

The Lowland Study Guide

The Lowland by Jhumpa Lahiri

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Plot Summary

The Lowland by Jhumpa Lahiri is a work of fiction that follows two brothers born only 15 months apart in Tollygunge who embark on two very different roads in life. Although they are inseparable as children, they have opposite natures and fate will put them on very different paths. Set in the 1960's, Udayan is a personable and outgoing young man who is drawn into the political upheaval of the Naxalite movement and who is willing to sacrifice everything in an effort to put an end to the starvation and inequality that caused so much suffering. The oldest brother Subhash is the more reserved and dutiful of the two brothers, letting Udayan take the spotlight and lead the way for most of their childhood. When his brother becomes involved in the political movement of the time Subhash decides to continue his education in America.

Udayan believed they could make a difference. Udayan didn't expect to meet Gauri however, and falling in love with her makes his life as a revolutionary even more risky. When Udayan's political activities graduate from painting slogans in secret to keeping watch while a policeman is killed, he tells Gauri that they will never have a family. Neither of them realize she is already pregnant - something Udayan will never know as he is killed by soldiers later that day.

Pursuing a life of research and science, Subhash is content until he receives a letter telling him his brother is dead. He returns to India to find his parents broken by the experience. When he learns that Udayan's young wife is expecting, he offers her an escape from the in-laws who have little use for her. Subhash takes her to America where she gives birth to Bela. Intricately woven, this story explores the repercussions of decisions made by Udayan, Subhash, Gauri and Bela, linking them through tragedy and love.



Part I: Chapter 1

Summary

In a quiet enclave just beyond the mosque located after Deshapran Sashmal Road divides, there are a series of modest middle-class homes on narrow lanes. There are two oblong ponds side-by-side which monsoons often caused to rise high enough that they became one body of water. Beyond them, the lowlands often flooded as well, sometimes up to as much as four feet deep for a time. Hyacinth grows so prolifically on the surface of that water that it appears solid.

Simple huts are around the edges, and poverty stricken people can be seen wading through to collect whatever edibles they can find. Autumn brings egrets that stand waiting for prey as the water slowly evaporates again. Brothers Subhash and Udayan often use this route as a shortcut through the neighborhood to the place where they play football.

Analysis

The lowlands surrounding Calcutta are a mixture of middle-class and poverty stricken residents. The opening theme of this story surrounds how the weather affects the region, monsoons turning the lowlands into hyacinth choked swamps for a time, until the water evaporates off enough to reveal the wet ground beneath. The waters are a source of growth for insects and other creatures who manage to endure the dry seasons by either burrowing in the mud and simulating death, or adapting and laying eggs to secure the next generation. It is a cycle of growth, birth and death. Monsoon season brings food sources that the poor can forage on as well – a symbiosis of life.

The secondary theme introduced is one of income disparity as middle-class homes give way to simple huts in the lowland areas. Left to fend for their families, the poverty stricken residents of the region forage to survive while just a short distance away, life is much different. Subhash and Udayan use the lowlands as a convenient short cut between their homes and the field where they play football, seemingly inured to the sight of those less fortunate who wade in the waters to survive.

Discussion Question 1

What different economic groups are discussed in the opening chapter and how are they represented?

Discussion Question 2

What effects do the yearly monsoons have on lowland regions?



Discussion Question 3

What varieties of life are dependent on the monsoons for survival and in what way?

Vocabulary

enclave, embankment, aggressively, periphery, egrets, simulating



Part I: Chapter 2

Summary

Subhash and Udayan have never been in the Tolly Club. Their neighbor Bismillah works as a caddy, selling them lost or abandoned golf balls, and once even a slightly bent putter an angry golfer left behind. One day as it begins to get dark Bismillah takes them to the western edge where the wall is low enough to get inside. He is sure they will find lots of golf balls on the ground around the tamarind trees where falling pods hid them from sight. Subhash offers to stand guard, but Udayan encourages him to follow. The wall hides the street traffic from inside where cannonball trees, bottle brush, eucalyptus and frangipani grow. Subhash notices how the grass follows the earth's sloping contours, covering it like a carpet. Egrets take off as they near, and the brothers, giddy with excitement stay away from the main entrance and the clubhouse.

They have so much fun that they continue to return to the club, but one night as they are leaving, the kerosene tin on the far side is missing. A policeman appears, tells them to empty their pockets and asks them if this is the first time they'd snuck in. They admit it isn't and he berates them. Udayan tries to claim responsibility to keep Subhash out of trouble. Telling Subhash to face the wall, the officer strikes his haunches hard enough for welts to remain for days. Udayan tries to shield him from more blows, but instead the policeman leaves.

Analysis

In this segment, the Partition of India is first mentioned, taking place in 1947 around the same time as when Subhash and Udayan are born. It is then that the wall height of Club Tolly is raised to keep an ever growing population of poverty-stricken people from watching for free. Since Partition, Hindus who fled areas like Chittagong, Dhaka and Rajshahi resettled in the outskirts of Tollygunge, living in shelters created from thatch or canvas with walls made of bamboo.

This chapter touches on the disparity between the rich and the poor in India. Udayan and Subhash scale the wall and for the first time explore the region inside Club Tolly. The lush and even lawns are a direct contrast to the poverty and shanty style living on the other side. Outside the gates, shanties crowd the once spacious region while inside trees flourish, flowers bloom and grass is grown to perfection. Outside the walls, shanties constructed by refugees of Partition have no electricity or sanitation, and the Adi Ganga in those areas is more of a sewage canal than a river like it once was. The increasing gap between those who have and those who don't is starkly evident. The contrasts between the manicured perfection of the greens and the conditions outside the wall are stark.



The relationship that brothers Subhash and Udayan have is also explored, revealing Udayan to be the stronger of the two despite being younger by 15 months. Subhash is lost without his brother, feeling like he is missing a part of himself whenever they are apart. Udayan is younger but is more confident and more daring than his older brother – a fact that frustrates Subhash to no end.

Subhash and Udayan continue to return to the Club, taking advantage of the lower wall while they still can. Like their father, who watched races through the fence before they were born, they are unable to resist the lure of a lifestyle they can't afford and would not otherwise be able to enjoy.

The illegalities of Subhash and Udayan's actions are examined when after several visits to Club Tolly, a policeman discovers them. He confronts them, has them empty their pockets and questions their right to be inside. When it becomes clear that this was not their first visit into the Club, the policeman decides to discipline them. Since Udayan claimed responsibility for the incursion, the officer has Subhash turn around and face the wall. Then he strikes him across his haunches with his steel shaft, and then again on the backs of his legs. Subhash, as the older brother, should have set a better example for Udayan, and the policeman sends that message by not doling out the same punishment to him as he did Subhash.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Subhash and Udayan continue to go over the wall into Club Tolly and what do they collect?

Discussion Question 2

What are the differences between the environment outside the wall, and the advantages that Club Tolly has to offer its guests?

Discussion Question 3

Is the punishment dealt to Subhash and Udayan when they are caught climbing out of Club Tolly by a policeman fair, and why or why not?

Vocabulary

minarets, displaced, obscured, ancestral, procession, leverage, undulating

Part I: Chapter 3

Summary

Subhash and Udayan appear alike at first glance, but inside they are very different. Subhash is cautious, whereas Udayan is outgoing and adventurous, a leader rather than a follower. As they get older and their freedom increases, Subhash wonders if his parents see his lack of inventiveness as a failing. It is impossible to outshine Udayan who seems to have the corner on surprising or impressing their parents. Udayan even protested that Subhash would be able to begin school a year earlier than he and as a result they were enrolled in the same class.

They learned about Tollygunge and its history; how mangroves reproduced and how the area came into being when Major William Tolly excavated and desilted the area which became known as Tolly's Nullah in 1770. In 1785 the Tolly Club grounds belonged to the chairman of the General Bank of India named Richard Johnson. A hundred years later William Cruickshank found the house built by Johnson abandoned, and covered in vines. He restored it and built the country club and extended the tramline to ensure easy access.

The brothers also learn about science, and soon fix any defective cords and switches and even install a buzzer to let them know when company came. That useful invention spent more time as a communication device, the brothers using Morse code to pass secret messages back and forth to each other. Eventually, they attended two of the best colleges in the city; Udayan studying physics at Presidency and Subhash chemical engineering at Jadavpur, the only boys in their neighborhood to have done so. Together, they even built a shortwave radio and heard broadcasts in languages they didn't recognize. One night in 1966, they even listened to the World Cup being played at Wembley. England won.

