

Sister of My Heart Study Guide

Sister of My Heart by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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Plot Summary

The novel *Sister of My Heart* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni details the sorrow filled lives of two Indian cousins. These cousins, Anju and Sudha, were born on the same day and lived together as sisters in a joint family consisting of the two girls and three mother figures. In a unique structure that allows both girls to share alternating parts of their story, Sudha and Anju describe their struggles with outdated Indian customs, the memories of their fathers, arranged marriages, separation, in-laws, pregnancy, miscarriage and abortion.

The central theme of the story is the girls' undying love for each other. Ultimately the two each feel they have a reason that they are responsible for one another's happiness. For instance, Sudha felt it was her fault that Anju's father was dead. It was Sudha's father who suggested that he and Anju's father go treasure hunting when the girls' mothers were pregnant. Two bodies were found in the area where the two went treasure hunting and it was assumed both men died. Therefore Sudha felt responsible for Anju because she thought it was her father's fault that Anju did not have a living father. When the mothers learn their husbands have died, both go into early labor. Anju is born first. Anju is placed on Sudha's mother's stomach in a belief that Anju's presence would make Sudha be born more quickly. Therefore, Anju feels responsible for Sudha because she was the one who called Sudha into the world.

Along with the central theme of the girls' friendship, there is a mystery concerning the deaths of both Sudha and Anju's fathers that unravels throughout the book. This mystery affects Sudha more deeply than Anju because Sudha's father's role in the treasure hunt was so questionable. At one point Sudha believes her father is a liar, cheater and a murderer. A letter given to Sudha at the end of the novel clears up the situation and helps Sudha come to peace with her father and his memory. It is with this letter that the novel has a surprising twist.

Love and sacrifice are also important issues in this novel. Sudha first gives up her true love because she is afraid if she elopes, Anju's future father-in-law will call off Anju's wedding. Although Anju's wedding was arranged, she loves her husband because he meets with her in secret at the bookstore and encourages her to talk about books. Although not intentionally, Anju sacrifices her health and her baby to earn money so that she can fly Sudha and her baby to America. Anju realizes India is not the ideal place for a single mother to raise a baby and wants better for her friend. As the story closes, Anju welcomes Sudha and her baby in America even though she realizes her husband has an obsession with Sudha.



Book 1, Chapters 1 -2

Book 1, Chapters 1 -2 Summary

As Chapter 1 opens, Pishi is telling Sudha and Anju the story about the Bidhata Purush, a god who visits babies the night they are born to write the child's fortune on their forehead. Pishi is one of Sudha and Anju's three mother-figures. They have no fathers. Pishi is actually the girls' widowed aunt who came to live in her younger brother's home after the death of her husband. In addition to her motherly duties, Pishi loves to tell the girls the old stories. Gouri Ma is Anju's birth mother. She acts as the leader of the family. She instills pride in Sudha. Nalini is Sudha's mother. Sudha describes her mother as beautiful, but often disappointed or worried.

Pishi had been the one to spend the first night with the two new born babies after they were born prematurely. Sudha hints the two mothers went into premature labor when they learned about the deaths of their husbands. Anju leaves the roof at this point but Sudha stays on, listening to Pishi and the sounds of those living in the streets.

The street sounds remind Sudha of their servant Singhji, who often stops the car so Sudha can give sweets to the girls who live in the street. Although Singhji's past is a mystery, he agreed to work for the Chatterjees for whatever they could pay him. Because his face is heavily scarred from a past burn, Sudha's mothers assumed he couldn't get work elsewhere. Singhji had told Sudha that once upon a time, he'd had a child. Though he doesn't tell her the child's gender, Sudha pictures that child with her face.

At the conclusion of this first chapter Sudha imagines what she believes the god Bidhata wrote on both her and Anju's foreheads the night of their birth. For Anju, Sudha believes a story of good luck and fortune was written. For herself, however, Sudha sees the words "beauty" and "goodness." She wonders if perhaps the last word the god wrote was "sorrow."

In Chapter 2, Anju picks up the story. Anju talks about how she hates everyone but Sudha, whom Anju describes as her other half. Anju, in fact, believes that other people are resentful of how happy she and Sudha are when they are together. She overhears Pishi tell her mother she is afraid the girls will suffer because of their deep love for one another. Already the girls are called snobs and looked down upon because they will not associate with other girls in their school.

Book 1, Chapters 1 -2 Analysis

There is not much action in these first two chapters, but they set up the framework for the remainder of the novel. First, Sudha and Anju are daughters of the Chatterjee family. The Chatterjees were once a very rich and influential family in India; however, they have recently fallen on hard times. Much of the family's income comes from a bookstore.



Although the Chatterjees are no longer as rich as they once were, they still try to abide by the old rules and customs of the Indian upper class.

Sudha and Anju are very close. They think of themselves not as cousins, but as sisters, or even twins. Community reaction to Sudha and Anju's relationship is mixed. Teachers try to separate the girls, friends suggest they interact with someone other than each other. In reality Sudha and Anju have all the relationship they need in each other. Although Sudha's mother suggests the two will only suffer from their relationship, Gouri does not punish the two for being as close as they are.

Sudha and Anju have grown up in a joint family. They live with both of their birth mothers as well as a widowed aunt. Both of their fathers are dead. The two were born the same day, both premature because their mothers went into early labor when they learned the news of their husbands' deaths. As a newborn Anju was placed on Sudha's mother's pregnant belly because it was believed the baby would call the other out of the womb.

Divakaruni chooses a writing style that allows both women to speak with their own styles and words. The first chapter is written from Sudha's point of view while the following one is written from Anju's point of view. Although it is obvious the two girls are extremely close, the differences in their personalities are visible immediately. For instance, Sudha loves to hear the stories of the old ways in India. She believes in these tales of gods, demons, blessings and curses that her aunt Pishi tells her. Anju, on the other hand, does not believe the stories nor does she even want to hear them. Although Sudha does believe these tales, while she is in public she backs up Anju's belief that they are just stories and could never really happen. In addition, Sudha's tone as she tells her parts of the story is reserved and thoughtful. She notices details. She is a kind person who shares her sweets with the poor children on the street. Anju's tone is more emotional. She is quick to react and quick to speak. Anju is not afraid to let her emotions and feelings show. For instance, when Pishi does not stop telling the old stories as Anju wishes, Anju stomps off to her room.

Notice also the attention given to the servant Singhji in these first two chapters of the novel. He has been hired as the driver for the Chatterjees for little pay. Notice particularly that when Singhji tells Sudha that he once had a child, she pictures this child as having her face. The mention of a relationship between Singhji and Sudha may be foreshadowing of a deeper relationship between the two.



Book 1, Chapter 3

Book 1, Chapter 3 Summary

One Sunday morning Sudha approaches Pishi as Pishi is setting out mangoes to dry. Sudha begs to be told the true story of what happened to her father. Pishi first warns Sudha that the story contains a secret which only Pishi knows. Pishi is afraid by telling Sudha the true story she will ruin Sudha's childhood and make the girl hate her. Sudha realizes her aunt's careful warnings indicate how serious the story really is.

Gopal claimed to be the son of an uncle who left the Chatterjee's ancestral home after a fight with his father. When his father died, Gopal explains his father told him to go back to the Chatterjees. Although Gopal and his young wife didn't tell the family much about themselves, Pishi was able to piece together the events of their background. Apparently, Gopal first saw Nalini as she was washing clothes in a creek. He promised her love, riches and posterity if she married him. Nalini was convinced and ran away with Gopal. The two are married in a quick ceremony at the Kali temple. Although the Chatterjees are confused about Gopal's identity, when the two appear at their house, they agree to take the couple in.

In order to make money and pay the Chatterjees back all the money they had given him over the years, Gopal looks for ways to make money. It was possibly Nalini's suggestion to Gopal that his baby would be ashamed to have him as a father that caused Gopal to search out his final money making opportunity. Gopal was away from the house for three days and when he finally returned, he has with him an enormous ruby. A man had approached him needing a partner to finance a trip to a ruby cave. The Chatterjee family is to keep this one ruby as a surety on the loan. Gopal asks the man permission to go along so he can get his own rubies. Bijoy agrees to loan the money only if he is allowed to go along on the trip also. Although the women are very displeased, it is finally decided the men will go. Bijoy and Gopal were supposed to return from their adventure in two weeks time, however, the women instead receive a telegram telling them their husbands' bodies have been found in a swamp.

At the end of the story Pishi stands up to leave. Sudha accuses Pishi of tricking her and not telling her the secret. Although still unwilling, Pishi tells Sudha the rest of the story. Bijoy had tried to purchase Gopal's ancestral home for him. He received a letter the day before the two were to leave on their adventure stating that the daughter of the homeowner was living there with her husband and children. The letter also stated there had been no male heirs to the estate. Bijoy plans to discuss the letter with Gopal during the trip.

After trying to comfort Sudha, Pishi leaves the girl alone on the rooftop. Sudha now sees her father as a thoughtless cheat who used the family and caused them grief. She has also learned that although her mother was haughty and prideful, she actually came from a family of peasants. As Sudha tries to deal with her emotional pain, a new pain in



her abdomen doubles her over. She then feels blood trickle between her legs. Even though Sudha knows the myths tell her the mangoes will rot if a menstruating woman touches them, she turns them over anyway. A final thought that causes her the most pain of all is that she is no relation at all to Anju.

Book 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

In this long chapter, the reader learns the story that composes the base of Sudha's existence. It both destroys her idea of who she thought she was and leaves her trying to redefine her identity. In one afternoon, all that she believed about her family and herself has been changed. Although she is innocent of any crime, Sudha bears the guilt of her father and mother's actions as she imagines the talk among the servants, and others. Perhaps the most painful knowledge for her to accept is the knowledge is that she really is not at all related to Anju. She feels the only tie that binds the two is the fact that it was Sudha's father who suggested the trip that resulted in the death of Bijoy, Anju's father.

Notice the imagery in this section. Particularly interesting is the contrast between the description depicting Sudha's former belief in the solidity of the past and her new beliefs. Sudha had once believed the past was like a banyan tree. These trees sprout aerial roots from their branches which form secondary trunks. This network of trunks gives the trees a massive amount of support and longevity. After hearing the story Pishi tells her, however, Sudha feels this image no longer describes her past. Instead of being firm and supportive, Sudha now sees her past as being more like a Ferris wheel that is spinning out of control. Consider also the relevance of Sudha's menstruation starting at the point when she learns the "truth" about her past. It is at the point that she learns about her father, losing the innocence of her original beliefs; that she becomes a woman, and loses her childhood innocence, in the physical sense.

Also, notice the many references to myth and superstition. For instance, during her story Pishi tells Sudha that Sudha's mother was unhappy while she was pregnant. Pishi indicates it was believed that an unhappy mother would cause the baby sorrow. In fact, Sudha's opportunity to get Pishi to tell her the story even comes from superstition. Sudha promises to take care of Pishi's drying mangoes. It is believed that if the fruit is touched by an unclean woman, it will grow a fungus. Although Sudha is not "unclean" at the time she promises Pishi to take care of the fruit, she becomes that way after the story is told. Although Sudha truly believes that by touching the mangoes, she will cause a fungus to grow, she does so anyway. At this point Sudha wants to cause some destruction to the world, the same way Pishi's news has destroyed her.

Finally, keep in mind how little of Pishi's story about Sudha's parents is based on fact. First, it seems it is assumed that the two men who are dead are Bijoy and Gopal. There are no questions asked about their identities. When the police are asked what happened to the third body, they assume it was eaten by crocodiles. They also state that the money from the trip is found in one of the men's clothing, so the police believe there was no robbery. However, there are no rubies found on either of the men's bodies or on the burned out boat.



