

An aerial photograph of a luxurious resort or gated community. The scene features several large, multi-story houses with red-tiled roofs and light-colored walls. Each house has a private swimming pool, some with slides and lounge furniture. The property is surrounded by lush greenery, including palm trees and manicured lawns. The overall atmosphere is one of high-end living and relaxation.

# A GREAT COUNTRY

*A Novel*

SHILPI SOMAYA GOWDA



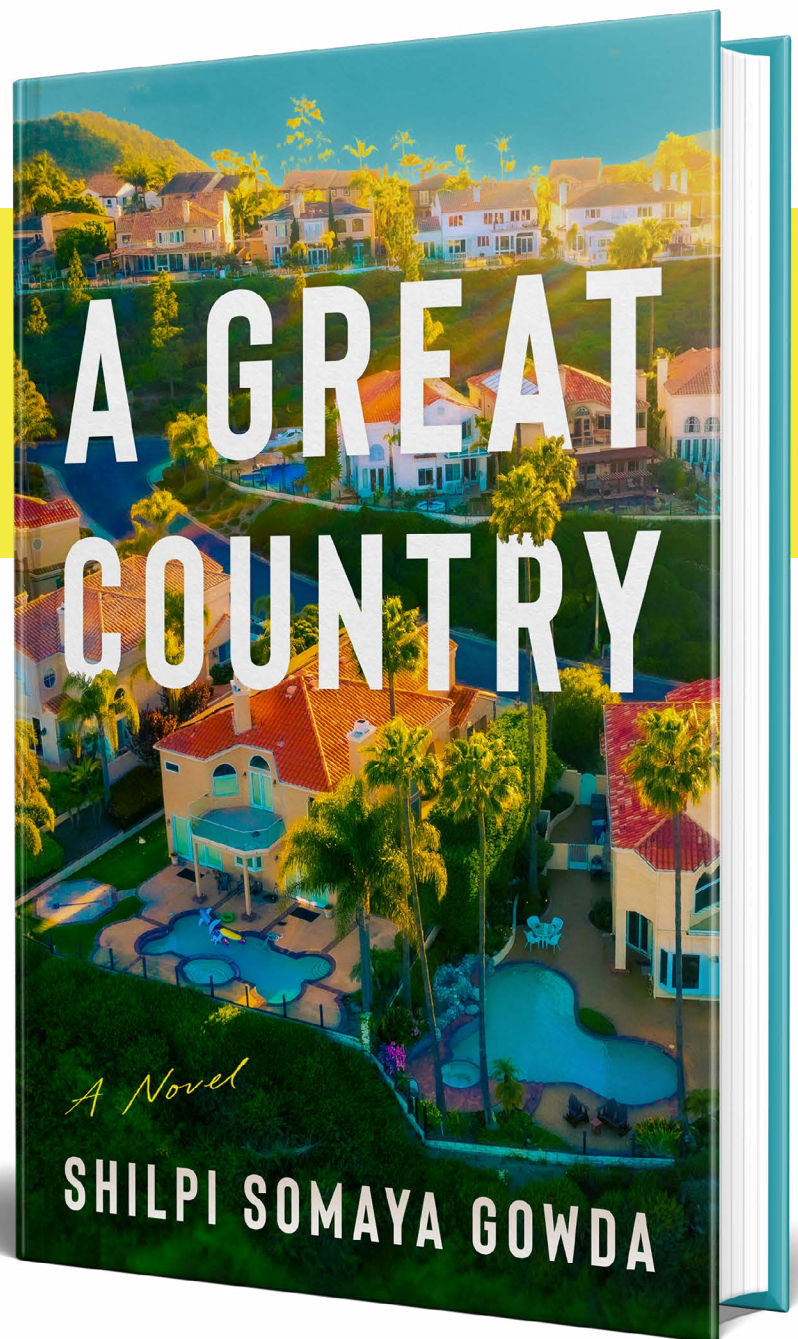
# ABOUT THE BOOK

From the *New York Times* bestselling author, a novel in the tradition of Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere*, exploring the ties and fractures of a close-knit Indian-American family in the aftermath of a violent encounter with the police.

