

HAUNTING BOMBAY

Reading Group Guide

1. The novel begins with the midwife telling the girl, “What you desire will become your truth.” Who is the girl and what is her desire? Is she able to fulfill it? Lovely’s desire is “to be free.” What does this mean to her, and does she find it?
2. What is Pinky’s position in the Mittal household? How do her interactions with the supernatural transform her place within the bungalow?
3. What compels Pinky to reach out to the ghost? What finally connects them across the divide of death? On page 116, Pinky asks Nimish, “How do you talk to someone if you are afraid?” And he answers, “A story, you begin with a story.” What are some examples in the novel of how stories are used to forge connections?
4. How do Pinky and the ghost eventually betray each other? Why does Pinky at first refuse to hear the truth about the drowning, and what makes her finally understand that she must hear it?
5. What happens when the silenced members of the Mittal household – the ghost, Avni, and Gulu – begin to speak the truth about the drowning? And why is this so terrifying? How do their ‘voices’ reimagine the story that had been told of the baby’s death?
6. What are the roles of various forms of water in the novel and their relation to life, death, and power?
7. How does the midwife’s prophesy that young Avni draws “dark powers from impure blood, blood of any kind from that region – birth blood, menstrual blood, virgin blood” play out with her possession of Lovely and Pinky?
8. Each person in the Mittal household, including the servants, has a secret. How do these secrets affect their view of the baby’s death and their feelings toward Avni? Which secrets are eventually revealed?
9. Savita is very superstitious while Maji is extremely religious. How do these views coexist and conflict within the bungalow? What roles do superstition, religion, and spirituality play in the novel?
10. How did the baby die? Was it an act of love, or one of shame?