The Association of Small Bombs Study Guide

The Association of Small Bombs by Karan Mahajan

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Mahajan, Karan. The Association of Small Bombs. New York: Penguin Random House, 2016. Print.

The book starts with a bomb exploding in Lajpat Nagar, a market in Delhi. After the explosion is described in detail, we learn that the Khurana's two young boys were killed in the blast. The narrator introduces us to Vikas and Deepa Khurana, a poor, liberal, Hindu couple in their forties. Vikas is a documentary maker, and Deepa bakes cakes to supplement their income.

The boys, 11 and 13, were supposed to take their sheltered, Muslim friend Mansoor home before going to the market. Instead, they decided to go to the market first with Mansoor. When the bomb went off, the two Khuranas were killed instantly. In a panic, Mansoor left the market and walked all through Delhi to his house.

Mansoor's parents, Afsheen and Sharif Ahmed, are close friends with the Khuranas, and once the Ahmeds find out that their son is alive while the Khuranas' sons are dead, they make an effort to comfort the grieving family. Vikas is overcome with guilt, and Deepa is obsessed with revenge.

The police announce that they have arrested three terrorists for the bomb, and the narrator switches over to the perspective of Shockie, a bomb-maker at JKIF, a cheap terrorist organization that he is contemplating leaving. Shockie's superiors order him to go to Delhi and set off a bomb in Lajpat Nagar, and he reluctantly does so. When he gets back home, he has a fight about violence and martyrdom with his best friend and roommate, Malik, who is an intellectual, nonviolent member of JKIF. When Shockie heads off on another mission for JKIF, the police come and arrest Malik for the bomb at Lajpat Nagar.

Meanwhile, the Khuranas become frustrated with the court system in Delhi. The trial for the terrorists is put off again and again, so Deepa encourages Vikas to get back to work on his films. Deepa, however, gets to work on getting someone to let her inside the jail to see the terrorists. When, at last, she gets her way and is given the chance to sit down with Malik and watch his jailers beat him, she finds no satisfaction. Vikas is frightened that her disappointment is so deep that she might kill herself, but instead she gets pregnant and the couple gives birth to a daughter.

After the daughter is born, Deepa and Vikas are happy for awhile, but soon Vikas becomes depressed, and he is consumed with visions of the past.

In "Mansoor Ahmed's Response to Terror," the narrator switches over to the point of view of Mansoor and we learn all about his life after the bomb. Suffering from intense pain in his wrists and arms, and agoraphobia, his childhood had been ruined by the bomb. Things seem to turn around once he goes to college in California. But, shortly after 9/11, the pain in his wrist returns and he must go home to Delhi for treatment.

While back in Delhi, he joins a group called Peace For All, which is fighting for the rights of the terrorists that have been arrested for the bombing in Lajpat Nagar. Mansoor is not convinced by the group's ideologies at first, but after his parents suffer a financial loss and he learns that he cannot return to college, he becomes close with a member of the group, Ayub. Ayub converts Mansoor into a strong Muslim believer, and Mansoor begins to believe that India is in desperate need of a revolution. Although he thinks he has found God, Mansoor becomes jealous of Ayub's relationship with a female member of Peace For All.

In "Ayub Azim's Response to Terror," the narrator switches over to Ayub. After a failed protest and a bad breakup with his girlfriend, Ayub goes back to his family's farm. Bitter and alone, he buys a gun with the intention of killing Modi. Unable to go through with the assassination, he decides to kill himself. Unable to go through with the suicide, he finds a group of terrorists led by Shockie and sets out to detonate a bomb in Sarojini Nagar, a market in Delhi.

In the last section, we learn that Vikas and Deepa are members of a group they call the Association of Small Bombs, which reaches out to victims of terrorism and fights for their rights. When they hear about the bomb in Sarojini Nagar, they go to the hospital to meet the victims and meet Ayub, who injured himself in the blast.

When Mansoor learns that Ayub is in the hospital, he goes with his parents to visit him. It soon becomes clear to him, however, that Ayub is responsible for the bomb.

Ayub disappears from the hospital, and Shockie is arrested for his involvement in the Lajpat Nagar bombing. Under torture, he names Ayub. Unable to find Ayub, who is dead, the police arrest and torture Mansoor, who, though innocent, admits to the Sarajini Nagar bombing. Twelve years later, he is released for lack of evidence, and he goes home to his parents' house, never leaving again.

Part 1: Blast: May 1996, Victims: May 1996, Terrorists: May 1996 (Chapters 0-5)

Summary

The novel begins with a short, seven-page section entitled “Blast: May 1996.” The section contains just one chapter, Chapter 0, and describes in detail an explosion in Lajpat Nagar, a crowded market in India where, we later learn, Nakul and Tushar Khurana, along with 11 others, are killed.

The omniscient narrator recounts the explosion in past tense and often jumps around in time and space. Although the book starts with the bomb going off, “for which Mr. and Mrs. Khurana were not present” (3), the narrator, without breaking, skips ahead in time to tell us that Mr. Khurana dug through leaves to find “the bodies of his two sons” (4). But Mr. Khurana did not find them. By the time he arrived at the market, his sons were already “dead at a nearby hospital” (4).

The narrator delves further into the past and tells us about the Khuranas. Mr. and Mrs. Khurana are both 40, and their two sons are 11 and 13. The family is a poor one, and the boys, we learn, were at the market to pick up the family’s old, out-of-date television set from the repair shop. Mr. Khurana, ashamed of his poverty, later tells his friends that the boys were at the market to pick up his watch.

Mr. Khurana is a documentary-maker, and he has suffered from bad dreams ever since making his first movie. After the bomb kills his children, he begins to have a reoccurring dream in which he is the bomb. The chapter ends with the boys’ cremation. In the distance, a pack of village children kick a tied-up cow who is eating ash.

The next section, “Victims,” starts off with a detailed account of the hours before the bomb. Vikas went outside for a walk. He was anxious for the boys to return, because he wanted to watch a cricket match on the television set. The boys had left to drop off their friend Mansoor at home. On their way back, they were supposed to pick up the TV.

Vikas met Mr. Monga on the street, and the man informed him that there had just been a bomb in Lajpat Nagar. Without informing Deepa, Vikas got into his car and headed to the market. He was not thinking of his boys, but of Mansoor. Mansoor is the son of Vikas and Deepa’s overprotective friends Afsheen and Sharif Ahmed. Mansoor is not allowed outside except to visit the Khuranas, but Vikas, who has “a strong bond with the boy” (13), liked to “give him a taste of the freedom he was denied by his parents. Sending him with the boys, instead of dropping him off personally, had been [Vikas’s] idea” (13).

There is a break in the narration and then we are treated to the last few moments of the boys’ lives. Tushar suggested that they all go to the market together, and Mansoor

agreed. The boys strolled through the market and then the bomb went off. Mansoor woke up and found his two friends dead. Panicked, he ran out of the market.

The narrator leaves Mansoor and focuses his attention on Afsheen Ahmed, who was getting anxious about Mansoor. She called Deepa, and Deepa suggested that perhaps the boys stopped at the market before taking Mansoor home. Afsheen told Deepa that there had been a blast at the market. Deepa got off the phone and went to the market.

The narrator makes another leap and we see Vikas at the hospital, weeping over the bodies of his two sons. Time passes, and eventually Sharif and Afsheen join him. The narrator switches back over to Mansoor. Bleeding, frightened, unused to being on his own, the boy walked for hours through the chaotic streets of Delhi.

Back at the hospital, Afsheen and Ahmed decided to leave. Convinced their son is dead, they drove home. They were both furious with the Khuranas for letting their son go out on his own. When they get home, they find Mansoor alive.

Chapter 2 begins and we watch as friends and the extended Khurana family come together to help “console and comfort” (24) Vikas and Deepa as they grieve at home after the cremation. The news reports that the Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Force (JKIF) has taken responsibility for the blast. The family (which is largely Hindu) “discussed the group and its intentions and fell back of their normal scorn for Muslims” (26).

Despite being Muslim themselves, Afsheen and Sharif take it upon themselves to come over to the house and be with the Khuranas. Mansoor remains at home for some time, but is eventually brought over to see the Khuranas. Vikas asks Mansoor if the boys died right away. Vikas explains that he is trying to make a case against the hospital and police for not responding to the scene immediately. Mansoor says that the boys were dead when he left, but he feels guilty and suspects that Vikas’s real question is: why had Mansoor “left them to die and walked away” (28)?

Once he accepts that “there was no one else to blame” (28), Vikas begins to feel shame. He believes that if he had remained a CA (chartered accountant) instead of becoming a documentarian he would have been able to better support his family and the boys would not have been in the market.

Deepa, on the other hand, “wanted only one thing: revenge. Having passed rapidly through the stages of grief, she had emerged at a clearing of rage and felt the only reasonable thing was to watch the boys’ killers die a violent death” (29). As she becomes more insistent that they put pressure on the police, the police surprise everyone and say they have arrested the people responsible for the bomb.

The next section, “Terrorists” begins with Shockie, a 26-year-old bomb-maker of the JKIF who lives in Kashmir, receiving the order to blow up Lajpat Nagar. We later learn that he makes bombs “in revenge for the military oppression in Kashmir” (34). The first thing he does is call his mother. “His mother thought he was a student in Kathmandu … and he wanted to give her an opportunity to save him” (34). He intends to ask her if she wants him to come home because she is sick, but she does not answer.

He goes to his room and asks his roommate Malik Aziz if he should go home. Malik accuses him of making excuses. The next day, Shockie and another JKIF agent, Meraj, take the bus to Delhi. At a town on the Indian border, the two stop for sandwiches and Shockie asks how much money they have. Two thousand, Meraj says. Shockie becomes angry. He says that the leader of JKIF, Abdul, makes fifty-thousand at his carpet shop alone. The JKIF is cheap, he implies, and only willing to spend a little money to make little bombs (or chocolates, as the terrorists call bombs. “These small chocolates will achieve nothing” (37), Shockie complains to Meraj.

When they arrive in Delhi they meet Taukir, another JKIF agent. The three men go back to Taukir’s house; he lives with his mother and sisters. The next day they go out shopping for bomb materials. When they get back, Taukir explains that they still must go steal a car.

Shockie is beyond furious. He goes to find a payphone and cancel the mission. His superiors had told him that he would not have to steal a car. “He had fumbled this crime before, and besides, he disliked all aspects of the job that made him feel like a common criminal” (44).

Before he can find a payphone, however, he sees a Maruti 800 parked on the street. He goes up to it, breaks off the petrol cap, and then heads back to Taukir’s house. Taukir and Meraj take the cap to a locksmith and get a key made (the key to the cap is the same as the key for the ignition). Shockie goes out for dinner and imagines raping all the women in the restaurant.

The next day, the three terrorists go back to find the Maruti 800, but it is gone. So they go to a rich neighborhood, find a cheap car, and repeat the process. This second time they are successful.

They park the car in an alley and Shockie begins to implant the bomb. While he does this “dangerous” (46) work, he thinks of all the other great terrorists who had gone before him and who he aspires to be like. He reminds himself that even these “genius[es] of terror” (47) are prone to make a mistake at this stage and blow themselves up. Shockie makes the other two men “stand with him as he risked his face” (47).

The next evening, the three terrorists drive the car to the market and park it in front of Shingar Dupatte. The owner comes out and tells them they cannot park there. They move the car, get out, and walk away. They wait for the explosion but it never comes. Shockie returns with the car the next day and sets off the bomb.

Shockie returns to Kashmir and tells his friend Malik that he wants to defect because the leadership is “corrupt and in denial, prone to inflating figures to get more funding … they were ideologically weak, not realizing that one big blast achieved much more, in terms of influencing policy, than hundreds of small ones” (52).

Malik and Shockie have been “inseparable” (53) friends ever since Shockie stabbed a soldier for Malik, who had previously been tortured and burned and electrocuted. Their relationship is described as a “marriage, held in place by a massive history” (53).

Shockie goes to see Abdul in order to resign, but Abdul surprises him by telling him that he is sending him to meet the leader of the Hubli Faction the next day. Shockie is excited by the prospect and asks if he can bring Malik with him. Abdul laughs.

Malik, it turns out, has a “reputation as something of a thinker in the group. This was not a positive appellation: he was regularly derided by the others as being effeminate, confused, contradictory, ineffectual, and eccentric” (56).

Shockie goes home and tries to convince Malik to come with him. Malik refuses, and Shockie grows frustrated. He tells Malik that he is lazy, that the others laugh at him, that he is being disrespected. Malik says that Shockie is a coward, and that “inflicting violence is cowardly” (59). If you want to be a hero, he tells Malik, “you have to be a martyr” (59).

Shockie goes to sleep and Malik stays up, reading the autobiography of Gandhi. Shockie leaves the next morning, meets with the Hubli Faction, and returns home, intent on apologizing to Malik. But when he gets back home he finds that Malik is gone, arrested for the bomb in Lajpat Nagar.

