



# The Unexpected Son

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## **The Unexpected Son** Shobhan Bantwal

"What happens when a woman who's realized her dreams wakes up to a shocking truth? Shobhan Bantwal's poignant new novel weaves a captivating tale of one woman's return to India: the place where she lost everything--and now has everything to gain. . .

It is a morning like any other in suburban New Jersey when Vinita Patil opens the battered envelope postmarked "Mumbai." But the letter inside turns her comfortable world upside down. It tells Vinita an impossible story: she has a grown son in India whose life may depend on her. . .

Once upon a time, a naive young college girl fell for a wealthy boy whose primary interests were cricket and womanizing. Vinita knew, even then, that a secret affair with a man whose language and values were different from her own was a mistake. He finished with her soon enough--leaving her to birth a baby that was stillborn. Or so Vinita was told. . .

Now, that child is a grown man in desperate need. To help her son, to know him, Vinita must revisit her darkest hours by returning to her battle-scarred homeland--and pray for the faith of the family she leaves behind. . .

## **The Unexpected Son Details**

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## From Reader Review The Unexpected Son for online ebook

### Nalini says

4.5/5

Okay while this was borderline cliché, it had a number of things I liked, that fell in two categories: for one, there was a sense of realness in the story line and two, the characters were relateable.

My only problem was the cliffhanger ending.. Does her son live or not?!

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### Kristin says

So this book was okay. I liked the basic story. I wouldn't recommend against reading the book. But I wouldn't get all excited recommending the book to anyone either. I am not a fan of the end of the book. It felt unfinished. It needed an epilogue, or all of the main characters coming together. Instead it felt a chapter short. And the quality of the writing, while not bad, wasn't exactly good either. Right now I'm reading a Thrity Umrigar (sp?) book and you can \*immediately\* feel the difference in the quality of the writing. Thrity's writing flows..... Bantwal's writing, instead, it has lots of details, but it feels like with a college paper, where you're supposed to add detail and atmosphere and feeling and so you add a lot of adjectives.... and so it's all there. But does it flow? Is it smooth? Not if you're not a talented writer. You know how some people are just BORN to be writers and others just want to write a book? I think this author wrote a decent book, but she wasn't BORN to be a writer. So if the storyline appeals to you, go ahead and read it, that's what I did. But moving on to a better writer, I am enjoying the next book that much more.

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### Suzanne (Chick with Books) Yester says

Shobhan is such a wonderful storyteller! She creates amazingly realistic characters, wonderful rich complicated stories that touch the reader in so many ways. The Unexpected Son does not disappoint on any of these levels! The story is rich with Indian culture, the voice of a young girls heart, and a mothers sense of duty...

Oh the foolishness of youth. But oh, what a wonderful story! Imagine holding onto a secret for 30 years only to find out you were not the only one holding onto a secret. When Vinita Patil receives a letter from Mumbai, little does she realize that her world will never be the same. Vinita is such a wonderful character! She is such a strong independent woman, torn between her modern sensibilities and the traditions of her upbringing. The story follows her from a serious young 19-year-old college girl, who has little time for boys. Her studies are important to her, in order to break free from the traditional views of a woman's place in her society and in order to honor her family with good grades. But then there's this boy... He's a bad boy... and he slowly seduces Vinita with his attentions and sweet talk and then... you guessed it... "something" happens. Vinita is pregnant, unwed, dumped and an emotional wreck. The men in her family decide what to do- which is to whisk her away to Bombay, where no one will know her, keeping the family honor, and where she is told by her family that her baby was born stillborn. If the story were only one of a son showing up on a birth mother's doorstep unexpected, it would be a good story. But, in the hands a Shobhan Bantwal you can expect so much more! And it all starts with that mysterious letter...

With the skills of Shobhan Bantwal's writing, we experience the culture of India through the eyes and ears of Vinita Patil. The traditional place of women, family honor, dating, marriage... The shame that Vinita carries through out her life is tempered by her happy marriage to her modern Indian husband (their courtship was a wonderful part of the story) and daughter, but the happiness she finds there will be shaken with the news of a son... The relationships between the members of Vinita's family are rich and complex, and as family secrets are revealed Vinita's strength of character shines through.