Analysis

In this segment, the relationship between Subhash and Udayan is explored as the boys excel in school and are accepted into different colleges. As Udayan makes friends in college, he begins socializing with them after school as well. While they spend considerably less time together now than they were used to, this doesn't really impact Subhash as he and Udayan still begin and end each day together. Subhash misses their chess games together though, and begins to play against himself.

Information and education are the main themes in this segment as Udayan becomes adept with electronics, and together he and Subhash construct a shortwave radio, listening to any foreign signals they can find. They hear news bulletins from Radio Peking, Radio Moscow, Voice of America and even the BBC, thereby increasing their understanding of the world around them and allowing them to listen to sports such as



the World Cup at Wembley. They hear about conditions in other countries broadening their horizons, and even hear other languages.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the main differences between Subhash and Udayan, and how do they affect their relationship with each other?

Discussion Question 2

What accomplishment do Subhash and Udayan manage, and what impact does this have on them and on their family?

Discussion Question 3

What changes occur when Subhash and Udayan begin college, and how do those changes affect the two brothers most?

Vocabulary

embroidered, commissioned, compulsively, spontaneously, perpetually, gesticulated



Part I: Chapter 4

Summary

Subhash and Udayan begin hearing about Naxalbari on All India Radio in 1967. They listen to the reports of how tribal peasants are manipulated by wealthy landowners; pushed off their land and robbed of the income from crops they'd grown. In March, a Naxalbarian sharecropper attempted to plough land he'd been evicted from, he was beaten and his plough and bullock taken from him. Sharecroppers retaliated, forcibly occupying land and burning records and deeds.

Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal, Bengali communists and dissidents of the Communist Party of India, Marxist: the CPI(M) began organizing after having met in prison and helped to organize the revolt, but this time their response was militant, demanding rights of ownership for sharecroppers. That May a police inspector was attacked by peasants with bows and arrows and killed. The following day, local police encounter a crowd rioting and when they wouldn't disband, eight women and three men were killed.

Udayan and Subhash listen at night and discuss the situation. Udayan insists that what the peasants did was worth the cost, blaming the United Front like many others. In Naxalbari, landowners were abducted and killed so by July the Central Government banned carrying weapons. In the same week, 500 men sent by the West Bengal cabinet raided the area, capturing insurgents, and killing those who wouldn't surrender, bringing the rebellion to its knees. Disgusted, Udayan took the report personally after announcing that this was only the beginning. By fall, Majumdar and Sanyal were in hiding.

Udayan continues to side with communist articles, bringing them home and even challenging his father the same way he challenged his teachers in school. He read aphorisms of Mao; pamphlets by Charu Majumdar and books like "The Wretched of the Earth" and "What Is To Be Done". Subhash reads some of them and asks Udayan if the rhetoric Majumdar is proposing could work. Udayan is convinced that it already had when Mao changed China. Now when they walk past the Tolly Club, Subhash remembers their excursions over the wall while Udayan feels that it is proof that India was behaving as though the British never left. He tells Subhash that the first thing Che had done after the Cuban revolution was to rid them of golf courses.

Analysis

The main theme of this segment is political uprising and the effect it has on both Subhash and Udayan. Naxalbari is somewhere they'd never heard of before, and is closer to Tibet than to Tollygunge, but despite that, their plight deeply affects Udayan.



While Subhash listens to the same broadcasts that his brother does, he is not nearly as invested emotionally as Udayan is becoming.

The political theme continues as the Communist movement spreads its rhetoric far and wide. Protesters take to the streets and demonstrations break out that defend the peasants and their rights. In Naxalbari, landowners are killed or abducted until the government insists that bows and arrows be banned. Once disarmed, the cabinet easily raids the region fearlessly, and either takes insurgents into custody, or kills them if they refuse to surrender themselves.

The family theme continues in this chapter as well. Udayan challenges his father for the first time, questioning his beliefs and behavior, while Subhash struggles to understand his brother's growing interest in the Communist movement. Their father assures them that this kind of rhetoric is not new, but Udayan insists that change is necessary. Their father had voted communist in the elections, but Udayan wants to know why he'd never taken a stand, but they knew the answer. As a government employee, their father had been forbidden to join any union or party, and if he'd spoken out, his job would have been over.

Change is the final theme as the brothers pass the Tolly Club and now have very separate feelings about the place. Subdash still remembers their excursions into the club grounds fondly as he recalls the trees imported the birds and jackals, and the carpet of green they enjoyed. Udayan, on the other hand, now had a different focus entirely, seeing the Club through different eyes. He sees the entire pastime of golf as bourgeoisie. He believes it is a symbol of proof that India was still behaving as though the British had never left and they were still a semi-colonial country.

Discussion Question 1

How do the broadcasts that Udayan and Subhash listen to affect them and how?

Discussion Question 2

What is the reason for the uprising of the peasants in Naxalbari?

Discussion Question 3

How does the government deal with the uprising in Naxalbari, and what is Udayan's reaction to the news?

Vocabulary

subsistence, contemptuous, insurgents, rhetoric, impetus, aphorisms, bourgeoisie



Part I: Chapter 5

Summary

The United Front collapses in early 1968 and President's Rule controls West Bengal. Although the education system becomes a target of unrest with exams boycotted and convocations disrupted, both brothers begin postgraduate studies. Subdash stays at Jadavpur while Udayan goes to Calcutta University.

Udayan begins attending meetings after school, sometimes missing dinner at home as a result, and one evening he invites Subhash to come along. Subhash does, out of curiosity, but it is nothing like the raucous debate he pictured in his mind. Instead, one student speaks quietly about the formation of a new society, and how parliamentary politics needed to come to an end. Subhash felt as though he wasn't there but Udayan is rapt. Subhash finds slogans, a can of red paint and a brush under the bed and questions Udayan about it one evening after he returns from painting slogans in the area. Subhash is worried that Udayan will get arrested, but Udayan insists that if they don't stand up to the issues, they are contributing to them. Then he invites Subhash to join him the next time.

Subhash acts as a lookout for Udayan, while he paints 'Long live Naxalbari' on a wall. His hand is unsteady – an issue that Subhash had noticed in the past already. Afterward Udayan is proud of his actions while Subhash is angry for feeling the need to prove himself to his brother.

When their studies were over, Udayan seems content with any ordinary occupation he can get while Subhash entertains ideas of going to the United States to take a Ph.D. program. When he tells Udayan, he berates him sure that if Subhash went, he would never return. At first angry, Udayan quickly returns insisting that Subhash is the other half of him and without him, he is nothing. He asks Subhash not to go but then instead it is Udayan who goes, claiming he is going sightseeing. Neither Subhash nor his parents believe him, but no one tries to stop him. When Udayan returns a month later, he is thin, has a beard and moustache and his tremors are more pronounced. Somehow, he is subdued, but never speaks of what he has done while he was gone.

In April of 1969, a third communist party is launched on Lenin's birthday to honor what had happened in Naxalbari. They called themselves Naxalites, Charu Majumdar holding the position of general secretary while Kanu Sanyal the party chairman. Kanu addresses the crowd having just been released from prison, officially naming the new party the Communist Party of India, Marxist-Lenin or the CPI (ML). Their primary task was to organize the peasants against the Indian state. Udayan attended the rally, but Subhash did not get invited, nor did he attend. In many ways, they had already separated.



Analysis

Political unrest continues to be a prevailing theme in this chapter as the United Front government collapses. Udayan becomes increasingly involved, while Subhash is more interested in his education and his future. The more radical students claimed that the youth in India were being taught to ignore what the common people needed, insisting campus administrators were corrupt.

Family is also a theme as Udayan becomes more involved in the communist movement, painting slogans and attending meetings while Subhash worries that he will be caught or that Udayan will dishonor their parents. When Subhash announces his desire to go to the United States to continue his Ph.D. studies, Udayan is angry at first but then admits that Subhash is the other half of him. He needed Subhash to be whole, but Subhash doesn't hear the love and need in his voice, hearing only a command to stay and to follow Udayan as he always had.

Leaving home is a theme that Subhash first initiates, but that Udayan puts into practice first, as he had done with things all of their lives. Udayan had always led, and Subdash isn't surprised when he announces he is leaving to 'see the sights'. While neither he nor his parents believed Udayan, they didn't stop him either.