Analysis

The first chapter of the first section of the book contains the novel’s climax. Mahajan detonates the bomb early in the plot so as to do away with suspense and anticipation. This is not an action or adventure novel. The novel is a dramatic tragedy, but Mahajan detonates the bomb early in order to rid his novel of a traditional dramatic structure. With a typical drama, rising action will slowly lead to a climax, after which comes the falling action. In this novel, the climax comes first, and all the rest of the novel is falling action, with quite a few flashbacks to the rising action we missed out on.

The first section, “Blast: May 1996,” has only one chapter, Chapter 0—an obvious play on the term “Ground Zero”—and in this section we are introduced to two main characters: Vikas and Deepa Khurana. Throughout the whole first section, they are referred to as only Mr. and Mrs. Khurana. Starting in the second section, “Victims: May 1996,” the two are referred to by their first names. The formality of the first section serves to exemplify the anonymity of victims of terrorism. The characters are not human in the first section. Rather, they are symbols of misfortune. It is not until the narrator delves into their lives in the second section and uncovers their pasts, their thoughts, and their lives that they become fully fleshed out. Adding to this is the fact that the boys, Tushar and Nakul, are left completely unnamed until the very end of the first section.

Vikas has reoccurring dreams in which he is the bomb that explodes in Lajpat Nagar, and these dreams of his are central to understanding Vikas as a character. In his

dreams he is the bomb that kills his sons because in reality he believes that he is responsible for their deaths because he is not wealthy enough to buy a new TV.

The dream is also important to understanding the goal of the novel. Vikas describes the dream as such: “You were coiled up, majestic with blackness, unaware that the universe outside you existed, and then a wire snapped and ripped open your eyelids all the way around and you had a vision of the world that was 360 degrees, and everything in your purview was doomed by seeing” (5). Mahajan’s mission is to set off the bomb and then study the aftereffects of the explosion from all 360 degrees.

Figurative language is an important element of the novel, and Mahajan starts using it to great effect early on in the novel. The cow that is kicked and beaten by the village children during the cremation serves as a symbol for the Khurana boys who are killed by the bomb. A few pages later, when Vikas first learns that a bomb has gone off in the market where his boys are, he is standing “near a small temple abutting a garbage dump” (12). The temple is defiled by the dumps close proximity to it, just as the lives of all the characters in close emotional proximity to the bomb are defiled by its detonation. This use of figurative language serves to elevate the story out of the realm of realism and into the realm of poetic, literary fiction.

The TV is a symbol of the Khurana’s poverty and Vikas’s guilt, but it is also a symbol of the Western world. Aside from being Western in origin, Vikas sends his boys to the market to pick up the TV on that specific day because he wants to watch a cricket match, a traditionally Western sport. Later, when we see that many of the “terrorists,” including Mansoor, are upset by the influence the West has had upon India, it becomes clear that the TV is a physical representation of that influence.

The TV is also wrapped up in the social hierarchy of the world in which our characters live. Despite the tragedy of the bomb and the death of their two sons, the Khuranas make it a point to lie about why the boys were at the market. And when Vikas first realizes that the boys might have been at the market during the explosion, his thoughts are with Mansoor, the son of his wealthier friends’, rather than his own sons. The way these characters hold on to artificial social conventions during extreme conditions is absurd, tragic, and a commentary on the class system in India.

The class system in India is further explored when the prejudices between Hindus and Muslims is made clear after the bomb. The Ahmeds are Muslim, and they come over to the Khuranas Hindu household to comfort their friends after the bomb, which was set off by Muslims, despite the extended family of Khuranas dislike of Muslims and constant discussion and “scorn” (25) for Muslims. This conflict between Hindus and Muslims is a constant thread throughout the text.

When the terrorists are introduced in the third section, “Terrorists: May 1996,” there is an immediate shift in setting which mirrors the shift in subject: Victim to Terrorist. There is none of the luxury of the Ahmed’s house, none of the homeyness of the Khurana’s flat, none of the bustle and energy of Delhi. Shockie and Malik live in the country, far removed from everything, in poverty.

The introduction of the terrorists leads to questions about the significance of certain characters in the novel. At first, it seems as if Vikas might act as protagonists. And Shockie, at first, seems like a natural antagonist. He sets off bombs and imagines raping women when he goes out to restaurants. But when Malik—intellectual, nonviolent, falsely imprisoned— is introduced, it seems as if he might make a more suitable protagonist than glum, depressed Vikas. Later, when Malik drops out of the story, it will be a contest between Mansoor and Ayub for lead protagonist, but in the end it seems as if this is a novel without any heroes or villains, just people.

Malik's relationship with Shockie serves to humanize Shockie. There is nothing unlikeable about Malik. He is a good man in a bad situation, and he is written with the intention of igniting the reader's sympathy. Shockie, on the other hand, is difficult to like. Aside from the obvious fact of being a terrorist, he is unsure of his motives, unattractive, and quick to anger. The only redeeming feature of his personality is his relationship with Malik, but this small redemption is quite possibly enough to take him out of the running as an antagonist.

Fate is a theme that runs throughout the novel, and the theme begins when Shockie tries, multiple times, to get out of setting off the bomb in Delhi. He tries to call his mother, he tries to get Malik to help him, he even contemplates quitting the JKIF. But in the end, he goes to Delhi. When he tries to set off the bomb, though, it does not work, and he must go back on a different day—the right day—and try again.

Discussion Question 1

Why was Vikas more concerned with Mansoor than his own sons? What other social conventions are held onto during the tragic explosion and the bomb's aftermath? What does this say about the culture in which our characters are living?

Discussion Question 2

Vikas and Deepa respond to the death of their sons in very different ways. Vikas becomes depressed and ashamed, and blames himself. Deepa becomes full of rage and desirous of revenge. How do these two people remain together in marriage despite their differences and the massive tragedy they have been through?

Discussion Question 3

The book starts with the story of the bomb according to the victims, but soon the reader is invited into the interior world of the terrorists. What does this switch in perspective do for the novel?

BOOKRAGS

Vocabulary

fiberglass, gangrenous, lurid, synchronicity, muckraking, compound, malaria, javelins, malnourished, bureaucrats, infrastructure, pulverized, shockwave, torrid, avuncular, oppression, bumpkins, moorings, impeccable, detonator

Part 2: Mr. and Mrs. Khurana's Response to Terror: 1996-1997 (Chapters 6-9)

Summary

The section begins in the courtroom. The Khuranas and the Ahmeds fantasize about the best ways to murder the terrorists, but, in the courtroom, when they see the terrorists, they become "dispirited" (67). The terrorists look "middle-class, harmless" (67). Deepa realizes that she does "not trust the government or the courts to do anything" (68). The hearing ends and the next one is set for September. Sharif predicts that the case will last 5-10 years. Vikas insists it will go quicker because the bomb was in Delhi.

On the way home, Deepa tells Vikas that she wants to speak to the court in September. Vikas phones his lawyer-friend Jaidev, but Jaidev says that a mother's testimony will not do any good. Nonetheless, Deepa and Vikas go to the police station the next day to register their statement and ask to speak.

With nothing to do but wait, the Khuranas are forced to get on with their lives. Vikas thinks of moving, because the house is full of memories of the boys, but the house was inherited, and it is a flat in a complex that his family owns. Vikas continues to blame himself for the bomb, and laments the fact that he had not sold the house and moved to Bombay years ago. Vikas finds a spot by the window and does nothing but look out it, searching for his sons.

The hearing is continually postponed. Deepa reads an article in a liberal newspaper that she and Vikas both respect that claims one of the terrorists arrested for the bomb was 16 and innocent.

Deepa encourages Vikas to get out of the house and back to work. He decides he wants to make a film about terrorism. Not its aftermath, but the moment of terror. He starts to visit crowded places in the hopes of catching an explosion on film.

Deepa, in turn, spends her time seeking help from Vikas's politically-connected family members. She is intent on meeting the imprisoned terrorists. She asks Vikas's cousin, Mukesh, to ask his friend, the spokesman of the BJP party, Venkaiah Naidu, for help. Mukesh agrees to this. It is implied that he agrees because he is romantically interested in Deepa.

Next, Deepa visits Vikas's uncle, Jagdish Chacaha, who was a former cabinet secretary. Jagdish tells Deepa that Mukesh will not be able to help her, but that he (Jagdish) will phone some of his friends for her.

Deepa goes back to her own house and reminisces about her childhood. She was a Christian South Indian who had grown up with a "reclusive" (83) father and had hardly known her mother before she died from cancer. She had gone to school and become a

CA, working in the same firm as Vikas. They had fallen in love, but after that, “everything had gone to ruin” (83). Vikas had grown depressed about his career and his poverty. For awhile, after the children were born, Vikas had seemed happy, but he soon fell back into his old, depressed ways. He complained about his family, and Delhi, and his home, but refused to do anything to change his life. Deepa grew frustrated with him, and accused him of changing. “You used to be different” (85), she said. “No … I was just on a break from being myself” (85), he answered.

In October, five months after the bomb, Vikas and Deepa, along with Jagdish and Mukesh, go to the Tihar Jail to meet Malik Aziz. Vikas is unhappy that his uncle and cousin have come along. The party is introduced to the deputy head of the jail system, Mrs. Thapar, and she takes them deeper into the jail.

The narrator switches over to Malik. Malik has been led to believe that he is meeting one of his favorite journalists. He is led into a room and given tea. The Khuranas are brought in, and the narrator switches back over to their perspective.

Malik refuses to speak. Deepa looks at him and hears the boys’ voices and sees them in her head. She is unable to ask Malik any questions. Vikas shows Malik a picture of the boys and asks what they had “to do with this” (91). Malik still does not answer.

Malik is taken away, stripped, and beaten. The party watches, but he still will not talk. Mrs. Thapar explains that she allowed the Khuranas to come to see if they could get Malik to speak, because he had not spoken since being arrested. All of the other terrorists had signed confessions and “happily mention[ed] others” (92). Vikas realizes that all of the other terrorists were “either broken or innocent, and this silent one was the closest they had come to finding a man who was guilty” (92).

The Khuranas return home and Vikas begins to fear that Deepa will commit suicide. He keeps a close watch on her. One night, they make love, and they continue to do so for weeks. Soon, they learn that Deepa is pregnant.

They are both surprised and unsure what to do. Deepa wonders if one of the boys might be reborn. She tells Vikas they ought to think things through before deciding anything.

They decide to keep the child, although they, and their relatives, are frightened of a miscarriage. But the child, a girl named Anusha, is born over a year after the bomb. The couple is happy for a time, and then Vikas begins to have “visions” (100).

He remembers Tushar and Nakul asking to go on a shoot with him, and he remembers telling them no. He remembers the time that he found out Nakul stole a toy from a classmate. Vikas was hurt by this. “Haven’t we given you everything?” (103) he asked his son. Poor though he is, Vikas had taken out a large loan from his brother Rajat, and used most of it to spoil his boys without telling Deepa.

One day, Deepa went to pick the boys up from school, but they refused to get out of the bus and into the car because they were ashamed of the family’s Fiat. Vikas had then

driven the boys to the market to teach them about poor people, but instead he ended up buying them a cricket bat.

His “visions” continue, and as he walks through Connaught Place he sees a sign for the State Bank of India and begins to weep. He wonders if the State Bank of India might be God. He wanders to his old office, and remembers how he first met Deepa. Standing against a wall, trying to look cool, Vikas had been approached by Deepa and asked if he was having a stroke. The two laugh, and bond through their shared love of film.

Analysis

Revenge is a theme that runs throughout the novel. The novel does not, however, rely on a traditional revenge plot. A revenge plot needs a protagonist and an antagonist, and, as previously discussed, this novel does not have a traditional protagonist or an antagonist. Nor does this novel focus on the victim’s quest for vengeance. But, for a few brief moments, our characters are enticed by the allure of revenge. At the first trial, before the terrorists are brought into the court, the Ahmeds and the Khuranas each fantasize about creative ways in which to kill the arrested men. Almost immediately, though, their lust for vengeance fades away. When they see the arrested men, who look “harmless” (68), Deepa even realizes that “She did not trust the government or the courts to do anything” (68). Although her opinion is formed on instinct, the reader knows, for a fact, that at least one of the arrested men, Malik, is innocent, and this forces the reader to agree with Deepa’s judgement of government’s effectivity.

The government’s inability to deliver justice is another theme that runs deep in the novel. Mahajan again plays with the idea of a revenge plot, which almost always gets started when the protagonist is unable to find justice through traditional means. In this novel, it becomes clear early on that none of the victims will be able to find justice through the ineffectual government’s justice system. But, the revenge plot is stifled and none of the characters ever find justice or vengeance for the bomb that went off. In this way, Mahajan attacks the bureaucracy of the Indian justice system in a humorless satire.