I really enjoyed this book. The characters came alive off the pages, the story captured my attention, and I loved the traditional Indian culture that served as the core of the story and as the basis for the relationships between the family members. There is a wealth of book to discuss here, and it would definitely make a perfect reading group selection. Readers who enjoy stories that deal with traditional cultural values will want to put this on their TBR list, but anyone who enjoys a great story, with a strong female lead character will want to too! I couldn't help myself and read it in one sitting!

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### **Marcy says**

I really enjoyed this story! Vinita is an Indian teenager who becomes involved with a high school "cassanova." When Vinita becomes pregnant, her parents and brother arrange for Vinita to give birth to her child far away from home. (An unattached Indian pregnant woman is not acceptable; In fact, an entire family will be shamed for life). When Vinita wakes up from her C-Section, she is told that her son died.

Vinita is lucky to marry an Indian divorced man who was living in the United States. Girish and Vinita have a loving relationship. They have a child together, who grows into a beautiful and extremely intelligent young woman.

One day, Vinita receives some mail from an anonymous sender that her son is alive and he has acute leukemia. Vinita's life is turned upside down when she leaves her husband and her daughter to go back to India with the intent of giving her son, now a brilliant chemistry professor, a bone marrow transplant which might save his life.

This novel not only depicts Vinita's family life story, but the "warring" between two ethnic groups in her home town in India. Vinita belongs to one group, the man who impregnates her belongs to the other group. Family tensions and group tensions continue to mount throughout the story. I read this in three days; I was aching to know how it would end.

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### **Mona says**

This is an easy read and is something of a page-turner if you're in the right frame of mind. (That is, too tired or sick to read a book that makes you think, but want something more than sudoku). I enjoyed it, especially the fact that it was set in a place with which I was somewhat unfamiliar - Belgaum (Palgaum), India. It's about a woman who, 30 years after giving birth to a still-born, illegitimate child, finds out that her child was/is actually alive. If you're thinking that this is a plot that is just right for really irritating, terrible writing, that's what I was thinking too but the author writes decently. It's not high literature but it's entirely readable.

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## Winnie L. says

### Novel review

This report I am writing is for Ms. Orona, my English IV teacher. The book I am currently reading is "The Unexpected Son" by Shobhan Bantwal. This book is 326 pages long and its publishers are the Kensington Publishing Corp. I decided to read this book because I have always liked to read stories that are from other countries because the authors of such books have a different perspective of things than authors of my home place due to the fact that they grew up in an entirely different culture than the one I'm used to.. I mostly just like reading books of cultures other than mine. I also decided to read this book because it had won the "National Indie Excellence Award" for best multicultural fiction.

The main character of this book is Vinita Shelke/Patil. Vinita is important in this book because the decision she makes not only affects her schooling, life, and future, but also threatens to destroy her family's reputation according to Indian customs.

Som kori, guy in college who Vinita gets involved with and dumps Vinita as soon he learns that she is pregnant. He suggests that Vinita should abort the baby. Vishal Shelke is Vinita's brother who acts upon her discretion and decides to give his sister's son up for adoption. He helps Vinita throughout her phase and supports her even when she finally puts herself to revisit her darkest times. Very protective of his sister. Sarla Shelke, Vinita's mother who supports her during the pregnancy. Also knew about Vishal's plan for the baby. Girish Patil, Vinita's husband, formerly divorced, very supportive of Vinita and their daughter. Girish distances himself from Vinita after learning that she hadn't trusted him with her teenage recklessness when she got involved with "the popular guy" at school. He feels disappointed by the whole situation since he was so honest to Vinita about himself. Arya Patil, Vinita and Girish's daughter. Arya does the opposite of what her father does, she categorizes her mother's indiscretions as mistakes made by a teen(vulnerable stage).