Illness also plays a role in this segment, as Udayan's tremors increase and become more noticeable. A doctor is consulted, but the worst fears are not confirmed, Udayan learning that his tremors came from an overactive thyroid gland. Though with medication, he regains his health, a part of Udayan always seems to be elsewhere or preoccupied.

Communism leaps into the forefront again in April of 1969 when the third communist party is launched. The theme of communism is prevalent throughout this story, and continues to grow in strength and numbers. Ten thousand people march to the center of the city to hear Kanu Sanyal speak.

Discussion Question 1

What crisis does the education system face and why?

Discussion Question 2

How does the relationship between Subhash and Udayan change and why?

Discussion Question 3

What new party is introduced in 1969 and what is their mandate?

Vocabulary

pedagogy, convocation, raucous, exhortation, capitulated, rostrum, exuberant



Part I: Chapter 6

Summary

A few months after the rally, Subhash leaves Calcutta for the United States where he will study marine chemistry. He shares a house on Rhode Island with another student named Richard who was studying sociology and planning to be a professor one day. Richard opposes the Vietnam War, and is outwardly demonstrative of the fact, but Subhash is acutely aware that he is in the country as a visitor whose status can just as easily be revoked, so he avoids such demonstrations.

Subhash is the only Indian from Calcutta at the university as far as he knows although Narasimhan, an economics professor from Madras originated in Calcutta. At the oceanography campus, Subhash studies gasses dissolved in a sea solution, and isotopes that come from deep sediment.

Subhash watches the ceremony of a small wedding at the chapel on Rhode Island and is compelled to investigate the church after they are gone. For reasons he doesn't understand, the church reminds him of the mosque from home. The door is locked, but he circles the building, looking in the windows and thinking about his own marriage one day, wondering what kind of woman his parents would select for him. Though he is beginning to feel as though he would like to have a companion, the idea of returning to Calcutta to get married soon arrests any haste he feels in the matter. Subhash is proud of the fact that he's come to America. It was a step that he knew Udayan would never have taken, and that motivated his decision more than anything else.

Richard teaches Subhash to drive, leaving him his car when he is not using it. He invites Subhash to come to Boston for a protest, but Subhash declines, citing that it is not his place to be protesting. Richard questions him about India and Udayan comes up in conversation for the first time. Just days later, a letter arrives in the mailbox from Udayan. In it, he tells Subhash that he met with Comrade Sanyal, and tells him that the country he comes home to will be a different one. Even their family home is changing, their father having taken a loan to add another floor to the structure so that when their sons marry, they would have somewhere to live. He adds that the days are dull without Subhash, and instructs him to burn the letter once he's read it. Subhash does so, and writes his brother back, telling him about his studies.

The next letter that comes from Udayan also includes a photograph of a young woman named Gauri whom he informs Subhash that he has married. Though their parents are still in shock, they have taken Udayan and Gauri in and they are learning to get along. Subhash realizes that he is resentful of Udayan who had once again pushed ahead of Subdash as though he weren't the elder of the two. Again, he destroys the letter after reading it, but keeps the photo of the woman whom he is now related to.



Analysis

Separation is an overall theme in this chapter as Subhash continues his education in the United States. Despite the sometimes overwhelming differences between America and India, Subhash finds similarities as well. He even cohabitates with a student who, much like his brother Udayan, is motivated to challenge injustice, protesting and orating to initiate change. Subhash subconsciously assigns himself a living arrangement that makes it easier to cope with being so far from home. Subhash loves his classes, and the oceanography campus is a short ride by bus along a wooded road from which most homes couldn't be seen. At the bottom of the hill is Narragansett Bay where he takes most of his classes.

At the same time, it is a leap of faith by Subhash, motivated to break free of the orbit of his brother and do something first – something real that hadn't already been done by his younger and more outgoing brother. Udayan, being the person he is however makes it unlikely that simply by relocating to another country Subhash will manage to become the older brother in more than simply age, but in experiences as well.

Subhash sees a wedding take place in a small church on Rhode Island that reminds him of the mosque near his family's home, foreshadowing a connection between weddings and home. Soon after his first letter from Udayan, a second letter arrives to introduce his new wife, Gauri, to Subhash. Once again Udayan has leaped ahead of his older brother, arranging his own marriage before his parents have even approached his older brother with an arrangement to be wed.

This ongoing familial theme continues as Subhash repeatedly feels defeated by his younger brother who appears to be leapfrogging ahead of him to experience and live life as the older brother rather than the younger sibling that he is.

Discussion Question 1

What similarities does Subhash see between Rhode Island and his homeland?

Discussion Question 2

What familial conflicts are explored in this chapter and how are they related?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways does Richard resemble Udayan and what is the one glaring difference?

Vocabulary

obstruct, estuaries, moraines, segregation, denouncing, arbitrarily, improvisational, fractious



Part II: Chapter 1

Summary

Udayan first meets Manash at Calcutta University, both graduate students in physics. Most of their shared interests, however, center on Naxalbari and the repercussions of events there; issues in Cuba; insurgencies in Latin American countries and the fact that around the world students were beginning to take a stand against exploitative systems. Udayan meets Gauri, Manash's sister, during one of his visits to their home, and their attraction to each other is immediate.

During the first several visits to their home, Udayan says nothing to Gauri, barely acknowledging her existence until she makes tea for them one day and his eyes linger on hers. She begins watching for him since Presidency where she went to school and Calcutta University where he attended where next door to each other. Then one day he stops in at their home to visit and Gauri is the only one there. Rather than leave and return when Manash is home, Udayan visits with Gauri and they talk easily and openly on a variety of subjects. He asks her about her family, and tells her a bit about his own.

Udayan is surprised when Gauri insists she has no intention of marrying, but continues to see her, taking her on marches and sharing a variety of reading material with her. She reads everything he gave her, and impresses him with her ability to converse intelligently with him afterward. Gauri can feel her mind opening, and growing. After a time, they learned that Manash had been behind their growing relationship, arranging for them to have time alone behind the scenes, and running interference with the rest of the family, positive that they would get along. Manash is right. Gauri has little self-confidence, often feeling like she was insignificant, but Udayan changes that, his actions making it clear that she mattered to him. Then one day there is a note inside one of the books he'd given her, inviting her to a matinee. She is fearful and changes her mind about going several times until when she finally shows, the film is already in its intermission. Udayan is standing outside waiting for her, and had been since the show began. He gives her a ticket and they walk into the dark theatre where he takes her hand for the first time.

Analysis

This chapter explores the budding relationship between Udayan and Gauri. The initial theme is friendship, as Udayan and Manash explore their political similarities and Gauri remains in the background. Manash can see the attraction between his sister and Udayan, and quietly works in the background to ensure they have time alone together to explore the possibilities.

Udayan and Gauri find common ground in many areas, and their connection easily foreshadows their deepening relationship and likely future together. Their growing



feelings for each other are obvious as Udayan begins giving her books to read, noticing small changes she makes to her hair, and then finally offering to take her to a matinee.

The impropriety of their relationship is touched on briefly, the theme of family and arranged marriages coming into play as they continue to see each other without family arrangement or approval. Strictly against the usual protocols, Udayan invites Gauri to a matinee, crossing the boundary between friendship and dating. Gauri almost doesn't go, but when she finally does, the matinee is already in its intermission. Udayan, aware of proprieties, doesn't take her hand until they are inside the darkened theatre.

Discussion Question 1

How does Gauri see herself as a woman and what is her role in the family?

Discussion Question 2

What does Manash do that stretches the boundaries of propriety and why?

Discussion Question 3

How does Udayan reveal his feelings for Gauri to her and what would custom dictate he should do instead?

Vocabulary

repercussions, exploitative, embellishing, estrangement, individualism, hierarchies



Part II: Chapter 2

Summary

Richard finds a teaching position in Chicago, so Subhash finds himself living alone in the second year of his Ph.D. For three weeks he joined a group of students and professors on a research vessel. They examine the results of a barge that had sunk off the coast of Falmouth two years previously, dumping almost 200,000 gallons of fuel oil, discovering that the marsh grass had been killed off by hydrocarbons and fiddler crabs had frozen, unable to bury themselves. At Georges Bank, diatoms explode in peacock blue and he watches humpback whales, and leaping dolphins. He misses his family, having not seen them for a year and a half now. Udayan continues to write, but his letters no longer contain political rhetoric, or end with slogans. Subhash saves his letters now, seeing no reason to burn them now. Letters from his parents say little about Gauri, commenting only that they hope he will let them choose his future wife and attend his wedding. He writes back, promising that they can arrange it all, wondering if Gauri has already taken his place.

