



## Discussion Questions

1. The lives of ordinary women—their working lives, domestic lives, and inner lives—are an important part of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. The author has noted elsewhere that she'd felt a shortage of such accounts in nonfiction about urban India. Do women like Zehrunisa and Asha have more freedom in an urban slum than they would have had in the villages where they were born? What is Meena, a Dalit, spared by living in the city? What freedoms do Meena, Asha, and Zehrunisa still lack, in your view?
2. Asha grew up in rural poverty, and the teenaged marriage arranged by her family was to a man who drank more than he worked. In Annawadi, she takes a series of calculated risks to give her daughter, Manju, a life far more hopeful than that of other young women such as Meena. What does Asha lose by her efforts to improve her daughter's life chances? What does she gain? Were Asha's choices understandable to you, in the end?
3. The author has said elsewhere that while the book brings to light serious injustices, she believes there is also hope on almost every single page: in the imaginations, intelligence, and courage of the people she writes about. What are the qualities of a child like Sunil that might flourish in a society that did a better job of recognizing his capacities?