Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East Study Guide

Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East by Gita Mehta

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This book is an exploration of and commentary on the decades-long history of the West's search for spiritual enlightenment in the teachings of Eastern religions and philosophies. As she comments on the relationship between faith and commerce in this particular set of circumstances, the author considers the tendency towards, and growth of, exploitation on both sides, particularly as manifest in the expanding practice of using spirituality as a commodity.

The author introduces her analysis of the East/West spiritual relationship with commentary on a pair of myths that, she contends, explain the circumstances from which the mutual exploitation in that relationship emerged. She then, throughout the book, explores various facets, motivations, manifestations and repercussions of that exploitation.

Prominent among the specific aspects of eastern spirituality that the author considers is the idea of karma - specifically, the belief that many aspects of an individual's current life carry with them echoes of past lives and/or the foundations of aspects of future lives. The subject of karma is discussed with particular focus in Sections One and Two. In Section Three, the author introduces another of her central contentions, one related to her initial commentary on karma. This is the idea that the true nature and implications of eastern philosophy and teachings are often too profoundly different from their "home" philosophies for western seekers to handle. This thesis is reiterated and supported, on several occasions throughout the book, by anecdotal reportage of individuals who, as the result of contemplating eastern spirituality too closely or too intently, have either lost their grip on reality or gone into forms of denial.

Sections Four through Seven discuss ways in which individuals on both sides of the spiritual equation under consideration, both seekers and teachers, see what they want to see and act in response to those perceptions. Here the author begins her consideration of the exploitation that takes place on both sides of the equation, illustrating how both seekers and teachers are willing to exploit, and be exploited, in order to get what they believe they want. Many teachers, she contends, want money. Many seekers, she further contends, want any kind of spiritual enlightenment they can get. The brief Section Eight, meanwhile, takes a mostly anecdotal look at ways in which the spiritual gap between west and east can be bridged through other, non-exploitative means. Section Nine, however, contrasts the hope implied in Section Eight with a vivid, multi-leveled portrayal on how India's long history of exploitation by a number of different western natures has created what amounts to a culture of exploitation, grounded across the (decades? centuries?) in the illegal drug trade.

Section Ten examines the role and function of sexuality in both eastern spirituality and in triggering desire for explorations of/connection with that spirituality in the west. Section Eleven deepens that consideration with an examination of the sexual/sensual appeal of those on the darker, more corrupt, and ultimately more destructive side of the equation. In Section Twelve, the author reiterates her contention that the true nature of

eastern philosophy and practice is ultimately too harsh for western seekers not only to understand and accept, but to want to understand and accept. Finally, in the brief Section Thirteen, the author holds out hope for future evolution of the east/west spiritual relationship, tempering it with the implication that both cultures have responsibility for creating the damage to that relationship, and both sides have a considerable way to go before a genuine, un-exploitative communion within that relationship can, and will, be realized.

Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

This book is an exploration of, and commentary on, the decades-long history of the West's search for spiritual enlightenment in the teachings of Eastern religions and philosophies. As she comments on the relationship between faith and commerce in this particular set of circumstances, the author considers the tendency towards, and growth of, exploitation on both sides, particularly as manifest in the expanding practice of using spirituality as a commodity.

The author sums up the relationship between Western need and Eastern accommodation of that need by referring to two myths, one Eastern and one Western. The introduction concludes with a brief commentary on how karma "chains humans to the wheel of existence", and how "even the most materialistic Indian knows that wheeling and dealing in karma" is a dangerous and foolish practice.

The Eastern myth summarized by the author defines the dangers associated with a desire for speed, a commentary on what the author sees as the recklessness and desperation associated with Western desire for enlightenment. The Western myth "introduces the devil as ... something harmless and amusing until it turns into the implacable force that exacts damnation as the price of greed." While the myth can clearly be seen as a further commentary on the West's desire for enlightenment (i.e., its spiritual greed), it can also be seen as commenting on the East's exploitation of that desire, exploitation that leads to its own experience of the corruptive power of greed.

Part 1, Reinventing the Wheel

Part 1, Reinventing the Wheel Summary and Analysis

1 - The author describes her encounter with a Brazilian guru, who professed to offer enlightenment but who revealed himself to believe that karma manifested in atmosphere, rather than in action.

2 - The author summarizes India's history of cultural colonization - first by the uptight British, then by the fast moving Americans, then by refugees from Pakistan following partition.

3 - The author comments on the pervasive influence of American popular culture on India, saying that the greatest rush of interest was triggered when "the kings of rock and roll" (i.e., the Beatles) became interested in and devoted to its teachings and music.

4 - The author comments here that the people and capitalists of India quickly became accustomed to the idea that their spirituality and ways of life were marketable and popular commodities in America.

The title refers to how the idea of the "wheel" of karma was "reinvented" following the interest of the Beatles in eastern spirituality, a manifestation of the process of both karma and spirituality becoming a commodity. Here the author also begins her consideration of how East began to exploit West, suggesting that once austere eastern teachers quickly became aware of the potential for profit and prosperity in the west's search for enlightenment. The reference to the Brazilian guru suggests that the capacity for exploitation, on both sides of the equation, is not limited to Americans and/or Indians, and that greed knows no geographic or political boundaries.

Part 2, Karma Crackers

Part 2, Karma Crackers Summary and Analysis

1 - In present tense narration, the author describes discovering in a Delhi newspaper a list of conferences all taking place at the same time - of spiritual celibates, of travel agents, of meditators, and of people wanting to make love in the name of Jesus.

2 - The author lists the various sessions held during the conference of celibates - the nature of karma, the need for moral action, and other aspects of spirituality in relation to questions of how the future was/is to manifest.

3 - The conference of meditators was highlighted by the presentation of a film during which, as images appeared of gurus with reputedly powerful spiritual energy, everyone stretched out their hands in the hopes of connecting with that energy.

4 - The travel agents were housed in Delhi's major hotels, none of which were equipped to handle such large numbers of foreigners accustomed to western luxury.

5 - The travel agents are also shown an India "more glamorous than anything at home", complete with dancing, music, local ceremonies, colorful clothing, elephants, and exotic food.

6 - At the Conference on the Future, a scientist was challenged by a student who suggested that science is, in fact, leading humanity to destruction. The scientist contended that nuclear war would, in fact, cleanse humanity. The student nodded in acceptance. "And India acquired another willing convert to the philosophy of the meaningfully meaningless."

