

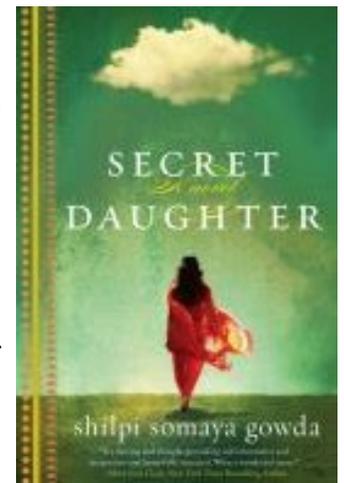


Secret Daughter

Shilpi Somaya Gowda

Discussion Questions

1. On the way to the orphanage in Bombay, Kavita reflects on "what power there is in naming another living being." She gives her daughter the name Usha at birth, but she is later raised by her adoptive parents as Asha. Kavita's name changed when she was married, and her given name reappears again later in the story. Even Krishnan becomes known as "Kris" in America. What is the significance of these changing names throughout the story? How are names intertwined with your own sense of identity and belonging?
2. Why do you think Somer made the decision to adopt a child from India, and do you believe her reasons were sound? Are there any parallels between how she made this decision, and her previous decision to marry Krishnan?
3. Both families in the novel leave their home in search of better life—the Merchants leave their village for Bombay, and Krishnan leaves India for America—and this act of migration creates longing for home and feelings of displacement. Do you think their migrations were driven more by wanting to leave home or being attracted to a new place? Would the characters have made different choices if they knew what the consequences would be?
4. Both marriages portrayed in the novel, despite different circumstances and origins, face significant challenges. How did Kavita and Jasu's marriage recover from the dramatic conflict they faced at the beginning? What caused the estrangement between Krishnan and Somer, and how did each spouse contribute to it?
5. This story turns on a twist of fate that changes the life path of Asha, and follows the parallel lives of Asha and her brother in India. Do you believe Asha was better off being taken to the orphanage as a baby than she would have been with her birth parents? Could Vijay have had a different life? How much of our lives are destined for us, and how much is within our power to change?
6. The importance of relationships across generations echoes through the novel, particularly at the end, with the deaths of Krishnan's father and Kavita's mother. What role do elder relatives play in the story? What hopes and expectations are passed down? What did you think of the relationship that develops between Sarla (Dadima) and Asha? How are these ideas complicated or resolved in the rituals of the cremation ceremonies at the end?





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About the Author

Shilpi Somaya Gowda was born and raised in Toronto to parents who migrated there from Mumbai. She holds an MBA from Stanford University, and a Bachelor's Degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 1991, she spent a summer as a volunteer in an Indian orphanage. A native of Canada, she has lived in New York, North Carolina, and California. She now lives in Dallas with her husband and children.

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