The novel’s mission is to look at the bomb from a number of conflicting perspectives, and occasionally the characters themselves become aware that there are conflicting perspectives in regards to their lives. When the Khuranas read an article in the Hindu that adds weight to Deepa’s suspicion that the men arrested are not the men who killed her son, Vikas admits to himself that “had they been on the other side of the blast, or rather not on any side, but outside its murderous circumference, they too would have doubted the speedy arrest of the terrorists, the conflicting but confident storylines offered by the police, the heartless manner in which the suspects had been held for a month before being produced for trial. Of course, being victims, they had to suppress all that” (73).

But Vikas’s actions also juxtapose the novel’s overarching goals when he becomes obsessed with making a documentary about terrorism. His goal is not to explore the

phenomena, but to witness a bomb detonating somewhere in Delhi and capture the explosion on film. He is propelled to do this because of the reoccurring dreams in which he is the bomb, but it is also suggested that he sets out to witness a bomb because he wants to die in a blast, just like his boys did. The novel, in contrast, is not all that concerned with the bomb itself. Instead, it is focused on the bomb's impact on human lives.

While there are plenty of moments of social commentary, the novel is primarily a tragedy, and this is never more apparent than when memories of the dead boys come flooding back to our characters. The narrator skips around in time often, in part because the story starts in medias res, but also to reflect the pain of a parent's grief. Often, just as the plot begins to pick up steam and the reader begins to believe that Deepa and Vikas are on the verge of moving forward, we are thrust back into a memory of the boys while they were alive. The abrupt switch from past to present is jarring, in a narrative sense, and reflects the sharp pangs of grief that overcome Deepa and Vikas at the most random moments.

The scene in the jail is tense and sparse, and is intended to fill the reader with horror. Mahajan concentrates on the bureaucratic orderliness of the rooms where visitors are allowed, while completely ignoring the deeper regions of the jail, where the prisoners are kept. The narrator enters the jail with the Khuranas, and only switches to Malik's perspective when Malik is brought out of the prisoner's area: "For him too the walk through the chambers of the jail was a new thing—most prisoners did not get to see this part of the jail. It was for visitors only. He marveled at the clean lines, the symmetric tiles, the photos on the wall" (89-90). Here, what is not shown, what is not said, is more important than what is. The horrors that Malik has faced are left up to the reader's imagination.

The revenge plot almost seems to come to fruition when the Khuranas watch through a window as Malik is stripped and beaten, but, again, Mahajan complicates matters. Vikas and Deepa are not shown to have any emotional reaction. Also, right after they witness the beating, the couple finds out that they have only been allowed access to the jail and Malik so as to act as human tools for the prison system. Moreover, the brief venture the narrator takes into Malik's perspective a page before this scene reiterates his innocence and goodness, and makes the reader feel sympathy for his plight, rather than satisfaction at his pain and humiliation. All of this seems to add up to the moral: when it comes to terrorism, revenge is not the answer. The matter of terrorism is complicated and confused, though, and the right answer is not as easy to find as the wrong one.

The confusion of what to do about terrorism is paralleled in the confusion of Deepa and Vikas's actions, motives, and intentions. When they get pregnant with Anusha, both of them are shocked, and neither of them realizes that the weeks of frantic love-making building up to the pregnancy were an attempt to create a new child to replace the old ones. Deep, in fact, was "convinced they would kill themselves" (96). And, when people begin to point out that the name "Anusha" is a combination of "Nakul" and "Tushar," Deepa "denied" (100) it. The characters seem to be flailing around without rhyme or

reason, lost in the chaos of their lives. This paints a picture of a confused world in which there is no logic, no black and white answers.

Despite all the narrative blame placed on the government and all the jabs taken at the ineffectual prison system, Vikas undergoes a transformation from a liberal to a conservative. Before the bomb kills his son, he admits that he would have been against imprisoning the terrorists for lack of evidence. But, because his sons are dead, he is content with their imprisonment and torture. In the midst of his depression and visions, he sees that State Bank of India sign, weeps, and realizes that: “I have started to love anything that exudes great power … to love anything that touches me from a great distance” (107). This transformation shows not just the tremendous change a bomb can bring in a single life, but it dramatizes the way in which different, personal life experience can shape extreme political views.

Discussion Question 1

The reader knows that Malik is innocent, but the Khuranas do not know this. What does this difference in perspectives do for the novel? Does it simply create dramatic tension, or does it suggest something about morality and crime?

Discussion Question 2

Malik has previously suggested that the JKIF write letters to the victims of blasts because the victims and the terrorists are both affected by the same governmental problems. In this section, we see the Khuranas’ disappointment with the government, and their lack of faith in the justice system. What does this similarity in characters who are opposed to one another do to strengthen the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Anusha’s birth seems to suggest a rebirth for Vikas and Deepa, but instead of moving forward with a new life, Vikas sinks into his past and is haunted by the ghosts that live in his visions. Why can he not move forward?

Vocabulary

circumstantial, sublimate, cricket, indifference, immutable, embargo, czar, patrician, obligatory, impurities, decrepit, frayed, bourgeois, futility, repentance, tarpaulin, misfortune, distended, braying, imitation

Part 3: Mansoor Ahmed's Response to Terror: May 1996-March 2003 (Chapters 10-22)

Summary

This section starts off with a recount of Mansoor's life directly after the explosion. We learn that he felt a great deal of guilt for leaving his friends, dead, at the market. Mansoor spent the summer after the bomb inside his house, with a broken arm, venturing out only a few times. His parents—who had never been religious—brought him to mosques and temples, but he experienced anxiety when in public. "Holy men" (118) were brought to his house to see him, pray with him, and give him "potions" (118).

When the summer ended and he returned to school, his anxiety was still with him. He was the only Muslim at his school, and the other children asked him if he blew up the market himself. During his physical therapy, which he went to for intense pain in his wrist, his doctor told him about her brother who worked in Information Technology in Houston.

In the present time, Sharif and Afsheen begin to suspect, just like the Khuranas, that the police have arrested the wrong people as terrorists. They decide to start saving money to send Mansoor to the U.S. for college.

The next chapter beings and the narrator skips ahead in time to 2001. Mansoor goes to college in Santa Clara to study computer science. Since the bomb, he has turned to computers for entertainment. "He was more intimate with his 486 … than with any person on Delhi" (122). Before he leaves, the Khuranas come over to say goodbye. We learn that the two families have grown apart. Mansoor arrives in the U.S. in August 2001. He feels at ease and bonds with his roommates. Then September 11th comes around, and "things began to change immediately" (124). Mansoor wants to tell the others that he was once the victim of terrorism, but when he does he finds that nobody cares about a small bomb in a foreign country.

So Mansoor begins to focus on his course work and programming. He works hard for a year, but then his wrist begins to hurt. He goes to the doctor and she tells him that he has carpal tunnel. His doctor tells him that the pain can be managed, but his pain gets worse. So, during his third semester, he goes back home to "recover" (129).

He returns to his old physical therapist. When he was little, he used to feel at ease in the office, but now he feels "panic—panic that life was passing him by" (130). The Khuranas invite him over to their house. He does not want to go, thinking that his presence will upset the couple, but his mother insists that the Khuranas will be happy to see him, not sad. Vikas tells Mansoor that the trial for the bombing is still going on, and

that no settlements have been paid. Before Mansoor leaves, Vikas gives him one of his old cameras. When Mansoor gets home, his mother takes the camera away. She is "superstitious" (134), and unwilling to allow anything touched by death into the house.

Inspired by his conversation with Vikas, Mansoor goes to the court to witness a hearing. When he gets there, though, the judge decides to do the proceedings through camera, and kicks everyone out. Mansoor is about to leave, but before he does he meets Naushad, a Muslim who works for Peace For All. Naushad is trying to get justice for the falsely imprisoned terrorists: a papier-mâché artist, a student in eighth grade, and Malik.

Mansoor tells Naushad that he will think about helping, but soon forgets about the conversation. Darius, a schoolmate of Mansoor's and a member of Peace For All, calls Mansoor and invites him to one of their meetings. Mansoor agrees to go, and ends up telling the group that he will consider writing petitions and editorials for them, although he fears that this will upset his parents and the Khuranas.

The next day, he goes with Ayub, another member of Peace For All, to meet the mothers and wives of the alleged terrorists. The women tell him horror stories of the torture that their sons and husbands have been through.

Mansoor plans to return to school in January, but meanwhile he continues to go to meetings. One day, Ayub invites Mansoor to come to the mosque after the meeting. Mansoor is not religious and is hesitant to go, but he cannot think of an excuse, so he gets onto Ayub's motorcycle and they go to the mosque together.

In the next chapter, the narrator switches over to Sharif's perspective. We learn that, in trying to buy a new house for his family to move into, Sharif has been swindled into taking on a massive lien on the new property. Because of the new debt (and a few other reasons we learn about later), Sharif asks Mansoor to postpone going back to college.

Although he "hadn't even loved his life in the U.S." (154), Mansoor is upset about this new development. He goes to a Peace For All meeting and feels like he does not belong there. Still, he tells the group that he will be staying in Delhi longer than expected, but he blames it on his health.

After the meeting, Ayub asks Mansoor to take a walk with him. Ayub tells Mansoor that his pain is psychological rather than physical. When he was younger, Ayub says, he was in a motorcycle crash. After the crash, his pain was horrible, but it went away when he "gave [himself] to Allah" (157). Mansoor is "enraged" (157) by the suggestion that his pain is not real, and decides he is done with Peace For All.

The next night, Mansoor asks his father to set him up with an internship so he can continue working with computers. His father agrees, but his mother insists that he see a doctor first. Mansoor goes to the doctor, who runs a "nerve conduction test" (159), and tells Mansoor that he will never be able to type or have a job that involves computers. Mansoor is devastated and angry. He becomes particularly angry with the Khuranas, who he begins to blame for the bomb.

Mansoor decides to go back to Peace For All. He also notices that, after the test, the pain in his wrist has become worse. This makes him question whether or not Ayub's ideas on pain might not be so far-fetched. He reads The Religion of Pain, which Ayub has given him, and starts exercising and doing visualizations, as the book suggests. "Miraculously" (165), his pain goes away.

Mansoor begins to go to the mosque with Ayub. During prayer, Mansoor visualizes happy memories of himself and Tushar and Nakul. He reflects on the pain in his wrist, and how it started back up in America. He begins to realize that he had been living a selfish life at college. Obsessed with Ayn Rand and porn, he thinks it was no wonder that his wrist started hurting so bad: "His body had been unable to take it" (170). He becomes intent on living a healthy, morally-righteous life. "The more he realized the connection between the mind and the body, the more he wished to keep his mind clean" (170).

He shares his new ideas with Ayub, who agrees with Mansoor. Ayub explains that the root of the problem lies with the "Western belief in the individual" (170). Mansoor begins to suspect that all of his problems stem not from the bomb, but from his own selfish obsession with his own well-being in the aftermath of the bomb. He begins to suspect that "a crisis of values was afoot not only in the Western world but in India, which had become a lapdog of the West, eager to imbibe its worse ideas while ditching its best ones" (172).

After he finds God, Mansoor returns to Lajpat Nagar. He observes the shopkeepers, and realizes that they were never given the luxury to be depressed or injured. They had to be brave and return to the sight of the bomb, unlike Mansoor, who hid away at home.

Mansoor begins to believe that what India needs is "a revolution of values" (176), and he plans to start a website that "connects old values with new problems" (176). He tells Ayub about his idea, and decides to ask Vikas to help with video content.

In the next chapter, the narrator switches over to Ayub's perspective for the first time. We learn that Ayub considers Mansoor a good friend—such a good friend that he decides he can trust him with a secret: he is in a relationship with Tara, an upper-class Hindu woman from Peace For All.

This short chapter ends, and we return to Mansoor. He begins to accompany Ayub and Tara out on the town. Despite his newfound religion, a burning jealousy takes hold of Mansoor. He starts masturbating to thoughts of Tara and hating himself for it.

Tara and Ayub tell Mansoor that they are planning a big protest because Narendra Modi is coming to Delhi. Modi is the chief minister of Gujarat, and some believe him to have been complicit in a series of riots in which many Muslims were killed, mutilated, and raped. But Mansoor is not interested. He asks when they will get back to working on freeing the falsely imprisoned terrorists, and Tara claims that they will do so after the protest.

Analysis

Mansoor's section is shaped a bit like a bildungsroman. We see him grow up from a boy of 12 to a young man of 20. At first, he is a scared, introverted, agoraphobe who is too frightened to leave his house. When he grows up, he goes to America and indulges in a year of decadence and "selfish" behavior. Then, when he returns to India, he finds God and becomes moral.

On its own, this section would suffice as a short novel in which Mansoor is the protagonist. And a good argument can be made for Mansoor as the protagonist. The bomb physically alters him in a way no other character is altered. When he comes back from America, though, and becomes curious about the trial, he does not seek out revenge the way his parents and the Khuranas do. Instead, he becomes a member of a group intent on freeing the men arrested for the bombing that killed his friends and destroyed his career. This twist, wherein the victim becomes the advocate for the supposed criminal, further complicates the idea of justice, vengeance, crime, and victimhood.