7 - Another participant in the conference commented that a lot of her friends have gone mad after undertaking spiritual searches in India.

8 - The author contrasts the attitudes and behavior of spiritual tourists with those of Indian people who, she says, not only fell into the trap of meeting the expectations of those tourists but also recognized and mocked their foolishness.

9 - The author comments on how many of the high numbers of visitors and/or immigrants to India become physically and/or emotionally unwell as the result of their stay, and on the high number of Indian nationals who live in and around the most busy tourist communities who also suffer from high anxiety and drug use.

10 - The author describes how many illegal visitors, in search of spiritual enlightenment, gain entrance into India by manipulating traditional cultural and spiritual insistence that visitors be treated like gods, and by bartering both women and drugs in exchange for that treatment. The author suggests that those who took advantage of Indian traditions of hospitality will face retribution when the wheel of karma turns in their direction.

In this section, the author paints a clear and vivid picture of how people on both sides of the equation of exploitation (those who need and those who exploit that need) see what they want to see and are shown what they want to see. She suggests that there is a reason for this duplicity other than the desire for gain. This is the idea that the genuine truth at the heart of Indian spirituality is ultimately too powerful and too strange for most western seekers to genuinely integrate (the title "Karma Crackers" is a reference to this, "crackers" in this sense being a popular, informal term for "insanity"). In other words, seekers want truths they're comfortable with, and teachers want to give them those truths - the more exploitative ones because it's easy, the genuine teachers because it's simply safer.

Part 3, Be Bop

Part 3, Be Bop Summary and Analysis

1 - When the author entered an ashram, she was assured by the people there that the experience is beautiful, but then comments on friends who warned her of its potential dangers.

2 - In the ashram, the guru was known as God, who (the author writes) welcomed a child from Switzerland who had been identified as an enlightened one ... and who asks the narrator to bring him guns and soldiers from Bombay.

3 - One night, an American tourist named Joanie was mocked because she hadn't adopted another, more enlightened name. One of the other residents said that the name reminded him of all the "shit" he and the others were trying to leave behind.

4 - The author comments on how the oft-joking guru bestows new names on those who come to his ashram by introducing her story with the same words that are often used to introduce jokes - "Here's a good one".

5 - The author suggests that most spiritual tourists, fleeing the individual-oriented philosophy of the west, are unable to accept and/or understand the essential Hindu teaching that "everything and every perception" is an illusion.

6 - The author describes how a Californian touch therapist, visiting an ashram devoted to the release of violent urges, was both surprised and shocked by both the violence he encountered there and by being told that violence is a fundamental part of being human.

7 - The author describes a meditation on past lives that, according to one story she heard, resulted in an American visitor losing her mind completely.

The title of this section is a clever, multi-leveled play on words. "Be Bop" in America is a freewheeling style of music, rhythmic and jazzy. "Bop" is also a slang term for dance, while "be" is something of a catch word in the westernization of eastern spirituality, often summed up (in western parlance) as the capacity to just "be", without intellectualization, suffering, or distraction. The title can therefore be seen as an ironic commentary on the boppy, freewheeling, sometimes hypocritical, often naïve (on both sides) and generally exploitative "dance" between a "teaching" partner and a "seeking" partner. Meanwhile, the author again contemplates ways in which the genuine truths of Eastern spirituality cannot be either appreciated or integrated by (many? most?) in the west.

Part 4, Tricks and Treats

Part 4, Tricks and Treats Summary and Analysis

1 - The author wonders how America, which she portrays as being a culture grounded in independence of thought, let itself be so taken over by the promise of eastern enlightenment.

2 - The author refers to an archaeological school of thought that suggests that in the time Jesus is, in effect, missing from the Bible ("between the ages of twelve and thirty"), he was in India studying and learning to perform miracles such as levitation.

3 - The author describes an incident in which a revered guru completely misinterpreted the presence of a group of Western diplomats, assuming they were there to gain wisdom when they were actually there to see him perform a miracle.

4 - An American disciple of that same guru, the author writes, saw the guru raise a man from the dead, but jokes that the real miracle of the occasion was the guru actually finding the body in the midst of bureaucratic confusion at the morgue.

5 - The author refers to bureaucratic practice as a Machine, commenting that those who ran (and profited from) the Machine of marketing to capitalize on humanity's need for, and belief in, miracles, both technological and spiritual.

6 - An American woman referred to as Blue Eyes tells her increasingly skeptical date, an Indian named Naresh, about some of the ways America is exploiting the teachings (including meditation techniques) of Indian gurus.

7 - The author describes a visit to a temple apparently placed beneath the busy streets of Manhattan, where she finds a guru whose devotees are quite obsessive, but when it comes to writing down his thoughts, the guru fails to put a coherent word on paper.

8 - The author comments here that a large number of gurus ("sadhus") have full control over their bodies, refuse to exploit it, and practice that control in the name of transcending the physical to reach the spiritual.

9 - An American caught up in sexual addiction/obsession seeks out the advice of a sadhu who, after initial resistance to the man's presence and persistence, responds by masturbating in front of him and commenting that awareness and acceptance of natural conditions, rather than obsessive rejection and worry, are the true ways to enlightenment.

This section contains some of the book's few references to Indian spiritual teachers who do not exploit western spiritual seekers. The blunt, uncompromising circumstances of their teachings (Parts 8 and 9) might be described as the non-ironic manifestations of the "treats" of this section's title, and can also be seen as manifestations of the sort of

uncomfortable teachings that the author suggests most seekers are uncomfortable with. More ironic manifestations of the title include the western diplomats who want to see the "treat" of materialization and other sorts of miracles. It could be argued, in fact, that in the west's perspective, the rewards of eastern spirituality are as miraculous as its more outward (legendary?) manifestations, like levitation and raising of the dead. Meanwhile, the author's commentary on the machine can be seen as referring to both seekers and teachers, with both sides constructing, and entering into, the "machinery" associated with the equation of exploitation. Finally, the author's idea about the life of Jesus can be seen as an interesting speculation, perhaps even a tongue-in-cheek commentary on how Christianity, like eastern religion, is dependent upon the enactment of miracles to trigger faith.

Part 5, What You See Is What You Are

Part 5, What You See Is What You Are Summary and Analysis

1 - A tired, frustrated American and his abrasive wife complain about how they don't recognize India as a place of spiritual refuge anymore, and about how they're resented because they opened the doors for so many other searchers.