Book 1, Chapters 4 - 6

Book 1, Chapters 4 - 6 Summary

In Chapter 4, Anju talks about the girls' thirteenth birthdays. Although Nalini thinks it is a bad idea, Gouri gives the girls money as a gift. She believes the girls can be trusted to use the money responsibly. Later that day, Anju is called to her mother's room alone. Her mother gives her a gift of gold bird-shaped earrings as a beginning piece of her bridal jewelry. Anju wants to show Sudha the earrings, to see her smile. Anju has noticed that Sudha has been acting strangely toward her lately. Gouri suggests that the earrings may make Sudha envious of Anju and the things she has. This statement angers Anju.

Anju finds Sudha on the terrace and shows her the earrings. She doesn't get the response she expected from Sudha. When Anju tries to joke with Sudha about their birthday presents being meant as part of their bridal dowry, Sudha asks her to please not compare them. The two argue, and then Sudha asks Anju if she would love her even if they weren't related. When Anju tells Sudha that she would love her no matter what, Sudha seems to be relieved.

In Chapter 5, Sudha refers to a new movie showing in Calcutta. Because the movie deals with a relationship between a man and woman, Sudha is sure her mother will not let her see it. Anju suggests the two cut class and go see the new movie. When Sudha replies that she is afraid they will get into trouble, Anju is angry that Sudha does not want to do as Anju asks. Anju taunts Sudha saying that if she was her true sister she would go with her.

In the next section, the two girls are sitting in the theater, dressed in new, fashionable clothes and wearing makeup. To Sudha's dismay, a man sits next to her. As soon as she looks at the man, however, Sudha finds she cannot take her eyes off him. The man also smiles and stares at her. As the girls leave the theater Sudha manages to tell the man her name and where she lives. Sarita Aunty catches the two as they change their clothes in the bathroom and escorts them home.

In Chapter 6, Anju and Sudha are sent to their rooms while the mothers devise a suitable punishment. Later in the office, Sudha's mother rants at her until Sudha comments that her father would still be with them to help raise Sudha if her mother had not nagged him to his death. Sudha adds that her mother told her own share of lies. Anju does not understand what she is hearing. A punishment is finally meted out. It is suggested the group break up when Nalini again speaks out. She claims that Anju is a bad influence on Sudha. Nalini also tells Sudha that as soon as she finishes school at the convent, she will be married.



Book 1, Chapters 4 - 6 Analysis

In this section Divakaruni begins to develop her theme dealing with the girls' fight against tradition. Although the book is set in the 1980's the girls have been raised in the outdated, traditional Indian ways. They attend a girls-only school. There are no men who live in the Chatterjee house, or even enter it. Although Anju fights against the old ways, her mother insists on raising her daughter in the way her husband would have wanted.

Another issue addressed in this section is the beginning of the separation between Anju and Sudha. Anju, of course, does not understand why Sudha has started acting the way that she has. Sudha has the choice to tell her cousin what she has learned about her father, and give her the burden of knowledge also. Or Sudha can keep the secret to herself and let Anju retain her innocent belief that the two girls really are related. It is Anju's show of undying affection to Sudha that helps Sudha realize she needs to keep the truth to herself and save her cousin from the truth.

It is also in this section of the book that Sudha meets Ashok. Sudha describes the look that passes between Ashok and herself as being the same one that is said to pass between a husband and wife the day of their marriage. It is with this look that Sudha has heard that the man and woman exchange parts of their soul with one another. At this point Sudha realizes why the mothers have kept her and Anju so sheltered. She believes it is to save them from heartache.

Notice also the passage of time during this section of chapters. In Chapter 4, the girls are celebrating their thirteenth birthday. Time skips ahead three years to the time they sneak out of school to watch the forbidden movie. Sudha is sixteen when she first meets Ashok.



Book 1, Chapters 7 - 11

Book 1, Chapters 7 - 11 Summary

In Chapter 7, Sudha feels as if she is being completely ruled by her mother. She wants to go to Anju, but on the way she stops when she sees the silhouette of her mother in her room. Her mother is crying. At this point Sudha realizes the stories her mother told were the only way for her to cover the disappointment in her life. However, these stories are slowly coming apart. Sudha realizes she should not fight against her mother's decision. In Chapter 8, Anju is angry with Sudha's decision not to fight her mother's will. Sudha reminds Anju that what she has always wanted was a happy family. Getting married is a step in this direction. In Chapter 9, Sudha sees Ashok again. Although he has a letter for her, she is not able to take it.

In Chapter 10, the day of Anju and Sudha's graduation finally arrives. On their last day of class, they ride to class with just Singhji. When they see Ashok, Sudha asks Singhji to stop. Anju notices for the first time how kind Singhji's eyes are. Sudha tells Ashok her mother is making wedding plans. Ashok indicates his parents will put in a request. He gives Sudha a diamond ring as a graduation gift. After the graduation party, Pishi knocks on the girls' door. She calls them to come to Gouri's room, telling them Gouri is very sick.

In Chapter 11, Sudha and the rest of the family crowd into Gouri Ma's room. Singhji takes charge of the situation. He leads the doctor into Gouri's bedroom, and then helps clear the room for the doctor. Singhji tells Nalini she must get herself under control. They wait in the hallway until the doctor leaves. Anju is told that her mother wants her. Sudha is sent to bed, but waits for Anju to finish with her mother. When Anju does finally come, she laughs hysterically when Sudha asks if she is all right. Anju will only tell Sudha that one of Pishi's sayings came true that night. When Sudha wakes she learns that Gouri had suffered a heart attack the night before. As a result, she decided Anju also must get married right away.

Book 1, Chapters 7 - 11 Analysis

In this section a great celebration is followed by a great sorrow. On the night of the girls' graduation, Gouri Ma suffers a heart attack. Although Gouri survives her attack, she decides that night that it is best for Anju to marry right away. This news is ironic since Anju had promised to Sudha that the same things would happen to them. Of course, Anju intended that she would be able to convince Sudha's mother to allow Sudha to attend college. Instead, Anju is forced into the same destiny as Sudha: an early marriage and life of service to a husband and his family. Because Sudha has always wanted a family she does not find it impossible to deal with her new future. Anju's dreams, however, revolve around books and literature. The idea of marriage and no college is harder for Anju to accept.



One important point to notice in this section is that way that Singhji takes charge of the family when Gouri becomes ill. It is noted by Sudha that she had never seen Singhji in the house before the night of Gouri's heart attack. That night, however, he carries the doctor's bags to Gouri's room. He also assists the doctor in clearing Gouri's bedroom so that Gouri can be examined. Singhji brings in chairs so the family can sit in the upstairs hallway. He also wipes away the water that has blown in from the rain. He calms Nalini who is screaming and crying loudly in her sadness about Gouri's illness. Sudha notes that Singhji's tone and stance becomes firm when he deals with her mother.



Book 1, Chapters 12 - 14

Book 1, Chapters 12 - 14 Summary

In Chapter 12 Anju describes the daily routine observed by the girls during their wedding preparations. Because of her sickness, Gouri has decided to sell the bookstore. The money from this sale will help to fund the two weddings. The mothers meet without the girls present to discuss the matches that the matchmaker has prepared for them. Although Anju wants to ask if Ashok's family has made an offer, Sudha insists that they must not interfere.

In Chapter 13, a match has been found for Sudha. Ramesh Sanyal is described as being unattractive but having a good job with the Indian Railways. His mother hopes for good looking grandsons and a daughter-in-law who can take charge of the household. In desperation Sudha goes to Singhji for help. Although Singhji is surprised to see Sudha, he agrees to help her when he sees her tears.

In Chapter 14, the Sanyals make a visit to see Sudha. Mrs. Sanyal is pleased with Sudha. She suggests they find a date for the wedding. When Anju asks Sudha how she is able to put up with the questions and stares of her prospective husband and his mother, Sudha says it is because she knows she doesn't have to marry Ramesh. Sudha tells Anju that Singhji has set up a meeting between Sudha and Ashok the following day.

Book 1, Chapters 12 - 14 Analysis

Chapters 12, 13 and 14 illustrate the rigidity with which the Chatterjee family adheres to the traditional ways of choosing mates for the daughters. The mothers use the services of a matchmaker and accept written proposals by suitors. The family's financial situation and amount of dowry requested by each suitor are taken into consideration. The girls are allowed no input into the decision of which suitor is chosen. A bridal viewing is arranged in which the prospective bride must appear before the suitor, displaying both her beauty as well as her ability to perform household tasks such as serving tea or dinner.

Anju and Sudha both dislike their family's adherence to the old traditions of matchmaking. Anju, however, is more vocal about her distaste than Sudha. Anju asks the mothers why the girls can't take part in choosing their future husbands. She also suggests that if she doesn't like the looks of her prospective husband when she first sees him, she will refuse to marry. Sudha, on the other hand, is quieter in her rebellion against the old ways. When Anju asks Sudha why she is so calm, Sudha tells her it is because she realizes she doesn't have to marry Ramesh, the man her mothers have picked out for her. Sudha has enlisted Singhji to help her arrange a meeting with Ashok.



Book 1, Chapters 15- 17

Book 1, Chapters 15- 17 Summary

In Chapter 15, Sudha pays a visit to the Kalighat temple as a cover to see Ashok. Ashok reasons that since the mothers refused his marriage proposal, their only choice is to elope. As the two make their plans, Sudha sees a newly eloped couple, who she believes are the ghosts of her own parents. Later that day Sudha lies watching for falling stars. She hopes for two of these stars, one on which to make a wish for herself and one for Anju. At midnight, Sudha sees one shooting star. Although Sudha wants to have that wish for herself, she instead wishes for her cousin to have a wonderful marriage.

In Chapter 16, Anju is not excited to meet her proposed husband. To make matters worse, her mother has accepted an offer to buy the family bookstore. Anju helps perform the final inventory on the store. As Anju is clearing shelves, a man enters the store. Anju takes notice of him because he is dressed in a traditional kurta. Anju is completely taken when the man asks for books by Virginia Woolf, Anju's favorite writer. He buys the whole set of Woolf books. When he asks Anju if she is in college, Anju tells him the story of her approaching marriage. The man puts his hand over Anju's when he takes his packages. He asks if she would like to know his name. He tells her that he is Sunil; the man Anju's mother has chosen to marry her.

In Chapter 17, Sudha describes the gossip Sunil's act of meeting his prospective wife on his own has caused. Although Mrs. Majumdar apologizes for her son's behavior, Sudha gets the feeling that she is very proud of him. Mr. Majumdar, on the other hand, is oppositional and opinionated. When Mr. Majumdar begins his discussion of the wedding, he stresses that the reputation of the family is of most importance to him. He says that if he finds out about some disgraceful act, even after the marriage has taken place, he is willing to send his daughter-in-law away to protect his family's reputation.

When Mr. Majumdar begins talking about the wedding, Gouri sends Sunil, Anju and Sudha to the garden. Sunil and Sudha are alone while Anju runs to get her father's copy of Woolf's book. Sunil stares at Sudha and tells her she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. When Sudha demands he stop, Sunil apologizes, realizing his words were inappropriate.

The next morning Sudha writes to Ashok telling him they cannot elope. Sudha fears that if they were to do so it would ruin Anju's coming marriage. Singhji is unhappy with the news and begs Sudha to reconsider. When Sudha tells Anju she will marry Ramesh instead of eloping with Ashok, Anju also begs Sudha to reconsider. Sudha refuses because she believes she is righting the wrongs her father created.

