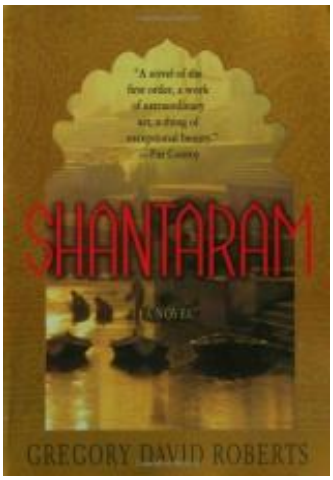
ReadingGroupGuides
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Shantaram

by



About the Book

"It took me a long time and most of the world to learn what I know about love and fate and the choices we make, but the heart of it came to me in an instant, while I was chained to a wall and being tortured."

So begins this epic, mesmerizing first novel set in the underworld of contemporary Bombay. **Shantaram** is narrated by Lin, an escaped convict with a false passport who flees maximum security prison in Australia for the teeming streets of a city where he can disappear.

Accompanied by his guide and faithful friend, Prabaker, the two enter Bombay's hidden society of beggars and gangsters, prostitutes and holy men, soldiers and actors, and Indians and exiles from other countries, who seek in this remarkable place what they cannot find elsewhere.

As a hunted man without a home, family, or identity, Lin searches for love and meaning while running a clinic in one of the city's poorest slums, and serving his apprenticeship in the dark arts of the Bombay mafia. The search leads him to war, prison torture, murder, and a series of enigmatic and bloody betrayals. The keys to unlock the mysteries and intrigues that bind Lin are held by two people. The first is Khader Khan: mafia godfather, criminal-philosopher-saint, and mentor to Lin in the underworld of the Golden City. The second is Karla: elusive, dangerous, and beautiful, whose passions are driven by secrets that torment her and yet give her a terrible power.

Burning slums and five-star hotels, romantic love and prison agonies, criminal wars and Bollywood films, spiritual gurus and mujaheddin guerrillas---this huge novel has the world of human experience in its reach, and a passionate love for India at its heart. Based on the life of the author, it is by any measure the debut of an extraordinary voice in literature.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss Bombay/Mumbai as a "character" in the book. What role does it play? What are the things Lin loves most about the city? Why does he fit in there?

2. Why are Prabaker and Lin drawn to each other so quickly? What do they have in common that binds them?

3. Discuss how Lin's prison stays end up casting a long shadow over his life. In what ways do the wounds from prison ? both physical and psychological ? change him? How do they change his outlook for the better? For the worse?

4. Characterize the various women in Lin's life and talk about the role they play and the influence they have on Lin: Karla? Madame Zhou? Lisa Carter?

5. "Shame" is an important theme throughout the book. What does Lin feel shamed by and how does this guide him through life? In which other characters do we see "shame," and what are the positive and negative effects?

6. The Bollywood world constantly weaves in and out of the fringes of Lin's story. Where do you see it influencing Lin and the other characters in the novel? How does it make you feel to have this glamorous world of film so closely linked to the underworld of the Bombay slums?

7. Khader Khan has a fascinating, almost paternal, influence in Lin's life. If you could pick just three words to describe his character, what would they be and why? Would you say you have chosen positive words to describe him, or negative ones?

8. Khader Khan arrives at the following conclusion: "It is wrong to kill. But your reasons were good. So therefore, the truth of this decision is that you did the wrong thing, for the right reasons..." Discuss what he means by this in the context of Lin's life. More generally, do you agree with him, that doing certain actions can be wrong, but for the right reasons? Why or why not?

9. Lin's journey to Afghanistan is brief but profound. Were you at all surprised by the depiction of social and political strife in that part of the world between the mujaheddin and the USSR? How do you see Afghanistan as depicted in the book tying into what you know of Afghanistan from more recent events?

10. *"The choice you make, between hating and forgiving, can become the story of your life."* Talk about this assertion in the first paragraph of the book in the context of Lin's entire life story. How does Lin's life change based on who he hates and who he forgives? How have the choices you've made with "hating and forgiving" affected your own life?

Author Bio

n/a

Critical Praise

"Vivid, entertaining. Its visceral, cinematic descriptive beauty truly impresses."

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