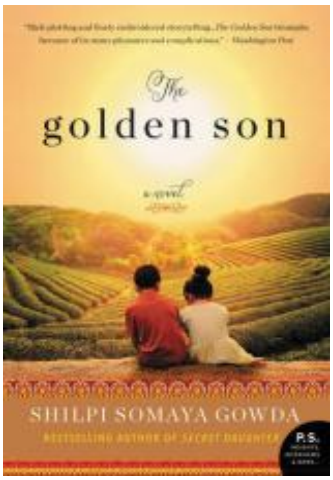
The Golden Son

by Shilpi Somaya Gowda



About the Book

The *New York Times* and #1 internationally bestselling author of SECRET DAUGHTER returns with an unforgettable story of family, responsibility, love, honor, tradition and identity, in which two childhood friends --- a young doctor and a newly married bride --- must balance the expectations of their culture and their families with the desires of their own hearts.

The first of his family to go to college, Anil Patel, the golden son, carries the weight of tradition and his family?s expectations when he leaves his tiny Indian village to begin a medical residency in Dallas, Texas, at one of the busiest and most competitive hospitals in America. When his father dies, Anil becomes the de facto head of the Patel household and inherits the mantle of arbiter for all of the village?s disputes. But he is uneasy with the custom, uncertain that he has the wisdom and courage demonstrated by his father and grandfather. His doubts are compounded by the difficulties he discovers in adjusting to a new culture and a new job, challenges that will shake his confidence in himself and his abilities.

Back home in India, Anil?s closest childhood friend, Leena, struggles to adapt to her demanding new husband and relatives. Arranged by her parents, the marriage shatters Leena?s romantic hopes, and eventually forces her to make a desperate choice that will hold drastic repercussions for herself and her family. Though Anil and Leena struggle to come to terms with their identities thousands of miles apart, their lives eventually intersect once more --- changing them both and the people they love forever.

Tender and bittersweet, THE GOLDEN SON illuminates the ambivalence of people caught between past and present, tradition and modernity, duty and choice; the push and pull of living in two cultures, and the painful decisions we must make to find our true selves.

Discussion Guide

Introduction

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Questions for Discussion

1. How does the author use the prologue --- entitled ?Maya the Harelip? --- to illustrate the pressure and expectations placed on Anil?s future?

2. How does the author use detail and description to show a sharp contrast between Anil?s lifestyle in Texas and his upbringing in India?

3. How does taking on the mantle of arbiter complicate Anil?s life and his identity?

4. Anil is struggling to acclimate to the social world of medical school, but he also struggles to fill his father?s shoes. Which role does he seem more reluctant to adopt? Why do you think this is?

5. In what way can we view the dispute of the mango tree as a metaphor?

6. Leena?s plight is certainly not that of every woman in the world, nor every woman in India, but it is reflective of a society that does not value women as much as men, particularly when her path is compared to Anil?s. Can you think of an example of systemic inequality between the sexes in your community or culture? Has there been a time when you?ve seen a woman?s worth put way below a man?s?

7. How do Anil?s and Leena?s dreams and youthful ideals shift over time?

8. Were you surprised by Leena?s decision at the end of the novel? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Shilpi Somaya Gowda is the *New York Times* bestselling, award-winning author of four novels: SECRET DAUGHTER, THE GOLDEN SON, THE SHAPE OF FAMILY and A GREAT COUNTRY. Her novels have been translated into over 30 languages, been #1 international bestsellers in several countries, and sold more than two million copies worldwide.

Shilpi holds an MBA from Stanford University, and a Bachelor?s Degree in Economics from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she was a Morehead-Cain scholar. She has served on the Advisory Board of the Children's Defense Fund, and is a Patron of Childhaven International, the organization for which she volunteered in India. She now lives in California.

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