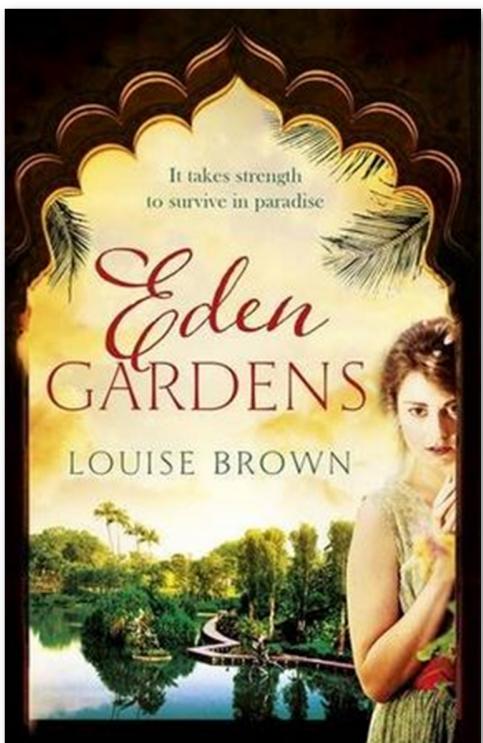




Helping you choose
your next book

Lovereading Reader reviews of **Eden Gardens** by Louise Brown headline

Below are the complete reviews, written by Lovereading members.



Catherine Bryce

A beautiful historical and thrilling novel set in the era of the decline of the Indian Raj.

'Eden Gardens' takes the reader to India set in the latter part of the 1940's when India was in the turmoil of obtaining independence. The book is written in such a way that the reader is beside the characters in the book, all of whom are beautifully described by the author.

However the reader experiences India from the poverty side of the country and brings reality to the characters in the book. Each character develops as the story unfolds, poor Maisy trying to survive each day, her selfish dominant

mother, Pushpa the ever loyal servant, Charlie - Maisy's son, MacBraye her lover and of course Sunil.

'Eden Gardens' is truly down to earth in relation to language used and also the events that take place. Love, drunkenness, prostitution, affairs, theft being some of the events which make the book such a vociferous read.

A truly brilliant novel, covering several genres, one I found difficult to put down and can thoroughly recommend it as the reader won't be disappointed!

Angie Rhodes

Calcutta, 1940s, Maisy, lives with her Mam, and Pushpa, their ayah, in Eden Gardens a ramshackle of a house.

They have no money, and to make matters worse, Mam "entertains" officers at night, mainly in a drunken stupor.

Mam has dreams, of Maisy marrying wealth, even though Maisy is more at home in the streets and Bazaars. Mam brings in a tutor, to educate Maisy, but when he falls ill, his son the beautiful and poetic dreamer Sunil Banerjee takes over, wins her heart and soul. Only he is Indian and she is white, their love affair was never going to be easy, but they did not expect the end result.

Beautifully written, you can smell the spices, feel the heat, and your heart will break, you will laugh at some of the things Mam says, and cry at others, you will want a sequel.

Alexandra Harper-Williams

Enthralling novel set in the colourful landscape of Calcutta in the 1940s told from the perspective of two very different women. Very enjoyable read!

'Eden Gardens' is a novel that takes the reader to the poorer streets of 1940s India and tells the story of three women, Maisy, her mother Mam and their ayah, Pushpa.

The three women have to fend for themselves in India after Maisy's father's death, escaping poverty through the only means they have, which is by Mam entertaining officers at night.

Beautiful Maisy is Mam's only hope for a brighter future, but when she grows up she falls in love with her enigmatic tutor Sunil and is faced with problems that make her question and re-evaluate her own role in the new world after the Second World War.

One thing that made this book really special to me was the account of Pushpa, the ayah, and how her life completely revolved around everything connected to Mam and Maya. Her complete devotion is depicted really sensitively, and it's fascinating to find out more about her background.

Louise Brown brings the smells and colours of 1940s India alive and shows a different side to British colonialism. I thoroughly enjoyed reading 'Eden Gardens' and look forward to reading more by this author.

Ann Peet

Moving love story set in 1940s India.

India in the 1940s is really brought to life in this engrossing novel. It is not a story of grand colonial life, however, but rather of the back streets, slums and brothels of Calcutta.

The main character is Maisy. Her father has died and she lives with her mother, who drinks too much and entertains British officers, and with their ayah, Pushpa. Maisy and Pushpa narrate alternate chapters so we get both their stories and see Indian history of this period through different perspectives. The struggle for an independent India makes an absorbing background to the story of Maisy growing up and falling in love with Sunil, the son of her tutor.

