

The Golden Son

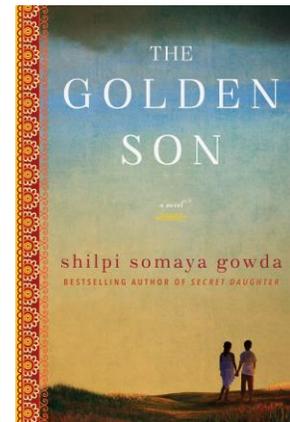
William Morrow

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Introduction

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



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

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

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

Questions for Discussion

1. *THE GOLDEN SON* deals with a myriad of issues, such as family, responsibility and acceptance. What do you think is the overall theme of this novel? What is the significance of the title?
2. Why didn't one of Anil's brothers take over as village arbiter when their father died?

3. After a very difficult first year of residency, Anil starts to make a connection with what he's learning and the patients he's treating: "Anil had not looked closely into his patients' eyes before, but now he found it impossible to look away...he saw bewilderment...and felt their silent trust like two ominous weights on his shoulders. Above all, he saw fear distilled to its purest form....he could never forget his patients were the fortunate ones --- in a world-class hospital filled with doctors and equipment, not an isolated village hundreds of kilometers away from the nearest medical facility....This is why he'd come to America." How does this change Anil as a doctor?
4. Leena feels responsible for the strife she causes her family after fleeing her abusive marriage. How would you have behaved if you were the parent in that situation? How would your own parents have dealt with it? Can you go against your own culture for the sake of your children?
5. Were you surprised by people's reactions to Leena after she flees Girish? What does this say about the place women hold in her society? Were you shocked when young Ritu revealed the truth about Girish's first wife?
6. Leena finds a new vocation in her pottery. How does this endeavor bring her back to life, so to speak? How is the clay a metaphor for life?
7. What do you think was the turning point for Anil, when he finally stopped resisting his role within his family?
8. Do you think Anil's decision to give the long-time farmhand a parcel of land was a wise one? Why or why not? What about his brother's reaction?
9. Anil realizes that "Not only was it impossible to truly belong in America, but he didn't fit in here (India) anymore either. He was a dweller of two lands, accepted by none." How did the attack on Baldev in Dallas contribute to Anil's feeling like a man without a country? What led to his alienation in India?
10. What did Anil learn from his relationship with his American girlfriend, Amber? What role did Dr. Sonia Mehta play in his life?
11. Anil observes fellow resident Trey Crandall taking unauthorized meds from the drug trolley at the hospital and struggles with how to handle this information. What would you have done in his situation? Why do you think he's reluctant to report Trey? Is it similar to the reason Baldev didn't press charges against his attackers?
12. How is Anil different from his two roommates, Baldev and Mahesh? What do they share in common?
13. Leena tells Anil: "People may never respect me. I don't expect it. I've survived this long. Damaged, but not broken." How have her "damage" and flaws given her strength?

14. What did you think of Anil's suggestion of an arbitration council made up of his brothers? How does this set-up utilize their skills?
15. Why do you think Leena turned down Anil's proposal of marriage and offer to bring her, her mother, Ritu and Dev to America?
16. Anil goes from being a foreigner in two lands to fully inhabiting his life in both India and America. What finally made this possible for him?