Mansoor is physically maimed by the bomb, but he is also emotionally damaged by the explosion. As the only character who survived the bomb, he carries the largest load of survivor's remorse. As a boy, when he remembers the bomb, "his eyes filled with tears. He hadn't known till then how selfish he was, and when he felt bad for the boys, it was undercut by a feeling that he was performing for God, And because he felt God could see him he was doubly guilty" (118). These childhood obsessions with selfishness and God come back to him as an adult. Back in India from the U.S., he becomes convinced that his health problems are the result of a selfish, Western, Ayn-Rand-inspired life. To cure his pain, he turns to God, prayer, and meditation.

Mansoor's behavior after the bomb most closely resembles the behavior of Vikas, and in many ways the characters act as doubles for one another. Mansoor and Vikas are both overcome with guilt: Mansoor for leaving the boys dead and running away, Vikas for sending the boys to the market. Mansoor deals with this guilt by fixating on selfishness and God later in life, whereas Vikas deals with his guilt by becoming the bomb in his dreams and attempting to recreate the explosion on film. Vikas is haunted by visions in which he flashes back to certain memories of the boys, and Mansoor is haunted by the ghosts of his friends in crowds of boys: "All crowds of a certain age contained them" (141).

Questions of crime and punishment float all throughout the novel. Mansoor reflects on the two concepts in regards to his own life when he begins to suspect that the pain in his wrist is a punishment from God for having used the tragedy of the bomb in his personal essay for college.

Torture of terrorists comes up quite a few times during the novel. The first instance is Malik. We learn, from his backstory, that he was tortured as a young man, and when the Khuranas visit him in jail we witness the guards beat him. But when Mansoor goes with Ayub to meet the wives and mothers of the arrested men, they tell him horror stories:

“One woman told Mansoor how her husband had been pumped with petrol in the anus. Another said her son had been hung from the ceiling of a police station till he lost all feeling in his hands … The last one narrated an even bleaker story … Her son [Malik] had been shocked in the genitals and had had some of his tongue scraped off with a blunt knife” (142). These horrific tidbits, presented in a calm, stoic manner that clashes with the content, are intended to present a simple moral to the reader: torture is wrong.

Being Muslim in India is not easy, and this clash between Muslim and Hindu people is explored throughout the novel. The biggest example of the prejudice and bigotry is given in the form of Narendra Modi, the chief minister of Gujarat, who is said to have been complicit in massive mob attacks on Muslims by Hindus: “they had realized that the Indian government wouldn’t protect them, that in fact it had an incentive to demonize and exterminate them” (144).

Mansoor, who was raised in India by parents who were only arbitrarily Muslim in religion, and who went to a school where he was the only Muslim student, does not embrace his Muslim identity until he connects with Peace For All: “The members of Peace For All were not radicals. They were eminently reasonable people, students engrossed in careers, people who wanted to be Indians but had discovered themselves instead to be Muslims and had started to embrace their identities. In their alienation, their desire to be included in the mainstream, Mansoor recognized himself” (144).

The clash between Western and Eastern ideals is explored throughout the novel and can be seen when Ayub and Mansoor discuss the psychology of pain. The East has long held that the body and the mind are one, while the West traditionally treats ailments of the mind and body as separate. Ayub tells Mansoor that he used to have pain in his back from a motorcycle accident, and that the pain was only cured when “I started praying and stopped thinking of myself” (157). He suggests that Mansoor’s pain from the bomb in his wrists is in his head. At first, Mansoor is angry at the suggestion, but he soon adopts Ayub’s ideology, accepts God, starts praying, meditating, and visualizing. Soon after, the pain stops, which seems to suggest that the body and the mind are one.

Ayub continues to teach Mansoor about the differences between the East and the West as their teacher/student relationship continues. He tells Mansoor that the most shocking thing about New York is that there are no old people because they are all in retirement homes because Americans are obsessed with individualism. Mansoor takes in Ayub’s words eagerly: His “mind was aswirl, He was on the verge of something great, of something new, and his entire worldview had been blotted out” (171). Mansoor’s ideas on religion, politics, and life shift because of Ayub’s guidance.

Much of the novel is tied up in trying to find meaning in a seemingly random, senseless act of terrorism. Every victim of the bomb asks themselves, at one point, or, sometimes, multiple points, what was the meaning of the bomb? Mansoor’s answer is bleak. After learning that his wrists are beyond repair and he will never be able to work in computers, he thinks: “I didn’t survive at all. I just spent longer dying, rendered crippled and obsolete like that old 486 on which I acquired my first repetitive injuries” (160). And,

considering the way things end up for Mansoor (12 years being tortured in jail for a crime he did not commit followed by a lifetime of solitude in his parents' house), perhaps Mansoor's answer to the question is a better one than all the optimistic, heartwarming ideas characters get about why the bomb happened to them. Because, in the end, the novel is pessimistic, and there is no rational reason for why the bomb went off.

The narrator foreshadows Mansoor's terrible ending more than 100 pages before the end of the novel. In the midst of Mansoor's miraculous recovery, the narrator adds, in a parenthetical break: "Later, when it was all over, when his life was coming to an end, he would think that he had probably started to recover because months of therapy had paid off; that he had been misdiagnose during the nerve test; and that his recovery had been an act of faith and belief, the sort that can only take hold a person when he is at his lowest" (165). This breaks the spell of optimism and joy that comes with Mansoor's newfound religion and recovery, and forces the reader to realize that Mansoor's happiness is a temporary madness, and that he is going to die.

The chemist acts as a foil for Mansoor. When Mansoor goes to Lajpat Nagar, full of anxiety and fear, he sees a chemist and wonders at how the man continued to work in the market after the bomb went off. At first Mansoor suspects that the man might have inhaled too many chemicals and become slow, but soon he realizes that the man was forced into bravery. Mansoor was given "the luxury of depression and injury" (175). Unlike Mansoor, who stayed home alone all summer recuperating from the blast, the chemist "had to go to bed every night knowing his world had been destroyed and wake up knowing he must feel the opposite and go on" (175).

Class again becomes an important issue when Tara and Ayub's relationship is divulged. Tara is the only Hindu in Peace For All, and her relationship with Ayub, a poor Muslim from the country, seems sweet and without problems until Mansoor becomes jealous: "This relationship, Mansoor thought, it's just Ayub's way out of poverty, out of being lower-class. That's why he's in this NGO—to attach himself to this rich, idealistic girl. As for Tara, she likes having power over these desperate Muslim men" (179). The class divide between Tara and Ayub becomes central to the plot as the two break up and Ayub begins to plan a bombing of his own later in the novel.

Mansoor's miraculous transformation from a self-indulgent hedonist into a righteous Muslim is undercut again, quite severely, by the narrator: "For a while it seemed that Mansoor, with the newfound flow of religion, could not be happy for anyone. Then negativity once again took his world hostage" (177). After this, Mansoor, who is supposed to be abstinent, becomes obsessed to Tara, and is unable to stop himself from masturbating. This turn of events is dramatic and unexpected. The plot of the whole section is structured around Mansoor's transformation and self-discovery. In the space of a single short chapter at the very end of the section, all the progress Mansoor has made is crushed. No reason is given for the shift: "He didn't know how or why it took hold" (179). And after Tara breaks up with Ayub, Mansoor looses interest in her. Like the bomb itself, there is no reason in this, and, after being led to believe that all the pain of Mansoor's past might have led to him becoming a better person, this hope is dashed and we are left with a bleak nihilism.

Discussion Question 1

Mansoor claims that all Indians are happy to be “puppets of fate” (162). How does the idea of fate function in the novel?

Discussion Question 2

Western culture is set into opposition with Eastern culture, with Ayn Rand’s The Fountainhead representing Western ideology, and the Quran representing Eastern ideology. Mansoor gives one up and replaces it with another. Must these two culture, two ideologies exist in opposition? Can there be harmony between the two?

Discussion Question 3

Mansoor is deeply affected by the bomb and the death of his two friends. How is his grief different from the grief of Mr. and Mrs. Khurana? How is it the same? When the three characters come together, do they give comfort to one another, or pain?

Vocabulary

programmer, plagiarized, serenity, rupees, communal, banalities, recuperate, superstitious, reverently, skullcap, endowment, spate, culminating, provisional, abroad, potent, enigmatic, paradigm, ego, idealistic

Part 4: Ayub Azim's Response to Terror: March 2003-October 2003 (Chapters 23-28)

Summary

In this section, we learn that Ayub "had been planning the rally for months" (183) with Tara. The couple is certain that the protest will be large, and that there will be many arrests. On the morning of the rally, Ayub goes to the protest and finds that the police are already breaking up the crowd. Ayub asks a policeman to arrest him, but the policeman says "You're not worth an arrest" (184).

The crowd disperses and Ayub begins to realize that nonviolent protest is ineffective: "He believed nonviolence suffered the fundamental problem of having no traffic with the media. The media reveled in sex and violence—how could nonviolence, with its graying temples and wise posture, match up?" (184-185).

After the rally, Tara breaks up with Ayub. We learn that she had secretly applied to grad school in the U.S., and has now decided to go. Ayub goes home to Azamgarh. When Mansoor messages him over the internet, Ayub says he is working as a salesman for a battery company, but Tara laughs at this and tells Mansoor that Ayub is visiting his sick father.

In the next chapter, we learn that Ayub is actually back at home working at his father's farm. He wants to go back to Delhi, but he has no money. He has seen the way Muslims are denied housing and jobs in Delhi, and so is afraid of trying to start a life there. He regrets his breakup with Tara, who had helped him financially. When he gets word from Mansoor that Tara has left for grad school, Ayub goes and buys a gun.

He tells the man he buys the gun from—an old acquaintance, Zunaid—that he needs it to solve a "monkey problem" (190) on the family farm, but the narrator soon reveals that Ayub wants the gun to assassinate Modi. Ayub begins to practice shooting. He daydreams about becoming a hero. But, when he takes the train to Delhi to kill Modi, he is unable to go through with his plan. He goes back home, intent on killing himself, but is also unable to do this. He writes a letter to Tara and visits a prostitute, imagining that he is making love to Tara.

Ayub goes back to Zunaid and confesses that he did not want the gun to kill monkeys. He lies to Zunaid and tells him that "he had been sent by a political party to recruit people to kill Modi and that he was looking for a team to carry it out" (195). Zunaid, who does not even know who Modi is at first, quickly agrees to help.

Zunaid then introduces Ayub to Shockie. Shockie is hesitant to trust Ayub, but when he learns that Ayub worked at Peace For All, and had met Malik, he becomes interested in Ayub. Shockie asks Ayub why he wants to kill Modi, and Ayub flashes back to a few weeks when he had taken a hallucinatory drug on his farm. He had a vision in which all the people in the world were just monkeys, and he saw that "the world existed in a state of battle between clans and races" (199). Ayub explains his ideas to Shockie, but Shockie says that the only way he will help is if Ayub finds a way to get Shockie into the jail to see Malik. Ayub says that Shockie can see Malik at his trial, and Shockie decides to trust Ayub.

Shockie takes Ayub with him to meet his group, which "operated out of a series of safe houses in the countryside of Uttar Pradesh" (201). Shockie, we learn, is no longer causing explosions himself, but has become a sort of "coach" (204) for the younger terrorists. He is older and sick with a "bad heart" (204). One of the young terrorists—Rafiq—tells Ayub that Shockie was involved with the bomb in Lajpat Nagar, and Ayub begins to suspect that Malik was not falsely imprisoned after all. Shockie, with tears falling down his face, tells Ayub the whole story about Malik, and Ayub wonders how a terrorist could be so emotional.

Ayub tells Tauqeer—another member of Shockie's group—that he is friends with Mansoor. Tauqueer suggests that Ayub stay with Mansoor when he goes to Delhi. It is decided that Ayub will go to Delhi first and await further instructions from the rest of the group, through email.

Ayub calls Mansoor and asks if he can come to stay with him. Mansoor is hesitant. He has not been getting along with his parents, who he feels are not embracing their Muslim culture and religion enough. He is also afraid of what Ayub will think of his nice house. But he agrees in the end.

When Ayub arrives, he tells Mansoor that he is engaged to a woman from his hometown and that he is in Delhi shopping for the wedding and looking for a new job. Time passes, and Ayub grows impatient. He believes that the group of terrorists has sent him to Delhi as a test or a trick. After Mansoor's father offers Ayub a job and Ayub begins to fear that his presence is becoming suspicious, Ayub leaves Mansoor's house and goes to a hotel in Daryaganj.

He finally receives an email from the group and goes to meet Shockie at a park. They talk about Mansoor, and Shockie expresses his remorse that his bomb hurt a Muslim. Then Shockie tells Ayub the plan. In order to "cause as much damage to the economy as possible" (224), Ayub will take a bomb to Sarojini Nagar, an open-air market, one week prior to the festival of Diwali. Ayub argues that it would be better to set off a blast in a mall, because he would rather kill the rich than the poor, but Shockie explains that there is too much security in the malls.