Then one summer day Subhash meets Holly and her son Joshua walking their dog Chester on the beach. He helps the boy find a starfish, and then has a conversation with Holly. Holly is friendly and personable, and Subhash seeks her out the next time he notices her car in the parking lot. They spend several occasions walking on the beach together and on one of those occasions, Holly invites Subhash to join her for dinner. Joshua is with his father, and Holly and Subhash are alone for the first time. After dinner, it begins to rain and he is ready to leave when Holly presses herself against him gently from behind and asks him if he'd like to stay. It is the first time that Subhash has been intimate with a woman, and is slightly embarrassed at first, but Holly quickly puts him at ease, and he forgets everything else. The consequences faded. The next morning Chester wakes Subdash who dresses, acutely aware of the fact that had Joshua been home, this would not have happened. She confirms it, asking if she should call the next time he was with his father. Subhash doesn't say no.

Analysis

Several strong themes emerge in this chapter, the first one as Subhash becomes increasingly involved in his studies, and begins to understand the importance of the relationships between man and environment. Like Udayan, Subhash finds passion in what he is doing, perhaps understanding his brother more in the process. Oddly, at the same time Udayan seems to have lost some of his passion for political concerns, transformed in some measure by his new wife and the concerns and realities that married life brings.

The familial theme is touched on as Subhash feels disconnected from his past and has no idea where the future will find him. Shipboard studies remind Subhash of home, and



how far away he is from his family, the ocean accentuating the distance between them. He is acutely aware of the time it takes to travel even a short distance across the earth's surface. In keeping with the familial theme, Subhash's parents comment on his future, suggesting rather hopefully that he will allow them to select a wife for him as custom dictates, unlike his brother who disregarded their wishes. Subhash continues to demonstrate his loyalty to his family by sending home money whenever he can and assuring them that he will follow their customary procedures for the selection of his wife. Despite that, once he has managed to send money and a letter, he all but ignores any familial contacts. He can't help but wonder if Gauri has already usurped his place in the family.

Subhash meets Holly and her son Joshua on the beach on day and they strike up a conversation. They enjoy each other's company and the next theme presented is desire as Subhash finds himself in Udayan's shoes – becoming involved with a woman who was not chosen by his family. After seeing her on the beach a few times, Holly invites him to her place for dinner and that leads to his first intimate experience with a woman. Despite his promises to his parents, Subhash gives them little or no thought as he and Holly spend the night together while her son is with his father.

Discussion Question 1

How does the basic tone and content in Udayan's letters to Subhash change, and what is the most likely reason for this?

Discussion Question 2

What qualities does Subhash find surprising in Holly and in what ways does he admire her?

Discussion Question 3

How does Subhash feel after his physical encounter with Holly, and how does Holly clarify her intentions?

Vocabulary

contamination, obliquely, cantilevered, imperfections, incredulous, exhilarated



Part II: Chapter 3

Summary

After his intimate night with Holly, Subhash realizes that he wants to tell Udayan about her, and discuss their shared knowledge of women with him. He visits her most Friday evenings when Joshua is gone; staying as long as Sunday most weeks and other than that he pretends nothing has changed. On occasion, they shop for groceries together – a task he would never have done with a woman in Calcutta unless he'd married her. He never feels the need to court her as he has seen many men his age do with women they are interested in, and Holly is beyond needing that kind of attention from him. Instead, they talk about their families and Subhash finds himself imagining what it would be like to be like Narasimhan and his American wife, married to Holly. At the same time, he understands that what he imagines is impossible.

On occasion, Joshua would not go to his father's and Subhash understood that he could not see Holly then, but he found himself wishing that circumstances were different. The following weekend, he visits her again and Joshua's father calls for advice after Joshua comes down with a fever. Holly talks him through medication dosages and running a warm bath while Subhash marvels that they can still speak to each other so civilly. He is reminded of a time when he and Udayan were young children and had become very ill. Their parents thought it was typhoid and worried for days that they would lose one or both of their children. Holly tells him that time stops when there is something threatening your children.

Analysis

The familial theme continues in this segment as Subhash's developing relationship with Holly brings him to understand Udayan and his rebellion where Gauri is concerned. He desperately wants to share the way he feels and the emotional connection he and Holly have with Udayan, knowing that only he would be able to relate to how he feels. Subhash waffles between this deeper understanding of his brother, and the rules and expectations of his family. He spends every weekend he can with Holly, but during the week he does his best to pretend that nothing was different.

Cultural upbringing is also a theme in this chapter as Subhash and Holly talk about the differences in their upbringing and resulting expectations in life. Subhash goes shopping with Holly and tells her how famine had been a reality of life, lining up for rations and for whatever was available on any given day and affordable. The differences in their upbringing and the expectations of family make Subhash realize that he will never be able to enjoy a relationship of any permanence with Holly, or bring her and Joshua into their family, knowing that to his parents all of this would be unthinkable; unacceptable. Despite knowing this to be fact, he continues to see her, but tells no one about her.



The impact that children have on family comes into play as well when Holly talks to her ex-husband on the phone while Subhash is there. Joshua is sick, and as Holly spends time telling her ex what to do for him, Subhash is reminded of an episode in his childhood when he and his brother had become very ill. He remembers the concern his parents felt, and how they'd worried that he and his brother would not survive. Holly knows that feeling well, telling him that time stops when your children are in danger.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the main differences in upbringing that Holly and Subhash discuss?

Discussion Question 2

How does Subhash cope with the way he feels about Holly and why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Subhash keep his relationship with Holly a secret from everyone?

Vocabulary

purifying, distinctive, clandestine, ambivalence, acrimony, inaccessible



Part II: Chapter 4

Summary

In the fall Holly takes Subhash on the ferry to Block Island to see the kestrels which had just begun to fly south. She'd reserved a room for them and presented him with a pair of binoculars in a leather case. They rent bikes and ride around the island.

Subhash has the most recent letter from Udayan in his pocket. He talks about Gauri and then follows that with codes and signals of their youth. Confused, Subhash wonders if perhaps Udayan's largest commitment was now to Gauri.

Subhash suggests that they should tell Joshua and Holly doesn't answer. She claims she has a headache from the sun, and in the morning seems better. On the ferry ride back, she tells him they are finished. She and Joshua's father are going to try again, she says, although she insists they can still be friends. Subhash is hurt, although he understands the reasons behind her actions. They sit separately on the way back and Subhash asks her not to call him again. Then he reads Udayan's letter again before ripping it up and throwing it into the ocean.

In 1971, his third fall begins in Rhode Island. For the first two years Subhash had received a parcel from his family at this time of year, but this year, a telegram comes instead telling him that Udayan is dead, and asking him to come home if he can.

Analysis

Holly invites Subhash to join her on Block Island to watch the kestrels begin their migration south, and during this trip, several incidents foreshadow the encroaching end to their relationship. First, Holly invites him to go somewhere else with her – something they hadn't done before. Then she gives him a pair of binoculars as a gift, which he later realizes are a parting gift of sorts. That night at the inn, Subhash suggests they tell Joshua about them, and Holly doesn't respond. Later they lie together without sexual contact for the first time and Holly seems a bit distant. All of these things combine to foreshadow the end.

Cultural differences are a strong theme in this segment as Subhash learns that Holly no longer wants to continue their relationship. She tells him that her ex-husband is back in her life, and that they are going to give their marriage another try, but Subhash is stunned by the news. Despite his awareness that their cultures are miles apart, and that he'd promised his parents that he would allow them to arrange his marriage for him as their customs dictate, he is angry and disappointed that Holly would end what they have. Their different upbringing and lifestyles make continuing this relationship impossible, she tells him. Subhash is aware of the differences in their ages, but Holly still reminds him of this fact as well. Even though she is doing him a favor by putting an end to what they shared, he is angry that she was the one who decided when.



The changing seasons remind Subhash of home, vivid colors the theme of his third autumn in Rhode Island. Subhash compares the colors of fall to the hues of spices his mother used, the metaphor transporting him across the miles between them in an instant.

Time and distance are a dominant theme as Subhash thinks of home and the holiday celebrated at this time of year. In the beginning, he hadn't missed the holiday, but now he can't help but want to go home. He thinks about Durga Pujo, and how every year the hymns celebrated the story of Durga's formation. No parcel from home comes this year either. Instead, he receives a telegram that tells him Udayan was killed, and asking him to come home if he can.

