

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Cinnamon Gardens by Shyam Selvadurai

- Why does Annalukshmi refer to Philomena Barnett as "the devil incarnate?"
- One book review states that the author "examines the price individuals paid for their rebellion against the conventional life." Besides Annalukshmi, what other characters rebel against convention?
- How are courtship and marriage depicted in the novel?
- What characters or character do you find most sympathetic and why?
- What was W.C. Wijewardena's motivation in exposing Balendran's and Richard's relationship to Balendran's father?
- How is Sonia's life an example of what Annalukshmi is trying to avoid?
- At the beginning of the novel Annalukshmi indicated that a verse from the Tirukkural-"I see the sea of love, but not the raft on which to cross it"--could be applied to her own life, if "desire" was substituted for "love." "For she saw clearly "the sea of her desires, but the raft fate had given her was so burdened with the mores of the world that she felt it would sink even in the shallowest of waters." What does she mean when she refers to "the mores of the world?"
- Did you think that the passages from the Tirukkural at the beginning of each chapter contributed to your understanding of the novel? Did you have a favorite passage?
- Religious conflict plays a major part in the novel. What are some examples?
- In a conversation with Annalukshmi, Mr. Jayweera refers to the situation that caused him to lose his post and left his family starving. He then says that " people with big ideas never think about the cost to others." He is actually referring to his own role in encouraging workers to strike He later says that "it is something I am very ashamed of " while Annalukshmi sees his action as something to be admired. Within the novel are there other characters whose big ideas have cost others?
- On the surface Miss Lawton seems to be a woman of principle much admired by her students. Do you think she was an admirable character? Do you feel she has any power in the novel? What about the other female characters?
- The author has included many details about gardens, architecture, and women's dress during this period. In your opinion are any of these descriptions particularly memorable? If so, which ones?



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- Authors sometimes leave their characters one-dimensional but usually strive for well-rounded characters that grow. How do you view the characters in this novel?
- Did you find the end of the novel satisfying? One reviewer states that "Selvaduri finally makes Annalukshmi understand and accept the consequences of her defiance." Meanwhile, "Balendran finds the courage to emerge from his father's domineering shadow." Do you agree? Did your perceptions of these two characters change throughout the novel?
- The book has had mixed reviews. One of them calls it "an ambitious, often moving, but ultimately unsatisfying novel." What do you think?