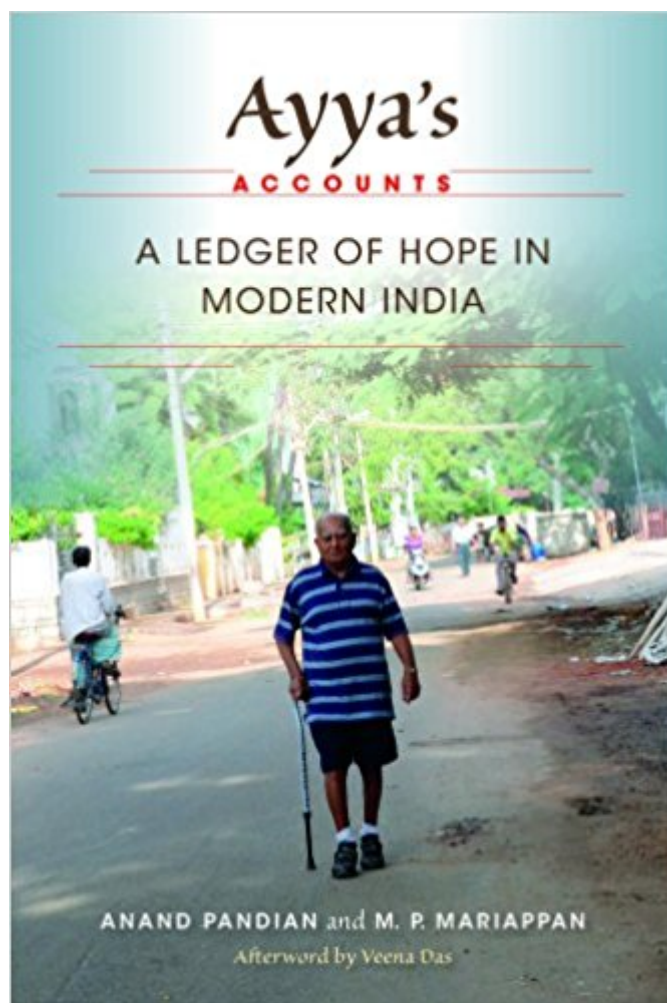


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Ayya's Accounts: A Ledger Of Hope In Modern India



Synopsis

Ayya's Accounts explores the life of an ordinary man— orphan, refugee, shopkeeper, and grandfather— during a century of tremendous hope and upheaval. Born in colonial India into a despised caste of former tree climbers, Ayya lost his mother as a child and came of age in a small town in lowland Burma. Forced to flee at the outbreak of World War II, he made a treacherous 1,700-mile journey by foot, boat, bullock cart, and rail back to southern India. Becoming a successful fruit merchant, Ayya educated and eventually settled many of his descendants in the United States. Luck, nerve, subterfuge, and sorrow all have their place along the precarious route of his advancement. Emerging out of tales told to his American grandson, Ayya's Accounts embodies a simple faith—that the story of a place as large and complex as modern India can be told through the life of a single individual.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Pandian's Ayya makes it possible to believe that the common can be uncommon. In the hands of this gifted writer, the eyes of this careful observer, and the ears of this persistent listener, an uncommon ordinariness itself becomes extraordinary. Indeed, Anand Pandian's loving dialogue with his Ayya is inspiration to all of us to listen, observe, and take note of our family histories. The little stories of our parents and grandparents are very much a part of the grand narrative of tradition and modernity." —India Currents

Anand Pandian's spellbinding memoir of his grandfather is at once a labor of love and a reckoning with life. Despite differences of location, language, and vocation, grandson and grandfather share such deep affinities that Pandian confesses to feeling

indebted to Ayya for his own life. Not only do 'all of us come to life in a sea of stories,' but it proves possible to read a nation's history between the lines of this biography. At the same time, Pandian's sensitive and luminous narrative demonstrates the power of a literary sensibility to broaden our ethnographic horizons and broach new philosophical questions in anthropology."

•Michael D. Jackson, author of *The Wherewithal of Life: Ethics, Migration, and the Question of Wellbeing*"The book is an unusually evocative cross-generational memoir, a wonderful read. Pandian's own elegant and sparse prose shows how a focus on one life can illuminate India's development and interaction with a rapidly modernizing world."

•Karen Leonard, *H-Asia H-Net*"I found the story of M. P. Mariappan's life completely engrossing, and found it reflected a bit of my own family's history from a completely different part of the globe."

•Sheilah Kast, *WYPR*"Pandian is to be lauded for bringing to light the significance of a life in ways [that]... reveal what it is like to be human, an anthropological project of much value in our fast-changing and turbulent world"

•American Ethnologist"One senses here something quite rare: the clearly delineated emergence of a person's life, thoughts, and relations through the course of a lifetime. And it surely helps that the author is a gifted writer. By the time I came to the end of the text, I felt like I had come to know Ayya in an intimate way, and I was grateful for that span of related knowing."