2 - The author returns her attention to the Beatles and the role their interest in eastern spiritualism played in creating and defining the equation of exploitation. She also refers to another famous seeker of truth, poet Allen Ginsberg.

3 - The author describes how Ginsberg arrived in bohemian Calcutta having pronounced on its freedom, which those who heard (and paid attention) regarded as a reference to sexual freedom and came in search of a giant orgy.

4 - The author suggests that while Indian philosophy is concerned less with providing answers to questions than with acknowledging the existence of the questions, said philosophy has not prevented either western spiritual tourists from seeking answers or gurus from exploiting their need for those answers.

5 - The author strikes up a conversation with a young English woman, a talented artist, who pays an Indian man to beat her up. As the woman lies weeping, the man shouts that she is the great granddaughter of a former British authority, there to release her guilt (through being beaten) over what the British did to India.

6 - This section contains comments from individuals on both sides on the east/west equation of exploitation. One says that visiting seekers are all really looking for Indian variations on the themes of their home spirituality.

Here again, the author comments on the mutually exploitative relationship between seeker and teacher by suggesting that the former sees what s/he wants to see, and the latter gives him/her exactly that. Also, the author repeats her contention that true eastern spirituality cannot be as easily absorbed, comprehended or lived as those who seek enlightenment (in the speedy, greedy way implied by the introduction) would like it to be. Finally, the anecdote about the British woman is among the most disturbing stories in the narrative. On one level, it is a vivid example of the (arguably self-dramatizing) blindness and desperation that the author repeatedly suggests is at the heart of most western seeking of eastern truth. On another level, it is an example of the (equally selfish?) willingness of so many easterners to in fact deny the karma and/or compassion at the heart of eastern spiritual teachings and instead exploit what boils down to western vulnerability.

Part 6, Behind the Urine Curtain

Part 6, Behind the Urine Curtain Summary and Analysis

1 - The author describes an encounter between a guru whose urine was believed to transform into rosewater and an English aristocrat who is given the honor of both seeing and drinking the sacred liquid, which hasn't been transformed at all.

2 - The author explains that public urination and/or defecation, is a fundamental manifestation of Indian culture and community. It is more important, she says, for Indians to keep their body clean than to keep the streets clean.

3 - In present tense narration, an architect assigned to city planning takes a place above the crowds of people at a city street corner and observes the teeming crowd, which includes a squad of Hare Krishna, an island of apparent calm.

4 - The author comments that all motion in India, whether the motion of the bowels or the motion on the streets, is perceived as beneficial.

5 - An art teacher (and former seeker) named Elizabeth is pestered by a guide who demands to know whether she likes what she sees. She finally realizes that he is in fact asking whether she likes his naked "full frontal exposure", and runs off.

6 - The author comments on how Indians have become accustomed to western tourists visiting erotically decorated temples for their titillation value, some even setting up small communities of prostitution.

7 - The author describes the social, political, and spiritual outcomes of an encounter between a group of nuns, their young students, and a group of partying, orgy-indulging hippies.

8 - Here the author recounts how a woman, in her determination to prove the miraculously preserved body of a saint was real, accidentally bit off a toe. This, the author says, is an example (like that of the aristocrat referred to in Part 1), of how careful one has to be with what one puts in one's mouth in India.

In this section, the author explores several aspects of the relationship between eastern spirituality and physicality, suggesting that eastern freedom and openness about the latter is a manifestation of an important principle of the former - that everything is part of the same whole, the karmic wheel of existence. On another level, the portrayals of western discomfort contained in this section can be seen as yet another manifestation of western inability to accept and/or accommodate key truths of eastern teaching and practice. Meanwhile, the term "urine curtain" can be seen as a joking play on the phrase "iron curtain", once used to describe the ideological, social, political and economic

barrier between the capitalist west and the socialist east. The curtain in this context can be seen as the barrier between the prudish west and the uninhibited east.

Part 7, Forked Tongues

Part 7, Forked Tongues Summary and Analysis

1 - The author accompanies a stranger to what he says is his sister's house to smoke some drugs, lighting them on the flame lighting an altar.

2 - In present tense narration, the author describes how, in New York City, a Sufi chauffeur refused to steal a parking space from another person because it would be bad karma.

3 - The author discusses the role of language in cultural integration, commenting on how karma, both the word and the concept, has been turned into an artificially weighted synonym for some kind of spiritual energy and/or connection.

4 - The author discusses the paradoxical relationship between actual Karmic Law and those who travel to the East in search of freedom from what they see as the constrictions and failings of Western philosophy.

5 - Here the author lists several examples of gurus who have modified their teachings to fit the needs of hurried Western seekers of truth, specifically referring to the man who had "the distinction of being teacher to the Beatles - the Maharishi."

6 - The author describes how the Maharishi shaped both the wisdom on offer and his means of expressing it to the unique needs of a variety of different seekers (including aristocrats and scientists).

7 - The author comments on how even clever wisdoms like the Maharishi's seem incapable of ending the desire of seekers for what they believe to be the truth.

In this section, the author continues her consideration of how the actual truth/nature of karma has been softened to accommodate/exploit the desires of seekers. She describes a flexibility in teaching, not necessarily in core spiritual perspective that gives rise to that teaching. In doing so, she raises a particularly interesting question.

The title "forked tongues" is a metaphoric representation of the principle of saying one thing and meaning another - at worst lying, at best giving a misleading impression. The image refers to two things. The first is the image of the snake, which has a forked tongue and which has, in many cultures and/or spiritual traditions, carries with it the connotation of treachery. The second is how white traders and/or colonists were viewed, perhaps stereotypically, by indigenous North Americans who, according to cliché, referred to those same white traders as speaking with the same sort of treacherous "forked tongue".

Parts 8 and 9

Parts 8 and 9 Summary and Analysis

Vox Pox, 1 - The author describes how, in a New York jazz club, a a famous Western jazz drummer and an equally famous (in the East) Indian drummer took each other by surprise with their skill and joy in playing.

2 - The author describes the atmosphere at the Indo-Jazz Yatra, a conference/festival organized by Indian jazz fans that featured American jazz in the evenings and recitals of Indian music in the mornings.

3 - The author describes how an argument between a Western man and an Eastern man over a motorcycle ended with the two men taking a ride together and returning in happy conversation and wearing each other's culture-centric clothes.

4 - The author narrates a story told at a party of an Indian high school dropout gaining friends and success by establishing himself in New York City as a "computer guru".