The Unexpected Son is based in Palgaum, India and some of it is based in New Jersey, U.S.A. This novel was written in the 20th century. Vinita's encounters with Som ("college boyfriend") mostly took place at the coffee shop. Other places that are significant in this novel would be the hospital because that's where all matters concerning Vinita's pregnancy were taken care of including the baby's adoption decision. Some parts of this book were scary due to the rivalry between marathi and kannada tribes, some people are intentionally beaten to death for merely being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But the novel in general has an emotional appeal to it, with the discovery of Vinita's pregnancy, her learning from her relatives that the baby died during birth and when she actually finds out that her son is in fact alive (and sick at the same time). Vinita goes back to India in hopes of being a possible marrow donor to Rohit, her alive son. The book ends with Vinita not being a possible donor and her brother, Vishal donates his marrow without telling anyone(except his wife) he was going to do so. Som is reported to have had an accident and died. Prior to his death, Barve had an accident whereby most of his supporters and followers assumed that it really wasn't an accident. Vinita ends up blaming herself for all of this chaos.

My final thoughts on "the unexpected son" are that it's an engaging book and at the same time very dramatic. I liked the book in that it clearly stated what the entire topic of the novel was to be, a mistake that cost many. I didn't really like the too much drama that the novel contained. The recurring theme of the novel is consistent throughout. I think there are just too many skips in paragraphs that shouldn't really have them, in that the author is still talking about the same thing from the previous paragraph. I feel like I learnt that being a strong women in a very "man" viewed world is difficult but at the same time, it's not worth it when we let other people control us and our decisions. I would recommend this book to many people because it deals with how we can solve our problems no matter how embarrassing and unfriendly our past may seem.

## Lorraine says

Well written.

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## Irene says

It is a morning like any other in suburban New Jersey when Vinita Patil opens the bettered envelope marked "Mumbai." But the letter inside turns her comfortable world upside down. It tells Vinita an impossible story: she has grown son in India whose life may depend on her.

Once upon a time, a naive young college girl fell in love with a wealthy boy whose primary interests were cricket and womanizing. Vinita knew, even then, that a secret affair with a man whose language and values were different from her own was a mistake. He finished with her soon enough, leaving her to birth a boy that was stillborn. Or so Vinita was told.

Now, that child is a grown man in desperate need. To help her son, to know him, Vinita must revisit her darkest hours by returning to her battle-scarred homeland and pray for the faith of the family she leaves behind.

This story portrays a young woman caught between love and duty, hope and despair.

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## Debbie says

I first saw this book on S. Krishna's Books and the cover immediately caught my eye. I've been making an effort to read outside of my comfort zone and this sounded like a great book to start off with. It was a wonderful read and gave an interesting glimpse into a culture that was pretty foreign to me. The story premise was immediately intriguing as a mother myself I cannot imagine going through 30 years of your life not knowing that you had a son and then to find out he is dying. It was shocking to see the types of cultural views and taboos that lead up to this situation and it made me wonder how true this is in today's world in India. In this story it was shocking that preserving the family's reputation was seen as much more important than the happiness of Vinita or even the well being of her child. Then we see how because her family pretended she had a form of cancer and was sent away for treatment instead of admitting she was pregnant she was still viewed as not marriageable and only introduced to men who had some sort of problem like being an alcoholic or a divorcee. All of this makes me want to learn more about the Indian culture to see how true to form the details in this story are.

Vinita was an interesting character because at times you heart breaks for her and other times she irritates the heck out of you and you want to shake some sense into her. She comes across as so real to me because she isn't perfect and makes dumb mistakes out of stubbornness that a lot of us would make in her shoes. Things don't always work out in the end like in a fairy tale and she has to learn to live with the consequences of her actions.

Her brother, Vishal, is another interesting character because he can come across as a real bastard but really he does what he believes is right for his family even if that means concealing the existence of Vinita's son from her for all these years. You want to dislike him for what he does but you can't because it is obvious how much he loves Vinita and respects his parents.