On the planned day, Ayub calls Mansoor and tells him he wants to accept the job from his father. Mansoor calls his father, who agrees. He is in a good mood, because the case against the Hindu couple who tricked him into buying their home and taking on

their massive debt is going well. The narrator reveals that Sharif's reasons for keeping Mansoor from going back to college were "not only financial" (228). His wife, Afsheen, had been depressed when Mansoor was away, and after 9/11 she began to worry that something might happen to Mansoor. Sharif, too, began to worry about his son's safety, so he used the family's financial difficulty as an excuse to keep Mansoor home.

Ayub goes to interview with Sharif. He does not intend to take the job, but he imagines that no one would suspect a man who has just gone to an interview of being about to blow up a market. After the interview, Ayub goes home, masturbates and cries, and then heads out to pick up the backpack with the bomb inside of it.

As Ayub takes a taxi to the market, time begins to slow down. He gets to the market, walks into its center, and puts his backpack down on the ground. He walks away and it explodes. Ayub falls to the ground, thinking: "Tara will hear me now" (234).

Analysis

Protest, in all its different forms, is analyzed throughout the novel. Ayub swings from being a believer in the power, and importance, of nonviolent protest to being a terrorist who sets off a bomb and kills innocent people in violent protest.

But the novel is not suggesting that violence is the logical answer to inefficient, nonviolent protest. Instead, the novel seems to argue that violent protest is not logical at all, and that its perpetrators are unstable and acting violently for reasons other than politics. When his rally fails to gain even a small amount of attention from the media, the police, or the government, Ayub loses faith in nonviolence, but it is not until Tara breaks up with him, he moves to his dreary hometown, and he has a vision after taking hallucinogens that he decides to convert to violence and kill Modi.

The media, for Ayub, is an antagonist, to him and to the whole country of India. "What would Gandhi do if he were alive today? Ayub wondered. Would the press even notice him or would it quickly slink on to stories of starlets spreading their legs in hotels the minute a protest came to nothing? The future of this country is in the hands of the media. But the media is blind and thinks its future is in the hands of consumers, and so it gives them what they want—sex and violence. And that's why, to punish all of them, to show them the end result of this strategy, I've come to plant a bomb" (220). Ayub's concerns about the media are legitimate, and his logic is convincing. The reader finds himself nodding in agreement until the last sentence abruptly jumps from cool logic to passionate illogic. Mahajan gives the terrorist space to defend his reasons and actions, but ultimately condemns him for the crime of being irrationally violent toward innocent people. Ayub even admits to himself that there is something fundamentally irrational about Shockie's group of terrorists: "Yes, there was something deeply illogical about how the group functioned, how it was organized, how it held its meetings—it prided itself on irrationality" (223). This mirrors Shockie's sentiments earlier in the book, during the first bomb, when he explains to his friends that the terrorist's best weapon against capture is irrationality.

Modi is another antagonist for Ayub, a human enemy who he hopes to assassinate. And Ayub's hatred of Modi is not rational, but passionate. Although Ayub has, again, legitimate concerns about Modi (he is, rumor has it, behind a number of grotesque attacks on Muslims), his concerns seem childish and immature because his hatred is not political, but personal: "He'd often wondered why, tried to examine how this bearded fellow had infiltrated his imagination and could only chalk it up to one thing: Modi's arrogance. There had been so many killers in Indian history but none as unrepentant or shameless as this capitalist political pig. None had operated in public view, And none seemed so above the law, so beloved by Hindus of all kinds—yes, he hated the Chief Minister because he represented the worse in Hindus, a belief in their own invincibility that always sprang up when they were doing well, making money hand over first, a belief that you could get away with anything if only you had money" (196). Here, we see that his fixation on Modi is personal, irrational, and a bit obsessive. It is also clear that Ayub's feelings toward Modi stem from his feeling about class, and his own position in the lower class. This, in turn, ties into his relationship with Tara, who was a high class Hindu. And this is why, when Ayub finally sets off the bomb, he does not think of Modi, but of Tara.

Allusions to other novels are sprinkled throughout the text. Gandhi's Autobiography is read and discussed by multiple terrorists and Ayn Rand's The Fountainhead is uses as a symbol of Western individualism. In this section, we learn that Ayub's favorite book is Raag Darbari. It was "the first novel he'd read about his type of town, in which a man dressed in khadi hitches a ride on a truck on the way back to town and is mistaken for a CBI agent" (195). Ayub thinks of the book right after he lies to Zunaid about being "sent by a political party to recruit people to kill Modi" (195)." He reflects to himself that, in the lie, he has "turned himself into an agent" (195). By turning himself into an agent, just like a character in a novel, he fictionalizes himself to himself, and, in this way, is able to go through with the bomb as he was unable to go through with shooting Modi or killing himself.

The vision Ayub has when he is on hallucinogenic drugs is horrific, and it is indicative of his mindset. Ayub thinks of the vision when Shockie asks why he is intent on killing Modi, and this suggests that his reason for wanting to assassinate the Chief Minister lies somewhere in the vision, in which Ayub sees that humans are just monkeys who put on an artificial coat of civilization. "What was Modi but a violent, screaming animal demanding the death and destruction of other clans? There were two ways to handle such a fat chest-beating monkey: to hide away forever in the forest or to attack him and his clan" (199). In the vision, Ayub sees Modi as an animal, but, in the end, it is Ayub who becomes an animal, wandering alone on the beach and eating coconuts.

In many ways, Shockie and Ayub are foils for one another. They are both terrorists, but whereas Ayub is passionate and riled up about politics, Shockie seems to make bombs out of sheer habit. When Ayub learns about Shockie's intimate relationship with Malik, and watches Shockie cry over his imprisoned friend, Ayub thinks: "Something is not right about this man. You can't be a terrorist and be so emotional and unguarded" (206). Here, we see that Ayub, who has become isolated from his old life and his old friends, cannot understand Shockie's deep feelings for his old friend.

The nihilism that Mansoor introduced into the novel is continued through Ayub. As he travels to Delhi to set off the bomb, he thinks to himself that he and the other terrorists are “all fighting for a place long vacated by God, fighting to save hell. What if I’ve died a long time ago and come here? he wondered. What if the defining characteristic of hell is that you’re locked in an endless, blind battle to reform it?” (211).

Ayub’s isolation is, to an extent, self-imposed. When he arrives in Delhi at Mansoor’s house, his old friend tries to connect with him, but everything Ayub tells Mansoor is a lie: his wedding, his job-search, his fiancé. As the two continue their reunion, Ayub admits that, because of his isolation back home, “basic interaction had become hard for him” (214). When Mansoor asks about Ayub’s trip home, and Ayub answers honestly, he is surprised at himself. In this, we can see that, although Ayub has made up his mind to isolate himself from his friend, there is something deep inside of him that still crave the sort of honesty, connection, and friendship that he used to have with Mansoor, the sort of friendship that Malik and Shockie had.

Discussion Question 1

Once Ayub goes home, he isolates himself from his old life and his old friends, including Mansoor. When he sees Mansoor again, he tells him many lies. But, several times during this section, Ayub is shocked that he has opened up and confessed a truth, either to Mansoor or Sharif. Where does this urge to confess come from?

Discussion Question 2

When Ayub takes a hallucinogenic drug, he has a vision in which he sees all of mankind as monkeys. What does this vision suggest about his viewpoint? What does it contribute to the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Ayub is shocked that Shockie cries over Malik. Is the idea of terrorism incompatible with ideas of friendship, love, and emotion? The book inarguably bridges together these ideas—why?

Vocabulary

bespectacled, incense, colonies, beta, retaliatory, economic, illogical, cyber, rebellion, righteous, conducting, compass, engulf, communal, sodium, skeletal, scrutiny, internationalization, recruit, rickshaw

Part 5: The Association of Small Bombs: October 2003- (Chapters 29-32)

Summary

The final section of the novel starts with Vikas and Deepa watching TV and seeing news of the bomb in Sarojini Nagar. The couple decides to go and meet the victims of the bomb the next day.

The narrator explains that Vikas and Deepa had joined and helped shape the Association of Terror Victims (which, we later learn, they refer to privately as the Association of Small Bombs) in 2002. The group fights for the rights of victims of small bombs, and, perhaps more importantly, they "collectively remember the blasts in which they had lost their relatives or limbs" (238).

Going further back in time, the narrator informs us that Vikas only began to grieve for his dead sons after his daughter was born. For this, he "hated" (239) her. After his daughter was born, and he was focusing on his new documentary as a way to escape his house and his life, his "marriage fell apart" (240).

Deepa, frustrated by her husband's continuous depression, began an affair with his cousin Mukesh. It is revealed that Deepa experienced guilt, just like Vikas did, for allowing Vikas to allow the boys to go to the market.

But, one day in 2002, shortly after Mansoor returned to Delhi from college, the Khuranas invited him for tea. Seeing him "freed something in both of them" (245), and the couple began to heal. Their relationship improved, and they forgave the boys for going to the market.

Deepa ended her affair with Mukesh, and then she and her husband went to meet with Gill, the leader of an association of terror victims that "lobbied for terrorists to be hanged" (247). Gill invites them to join his group, and the Khuranas begin working with other victims. Their marriage becomes stronger than ever before, but they begin to neglect their daughter Anusha.

In the next chapter, we learn that Deepa and Vikas's role in The Association of Small Bombs is to act as the "matriarch and patriarch" (250) of a support group. Gill, on the other hand, is in charge of fighting to punish the terrorists themselves. As such, the group is in "direct opposition" (250) to Ayub's Peace For All. Vikas and Deepa go to the hospital and visit the victims of the bomb, including Ayub, whose eye has been punctured and whose legs have been wounded.

In the next chapter, Mansoor learns about the bomb. He sees Ayub on TV, and goes with his mother, Afsheen, to visit his friend. At the hospital, Ayub—who has given the

doctors a fake Hindu name—plays the victim to Mansoor and Afsheen, while he secretly awaits communication from the other terrorists.

When Mansoor and Afsheen leave, Ayub begins to fear that Afsheen knows that he detonated the bomb. He attempts to escape from the hospital, but realizes someone stole his money “when he was lying in the mud, bleeding” (258).

Mansoor comes back to the hospital with his father, Sharif. When Sharif goes outside to make a call, Ayub tells Mansoor that he is going to be arrested, and then he lies about why: “He said he had enraged so many policeman over the years with his activism that they had vowed to take revenge on him; one had come by and threatened him with arrest” (260).

Ayub begs Mansoor not to tell Sharif, and Mansoor agrees. Mansoor asks what Ayub needs, and then proceeds to give Ayub money. When Ayub puts the money into his pocket, he smiles, and “In that smile Mansoor suddenly knew that Ayub had done it” (261). Despite this realization, Mansoor leaves the hospital. That night, he has chills. In the morning, Afsheen suggests they go and visit the hospital. Mansoor calls the hospital and discovers than Ayub has gone.

In the last chapter, we learn that three years into his imprisonment, Malik had named Shockie as the terrorist responsible for the bomb in Lajpat Nagar. The police, the Khuranas, and Gill began tracking Shockie.

But Shockie was never found - not until now. He had come to see Ayub as a friend, a sort of replacement for Malik, and so had stayed in Delhi, lingering around the park where he was supposed to meet Ayub after the blast. A “paranoid” (264) man who lived nearby had noticed his presence and called the police, and then Shockie was arrested for the bomb in Sarojini Nagar. Once arrested, he tells his captors and torturers that “The real mastermind is Ayub Azmi. He’s done the last ten blasts. I’ve been his servant” (264).

Ayub, we learn, has gone back to the base in Hubli. Once the other terrorists realize Shockie has been arrested, they leave the base. Ayub goes with Tauqueer to a shack on the ocean. After a few days, Tauqueer disappears, leaving Ayub locked inside the shack with no food or water. Ayub passes out, and when he wakes up he is on an operating table in another shack. Tauqueer is there, and Ayub is told that a bomb has been implanted inside of his body. It will, they say, go off when he moves a certain way. Ayub is dumped on the beach and left alone. In a fit of mania, he runs through a deserted village, crying for help. A day later, he is found dead, not from an explosion, but from hunger and exhaustion.

In Delhi, Mansoor is arrested and tortured. He confesses to the bomb in Sarojini Nagar and is transferred to Tihar Jail. The Khuranas try to help the Ahmeds, but years pass and Mansoor is still awaiting trial. He decides he hates religion. His mother comes to visit often, but he yells at her when she cries. Vikas comes to visit, and tells Mansoor that his documentary about terrorism is going to “speed up the process” (273), but in

reality Vikas has become a “broken man” (273). Upset about Mansoor, he suggests that he and Deepa sell their house and use the money to help the Ahmeds pay for the trial. She refuses, and he believes she has become selfish. During a fight, she tells him about her affair, and he moves out. In his flat, he works and eats only bananas, and then dies of a potassium overdose a year later.