Although Sudha had asked for no response from Ashok, Singhji brings back a letter. Singhji tells Sudha that Ashok was shocked that Sudha had chosen Anju over him. He



had never thought that Anju would be a rival for Sudha's affection. Singhji begs Sudha to change her mind but she refuses, explaining to Singhji that she knows that if she elopes, Sunil's father will have the wedding called off. Sudha goes so far as to tell Singhji that she hopes what she is doing will make up for things that were done to Anju before she was even born. Although Singhji seems to want to pursue the subject further, Sudha tells him she is ill and needs to lie down.

Book 1, Chapters 15- 17 Analysis

Sudha travels the whole range of emotions with Ashok in this section. In Chapter 15, they met and plan to elope. Sudha is overjoyed even though her cousin, Anju, discourages the arrangement. Once Anju meets and falls in love with Sunil, however, she understands Sudha's feelings and is no longer as discouraging of the idea of elopement. Unfortunately, Sudha has learned from Anju's future father-in-law that if any scandal is discovered in the Chatterjee family, he will have the wedding canceled, or will even annul the marriage if the two are already wed. Since Sudha believes the man will see her elopement as a scandal, she writes to Ashok, stopping the elopement so that they will not interfere with Anju's wedding.

Sacrifice is another topic dealt with strongly in this section of chapters. It is in this section that Sudha begins to sacrifice her own happiness for her cousin's happiness. Sudha believes the only way for her cousin to marry the man that she wants to marry; Sudha must not marry the man whom she wishes to marry. As a result of her guilt and her feelings of responsibility because of her father's actions, Sudha forfeits her own happiness for Anju's. Examples of this occur not only with Sudha's decision to not elope with Ashok, but also her decision to use her falling star wish on her cousin instead of herself.

Notice also in this section that as Anju's outlook becomes more positive, Sudha's becomes more negative. Anju does not realize that Sudha's decision to break off her elopement with Ashok comes as a result of Anju's father-in-law's requirement that his future daughter-in-law's family be scandal free. Anju is also unaware that her fiancée has told Sudha she is the most beautiful person he has ever seen and that he wishes he had met her before he met Anju. Although Sudha at first likes Anju's future husband, she is deeply distressed by this experience. This statement by Sunil is one that will continue to haunt Sudha and himself through the rest of the book.

Also important in this section is Sudha's developing relationship with Singhji. The importance of Singhji's role in the novel and his reasons for wanting to help Sudha will become clearer later in the novel. Singhji does, however, encourage Sudha to elope with Ashok. He seems disturbed that Sudha believes she will make up for some past wrong by not causing Anju's marriage to be cancelled. Although Singhji seems to want to discuss this idea with Sudha, she leaves before he can say his piece.



Book 1, Chapters 18 - 20

Book 1, Chapters 18 - 20 Summary

Chapter 18 begins with Anju's description of her overwhelming feelings of love for Sunil. The tone changes as the mothers call the girls for a meeting in Gouri's room. The doors are locked and curtains closed before the mothers open a worn looking jewelry box displaying a large ruby. They want the girls' input into what should be done with the ruby, the jewel that the girls' fathers left before they went on their adventure. When Sudha sees the jewel she realizes the story Pishi told her was really true. There is much discussion about the fate of the ruby. Anju speaks with finality when she tells them to put the jewel back into the vault. She says that it is not yet really theirs, but breaks off before giving a reason. Anju does not speak out loud her feeling that the family must suffer more before they will really own the jewel.

In Chapter 19, Sudha describes the wedding preparations going on the day before the girls' wedding. Sudha spends the day with Anju, feeling a sense of sadness that she will soon be leaving this life behind. As Sudha contemplates her future, Singhji knocks on the door. He bears a pile of mail. Sudha is surprised to see him. Singhji waits as Sudha sorts through the mail. A fat packet falls out of the stack. It has Sudha's name on it. When she opens it, piles of money fall out of the packet. Singhji seems as shocked as Sudha. Sudha finds in the packet a note signed by her father. Singhji tells Sudha that there is enough money for her and Ashok to live on for years. Sudha considers the idea for a moment, but then can think of nothing but the idea that her father is alive but has never reached out to her until this point.

Sudha takes the packet to Pishi's room. Pishi knows something is wrong. Sudha hands Pishi the letter from her father. Pishi is shocked by the pile of money that falls from Sudha's sari. In her distraction Pishi has crushed Sudha's wedding garland in her hand, pushing a needle deep into her palm so that blood stains the white flowers. As Sudha cares for the wound, Pishi tells her that because they had their babies early, the mothers were unable to go and identify the bodies. Pishi's suggestion that one of the dead men might not have been who they thought leads Sudha to the conclusion that her father actually killed Bijoy. She assumes that since the packet is postmarked Calcutta, her father has been living in the same city with her all of her life. She believes the money in the packet came from the sale of his ruby.

Pishi brings Sudha back to reality telling her she must pull herself together. Sudha decides to have the money given to beggars at the Kalighat Temple. Pishi is pleased with Sudha's decision. Sudha, however, will not be comforted by Pishi's statement that Sudha is not responsible for her father's actions. Sudha indicates that her father's blessing gift has only cemented in her mind the idea that her father murdered her uncle, Anju's father.



In Chapter 20, Anju studies Sunil's feet as the priest recites the wedding mantras. Sudha and Ramesh are getting married at the same time. Anju would like to see Sudha's face, to know that she is all right. Anju makes Sunil wait as she watches Sudha. She is not surprised to hear Sunil praise Sudha's beauty, but also sees something in his face she does not quite recognize. As the ceremonies progress, Anju begins to realize her new husband is in love with her cousin. At one point, Sudha drops her handkerchief. Anju watches as Sunil picks it up, but doesn't return it to Sudha. He instead tucks it into his pocket. Once they are alone, Anju asks Sudha how it feels to have Anju's husband be in love with Sudha. Anju believes she sees guilt on Sudha's face. Although Sudha calls for her to wait, Anju leaves the room in a rage.

Book 1, Chapters 18 - 20 Analysis

In this section, the focus is different for each of the girls. Although she was at first unhappy at the prospect of getting married, Anju is now blindly in love with her new husband-to-be. Sudha, on the other hand, is dealing with painful issues concerning her father. First, the mothers show the girls the ruby that Gopal left with the family when the two men left on their trip. The sight of this ruby seals in Sudha's mind that the story about her father is really true. Although she knows little of the story, Anju speaks up and tells the mothers the ruby should be put back in the vault. Anju has a belief that the house of the Chatterjees must be reduced to rubble before the jewel will be truly theirs.

In addition to her shock of seeing the jewel, Sudha also receives a packet of money addressed to her from her father as a wedding gift. Sudha believes this packet of money has come from the sale of the ruby that Gopal got while on his adventure trip. She also believes that since her father is alive, this means that he must have murdered the other two men who went on the trip with him. This knowledge causes Sudha to be even more sure that she owes it to Anju not disrupt Anju's marriage in any way. Even when Singhji suggests Sudha and Ashok could live off the money from her father, Sudha refuses to even consider the idea. She believes the money is tainted because it was earned as the result of a murder. Instead of using the money to benefit herself in any way, Sudha has the money taken to a temple and given to beggars.



Book 2, Chapters 21 - 24

Book 2, Chapters 21 - 24 Summary

In Chapter 21, Sudha recounts the events of her wedding night. Because he knows Sudha is not comfortable with him, he suggests they wait to begin having marital relations with each other. In Chapter 22, Anju states she loves being married. She does not, however, like her father-in-law. One night at dinner Sunil's mother makes a special dish for Sunil that Sunil's father dislikes. When Sunil's father discovers what she has done, he throws the dish at his wife. Sunil attempts to stand up for his mother but his father accuses Sunil of drinking and whoring in America. As Anju lies in bed later and cries, she misses Sudha. When Sunil comes, Anju asks if she can go home and stay with her mother's when Sunil goes back to America. Sunil agrees.

In Chapter 23, Sudha describes how she is fitting into her new life. She has been given a ring of keys which symbolizes the transference of power from Sudha's mother-in-law to Sudha. Sudha often thinks of Anju during her early morning time at the Sanyal house. In Chapter 24, Anju wishes she had not promised to visit Sudha. When she finally sees her cousin, however, Anju is overjoyed. Anju is annoyed by the way Sudha's new family treats her like a servant, and the way Sudha responds so docilely to this treatment.

Book 2, Chapters 21 - 24 Analysis

In these chapters Anju begins to realize how different her life with Sunil's parents might be once Sunil leaves for America. Anju is waiting for her visa to be approved and cannot go to America with him. She must wait awhile in India. Anju hates the way that Sunil's mother is so docile even when she is badly treated by Sunil's father. She hates the way Sunil's father is cruel to Sunil's mother. When Anju visits Sudha in her new home, she sees this same docile nature developing in Sudha. She wants her cousin to stand up for herself and not allow her in-laws to treat her as a servant. Sudha, however, seems to believe she is fitting in well to the accepted role as a wife and household director.



Book 2, Chapters 25 - 28

Book 2, Chapters 25 - 28 Summary

In Chapter 25, Sudha realizes that it is because she knows she is liked and needed in her husband's house that she is not unhappy. Sudha and Anju communicate through letters. Sudha must destroy these letters to keep her mother-in-law from reading them. Until the day of Aunt Tarini's visit, Anju's letters are the only excitement Sudha has in her life. Ramesh's mother is determined to impress Aunt Tarini as a result of a rivalry that started when Aunt Tarini insulted Ramesh's mother's wedding jewelry. Ramesh's mother is furious when she discovers that Aunt Tarini's daughter-in-law is pregnant. Although Sudha and Ramesh have been trying to get pregnant, they have not been successful.

In Chapter 26, Anju juggles mail, groceries and cleaning as she tries to unlock her apartment. She has short hair and has picked up many American terms, including curse words. Anju admits that her American life is not what she had thought it would be. Even after three years she still does not completely understand her husband. She also hates to cook. Her ideas of romance have dissolved. When Sunil admit to her that he does not like Virginia Woolf, Anju feels cheated. Although she sometimes thinks of leaving Sunil, she knows in reality she loves him now more than ever.

Sunil and Anju rarely talk about Sudha until one day Anju decides they must no longer ignore her existence. As she tells Sunil about their childhood, she realizes how much she misses her cousin. Anju sits with a letter from the mothers, worried about what news it holds. Anju is concerned because she has heard from the mothers that Sudha is having trouble getting pregnant. Sudha, however, has not mentioned this to Anju in any of her letters. In this most recent letter, Sudha has visited a local gynecologist who has found no problems. Mrs. Sanyal, however, wants a second opinion. Anju tries to talk to Sunil about Sudha, a conversation that ends in an argument and Sunil leaving. After she calms herself, Anju tries to find ways she can help Sudha.

In Chapter 27, Sudha admits she does not understand her mother-in-law. She realizes as she rides with her husband and his mother to her second doctor's appointment that what Mrs. Sanyal wants is control. The doctor tells the women there is nothing wrong with Sudha and suggests that they have Ramesh checked out. He gives Sudha the name and number of a doctor. Sudha memorizes this number in the bathroom because she knows her mother-in-law will take it away and destroy it once they are outside of the office. That night Sudha asks Ramesh to see the doctor and he agrees.

In Chapter 28, Anju recounts communication problems with her family in India. The main issue is the cost of the phone calls. When Anju tries to talk to Sudha during Sudha's brief stay with the mothers, she is disappointed by what little information she gets from her cousin. She does learn that Sudha does want a baby. Sudha also tells Anju how sick Gouri is. She wonders if she was right to move so far away from her family.



