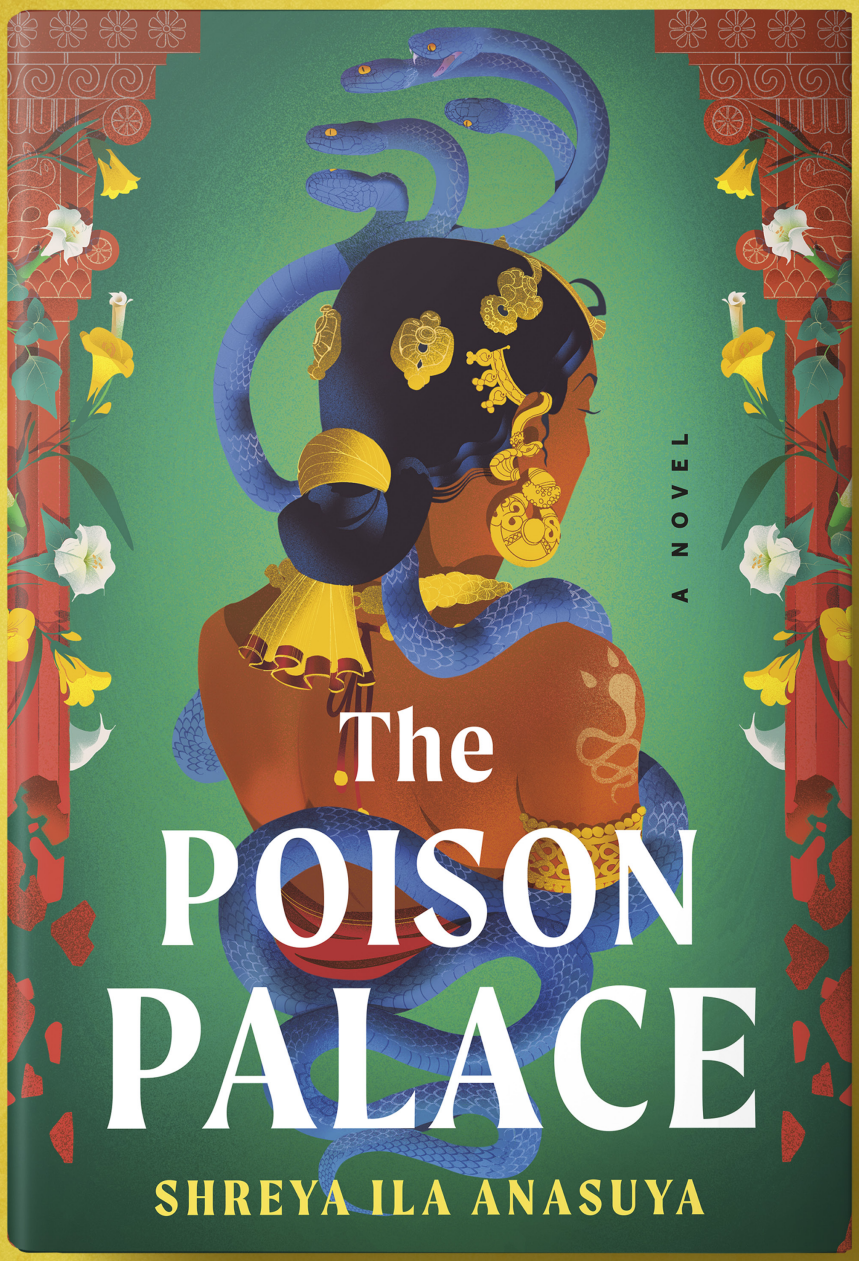
DUTTON



DISCUSSION GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Eka feel about her role as a poison maiden, as compared to Ira? How does this feeling change over time?

2. Eka and Ira are trained in music and dance, inducted into the cult of Ashlesha, and are successfully able to act as healers and priestesses. What does this multiplicity of roles mean for how we think about people in the ancient world?

3. The format of the novel is Eka recounting the story of her life to the memory keeper. Who is the memory keeper? How do we "keep" memories, especially when they belong to the ancient past?

4. Many deities are mentioned in the story—Ashlesha is based on a number of Indian serpent goddesses, Eka hears about Dionysus from Alexander, and later encounters Inanna, Mithra, Anahita, and Bel-Marduk. How are they similar or different?

5. This is a re-centering of an Indian, feminine and queer perspective, with its own ideas of power. How does the book de-center Alexander? How is it possible to de-center a character who has featured in so many different types of storytelling?

6. Most of the book is told from Eka's perspective, though it is interspersed with chapters from the point of view of other characters. What do the other POVs add to your understanding of the world of the book?

7. How does being separated from Ira impact Eka? What does she do in response to her overwhelming feelings?

8. How does the world of *The Poison Palace* feel similar to or different from our own world?

9. What is the role of magic, prophecy, omens, deities, and animism in the story? What happens when all of these are taken for granted as being "true"?

10. How do you think Eka and Ira's long journey changed them? What do you imagine happens at the very end between them?