Sharif and Afsheen remain together, working for charities and becoming religious, but they live in poverty. One day, Sharif’s car begins to act funny. Then, Afsheen’s buttons disappear. And finally, a lemon full of blood is found behind a picture of Mansoor. The Ahmeds believe black magic is being used against them, and seek out an expert to “counter” (275) the force.

Twelve years after the bomb, after Shockie and Malik are executed, Mansoor is let out of jail for “lack of evidence” (275). When his parents pick him up and bring him back to their new home, Afsheen asks if he wants to go out to celebrate. Mansoor declines, and the book ends with the narrator’s declaration that Mansoor: “never went out again” (276).

Analysis

Vikas and Deepa belong to the Association of Small Bombs as a way to honor the memory of their sons, and memory is an important theme in the book. In earlier chapters, the memories of the boy have always been sharp, painful, tragic things. In this section, though, the memory of the boys serves a purpose: Vikas “decided it was important to remember in order to keep the past from repeating itself; the country was moving so fast, hurtling so enthusiastically into the future, that people had little idea of how easily everything could be undone”(238). Later, we learn that he and Deep both believe that their past tragedy happened in order to give them a larger purpose in life: “it gave them enormous solace to know that their suffering had not been for naught, that they had been able to eke a large meaning out of it” (248). This noble purpose is in direct contradiction to the bleak nihilism in Mansoor and Ayub’s chapters. And indeed, by the end of the novel, Vikas looses his optimism and ends his life in a tragic way.

Anusha, Vikas and Deepa’s daughter, is a symbol of the future. Vikas claims that he hates her, though, and instead of embracing her focuses his energy on preserving the memory of his boys with the Association of Small Bombs. He also walks through the market and imagines “it had never happened. He was forty-seven, successful, with a loving wife and two boys and a daughter” (239). Vikas’s inability to embrace his daughter and let go of the memory of his boys is an inability to let go of the past and embrace the future.

The Khurana’s obsession with the past is ultimately an obsession with death. They reject their daughter and the future and devote their lives to charitable work, but there is something sinister in their desire to repeat the tragedy that tore their lives apart over and over again: “The way the association was structured—depended, in a way, on the inflow of victims—made the Khuranas perversely eager for new bombings” (250).

Guilt is a theme that runs throughout the novel. Up until now, Vikas and Mansoor have been the only two characters to carry the load of guilt over the bomb, but in this section Deepa takes some of the weight from them. Guilt is not cathartic, but forgiveness is. When Deepa and Vikas realize that the boys were also responsible for their actions —"the boys had ruined their lives, The boys, not the bomb, had been their killers" (246) —they forgive the boys. With forgiveness, the couple grows closer and happier. This does not last, however, and one must wonder if the novel is suggesting that, had the couple learned to forgive all involved, they might have had a happy ending.

But the Khuranas do not find it in themselves to forgive the terrorists, and their political transformation is one of great importance. Like Mansoor, who went from boy, to individualist, to Muslim, to nihilist, the Khuranas politics are shifted by the bomb. After the bomb, "they were shocked at themselves. They were no longer liberals" (247). They tell reporters that the government should "kill everyone in the Taliban" (246) and join a group led by a man who "lobbied for terrorists to be hanged" (247). Most dramatic of all, however, is their attitude toward torture. When they witness Malik being tortured, the couple stands silently and has no emotional reaction. But when they watch Shockie being tortured, they watch "with delight" (264).

The most dramatic transformation, however, still belongs to Ayub. He starts out as a good, peaceful, intelligent man and ends up as a terrorist. When Ayub realizes that he has crossed a line, he panics. "Before, for all his planning, he was an innocent, pure potentiality. Now, he was a murderer and a terrorist" (257). He becomes bad, and, in the end, he is literally turned into a bomb. Although the other terrorists might not really place a bomb inside him, he believes that he has a bomb in his chest. And the metaphor is obvious: once you become a terrorist, you are no longer human, you are a walking, talking bomb.

The end of the novel is tightly structured so as to tie up all loose ends. There are a number of coincidences and a good deal of circularity. Mansoor embodies this when he visits Ayub in the hospital: "Mansoor, resting against the door, marveled at the oddness of the situation—the way in which life had come full circle, so that he was the well one now, with strong arms, a skullcap on his head, a prayer on his lips, visiting someone else who'd been injured in a blast" (254).

The novel, as a whole, explores the different perspectives of characters on different sides of the first bomb, and the experiment is complicated when Mansoor, a victim of the first bomb, becomes unwittingly complicit in the second bomb. Mahajan comments on this play with perspectives and angles through Ayub, as he fabricates a story for Mansoor and Afsheen: "I fought for the rights of people arrested for terror but I've never been on this side … One understands how the victims must feel about terrorists. They're looking for revenge. They don't want to listen to reason. What happened is so irrational that it makes people irrational" (259). Ayub, who is a victim of his own bomb, is the only character in the novel who confesses to being able to see both sides of the issue.

Discussion Question 1

When Mansoor goes to the hospital to visit Ayub, he reflects that his life has come full circle. What other characters have come full circle by the end of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

In this section, Afsheen forgives her boys for going to the market and dying. Victims do not typically need to be forgiven—what does this break from traditional victim/criminal roles do for the novel?

Discussion Question 3

While working with the Association of Small Bombs, Vikas and Deepa find a brief peace because they believe their tragedy has meaning. Do either of them hold onto this belief through the end of the novel? Did the bomb have any greater meaning?

Vocabulary

susurration, curios, superstition, subsisting, potassium, recurring, rummaging, patriarch, matriarch, threshold, separatists, dismantled, brandished, estimation, stasis, star-crossed, protocol, staph, tremor, fabricate

Characters

Vikas Khurana

Vikas is the husband of Deepa and the father of Nakul, Tushar, and, later, Anusha. Although there is no protagonist in the novel, he and his wife are the female and male leads of the first part of the novel.

Vikas grew up in a solid, middle-class, Hindu family, and started out his career as an accountant. Soon after meeting his wife at the firm where they both worked, he quit in order to become a documentary filmmaker. Vikas was never satisfied with his career, which never made him much money, and he blamed his lack of success on his inability to move out of Delhi because of his children. When his boys are killed, he blames himself for their deaths.

After the boys are killed, Vikas falls into a depression that lasts the better part of a decade. He occasionally snaps out of it, especially when he and Deepa are getting along, but for the most part he is permanently crippled by the bomb, much like Mansoor.

Vikas' relationship with Deepa takes a long time to crumble, and they spend many years together after the bomb, but eventually their relationship completely breaks. Once his marriage falls apart, Vikas has nothing left to live for, and he retreats to a lonely apartment where he dies from a potassium overdose because he eats nothing but bananas for a year.

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Deepa Khurana

Deepa is the wife of Vikas and the mother of Nakul, Tushar, and Anusha. Although she is not the protagonist, she is the most important, and most well-rounded, female character.

Deepa grew up in South India and was raised as a Christian. Her mother died when she was very young, and she had no other siblings. When Deepa met Vikas, she was working as an accountant. Once she had the boys, though, she quit working. Vikas’s career as a filmmaker was not enough to support the family, though, so Deepa baked cakes on the side to supplement their income.

As the mother of the victims, Deepa is perhaps most affected by the bomb. When her boys are killed, she wants revenge. But, when she finally manages to get what she wants, she is not satisfied. In order to find meaning in her life again, she has an affair with Mukesh. When the affair ends, she starts working with an organization that attempts to help other victims of small bombs.

In the end, though, it is her daughter, Anusha, that allows Deepa to move forward into the future and leave her boys in the past. While Vikas dies alone in an apartment, Mansoor wastes away in prison, Ayub dies alone on a beach, and the Ahmeds sink into poverty, Deepa's story ends relatively happily. She moves away with Anusha, and no other details about her life are given, which suggests that Deepa is the only one who does not meet a horrible fate.

Mansoor Ahmed

Mansoor is the son of Sharif and Afsheen Ahmed. He is the protagonist of his own section. He is with Tushar and Nakul, his best friends, when the bomb goes off, but he is not killed. When he turns 18, he goes to college in America, but he comes back to Delhi because of an injury that started with the bomb.

While in Delhi, he joins a group called Peace For All and finds God. He begins to resent his parents, who he believes are too wealthy and not religious enough. He becomes good friends with Ayub, but jealousy on Mansoor's part in regards to Ayub's girlfriend, Tara, destroys their friendship.

Mansoor thinks that Ayub is ready to forgive and forget when Ayub comes back to Delhi and asks to stay at Mansoor's house, but Ayub is only using Mansoor. When Ayub sets off a second bomb, he indirectly links Mansoor to the bomb in Sarojini Nagar, and Mansoor is arrested, tortured, and imprisoned for 12 years before being released. When he is released, all he wants to do is be with his parents.

Ayub Azim

Ayub is a member of Peace For All. He is the intellectual voice of reason for the group, and he becomes good friends with Mansoor. He takes him under his wing, and teaches him how to be a better Muslim.

Ayub is deeply in love with his girlfriend, Tara, and he is devastated when she breaks up with him. He goes back to his family’s farm after the breakup. While there, he takes hallucinogenic drugs and buys a gun to kill the politician, Modi, with.

When this plan fails, he joins a group of terrorists lead by Shockie. He goes to Delhi and stays with Mansoor, pretending that he is in town for his own wedding. He finally sets off a bomb in Sarojini Nagar, but ends up in the hospital because of wounds from his own bomb. He escapes arrest, but he is left for dead by his terrorist friends. In his fall from grace, he is the antihero of the novel.

Malik

Malik is Shockie's best friend. Although Malik is a member of JKIF, he believes in nonviolent protest and his favorite book is Gandhi's Autobiography. He is falsely imprisoned, tortured, and executed for the Lajpat Nagar bombing.

Shaukat "Shockie" Guru

Shockie is Malik's best friend. He is also the bomb maker for JKIF. He is 26, obese, and balding. He sets off the bomb in Lajpat Nagar.

Later in life, he becomes a mentor and coach for a group of younger terrorists. While in this role, he meets Ayub and helps him set off the bomb in Sarojini Nagar. His friendship with Ayub gets him arrested for the bomb in Lajpat Nagar. He is tortured and executed.

Nakul Khurana

Nakul is the son of Vikas and Deepa. He is 11 when the bomb kills him. He plays guitar, does origami, and is described as handsome and sporty.

Tushar Khurana

Tushar is the son of Vikas and Deepa. He is 13 when the bomb kills him. He is plump and responsible, and he likes to bake cakes with his mom.

Sharif Ahmed

Sharif is the father of Mansoor and the husband of Afsheen. He and his wife are wealthy Muslims, and they are good friends with the Khuranas. His relationship with his son is strained when Mansoor becomes a member of Peace For All, but in the end they make up.

Afsheen Ahmed

Afsheen is the mother of Mansoor and the wife of Sharif. When the bomb goes off and Afsheen realizes that Mansoor was at the market, she is furious with the Khuranas for letting her sheltered son go off on his own. But when Mansoor is found she takes pity on the Khuranas and their loss, and she does everything she can for them.

Anusha Khurana

Anusha is the youngest daughter of Vikas and Deepa. She is born after her brothers are killed. Her father rejects her and the promise of a future that she brings.

Taukish

Taukish is a JKIF agent who helps Shockie set off the bomb in Lajpat Nagar. He lives with his mother and unmarried sisters.

Meraj

Meraj is another JKIF agent who helps Shockie set off the bomb. He is friends with Taukish.

Abdul

Abdul is the leader of the JKIF. He owns a carpet shop and runs the JKIF on the side. Shockie despises him for being so cheap.

Jaidev

Jaidev is a lawyer and a friend of Vikas. He gives the Khuranas legal advice about the trial.

Mukesh

Mukesh is a cousin of Vikas. He offers to help Deepa meet with the imprisoned suspects. Later, he has an affair with Deepa.

Venkaiah Naidu

Naidu is a friend of Mukesh, and the spokesman of the BJP party. Mukesh offers to contact him to help Deepa meet with the terrorists.

Jagdish

Jagdish is one of Vikas's uncles. He was the former cabinet secretary, and he offers to help Deepa get inside the jail to meet the terrorists.

Mrs. Thapar

Mrs. Tapar is the deputy head of the jail system. She believes that her prison reforms convicts, but Vikas disagrees with her and her system.

Rajat

Rajat is Vikas’s brother. He loans Vikas a large sum of money.

Darius

Darius is Mansoor’s friend from school and a member of Peace For All. He phones Mansoor and gets him to join the group.

Tauqueer.

Tauqueer is a member of Shockie's group of terrorists. He escapes with Ayub to a shack on the beach, but then turns him in to other terrorists as a traitor.