Book 2, Chapters 25 - 28 Analysis

Three years have passed since the girls' weddings. They each struggle with their new identities as wives, and their new relationships with each other. Although Sudha does not feel that she had the love she would have enjoyed with Ashok, she feels needed and liked by the Sanyals. Anju, on the other hand, seems to be overwhelmed by her life in America. She is far away from her family and unable to do anything to help them. Even when they talk over the phone, Anju feels like she hasn't really communicated with her family. Perhaps what is worse for Anju is that she feels as if Sudha is hiding things from her. The fear is confirmed when Anju learns from the mothers that Sudha has been unable to get pregnant, Sudha has never mentioned this problem.

Anju and Sudha also struggle in their relationships with their new husbands. Although Sudha sees Ramesh as a friend and ally, she is fearful that if Mrs. Sanyal ever took a dislike to her, Ramesh would not stand up for her. This causes Sudha a great deal of distress, especially when Mrs. Sanyal becomes so intent on Sudha getting pregnant. Anju is frustrated that so many of her dreams of romance have not come to pass. Especially disappointing was Sunil's refusal to read Virginia Woolf with her. Although when they had met in the bookstore the first time, Sunil had given her the impression that he liked the author, he now admits he cares nothing for literature. This announcement leaves Anju feeling as if she had been deceived. Anju and Sunil also fight often. In addition, Sudha is still a sore spot between them. Even so, Anju has begun talking to Sunil about Sudha, telling him about their childhood together.

The determination of the identities of other people is also very important to this section of the novel. For instance, Sudha says that she is having trouble determining what type of person her mother-in-law actually is. Although she at first seems kind, Sudha begins to see what she suspects is her mother-in-law's real personality coming out when Sudha is unable to get pregnant. Sudha discovers Mrs. Sanyal is actually controlling and domineering, especially when it comes to her son. To make matters worse, Ramesh seems unwilling to stand up against his mother.

While Sudha is trying to figure out her mother-in-law, Anju is trying to come to terms with what kind of person her husband really is. She says that he has many faces. At one point he is a loving husband who cares for her when she is sick, the next minute he yells at her for getting paper out of his desk drawers. He takes spells of going out in the evenings. During these nights, Anju is not able to locate him and he will not tell her where he has been. In addition, the two have violent arguments. Despite these shortcomings, however, Anju realizes she loves Sunil more now than she ever did.



Book 2, Chapters 29 - 31

Book 2, Chapters 29 - 31 Summary

In Chapter 29, Sudha visits Singhji before she leaves her mothers' home. He is pleased to see her. He tells Sudha it was Ashok she saw during their drive. Ashok has been getting news of Sudha from Singhji ever since Sudha was married. Singhji gives Sudha a letter from Ashok requesting that she come with him. Sudha hopes to be able to speak to Singhji before he leaves them at the Sanyal house. When they reach the house, however, Mrs. Sanyal is waiting to take Sudha to the Goddess Shasti's shrine.

At Shasti's shrine Sudha is surprised when the girl next to her says she hears the goddess telling her she must choose between her two loves. The girl is confused by her message, but Sudha feels these words are for her. Sudha ties Ashok's letter to the goddess' tree, believing she must once again give up her desire for Ashok in exchange for her desire for a baby.

In Chapter 30, Anju is not feeling well. She discovers she is pregnant. Sunil is soon excited about the baby. He wants to tell the mothers about the pregnancy but Anju puts him off because she does not want to hurt Sudha. When Anju does finally call India she learns that Sudha is also pregnant. In Chapter 31, Sudha receives new respect since she has become pregnant. For instance, Mrs. Sanyal has taken over much of Sudha's work. Sudha, however, remembers how Mrs. Sanyal treated her before she became pregnant. She wonders if all this newfound love and caring is really for her, or for the child she is carrying. What surprises Sudha most is that Mrs. Sanyal has told no one that Sudha is pregnant yet.

In Anju's letter, she reminds Sudha of the retarded boy at their great-uncle's house. There has been another cousin who has recently given birth to a retarded child. Anju is going to have her baby checked and suggests that Gouri must have told Sudha about the retarded baby so Sudha can get her child checked also. Since Gouri has said nothing to Sudha about needing an appointment, Sudha assumes it is because Gouri knows Sudha is not really related to the family. Sudha's mother calls, however, and suggests Sudha be tested. Mrs. Sanyal is pleased to tell her that an appointment has already been made.

Book 2, Chapters 29 - 31 Analysis

Like most everything else they have done in their lives, Sudha and Anju are now pregnant together. Mrs. Sanyal has suddenly become overly kind to Sudha. Although Sudha feels she should be grateful to her mother-in-law, she is instead resentful, feeling that Mrs. Sanyal is only pretending to care because of the baby she is carrying.

Because she believes she is of no blood relation to Anju and the Chatterjees, Sudha assumes that Gouri also is aware of the fact that her father was an impostor. She

believes this is why Gouri has not called her to suggest she be checked to be sure her baby is all right, and not suffering with the brain defect believed to be hereditary in the Chatterjee family. When Sudha's mother calls, Sudha is surprised to learn that her mother-in-law has already made an appointment for her.



Book 2, Chapters 32 - 34

Book 2, Chapters 32 - 34 Summary

Anju's amniocentesis goes well. Her baby boy is normal. After the appointment, Sunil and Anju splurge on dinner, and then make love. Anju falls asleep and does not call Sudha when she intended. When she does call India, Sudha's monotone voice tells Anju that Sudha's baby girl is all right also. Anju feels that something terrible has happened to Sudha. Anju calls her mother, but she knows of nothing that might be wrong with Sudha. Anju is woken from a nightmare when the phone rings. It is Sudha. She has gone to the post office while her mother-in-law is napping so she could speak to Anju privately. Sudha tells Anju that her mother-in-law wants her to have an abortion because the baby is not a boy. Ramesh is refusing to stand up to his mother and protect his wife and baby. Although Sudha has money with her, she is not able to go home because the mothers have told her she must not do so. They believe it is better for Sudha to stay with her in-laws even if they abort the baby.

In Chapter 23, Sudha takes a train back to Calcutta. When she rings the bell at her house, Ramur is surprised to see Sudha. Sudha's mother is angry that she has left the Sanyals. When Sudha tells Pishi and Gouri what has happened, however, they support Sudha and her decision. The next morning Gouri calls Mrs. Sanyal and tries to work out a compromise. She refuses to let Gouri speak to Ramesh and says the only way things can be fixed is if Sudha gets an abortion. Sudha insists that if Ramesh want his daughter, and Sudha, he knows where to find them. Instead, Sudha receives divorce papers. The mothers decide they want a better life for Sudha as a single woman than what they had. They decide to sell the house. Pishi tells them they will buy a flat, and pay for Sudha's medical care. Pishi also wants Gouri to see a doctor, and have heart surgery if it is still needed. The mothers want to give Sudha a blessing but the traditional blessing of having sons doesn't fit. Sudha asks instead for courage to stand up for herself and her baby. She then showers and removes the remainder of the marriage sindur from her forehead. This action is representative of Sudha's act of washing away all of the preconceived notions of her life.

In Chapter 34, Anju worries that she did not advise Sudha correctly. Talking with Sunil does not calm Anju's fears, only makes them worse. As she tries to sleep on the couch one night, Anju decides she will get a job at her college's library and save to money to bring Sudha and her baby to America.

Book 2, Chapters 32 - 34 Analysis

Tradition is a huge factor in this section of three chapters. Although her mothers advised against it, Sudha has decided to leave Ramesh in order to save her baby. Although this book is set in the 1980s, divorce is still seen as a disgrace. In fact, it is Nalini's first comment that by leaving her husband, Sudha has disgraced the entire family.



Surprisingly, it is Pishi who speaks up most vehemently in Sudha's favor. As a widow, Pishi has experienced the cruelty of India's traditional views for women. She has not been allowed to remarry, has not been allowed even to go to most social gatherings. Pishi tells Sudha and the other mothers that she is unhappy with her society that deems it acceptable for a baby to be killed because it is the wrong gender, but does not support a woman who leaves the family in order to save that child.



Book 2, Chapter 35 - 37

Book 2, Chapter 35 - 37 Summary

In Chapter 35, Sudha helps her mothers move out of the family mansion into their new flat. Their house will be torn down to allow an apartment complex to be built. Gouri has had her heart surgery and is feeling, and looking, much better. As they work, Gouri tells Sudha she has a visitor in the living room. It is Ashok. After Ashok convinces Sudha he has not come to gloat or offer her pity, he tells her he wants to marry her. In preparation for their wedding, Ashok and Sudha begin spending more time together. All family members approve of the wedding, except perhaps Sudha's unborn daughter who has taken to kicking at Ashok whenever he tries to come near Sudha. As Ashok drops Sudha off at her mothers' flat one evening he surprises her by requesting that she allow her baby to live with her mothers once it is born. He suggests that he feels he might not be able to love Sudha's daughter as completely as he should. Sudha is surprised, and displeased.

In Chapter 36, Anju enjoys earning her own money. She is careful to keep her job a secret from Sunil, though. Anju's doctor is still not happy with her blood pressure and sugar levels. He tells her that if her levels aren't better by her next appointment, he may consider putting her on bed rest. Anju takes care of herself and by her next appointment, the doctor is happy with her test results. Later that day when Anju hides her bank book in a drawer, she realizes how easy it is to hide things from her husband. On the other hand, however, she also wonders what he might be hiding from her.

In Chapter 37, Sudha draws out sketches of baby clothes as she thinks about what response she should have to Ashok's request to allow her daughter to be raised by her mothers. Sudha's mothers encourage her to accept Ashok's proposal of marriage despite his conditions. Sudha, however, cannot imagine abandoning her daughter, even to her grandmothers. Sudha finally writes to Ashok that she cannot give her daughter up even for him. Meanwhile, Sudha has a dream of Prem, Anju's son, who is calling to Sudha and Dayita saying "come." When she wakes Sudha tries to cheer herself by designing a quilt, but she keeps thinking of Anju's last letter in which she suggests that Sudha come to America. Since Anju is secretly working to pay for the ticket, Sudha suspects Sunil does not want her to come. As Sudha turns her attention back to her quilt the wind blows her design out the window. Sudha has the feeling it is the Bidhata Purush trying to regain control over her life. Sudha triumphs over the Bidhata by sketching another quilt design, this one more beautiful than the one that was lost. It is after a visit full of cruel remarks made by Sarita Aunty, that Sudha seriously reconsiders going to America with Anju.



Book 2, Chapter 35 - 37 Analysis

The idea of identity is explored in these three chapters. Since she has now placed herself in a position often not found in Indian society, Sudha has the opportunity to become anything that she wishes. The scene in which Sudha designs the quilt is an important scene and one that is rich in symbolism. Sudha's original quilt design, which could symbolize her original plans for her life, is blown out the window. In the same way, Sudha's life is destroyed by her mother-in-law's decision that Sudha should have an abortion. However, although Sudha feels the displeasure of the Bidhata Purush, Sudha begins again with another quilt design, or another plan for her life, her own plan. This plan turns out even more beautiful than the original design.

In addition to Sudha's search for identity, the mothers are also searching for new ways to define themselves. When they move from their ancestral home into their flat, they allow themselves pleasures they never experienced before. Sudha admits that it is amazing that although these three women dreaded and worked against this change in their lives for so long, that now that the change has come, they are happier than they have ever been in their lives. It is almost as if they are relieved they no longer have to live up to the demands of society. The worst has happened to them, there is nothing else to dread.

This section of chapters begins in a jubilant tone as Ashok meets with Sudha and reaffirms his desire to marry her. Even though Sudha accepts his offer, their happiness is tinted with suggestions that all may not work out for the best. When Ashok suggests Sudha give her baby to the mothers to raise once it is born, she realizes she cannot agree to this condition. She has already gone through so much and given up so much to keep her daughter. It seems almost foolish that one who claimed to love and understand her so much could ask such a thing of her.