The Odds and the Gods, 1 - A young French girl, accused of murdering her husband (a guru) and their son explains how her husband told her he had to take their son with her when he died so they could work together for peace in their next incarnations. She also describes how, after leaving France and making her way to India, she realized she could stay with her old identity (symbolized by her passport) or create a one (symbolized by a string of beads), and eventually threw her passport into a river. At that moment, she says, she saw her guru/husband's face in the water.

2 - The author uses the above story as a springboard into commentary on the flourishing trade, in India, of black market passports in particular and of the black market in general.

3 - The French girl sat as a photographer sent by her mother takes pictures of her and her daughter. According to her mother, the girl says, she will take over the family business, but instead she (the girl) is determined to devote her life to spiritual pursuits as she moves to Benares.

4 - The author comments on how the Indian city of Benares has become a center of the country's revitalized drug trade, established centuries previously by the colonializing British, French, Dutch and Portuguese to support their own economies.

5 -The author lists the French girl's options - move to Benares, take over her leadership of her husband's ashram (and control over the "hearts and fortunes of a large and wealthy religious community"), or get a new passport and sell it to set herself up as a "drug entrepreneur". International police, the author comments, may still catch up with the girl which is, the author says, either karma or "showbiz".

The four brief anecdotes in "Vox Pox" illustrate the potential for healthy union, connection and/or discussion between the two sides (seeker and teacher) of the equation of exploitation. In terms of the title, "vox" is a Latin term meaning voice, while "pox" is a shorthand term for the fatal disease "smallpox". The suggestion here is that language, and perhaps by extension ideas, is a "pox" on the genuine connection possible when people connect on a non-verbal, non-ideological, more spiritual level (as the individuals in these anecdotes do).

On the other hand, and probably in deliberate contrast, "The Odds and the Gods" is anchored by vivid, pointed portrayals of exploitation. First, there is the self-centered the French girl (apparently unaware of her self-righteousness and destructiveness), paralleled by the portrait of the corrupt society (grounded in the drug trade and the socio-cultural tradition of exploitation that made that trade possible) that enables her. Meanwhile, the comment about karma or showbiz is an ironic one, given that throughout the book, the author has carefully implied a connection between the two. Finally, the section's title can be seen as a summary of the French girl's actions - specifically, the gambles she takes (i.e., playing the odds with the gods) with her life.

Part 10, Sex and the Singles Guru

Part 10, Sex and the Singles Guru Summary and Analysis

1 - The author describes how a woman named Ma, the chief devotee of a well-known guru, accepted the adoration of inmates of the guru's ashram while managing its financial, administrative and political relations with the outside world and while balancing the two worlds' different perspectives on sex.

2 - Outside of Ma's office, the author encountered a paper collector preparing the ashram's discarded paper for recycling, who muses about allowing a beautiful girl (outside the ashram "bathing" in the guru's energy) to meet her husband so that he would maybe give her (the collector) a little peace.

3 - The author contrasts this particular guru's free attitudes towards sexuality with those of other gurus, who tend toward more conservative perspectives in order to protect themselves and their ashrams from being overwhelmed with people seeking no-strings sex.

4 - Here the author considers Tantra, which she says is being exploited as a justification for unfettered sexual expression.

5 - The author comments on how children in ashrams are sexualized from a very young age, and how children of non-Eastern seekers, when they return home, have difficulty in blending their sexual sensibilities with those of the more conservative West.

6 - Here the author describes attempts made by a pair of Western seekers to rehabilitate a child rescued from an exploitative Indian father, a child unable to comprehend how her habits of thieving and sexually pleasing adults are unacceptable.

7 - The author discusses how nuns, established in convents near certain ashrams in order to aid those whose sense of reality has become changed by their time there, themselves join the ashrams and find themselves sexually, emotionally and spiritually both exploited and revered.

8 - Here the author returns her attention to the progressive guru from Section 1, commenting on how many people misinterpret his teaching on sexual experimentation.

This section's title is yet another play on words - in this case, the title of a popular self help book entitled "Sex and the Single Man". The content of the section echoes that of Section 6, which also considered the role of bodily function/activity within eastern spirituality.

The disturbing narrative of child rehabilitation in Part 6 (presented without authorial judgment) is one of the starkest illustrations in the book of one of its key motifs - the idea that western thought and perspective are simply unable, not to mention unequipped, to handle uncomfortable truths about eastern perspective and experience. The idea is also explored in the narrative of the nuns. The juxtaposition of these stories with the description of Ma is particularly telling, in that she seems both able and willing to accommodate (exploit?) the non-spiritual business and bureaucratic aspects (the western aspects?) of existence in India with the spiritual work of the ashram.

Part 11, Cowboys and Indians

Part 11, Cowboys and Indians Summary and Analysis

1 - A police officer commented, during the investigation of the murder of a white man, that "If the deceased was Hindu-minded ... it is the probable cause of death."

2 - The author comments on how more and more of the "Hindu-minded", both practitioners and seekers, are ending up dead.

3 - As an example of how extreme the influence and desire of such people can be, the author discusses (at some length) the history and activities of a Hindu cult called the Anand Marg.

4 - The author recounts anecdotes recounted to her about the sexual attractiveness of a particular serial killer, and of how two nuns apparently disappeared while studying with a charismatic, Tantric guru who, rumor has it, practiced ritual murder.

5 - Here the author recounts conflicting anecdotes about a man who, on the one hand, is reputed to be a big time drug lord and, on the other hand, is portrayed as a small time poser.

6 - On her way to search for the supposed drug dealer, the author was asked by a spoiled American to obtain an over-priced silver flute.

7 - The author searches a beachfront flea market, eventually encountering a young man with a perfect silver flute and who is also selling a pair of religious texts because, having been manipulated into trafficking drugs in exchange for a new passport, he believed himself to be in a state of mortal sin and therefore no longer permitted to read them. He didn't sell his flute.

8 - The author encounters the drug dealer on the street, outrageously dressed and accompanied by young, sexy women. She is surprised to hear him describe himself as Chief Crazy Horse. "He was in the wrong Indies," the author comments, "but he had the right act."