I did not want to put this one down and my co-workers laughed at me as I frantically tried to finish the last 8 pages before we had to start a training class because I couldn't wait to find out what happened. This is a wonderful book if you are looking for a glimpse into Indian culture.

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## Arti says

The Unexpected Son by Shobhan Bantwal is the story of an Indian girl from brought up with traditional Indian values.

1976

Vinita Shelke, 19, is the topper of her class in Shivraj College, Palgaum, Karnataka. Her father is an accountant and her mother, a pious, traditional housewife. Her elder brother, Vishal, is a chartered accountant who works in Bombay. She learns Bharatnatyam and Prema is her best friend.

Somesh Kori, a rich landlord's son, is the college heart throb and the captain of the college cricket team. As a wager in a bet, he makes Vinita fall for him, plays with her emotions and leaves her when she is pregnant. She decides to keep the baby and says that she would do whatever she can to take care of the baby. To save the family name, her parents and her brother move her to Bombay where her brother takes care of her. Her family tells her that her son was stillborn.

She reconciles with her life, studies in Bombay and gets a job there. She is introduced to a few eligible men. Girish Patil, a divorcee from New Jersey, is one of them. She likes him and is unable to divulge the truth to him, even though, she does not intend to do so. May be this is her destiny.

Thirty years later:

Mrs Vinita Shelke Patil, who now lives in New Jersey with her husband, Girish, and daughter, Arya, receives an anonymous letter from Bombay saying that her son is dying and that her brother knows the details. Her husband, who does not know her secret, is out of town and she cannot confide in her daughter. When she tells it to both of them, Girish withdraws into his shell and Arya, after her initial withdrawal, becomes her confidante.

She decides to go back to Palgaum, meet her family and her son. She wants to be there for her son, Rohit, who teaches Chemistry in Shivraj College and help him in whichever way possible, even if that means that she becomes the bone marrow donor or talk to Somesh and ask him to become one.

My Take:

The characters have been very beautifully described. Vinita is strong and independent, yet an introvert and modern yet traditional; Girish is very understanding and open; Vishal is very strict on the outside but very soft inside; Arya, very understanding. Communal riots between the Marathis and Kannadas add a little political angle to the story.

I liked the way the author has described the courtship of Vinita and Girish, she wanting to tell him everything, but somehow, cannot do so and he so open about his past. She has wonderfully shown the different directions a mother daughter relationship can move depending upon the people in question.

A very well written story of a mother's love for a child she did not know existed. As I was reading, I got so involved in the story, like all Shobhan Bantwal's stories, that I could not keep the book down and was reading in the kitchen waiting for the water to boil and dreamt of the characters.

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## Cheryl says

Vinita Patil left Mumbai, India a long time ago. She is happily married now and has a daughter. They live in America. Vinita didn't really leave India on good terms. So she could not imagine why someone would be sending her a letter from Mumbai. The letter says that Vinita's son, Rohit has Myeloid leukemia and needs a donor. First it is a shock that Vinita's son has Myeloid leukemia but the bigger surprise is that Vinita didn't know that she had a son.

Vinita had just finished dancing at the college gala. Back stage, Vinita hears a male voice. She turns and it is Somesh Kori. He is the guy that all the ladies want to date. Vinita and Som date. Vinita becomes pregnant. To both her family and Som's disapproval. Som offers to pay Vinita to have an abortion. Vinita is stubborn and gives birth to a son, though her family tells Vinita that he was born stillborn.

This letter tears Vinita and her husband apart. She never told her husband that she gave born to a child. Rohit believes that Vinita discarded him. Can Vinita find a way back into both her husband and her son's hearts?

The Unexpected Son is the fourth book from author, Shobhan Bantwal. This book just cemented my love for Mrs. Bantwal. As if I needed any more of a reason to rave. I was already a fan before this book. Mrs. Bantwal brings to life the world of India like no one else can. I felt both sadness and happiness for Vinita and Rohit. Sadness that she missed growing up with him and Vinita wanted him so bad but happy that they were able to reconnect.

