

# GOOP BOOK CLUB

## A Reading Guide for *Latitudes of Longing* by Shubhangi Swarup

Sure, you might get made fun of if you underline your books. But we like being able to look back at the passages, scenes, words, quotes, and turns in a story that affected us. And we like being able to talk about them with you. Let us know what you think in our new [book club Facebook group](#).

Here, we picked some of our favorite moments from each section of *Latitudes of Longing*: Islands, Faultline, Valley, Snow Desert.

### Islands

1. Page 9: “When Girija Prasad first came here, he arrived believing in half-truths like ‘no man is an island.’ It has taken him a year to realize that no island is an island either. It is part of a greater geological pattern that connects all the lands and oceans of the world. Half a mile away from his home, he found a living plant that was previously only seen as a fossil in Madagascar and central Africa.” How do the different characters view the interconnectedness of human beings? And how were their philosophies shaped by what they saw in nature?
2. Page 28: “Born of generations interlocked in the missionary, it seems impossible to imagine sex among equals.” What did you make of the relationship between Chanda Devi and Girija Prasad? Were you surprised by how their love story unfolded?
3. Page 78: “Call it the influence of his wife or the presentiment of a father, but Girija Prasad begins to wonder if elements too have souls. Do they also worry about their legacies? Do their ghosts haunt the earth, like the sahibs of Ross Island? If a human being is not reducible to mere bones and blood, how can an ocean be reduced to its geographical space, the element of water or the form it takes?” Why do we tend to draw such a sharp distinction between sentient and nonsentient beings?
4. Page 84: “In the house on Mount Harriet, Mary becomes the gravitational center. She is the reason why things move and why things stay in place. Girija Prasad and Devi feel the deepest form of gratitude and love toward her—they take her for granted.” What did you

want for Mary? And thinking about how different characters expressed love throughout the book, who did you relate to most in terms of a love language?

5. Page 92: “Unlike her parents, Devi has fiercely curly hair. A reminder that she is more than their synthesis.” Why is this idea—that we are more than the sum of our parts—so central to the novel?
6. Page 107: “Life and death are a continuum. No one has studied this as closely as he has. ‘All of us are burdened by the twin destinies of saying goodbye to our loved ones and departing from our loved ones ourselves,’ he writes in a letter accompanying the gift. ‘Let this not obliterate the greater destiny we all share—the fleeting moments we have together.’” What was Girija Prasad trying to say to Devi about our purpose here?

### **Faultline**

7. Page 148: “And as for the son, when he gave up his life to atone for humanity’s sins, did he think even once about his mother? Was she not part of the same humanity his heart reached out to?” How did this book subvert traditional notions of motherhood?
8. Page 155: “For Plato, these are all excuses—communism, ethnicity, democracy, even resources. Excuses that change with the changing times. As a student, it was communism he’d fought for. As an ex-political prisoner, it is democracy.” What do you think most conflicts boil down to?
9. Page 158: “If the evolution of life was guided by survival, the movement of continents was guided by an imagination that no life form would be capable of comprehending.” Do you find comfort in the unknown?
10. Page 159: “Memory was life reflected in a shattered mirror.” Mary and Girija Prasad dealt with grief and memories in different ways. Did you relate to either of their experiences?

### **Valley**

11. Page 203 (Plato to Thapa): “That is art’s biggest tragedy. We can imagine god, god’s enemies, ideologies to fight over, but we can’t tell a single story of which we are not the center.” Why do we believe (or behave as if) human beings are the ultimate species? How did some of the characters in the book challenge this notion? And what do you think the author is saying about individualism?

12. Page 204 (Thapa to Plato): “I don’t know what makes an incident or an event a story. For that matter, what makes a story a story?” Who was your favorite storyteller in the book? Which myth carried the greatest meaning for you? Were there any you didn’t understand?
13. Page 219: “In heaven, we are all inconsequential. Could there exist a bigger blessing? The place cannot be experienced in a photograph or a film. It must be lived.” This was Thapa’s idea of heaven. What’s yours?

### **Snow Desert**

14. Page 234: “Perhaps that’s how time is for some of us. It doesn’t fly. It sits still.” When Thapa returns to the Mishmi settlement years later looking for the chief’s home, a woman there says this to him. How did the author play with time throughout the book and particularly in this last section?
15. Page 260 (from Apo’s story about the cheemo): “Some dreams are so beautiful and fragile, Ghazala, they are left unrealized.” What would make an unrealized dream beautiful?
16. Page 272: “Stories are the cure to various neuroses triggered by the extremes and hardship.” What stories have you found solace in?