**Pacific Hills, California:** Gated communities, ocean views, well-tended lawns, serene pools, and now the new home of the Shah family. For the Shah parents, who came to America twenty years earlier with little more than an education and their new marriage, this move represents the culmination of years of hard work and dreaming. For their children, born and raised in America, success is not so simple.

For the most part, the differences among the five members of the Shah family are minor irritants, arguments between parents and children, older and younger siblings. But one Saturday night, the twelve-year-old son is arrested. The fallout from that event will shake each family member's perception of themselves as individuals, as community members, as Americans, and will lead each to consider: How do we define success? At what cost comes ambition? And what is our role and responsibility in the cultural mosaic of modern America?

For readers of *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett and *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid, *A Great Country* explores themes of immigration, generational conflict, social class and privilege as it reconsiders the myth of the model minority and questions the price of the American dream.



**ON SALE MARCH 26, 2024**  
9780063324343 | \$30

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# MEET THE FAMILIES OF *A GREAT COUNTRY*



**THE SHAHS** are a middle-class Indian-American family in Orange County, Southern California. The parents, Priya and Ashok, immigrated in 2000 after marrying in India, and have recently achieved their ambition of moving into tony Pacific Hills with their children. Deepa (16) is rebellious and adamant about staying at her gritty urban high school, while Maya (14), an assimilating striver like her parents, is thrilled to start at her posh new high school. Ajay (12) is a gangly quiet boy absorbed in his own pursuits, and flies beneath the family's radar until his fateful actions set the story in motion.



**THE SHARMAS** are the Indian pioneers into Pacific Hills and encouraged the Shahs to stretch their way into the neighborhood. Vikram is a celebrated biotech entrepreneur who is ruthless in business and in life, and we learn how this behavior gets him into trouble. His wife, Veena, embodies the good taste afforded by the Sharmas' wealth, a woman who is always impeccably styled, just like her showcase home. Their two young children are usually tucked away, cared for by an undocumented nanny who commutes from Tijuana.



**THE DHILLONS** are the Shahs' closest friends in America. They met Archana (Archie), a psychologist, and Shrikesh (Ricky), an IT engineer, in grad student housing when they were all new immigrants. The two couples have been a lifeline for each other ever since, weathering career stalls, marital problems, and parenting challenges. The Dhillons, with their twin teen boys, stayed in the old neighborhood while the Shahs moved up, and their friendship is both a steady source of strength and a reminder of what they left behind.



**THE BAKERS** live on an estate at the crest of Pacific Hills and are known throughout the region for their eponymous development company, which has created intergenerational wealth and a life of comfort and mediocrity for their children. Spence is an unabashed capitalist; his wife, Miranda, privileged but well-meaning, tries to befriend Priya when their daughters, Ashley and Maya, play field hockey together. Their older son, Chase, toys with Maya's affections, leading to some inadvisable adolescent behavior.



**THE GARCIAS\*** are a typical family at Cesar Chavez High School, where Deepa ends up staying after the Shahs move neighborhoods. Her best friend Paco is an outwardly macho but tender-hearted boy, coming to terms with being gay in his strict Catholic family. After Paco's father, Francisco, dies unexpectedly, Paco becomes the man of the family, helping to care for his two younger sisters and perennially worrying over his mother Lucia's undocumented status.

\*This surname is not referenced in the novel; characters are only referenced by their first names.





# SHILPI SOMAYA GOWDA

Long a book club favorite,  
Gowda pushes new boundaries  
in *A Great Country*

**SHILPIGOWDA.COM**

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**Shilpi Somaya Gowda** is the award-winning, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Secret Daughter*, *The Golden Son*, *The Shape of Family*, and *A Great Country* (coming March 2024). She is a writer of two worlds. Born in Toronto to Indian immigrant parents, she has spent her life straddling the cultures of East and West. Her novels, which have been translated into over 30 languages and sold more than two million copies worldwide, are an insightful exploration of the complex relationships between family, culture, and identity.