Cowboys, in the socio-cultural folklore of the west, are icons of independence, courage, and self-determination. In many ways, they are cultural rebels, embodiments of the western, particularly American, ideal of individuality. There is the sense in this section that the drug dealer, the serial killer, the murderous guru, and the members of the Anand Marg are portrayed as shallow, superficial, but undeniably dangerous corruptions of that ideal ... corruptions made possible by misunderstandings and/or misinterpretations of both eastern and western philosophy, of sexuality and of prosperity. Meanwhile, there is the author's commentary on how the drug dealer refers to himself as Crazy Horse, the name of a noble, well regarded, powerful Native American chieftain - again, a manifestation of what the author suggests is the shallow,

delusional self-aggrandizement at the core of the western cult of individuality. The suggestion here is that cowboys and Indians (which is, by the way, the name of a popular, perhaps uniquely American, children's game) are victims of the same sort of delusional thinking that defines the exploitative perspectives of both seekers and teachers on the two sides of the equation of exploitation. Then there is the story of the silver flute seller, which can be seen as a reference to the relative shallowness (hypocrisy?) of western spiritual teaching. Finally, "Hindu minded" can be seen as a shorthand description of eastern philosophy that focuses on the value/rewards of karma; i.e., the idea that existence goes on long after an experience of this particular physical life.

Parts 12 and 13

Parts 12 and 13 Summary and Analysis

Being Hindu Means Never Having to Say You're Sorry 1 - The author comments on the disillusionment she finds in several ashrams, wondering whether they should all be regarded as funnels for almost endless amounts of cash.

2, 3 - Here again the author comments on the disparity between what the gurus of the East promise and what they can actually deliver, suggesting again that the problem with so many western seekers is that they simply cannot reconcile fundamental truths about Eastern philosophy with Western perspectives.

4 - The author comments that the core element of Eastern philosophy is Dharma, and that Western intellectualization and abstractions and Indian spiritual practices are both distractions from dharma's harshness.

5 - Here the author suggests that when ashram inmates become too aware of how corrupt their gurus actually are, the guru re-directs their attention.

6 - The author illustrates the actual truth of eastern philosophy with a very brief anecdote revealing the actions and motivations of students of the Buddha.

7 - Here the author suggests a possible outcome of interaction between a fearful seeker and a genuine, compassionate guru.

Om is where the Art Is, 1 - The author reminds the reader that the true seeker cannot claim to be enlightened until they have looked on, and accepted the truth of, both the sacred and the profane.

2 - The author suggests that the truth of India's socio-cultural conditions is being overshadowed by both philosophy and by seekers from the West.

3 - In conclusion, the author suggests that doubt and anxiety about spiritual identity has been going on for centuries, raises a small cheer in praise of fear, and comments that "those who have passed beyond fear can't hear".

The title of Section 12 is a paraphrase of a quote from the film "Love Story", in which one character told another "Love means never having to say you're sorry." The once popular saying has been frequently ridiculed since, according to most interpreters, love actually means having to say you're sorry quite frequently. In using this as her title, the author seems to be suggesting that while many (most?) on the teacher side of the eastern teacher/western seeker equation of exploitation seem to believe they have no reason/responsibility to apologize for the spiritual and/or psychological damage they do (either consciously or unconsciously), they actually do. She then ties this implication to the once-again repeated suggestion that true eastern philosophy and perspectives are

simply not compatible with western experience, the further implication being that this is an even greater reason for the oft-hypocritical east to have the capacity, if not the willingness, to apologize.

The title of the book's final section is yet another play on words - in this case, the phrase (platitude?) "home is where the heart is". In this case, "om" refers to the (syllable? sound?) commonly utilized in meditation - specifically, transcendental meditation of the sort practiced/preached by the Maharishi and other eastern gurus. "Art", meanwhile, can be seen as having a double meaning - the art of true spiritual connection and/or enlightenment, and the more manipulative "arts" of teachers exploiting seekers and seekers exploiting teachers. In other words, "om" is the metaphorical home, or heart, of the art.

Finally, in the book's concluding section (is there irony in it being the thirteenth?), the author suggests that there is still, and always will be, value in both genuine teaching and genuine seeking. She further suggests that both have their roots in the sacred and the profane (i.e., in the fully human), and implies that ultimately, there is a spiritual truth that transcends any and all aspects of physical earthly existence. This truth, the final phrases of the book suggests, is revealed only to those who have passed beyond the fear that either teaching or seeking, of any discipline or culture or hemisphere, will ultimately reveal nothing.

Characters

The Author (Gita Mehta)

Mehta is a novelist, filmmaker, and cultural commentator. She writes from the perspective of having lived in both the east and the west, of having observed the needs and values of both sets of cultures and belief systems, and of having analyzed both the strengths and the vulnerabilities of each. There is the sense, however, from both the content and style of her writing, that her perspective is primarily Indian - that she is writing from a place of concern for the vulnerability and long-term future of her home country, a concern that (it must be noted) carries with it no illusions. In other words, her considerations of India's values and practices when it comes to its complex economic, spiritual relationship with the west are neither soften nor eased by patriotism or culturally motivated naivete. There is a clear eyed certain skepticism, bordering on cynicism, about her perspective that extends to both sides of the book's thematic considerations. She is of the clear opinion that neither culture is fully right, neither culture is fully wrong, and neither culture is selfless in either its intent or its actions. Both cultures are equally under the microscope, and both come under equal scrutiny and equal targeting, as it were, for the ways in which they take advantage of each other. The book is, in short, written from a fundamentally objective point of view, even though it incorporates a significant number of subjectively recounted anecdotes and commentaries.

The Beatles

At what was arguably the peak of their phenomenal international success as an innovative and popular rock band, the Beatles publicly and loudly professed an interest in, and devotion to, Indian music and culture. The author contends that the interest of such intensely influential figures triggered an overwhelming tidal wave of interest in Eastern philosophy, a wave that opportunists and capitalists in India became all too happy to accommodate, but not necessarily with any kind of spiritual integrity.

Joanie

This American tourist, a visitor at the ashram visited by the author in chapter three, is mocked by the longer term guests at the ashram because she hasn't adopted a name more appropriate to her spiritual search. She was mocked, one of the long-termers suggests, because her name was too evocative of everything he and the other seekers at the ashram were trying to leave behind.

Sadhu

As portrayed by the author, the sadhu is a guru or holy man who pursues individual enlightenment for its own sake, rather than teaching it to others (or, as the author often suggests, using it as a tool for exploitation of gullible seekers).

Allen Ginsberg

Ginsberg was a famous Sixties counter-culture poet and social activist. He, according to the author, "had seen the best minds of his generation screaming for release from the American Dream" and sought inspiration on how to help them, and his country, in India and specifically in Calcutta.

The English Artist

This young British woman masochistically releases her guilt over what her country's imperialist practices did to India's culture and society by allowing an Indian man to beat her up.

