects of life in the seventeenth century in southern India, Idris is a page-turner that will intrigue and excite readers everywhere.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anita Nair is the best-selling author of five novels, *The Better Man*, *Ladies Coupé*, *Mistress*, *Lessons in Forgetting* and *Cut Like Wound*. *Mistress* was longlisted for the 2008 Orange Prize in the UK. Her books have been translated into thirty languages around the world. Anita lives in Bangalore with her husband and son. Visit her at [www.anitanair.net](http://www.anitanair.net).

## **Idris : Keeper of the Light Details**

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# From Reader Review Idris : Keeper of the Light for online ebook

## Preethi Venugopala says

"I am Idris Maymoon Samataar Guleed, previously of Dikhil. Now a traveller of the world, seeking the measure of earth and man." This is how Idris introduces himself. And that is exactly what he is.

A Somali trader, he ends up at the Malabar coast to watch the Mamangam which is held once in every 12 years, where the chavers or the select warriors of a tribe set out to kill the Zamorin, the cruel ruler. A chance encounter with Kandavar, who resembles him in every way, makes Idris realize that he is his son. Kandavar is determined to become a Chaver. He is born into a family of brave Chavers and he can't wait to fight the Zamorin.

To distract him, Chandu Menon, Kandavar's uncle and Kuttimalu, his mother, asks Idris, the man who has travelled the world to take the boy with him in his travels. To make him understand that the world outside is marvellous. And that becoming a soon-to-be-forgotten war hero for a lost cause was not worth it.

They travel along the coast of southern India, via Ceylon, Thoothukudi and Paliacatta, and finally reaches the diamond mines of Kolar. The book takes you through the adventures that come their way along with many side stories that give us glimpses of the various traditions, myths and history that surrounds the lives of the various characters that flit in and out of the story.

The book is a pleasant experience with its lyrical writing and quiet flow. Being fiction, the clever author has chosen not to bore the reader with the explicit detailing of the times. But yet, we travel with Idris, Kandavar and Sala Pokkar to the various places, see what they see and feel how they feel.

All in all, it is a gem of a book.  
Highly recommended.

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## Judith says

Lo interesante de la historia es su recreación, los lugares, hechos todo lo referente a su cultura lo que llaman mas la atención, por lo que se puede apreciar, la autora se a documentado para realizar un trabajo con muy bien detallado con por supuesto sus dotes de imaginación y creatividad.

Nuestro principal personajes es Idris si bien su hijo también lo es pero este en mi caso no me atrapo del todo, siendo mas Idris un personajes muy bien logrado con una muy marcada personalidad y en cuanto a sus rasgos físicos.

Muy buenas descripciones de los lugares, locaciones atrapantes, variados personajes que dan su buena cuota a la historia, aprenderemos sobre su cultura, viajaremos al pasado y conoceremos el sur de la India con un hombre cautivador y su hijo ávido de curiosidad en busca de respuestas para lograr un futuro estable y prometedor.

Mi reseña original: <http://zonaexentrica.blogspot.com.uy/...>

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## **Bindu Vinod says**

It provides you an outlook on how Kerala was a very long time back. Idris is like the lone ranger way long back. An adventurer without a home.

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## **Kalyanaraman Durgadas says**

It is 1659. The place, Malabar. He is 'Idris, Idris Maymoon Samataar Guleed. Previously of Dikhil, Now an eternal traveller seeking the measure of earth and man', a man who is more at home among the heavenly bodies than the earth he walks.

Idris is expected to prevent his son from following the Chavers who have traditionally sworn to kill the Zamorin. Idris and his son Kandavar, who he hadn't previously suspected existed, go on a voyage.

Anita Nair makes the voyage is as real as it is metaphorical. They travel from place to place, his good eye as unwinking as his enamel one, even at night, when his only true companions are the stars of the night sky. He moves from relationship to relationship, searching, searching... Perhaps Kandavar learns more than he bargained for, merely being with Idris.

Anita Nair paints an exotic yet fully believable picture of 17th century Malabar. Pearl diving at Thoothukkudi, trading at Serendip, diamond prospecting at Golconda... the story moves on, always keeping the reader interested.

the amount of research the author has put in, not in recording imperial and noble lives, but in figuring out how the average man-on-the street must have lived, is truly impressive.

We are left with a sense of completion with respect to Idris, who has muscled his way into the book and dominated it, but questions remain of Kandavar. How much has he changed? What are these strange premonitions he has had leading up to? does he still dream of assassinating the Zamorin?

