

★ **Ever Since We Small****Celeste Mohammed**

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Generations of women wrestle with an inherited legacy of trauma in Celeste Mohammed's sprawling novel-in-stories *Ever Since We Small*.

Split into two sections, "Then" and "Now," the novel does a masterful job of capturing the nuances of personal and collective histories. It follows an Indo-Caribbean family from 1889 to 2017 in a series of interconnected short stories, beginning with Jayanti, who travels from India to Trinidad to live as an indentured servant after she is charged by her community to commit *sati*, a ritual self-immolation meant to preserve the honor of her late husband's family.

In Trinidad, Jayanti's descendants move through the world marred by historical trauma and contemporary expressions of violence, poverty, shame, and oppression. Proud to be a first-generation Indian immigrant, Jayanti's grandson Lall nevertheless becomes trapped within the cycles of patriarchal violence responsible for his forebearers' fates. And his son Shiva takes a child bride whose tragic fate haunts her descendants in the contemporary West Indies.

Although connected by their characters' ancestral ties and a focus on various manifestations of gender-based violence, the stories are thematically and stylistically diverse. Written in both Standard English and a multitude of forms of Trinidad Krio, they capture the rich cadences of Caribbean speech and social life. Told from varying perspectives, including in the voice of a forest, the book's strength is in its various representations of pain, resilience, and self-discovery. Its depictions of violence and tragedy are unflinching. Still, even the most brutal of its characters are rendered with an empathetic eye towards the political and social realities that shape human destinies.

Drawing upon both historical realities and folkloric tradition, *Ever Since We Small* is a compelling novel built on a tapestry of fractured legacies and spectacular resilience.

BELLA MOSES (January / February 2026)

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