Meanwhile, Sudha is concerned about the treatment her daughter will receive as a fatherless child in India. Sudha does not want her daughter to live this life filled with hate and insults. It is after a visit by Sarita Aunty in which the opinionated woman is openly hateful to her that Sudha begins to seriously consider moving to America with Anju.



Book 2, Chapters 38 - 40

Book 2, Chapters 38 - 40 Summary

In Chapter 38, Anju falls asleep when she is supposed to be studying in the library. She arrives home to find Sunil already there. Sunil is angry. There was a message left on the answer machine from the library asking Anju to work an extra shift. Anju tells Sunil she was saving the money to buy Sudha a plane ticket to America. The pain Anju has felt all day in her back and stomach worsens. As they continue to argue, the pain makes her double over and wetness spreads down her pants. Sunil calls an ambulance. Anju passes out. When she regains consciousness, Anju realizes she has lost her baby. Although the doctors tried to do a caesarian section, there was a problem with the umbilical cord. Sunil tells her the baby was beautiful. She sees the anger in his face. She realizes that she killed her baby.

In Chapter 39, the mothers try to keep the news of Anju's miscarriage a secret from Sudha, but Sudha suspects something is wrong. When Sudha finally manages to get though to America Sunil answers the phone. Sunil begs Sudha to help. Sunil puts the phone to Anju's ear and Sudha tells her a story. As the words of Sudha's story run out, Anju picks up the story when Sudha stops. Anju's begs Sudha to come to her. Sudha promises she will as soon as the baby is born. Sunil tells Sudha he will arrange for tickets and visas for Sudha and Dayita.

When Dayita is born, the mothers fight over who will hold her. Even Singhji takes Dayita away from Sudha and sends her away. It is only when Sudha nurses Dayita that she has the baby to herself. During one of these sessions, she tells Dayita the story of Prem. After this session, her mother tells Sudha she has a visitor. It is Ashok. He asks to hold Dayita, and then tells Sudha that what he asked of her was wrong. He asks her again to marry him. For a moment Sudha considers, then remembers Anju. Ashok tells her he understands she must go and help Anju. Sudha kisses Ashok's cheek as a farewell gesture.

As badly as Anju wants Sudha to come to America, she wonders if she is encouraging her cousin to make the right choice. Anju is busy cleaning up a room in the apartment in which Sudha and Dayita can stay. As Anju empties out desk drawers, she finds a wooden container containing Sudha's wedding handkerchief. As Anju thinks back over Sunil's action of the past months with the fresh memory of the handkerchief, she wonders if her were trying to spare he from some hurt. Anju knows, however, there is no going back.

Book 2, Chapters 38 - 40 Analysis

One of the most interesting points in this section is Sunil's description of Prem as a baby Krishna. Prem appeared this same way in Sudha's dream. Although it may appear at



first that this dream is only a call for Sudha to come to America, it is actually a foreshadowing of what is about to happen to Anju's baby. Prem still wants Sudha to come to America but perhaps it is to comfort Anju instead of meeting Prem.

When Anju finds Sudha's handkerchief in Sunil's things, she realizes the troubles that might be coming. The memories of her wedding day come back. Anju remembers how strangely Sunil has always acted whenever Anju mentioned Sudha's name. Anju wonders if Sunil has tried to keep Sudha away from America and their family as a means of protection. She wonders to what troubles she has opened up her family.



Book 2, Chapters 41 - 42

Book 2, Chapters 41 - 42 Summary

In Chapter 41, Sudha prepares to board the plane for America, both happy and sad at once. In Sudha's carryon bag, she spies a brown paper packet. The mothers tell her not to open it until she is on the plane. Sudha and Dayita had received many gifts upon their departure. These included a credit card from Ashok. Ashok tells Sudha he does not want her or Dayita to want for anything. In addition he tells her to feel free to use it to buy a return plane ticket when she is ready to come back to India. A few days before she left India, Sudha had received a wedding card from Ramesh's mother. Sudha feels the pain of this last stab from her ex-mother-in-law.

As soon as Sudha settles into her seat in the plane, she opens the brown paper packet. Inside is a jewelry box for Dayita. The mothers have had the ruby made into a pendant for the baby. The jewel does not give Sudha the feeling of horror that it did when she first saw it. Sudha believes it may be because the Chatterjees have finally gone through enough suffering.

Sudha then sees another envelope in her bag. This envelope has the same writing on it as the one she received from her father for her wedding. Although she wants to throw it away, Sudha reads the letter. It tells her father's story. He first tells of the day they found the rubies. After they returned with their jewels and ate dinner, Bijoy told Gopal they had to talk. Bijoy asks Gopal about their relationship. Gopal tells Bijoy he is the son of Bijoy's uncle but not by the uncle's wife, but a maid. When the maid became pregnant she was sent back to her family. The family's pride caused them to send the young girl back to the home of the father of the baby. Gopal's mother was determined to stay alive and keep her baby. She made such a fuss that Gopal's father gave her position back. Gopal grew up angry with his father for the way he and his mother were treated. When Gopal's family fled from their house during the riots, it kept Gopal from doing anything cruel to his father. It was at this point that Gopal tricked Nalini into marrying him, and then went to the Chatterjee home. Bijoy accepts Gopal's story.

Gopal sleeps. He is certain that Haldar had drugged himself and Bijoy. He is aware of the boat starting, a splash and then hands searching his body for his ruby. When Gopal is thrown into the water, it brings him out of his drug induced paralysis. He searches for Bijoy, but realizes he must swim back to the boat. Once on the boat Gopal attacks but Haldar is strong. He throws a lantern at Gopal's face. He grabs a hook and knocks Haldar over the edge of the boat. Not only was Gopal's face burned, the lantern also sets the boat on fire. Gopal escapes in the dinghy. Although he searches for Bijoy, he is not to be found. Gopal finally rows to shore and collapses. He is discovered by the people of a village who try to care for his as best they can.

When Gopal sees the ruin his face has become, he realizes he can't bear to go home. He feels he is responsible for Bijoy's death. When Gopal sees his obituary, he realizes



he has been spared from the pain of having to face his family. Even so, Gopal feels drawn to Calcutta. He learns the Chatterjee women need a driver. He applies for the position. He becomes Singhji. Even though he was with his family, he is unable to help them or reach out to them in any way. When Singhji realizes what Pishi has led Sudha to believe about her father, he vowed to tell Sudha the right story once she is old enough. Singhji asks only that Sudha not tell the mothers who he is, and that when Dayita is old enough Sudha will tell her of her grandfather. Dayita cries and Sudha leaves the letter to care for her daughter. In order to stop the crying, Sudha whispers a version of the story of the Queen of Swords into her ear.

In Chapter 42, Anju waits impatiently for Sudha's plane to land. Although she wonders what might happen between Sunil and Sudha after Sudha arrives, she still looks forward to Sudha's coming. As they wait for the plane to unload and its passengers to pass through immigration, Anju goes to the rest room for some alone time. When she returns, she overhears a man ask Sunil if Sudha, who is moving toward them, is his wife. Sunil does not correct the man. Anju is angry at her husband, but happy to see Sudha. When the women embrace, Dayita wails because she is squashed between them. Sudha hands the baby to Anju and though Anju tries to refuse, but Sudha forces her. Surprisingly, Anju feels nothing but love for her niece once she has her in her arms. Sudha recognizes what is happening with Anju and puts her arm around Anju, helping to support Dayita with the other arm. Although Sunil pushes them to go, the three stand there realizing how they fit into each others' lives. The coming trouble, Anju decides can wait.

Book 2, Chapters 41 - 42 Analysis

It is at this point that both Sudha and Anju finally find peace from each of their own personal battles. On the plane on the way to America, Sudha reads a letter from her father. This letter tells Sudha what actually happened the night of Bijoy's death. It explains the confusing information about Gopal's father, as well as the circumstances of Bijoy's death. Sudha also learns that her father has actually been with her all along even though he has been under the disguise of the servant Singhji. Sudha gains her peace when she learns her father is not a murderer and that she is really Anju's cousin.

Anju receives peace from the guilt of the death of her baby when Sudha forces her to take Dayita. Although Anju had made up her mind not to love or accept her niece, when the baby is actually in her arms, she finds herself unable to keep herself from loving the child. The last scenes of the book depict the two women entwined together holding the baby. The only distraction in this otherwise loving scene is the figure of the impatient Sunil, wanting to go home.



Characters

Basudha

Sudha is the daughter of Gopal and Nalini Chatterjee. She marries Ramesh Sanyal in an arranged marriage. Sudha later divorces Ramesh because his mother insists she abort her baby because it is a girl. Sudha is the mother of Dayita.

Sudha is born and grows up in the illustrious Chatterjee house in Calcutta, India. Both she and her cousin Anju are shielded from the troubles of life by their mothers and aunt, who raise them in the ways of the traditional Indian customs. Sudha loves hearing the stories of the old Indian ways told by her Aunt Pishi. One story that Sudha does not love is the story of the way her father, Gopal, decided to go treasure hunting while Sudha's mother was pregnant with her. Anju's father also went with Gopal. Both men were killed during the trip. As a result, Sudha feels responsible for Anju's happiness because she thinks it was her father's fault Anju's father was killed.

One day during school, Sudha and Anju sneak out of class to watch a movie. Ashok Ghosh happens to sit next to Sudha. The two fall in love. Although Ashok's parents send a proposal to Sudha's mother for Sudha's hand in marriage, the proposal is rejected. Sudha is instead promised in marriage to Ramesh by her mother. Ashok and Sudha make plans to elope, but Sudha calls off the elopement when she learns that Anju's future father-in-law will call off Anju's engagement and even marriage if he finds scandal in the family. Anju is unaware of Sudha's sacrifice and is angry with her cousin when she discovers that her husband believes Sudha to be the most beautiful woman in the world.

Although her mother-in-law is not kind to Sudha, especially when Sudha does not get pregnant as quickly as she expected, Sudha is docile and obedient in her new life. She rebels against her mother-in-law, however, when the woman suggests that Sudha should abort the baby she finally does become pregnant with when the child is discovered to be a girl. At this point Sudha goes back to live with her mother and aunts in Calcutta. Ashok has waited for Sudha and the two try to repair their relationship. When Ashok suggests Sudha let her mother raise the girl away from them, Sudha will not consider his suggestion. Sudha then travels to America to visit her sister.

One major aspect of Sudha's life is her uncertainty about her father's role in her uncle's death. First Sudha believes her father only set up the circumstances that led to Bijoy's death. After receiving a letter and gift of money from her father for her wedding, Sudha's beliefs change and she is afraid her father actually killed Anju's father. It is not until Sudha is on the plane to America that Sudha learns the truth about her father. This new knowledge that her father not only has not been a murderer, and also has been a positive part of her life, allows Sudha to finally leave behind her burden of guilt associated with the death of Anju's father.



Anjuli

Anju is the daughter of Gouri and Bijoy Chatterjee. She is married to Sunil Majumdar in an arranged marriage. The two live in America where Sunil works for a computer company. Anju is allowed to go to college and study literature. She miscarries their first baby, Prem.

When Anju and Sudha's mothers learn of their husbands' deaths, both women go into early labor. Anju is born first. Sudha's mother has trouble and it is feared that the doctor will have to come and perform a cesarean section, a procedure considered risky at that time. According to the old tales, the mothers laid Anju on top of Nalini's stomach. They believed the first baby will call the second from the womb. Because Sudha is born shortly after this action is taken, Anju believes she was responsible for Sudha being born safely. For this reason, Anju believes she is responsible for helping her cousin remain happy and safe.