The historical aspects with all the issues of race and class are interesting and well researched but what stays in mind are the evocative descriptions of the tastes, smells and colours of India and the moving stories of two sympathetic characters, headstrong Maisy and loyal, self-sacrificing Pushpa.

Phylippa Smithson

This is not a love story, a fictional account of another side to living in India for the Brits in the 1920s-40s nor a family saga. It is all of the above and I loved it.

Born in Leeds 'Mam' or Mrs Brooks has wants more than her Leeds based future threatens – dead-end job, marriage, children. So she goes in search of a wealthy husband and a spoilt life in early 20th century India.

Unfortunately, Calcutta does not reward her ambitions. Her marriage does not bring wealth and when her husband dies, she is left to bring up 5 year old Maisy in an India that is changing as the British colonial life is drawing to an end.

So Maisy finds herself with many and various 'uncles' who come to the home for entertainment, whisky and night activities.

With a 'reputation' established, Mam, Maisy and Pushpa, a Bengali who is basically responsible for bringing Maisy up (including exposing her to the colour, foods, people and the seedy side of India), they face the prejudices of the locals and the British. All hopes that Maisy may free them from such prejudices by meeting the man Mam failed to meet, is lost when she falls in love with Samil, a revolutionary driving the change in India.

Life for a Brit in India during the Raj is often portrayed as of privilege, being

insular and parochial. 'Eden Gardens' brings a credible alternative to that perception. Great read.

Allison Batten

A light-hearted read, good to curl up in a chair with!

Set in India in the 1940's this is an interesting read, it depicts a seedier side of Calcutta not often written about in books but it still manages to be entertaining.

Maisy's "Mam" is a bit of a character, happily entertaining officers in the night whilst Maisy is left to roam around the streets of downtown Calcutta with the loyal Pushpa.

This is not a particularly long or involving book but is an enjoyable light read, good for a holiday or a lazy weekend.

I will look forward to reading other books by this author.

Evelyn Love-Gajardo

This book has it all - exotic location, strong characters, believable plot and a doomed love affair. I've never been to India but the author manages to evoke the smells, sounds and tastes of the country in such an authentic way that you feel as if you're there. She also conveys the contrast in the lives of the British during the Raj and the local Indian population, and doesn't skim over the violence of Partition.

The story is narrated by Pushpa, the Indian ayah, and Maisie, the English memsahib, both strong characters with interesting stories to tell.

I found the book to be very well written and it held my attention throughout, so I would recommend it.

Janet Gilliard

I really enjoyed this book. I was transported to the heat of India. If you enjoyed 'Far Pavilions' you will enjoy this. It is the other side of India - poverty dirt and class divides. It is the story of two women trying to find love before and during the Second World War. After living with an alcoholic mother Maisy meets and falls in love with Sunil just as the Second World War starts and their world changes.

Alison Bisping

Calcutta, 1940s. Maisy, her Mum and their ayah Pushpa live in a ramshackle house. Mum is a prostitute to British Officers, a white English woman, wanting to have a better life and be accepted in all the Upper Class English clubs. She has her hopes set on Maisy making their fortune, elevating their position in society.

Maisy has grown up playing in the streets, eating bazaar food and speaking Bengali, and when she meets Sunil, her future is set. However, all is not as it seems.

Great descriptions of India – I've never been to Calcutta, but have to other parts, and it brought back great memories – smells, the people, the bazaars, the colour all around...

A great book containing scandal and danger in a time where race, class and gender were everything.

Sarah Harper

This absorbing book will immerse you in the colour, squalor, caste and strict social order of India and provide a glimpse of another world that will linger on in your memory.

Immersed in Calcutta's colour and squalor, caste and strict social order, we follow Maisy, as she is raised by her ayah Pushpa, on the edge of society. When cholera claims her father in a matter of hours, she and her family must forge a new life for themselves in a place where ancestry and heritage are everything. Forced to entertain a long line of ex-pats, Maisy's mother numbs herself with drink. Her high hopes of Maisy marrying a wealthy man and providing them with a better life are dashed when Maisy falls for the young, poor, Indian revolutionary, Sunil. Although only a child herself, Maisy insists on keeping his baby and so Charlie is born. With another mouth to feed Mam is forced to continue in her line of work but age is against her and she needs to find an alternative means of paying the bills. When Gordon, a rich jute baron, takes Maisy as his mistress and lavishes gifts, including a beautiful home, upon her they appear to have landed on their feet. But Gordon is a jealous man and Maisy's one true love could destroy everything.

