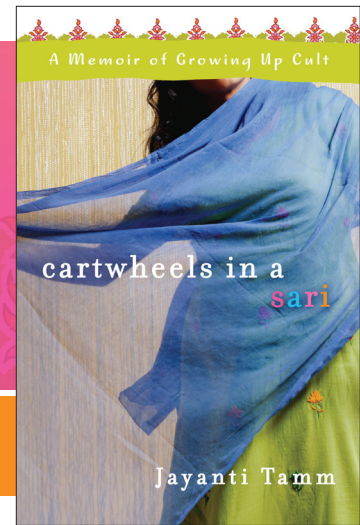


cartwheels in a sari

A Memoir of Growing Up Cult

by Jayanti Tamm

READER'S GUIDE



ABOUT THIS BOOK

“The story of Tamm’s birth—that she pressed her hands together in prayer at barely an hour old—was as festooned with mythology as the spiritual leader Sri Chinmoy, who deemed her his ‘Chosen One.’ Tamm recounts how the title meant little; as a member of the controversial religious group, she was subjected to constant manipulation... Tamm, who left the group at age 24 after having a psychological breakdown, writes with wit, but her hurt is obvious. Yet as she did after performing cartwheels for Chinmoy (who died in ‘07), the now happily married mother lands on her feet—and her effort is worthy of applause.”

—*People*, four-star review

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

To provide reading groups with informed and thought-provoking questions, some important aspects of the plot as well as the ending are revealed in these discussion questions. To avoid ruining any surprises, we suggest that you finish reading *CARTWHEELS IN A SARI* before reading the questions below.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the title of Jayanti’s memoir. Performing cartwheels while wearing a sari certainly implies a sense of impossibility and absurdity, but does it also speak to the larger chasm between the cultures and traditions of East and West?
2. How did Jayanti’s memoir alter your preconceived ideas about cults? What struck you about the disciples who chose to follow that lifestyle?
3. How would you characterize the dynamics within Jayanti’s family? Did you sense them becoming increasingly torn apart through the course of the book?
4. What did it take to fit in within the cult? How did the cult’s hierarchy affect the disciples’ behavior?
5. How did Jayanti’s experience of being the ‘chosen one’ in the cult compare to her experiences in the ‘outside’ world?
6. Over the course of the memoir, Jayanti’s own faith is irrevocably altered. Is there a specific scene where she has an early epiphany?



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7. In the first chapter, the guru imposes a rule that all members—even the married ones—had to be celibate. Toward the middle, when Jayanti's mother notifies the guru that she is pregnant, the guru coldly informs her to abort the baby. As a teenager and young adult, this mandate leads Jayanti to seek out clandestine relationships. Do you feel that controlling people's sexuality is inevitably unsustainable?
8. In the midst of the story is the relationship between Jayanti and Chahna. How would you describe their unlikely friendship? Do you view Chahna as having betrayed Jayanti?
9. After being in Europe and having tasted freedom, Jayanti returns to Queens. Were you surprised? Why do you think she makes this decision?
10. *CARTWHEELS IN A SARI* recounts an adult woman's memories of her coming-of-age. How did Jayanti's understanding of the guru and the cult change as she grew older? Are there some points in the book in which she reverted to the same level of faith and trust that she had as a child?
11. The book ends with the strange coincidence of the guru's death on the same morning as the birth of Jayanti's own daughter. Did you find that this offered an irrevocable sense of closure?
12. There are many people, including celebrities and heads of state, who view Sri Chinmoy as a holy man, a saint. The book, of course, portrays a more complicated reality. Do you feel that anytime a human being claims to be a direct representative of "God," there are always going to be true believers and skeptics?

Visit the author at JayantiTamm.com



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