Tara

Tara is a member of Peace For All. She dates, and then breaks up with, Ayub. Mansoor has romantic feelings for her.

Narendra Modi

Narendra Modi is the chief minister of Gujarat. He is suspected of being complicit in horrendous crimes against Muslims in India. Ayub attempts to assassinate him.

Zunaid

Zunaid is a small-time thug in Azamgarh. He gets a gun for Ayub, and then helps connect him with Shockie.

K. R. Gill

Gill is the leader of an association for terror victims that he runs with Vikas and Deepa. He is a conservative, and he believes that terrorists ought to be hanged.

Symbols and Symbolism

The TV

The TV acts as a symbol of the Khurana's poverty and Vikas's guilt over being unable to provide for his family financially. The boys were at Lajpat Nagar in order to pick up the television set, which was being repaired instead of replaced, like a wealthier family would have done. For Vikas, his failure to generate money lead directly to the death of his sons.

The State Bank of India Sign

The State Bank of India sign is a symbol for India itself. Vikas sees the sign when he is wandering the streets of Delhi in a confused haze after the boys have died, and he begins to weep for love of it.

The Cow

The cow is a symbol of the senseless violence of terrorism. At the boys' cremation, a group of children kick and beat the cow for no reason, angering Vikas.

The Khurana Complex

The Khurana Complex is a symbol of family. The large property is broken into separate flats, and each flat is inhabited by a different Khurana. In the beginning of the novel, the communal areas of the complex are rarely used, but when the family comes together to comfort Vikas and Deepa, the shared rooms are opened up and used again.

The Fountainhead

Ayn Rand's The Fountainhead is used as a symbol of Western Ideology. Mansoor becomes obsessed with the book when he goes to college in California, and he renounces it and its "selfish" ideology when he finds God and recommits himself to the Muslim religion.

Nakul and Tushar

Nakul and Tushar are symbols of innocence. Their function in the text is to act as a foil to the violence of terrorism.

Gandhi’s Autobiography

Gandhi’s Autobiography acts as a symbol of nonviolent protest. Malik reads and quotes from the book before being arrested, and Ayub stays up reading it all night before his nonviolent protest.

Modi

For Ayub, Modi is a symbol of Indian bigotry against Muslims. This is why Ayub targets Modi and fantasizes about assassinating him, although he never goes through with it.

Anusha

Anusha is a symbol of rebirth. Deepa allows herself and her life to get a second start with the birth of her daughter, but Vikas rejects his daughter, and the idea of a second start, and dies alone.

The Abandoned Village

The abandoned village is a symbol of complete isolation. After the terrorists leave Ayub for dead, he runs through this empty village on the sea, crying for help and for God.

Settings

The Khurana Complex

The complex is home to the Khuranas. Vikas inherited a flat in the complex from his father, and all of the other flats are occupied by his relatives. His flat is haunted by the ghosts of his dead children, and if he could afford to move himself and Deepa out of the complex he would.

Tihar Jail

Tihar Jail is the jail in Delhi where terrorists are held. The walls around it are covered with barbed wire and crushed glass. Inside, there are dozens of doors and gates and winding paths. The administration offices are clean and bureaucratic, which contrasts with the torture that happens there.

Santa Clara

Santa Clara is where Mansoor goes to college. At first, it seems like a sort of paradise, far removed from all the troubles of his past and of India. But after 9/11, the campus looses much of its allure.

Lajpat Nagar

Lajpat Nagar is where the Khurana boys are killed. It is a big, bustling open-air market filled with dozens of different shops.

Sarojini Nagar

Sarojini Nagar is where Ayub sets off the second bomb. It is also an open-air market with dozens of different shops.

Azamgarh

Azamgarh is Ayub’s hometown. It is far removed from Delhi and is described as a place where all of India’s trash is sent.

Delhi

Delhi is the central location for the novel. Both bombs explode in markets in Delhi.

Themes and Motifs

Fate

Without any truly guilty criminals to cast blame onto (or, to put it another way, with so much guilt to spread around that no one human is any more guilty than another), the novel asks that the reader consider the possibility that all of the tragedy might have been predestined to occur by some divine influence, and the book suggests that fate might be a more serious antagonist to the characters than any other person. Because fate is larger and more powerful than human motivations, mistakes, and desires, Mahajan is able to add depth to the already complex issues within the novel.

The novel starts out with a bomb, and everything that happens, afterwards, to the characters involved in the bomb, leads to a second bomb. The circularity of the plot lends itself to the idea that fate is running the lives of all of the characters. Everything seems to have happened at just the right time, in just the right space. At the very end of the book, Mansoor, who is in prison for a bomb he did not set off, "thought of his life and came to the conclusion it could not have gone any other way; he was still living out the phase that had started with the 1996 bomb; his mistake had been to think that it could go away overnight. But nothing did. You had to settle into tragedy as you settled into love or death" (272). Here, Mansoor echoes the plot of the novel: everything was set in stone the moment the bomb went off.

And, in truth, fate is an adversarial presence long before the bomb goes off. Shockie tries to get out of going to Delhi and setting off the bomb. If his mother had answered her phone, if he had quit the JKIF, if he had never gone to Delhi—then the bomb would not have gone off. Fate runs deeper than Shockie's decisions, though. When he gets to Delhi, the first bomb he plants in the market fails to go off. If it had gone off on the first day, the boys would still be alive. Another set of people would be dead, but the Khuranas and the Ahmeds would remain untainted by terrorism. Fate seems to have mandated that the blast occur on that specific day at that specific time. That the bomb is nearly thwarted half a dozen times before it goes off serves to underline the cosmic destiny of the whole event.

Aside from being embedded in the very fabric of the plot, characters often speak of or ponder the notion of fate. After Mansoor's injuries send him back to India, but before he finds God, he becomes angry with the Khuranas for allowing him to go to the market: "Indians were like that, happy to be puppets of fate" (162). His words are bitter and angry, but there is truth to them—all of the characters in this book are puppets of fate, even (perhaps especially) the terrorists.

Vikas, too, reflects that he has had an obsession with death and misery since a young age: "Maybe if he had not thought so much, worried so much about death, it would not have come from him" (252). Here, although Vikas does not mention fate by name, it is

clear that he suspects that his life was mapped out, set on a trajectory, from the beginning, and that he himself was complicit in bringing all the tragedy to pass.

Victims and Criminals

Karan Mahajan breaks down the barriers between good and evil by portraying the same story through two perspectives—that of the 'victims' and that of the 'terrorists.' On the surface, there are two categories of characters in this novel: victims and criminals/terrorists. Two of the first sections are, in fact, entitled "Victims" and "Terrorists" respectively. And in the beginning of the novel, the distinction seems just as black and white as the categorically entitled sections. The victims are those who were hurt by the bomb: Tushar and Nakul Khurana, Mansoor Ahmed, and their parents: Vikas, Deepa, Afsheen, and Sharif. The criminal is the one who set off the bomb: Shockie.

But the novel is not so black and white. As we learn more about the characters, it becomes clear that none of the victims are entirely innocent. Vikas was responsible for the boys being at the market during the bomb. He sent them there to fetch his TV, which was being repaired because he was too poor to fix it, so that he could watch a cricket game that was coming on that night. Deepa blames herself for being so lenient with Vikas and allowing him to allow the boys to go to the market. Tushar and Nakul are responsible for deciding to disobey their father and go to the market before taking Mansoor home, and Mansoor is responsible for agreeing to go along with the plan. This is not to suggest that any of these characters deserved any of this to happen, but much of the novel is concerned with guilt and blame, and where it lies is a fundamental question that never seems to be answered by Mahajan, only complicated.

Shockie sets off the bomb that ruins numerous lives, he is a criminal and a terrorist, and yet he is not an evil character. Instead, Mahajan allows him to be redeemed through his friendship with Malik. Their friendship is a genuine, loving relationship that matches the one between the Khuranas.

The disintegration of barriers between victim and criminal reaches completion when it comes to Ayub and Mansoor. Mansoor is a victim, and yet he sympathizes with and advocates for the criminals. Ayub is not a victim of the first bomb, and yet he is the star of a section entitled "Ayub Azim's Response To Terror." This suggests that he is, in fact, a victim. And, as we learn more about his past, his social status, and his hometown, we can see that he is a victim of poverty, of circumstance, and of bigotry. Ayub is also, however, a criminal and a terrorist. He sets off a bomb and kills even more people than Shockie's first bomb did.

At the end of the novel, the wall between good and evil crumbles down, and everyone is left on an equal playing field of misery. All of the characters—victims and criminals alike—are miserable. All of the criminals are punished: Shockie is executed and Ayub dies alone on the beach. The victims ought to be happy, especially the Khuranas, who sought out revenge from the start, but they are not. They are no better off than the

criminals. Vikas and Deepa's relationship crumbles and Vikas dies, Afsheen and Sharif fall into poverty and lose their son, and Mansoor is jailed for 12 years.

Isiolation and Otherness

Ayub's experience with otherness as he lives as a Muslim in a Hindu country serves as an example of how isolation can destroy a human. Ayub is the only character who experiences true isolation, and his isolation is rooted in his "otherness." Being a Muslim in India is no easy feat. It is difficult to find housing, employment, and justice. Sharif, Afsheen, and Mansoor are also Muslims, and they face much the same bigotry that Ayub faces. When the first bomb goes off, they must endure many snide comments from the Khuranas extended family, and Sharif is swindled into buying a house with a large lien on it because, as a Muslim, there were many houses he was not allowed to purchase. But the Ahmeds are wealthy and in a much better position, socially, than Ayub is. Adding to this, the Ahmeds are not particularly religious, whereas Ayub is borderline radical in his religious beliefs. When he is in Delhi, supported by a whole group of sympathetic friends and Muslims, Ayub does not feel the loneliness of his position as a poor, Muslim man in a Hindu country; the members of Peace For All were "people who wanted to be Indians but had discovered themselves instead to be Muslims and had started to embrace their identities. In their alienation, their desire to be included in the mainstream, Mansoor recognized himself" (144). But, when he breaks up with Tara and goes home to Azamgarh because he feels he cannot make it in the city without his Hindu girlfriend and the financial security she gave him, he becomes isolated. He disconnects from all his old friends and even loses the ability to communicate with language.

As luck, or perhaps fate, would have it, Ayub's one great fear is isolation. When he is training with Shockie's group of terrorists, he imagines how heroic he will be when he martyrs himself and allows himself to be arrested after setting off the bomb. He believes that getting arrested is the only way to make a statement. His one fear, however, is that he might get put in isolation: "Despite the fact that he had almost given himself up for arrest at the rally, he had a total fear of solitary confinement, believed it would absolutely break him. He was a person who thrived on company, who desired camaraderie, even in in its lowest, most base form; he felt that just seeing other people, no matter the circumstances, even if the people were enemies, filled you with health, gave you a reason to live (we are monkeys). Without other faces it would be over; he'd be thrown down the well of madness" (205).

And in the end Ayub's fate is perhaps more terrible than any other characters because it is his greatest fear realized. Ayub does not martyr himself, as he planned. Instead, he escapes capture and flees Delhi. He meets up with Tauqueer, and they spend a pleasant couple of days in a shack, but soon his terrorist friends betray him. He is locked in a shack, alone. When he wakes up, they tell him that he has a bomb in his chest that will detonate at any moment. The horror begins in earnest, however, when they leave him on a beach and he runs madly through an abandoned village: "Arriving at the hut, he panted and waited, hoping someone would show up. But it was a bombed

out husk. No one was there. He saw an entire village of husks leading up a hill. He wondered if this was a place that had gone extinct in an experiment of the sort that was being carried out on him" (267). The last we see of him, he is screaming out for help, but no one is there to hear him. He apologizes to God, and asks to be taken back, but he dies alone on the beach, a destroyed husk of the man he used to be.

Crime and Punishment

Through various characters' experiences with the justice system, Karan Mahajan shows that the justice system in India is fundamentally flawed and that, without justice, there is only chaos and violence. The book begins with a bomb, and then proceeds to analyze the fallout. For the Khuranas, especially Deepa, the months following the bomb are full of a desire to attain justice for their sons. There is nothing Deepa wants more than vengeance, and when she goes to the court she expects the experience to be cathartic. It is not.

The court system in India is incapable of meeting the victims' need for justice. Although Malik is somewhat connected to the bomb, his connection is arbitrary, and he is the only one of three men arrested for the bomb that seems to have any connection at all. The others are just scapegoats, arrested so that the government can look as if it has an iron fist in regards to terrorism. The trial is a farce that lasts over five years. Mansoor's arrest and subsequent jailing, which lasts another 12 years, is the final straw in a novel which seems intent on proving that victims of small bombs in India cannot expect justice.

In the absence of justice, the victims must resort to vengeance. Deepa and Vikas go to the jail intent on confronting the terrorists. If the courts will not do their job, Deepa thinks, then it is her responsibility to seek out favors from Vikas's powerful family members and obtain special permission to enter the jail. She does, but when she and Vikas visit the jail and watch Malik being beaten and tortured by the guards, she leaves feeling depressed and suicidal rather than vindicated.

