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Questions for Discussion

1. The slum where the book takes place is named Heaven. What makes it a heaven for the girls who live there? How do the girls make Heaven into a safe harbor for themselves and their families?
2. The book is written in first-person plural. This means that the story is told by the collective voice of all the girls, not just one. Why do you think the author made this choice? Did the voice work for you? Why or why not?
3. The women in Heaven have many different kinds of marriages, some of which are happy and some of which are not. Some of the marriages ended before the book began, while others are not what they seem. Which marriage was the most interesting to you? Why?
4. Padma's father is one of the few men in Heaven widely considered to be a good husband and a good father. By the end of Padma's story, do you consider her father a good man? Why or why not?
5. The book features a number of trans and queer characters. What makes these characters different from queer characters you find in other books? How did their circumstances shape their expectations for themselves and their own happiness?
6. Deepa is the first and last character we meet. How do you think her story frames the book? How does her disability affect her role in Heaven's history? How does it affect her relationship with the other characters?
7. What roles do caste, faith, and class play in the book? How does gender intersect with these identities to shape the characters' stories?
8. Selvi Aunty and Joy are Dalit, while Leela and her family are Brahmin. These women represent both ends of the caste spectrum. How does caste shape their identities? How does caste shape the way they see themselves, and the way others see them?
9. Rukshana and Fatima Aunty are Muslim women who are outspoken advocates for themselves and their communities. How does Islamophobia affect their lives? How does their Muslim identity give them strength?
10. The characters in Heaven grow and change alongside the city of Bangalore. How is Heaven's history tied to Bangalore's history? How are the two similar, and how are they different? How do the characters influence Bangalore, and how does Bangalore influence the characters?
11. In the final scene of the book, the characters speculate about what heaven is really like. What do you think heaven is like? How did this story shape your idea of heaven?