



THE ENGLISH PROBLEM

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Do you think the novel's title is apt? How would you define "the English problem"?
2. Shiv's first court case as a barrister is against a fellow Indian man. He's chosen for a reason. How do you think the case affects him? What could he have done differently?
3. The book begins with Shiv's arrival in England in 1931 and then jumps to his departure from its shores ten years later. How does this structure serve the story? Is it helpful to have these two markers of time highlighted in the beginning?
4. What did you think about Mairi, Shiv's nurse on the voyage back to India? How are Shiv and his nurse both alike and different?
5. Discuss the racism toward Shiv in the novel. How is it overt? In what ways is it subtle? How does he respond to it?
6. What was the most powerful scene involving racism for you?
7. Between the hopes his father has for him, the plan Gandhi has for him, and the path Mr. Polak has laid out for him, how much of Shiv's life is really his own? How does he begin to claim it for himself?
8. Shiv's typesetter friend, Tibor Schmidt, says, "Freedom from fear is home." What does that mean to Shiv? How do those words resonate with you?
9. In what ways are Lucy and Shiv different? In what ways are they alike? What does being with Lucy do for Shiv? And what does being with Shiv do for Lucy?
10. Discuss Shiv's relationship with Julia. Is the life they have together fulfilling for Shiv? What obstacles must they overcome?
11. The book features many real-life people, including Gandhi and writer Virginia Woolf. What did you think of their portrayals? Were you surprised by anything you learned about them?
12. Why do you think Gandhi and the media make up the story about Shiv and his fasting? Why not reveal that he'd been shot in England?
13. Throughout the novel, Shiv is told to sit back, observe, and downplay his feelings ("don't show your light"). What do you think is the intention behind such "advice"? What harm does it actually cause?
14. What did you think of the ending? How do you think Shiv's life will look going forward?