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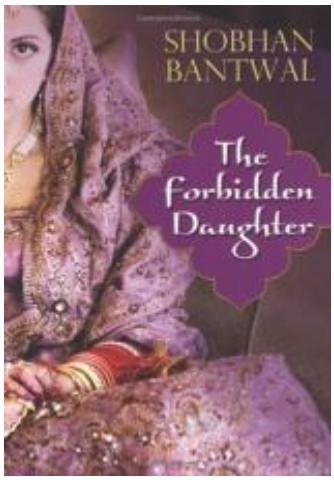
The Forbidden Daughter

by Shobhan Bantwal



About the Book

A wonderful follow-up to **The Dowry Bride**, Shobhan Bantwal's debut novel, **The Forbidden Daughter** takes on the very real, controversial, and dramatic subject of gender-selective abortion in India today. This gripping new novel asks: Where can a woman turn when life's greatest blessing is seen as a curse?

Discussion Guide

1. The protagonist, Isha Tilak, makes the decision to keep her baby and not abort it despite repeated attempts by her in-laws to coerce her into doing so. Do you think this is wise on her part, considering she will alienate them and may have to give up a comfortable lifestyle for her first child? What would her life be like if she decided to obey her in-laws instead?

2. In the opening of the book, I have quoted a folksong from northern India. How do you view the sentiment in that song? Does it portray the dilemma some women from certain cultures may have to face?

3. Are Isha?s in-laws entirely wrong in thinking their would-be grandchild should be aborted because it will be the second female child when they want a boy? Or is this a valid concern for certain families?

4. Isha?s opinion about arranged marriage is that it always comes as a package deal --- the in-laws and extended family come hand-in-hand with a husband. Do you think this is a positive thing for a woman?s emotional and mental growth, or is it a hindrance? Discuss the pros and cons.

5. Isha, although college educated, chooses to be a housewife and mother. Do you think this is a wise decision on a woman?s part in the twenty-first century? What are some advantages and disadvantages for most women of choosing a career versus staying at home?

6. Is Palgaum, the fictitious and conservative Indian town in this story, reminiscent of any town that you know? Discuss whether contemporary small towns are essentially the same, no matter where in the world they are located.

7. Do you think the kidnapping in the story perhaps helps Isha gain a better understanding of her in-laws and a more tolerant attitude to them and to life in general? What lessons does she gain from almost losing her daughter?

8. What role does Sheila, Isha?s sister-in-law play in the story? Discuss how she becomes a catalyst in Isha?s life as well as her children?s.

9. Was it a good idea to add romantic elements to this story? Does the romance help the story become more interesting?

10. *The Lancet*, a British medical journal, reports that, according to a study, nearly 10 million female fetuses may have been aborted in India in the last two decades. How do you feel about this? Will selective abortions have a significant impact on the world?

11. Do you think ideas about producing male heirs are likely to change in the male-oriented cultures of the world? If not, what are some of the things that are likely to bring about change?

12. Isha feels guilty about developing a fondness for Harish because she is a recent widow. Is she justified in her feelings? How does widowhood affect women like Isha, who live in a society that still treats widows differently than other women?

Author Bio

Shobhan Bantwal was born and raised in India and came to the United States as a young bride in an arranged marriage. She has published short fiction in literary magazines and articles in a number of publications. Writing plays in her mother tongue (Indian language?Konkani) and performing on stage at Indian-American conventions are some of her hobbies. She lives in New Jersey with her husband. Shobhan loves to hear from her readers.

Critical Praise

"Splendidly depicts passion, brutality, and cultures in conflict."

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