Anju's original plan is to go to college, then run the family bookstore. Her plans do not include getting married. However, when her mother has a heart attack, Anju is forced to give up her dreams of college and begin marriage preparations. Anju falls in love with Sunil when he visits the family bookstore and pretends to like the author Virginia Woolf. When Anju later learns Sunil was only pretending to like this author in order to win Anju's affection, Anju feels as if she has been tricked by Sunil. Anju felt jealousy for her cousin the first time on the day of their weddings. It is on this day that Anju realizes that Sunil finds Sudha attractive and might have feelings for her. Anju misreads Sudha's body language when she steps away from Anju's attempt to hug her after Anju feels regret for accusing her cousin of cheating on her. Anju believes this action indicates Sudha is guilty of the crime of which Anju has accused her.

Once in America Anju and Sunil have a stormy relationship. Anju is moody and the two often fight. Anju becomes pregnant at the same time Sudha does. When she learns that Sudha's mother-in-law is trying to force Sudha to have an abortion, Anju secretly begins working in a library to save money for Sudha to come to America. Even though her doctor warns Anju to eat right and avoid stress, Anju does not follow the doctor's orders and goes into early labor. Because the umbilical cord is wrapped around the baby's neck, he dies before he can be born through a cesarean section. It is only when Anju speaks with Sudha on the phone that Anju begins to heal from the death of her baby. Although Anju openly tells others she does not want Sudha's baby to come, Anju still plans for Sudha to visit them in America. Again at the airport, Anju watches as another man asks Sunil if Sudha is his wife. Sunil does not correct the man. Despite this, Anju is happy to see Sudha. Although she does not want to, Sudha forces her to hold Dayita. With Dayita in her arms, and her cousin's arms wrapped around her, Anju begins to realize that it is this child that will help to bring her healing.



Ashok Ghosh

Ashok Ghosh is the man that Sudha meets in the movie theater and falls in love with. Although his family is wealthy, they are wealthy because they are laborers. One day Singhji slows the car as he carries the girls to school and allows Sudha and Ashok to talk. Ashok gives Sudha a diamond ring. Sudha sees Ashok several times on the street but they are unable to talk. When Sudha's mother decides Sudha is to get married, Ashok's family makes a proposal for Sudha. However, this proposal is turned down by Sudha's mother. Ashok arranges a meeting with Sudha in the Kalighat Temple where the two make plans to elope. When Sudha calls off these plans for the sake of Anju, Ashok is angry. He writes to Sudha stating that he hopes she experiences the same kind of pain he has experienced.

Although Ashok is angry with Sudha for marrying Ramesh, he waits for her. When Sudha returns to her mother's home after leaving her husband, Ashok tries to initiate a new relationship. However, Ashok tells Sudha that he wants her to give Dayita to Sudha's mother to raise, a proposition that Sudha cannot accept. Although Ashok later withdraws his request, Sudha has already made up her mind to visit Anju in America. Before Sudha leaves, Ashok gives her a credit card so that she can buy anything she might need in America. He also hopes that she will use the card so that she can buy a plane ticket to come back to Calcutta and him.

Sunil Majumdar

Sunil Majumdar is Anju's husband. Although he was raised by a traditionally Indian family, he breaks with tradition and meets Anju before the ritual bride viewing. Sunil approaches Anju in the Chatterjee bookstore and pretends to be interested in the author Virginia Woolf, an author whom he knows is Anju's favorite. When Anju later learns that Sunil has no interest at all in Woolf's writing, she feels as if she has been used by Sunil. Sunil also makes life hard for the newlywed couple because he insists upon sending large amounts of money back to India in an effort to repay his father for all that he has done.

When Sunil first meets Sudha he tells her he wishes he had met her before Anju. He tells Sudha she is the most beautiful woman he has seen in all of America and India. Sunil apologizes when Sudha tells him to stop. He realizes his behavior was incorrect but can't help the way he feels. During their wedding, Sunil picks up a handkerchief that he sees Sudha drop. Sunil keeps this handkerchief until Anju finds it years later tucked inside a gift box. Although Sunil tries to keep Sudha from coming to America because he realizes he has feelings for her, he cannot stop his strong willed wife's plans.

Ramesh Sanyal

Ramesh Sanyal is Sudha's husband chosen by arranged marriage. He, like Sudha, has grown up without a father. Ramesh's mother, however, is very controlling and



possessive of her son. Because he realizes Sudha is uncomfortable with him, he suggests on their wedding night that they delay their marital relationship until Sudha is more comfortable. When a doctor suggests that it is Ramesh and not Sudha who the reason Sudha cannot get pregnant, Ramesh agrees to seek treatment for his fertility problem. Although Ramesh is agreeable with Sudha when Ramesh's mother is unaware, he will not stand up for Sudha against his mother. For instance, when Sudha's mother-in-law is pressuring Sudha to abort her baby because it is a girl, Ramesh only drops his head and tells Sudha to leave him alone. He also refuses to tell his mother he has been receiving treatment for infertility. That it was not Sudha's fault she could not get pregnant, nor was it the trip to Shasti's shrine that helped Sudha get pregnant.

Gouri

Gouri is Anju's mother. She was the wife of Bijoy. Gouri is the one who took over the position of leader of the Chatterjee family after Bijoy and Gopal were killed. Before her husband left on the adventure trip, Gouri asked her husband how she should raise their child if he did not return. Bijoy requested the child be raised in the traditional Indian ways. Despite her daughter's displeasure, Gouri has kept this promise to her husband. Gouri is also the one who managed the Chatterjee bookstore, from which the Chatterjee women earned their money. Workers in the store have fond memories of Gouri as a good employer who took care of her workers. As a result of the stress in her life, however, Gouri develops heart trouble. She has a heart attack the night of Anju and Sudha's school graduation. For this reason, Gouri decides Anju should get married right away instead of waiting until after she finishes college. It is at this point that Gouri also sells the family bookstore. Sudha states that when Gouri smiles at her, it makes her want to be a better person, noble and brave, just as Gouri is.

Nalini

Nalini is Sudha's mother. She eloped with Gopal when he proposed to her after he saw her washing clothes in a creek. Despite her poor background, Nalini often talks about how much better things were when she lived with her father. Sudha believes this means her mother's family was rich. It is Pishi, however, who tells her from where her mother really came. Nalini often frowns, her daughter is unsure if this frown is as a result of worry or displeasure. The night that Sudha learns her mother intends her to get married, Sudha secretly sees her mother standing at her bedroom window calling out Sudha's name. It is at this point that Sudha realizes how important it is to cooperate with her mother's desires for her. Sudha is all that Nalini has left.

Singhji/Gopal Sudha's father

Singhji turns out to be two characters in one. He is actually Sudha's father, Gopal, who serves the family as a chauffeur. Because his face was burned badly during his fight



with Haldar, Gopal's family does not recognize him. In this way Gopal is able to be part of his daughter's life, but still keep from hurting his wife, Nalini, any longer.

As Gopal, Gopal swept Nalini off her feet on day when he saw her washing clothes in a creek. He convinced her to elope with him and took her to his family's home in Calcutta. Gopal tells his family he is the son of one of the family's uncles. However, he fails to tell them that he is a son of this man by one of the maids in the household. In addition, Gopal turned out to be a person who liked to take chances when it came to making money. Many of his money making feats were financed by Bijoy, leaving the family short on money. Gopal's final money making scheme involves financing a man's trip to a ruby filled cave. Gopal has asked this man if he would be willing to allow Gopal to go along with him and get a ruby of his own. Gopal hopes the jewel will allow him to make his own living and pay Bijoy back all the money he has borrowed in the past. When Gopal realizes he and Bijoy had been drugged by Haldar, he swims back to the boat and fights with Haldar. It is during this fight that Gopal's face is burned. Haldar is also killed. Although Gopal is in severe pain, he tries to locate and save Bijoy but is unable to find him.

Gopal tries to determine how he will tell his family what happened to himself and to Bijoy. When he sees an obituary for himself and Bijoy, Gopal decides to continue to keep his identity secret. He feels this decision is best because it will keep the Chatterjee women from the pain of learning that he lived while Bijoy died. When he learned that the women needed a chauffeur, however, he applied for the job so that he could be close to them. As Singhji, Gopal is able to watch his daughter grow up. When Sudha begins confiding in Singhji, he is able to even take some part in his daughter's life. He is also able to spend time with his granddaughter before Sudha takes her to America with her.

Pishi

Pishi is the widowed aunt who lives with Sudha, Anju and their mothers. Because Pishi had no children, she loves and cares for Sudha and Anju like they are her own children. Pishi enjoys telling the girls the stories of the old ways. Pishi is the one who takes care of the newborn babies the night they are born. It is also Pishi who tells Sudha what she knows about Sudha's father. However, Pishi's story is full of half truths. This story leads Sudha to believe that her father was a murderer and that he was in no way related to the Chatterjees. Pishi builds her story based on what she knows of Sudha's father. For instance, Pishi was present when Bijoy received the letter stating Gopal was not related to their uncle. Pishi was never aware that Gopal was an illegitimate child through a household maid.

Bidhata Purush

The Bidhata Purush is a god who supposedly visits each Indian baby the night after they are born to write their fortune on their forehead. It is also believed that the Bidhata Purush writes the date of a person's death on their forehead at birth. Some Indians



seem to believe that their entire life hinges on what the Bidhata Purush writes on their forehead. Pishi credits the Bidhata Purush with allowing her to be a mother to her nieces.

Mr. Majumdar

Mr. Majumdar is Sunil's father. Majumdar is hot headed and pompous. During the bride viewing he tells Anju's family that he has no qualms about breaking off Anju and Sunil's engagement, or even their marriage if he finds any scandal in Anju's family. Majumdar is abusive and cruel to his wife and his son. During one dinner, Majumdar throws a bowl of food at his wife after he learns she has cooked a dish for Sunil that he has forbidden her to cook. It is on this evening that Sunil's relationship with his father comes to a head. Majumdar accuses Sunil of drinking and sleeping around during his years at college. As a result of Majumdar's show of anger, Anju refuses to stay with the Majumdar's while she is waiting for her visa to come through.

Bijoy

Bijoy is Anju's father. Before he leaves for his treasure hunt, he asks his wife to raise his child in the traditional Indian way if he does not come back from his trip. Although Sudha assumes her father forced Bijoy to go on the trip with him, she learns that Bijoy wanted to go and find his own ruby. Bijoy also pawned the family's paddies and their country house in order to finance the trip. When Bijoy tries to buy Gopal's family home back for him, he receives a letter stating that Gopal's father did not have a male heir. Although Bijoy believes Gopal has been lying to him, he still goes on the adventure trip with him. Bijoy learns Gopal's real story on the boat before he passes out from the drugs. Because he cannot swim, Bijoy dies when Haldar throws him overboard.

Haldar

Haldar is the man who tricks Gopal and Bijoy into going on a trip to retrieve rubies from a cave in the Sundarban jungle. Haldar asks Gopal for money to fund the trip. It is Gopal who asks to go with Haldar and get his own ruby. After the men get their rubies, Haldar drugs the two men in an attempt to kill them and keep their money and jewels. Gopal, however, survives the drugging and swims back to the boat after Haldar throws him overboard. After a struggle, Haldar is killed by Gopal. It is during this struggle that Haldar throws a lantern at Gopal. It is the fire from this lantern that causes the burns on Gopal's face.

Dayita

Dayita is Sudha's baby. Dayita is saved by her mother when Sudha leaves her husband because her mother-in-law wants to have the baby killed because she is not a boy. Even while in the womb, Dayita seems to take a dislike to Ashok. She kicks him



whenever he tries to come close to Sudha. The mothers have the ruby made into a pendant for Dayita. They give it to Sudha to open on the way to America. When Anju holds Dayita for the first time, she realizes that this child holds the ability to help her heal from Prem's death.