Gowda was awarded a Morehead-Cain Scholarship to study at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she earned a bachelor's degree with highest honors and distinction in economics and international studies. She began her career as an investment banker in New York and later earned her MBA from Stanford University. Her non-fiction writing was published in *Harvard Business Review* and *Business and Society Review*.

After a decade in the business world, Gowda began writing fiction in 2006, inspired by her time volunteering at an Indian orphanage during college. Her first novel, *Secret Daughter* (2010), tells the story of two families, one Indian and one American, who are bound by an adopted daughter. The novel was a critical and commercial success, and it is being adapted into a feature film starring Priyanka Chopra and Sienna Miller.

Gowda's second novel, *The Golden Son* (2015), is a coming-of-age story about a young man who leaves his Indian village to pursue his dream of becoming a doctor in America. It examines the challenges of balancing tradition and ambition, and was awarded the French literary prize, Prix des Lycéens Folio.

Her latest novel, *The Shape of Family* (2020), is about a family that finds their way back together after a splintering tragedy. It explores the themes of love, loss, and redemption, and it was an international and American bestseller.

Gowda was awarded the San Diego Writer of the Year in 2023, and a Ragdale Foundation residency. Her novels have garnered literary recognition and bestseller status around the world, and honors that include Indie Next Great Read, Target Book Club Pick, Costco Buyer's Pick, Chapters Indigo Heather's Pick, and Amnesty International Book Club Pick.

She has served on the Advisory Board of the Children's Defense Fund, and is a Patron of Childhaven International, the organization for which she volunteered in India. She lives in Southern California with her husband, children, and their dog, Chai. When she's not writing or reading, she enjoys being active in nature, getting creative in the kitchen, and competitive family games.



# A CONVERSATION WITH SHILPI SOMAYA GOWDA ABOUT *A GREAT COUNTRY*

**Q: What made you want to write this book?  
How much of *A Great Country* is drawn from your own experiences?**

**A:** In the summer of 1989, I worked as an intern with the Minneapolis Police Department as part of my college scholarship. I developed appreciation for the dangers police officers face every day, and respect for those who put their lives on the line to improve their communities.

Thirty years later, when the Minneapolis Police Department was in the news, I watched in shock and sorrow, as did many others, as the life of George Floyd was extinguished by an officer of the law. I thought more about what I'd seen that summer as a nineteen-year-old, trying to reconcile the many brave and decent officers I'd met with what I now saw in a horrific 8:46 minute video clip. It was not, of course, the first nor the last time such a tragedy would occur. Incidents of police brutality have always been part of our society, but the rise of smartphones and social media have made it more visible, and made us all more aware. In the following months, the discussions I witnessed were fraught and often extreme, with people starkly defending one side or the other, and most eager for a decisive solution. It struck me that these conversations were lacking.

At the same time, in those early months of the pandemic, violence against Asian-Americans saw a disturbing rise in frequency and boldness. A new conversation was starting to emerge in South Asian American circles. The minority group often deemed to be "model" in the U.S. was being forced to reconsider its role and comfort level in this country.

**"SHOULD WE BE SEEKING COMMON CAUSE WITH OTHER COMMUNITIES OF COLOR? OR PROTECTING OURSELVES IN DANGEROUS TIMES? WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE AN AMERICAN IN THIS NEW CONTEXT, HYPHENATED OR OTHERWISE?"**

These were the ideas — the social, cultural, political forces in America today — I wanted to explore in this novel.

**Q: The novel opens with a pivotal event that involves police violence. How do you hope readers interpret that scene?**

I didn't want the story to be overwhelmed by an act of extreme violence, or preoccupied by the internal investigations that ensue after an officer-involved shooting. I wanted the incident to be more ambiguous, in terms of fault and cause. These subtler incidents occur far more often, and form much of the fabric between the police and the community. While they may not be caught on camera or capture public attention, collectively, they do great damage to our societal trust. It's harder to have a productive discussion at the extremes, so I wanted this story to stay in the area of complexity and nuance.

