

## **Discussion Questions (Aug. 10, 2017)**

### **Behind the Beautiful Forevers by Katherine Boo**

1. What was your notion of India, Indian culture, and Indian civilization before you read Katherine Boo's Behind the Beautiful Forevers?
2. What do you understand by globalization? What is the impact of globalization in middle America? Has globalization had a trickle-down effect in rural America? What is the impact of globalization in Mumbai, as described in Boo's book?
3. Do you sense a reversion to religious and cultural fundamentalism in Mumbai? Does the right-wing Shiv Sena attempt to create a "unified" identity in Mumbai? Does that cause an erosion of unique and distinctive cultural identities? Provide examples from the book.
4. Does the increasing communalization of Indian, as seen in the book, seriously question the politics of inclusion, multiculturalism, and secularism in India?
5. Is the polarizing rhetoric deployed by Shiv Sena bigwigs on the campaign trail in Maharashtra (Mumbai) and their representatives, like the slumlord Asha, harmful? What sort of impact does such politics have on a multireligious, multicultural, and multiethnic nation like India?
6. Does the short-sighted vision of these bigwigs render the nation all the more threatening because the aggressive and hostile politics that leads to its construction does not bind Muslim to Hindu or Bengali to Kashmiri but rather sunders Bengali from Bengali, Kashmiri from Kashmiri? Provide examples.
7. Hindus and Muslims in India share cultural, linguistic, and social commonalities. Does the politics of religious fanaticism polarize these ethnic groups into Hindus and Muslims who are required to disown their cultural, linguistic, and social unities? Substantiate.

8. Do you sense the stifling of minority voices that express divergent cultural and social opinions in the book? Which characters voices are most stifled in Boo's book?
9. Has the political rhetoric of the Shiv Sena established an inclusion/ exclusion dichotomy in which those who belong, the majority, can be winnowed away from those who are outsiders, the minority? Provide examples.
10. How does the lack of infrastructure in this Mumbai society, particularly in the slum, destroy capabilities, innate or otherwise?
11. In the picture of Mumbai delineated by Boo, does a government's economic and social policy benefit a particular class, caste, religious group? Is there a hierarchy in the slum?
12. Is corruption institutionalized in this society? From your point of view, how can accountability and transparency be encouraged in this society?
13. Have you seen any Hollywood movie about India? Which one(s)? How was India portrayed in that movie? Exotic? Backward? Poverty stricken? Corrupt? Land of kings and queens? Land of ornate palaces and jewels? Does Katherine Boo's Behind the Beautiful Forevers challenge the exoticization of India? How? Please explain.