Set against the growing tension as India fights for independence, we are whisked from the heat and colour of Calcutta to a cold, grey England and an even bleaker welcome in Scotland before our characters can settle where they

truly belong. Very reminiscent of Amy Tan's 'Valley of Amazement', the stories of Pushpa, Maisy and Mam are an eye opening account of life as a woman in India. This absorbing book provides a glimpse of another world that will linger on in your memory.

Joy Bosworth

This is not the overworked tale of white rulers living it up in India. It is, instead, a gripping story of a shady white woman and her daughter along with their faithful servant.

For those able to get on and profit from the Raj India can be a time of luxury but for a rebellious servant from Leeds things do not go so well. Her only means of support is her current man and as her looks fade her drinking increases, so even more her looks fade. At this point her men get lower and of shorter duration. The plans she once had for her blonde daughter, Maisy to return to England to be educated dissolve into trying push Maisy into the same profession.

Maisy falls in love. At a time of Partition and national upheaval Maisy is blinkered by the desire to follow her love. However, she too has obstacles preventing her living a decent life.

Only their old servant is straightforward – or is she?

It seems the difference in class and skin colour determine the arrangements made for how men are entertained, there is no other difference at all when driven by a necessity to buy food.

This is often a gory story of brutality and murder from every party involved in ruling India. The difference being that it continues without British meddling.

If the Indian part is as accurate as that set in England, which I assume it is, then it reflects a dark time in the country and the lengths people will go to in order to survive.

Lorraine Blencoe

*The title is deceptive, it hints at frivolity and ease. But this is a story of the British Raj and its underbelly and the end of its dominance in India. It's the story of a girl born to British parents in India and her struggle to fit in to either society. **It's a compulsive read. It looks at Indian independence through the eyes of three women and their different perspectives on survival. It pulls no punches and examines extremes.** I can't say it was*

an enjoyable read but it's a must. Powerful and insightful.

Chloe Hill

This book had lovable characters, great imagery and gave me an insight into life on the harsher side of the British Empire.

I was really excited to read this book I received from Lovereading in return for an honest review because I was intrigued by the cover and blurb. This was not some kind of Indian Princess fairy tale, nor really just the story of a beggar. It was a good story following a British girl growing up in India, trying to fight poverty. It also follows their ayah, Pushpa and backtracks to her life.

Warning: this book includes quite a lot of content on prostitution, so if you don't want some honesty about it, then it isn't for you.

The book had a bit of an uneven pace in places but the writing itself was good. The characters were well developed and I managed to sympathise with most. In some ways, 'Eden Gardens' is quite educational, giving you an insight into how the British Empire affected those who were a part of it and what life would have been like at the time. It has great imagery and you can really feel everything that happens.

Zara Kazi

A good read.

When I first read the summary of the book, I was very excited to read it. I was not disappointed. I knew not to expect an Indian Princess fairy-tale so I enjoyed reading the life of a White British girl growing up in India, trying to avoid poverty at all costs.

*Since the book is written in dual narrative, we get to see the story line between the perspective of both the British and Indian women (Pushpa). This is shown simply through the **Brown captures the atmosphere in Calcutta in the 1940's by touching upon intricate details that really make you feel as if you, yourself are in India.** little things such as the street food. Overall, it is a good read.*

Edel Waugh

This is the story about one British family in Calcutta in India. The main

characters are Maisy and her mother. Maisy's mother drinks a lot and she is a prostitute who does her work in the same place she lives leaving her daughter vulnerable. As Maisy grows up, the apple does not fall far from the tree, as her love life is almost as tragic and heart breaking as her mothers. The descriptions of the area they live in, and the oppressive heat and smells made this a book you could almost feel. It left me uncomfortable and glad I lived in a country that is cold most of the time. These women are resilient and flawed, they face life head on despite how much it knocks them down, and their strength is admirable.

Love, family and friendship is at the centre of this story and you can see how it is that which holds these women up when their life is not going to plan.

If you enjoy books with strong female lead characters set in exotic locations around war times then this book is for you.

<http://edelwaugh.blogspot.ie/2016/02/eden-gardens-by-louise-brown-review.html?m=1>

Yvonne Richardson

This was a lovely historical tale. Set in Calcutta during the 1940's onwards. A tale of the conflicts of love and betrayal between Maisy and Sunil, her forbidden lover. Maisy's struggle to find answers. Living with her alcoholic mother who entertains men behind the backs of British Colonial Wives. Maisy is more or less raised by her loving ayah, Puspha, who is often more of a mother to Maisy than her own mother. Exploring the streets of Calcutta the descriptions of food and spices leaves your taste buds watering. The heat and the fragrant beauty of Eden Gardens itself. The danger and blood shed from political unrest. A charming tale of love and loss. Set in a colourful exotic country.

A great book for escaping into and perfect for holiday's and bookclubs!