**Q: What do you think is the role of fiction when it comes to contentious social or political issues?**

**A:** Much of our perspective is naturally informed by our own life experience. But in the pages of a great story, the reader can also dare to stretch a little — to step into another person's shoes and mindset for a moment, to see how decisions that seem irrational to us might make perfect sense for someone else.

Contentious social or political issues have the tendency to drive people to extremes. It's much easier to dislike someone in the abstract. When that person is your colleague, your classmate, or your neighbor, it can become easier to see their goodness, to extend the benefit of the doubt, or even some grace.

Fiction is, after all, a product of imagination. I'd like to believe it can carry us to a place of empathy, understanding, and perhaps even forgiveness that's harder to reach in our daily lives. If we are to face some of our society's greatest challenges, we must be willing to explore these issues and perspectives in an earnest and open way, and try to find common ground.



**Q: Priya, the matriarch of the family, has a profound evolution throughout the course of the novel. How do you think about her character development?**

**A:** Priya is challenged to rethink her world view twice during this story. The first time occurs when she leaves India to immigrate to America. Although it's a move driven by much optimism, it's also destabilizing. A new country, a new marriage, and new parenthood force her to recast her life and future. After Priya adapts to life in the U.S., she finds some comfort until the incident with her son shatters her world view again. After a rapid crumbling of her beliefs, Priya reconsiders her assumptions around success, striving, and safety. She wonders where she went wrong as a parent. She finds empathy for others in new ways. Priya's evolution is in response to a sudden shock, but it's also a compression of how new understanding can come to all of us when we're willing to have an attitude of humility and openness.

**Q: You craft a central portrait of friendship between the Shah parents, Priya and Ashok, and their longtime friends Archie and Ricky. How does the bond between these two couples help shape the events in the novel?**

**A:** These two couples are vital to each other in a way that I hope will resonate with many readers. Strangers in a strange land together, they are adopted family without the baggage of family. The Dhillons are familiar enough to provide comfort, but coming from a different region of India, they also provide an expansion of perspective for the Shahs. These friends have known each other at their most hopeful and most vulnerable, and before the responsibilities of careers, homes, and children weigh on them. In the period of crisis in the story, the Dhillons

are both a steady source of strength to the Shahs, and a reminder of what they left behind. In my experience, these friendships are one of the greatest gifts of growing older: drawing on the wisdom, support, and love of those I've been lucky to find along the way, and I wanted to portray that in the novel.

**Q: What informed the perspectives of the Shah parents, who immigrated from India two decades ago, compared to their children who have been born and raised in America?**

**A:** Ashok is shaped by his upbringing in a lower-caste, working-class family in Mumbai. There's not much upward mobility for him in India, and his best path out is through education. He idealizes America as a pure meritocracy where he can prove himself, "a great country" as his father calls it. Growing up in a country riddled with inefficiency and corruption, he takes a dim view of political protests that never seem to improve conditions. Priya also invests great faith in playing by the rules and working hard. She believes their struggles to build a life in America will pay off in the lives of their children. Those children, however, are largely impervious to their parents' perspective. The Shah kids are influenced by their peers, media, and American culture. While some of their values align with their parents, on other issues, they seem oceans apart. I think every generation naturally has its conflicts, and cultural differences can complicate these. As the bridge generation (whose parents immigrated, and whose children are fully Westernized) to which I and many of my friends belong, it can sometimes feel like a yawning gap to cross. But it also presents an opportunity to take the best of two worlds and shape a unique set of family values.

