

Stepmothering: A Spiritual Journey

Jasjit K. Sangha.

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REVIEWED BY TALIA ESNARD

Many stories related to step-parenting remain either untold or uninterrogated. This silence or invisibility is part of a broader social system that undervalues the role of step-parents and dismisses the conflicting expectations and emotions of step-parents and their step-children.

In her narrative, *Stepmothering: A Spiritual Journey*, Jasjit K. Sangha provides insight into the uncertainties, struggles, and agonies, lessons, blessings, and joys related to the bond-building endeavour of step-mothering. Through her personal lens, a reader connects with the range of emotions linked to the challenges of step-mothering: excitement, trepidation, anger, worry, and jealousy, for example. Sangha shares her own insecurities, fears and wishes, cultural and ideological clashes, persistent conflicts and attempts to overcome the trials associated with step-mothering. In so doing, she probes the key issue of emotional attachment between step-mothers and step-children and how it affects the identities of mothers and children alike.

Sangha's narrative also gives voice to the emotional trials of children suffering from the loss of a biological parent and seeking to form new bonds with step-mothers. The author examines the complex assumptions and beliefs that shape these relationships and shows how they can produce conflicting moments of closeness and coldness, clarity and confusion. Such tension may result in paradoxical feelings of connection and separateness that can either enable or inhibit the formation of an emotional bond between step-mothers and step-children.

To deepen her personal story, the author heads each chapter with pictures, poems, and phrases from other step-mothers. Overall, Sangha's narrative presents a convincing picture of the challenging emotions and mental strain associated with step-mothering. She unveils the experiences of women and children who struggle with the intricacies, insecurities, paradoxes, and complexities of step-families. She also reveals the importance of culture, religion, spirituality, and support systems in helping to build resilient step-families.