

## Discussion Questions for *A Disappearance in Fiji* by Nilima Rao

1. The following quote reveals Akal's prejudices at the start of the novel: "He had not created the situation, and it had nothing to do with him, really. The Indians being brought over as *girmityas* were not the kind he would have ever dealt with in India. They were not his people, even if they were his countrymen" (p. 22). Discuss Akal's attitude about the indentured Indians and his lack of personal responsibility on the matter. Do you think he goes through a moral awakening in this novel? Why? If not, do you think he will in future books?
2. Akal considers himself to be different from the Indian indentured servants because of his Sikh background, his standing in the police force, and the colonialist society that dominates the setting of the novel. Which do you think plays the largest part in his internalized biases: class, faith, income, or something else?
3. Rao writes in the Author's Note that the article snippets interspersed between chapters are largely "actual articles from the *Fiji Times* from the period." How did these newspaper clippings illuminate different elements of life in Fiji for you?
4. What was your reaction to the big reveal of Akal's background in Hong Kong and the reason he was disgraced and sent to Fiji? Did this change your opinion of his character?
5. Why do you think Akal felt guilty when he and Robert learned what happened to Kunti, despite his lack of personal responsibility?
6. Were you surprised when the story's antagonists were revealed? Were they who you expected? Why or why not?
7. Toward the end of the book, Akal poses this question to himself: "Was it ethical to disobey orders which themselves seemed unethical?" (p. 245) Have you ever been in a similar moral situation, and if so, what did you do? If not, what would you do when faced with such a choice?
8. Prior to reading this novel, how much did you know about the history of Fiji, particularly the Indian indenture system? How did reading this novel change your perspective of the island?