I for one am eager to lay my hands on the rest of the trilogy as soon as they are published.

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## **Madumitha Selvaraj says**

My first book by Anita Nair. An unusual tale set in the 1600s about a journey and a destiny intertwining two different cultures and human lives. I loved the way the author has layered the story. How each character sort of acts as a window for another. One of the few fictional works in India that describes the matriarchal system that was present in those time in Kerala. The topographical detail was so refreshing to read...From Kerala shores to Ceylon, Thoothukudi and Golconda - She brings you the scene in your head as you read the lines. And of course, the intrinsic poet that she is, her writing does take a fantastic route that conveys more than it

reads! I was entranced by bot Idris' journey in land and in mind. One of the best books about a part of India in the Seventeenth century - well researched and very well written!

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### **Monideepa Sahu says**

This is a gripping tale of adventure set in 17th century South India. Idris, a trader of Somali origin, sails across the seas and travels across India. This powerful personality seems too noble to be true; a man who needs nothing, who cannot be tempted or corrupted. Yet, in the course of the novel, he discovers that he does indeed need something; that special place and person to call his own.

The book is well-researched. The author does a great job of bringing another age to life. If you loved Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke, and Kunal Basu's The Yellow Emperor's Cure, you're sure to enjoy this one.

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### **Magda says**

Di solito gli scrittori indiani non mi deludono mai, hanno sempre un tocco mistico che mi piace molto e mi coinvolge nella lettura. Questa storia è bella, a tratti toccante, ma l'inserimento di tanti vocaboli stranieri (indiani e arabi), hanno reso la lettura lenta e noiosa.

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### **dely says**

La premessa era ottima: un commerciante somalo, Idris, che viaggia attraverso l'India del XVII secolo vivendo mille avventure. Amando libri che parlano dell'India pensavo che anche questo potesse essere interessante. Il libro, in effetti, parla di viaggi e avventure, ma è di una noia mortale e non ne sono rimasta coinvolta, anzi, non vedevo l'ora che finisse. Il linguaggio è piatto e la traduzione lascia a desiderare. Oltre a questo, il personaggio principale è perfetto, un super figo che tutti amano: tutti gli si affezionano e lo ammirano, è saggio, sa sempre cosa dire scegliendo il momento giusto per parlare e per tacere, è un leader nato e tutti pendono dalle sue labbra, fa solo ottimi affari e, ovviamente, è anche un figo della madonna e le donne s'innamorano subito di lui. All'inizio del libro incontra un ragazzino che riconosce subito come suo figlio perché alcuni anni prima aveva avuto una relazione con una donna indiana. Ovviamente i parenti del ragazzino permettono a un perfetto sconosciuto di portarsi il bambino in viaggio per toglierli dalla testa l'idea di diventare un guerriero. Il commerciante somalo sarà ovviamente un padre perfetto anche se non potrà confessare al ragazzino di essere il padre naturale perché altrimenti la madre verrebbe buttata fuori dalla sua casta.

Ho avuto l'impressione che gli accenni storici e culturali dell'India, che erano sicuramente interessanti, rimanessero in sottofondo perché oscurati dalla perfezione di Idris. In primo piano c'è sempre e soltanto lui e la sua perfezione.

### **English**

I rated it 2\* only because I was able to finish it but it was so boring! It's a book full of adventures and trips of a Somali merchant who travels in India during the 17th century so the premise was very interesting but I didn't like the writing style and everything was so boring: the description of the characters, their trips, etc. It

could have been much better. Perhaps the fault is also of the translation because I had to read some sentences twice before understanding what was written.

The main character seems also the perfect man who knows everything, everyone likes him, he has a lot of luck with his trades...everything is too perfect. I couldn't relate to any of the characters and didn't like any of them.

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## **lou says**

Me costó trabajo iniciar la historia, pero una vez que comprendí de qué iba el asunto me enamoré de la relación de Idris y Kandavar, este chiquillo tiene una personalidad encantadora y la relación es entrañable, tanto hasta el final en que sabe lo que tiene que hacer para conservar ese vínculo.

Sala Pokkar es otro personaje entrañable.

Lo que me gusta de la narración es cómo se tejen vínculos entre los personajes, por supuesto desde la piedra angular que es Idris; y no sólo se tejen vínculos humanos fraternos o amorios, se tejen hermosísimos vínculos con los animales. Eso corona una historia que a mí sí me gustó, aunque esta vez tardé más de lo que habría querido, pero no por la historia sino por temas personales.