In this segment, Subhash suffers the loss of two intense relationships – both dying in one form or another. The end of his relationship with Holly is significant as it was the death of his first physical relationship with a woman – a connection he felt deeply and wanted to share with the one person on earth he believed would understand – his brother. Shortly afterward, he receives the news that his brother is dead, and his loss is that much more significant because he has lost Holly as well.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Subhash find the letter Udayan sent him both confusing and consoling?

Discussion Question 2

How does Holly attempt to disengage herself from Subhash and what foreshadows her breakup with him?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways does Holly's pronouncement compare to the telegram Subhash gets from home and why?

Vocabulary

immerse, instantaneous, precarious, pensive, relinquished, bisected



Part III: Chapter 1

Summary

Subhash takes a bus to Boston and begins the long trip home. He lands in Delhi, and boards a train to Howrah Station. On the train, other passengers tell him that by 1970 the Naxalites had gone underground, surfacing only to attack, intimidate voters, fire pipe guns, and hide bombs in public places. They killed the French consul's wife; assassinated the vice-chancellor of Jadavpur University; and took control of certain neighborhoods, including Tollygunge. New laws gave police and paramilitary the right to enter without warrants, and arrest without charges. Subhash realizes then that police killed his brother.

Home is strange to him at first. Subhash had forgotten how the concentration of so many people in one place came with a stench of its own. His father's younger cousin, Biren Kaka and his wife are waiting for him when he arrives. His parents haven't come despite the hero's welcome he'd been promised when he left. The station is where he'd last seen Udayan and he remembers their goodbyes.

Little remains of the small house he grew up in, the construction now complete but ungainly. He walks past his brother's footprints and sees his parents sitting above through the grille. He presses the buzzer and his father lowers a key telling Subhash to lock the gate behind him. At first they look the same, but then he notices the grief in their eyes. The death portrait of Udayan on the wall makes it all real and Subhash cries when he sees it. He settles himself in the room he and Udayan once shared, struck by how small and dark it is. Subhash goes upstairs for lunch and sits with his back to the portrait, unable to look at it. Gauri eats alone in the kitchen, and his mother admits she is expecting a child.

After lunch, he walks past the ponds and finds a stone that marks Udayan's death with his name, and years of life. Overwhelmed with memories of the past, he returns to the house and sleeps through dinner. In the kitchen, he finds Gauri sitting on the floor and introduces himself.

Slowly, he settles into the new house. Although larger and with enough rooms to withdraw alone to, there seems to be no place for guests or family to gather. The terrace is the only place his parents spend time in, looking over the neighborhood quietly. Gauri does not join them.

Subhash is given his and Udayan's gifts for Durga Pujo, and his mother calls him Udayan several times. He doesn't bother to correct her. It seems impossible to interact with them. They have no interest in his life in Rhode Island, or in talking about their own. Every evening at the same time, his mother walks to the marker and leaves flowers on Udayan's stone after washing it clean. Without being told, he knows that this is the hour



his brother died. One night, he finally asks them what happened, and his father admits that he had let the police in but beyond that they say little.

In the morning he finds Gauri and gives her a paperback Udayan had asked him to bring for her. She invites him into her room noticing the blend of her things and Udayan's. They talk, Gauri asking more questions about his life in Rhode Island than his parents had and learning that she had finished her bachelor's in philosophy. She'd considered a master's program, but now Udayan's child was on the way and due in the summer. He asks her how life with his parents was, and offers to take her back to her family, but they don't want contact with her. Since she ran off with Udayan to begin with, and then he was killed by soldiers, they are understandably afraid to be associated with her. Finally, Subhash asks her what happened to his brother.

Analysis

The initial theme in this chapter is change. Subhash returns to India, noticing many things that were commonplace before now stand out to him. After three years in Rhode Island, he had forgotten how busy and intense it was to be around so many people.

This leads directly into culture shock for Subhash who had forgotten the smells and sounds that so many people together create. There is a concentrated stench that assaults him at first – the sour smell of septic; and the reek of algae and of open drains. The water from the corporation tank is metallic and so rich in iron that it leaves a residue. Even his first meal with them is a reminder of the differences in culture – Subhash reverting to eating on the floor with his fingers again. Other cultural differences are also observed, such as Gauri's apparent segregation from the rest of the family – a practice Subhash is sure would have angered Udayan.

The familial theme changes for Subhash as well. He is surprised by the sameness of his home and parents, and the differences brought about by Udayan's marriage, his death, and his wife's pregnancy. Once comfortable in the home of his childhood, he finds it small and disjointed, despite the addition of the new floor. He is struck by the differences as they collide with his memories. Now his family had lost Udayan, but gained Gauri and their coming child.

Political unrest seems to have abated, but residual effects still linger as his parents now lock and check the gate often, and seem afraid to discuss anything that is related to Udayan's death. Subhash sees the memorial tablet erected by his brother's party comrades for their political martyr. The stone is located in the lowlands where water comes and goes each day and the location tells Subhash that it was placed where Udayan was killed. Charu Majumdar is India's most wanted man and a substantial bounty offered for him, but the conflict while liberating Muslim Bengalis only causes another refugee surge across the border.



Discussion Question 1

What changes does Subhash notice when he returns to India and his family?

Discussion Question 2

What is Durga Pujo and how is it celebrated?

Discussion Question 3

How does Subhash's family home differ now from what it was like when he lived there and how does Subhash feel about it?

Vocabulary

intimidated, sadistic, interrogating, diminished, liberation, segregation, martyrs



Part III: Chapter 2

Summary

Slowly Gauri describes the events of the day that Udayan was killed. In the week before Durga Pujo – the month of Ashvin, Gauri and her mother-in-law had gone shopping, picking up gifts for the holidays and odds and ends for the house. The driver of the rickshaw refuses to take them all the way home, so grabbing their parcels, they walk the remaining distance. Gauri is the first to see the Central Reserve Police van parked on the bank of the first pond. They see the key dangling in the lock and Gauri sees her father-in-law coming downstairs carefully. An officer points his weapon at them, and instructs them to leave the house.

They are herded towards the lowland and the officer in charge announces they are seeking Udayan Mitra. Through a megaphone, the neighbors are warned that harboring him is breaking the law. Gauri is questioned but says nothing although she knows where Udayan is hiding. The officer threatens to eliminate each member of his family in turn if Udayan doesn't reveal himself. Finally he stands up, hands raised, and is instructed to ask for his parent's forgiveness for being a traitor to his country. His hands are bound, one injured and obviously painful, and he is pushed into the van. The family is taken back to the house. They climb up to the terrace and can see Udayan standing beside the van. One soldier unties his hands and then without warning shoots Udayan three times in the back. The soldiers drag his body back to the van and drive away.

The police had uncovered a diary under the mattress that contained proof of Udayan's guilt; notes on how to make a Molotov cocktail; the differences between using methanol and gasoline; nitric acid versus potassium chlorate; and more. There was a map of the Tolly Club, detailed with locations of buildings and schedules of guards along with when certain venues were open or closed and what targets were best.

Gauri admits Udayan had been questioned a few months earlier, but had been released. Then, a month before his death Udayan didn't come home. Early the next morning, he climbed the back wall, his arm in a sling and his right hand bandaged. He told Gauri he and two others had been constructing a bomb when it had detonated, taking his fingers and part of his hearing. Fearing the police would connect him to the explosion, he left for two weeks. Finally, unable to find shelter, he returned. He hid in the house and kept away from windows so that he wasn't seen. A week passed, and finally Udayan convinced Gauri and his mother to do some holiday shopping and to behave normally.

Udayan's body is not returned and for ten days Gauri observes the rules. She does not wash, change, comb her hair or wear slippers, shutting herself in the room they shared. On the eleventh day, a priest came for final rites. At just 23 years old, Gauri is a widow. Dashami – the end of Pujo – comes and goes.



A month after Udayan's death, her mother-in-law enters her room to see why she hasn't come down to help her with the preparations for the day. After only a few minutes, she tells Gauri not to bother getting up but Gauri doesn't understand. Her mother-in-law is surprised that such a supposedly intelligent woman doesn't know when she is expecting a child.

Gauri always had a unique ability to keep track of time in her head, as well as other concepts such as numbers and letters of the alphabet. Time was arrayed in her mind like an orbit in space and letters and numbers appeared to her like chain links. Each concept is three dimensional in her mind. The image of time is strongest, orienting her across the spectrum of years but the present seems to elude her. She wants an end to the days and weeks still ahead of her, but the new life in her won't let her give up.

