

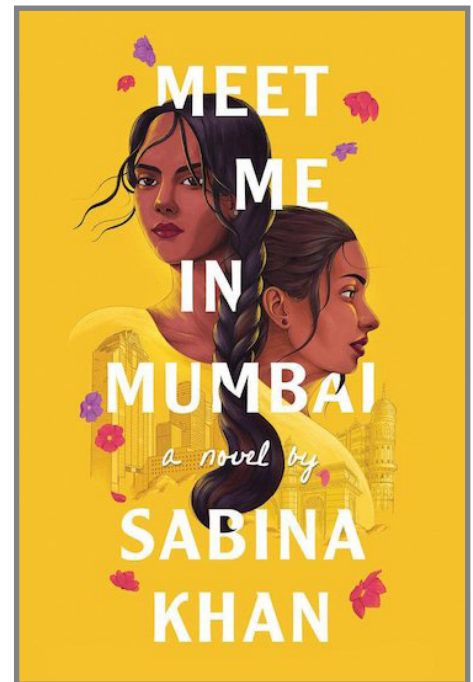
Meet Me in Mumbai

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
(Language, Sexual Content)



SYNOPSIS

Ayesha is a world away from home when she meets the boy of her dreams. Like her, Suresh is from India but going to high school in Illinois. Once they get together, they are inseparable . . . until a twist of fate takes Suresh back to India right when Ayesha discovers she's pregnant. Suddenly she feels she's on her own, navigating the biggest decision she'll ever make.

Seventeen years later, Ayesha's daughter Mira finds an old box with letters addressed to her from her birth mother. Although Mira loves the moms who adopted her, she's intrigued to discover something more about her history. In one letter, Ayesha writes that if Mira can forgive her for what she had to do, she should find a way to travel to India for her eighteenth birthday and meet her.

Mira knows she'll always regret it if she doesn't go. But is she actually ready for what she will learn?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sabina Khan writes about Muslim teens who straddle cultures. She was born in Germany, spent her teens in Bangladesh and lived in Macao, Illinois and Texas before settling in British Columbia with her husband and two daughters.

Sabina is an educational consultant helping young people with academic and personal challenges. She started writing because she couldn't find stories with characters who looked like her daughters or her students. She discovered that while Canada has a very diverse population, in schools, students are required to read the same books that have been in the curriculum for decades. Her mission became to write books, both fantasy and contemporary, where the young people around her could see themselves as heroes overcoming obstacles to find love and happiness.

Sabina is passionate about creating awareness around LGBTQIA+ issues and for representation of all peoples in literature. She has spoken at events across North America including TeenBookCon, the Montreal YA Festival and the ABA Winter Institute. Visit her at: www.sabina-khan.com.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What age group do you think this book is aimed at?
 - What genre do you predict this book might be?