Sarita Aunty

Sarita Aunty is one of the relatives who is openly hateful to Anju and Sudha concerning their closeness. It is also Sarita who discovers Anju and Sudha in the movie theater bathroom. She is happy with the opportunity to take the girls back to their home where she knows they will be in trouble.

Prem

Prem is the name that Anju has chosen for her baby. Prem dies when Anju goes into early labor. Oxygen is cut off to the baby and his heart has stopped beating by the time the doctors try to deliver Prem by Cesarean section.

Aunt Tarini

Aunt Tarini is Ramesh's deceased father's sister. Aunt Tarini is disliked by Ramesh's mother because of a statement Tarini made about her wedding jewelry years ago. Tarini has also been spreading rumors about Sudha, saying that something is wrong with her because she hasn't gotten pregnant yet.

Deepa

Deepa is Aunt Tarini's daughter-in-law. Deepa becomes pregnant before Sudha, causing Sudha's mother-in-law to be furious.



Objects/Places

Childbirth Amulet

It is this special amulet that Nalini gives the credit of allowing her to give natural birth to Sudha, not Anju's act of calling Sudha from her womb.

Drying Mangoes

Sudha promises to help Pishi with her work drying these mangoes in exchange for the real story of her father. These mangoes are ruined, however, when Sudha touches them after starting her period. According to superstition, if a menstruating woman was to touch the mangoes, it would cause them to grow a fungus.

Music Case Stitched in Red Silk

This music case contains a flute which was often played by Sudha's father. It was one of the few possessions he had when he arrived at the Chatterjee mansion.

Ruby Cave

The ruby cave is a cave located in the Sundarban jungles. Bijoy and Gopal are drawn to the cave in an adventure trip where they are promised a ruby of their own.

Hogg's Market

Hogg's Market is the market from which Bijoy bought mangoes for Sudha's mother during her pregnancy.

Country Mansion

This country mansion and its surrounding lands were pawned by Bijoy in order to finance the trip to search for rubies.

Ferris Wheel

After hearing the story of her father from Pishi, Sudha compares her past to this carnival ride.



Bardhaman

Bardhaman is the town where Ramesh and his mother live.

Great Black Shiva Lingam

It is behind this statue that Sudha and Ashok make their plans to elope.

Chatterjee and Sons Fine Books

It is from this book store that most of the income for the Chatterjee family comes in the later years after the sale of the family rice paddies. Anju has hopes of running this book store on her own one day. It is also in this store that Anju meets Sunil for the first time.

Bottle of Nitroglycerine Tablets

When Anju sees this bottle of tablets sitting on her mother's bedside table when they are called in to discuss the ruby, Anju realizes this meeting is a serious and stressful one.

Large Ruby in a Worn-Looking Jewelry Box

When Sudha sees this ruby for the first time, she realizes that the story about her father was really true. The mothers later have the ruby made into a pendant for Dayita, Sudha's daughter.

A Small, Fat Packet Without a Sender's Name

Singhji gives this packet to Sudha with a stack of wedding mail. The packet contains a bundle of money and a note from Sudha's father, who was believed dead.

Sudha's Wedding Garland

Ironically, Sudha's wedding garland is ruined when Pishi accidentally jabs a needle into her palm when Sudha shows her the note from her father as well as the money he sent.

Silk Sheet

This silk sheet is held up between the bride and groom until the appropriate time in the ceremony when the bride and groom were allowed to see each other. When the sheet is dropped between Anju and Sunil, Anju is looking at Sudha, not her husband.



Handkerchief

Anju watches as Sudha drops her handkerchief at the wedding and Sunil picks it up. Anju later finds this handkerchief stowed away among some of her husband's things in their apartment in America.

Bowl of Tamarind Chutney

Sunil's mother makes this chutney for him as a special gift before he goes to America. Sunil's father becomes irate when he learns she had made the dish. He throws the food at her. The ensuing argument causes Anju to decide to stay with her family until she can go to America with Sunil.

Ring of Keys

Shortly after Sudha joins her husband's family, her mother-in-law gives her this ring of keys which symbolizes Sudha's role in the Sanyal household. Note that in Sudha's childhood drawing of herself and her family, she pictures herself as carrying a ring of keys.

Shrine of Goddess Shasti

It is to this shrine that Sudha's mother-in-law takes her in an attempt to cure Sudha of her inability to conceive. While in the shrine, Sudha receives a message through another worshiper telling her she must make a choice between the two men in her life.

Dey's Medical Stores in Calcutta

Dey's is the store from where Sudha's mother-in-law buys prenatal vitamins for Sudha.

California Redwoods

Anju compares herself to one of these trees when she learns of Sunil's crush on Sudha during their wedding. However, the tree she refers to has been struck by lightning and only appears to be solid. In reality, it is hollow on the inside and is easily pushed over.

Kalighat Temple

It is at this temple that Ashok and Sudha meet to plan their elopement. It is also to this temple that Sudha requests that the money her father gave her be taken and given to beggars.

Small Oval Wooden Container - Kashmiri box

It is in this box, which was given to Anju and Sunil as a wedding gift, that Anju finds Sudha's wedding handkerchief.



Themes

Identity

The theme of identity is a very important theme in this novel. Many of the issues faced in the novel deal with one's search for, or discovery of, their identity. For instance, Sudha, one of the main characters of the novel, does not discover her true identity until the end of the novel. For most of her life Sudha has believed that her father was a liar and murderer. She has also believed that he was responsible for the death of Anju's father. In addition, she believed she was of no true relation to Anju. When Sudha receives and reads a letter from Singhji, she learns that her father did not intentionally lie to the Chatterjees, nor did he murder Bijoy. In fact, he has been living near Sudha and trying to advise Sudha within the limits of his own hidden identity.

While married, Sudha tried to mold herself to the role of a docile and obedient wife and daughter-in-law. She found herself unable to continue in this role when her mother-in-law required she abort her baby because it was not a girl. At the point that Sudha divorces her husband there is a scene where she is in the shower, washing the marriage sindur from her forehead. It is indicated this washing is symbolic of Sudha's desire to wash away any preconceived notions for what kind of life she should live. It is at this point that Sudha is finally free to create her own identity.

Another character struggling with his identity is Singhji. Although it is unknown to the Chatterjee women, Singhji is actually Gopal in disguise. He has decided that since his family believes he is dead, it is better for him to not let them know he is still living. Instead, he applies for a job as the family chauffeur. Since his face was burned during his fight with Haldar, and he now wears a beard and turban, his family does not recognize him. Even though he is part of his family's life in a way, Singhji finds it difficult to live on the outskirts of their lives, able to contribute only in small ways. Singhji tells Sudha in his letter to her that he has found it very painful to keep his identity hidden from his family, and especially from Sudha. There have been many times he has wanted to tell Sudha that she is not the daughter of a murderer and that she is indeed related to Anju. His desire to keep his identity a secret, however has kept him from being able to do so.

Identity is also a struggle for Gouri, Nalini and Pishi. Although they would like to live their lives in the old ways, life has moved on without them. They struggle to keep up appearances as an illustrious and influential Indian family even though they are no longer able to afford this lifestyle. Once they finally sell their family home and move into a new apartment, the Chatterjee women seem to finally be able to leave behind the traditional ways.



Break With Tradition

The idea of breaking with tradition is another idea that surfaces often in this novel. The Chatterjee house and its members are very rooted in tradition. After all, Bijoy has requested that his child be raised in the old tradition. Out of respect for her dead husband, Gouri does her best to see that this wish is fulfilled. The girls, Anju more than Sudha, wish their mothers would relax their traditional ways and let the girls have the same freedoms of other girls their age. Instead, however, Anju and Sudha wear plain clothes, and are escorted from the home to their all-girls school by a chauffeur. They not allowed to go out on the streets alone. Although the novel is set in the 1980s the girls' husbands are chosen by the mothers with no input from the girls. This practice of arranged marriage is another tradition from which Anju and Sudha strongly wish the mothers would depart.

The major break with tradition occurs when the mothers sell the Chatterjee mansion and move into an apartment. It is at this point that the mothers begin to allow themselves to do things and go places they never would have before thought proper for widows. Sudha believes this change may have come because the mothers no longer have anything to dread from breaking with tradition. Since one of their daughters is unmarried and pregnant, and the other has miscarried her first son, the worst imaginable has happened to the family. Anju breaks with the Indian tradition when she moves away to America. Although her mothers would not have approved, Anju cuts her hair short, wears jeans and even curses from time to time. It is assumed, however, that Anju's married life will be an unconventional one when Sunil breaks with tradition and meets Anju before the formal bride viewing. Sudha's break with tradition comes when she leaves her husband in order to save her baby. At this point, it is up to Sudha to make her own rules. Single mothers were almost unheard of in India. Since Sudha now falls into this small group, she is free to create her own role for herself. Sudha's move to America gives her even more freedom and better ability to create her own identity.

Coming of Age

All in all *Sister of My Heart* is really a coming of age story for Anju and Sudha. The novel outlines both of the girls' transformations from young girls to mature women. This coming of age means that each of the girls must learn separate lessons as they mature physically and emotionally. Although some of these lessons threaten to tear they girls' relationship with each other apart, in the end they wind up with a stronger relationship than ever.

One of the first lessons that Sudha learns, and the one that ages her most, is the painful lesson that adults lie and deceive. When Pishi tells Sudha her interpretation of Gopal's story, everything that Sudha believed about herself and her parents crumbles. Sudha believes she is not related to Anju, who has been like a sister to her, at all. Sudha, however, keeps this painful information to herself for years, saving Anju from the painful knowledge of what might have happened between their fathers. Sudha sacrifices much



for Anju, including Ashok, her true love. One person Sudha refuses to sacrifice is her daughter. Sudha leaves her unsupportive husband and abusive mother-in-law when they try to make her abort her baby because it is not a boy.

Anju goes through life being impulsive and headstrong. Although she believes she knows everything about Sudha, Anju has no idea what a huge burden Sudha is carrying. Anju's first lesson comes on the night of her school graduation when Gouri suffers her heart attack. It is on this night that Anju is told she must give up her plans to go to college and must instead get married. Although this news devastates Anju, she appears to forget her pain when she meets Sunil and falls in love with him.

Anju's dreams of a magical and romantic wedding and marriage are destroyed during her wedding ceremony. It is during this ceremony that Anju begins to realize that her husband has some sort of feelings for Sudha. Throughout her marriage, this knowledge that Sunil is somehow in love with Sudha haunts Anju. She notices Sunil's small changes in body language and posture whenever she mentions Sudha. Despite the feeling that the decision to bring Sudha to America may cause problems in her marriage, Anju decides to stay with her plans to bring her cousin to America. Anju has learned how important her cousin's love is to her.



Style

Point of View

This novel is told from the first person point of view. This point of view is unique in that this first person point of view is passed back and forth between Sudha and Anju, two of the main characters of the novel. The story is also told in the present tense. For this reason, the story unfolds for the characters in the same way that it unfolds for the reader. Although there is foreshadowing included in the novel, many of the big discoveries, especially the twist at the end of the novel, are as much a surprise for the reader as they are for the characters.

Much of this story is told through each girl's thoughts and reactions to what is going around them. For this reason, the first person point of view is the ideal point of view. This way the reader knows firsthand what each girl is thinking. Divakaruni's technique of allowing the girls to take turns telling their story allows each girl to give her own unique viewpoint of what is happening. This technique allows the reader to get to know each girl in a personal, one-on-one manner.