Analysis

Gauri tells Subhash about the events that led up to Udayan's death, the initial theme of family prevalent as she describes her shopping trip with her mother-in-law. They had purchased gift items for family members, along with material for new clothes, slippers, towels and more.

The theme of continuing unrest presents itself before they get home, their driver unwilling to go down the alley to their enclave. Instead, they are forced to walk with all of their parcels the rest of the way home. A police van is parked near the ponds, and soldiers are visible. Questions and threats finally convince Udayan to reveal himself, and soon after, Udayan is shot dead.

While Gauri is loyal to her husband, the evidence police find in their room is undeniable. Terrorism is the theme that leads to Udayan's death after police discover written proof of his involvement in terrorist acts.

Around them, the holidays are celebrated while they mourn the loss of Udayan. There is unfortunate irony in the fact that Udayan loses his life during the rebirth of Durga and before he learns of the life Gauri carries inside her.

The isolation and segregation set upon Gauri after Udayan's death foreshadows a change in her living circumstances as it is clear that she is unwelcome in their home. It also foreshadows a coming battle for the custody of her child as Udayan's parents want his offspring but not the vessel that gives it life.

Discussion Question 1

What evidence is found in the Mitra household, and what conclusions can be drawn from it?



Discussion Question 2

What is Gauri's status in the Mitra household after Udayan's death and what does Subhash realize?

Discussion Question 3

How does Gauri catalog information in her mind and how does that differ from the way most people do?

Vocabulary

disembark, egress, paramilitary, unambiguous, configuration, conspicuous



Part III: Chapter 3

Summary

Subhash takes the new material he was given to the small shop in the city that he and Udayan had gone to yearly together. The tailor measures him, sketching designs and attaching a small swath of material to the receipt.

He rides the bus to Esplanade and gets out, feeling like as much of a foreigner as the tourists he sees. He lights a cigarette and a shop owner engages him, inviting him in to have a cup of tea. Subhash is comforted by the gesture, a courtesy of hospitality that didn't exist in the United States. He purchases two woolen shawls – one for his mother and one for Gauri. Although it is only appropriate for Udayan's widow to wear ivory, brown or gray shades now, Subhash feels compelled to purchase a turquoise one instead. At home he gives his mother the shawl and shows her the one he bought for Gauri, but she discourages him. He talks to his mother about her, and learns that his mother was plotting to force Gauri out but keep her child after it is born. He asks her to accept Gauri for Udayan's sake, but then she loses her temper with him and the conversation ends.

Unable to sleep that night, Subhash turns it all over in his mind and slowly an alternative future emerges in his mind. He may not be able to help his parents, but perhaps he could take Gauri from the cruelty of his parents' care in their joyless home. Instead, he could marry her and take her to the United States with him. Subhash takes her the shawl and tells her he'd like her to wear it. She puts it away in the box and he loses his nerve.

The next afternoon two policemen and an investigator from the Intelligence Bureau come to the door and ask for Gauri. The investigator questions her and Subhash, showing Gauri photos and asking about his associations. Gauri plays dumb and they soon leave. Then Subhash joins her on the terrace and tells her the truth, offering his solution. Gauri admits that Udayan had told her he didn't want to start a family until after Subhash had had his first child.

Analysis

Obligation is the initial theme as Subhash goes to the city with the material his parents gave him. He knows that there are few places that will tailor clothing in Rhode Island, and doesn't want this gift to go to waste.

The theme of home has come to mean something different to Subhash now, but he hadn't realized it until he spent some time in his former hometown, and then in Calcutta. Walking the streets there, Subhash discovers that ironically, he identifies more with the tourists and foreigners he sees on the streets than he does a Bengali. He understands



that he no longer considers this his home, and looks forward to being able to leave it behind.

Hospitality is a theme that Subhash had forgotten about during his time in the United States. When a shopkeeper invites him in for tea, and then proceeds to lay out one woolen shawl after another for his approval, Subhash can't help but purchase one for his mother and one for Gauri.

Cultural customs continue to be compared and contrasted in this segment as Subhash decides to buy a turquoise shawl for Gauri. According to custom in his country, Gauri is now limited to clothing that is drab and plain. Colors like grey, tan, brown, or ivory would all be acceptable, but again Subhash breaks the rules and buys her what he thinks would look nice on her instead.

Subhash's purchase of a shawl for Gauri, and the personal nature of his gift to her foreshadow the growing feelings he has for her, and his desire to take her from the home she is trapped in now. Subhash's mother is determined to maintain their cultural exclusion of her, citing it as proper but Subhash knows the truth. Their behavior disturbs Subhash and embarrasses him. He argues until his mother tells him to shut up.

The familial theme takes a turn in this segment as Subhash sees a side of his parents that he hadn't noticed before. He talks to them about Gauri, trying to understand why they are so intent on secluding her, and finally realizes that they have no intention of making her welcome. In fact, they'd rather that she had her child and then left, leaving her child with them of course.

Discussion Question 1

What does Subhash realize as he walks the streets in Calcutta, and what sales techniques does he notice that are not used in America?

Discussion Question 2

Which purchase does Subhash make that could be considered inappropriate and why?

Discussion Question 3

What reasons does Subhash give for wanting Gauri to come with him to America, and what reasons does he want her to come that he does not share with her?

Vocabulary

intuiting, evasive, dissuade, disheveled, composed, implicit



Part IV: Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

Gauri arrives in Boston where Subhash waits to take her to her new home with him. Again she is struck by the similarities between Subhash and Udayan. She watches the passing scenery, barely able to understand the radio despite having had an English education at Presidency. In the apartment, he gives Gauri the bedroom, willing to sleep on the sofa bed. She listens to his morning routine, grateful that he is so independent on one hand, but also confused as to her place in his life. Subhash gives Gauri a key to the front door and to the mailbox, some money and a telephone number he can be reached at. She waits until she he leaves before getting up. Though grateful for the chance to leave her former life behind, her marriage to Subhash is more of a way to keep Udayan with her than anything else.

It takes time for Gauri to settle into her new surroundings. Subhash continues to cook for them both, but soon Gauri begins to feel confined. She begins with a walk around the campus and gaining confidence, begins to explore. Amazed that she can freely enter the school, she wanders around, slipping into a lecture hall in the philosophy department. Tired and feeling heavy, she sits through the lecture, even taking notes in the margins of a campus paper. After the first time, Gauri begins attending the class twice a week. She even begins to participate and to her surprise the professor answers her as though she is just another student. She discovers the lounge in the women's bathroom, sitting there at times and watching as women came and went, applying makeup or touching up their hair.

Subhash takes her to an obstetrician and stops at the grocery store on the way home. While he is inside, Gauri looks through the glove box and discovers a woman's elastic hair band. Rather than curiosity, Gauri feels relief that there is some other woman in Subhash's life. Perhaps she didn't have to love him. She seems unable to talk to him; to tell him how grateful she is or to convey how much better a man than Udayan he is.

Subhash starts the new semester late, moving into one of the apartments reserved for families, and purchasing the things they needed to set up a house. He sees Gauri only in glimpses, and one night hears her relive Udayan's death, whimpering. He happens to see Narisimhan and fills him in on the changes in his life when he asks. He tells Narisimhan that he is married, but not that it is to Udayan's wife, and Narisimhan invites him and Gauri to dinner.

They attend a dinner party together, and Subhash is happy to see that Gauri is mingling with the other women, and for a short time, he feels as though things might be okay. Narisimhan and Kate give them an assortment of baby items their boys have outgrown, and on the way home he tries to talk to her about their visit, but Gauri is back to being withdrawn and uncommunicative. She tells him she doesn't want to know them, and that they have nothing in common.



Days later, he comes home to find her gone, and all of her clothing shredded in the bedroom. A pair of scissors and large portions of her hair are testament to other alterations. When she finally returns, she tells him she's been shopping and calmly puts her shredded clothing into a garbage bag. He says nothing about the waste or the money as she unpacks her new possessions. That night, he has his first intimate dream of her, and wakes still feeling the need to hold her, and knowing it is still too soon.

Analysis

The reality of her situation hits her as she sees Subhash waiting for her when she lands in Boston. The theme of change is strong, as it was for Subhash when he first arrived in the United States. He does his best to welcome her and bridge the difference. As much as everything has changed for Gauri, the one constant is his voice – the same voice as Udayan.