**“ASHOK IDEALIZES AMERICA AS A PURE MERITOCRACY WHERE HE CAN PROVE HIMSELF, ‘A GREAT COUNTRY’ AS HIS FATHER CALLS IT.”**





LOS ANGELES



# FIND YOUR WAY AROUND *A GREAT COUNTRY*

DISNEYLAND

PACIFIC  
HILLS\*

BAKERS

SHAHS  
(NEW)

SHARMAS

COUNTY JAIL

CITY OF IRVINE

HINDU  
TEMPLE

DHILLONS

CESAR CHAVEZ  
HIGH SCHOOL \*

SHAHS  
(OLD)

JOHN WAYNE  
AIRPORT

PACIFIC  
OCEAN

CALIFORNIA  
(UNITED STATES)

SAN DIEGO

SAN YSIDRO CROSSING

TIJUANA

BAJA CALIFORNIA  
(MEXICO)

\*FICTIONAL



# NATIONAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

National Digital Advertising

Social Media Advertising

Paid Influencer Promotion

National Radio and Podcast Interviews

National Print and Online Media Coverage

Pre-Publication Author Events

Select Author Appearances

Bookstagram/BookTok Influencer Outreach,  
Including a Custom Mailing

Prepublication Online Buzz Campaign,  
Including Early Consumer Reads

Month-by-Month Teaser Campaign

Major Reading Group Outreach, Including Features  
on the Book Club Girl Platform and in the Book Club Girl Newsletter

Targeted Email Marketing Based on Consumer  
Browsing and Category Interests

Features on the Mariner Books Social Media Platform

Book Trailer Video

Reading Group Guide

Ebook Backlist Price Promotions,  
with Teaser Excerpts from *A Great Country*

Library Marketing

National Distribution of Reader's Edition

Egalley Available on Edelweiss and NetGalley



# PRAISE FOR SHILPI SOMAYA GOWDA

"Gowda can write up moments that break your heart."  
—*Globe and Mail*

"Shilpi Somaya Gowda is a compassionate and wise storyteller  
who keeps us riveted from beginning to end."  
—Jean Kwok, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Leftover Woman*

"A gifted storyteller."  
—*Vancouver Sun*

"The prose is so achingly touching, it draws the reader  
in with every description and emotion of the characters."  
—*Associated Press*

"Gowda renders even the worst decisions made by  
the Olanders with compassion and insight, so much  
so that rooting for them — despite and because of their fragility  
— becomes a pleasure... What a gift, to be that transported."  
—*San Francisco Chronicle*, on *The Shape of Family*

"In prose of quiet beauty, Shilpi Somaya Gowda drills down  
into the American Dream and comes up with pure gold."  
—Tatjana Soli, author of *The Lotus Eaters*, on *The Shape of Family*

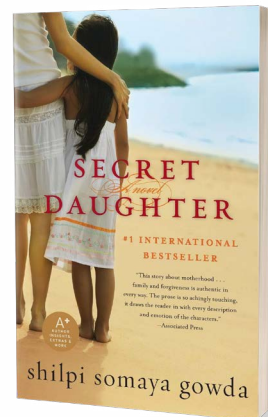
"This satisfying immersion in two complicated  
cultures offers no easy resolutions."  
—*Washington Post* on *The Golden Son*



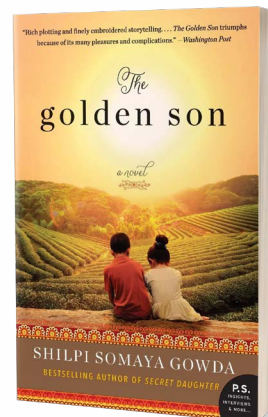


# ALSO BY SHILPI SOMAYA GOWDA

"A nuanced coming-of-age story that is faithful to the economic and emotional realities of two very different cultures."  
—*Washington Post*



"An illuminating portrait of a young Indian man who must learn to reconcile his career ambitions in America with the traditional values and expectations of his family in India. Compelling."  
—Vanessa Diffenbaugh,  
*New York Times*–bestselling author  
of *The Language of Flowers*



"A deeply involving story of a family falling apart, *The Shape of Family* rings so true."  
—Emma Donoghue, *New York Times*–  
bestselling author of *Room*

