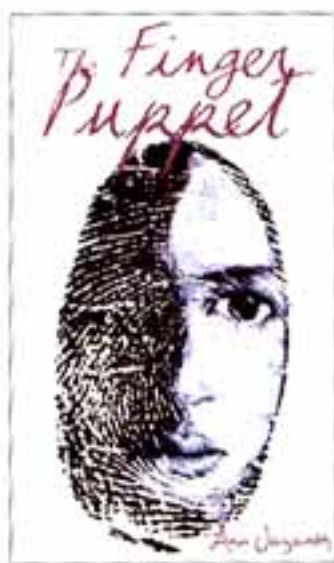


THE FINGER PUPPET

Anu Jayanth

Harper Collins, Rs. 295

Sometimes, the writing is so good that it delays your instinctive reaction to a tale that's been squinched off its juice by almost every living Indian writer in English. Unfortunately, when good writing is so studied, the delay is not long enough. So it's somewhere around the time when Tara - she whose tongue is stitched to the base of her mouth by a piece of skin - is playing a game of chess with her thumb, one that's painted with eyes, nose, mouth and even a frock, one who she speaks to as her imaginary friend, and Tara says, 'You do as I tell you or I'll wipe you out', that the penny drops.



A story of a Tam-Brahm family in the sixties, with generous, overwhelming doses of jasmine and pin-head *bindis*, convent school and Carnatic music, with a meek but profound mother-figure who becomes a source for all our rich mytholo-

gy, especially with her understanding of the Vedas (the author's forté, clearly), an abusive father between whose approval and hate, the three sisters (beautiful Padmini, sharp-tongued Cordelia and 'dumb-box' Tara) scurry, and a certain Ved Prakash, whose entry, predictably, shakes their worlds (together) apart.

Clever language engulfs familiar diaspora anxieties and nostalgia in a sometimes tedious, sometimes refreshing telling of the same tale.