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## **Miguel says**

Idris es un viajante que conoce a su hijo y se le lleva para que conozca mundo.

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## **Aathira Jim says**

From the book cover: The year is 1659. Idris, a Somali trader, is in Malabar to attend the Zamorin's Mamangam festivities. Everywhere he goes, his jewelled eye evokes a sense of wonder and incredulity. Then, by a strange twist of fate, Idris meets his nine-year-old son, Kandavar, born of a mysterious midnight tryst in this very land. Anxious to remain close to him for as long as possible, he joins the Nair household headed by Kandavar's uncle, and is charged with a crucial task: of distracting the boy from his dream of becoming a Chaver, a warrior whose sole ambition is to assassinate the Zamorin, in a tradition whose beginnings have been lost in time.

In an attempt to stave off the inevitable, Idris embarks with his son on a voyage that takes them from Malabar to Ceylon, and from Thoothukudi to the diamond mines of Golkonda, where he meets the queenly Thilothamma, as solitary a being as he is. Will the mines reward him? Will he find the strength to leave his new-found love and journey back to his son's land – and to an uncertain future?

Packed with adventure and passion, and full of fascinating insights into life in the seventeenth century, Idris: Keeper of the Light will keep you riveted and hungry for more.

My take: I bought this book seeing all the raving reviews that it has been getting. Besides it was by one of my favorite authors. So I might have bought it anyway. The book I bought was the hard bound version (I don't think they have a paperback version as yet). Of late, I have been having a thing for hard bound books.

And I'm glad I got it because this one is definitely for keeps.

Historical fiction is a genre that I'm not a huge fan of. Mainly because it reminds me of my school days where mugging up dates for my history exam gave me nightmares. For this very reason, I was skeptical when I picked it up. But I couldn't have been more wrong. A few pages into the book and I was hooked. Nair is an author who does her homework and the amount of research that has gone into it is vast and it shows.

Idris breaks the stereotype of the typical hero. He is black as the night and tall like a palm tree. With his one gold eye and his passion for adventure and star gazing, Idris grows on you. In his own words, he was Idris Maymoon Samataar Guleed. Previously of Dikhil. Now an eternal traveller seeking the measure of earth and man.

The language that Nair has used is poetic. This has made reading Idris an absolute joy. The sprinkling of various words in Malayalam, Arabic or Telugu in any other context might have been putting off for the readers, but here, it somehow makes the novel more endearing. They are necessary for the story much like its protagonist who is a jack of all trades.

At 380 odd pages and the subject dealt with, the book is not an easy read, but I found myself racing through the book along with Idris and Kandavar. I finished the book in three days straight and I'm still stuck somewhere between the pages. There are a lot more that I would like to find out about Idris but unfortunately, looks like I will have to wait till the remaining two books of the trilogy comes out. Yes, you heard that right. It's a trilogy. Considering the nature of the subject, I think it's only fair. Besides, if this is the type of writing then I'm looking forward to some bulkier reads.

Like all of Nair's previous works, the women characters in the novel are well etched out. Be it Kuttimalu-Kandavar's mother or Margarida, the child prostitute or Thilothamma, a strong and independent woman who finds solace in the company of her dogs, all of whom changes Idris's life in one way or the other. I only wish they had been given more space as these were characters who were anything but cliched. But then, I guess the story would have deviated from the title, which wouldn't have been fair to Idris.

The other characters that Idris meets across the span of his journey all contribute to the story in their own ways. Idris is not just a novel about him but it surrounds the people that influence his life in one way or the other. Be it the faithful Sala Pokkar who joins him and Kandavar on their journey or Chandu Nair, Kandavar's uncle or Golla, an attendant who is introduced towards the latter part of the story.

The other thing that I loved about the book was that Nair has weaved in many intricate stories into the main one. Like the story of Venkata Reddy, Thilothamma's great-grandfather with a secret that he took to his grave. The flashes of memory which takes back to Idris's past are as enchanting as well.

On the whole, Idris is a well written, well researched novel which offers insights into the seventeenth century. But more importantly, it is the story of a man who loves to travel and not belong. Who refuses to be tied down. It is the story of a star gazer who is on the path of discovering himself; of a journey that takes us across the seas and then some more.