Elizabeth

This western artist, a returning visitor to India, is shocked by what she sees as the sudden and inappropriate erotic encounter she has with a free-spirited Indian guide in one of India's notorious erotic temples.

The Maharishi

This particular guru, one of only a few named in the narrative, is possibly one of the most famous gurus of recent years, if only because (as the author points out) he was the teacher who instructed and guided the Beatles. In Section Seven, the author portrays him as being both skilled and clever in how he manipulates his teachings to enlighten seekers in the way they seem most able, and willing, to hear them.

The

The immigrant widow of a guru, the unnamed "French Girl" embodies (in Section Eight) the author's thematic consideration of how non-Indians have adopted Indian philosophies without really considering the potential consequences.

Ma

Ma is the administrative assistant to one of India's more permissive gurus. Adored by the inmates of the guru's ashram who are generally unable to adore the reclusive guru in person, Ma is worldly and practical when it comes to the ashram's relationships with outside authorities.

The Anand Marg

This is the name given to a group of followers of the guru Sarkar, whose beliefs and practices came under attack from his wife who was, in turn, attacked by Sarkar and his followers. In order to reinforce their position of authority, the author says, the Anand Marg engaged in political sabotage and violent attacks on those who opposed them.

Objects/Places

India

This eastern country, home of several of the world's key belief/spiritual systems, has a history of colonization (by the British) and conflict (with other Eastern states and within its own borders), as well as a history and/or reputation of spiritual enlightenment. The book's primary narrative and thematic focus is defined by its explorations of the nature and function of that enlightenment, as well as the reasons why it has both exploited, and been exploited, western seekers of enlightenment.

Spiritual Tourism

The term used by the author in her introduction to sum up the West's predominant attitude towards Eastern spirituality - traveling in search of enlightenment, in search of life's meaning as defined in other, outer, more appealing terms and practices.

Karma

A component of Eastern philosophy that suggests that both negative and positive experiences in an individual's current experience of earthly, physical existence will have repercussions in that individual's next incarnation into that existence.

Capitalism

Capitalism is a system of economics that emphasizes, supports and sustains the ideas of profit, unregulated/free markets, and freedom to achieve individual prosperity. Its ideological opposite is socialism, which emphasizes the value of and/or the need for the wealth of a community as a whole to contribute and/or support the well being of that community. In very general terms, capitalism is a western philosophy, while socialism is an eastern philosophy.

Partition

In 1947, following the official withdrawal of England from India, the northern portion of the country was partitioned into what became Pakistan. In the wake of the separation, several hundred thousand Hindus migrated from the new country into the old.

Delhi

Delhi is one of India's largest cities, a combination of Old Delhi (its centuries-old capital) and New Delhi, developed by Britain as the replacement for Calcutta as India's capital.

Ashram

An ashram is a small spiritual commune, a community of shifting populations with meditation and spiritual growth as its primary focus. The presence of a guru, or at least one of a guru's deputies, is an inspiration and/or a trigger for such spiritual growth.

The Machine

A term used by the author to refer to an organization (i.e., a bureaucracy) or belief system (i.e., capitalism) more interested in perpetuating itself and making itself greater than in actually working for, and/or serving, those for whom it was designed to work.

Transcendental Meditation

The term popularized by the Maharishi and his followers, including the Beatles, used to refer a particular kind of spiritual practice that focused on and/or triggered an intimate, personal connection with the Divine.

Benares

This large city in India is described by the author in chapter eight as being the center of India's drug culture.

Opium

This illegal hallucinogen, made from the seeds of poppies, was for several centuries and still is a foundation of India's black market economy, and perhaps even of its economy in general.

Themes

The West's Search for Spiritual Meaning

Throughout the book, the author's narrative focus is on incidents and circumstances arising from western society's search for connection to the more spiritual aspects of existence. The primary thematic contention arising from this narrative focus is that western society and culture experiences the need that triggers this search as the result of being grounded in various manifestations of capitalism. The author further suggests that capitalism, in its ever intensifying, ever hungry search for economic and material prosperity, has left behind or perhaps abandoned considerations of genuine spiritual well being. In general, she contends, the west sees the less capitalistic east as a source of enlightenment about how to achieve that well being. She also suggests that, in an ironic expression of the same spirit of acquisitiveness that drives capitalism itself, the west is driven to acquire that enlightenment.

It's important to note that while the author refers to searchers from several western countries and cultures, her emphasis throughout the book is on searchers from America, arguably the most intensely capitalistic country in the western hemisphere and a world leader, not just economically but also socially and culturally. Her contention is that what America values, wants, and needs, the world comes to value, want and need, a circumstance that applies to societies in both the western and eastern hemispheres. In other words, and in the author's thematic perspective, America is a world leader on a number of levels, both consciously and unconsciously.

Two Sides of Exploitation

Another of the book's key thematic points is the contention that while the east and its teachings are being exploited by the west, the west's longing and desperation are simultaneously being exploited by the east. The book contains several anecdotes referring to ways that gurus, ashrams, and other aspects of eastern spirituality have come into being and/or shaped what they have to offer in order to specifically take advantage of the western need for meaning. The book is careful to point out that there are different sorts of exploitation at work here. There are stories of deliberately false teachings, of gurus and ashrams that merely appear to be offering spiritual guidance but which are, in fact, established solely to take the money of those eager and willing to spend it in order to achieve enlightenment (note here the presence and influence of capitalistic intent). The book also contains stories of genuinely spiritual leadership that exploits the desires and bank accounts of religious seekers in a similar way, but at the same time reserves what might be described as "genuine" spiritual experiences (those deemed too intense for idealistic, spiritually immature western seekers to handle) for those of eastern background (is there hypocrisy here)? It's interesting to note that the book contains relatively few references to spiritual teachers/leadership that has remained untouched by either aspect of exploitation, with the apparent implication being

that there are none. In any case, and as suggested above, the implication of this thematic perspective is that America's leadership of the world manifests, at times, in ways that countries and societies following that leadership might not realize.