Gauri feels the ghost of Udayan in the child she carries, a constant reminder that he is with her, but not with her; alive, but dead. It is just one of the many contrasting themes in her life now. She learned English at Presidency, but can hardly understand the radio. She is married, but isolated from her husband emotionally. She is a wife, but does nothing to look after her husband. She lives with Subhash, but separate from him. Udayan's child is growing inside her, but will call Subhash father.

Independence is an unlikely theme in this segment as Udayan does what he can to ensure that Gauri has hers despite the fact that he is now her husband. He gives her money, keys, and his telephone number so that she has freedom, but at first she is reluctant to leave the apartment. Her decision to marry Subhash had been impulsive and seemed as though it would give her the freedom she wanted, but she had just exchanged one version of containment and isolation for another.

Their wedding had been a registry wedding again, but everyone excepting Manash had refused to attend, foreshadowing the possibility that her decision will bring her nothing but loneliness and isolation.

Gauri compares thick fog to death, convinced that Udayan is now in a place where the thick fog and condensation are all that he sees and panics briefly. In her mind, she also constantly compares the two brothers. While they share the same voice, everything else is different. Udayan was not predictable like Subhash is, sticking to a schedule of regularity. Udayan never lifted a finger to serve himself at home while Subhash seems to require nothing of her.

This segment is one of notable differences as well. In Rhode Island, she is anonymous, able to roam around at will. There were no police to block her access, or stop her with questions, while at Presidency she'd seen rocks thrown at a helicopter that carried Robert McNamara when he'd come to visit and been there when protestors had locked the vice chancellor in his office while trams were burned. In Rhode Island, she travels freely, attends classes that interest her, and no one to condemn her for her actions.



Gauri is changing as well. As she watches the women on campus, she realizes that more and more, she wants to be like them; be able to dress like them and behave like them. She shreds her clothing, shopping for items that are more American in style than Indian.

The theme of family continues in this segment on several fronts. First and foremost is the new relationship she has with Subhash. Their marriage creates a legal family for Gauri and the child Udayan gave her, although she attaches little significance to their union beyond the fact that it saved her from Tollygunge and her in-laws. Gauri notices the students who leave for the long weekends, headed home to see family. She stands where they gather, listening and watching their behavior wondering about the places they are going to. Gauri sees an obstetrician, who tells her how her baby is progressing and she relays this information to Subhash with little emotion or apparent connection. She and Subhash continue to sleep in separate rooms and spend all of their time apart from each other except for when meals are ready to eat. Then she emerges long enough to consume what Subhash made for her before retreating again. They attend a dinner party and while presenting themselves as a married couple expecting a child; emotionally Gauri has little attachment to either, pretending to enjoy herself until they are on the way home again.

Discussion Question 1

What are the similarities and the differences that exist between the marriage ceremony Gauri and Udayan had, and the ceremony she had with Subhash?

Discussion Question 2

How does Gauri adapt to living in Rhode Island, and what contrasts between the two countries are most evident to her?

Discussion Question 3

How does Gauri feel about the first dinner party she and Subhash attend, and what changes does that evening precipitate in her?

Vocabulary

fraternity, audacious, denouncing, impenetrable, syllogisms, exploitation



Part IV: Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

Summer nears and Gauri spends more time in the air conditioned library, enjoying that she can be anonymous. In June, after commencement, there were few people around, and she often felt as though she had the place to herself. She stays near the philosophy section, reading and taking notes. In July, the heat seemed intolerable. Most campus buildings were closed now and predictably, her contractions begin in the library three days before her due date. She goes home, packs a bag and waits for Subhash. He put his arm around her, helping her to the car, and then driving through a downpour that forces him to go slowly. Like many mothers-to-be, now that the time had come a part of her would rather have put off the birth for a while longer.

Gauri delivers a girl and agrees to name her Bela for Subhash. She is put in his arms first in the hospital. At home, they share her care despite the resistance she feels to do so at first. Bela demands little, and everything. It isn't long before she welcomes the break that Subhash gives her from the demands of motherhood. While pregnant, Gauri had felt competent; capable, but now she is acutely aware of how dependent Bela is on them to protect her, and see to her needs. She constantly feared dropping Bela, rolling over on her in her sleep, and a hundred other scenarios that made it easier on her if she just let Subhash handle her instead. Bela is a wonder to him, and he enjoys his time with her, feeling a sense of purpose and need. One night, he takes Bela back into the bedroom and lies down with her beside Gauri, staying on top of the covers. Bela is on his chest, and soon they both fall asleep. When he wakes, Gauri is feeding Bela and it is morning. He apologizes for being there and begins to get up, but she stops him, admitting that his company was comforting, and that they'd been separate for long enough.

In the beginning, she expresses no desire, but she seems willing enough that Subhash begins a physical relationship with her, amazed by her in so many ways. She says little, but when her breath comes faster he recognizes the only moment in which she no longer resists him.

By the age of four, Bela is developing memory and learns the word 'yesterday' although time is a concept she doesn't understand. The name Bela is the name of a flower, but also a word to describe a span of time when another word is put ahead of it. Gauri is less patient with Bela than Subhash, frustrated with her when she is slow to get ready. She takes Bela to nursery school each morning and picks her up in the afternoon, going to the library in between. She struggles to understand time; whether it exists on its own or simply as a construct of our minds; whether animals have a sense of it passing; and what causes time to seemingly slow, or speed up. She makes notes and uses her diary to record her impressions, considering how she'd believed she and Udayan would be together forever; how Subhash believed now they would raise Bela as a family forever; and how nothing seemed to work out the way the mind planned.



At noon, Gauri returns to collect Bela who does not assault her with the events of her day like the other children did. Bela, by comparison, is composed and adult in her behavior in many ways. At home, they collect the mail which consists mainly of bills.

Occasionally, Manash writes to her, giving her current news. Many of Udayan's friends are still in prison, often being tortured, despite demands from prominent western intellectuals that they be released. To this day, a part of Gauri still expects to hear something from Udayan.

Analysis

In this segment, the primary theme is transition. Gauri is due to deliver her baby soon, and spends her time in the air conditioned library, studying by herself. Having made no friends, she is always alone, her only contact with Subhash. Then the baby comes and their lives change. Gauri goes from being independent and alone to having a dependent and seldom having a moment to herself. The campus is also in a state of transition from the school year to the summer months; from being crowded and busy to being quiet and mostly empty. Even Subhash faces the transitions from husband to father; as Gauri does from wife to mother.

Fear is another strong theme as Gauri realizes for the first time how dependent her new baby girl really is. She dreams of the millions of things that may harm her baby, or the multitude of ways that she might inadvertently be responsible for hurting Bela in some way by dropping her or smothering her in her sleep when she rolls over.

The theme of family is altered in this segment as Gauri and Subhash become parents. As the reality of Bela's birth affects their lives, Gauri struggles with motherhood while Subhash seems to thrive with the added responsibilities. He eagerly takes on the role of fatherhood while Gauri struggles with her new role as mother. The arrival of Bela finally erodes the remainder of the wall between her parents, bringing them together as a couple for the first time since their wedding.

Time is also a theme that comes into play again as Bela grows and her interpretation of the flow of time gives Gauri much to consider. She often wishes that she could live in Bela's idea of time where yesterday encompasses all that has happened before now, and the events can be twenty-four hours or twenty-four years ago but are the same distance away. The future is something Gauri also considers, thinking about how just two years earlier, she'd firmly believed that she and Udayan would be together forever, much as Subhash now believes that he and Gauri will be a family with Bela forever now. The constructs of time crash in her mind and she struggles to understand the theory.

Discussion Question 1

How do Gauri and Subhash respond to the new responsibilities of parenthood; which of them seems to adapt better and why?



Discussion Question 2

What theory has Gauri had an interest in for all of her life, and why is it so confounding for her now?

Discussion Question 3

What incident creates the atmosphere that allows Gauri and Subhash to finally break down some of the wall between them and how?

Vocabulary

demarcated, reflexive, synonymous, unilateral, contradicting, successive, invariance⁴



Part IV: Chapters 5 - 7

Summary

It has been five years since Subhash went to Calcutta last, and though his parents now say they would like to meet Bela and would accept Gauri, Subhash still declines their invitation, telling them that Bela is still too young. Bela is growing at a rate that Subhash can almost see. She writes her own name and ties her own shoes despite the sometimes childish mannerisms that remain. On Saturdays he takes her shopping, loving his private time with her, often amazed at how much like Udayan she is.

