

The Secrets Between Us

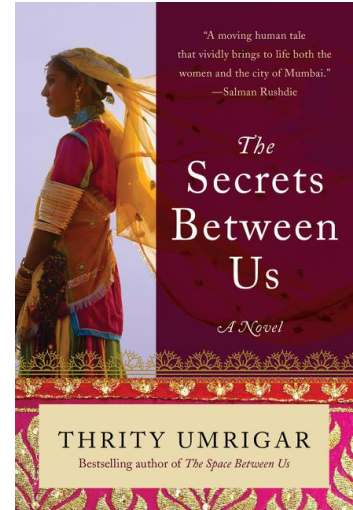
Harper Perennial

By Thrity Umrigar

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Introduction

Bhima, the unforgettable main character of Thrity Umrigar's beloved national bestseller *The Space Between Us*, returns in this triumphant sequel—a poignant and compelling novel in which the former servant struggles against the circumstances of class and misfortune to forge a new path for herself and her granddaughter in modern India.



"It isn't the words we speak that make us who we are. Or even the deeds we do. It is the secrets buried in our hearts."

Poor and illiterate, Bhima had faithfully worked for the Dubash family, an upper-middle-class Parsi household, for more than twenty years. Yet after courageously speaking the truth about a heinous crime perpetrated against her own family, the devoted servant was cruelly fired. The sting of that dismissal was made more painful coming from Sera Dubash, the temperamental employer who had long been Bhima's only confidante. A woman who has endured despair and loss with stoicism, Bhima must now find some other way to support herself and her granddaughter, Maya.

Bhima's fortunes take an unexpected turn when her path intersects with Parvati, a bitter, taciturn older woman. The two acquaintances soon form a tentative business partnership, selling fruits and vegetables at the local market. As they work together, these two women seemingly bound by fate grow closer, each confessing the truth about their lives and the wounds that haunt them. Discovering her first true friend, Bhima pieces together a new life, and together, the two women learn to stand on their own.

A dazzling story of gender, strength, friendship, and second chances, *The Secrets Between Us* is a powerful and perceptive novel that brilliantly evokes the complexities of life in modern India and the harsh realities faced by women born without privilege as they struggle to survive.

Questions for Discussion

1. Parvati is a gruff and bitter character. At what point in the novel did you feel sympathetic toward her?
2. Sera Dubash plays a minor role in *Secrets*, compared to the first book. Do you feel as if her appearance helps you understand her decision in the first novel a little better?
3. Do you feel as if Sunita and Chitra are important to this novel? Why? What role do they play?

4. The novel claims that it is the secrets that we harbor that define us. What does this mean? Do you agree?
5. Thrity Umrigar has said that she was interested in exploring the internal manifestations of poverty. What are some examples of this in the novel and how did they increase your understanding of poverty?
6. In any good friendship, each person learns something from the other. What do Bhima and Parvati teach one another?
7. Do you see a hopeful future for Maya? Will she make it out of the slums? What gives you hope and why?
8. What is your favorite line or quote in this novel? What did it mean to you?
9. *Secrets* is also a portrait of a city and country undergoing rapid changes. List some of those changes. Are they for the better or worse?
10. Parvati's story hinges on the fact that she is sold into prostitution by her father. Do you understand his motivations, or did you find yourself judging him? What else could he have done instead of this shocking act?
11. Many readers have expressed a desire for a companion book to *The Space Between Us* for years. Did *Secrets* meet your expectations for a companion or sequel? Why or why not?
12. *Secrets* is set during the years 2006–2007 in India. What differences in the characters and narratives might you expect to see if their stories were taking place today?
13. Parvati has a minor role in *Space* and a major role in *Secrets*. Are there any other minor characters from either book whose stories you would like to know? Who are they? What do you imagine their stories might be?
14. If you were to write an additional last chapter to this book, what would it say?
15. Should there be a third book? If so, where would you take Bhima's story?