- Who do you think might be the main character/s in this novel?
- Where do you think this story might be set?
- What do the different buildings look like on the cover? Why might there be two distinct styles of building shown?
- Where is Mumbai?
- Ayesha is a long way from home and from anything familiar, and finds this difficult at times. Think about what makes your home different from other places you have been/read about/seen on screen. If you had to describe the scents, sounds and tastes of your home how would you do it?
- American parties and how Ayesha and her friends party in Mumbai are very different. What, to you, does a party consist of? What would you expect an older gathering of teens to do at a party in your local area?
- Ayesha loves watching Bollywood movies. Watch a Bollywood movie starring at least one of Ayesha's favourite actors. As a class, discuss the movie—how is it similar or different to the movies you like to watch?
- In Chapter Eight, Natasha and Ayesha discuss the difference between how much freedom and independence Natasha's parents are willing to give her, and how much Ayesha's parents think is appropriate for a young woman. In small groups, discuss the two different parenting perspectives, and where the line lies between being caring and being overprotective, as well as the line between trusted independence and neglect. In your discussions consider the role that cultural beliefs and expectations have to play in these parenting decisions, and how much Ayesha's and Natasha's parents' attitudes are affected by the cultures and societies they live in.
- Throughout the novel both Ayesha and Mira wear various traditional items of clothing. What are shalwar kameez, churidar kurta and jhumka? What are some of the other clothes and accessories mentioned throughout the course of the novel? Individually or in pairs, design an outfit that incorporates one or more pieces of the clothing or accessories mentioned in the novel. Draw and colour a detailed picture of your design, and write a paragraph discussing your colour, fabric and accessory choices, explaining what items of modern Western clothing (if any) you chose to incorporate in your design, and what items of Indian clothing you paired them with and why.
- What was your first reaction on reading Chapter Fourteen where Ayesha and Suresh, having just slept together for the first time, talk about their hopes and dreams for the future?
- How does the author create an ominous feeling to the relationship between Ayesha and Suresh while having Ayesha remain oblivious, fall increasingly in love, and become more intimate and entangled with Suresh? In small groups or as a class, discuss whether the conversations between Ayesha and Suresh in Chapter Fourteen, or Ayesha's internal musings, are an example of foreshadowing, and if so in what way, and why the author might have chosen to present their interactions like this.
- On p 95 Ayesha attempts to describe to Natasha her feelings around the morality of abortion for her, personally, in contrast to her beliefs about the rights of all women to have the freedom to make their own choices about abortion. As a class, or in small groups, discuss the importance of the overarching principles of freedom of choice and bodily autonomy including all individual choices surrounding the issue.
- How much has the adoption process changed since Ayesha's time, and what are the current attitudes towards adoption? What is the process like in Australia and New Zealand, and how does it differ from what Ayesha describes as happening in the USA two decades ago?
- Do you think Ayesha made the right decision? Why/why not?
- Why is access to safe, affordable, and confidential abortion important to society as a whole, not just to individuals? As a class, investigate and discuss the affects of access to safe, reliable, and affordable contraception and abortion on teenage pregnancy rates, on generational poverty, and on public health and welfare. Consider in your discussion what some of the long term societal impacts of lack of access are, and how they affect more than just the individuals concerned.
- One of the key factors that influences Ayesha's decision to have her baby adopted, and to keep the birth secret from her family, is the unseen pressure of familial expectation, and her desire to protect those she loves from societal disapproval and censure. To what extent are the decisions we make as young adults influenced by our concern for our families, and is this something that should be embraced, or something that should be struggled against? In small groups, or as a class, discuss the importance of being able to identify the rationale behind the often life-altering

decisions and choices made in young adulthood, and the necessity to balance our desire to please those we love, with our need to consider our own long term well-being.

- What is 'Desi'? Make and eat some of the Desi foods described in the novel.
- Is Ayesha's decision to have the baby, and then give it up for adoption selfish or selfless? As a class, debate this topic, considering whose best interests are being served by her coming to this decision. Support your arguments with at least three pieces of evidence from the text.
- How does having read Ayesha's story from her point of view first, affect how you interpret actions and events while reading Mira's story? Why do you think the author chose to give each of the main characters their own first-person story within the novel, and what would have been the effect on your understanding of events and empathy for different characters had only one of them told their personal story? In small groups discuss how your sympathy for and understanding of various different characters is impacted by the dual-protagonist narrative structure of the novel.
- How do Mira's relationships with her friends and peers change and shift as a result of her exploring her heritage?
- How do you think Mira's desire to meet her birthmother affects her adoptive parents? Provide evidence from the text to support your assertion.
- Do you think knowledge of one's birth family and the circumstances surrounding one's birth is important to people who have been adopted? Why/why not? What are some of the confounding factors that can complicate this sort of situation?
- Do you agree that privilege is often invisible to those who have it and the lack of it can be an insurmountable obstacle to those who don't? Re-read Chapter Twelve and consider Mira's new understanding of privilege on p 232 in light of the rest of the chapter. Use examples from her life to support your stated position on the importance of privilege, and the importance of lived experience to understanding it.
- If you visited Mumbai, what are some of the places you'd like to go and things you'd like to see? Research Mumbai as a tourist destination and create yourself an itinerary.
- Rewrite the meeting between Mira and Suresh from the point of view of Suresh. How much do you think he has thought about Ayesha and her situation over the intervening 18 years? What makes you think this?
- Listen to some of the songs mentioned in the story. What is your opinion of them? How similar/different are they to the music you usually listen to? In pairs or small groups, create a playlist of songs you enjoy that were popular the year Ayesha and Suresh met.