For anyone who has not discovered Shobhan Bantwal and her books, then you had better head to the nearest book store or online store and order her books today. You won't be sorry you did, only sorry you didn't try her sooner. The Unexpected Son is an expected winner!

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## **Pamela Kramer says**

The Unexpected Son, due to be released in August, 2010, delves deeply into the Indian/ Hindu culture. In this, her fourth novel, Bantwal takes us to Palgaum, perhaps a town based on Belgaum, her hometown.

Unlike the previous books, in The Unexpected Son the reader learns about politics and prejudice in India. In the town of Palgaum, rival cultures battle for power causing riots, mayhem and real danger to the citizens of the town. Each group, the Kannada and the Marathi, believe that the town should belong to Karnataka and Maharashtra respectively. The two groups boast different cultures and languages and true enmity exists between them.

This is the backdrop for a one-sided Romeo and Juliet where only Juliet is in love. Vinita, an admittedly plain girl, falls for the playboy and gets pregnant. In India in the 70's, this is unheard of. Vinita refuses to have an abortion, has the baby, loses the baby, and end up married in America.

However, after thirty happy years of marriage, Vinita gets a shock--the son she thought was dead is alive, but needs her help. She must return to India to resolve what was begun when she was a naive teenager. Will her husband understand? Will she be able to save her newly-found son's life?

Bantwal tells the story in two time periods--the present and the 1970's. What happened to Vinita when she was nineteen and how those experiences now impact her life are the center of the story. Bantwal is able to seamlessly weave the two tales together and keep the reader enthralled. There are subtle clues which foreshadow events for the perceptive reader, but most of all there is the message this author loves to write about: the importance of family.

As in her other books, Bantwal shows that she loves to teach us about India--its culture, religion and people--and in such a delightful book, we enjoy the learning!

Visit Shobhan Bantwal's website for information about her three previous books and biographical information. Mrs. Bantwal knows a lot about India and arranged marriages. She lived in India until she came to the United States through an arranged marriage.

Any of her books are great choices for a book club.

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## **VaultOfBooks says**

Settled in New Jersey with her husband and daughter, when 50-year old Vinita receives a “typically Indian looking” letter from Mumbai, little did she know that her life was going to change. Upon reading the letter, she is catapulted into her past. A past she had left behind with great difficulty, and moved on.

19-year old Vinita was the ideal daughter that every parent wished for. She was brilliant in her studies, topped each year, was obedient and had bright plans for her future. But when the college playboy Somesh Kori, quite literally bumps into her, her near-perfect life goes completely topsy-turvy. Suddenly she is lying to her parents, is completely distracted from her goals, and falls to the 5th rank from the 1st. Despite many warnings from her friends, she truly believes in her relationship with Sohm. Soon enough, she gets pregnant and Sohm wants nothing to do with the child. In the India of the 70's, an unmarried pregnant woman was considered a taboo and a blemish on the reputation of the family. (Notably, she still is.) Upon refusing to get an abortion done, her family takes her to Mumbai for her delivery. But the child was stillborn.

Thirty years later when Vinita gets a letter telling her that her son is dying of acute leukaemia, she is stunned. She never had a son, did she? At least not one who lived. A secret she had guarded for thirty years suddenly comes tumbling out and disrupts her normal, peaceful life. Will her husband ever forgive her betrayal? Will her daughter come to terms with her mother's illicit affair and a half-brother? Or will her son ever accept her as his mother?

The narrative is divided in two parts: the past and the present. The past (1976-1982) gives us a vivid description of what life was like in those days; when the newest acquisition one felt the need to show-off among their peers was an Ambassador car, and when coffee was the big rage because it was popularized in America. The present (2012) tells us about life as it is today, with small towns of 1976 being given the status of a city by the government and development taking place at every nook and corner. Another thing that has changed, for the worse however, are the Marathi-Kannada communal riots in Palgaum, which intensify with each passing day. Palgaum (now Belgaum), a district stuck in between Maharashtra and Karnataka, with almost equal Marathi and Kannada residents is being fought over by the two states to make it a part of their own. However, what hasn't changed in these thirty years are the strong virtues that are ingrained involuntarily in every Hindu household, and the importance of “parivaar ki izzat”.