It is the sort of book that upon completion you need to pause and really reflect on what just happened. I finished this book last night and needed some time to just think about it before penning this review. This one deserves a five star rating and no less!

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## Tiempo de Lectura says

Este libro me anime a leerlo ya que me llamo mucho la atención la nacionalidad de la autora, la india es un lugar rico en cultura y eso me gusta, así como también que decía que es basado en el siglo XVII y que es una historia de un padre e hijo, y yo amo las historias de lazos familiares.

Cuando lo comencé a leer me di cuenta que Anita Nair tiene un estilo muy propio en su narrativa, son de esos libros que te muestra las emociones, que tienen descripciones ricas en alegorías pero sin exageras, de esos libros que logran transporta a través del tiempo. Sin embargo si es un libro el cual te tienes que tomar el tiempo necesario para leer, ya que si es cierto que la narrativa no es densa pero si de esas que requieren reflexionarse, así como tiene muchas palabras en indu, entonces eso podría ser algo complicado para los que no están acostumbrados a leer libros de este tipo, pero no se asusten que al final la autora se encarga de dejar un pequeño glosario de algunas palabras.

La temática en si de la historia es muy bueno e interesante, los personajes son creíbles, aunque se utiliza a veces elementos religiosos y sobrenaturales, pero están basado todo en las creencias indias. Me encanto como la autora nos describe la personalidad del padre y de su hijo, los cuales a pesar que la sangre los une, no se han complementado del todo, pero el viaje que realizaran en el libro les ayudara a eso, a conocerse mejor tanto a ellos mismos como el uno al otro. También cabe mencionar que el libro tiene su toque de amor y erotismo, pero nada cargado si no lo que tiene que ser.

Es un libro muy recomendable :)

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## Payal says

Idris, a Somali trader running from his own demons, fathered Kandavar during a moonlight tryst on a previous visit to Malabar, and when fate brings father and son together in unlikely fashion, neither has an idea of how far it will take them. From Malabar to Ceylon to Thoothukudi (present-day Tuticorin) and finally to the diamond mines of Golkonda, "seeking the measure of earth and man" and more. Anita Nair delivers an unforgettable tale, a blend of adventure and passion, love and longing. Even though she does not claim to have been historically accurate, she paints a spellbinding canvas of life in the 1660s and thereabouts in the region we now know of Kerala. (For those in search of more information, the bibliography is a good place to start -- or the Internet if one is in a hurry. In fact, a little background only will keep a reader from being overwhelmed by the terminology, especially towards the beginning of the book, and it certainly adds to a fuller enjoyment of Idris.)

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## Vanessa Romero says

- \* un clásico cuento para adultos
- \* con una hermosa narración
- \* llena de historias atrapantes y fascinantes
- \* con una mezcla de historia, realidad y magia en todo momento
- \* acompañada de personajes inolvidables (principalmente Idris y Thilothamma) 3
- \* que nos transporta a algún lugar de la fantástica y misteriosa India



## Girish says

*"I am Idris Maymoon Samataar Guleed, previously of Dikhil. Now a traveller of the world, seeking the measure of earth and man"*

At the end of the book, I don't think I got the measure of any of the characters. The book seemed almost a 2D portrayal of what the author considered an adventure, which is more a no strings attached journey that just spans like 300 pages.

Idris Maymoon lands at Kozhikode during the Mamangam of 1659 where an attempt is made on the then Zamorin Asuwathi Thirunal by the Chevars. He discovers Kandavar, his 9 year old son, a product of a one-night stand (for the lack of better word) during the last Mamangam, when he was last here. The book then unravels episode after episode of stories from 17th century society of the caste system, Kalari, the trade and an almost sacrilegious love story.

In order to make his son appreciate life than throw it on a suicide mission, he takes him under his wings and sets out on his travel across the different ports of South India, where they meet different people and have 'adventures' (again lack of better word). When you are to tell stories of different shores, there needs to be a binding factor which is notably missing. I take an episode at random and I can still read the entire story without needing to know any backdrop. Then what is the point of the book?

Idris was touted as an adventure but it seems more a glorified journal entry of a traveler/trader. There is no resistance and it is almost too easy. Aside, none of the characters actually are explored/tested. Even the traders are honest, straight forward people, for crying out loud!

When you have read a decent number of books you realise there are only 2 kind of things that keep you invested in a book. The What-Why (of happenings or events) or Who (characters who you get to know). In this book neither worked.

An insipid attempt at historical fiction..

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