•Robert Desjarlais, author of *Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists*"Ayya's youth in an impoverished family in rural Tamil Nadu in the 1920s becomes not just the story of an individual in Pandian's hands, but rather a window onto an entire historical tapestry."

•Los Angeles Review of Books"Ayya's *Accounts* makes for pretty gripping reading, even for people who have never read this kind of first-person anthropology before."

•The Aerogram"Ayya's *Accounts* is at once a mesmerising memoir of an ordinary man's life and an anthropologist's revealing examination of the astounding changes experienced by persons and families over a century of tremendous hope and upheaval in modern India.... Ayya tells his tale to his first-born grandson, an anthropology professor in the USA, Anand Pandian. Pandian beautifully re-crafts the tale, while interlacing it with pithy interludes of anthropological insight. The result is an inventive text impossible to put down."

•Sarah Lamb, *South Asia*"Ayya's *Accounts* is a gem of a book: fluid, accessible, moving, instructive, compact. It is a book with the word 'hope' in its title and this means a lot. Ayya's *Accounts* shows readers a globalized world that is not dehumanized. If I were teaching 'Introduction to Anthropology,' I would assign this book right at the beginning."

•Ann Grodzins Gold, *Journal of Anthropological Research*"Overall, this is a beautifully written, deeply engaging book. Theory – such as it is present at all – is worn lightly, insights emerging gently through an engagement with Ayya's

stories, rather than imposed to make sense of the whole." âJames Staples, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute

"The... work, accessible rather than academic, is only deceptively simpleâbecause, in sketching an ordinary manâs passage over a lifetime, from tradition to modernity, it also charts a countryâs century-long journey. This is where the anthropologistâs skill comes in handy. Pandian, who spent a lot of time in India, has been able to absorb Ayyaâs experiences and make them seem universal." âKhabar

"Pandian and Mariappan underscore how provincial India, which once represented the past, can also ultimately become the telos of the future." âAmerican Book Review

"Spanning India, Burma (Myanmar), and America, this is an absorbing exploration of one manâs life." âLibrary Journal

"I suspect theyâll never make a movie about M.P. Mariappan, but no one deemed a superhero by the movies has had a more interesting life with such extraordinary sweep. He was born in 1919 in British Colonial India... He drank milk from mud pots. He fled for his life during World War II, walking a treacherous 1,700 mile route from Burma to southern India. He sold fruit. He suffered the death of a daughter. He survived both an old world illness, the plague, and a new world one, prostate cancer. And now many of his grandchildren have grown up to be teachers, engineers and other professionals living in the U.S. as well as India." âScott Simon, NPR Weekend Edition

"Written elegantly, translated eloquently, Ayyaâs Accounts is an absorbing read. Pandianâs conviction that the history of modern India might be read through an individual is proven through this book: following Ayya, his times and his extended family we learn of many vital issues in South Asian history, culture and diaspora. This promises to also be a good book for classroom adoption, appealing to the imaginations of students at all levels and grounding larger abstractions in vividly lived, emotionally resonant particulars." âKirin Narayan, Postcolonial Studies

Anand Pandian is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. He is author of *Crooked Stalks: Cultivating Virtue in South India*, co-editor of *Ethical Life in South Asia* (IUP, 2011) and *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*, and a contributor to *Everyday Life in South Asia* (IUP, 2010). M. P. Mariappan (1919-2014) was a retired fruit merchant living in the south Indian city of Madurai at the time he co-authored *Ayyaâs Accounts*. Veena Das is Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. Her many books include *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* and *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*.

Being an India American brought up in mainly in the US, one easily forgets the reasons for 1st

generation immigrants leaving India in the first place and the courage that is required. Particularly, now if one visits India and picks the right places, you can isolate yourself into a very Western type of experience with top notch hotels, foods, transportation, etc. that often cater to Indian's who have returned from being ex-pats. This is type of life that Ayya's children and grandchildren whether still in the West or India live. As described eloquently in the book, this is nothing sort of dramatic as the circumstances of many part's of Ayya's life was defined by squalid poverty. The ground work for this type of dramatic change comes from many sources both large and small (government policy changes, the internet). Yet at it's core it's still a story of individuals. For example, a striking component of India is it's educated populace and one reason education is so emphasized is it has been used by parents like Ayya to push their children up the socioeconomic ladder. This book's core achievement is showing how an ordinary individual's account of his own life is both a reflection of things beyond his control (caste, war, death) and what can personally be done to make a life successful. There is a striking comment in the book by Ayya where he states I am no Mahatma, I am no "great man". Yet in many ways this book shows how when we look back on the past that the best way to understand and take lessons from history is not just to look at leaders of men but to walk in the shoes of those who have actually lived it in the trenches.

I recommend this book. Very well written and quite an amazing story of one man, which is very well told by his grandson. Its also a reflection for us the readers on the diaspora of people. I really enjoyed it.

This book reminds me of a large painting which holds your attention because the more you look the more you see. It is not painted with bold colors, but with a rich depth and simple charm. I highly recommend this book to anyone who loves true stories of hope.

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