I really enjoyed reading the book. The plot was not unique or unheard of. But the way the story has been narrated kept me enthralled until the very end. Shobhan Bantwal effortlessly weaved the past with the present, with the two parts in complete sync with one another. Like her previous book that I read, *The Reluctant Matchmaker*, the author has substantially emphasized on the rich Indian culture...the traditional place of women, family, honour, dignity and shame. However, unlike her previous book, we get to read about the political scenario from the 70's to present day in the form of the Marathi-Kannada clashes. The language used is not particularly elaborate or fancy, but neither is it dull and drab. The relationships between the members of Vinita's family are complex, and secrets are unravelled at every step. The characters were

simple and realistic, though none of them really leapt out of the book for me. However, if I had to choose a favourite, it would definitely be Vinita. She is a girl with a mind of her own who wants to break through the norms of society and become independent. She ensures she has a say in the decisions that are made by her family for her. As the book progresses, Vinita's strength of character shines through.

The only complaint I had with the book was the ending. It seemed vague and incomplete, with a LOT of scope left for imagination. The book felt incomplete of a last chapter, or an epilogue giving the readers an insight into what finally happened. But beyond this, I doubt I can find any fault.

Shobhan Bantwal is a very talented writer, and I have enjoyed reading both *The Unexpected Son* and *The Reluctant Matchmaker*. *The Unexpected Son* is a tremendous fast-paced read that you would probably finish in a single sitting.

Originally reviewed at [Vaultofbooks.com](http://Vaultofbooks.com), a close-knit community of fanatical readers. We are looking for perceptive readers who can write well, and we are eager to provide lots of free books in exchange for reviews. Shoot us a mail at [contact@vaultofbooks.com](mailto:contact@vaultofbooks.com)

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### **Jennifer says**

My review from my blog Rundpinne...[return]....Stunningly beautiful, *The Unexpected Son* by Shobhan Bantwal is a story of family honor, deceit, and forgiveness. The top student in her University class, Vinita had a plan for her life until Somesh Kori enters her life. Som is a rake in every sense of the word, but Vini is young and her emotions took over and she suffered terribly for her mistake. Thirty years pass, Vini is now living in America with her husband Girish and daughter Arya when a mysterious letter arrives from Mumbai, shocking Vini and once again bringing scandal to her family as well as opening old and new wounds. Bantwal does an exceptional job describing life in India, the cultural biases as well as the customs and beliefs. I was fascinated by the family dynamics in India as well as in America. Bantwal has created an exceptional cast of characters that are flawed and quite human to the point the reader may forget this is a work of fiction. *The Unexpected Son* is filled with several storylines all stemming from Vini's indiscretion as an 18-year-old and I was drawn into the lives of Vinita, Arya and Girish, Rohini, Kishore, Vishal and Sayee, the Patil's, and into the life of Rohit and his family. Bantwal writes a beautiful story of love, loss, deception and redemption and I highly recommend *The Unexpected Son* to any reader and to book discussion groups.

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### **Jenee Rager says**

This was one of the few times that I've read a book and been able to say exactly what I didn't like about it. The author is talented, and the story does flow well. However I grew very agitated by the fact she kept referring to Vinita and Sol as "real" parents instead of birth parents or biological parents. Every time it happened I got more irritated and just wanted to scream at whoever was saying it that "real" parents are the ones who raise a child, who stay up all night with the child when they are sick, who spend their days working to support the child's needs and dreams. It was just super frustrating for me. I also did not empathize with Vinita as a main character, as the book wore on she became more and more unlikeable. She had an inflated sense of ego and the whole "poor me" attitude just got grating.

Like I said the author is talented and I will still try other books by her, but this one just didn't work for me because of the above reasons.