Spirituality as Commodity

Throughout the book, the author builds the thematic case that the philosophies and practices of the once spiritually purer east have, to varying degrees, become corrupted and/or tainted by the capitalistic west's perspective that spirituality is, to some degree, as much of a commodity as everything else. To begin with, this is the contention of the book's title, which suggests that karma has become as much of a marketable, desirable product, or article of trade, as Coca-Cola, arguably one of the most universally recognizable manifestations of America's capitalistic empire-building. Then there are the repeated references to ways in which spiritual seekers are, in fact, consumers of the product known as enlightenment, and the (parallel? accompanying?) ways in which spiritual teachers have become producers of that enlightenment. To look at it another way, the author's narrative and commentary both suggest that the capitalistic principles of supply and demand, of market-driven productivity, and of profit at the expense of value have come into play on both sides of this particular equation (to continue the mathematic/economic imagery). What the author doesn't do, interestingly, is compare this essential circumstance (i.e., enlightenment and grace being bestowed and/or discovered as the result of both financial and spiritual devotion) to similar, centuries old practices established and maintained by several Christian religions. One example - the now (mostly) abandoned practice of indulgences in the Roman Catholic church, in which patrons could purchase forgiveness of sins and misdeeds through a substantial contribution. In short, what the author suggests has happened to/in eastern spirituality is (unfortunately?) a (failing? practice?) evident in other forms of spiritual practice as well.

Style

Perspective

The author analyzes the western seeker/eastern teacher dynamic of exploitation from a variety of perspectives. Without explicitly saying so, and taking all those perspectives into account, she seems to be writing with the intent of drawing the attention of both cultures to the frailties and flaws of each other's systems and practices - the east, she says, is far from the idealized source of spiritual grace and selflessness that western need has turned it into. She is, in a sense, appealing to audiences in both cultures, saying to both east and west that the potential and reality of exploitation is inherent in the principles and practices on both sides of what was once perceived as a profound spiritual divide but which is, in fact, becoming less and less of one. In terms of the book's effect on the intended audience, there is the sense that, as the author implies, readers in the west might be more surprised than readers in the east. The former, she suggests, look at the east with a certain naïvete which, as previously suggested, is sourced in need and emptiness. The east, she also suggests, knows full well what it is doing in exploiting the visitors, to a point - she also seems to be suggesting that, in exploiting the exploiters, eastern teachers (and perhaps governments) are, in fact, becoming more like those who, in an admittedly somewhat patronizing way, they see as being more or less gullible fools.

Tone

One of the most appealing and engaging aspects of the book is the way it so frequently shifts its tone. It is at times objective (e.g., when it presents and/or explores certain unarguable facts, such as how the interest in eastern spirituality virtually exploded once the Beatles expressed interest in it) and at other times subjective (e.g., when the author refers to her personal experiences with double sided exploitation). It is at times frank and blunt, at other times pointedly skeptical (and almost cynical), at still other times either anecdotal or analytical. It shifts back and forth between present tense and past tense narration. In short, the variety of tonal qualities throughout the book, the collage of narrative styles and stylized narratives, evokes the collage of spiritual practices and/or perspectives described in the narrative itself. In other words, style and substance echo and reinforce each other, creating the sense that, like both sides of the spiritual tourism practiced in India, the book is not always up front and/or obvious about the truths it's evoking.

This multiplicity of tonal qualities is undeniably both engaging and entertaining, but is also classically satirical, satire being defined as a style of humor and/or social commentary that points up absurdity and excess by exaggerating attitude and action. It's interesting to note, however, that the satire is not in the writing, but in the events written about. In particular, the extreme actions of spiritual exploiters, both seekers and teachers, essentially satirize themselves. On several occasions, anecdotes revealing

the lengths to which those on each side of the equation will or can go, and the beliefs/needs that drive those people To those lengths, at times come across as being too incredible to be believed. And yet, the author presents them matter-of-factly, with a matter-of-fact sensibility and a sense of objective truth that, in all likelihood, will leave the reader shaking his or her head in rueful acceptance and/or insight into just how foolish or selfish people can be.

Structure

In the same way as there is considerable variety in the book's tonal perspectives, there is also variety in its structure. There are longer sections and shorter sections, longer anecdotes and shorter anecdotes within each section, longer commentaries and shorter commentaries. In other words, the author triggers and keeps the reader's interest not only by constantly shifting the qualities and sensibilities of the words she uses, but also the ways in which she puts those words together. Again, the image that comes to mind when considering the overall impression of the book is "collage", larger chunks of material juxtaposed with smaller chunks of material, all of different textural qualities, to create an overall picture that, as suggested above, carries with it clear echoes of the culture and philosophy under consideration. There are both pros and cons to this format. On the one hand, and as discussed, there is clearly the sense that the reader can, and will, be effectively engaged by this unpredictable, somewhat chaotic approach. On the other hand, there is a lingering sense of borderline incoherence, almost of stream of consciousness, that impressions and contemplations are ricocheting one off the other, with thematic cohesion within each section emerging almost as an afterthought. Ultimately, though, the cumulative effect of both style and tone is more positive than negative, in that the author's central thesis makes itself clear in a somewhat subversive way. Throughout the narrative, the reader is being gently led into deeper insight and understanding through humor, rather than through more academic and perhaps drier analysis and commentary.

Quotes

"[T]hose days seem now an age of such innocence - when global escapism masquerading as spiritual hunger resulted at worst in individual madness, at best in a hard-won awareness that the benediction of jet-stream gurus was seldom more than skywriting, and that the mystic East, given half a chance, could teach the west a thing or two about materialism." Introduction p. x

"They thought we were simple. We thought they were neon. They thought we were profound. We knew we were provincial. Everybody thought everybody else was ridiculously exotic and everybody got it wrong." Part 1, Reinventing the Wheel, p. 5

"Heathens do dabble in the irrational, and none more elaborately than Indian heathens, who have in their long evolution spent a couple of thousand years cultivating the transcendence of reason, another couple of thousand years on the denial of reason, and even more millennia on accepting reason but rejecting its authenticity." Part 2, Karma Crackers, p. 18

"[A]nd why were we, laughing all the way, selling our birthright for a mess of pot?" Ibid, p. 20

"'The flesh is the only battlefield. Wars are won by the soul. The mature man seeks to understand his nature until he understands Nature.'" Part 4, Tricks and Treats, p. 59

"He had the face of a saint, eyeballs fallen three inches backwards into hollow sockets, no flesh on the cheekbones, lines of pain around the mouth." Part 5, What You See is What You Are, p. 64

"Columbus discovered America looking for India. The Beatles discovered India escaping from America. Both journeys were exhausting and it could be argued that the Beatles encountered no fewer monsters on their way. The leviathans of the deep were perhaps less frightening than the grotesques spawned by public relations." Ibid, pp. 66-67