Mansoor is the only victim of the original bomb who does not wish to seek vengeance, but his desire to get justice (or "Peace") for all, even the terrorists, costs him 12 years in jail, which suggests that without a proper justice system, even those who do not answer the call to vengeance are subject to endure chaos where there should be order. Mansoor is the only victim of the bomb who can look at the issue of justice with a rational head, and. Despite having seen his two friends die, and having lived with horrendous pain and anxiety because of a bomb set off by terrorists, Mansoor has sympathy for the arrested men. When he goes to visit the mothers and wives of the imprisoned men, he listens to their stories of torture with horror and compassion. He protests on their behalf, writes articles, and gives interviews. In the end, though, Mansoor ends up just like them. He is imprisoned for another bomb, in another market, and is locked up for 12 years.

Violent and Nonviolent Protest

Through a series of protests that vary in degree of violence but not in their lack of efficiency at igniting social change, Karan Mahajan suggests that without the ability to protest, there can be no democracy. The first act of protest we witness is the bomb that sets the plot in motion. The bomb, which goes off in Delhi, is an act of violent protest against Indian military oppression in Kashmir. The book itself is a testament to the fact that violent protest is inefficient: A reader who knows nothing about Kashmir to begin with will end the book without knowing much more than that. The violence of the bomb does not generate thought, debate, or change. Instead, it generates tragedy. With the tragedy comes pity, compassion, and righteous anger. None of the victims discuss Kashmir, the military, or oppression. If they discuss the terrorists at all, it is to ridicule them and their Muslim faith: “They can’t live in peace, these Muslims. Anywhere they show up, they’re at war … A violent religion of violent people. In the Quran, it’s written—no Muslim is supposed to rest till he’s drunk the blood of seventy-two unbelievers” (25).

Semi-violent protest is also shown to be ineffective. Malik is the first character to discuss suicide as protest: “What do you think these attacks are going to achieve? Today when you were complaining about the blast not being big enough, I was thinking: It doesn’t matter. It’s all wrong. Blasts are a way of hiding. If you want to be a hero you have to be a martyr” (59). Here, Malik is a fan of Gandhi, and is much taken with his idea about the Holocaust: “You know what Gandhi said Jews should do when face with the Nazis? Commit mass suicide”(59). Later, right before their nonviolent protest, Tara and Ayub stay up all night reading Gandhi’s autobiography, and Tara echoes Malik, almost word-for-word. “Think of it. If the Jews were able to muster that kind of courage, the Holocaust would have never happened” (180). Mansoor answers this inane comment by pointing out that suicide is a form of violence too.

Nonviolent protest is given a chance, but it seems to be just as ineffective as all the other forms. Ayub and Tara spend months planning their protest, but when the day comes, nobody cares about them. The media does not report on them, the police will not arrest them, and Modi will not refrain from making an appearance in public because of them. This inability to ignite change the nonviolent way propels Ayub to ignite it the violent way, and we come full circle back to another bomb, which is just as ineffective in regards to changing policy as the first one. And, if citizens have no adequate way to protest, they cannot truly live in a democracy.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator. The narrator uses his omniscient powers often, and we are given insight into more than ten character's thoughts, motivations, and desires. Because so many characters are given the spotlight, the novel does not come off as biased toward any one character's opinions, as a first-person narrative or even a more traditional third-person omniscient is apt to do. Instead, the novel almost reads like a police report, where everyone's experience is given equal, almost clinical consideration.

Language and Meaning

While the narrative structure of the novel takes on a stream of consciousness flow at times, floating from one subject to another, one place to another, one time to another, the language is not as organic. The language of the novel is, for the most part, stiff and formal. The narrator's diction is high, his vocabulary is elevated, and his syntax is complex. The high diction of the text gives the impression that the reader is being given a truthful, real, and nonbiased account of events. There is little wordplay, and the tone of the novel is quite serious, which is appropriate in a tragedy.

While there is little wordplay, there is quite a bit of poetic, flowery language. Mahajan makes frequent use of figurative language. Although the novel lacks any extended metaphors, hardly a page goes by without a metaphor or simile popping up. Emotions are described with metaphor: "He was a mannequin of pain" (164), people are described with metaphor: "People began climbing over the corpses with the guilty looks of burglars" (15), places are described with metaphors: "It was a town made of trash" (191). Characters even think in metaphor: "Religion, Shockie thought, the crutch of the weak" (57).

The omniscient narrator often slips into characters' heads, and when he does there is little change in tone, diction, or syntax. In his interior thoughts, Mansoor ponders the existence of God in much the same way the narrator might, complete with a semicolon, which the narrator uses often: "When it comes to cause and effect, he thought, I really do believe God exists; I really do think God is watching, drawing his conclusions, doling out consequences" (128).

The exception to this formal diction comes in the novel's dialogue. Although there is not much dialogue in the book, when the characters are given the chance to speak they are often less stiff than the narrator or the inner monologues are. Contractions and fragments are used. Light cursing and colloquialisms are allowed.

Mahajan also breaks up the monotony of his formal diction by sprinkling in Hindi words that the English reader must decode. Characters wear "khadi" (195), friends call one

another “bhai” (266), and money is laundered through “hawala” (39). This language gives life to the formal prose and gives the reader the sense that he is in Delhi.

Two unique breaks from the novel’s overall tone and style occur early in the novel. The first is in the very first section and is the only time in the book where the narrator directly addresses a character: “The boys had stored, between them, all the world’s possibilities. Nakul had been handsome and sporty; Tushar had been plump and responsible—what does it matter? Who’s to say that this is what they would have remained? Who’s to say, Mr. and Mrs. Khurana, that you lost something you knew?” (6).

The other break from the norm occurs three chapters later. After a long description about Delhi as Shockie drives through the city, the narrator concludes: “A woman with big haunches sat astride a stool next to a parked scooter; she was peeling onions into a steel plate and laughing. Before municipal walls painted with pictures of weapon-toting gods—meant to keep men from urinating—men urinated. Delhi. Fuck. I love it too” (41). This is the only point in the novel where the narrator speaks of himself in the first -person, the only point in the novel where the narrator curses, and the only point in the novel where the narrator gives a direct opinion to the reader.

Structure

The novel is broken up into five sections. The first section, which is entitled “Blast: May 1996,” is the shortest section of the novel. Unlike a traditional novel, which might spend a couple hundred pages building up to the climactic even of an explosion, this novel starts off with the climax. The bomb goes off in Lajpat Nagar before we know who set it off, who is in the market, or why we ought to care. The next two sections are entitled “Victims” and “Terrorists” and, as the titles suggest, they introduce us to the victims and terrorists involved in the blast.

The next section, “Mr. and Mrs. Khurana’s Response to Terror: 1996-1997,” gives an account of the year after the bomb in Lajpat Nagar from the perspective of Vikas and Deepa Khurana. But the narrator does not stick to a linear chronology. Instead, there are frequent jumps in time and space, and the story of Vikas and Deepa’s childhoods, courtship, early married life, and reactions to the bomb are jumbled up in an almost stream-of-conscious type of style.

And, just like in the previous section, “Mansoor Ahmed’s Response to Terror: May 1996-March 2003” gives a detailed, though non-linear, account of Mansoor’s life after the bomb. In this section, which reads a bit like a bildungsroman, we watch Mansoor grow from a boy to a man. He leaves India, returns, and changes his opinions on politics, religion, and society itself a number of times in the span of eight years.

The next section, “Ayub Azmi’s Response to Terror: March 2003-October 2003” is quite interesting in that Ayub Azmi was not a victim of terrorism. Unlike Mansoor, Vikas, and Deepa, Ayub was unaffected by the blast. And yet, he stars in a section in which he is said to be “responding to terror.” The terror he experiences, then, must be interpreted as

the terror he experienced in his hometown. After he leaves Delhi, he goes back to Azamgarh, alone and isolated and afraid to go back to Delhi because he does not believe a Muslim can make a good life for himself in the city. His response, to this, is to ignite a bomb.

The last section, The Association of Small Bombs, contains the conclusion to the novel. In this section, we learn that its title, and the title of the novel itself, were taken from the conservative group intent on executing terrorists and getting justice for victims of terrorism that Deepa and Vikas join. But, as the novel wraps up and we learn how the first bomb is connected to the second bomb in a number of coincidences, we see that the word association is being used in both of its definitions.

Quotes

A good bombing begins everywhere at once.
-- Narrator (Chapter 0)

Importance: This quote describes the bomb that goes off in the beginning of the story and sets the plot in motion.

It was all anticlimax.
-- Narrator (Chapter 3)

Importance: This quote describes Shockie's feelings toward the bomb in Lajpat Nagar. Because it is the second one he attempts to detonate, the explosion is not as thrilling as he wishes it were. The structure of the novel, which starts with the climax and proceeds to explore the falling action, is, also, all anticlimax.

We're like tightly packed molecules.
-- Tushar (Chapter 7)

Importance: Tushar Khurana says this to his parents before he dies. He is speaking about how close the family is when they all sleep together in the same bed. After the boys die, Vikas and Deepa can no longer sleep in their bed.

Divide and rule. It wasn't just the British toward the Indians but all parents toward their children.
-- Narrator (Chapter 9)

Importance: This quote explains how Vikas felt about his two boys before they died. He admits to being a less than perfect father, and, after their death, he regrets the way that he pushed the boys away and set them against one another by choosing favorites.

He dreamed fantastically. He'd always been a dreamer. In the dreams, all the parts of his life came together. Film, family, mother, father, characters, children. Life is fragmentary but dreams are not. This is why, later, he would put so much stock in the bomb dreams.
-- Narrator (Chapter 9)

Importance: This quote is describing Vikas's obsession with dreams. After the boys die, he has a reoccurring dream in which he is the bomb that kills his sons. He explodes, over and over again, killing them himself.

The government, with its stupid boards, its multilingual blandness, its boring acronyms, had been there for him since his childhood. It had seen him grow up. Through its boards it had told him: You are here. You are in India. You exist.
-- Narrator (Chapter 9)

Importance: This quote explains the reverence Vikas feels when he catches sight of the State Bank of India sign. Despite the inefficiencies of the government, which we see in the judicial system, Vikas feels a deep love for his country.

In this city they prefer deformed citizens to informed citizens.
-- Sharif (Chapter 11)

Importance: Sharif says this quote to his son, Mansoor, when they are discussing the men who have been falsely imprisoned for setting off the bomb in Lajpat Nagar. Mansoor asks his father what they, as "informed citizens," can do to help the men, and Sharif answers with this. Because the government, the media, and the police do not respect and value nonviolent protests, they back protestors into a corner and invite violent protest.

But Indians were like that, happy to be puppets of fate. ‘Chalta hai.’ ‘It’s in God’s hands.’ ‘Everything goes.
-- Narrator (Chapter 19)

Importance: When Mansoor is forced to return to India because of injuries in his wrist, he becomes angry with Vikas and Deepa Khurana. He blames them for having allowed him to go to the market without supervision. Fate is also an important theme that is explored throughout the course of the novel.

What would Gandhi do if he were alive today? Ayub wondered. Would the press even notice him or would it quickly slink on to stories of starlets spreading their legs in hotels the minute a protest came to nothing? The future of this country is in the hands of the media. But the media is blind and thinks its future is in the hands of consumers, and so it gives them what they want—sex and violence. And that’s why, to punish all of them, to show them the end result of this strategy, I’ve come to plant a bomb.
-- Ayub (Chapter 27)

Importance: These thoughts go through Ayub's head as he awaits communication from Shockie's group of terrorists in a hotel. Ayub, who used to believe in Gandhi's ideas about nonviolent protest, has changed his mind and is about to set off a bomb in violent protest.

Terror is a form of urban planning.
-- Ayub (Chapter 28)

Importance: Ayub thinks this as he imagines that the bomb he sets off with alter the way Delhi sets up its outdoor markets. He goes on to reflect on Mohammed Atta, one of the 9/11 hijackers, who was an urban planning student in Germany before going on to change the landscape of New York forever.

But seeing Mansoor in their drawing room—young, able-bodied, grown up, handsome, thin, holding out his wrists, his stormy eyebrows like two thoughts disagreeing with each other—freed something in both of them.

-- Narrator (Chapter 29)

Importance: This quote takes place when Vikas and Deepa reunite with Mansoor. Seeing the boy who survived the blast that killed their son does not fill the couple with sadness. Instead, it gives them solace and allows them to, briefly, reunite as husband and wife.

For all his pain, Ayub’s ability to fabricate hadn’t gone away; it had got better with desperation.
-- Narrator (Chapter 31)

Importance: This quote describes Ayub's ability to lie while he is in the hospital after the bomb goes off, a victim of his own crime. He lies to doctors, nurses, reporters, and his friend Mansoor.