# The Henna Artist by Alka Joshi

## Synopsis

Lakshimi, a young woman in 1950’s India, flees an abusive arranged marriage to go to Jaipur, a city full of promise and opportunity. Lakshimi makes her living as a henna artist and before long she becomes well known as the best at her craft in that city. Her customers are mostly upper class women and Lakshimi has to be careful to avoid those who are jealous of her reputation. This careful, but independent, life is interrupted by the appearance of her husband who has tracked her down bringing someone with him who will change her life forever.

## Discussion questions

1. Did you know much about Indian culture in the 1950’s prior to reading this book? What did you learn. What surprised you?
2. Do you think Lakshimi could have found another way to escape her abusive marriage? What do you think of the choices she made to change her circumstances?
3. What do you think Lakshimi has ultimately learned about herself and her place in the world by the end of the novel?
4. Lakshimi and Malik are very close, even though she is Hindu and he is Muslim. What does this say about the relationship between these two religions?
5. What does the novel show about the caste system in 1950’s India and people’s ability to navigate the rules and restrictions within it? Is this same caste system still in place today?
6. What does the novel tell you about the role of the henna artist in Indian culture in general and in wedding traditions in particular? What does the henna itself symbolize?
7. Discuss Lakshimi’s clients. How they differ, and how are they similar? Are they more or less independence than Lakshimi?

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