"When they came out of their spiritual retreats ... they glowed with vegetarian good health. They were unbeatable advertisements for the healing powers of India ... it was inevitable that those who pursued the goal of eternal youth would follow in their wake, eager to use the unguents of the spirit if these provided the immortal complexion." Ibid, p. p. 68

"In a tradition where the question asks itself and the answer replies itself and all that remains is to establish the identity of the asker, clearly the [west] is going to experience serious difficulty in eliciting any information at all, be it spiritual, physical, or just the fastest way to get to the next town." Ibid, p. 71

"'You may say these foreigners, they work like donkeys but they think like kings. We Indians, we think like donkeys and we work like kings.'" Ibid, p. 77

"'Here, you're ignored, you're not important at all, so you are forced back on your own resources, not the resources of some huge mammary machine. If you can get used to the indifference, you learn to function again.' India as the new magnet for the new despair. When you're tired of winning come lose with us.'" Ibid, p. 78

"The communal cleansing is one of the more social moments in the Indian villager's life, and such manners are not singular to the sons of the soil. It is a preoccupation that has influenced many aspects of our culture ... the Indian city dweller is preoccupied with keeping his own body, not the civic body, in good running order ..." Part 6, Behind the Urine Curtain, p. 83

"Our streets and our stations are thronged with people from a thousand different backgrounds with whom it is practically impossible to a void conversation. During the conversation you may find that your money has been stolen, or you may find you have been speaking to a sage. Both experiences are considered educational." Ibid, p. 86

"The educated tourist is well aware of the dangers of breaking down those invisible and visible barriers that sustain spiritual distinction. Not for nothing were the Englishmen who manned the Indian Civil Service instructed to wear black tie for dinner every evening ... the itinerant travelers who sweep through India today don't dress for dinner, and are treated by the natives with a corresponding informality." Ibid, p. 89

"Conventional wisdom has it that a kiss is just a kiss. But in India who knows? Whether you are an English aristocrat inspired by Hindu faith, or just an Indian housewife torn by Christian doubts, in the Land of the Sages it is probably politic to keep the mouth free of foreign objects. In order to avoid the humiliating alternatives of swallowing everything you hear. Or having to spit out the obvious." Ibid, p. 92

"With language as with goods you take what you need. The British took from us jodhpurs and bungalows ... words for more settled times. We had taken the idiom of modern America because it seemed to have no discernible provenance, a spontaneous verbalism that embraced the immediate as well as the immediate future."
p. 99

"The Karmic Law would seem to suggest that there is no heaven, only a series of life sentences, and that salvation occurs not in an after-life paradise but with a successful death. For us eternal life is death - not in the bosom of Jesus - but just death, no more being born again to endure life again to die again." Part 7, Forked Tongues, p. 101

"It is [the outsider's] perception of himself as the philosopher and not a s the victim of the philosophy that permits him t o be so enthusiastic, an enthusiasm that stems from the hiatus between the Western emphasis on conquest and the Eastern emphasis on endurance." Ibid, p. 101 (2)

"The art of dialing has replaced the art of dialogue. When the person on the other end of the receiver doesn't understand the conversation, then drop the hard part, beam out the essence, and describe the resulting homogeneity as successful correspondence and cultural exchange." Part 8, Vox Pox, p. 118

"The danger of men becoming Muzak, a background hum to keep busy machines happy, has not been overlooked in India ... unless the proper distance and resepect were maintained between men and the products of their invention, it was possible that the machine might take over ... as a result of [precautions], they are still sometimes able to converse without the intermediary of a machine." Ibid, p. 121

"Waist deep in devotion Ma spoke into the telephone, juggling the ashram's large fortune and dicey reputation, taking on the role of the humble, uneducated Hindu woman with one caller, the arrogant spiritual leader with another, and the flirtatious woman of the world with a third." Part 10, Sex and the Singles Guru, p. 145

"The Tantrics believe that perfect synthesis - because it cancels out time and space - allows the human mind to perceive eternity in the present. They say it is possible for the truly aware man to realize this synthesis in sexual union or in physical communion with death." Ibid, p. 150

"[E]verything that [the couple is] learning from their Tantric guru - that the world and good and evil are mere illusion - indicates that the child is the one who has really understood the nature of the ephemeral world and that they are the laggards, still trying to impose a vision of morality, which they maintain they no longer have, in a world where it has become inapplicable." Ibid, p. 155

"Dharma means not distinction between chaos and order, accepting good and evil as indivisible, witnessing simultaneous continuity as the moral order, being as a process of endless becoming." Part 12, Being Hindu Means Never Having To Say You're Sorry, p. 186

"The more the Buddha explained the Void, the faster his disciples rushed to fill the Void with the Buddha." Ibid, p. 187

"[I]t is possible that in the not too distant future if the Indian wants to learn about India he will have to consult the West, and if the West wants to remember how they were, they will have to come to us." Part 13, Om is Where the Art Is, p. 192

Topics for Discussion

In what ways is India's experience of exploitation by America unique? In what ways has America's capitalistic spirit and drive manifested in other cultures?

In what ways is America's experience of exploitation by India unique? In what ways have other cultures taken advantage of America's principles and practices?

Research the recent discussions of how the book and/or film of "Eat Pray Love" has exploited and/or idealized Indian culture and spiritual practices. In what ways do concerns raised in those discussions echo discussions in "Karma Cola"? Discuss ways in which the West's views of Eastern spirituality have changed and/or stayed the same.

The author frequently suggests that in many ways, the "watering down" of the truths of eastern spirituality is necessary to even begin to accommodate the needs of western seekers. Debate the question of whether this "watering down" is a manifestation of the east's exploitation of the west or whether it is a manifestation of genuine, spiritually oriented helpfulness.

Consider the question raised by the author in Part 1 of Section 4 of why America, with its culture of individuality, is so drawn to eastern spirituality (with its culture of individual surrender to the spiritual whole). What, do you think, is the answer to her question - why was, and is, the west in general and America in particular so drawn to the principles and practices of eastern spiritual thought?

Consider the portrayal of so-called "spiritual flexibility ..." in part eight. Discuss whether such flexibility (as demonstrated, for example, by the Maharishi) is a betrayal of spiritual principles or simply a relaxing of them in order to, as has been previously discussed, ease the way for western understanding of complex eastern spiritual principles.

In what ways has the author, throughout the novel, portrayed and/or defined the link between karma (or the exploitation thereof) and "showbiz"?