Setting

The majority of this novel is set in the physical location of Calcutta, India. Action takes place in the ancient Chatterjee mansion, Sudha and Anju's school, a movie theater, and the streets of Calcutta. Once Anju is married, she moves with her husband to America where they live in an apartment in California. Action also takes place in the Sanyal home. It is in this home in the town of Bardhaman that Sudha lives with her husband and mother-in-law after she is married to Ramesh. Some sections of the book are also set in the Majumdar home, the place where Anju lives with her in-laws until Sunil returns to America.

Perhaps as important as the physical location of the story is the time period in which it is set. Although the lifestyle of the Chatterjee family seems very outdated, the story is actually set in the 1980s. It is important to realize what time period the book is set in so that the reader can fully comprehend how behind the time the Indians actually are. Although in America, women are very free to do what they want, it is not this way in India. Women are expected to wives and mothers. Laws very strictly define the roles of widows as well as female divorcees. When it is time for girls to marry, a husband is chosen by the girl's mother. Although the prospective husband is given the choice to accept or decline the woman as a wife, the woman is not given this opportunity. She has little or no choice in who she marries unless she elopes. Male heirs are also very important in Indian families. Aborting babies just because they are girls is a common practice.



Language and Meaning

The language of this story is very relaxed. In the beginning it is written in the language one would expect from two young girls. As the girls mature and learn from their life experiences, their writing and tone changes to match this maturation. Each girl uses her own personal language and style to portray to the reader her own view of what is happening to her and around her.

There are many instances of foreshadowing in this novel; however, these instances of foreshadowing appear very unimportant at the time they are mentioned. For instance, Sudha mentions that when she imagines Singhji's child, it has her face. Although the reader may overlook this vision as one that any child might have, it is actually ironic that she is indeed Singhji's daughter. Also, Sudha has a dream where Anju's baby, Prem, appears as a blue baby Krishna. It is easy to interpret this dream as indicating that even Anju's baby has a desire for Sudha to come to America. This dream, however, takes on an ironically morbid meaning when Sunil describes Prem as looking like a blue baby Krishna when he is taken from his mother's womb.

Structure

This novel is split into two main parts. Each of these two main sections are of about equal lengths. The first part, entitled *The Princess in the Palace of Snakes* deals with Anju and Sudha's lives before and up to the time of their weddings. This section is titled after a fairy tale the two cousins would act out as children. Anju believes that in her relationship with Ashok, Sudha has begun to act out the actions of this fairy tale in real life. The second part, entitled *The Queen of Swords*, deals with Anju and Sudha's lives after their weddings. This section takes its title from the story that Sudha tells Anju after Anju miscarries her baby.

Inside each of these two main parts of the novel, the material is broken down into several chapters. It is with these chapter divisions that the most interesting aspect of this novel is seen. Information in these chapters alternates between Anju and Sudha's viewpoints. One chapter is told by Sudha while the next is told by Anju. One girl picks up the story where the other leaves off. Together the girls tell a seamless story.

This story is very complex. It involves at least one main plot and several subplots. Some of these subplots are more prominent than others. The main plot of the book traces the lives of two Indian girls through their childhood through the early years of their marriages. One of the major subplots, which could almost be considered the main plot of the story, is the story of Sudha's father. It is not until the end of the novel, however, with the revelation that Sudha's father is alive and has been part of her life as the servant Singhji that the reader realizes how central Sudha's father has been to the story. Subplots include Anju's wedding, her miscarriage, Sudha's wedding and divorce, and her fight to keep her child. Another important subplot is Sudha's relationship with Ashok.



Quotes

"They say in the old tales that the first night after a child is born, the Bidhata Purush comes down to earth himself to decide what its fortune is to be." Book 1, Chapter 1, pg. 3

"I could never hate Sudha. Because she is my other half. The sister of my heart." Book 1, Chapter 2, pg. 11

"And the thought shapes itself into a wail that spirals tornado-like through the old mansion of the Chatterjees, shaking every stone: I, Sudha, am nothing to Anju. Not twin, not sister, not cousin. Not anyone except the daughter of the man who with his foolish dreams led her father to his death." Book 1, Chapter 3, pg. 39

"When she motions to me to come sit by her and lays her hand lightly on my head, I feel a tumult of love in my heart. I understand why Sudha sacrificed so much to make her mother happy. I'm willing to do the same, I tell myself, but luckily my mother won't ask it of me." Book 1, Chapter 10, pg. 85

"In my bones I know them - the shades of my parents, impressions left in this temple air from their marriage day twenty-one years ago. Did they appear to remind me of their story? Or to warn me about mine?" Book 1, Chapter 15, pg. 110

"Opposing desires battle in my heart for Anju and me, pulling me this way and that. But finally I ask for a wonderful marriage for my cousin, a husband whom she will love with all her being. I know I will have to pay for my wish, for that is the way of this world on the wrong side of the sky, where there is never enough happiness for all of us." Book 1, Chapter 15, pg. 115

"You who are going to have a difficult life already, I fear, with your father-in-law whose bloodhound nose can sniff out every indiscretion, and your husband who thinks I am the most beautiful woman he's ever seen." Book 1, Chapter 16, pg. 128

"I am righting my father's wrongs." Book 1, Chapter 16, pg. 129

"Because once upon a time a man raised an oar and brought it down on another's head. His rage is a river that runs through my body, and its waters are my blood. That is the blessing-gift my father has sent me." Book 1, Chapter 19, pg. 147

"Once I would have known, even without Sudha telling me, what the problem was. But recently it's like a fog has drifted between our hearts." Book 1, Chapter 19, pg. 149

"Yes, for the first time in my life I'm consumed by jealousy of Sudha, sister of my heart." Book 1, Chapter 20, pg. 152



"But I walk out of the room, lurching under the weight of the lesson I've learned less than one hour into wifehood: how quickly the sweetest love turns rancid when it isn't returned. When the one you love loves someone else." Book 1, Chapter 20, pg. 153

"Your curse has come true already, for isn't the hatred in the eyes of my dearest cousin for whom I gave you up the worst of betrayals?" Book 2, Chapter 21, pg. 158

"I will never love Ramesh - only toward one man can I feel that wrenching whirlwind emotion, soaring to heaven, flung down to hell, both at once. But our little conspiracy makes me feel we can be friends." Book 2, Chapter 21, pg. 160

"That was why she gave me those keys, symbol of shared power - not so much because she liked me - she hardly knew me, after all - but because I belonged to the family now." Book 2, Chapter 23, pg. 169

"Marriage has complicated our lives, divided our loyalties, set us on our different wifely orbits." Book 2, Chapter 24, pg. 176

"It doesn't matter that she didn't tell you what's going on. She's still the sister of your heart, the one you called out into the world, the one you're responsible for." Book 2, Chapter 26, pg. 194

"I nod meek agreement. I am learning my mother-in-law's lessons well, how to hide the plans whirring busily inside my head behind a face as empty and sweet as a mask made of sugar." Book 2, Chapter 27, pg. 199

"How quick and eager I was to come so far from my family, not knowing how much I was giving up, and how little I would gain." Book 2, Chapter 28, pg. 206

"Is this how it's always going to be in my life, love and caring denied to me where I expect them, and given when I am not looking?" Book 2, Chapter 29, pg. 210

"But she is only repeating a truth I had accepted long ago into the core of my pessimistic heart, a truth that passion made me briefly forget: a death for a life, one love sacrificed for another. That is the nature of this world." Book 2, Chapter 29, pg. 217

"Two babies, coming to us together! It's a wonderful world, more wonderful that I deserve, and I vow to be a good person for the rest of my life - gentler and calmer and less selfish, like my cousin - so I can measure up to it." Book 2, Chapter 31, pg. 223

"All of this love and caring, I want to shout, is it for Sudha, or for the new heir of the Sanyals?" Book 2, Chapter 32, pg. 226

"Maybe I am being unnecessarily hard on her. Maybe this is her real nature, and that other, during those doctor visits and that afternoon at the shrine, was the cruelty that sometimes rises in us when we are desperate." Book 2, Chapter 32, pg. 227



"Gouri Ma, who loves me like a daughter, who would never want harm of any kind to come upon me. There's only one explanation for her silence: she knew - as Pishi had suspected she did - that my father was an impostor, unrelated to her husband." Book 2, Chapter 31, pg. 229

"I didn't know how starved I had been for food served with love, food I could eat without choking on the strings attached to it." Book 2, Chapter 33, pg. 245

"I spit on this society which says it's fine to kill a baby girl in her mother's womb, but wrong for the mother to run away to save her child." Book 2, Chapter 33, pg. 247

"In the shower I scrub until the last vestige of red is washed down the drain. I am washing away unhappiness, I tell myself. I am washing away the stamp of duty. I am washing away the death sentence that was passed on my daughter. I am washing away everything the Bidhata Purush wrote, for I've had enough of living a life decreed by someone else." Book 2, Chapter 33, pg. 249

"How little I know of this man. How little we ever know of the men we rush into loving." Book 2, Chapter 34, pg. 252

"Today is the day we move to our flat. It's also the day the construction company starts tearing down the house - I can't call it our house anymore - so they can begin building the twenty-four-story apartment complex that will take its place." Book 2, Chapter 35, pg. 255

"We were starting anew, my daughter and I, and because there were no roles charted out for us by society, we could become anything we wanted." Book 2, Chapter 35, pg. 257

"Is it because, being older, we know how grudgingly the world hands out its gifts, how eager it is to snatch them back." Book 2, Chapter 35, pg. 262

"Involuntarily, I shiver. Is this the Bidhata Purush's chill, vindictive breath warning me not to stitch into my life patterns he has not placed there?" Book 2, Chapter 37, pg. 273

"Along with the old house, the mothers seem to have shrugged off a great burden of tradition." Book 2, Chapter 37, pg.

"The ancestral house of the Chatterjees is indeed reduced to rubble, and of its two daughters, one is childless and the other without a husband." Book 2, Chapter 40, pg. 304

"There is something marvelous about the way a jewel which had driven men to acts of folly and desperation lies forgotten on my daughter's innocent chest." Book 2, Chapter 40, pg. 304



"So, Sudha, here is my gift, the only one I have left to give: You are not the daughter of a murderer - not in the sense you've feared all these years." Book 2, Chapter 40, pg. 313

"Nor have I had the courage to ask my husband whether that handkerchief, folded so carefully into the Kashmiri box, is the forgotten remnant of an old crush, or proof of a continuing obsession." Book 2, Chapter 41, pg. 318

"Two women who have traveled the vale of sorrow, and the baby who will save them, who has saved them already." Book 2, Chapter 42, pg. 322



Topics for Discussion

If you were Pishi would you have told Sudha the "truth" about her family? Why or why not? Consider that the tale that Pishi told turned out to be incomplete with misleading information. How might Sudha's life have been different if she had never heard this tale from Pishi?

Do you find it concerning that none of the people who claimed to love Gopal so much ever recognized him when he returned to them as Singhji? Even though his face was disfigured, his voice, body shape and way of moving should have remained the same. Why or why do you not believe he was not recognized?

Does it surprise you that Gopal/Singhji encourages Sudha to elope with Ashok? Why or why not?

Sudha does not tell Anju the truth about her father; that she believes he was not actually related to the Chatterjees at all. Does she do this to protect herself or to protect Anju? Explain your answer.

Consider Anju's statement in Chapter 38 that she was responsible for her baby's death. Do you believe this was so? Why or why not?

Compare and contrast Anju's married life in America with Sudha's married life in India.

Discuss any foreshadowing that you may have picked up on indicating that Singhji is Sudha's father.

Research the current Indian viewpoint of women. Have conditions in India become any more favorable toward women since the time period in which this book was written? Why or why not?