**How Kaavya Viswanathan Got Charged With Plagiarism...**

The 18-year old Indian's fairly-tale debut with record advances, *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life*, comes under the scanner as "striking parallels" are found with two books by Megan F. McCafferty

Harvard's *Crimson*reports that **[Kaavya Viswanathan](http://www.outlookindia.com/10Question.asp?fodname=20060501&secname=Books" \t "_blank)**'s *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life* contains several passages that are strikingly similar to two books by Megan F. McCafferty -- the 2001 novel *Sloppy Firsts* and the 2003 novel *Second Helpings*.

The *Crimson* quotes McCafferty's agent Joanna Pulcini, according to whom the author found learned about the similarities on April 11 in an e-mail from a fan. Pulcini then notified Random House, which published both of McCafferty’s novels.

A 14-word passage, it would appear, is a verbatim reproduction from McCafferty’s book *Sloppy Firsts*, page 6 of which has the following passage:

"Sabrina was the *brainy* Angel. Yet another example of how every girl had to be one or the other: Pretty or smart. Guess which one I got. You’ll see where it’s gotten me."

On page 39 of *Opal Mehta,*there is a passage as follows:

"Moneypenny was the *brainy* female character. Yet another example of how every girl had to be one or the other: smart or pretty. I had long resigned myself to category one, and as long as it got me to Harvard, I was happy. Except, it hadn’t gotten me to Harvard. Clearly, it was time to switch to category two."

The Crimson points out that the italics appear in the originals, and goes on to show more similarities. For example, Page 237 of McCafferty’s book *Sloppy Firsts* has the following line:

"Finally, four major department stores and 170 specialty shops later, we were done."

Wonder of wonders, Kaavya Viswanathan's *Opal Mehta* on page 51, has this:

"Five department stores, and 170 specialty shops later, I was sick of listening to her hum along to Alicia Keys...."

It does not end there. McCafferty's second novel, *Second Helpings*, too, has its fair share of lines finding an echo in *Opal Mehta.*Consider page 67 of *Second Helpings* which has the following:

"...but in a truly sadomasochistic dieting gesture, they chose to buy their Diet Cokes at Cinnabon."

And then page 46 of *Opal Mehta*, which has:

"In a truly masochistic gesture, they had decided to buy Diet Cokes from Mrs. Fields..."

The *Crimson* says Viswanathan, when asked to respond, just said, "No comment. I have no idea what you are talking about."

There has been no comment yet from her publishers, Little Brown yet, though critics have been scathing. The *Crimson*quotes Werner Sollors, the Cabot Professor of English Literature and Professor of African and African American Studies, as saying, "Judging by the excerpts you have assembled, and three department stores and 169 specialty shops later, it looks as though some strong version of anxiety of influence could clearly be detected in *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life*, all the more so because of those miniscule variations that change ‘Human Evolution’ to ‘Psych’ in the hope of making the result less easily googleable."

What confounds the critics though is as to why the instances cited -- there were as many as 24 instances of such "parallels" -- found their way without even cosmetic changes to make detection difficult. On the other hand, the cosmetic changes, where introduced, are perhaps even more telling