One day Subhash sees Holly and her husband in the parking lot. She walks over and says hello to him, introducing Keith to him. Subhash introduces Bela and when they go their separate ways, Subhash is surprised to realize that he is slightly jealous at their obvious happiness with each other.

Despite knowing that a second child would provide a playmate for Bela, Gauri has no intentions of becoming a mother again. She still sleeps with Subhash, but only to arrive at the brain-numbing state that allows her to sleep. At five, Bela begins kindergarten, but is only in school for half the day. Gauri wants to find a baby-sitter so that she can continue studies herself, but Subhash refuses to allow a stranger to look after Bela. Angry, she almost tells him that he is not Bela's father, but seeing her face when he arrives to watch her ballet recital shows her that he is. Still, she tells him it is important to her, so he rearranges his schedule to be home. Gauri begins preparing early so that she can leave as soon as Subhash arrives, extending her 'free' time as much as possible and begins to resent Subhash when he is at work, teaching a class, or at sea conducting research. Ashamed of the way she feels, she is also frightened that raising Bela isn't bringing her life meaning or purpose. At first, she thought it was something that would come with time, but instead she is increasing numb to it all.

When the semester is complete, Gauri hands in her essay, and is asked to come to Professor Weiss's office. The essay is forty pages rather than the ten he'd asked for, and after asking her a few questions about her husband and where they met. She admits that her first husband was killed, and she'd married his brother to escape her life. Without prying further, he suggests that she take up either French or German and join a doctoral program, offering to serve on her committee. He promised to ensure her admittance, suggesting she take some upper level courses that would count towards her master's and then shakes her hand.

Bela begins first grade and after the first week is walking to and from the bus stop by herself. One morning she returned, unwilling to cross the pavement where uncounted worms had come to the surface when the ground became saturated. Bela didn't want to walk on them and begs to be allowed to stay home, but Gauri gets angry with her, insisting she go. Bela sobs and tells Gauri she doesn't like her and never will, running ahead to the bus. Though nothing more than a childish temper tantrum, Bela's words



prompt Gauri to want to tell her about her father. Subhash is fearful when she tells him, but he argues that she is only six, and too young to understand. He makes Gauri promise him that she will not tell Bela unless they do it together.

Gauri becomes aware of a man on campus; thick around the midriff and in his fifties, he wears a corduroy jacket and carries a briefcase that looks battered. She notices a wedding band on his finger, and the more often she sees him, the more she wants to. Her body begins reacting to him, and she pretends that she is with him when she is in bed with Subhash. She prepares on the days she knows she will see him, and one day follows him into the student union. She watches as he leans over a woman and kisses her. After that, she avoided the places where she had seen him.

Over summer vacation, Gauri spends her days with Bela. She has no car to take them out, and slowly the walls close in on her. Gauri decides to leave Bela by herself while she runs to the store, telling Bela she is going for mail. It is a quick trip, and she returns to find everything as she left it. Soon she is escaping for brief periods every day, reveling in her freedom, however brief. One day, Subhash returns from work early, and finds Bela alone. She tells him her mother is getting the mail, but he'd just done that and Gauri wasn't there. When she returns, he hardly even looks at her, and doesn't talk to her for over a week. Finally, he tells her his mother was right. She didn't deserve the privilege of raising a child. In the spring, she is admitted to a doctoral program in Boston at no cost, and Subhash says nothing even when she arranges for undergraduates to watch Bela while she is gone.

Analysis

This segment continues the family theme on several fronts as well as dissecting relationships between the Mitra family members on both continents. Bela is growing exponentially and Subhash's parents have finally asked that they come and visit. Five years have passed since Subhash was in Calcutta last, and he has no desire to go now. In truth, he is not willing to face the only people left who know that he is not Bela's father. At her insistence, Subhash lies with Bela at night until she falls asleep, and he realizes that no one has ever touched him as deeply as she does except for Udayan. Gauri never complains, but she has also never returned to the smiling, and happy looking girl he first saw in the photo Udayan sent. She also never shows affection to Bela, and Subhash can't help but remember his mother's prediction that she would never love him. Subhash suggests they have another child, and Gauri postpones the idea claiming she isn't ready. Bela is happy to enlist her parents as playmates, but while Subhash is willing and attentive to her, Gauri is distracted bordering on negligent. Gauri can hardly believe the depth of her attachment to Bela, despite how desperately she feels the need to be on her own at times.

Continuing education plays a large part in their lives as well. Subhash continues to study and to teach, and Gauri yearns to return to an education as well. She wants to take classes but Subhash is reluctant to allow a stranger to look after Bela. He refuses at first but eventually relents, coming home early himself to be with Bela. Gauri's efforts



in class don't go unnoticed, and at the end of the term, Professor Weiss suggests she apply herself towards her doctorate, offering to do what he could to assure her acceptance.

Gauri's desire to return to her education foreshadows upcoming difficulties in her home life. Her love for Bela is something that is visceral, but different from Subhash's love for Bela. Subhash is more of a parent than Gauri wants to be and what little freedom she secures from them is like a breath of fresh air for her. Subhash catches Gauri leaving Bela alone during the day and their relationship deteriorates as a result. She promises it will never happen again, but knew that he would never forgive her. The distance between them widens. He no longer touches her, or wants to sleep with her, and he no longer suggests that they have a second child.

Financial status comes into play after Gauri reveals her desire to pursue her education. Her lack of desire to be with or raise Bela creates a chasm between Gauri and Subhash that he is content to maintain. There is no discussion of separation, partially for the sake of Bela and partially because Subhash realizes that without him, Gauri has no means of support.

Discussion Question 1

What pros and cons are considered regarding giving Bela a sibling and by whom?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Gauri become resentful, and what is it that she wants?

Discussion Question 3

What predictions did Subhash's mother make, and what does Subhash now realize?

Vocabulary

eutrophication, superlative, reconstitutes, immanence, praxis, presumptuous



Part V: Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

Bijoli watches as slowly the two ponds fill with waste, clogged with the assorted detritus of humanity. All over Calcutta, ponds and wetlands are being filled in to make room for more housing. She remembers how Subhash and Udayan had used the ponds to cool off in the summer, and how less fortunate people even bathed in them at one time. Still, at the same hour each day, she goes to the courtyard to pick flowers to put on Udayan's stone after she cleans it. Bijoli is still angry that Udayan's body was never returned.

The year following Udayan's death, Bijoli's husband retired. Instead, he rose before dawn and took a tram to Babu Ghat to bathe in the Ganges. At home, he remained in his room and read. At one point, he suggested selling the house and leaving Tollygunge, going perhaps to a quiet mountain town instead. She considers it, but is unable to leave the area where Udayan had lived and died. One night Bijoli's husband goes to bed as usual, but in the morning doesn't get up. Bijoli sends Deepa to his room with tea, and when the teacup drops and breaks she knows without being told that her husband is dead. Now a widow, she adopts plain white saris; no bangles or vermilion mark on her forehead and she stopped eating fish. Gauri's marriage to Subhash is still stupefying.

Deepa looks after Bijoli now. Bijoli's husband's pension is just enough to feed her and to pay Deepa. Subhash sends her money on occasion too. In all, it is enough for her to install a phone line and her first call to Subhash is when his father has been dead for a few days already.

Bijoli reminisces, thinking about her husband; how they'd built this home for their family; and remembering the famine they survived, she thinks about life when her boys were young. One day she wades out with a basket in hand and begins to clean out the garbage there. She plans to keep Udayan's stone free of garbage, taking several loads away each day. One day new items are strewn around Udayan's stone, originating from a marriage nearby. Angrily she calls out to them asking who was responsible. Who had desecrated this spot? She talks to herself and to no one until Deepa comes and takes her home. Once settled with tea on the terrace, Deepa gives Bijoli a letter from Subhash. In it, he tells her he will be bringing Bela to Calcutta but that Gauri will not come. He and Bela will stay six weeks he adds and tells her that she believes he is her father and that is all she knows.

Bela and Subhash arrive in Calcutta at the beginning of monsoon season. Subhash stands on his mother's terrace with her and shows her the two ponds that will eventually have water that is as high as her shoulders. Bijoli gives Bela a necklace. Subhash brings his mother photos taken over time from home and she barely looks at them. When Subhash tells her they are copies he made for her, she tells him she's already seen them and hands them back. Some fall as she hands them back.



Bela's life is catalogued as she examines certain rites of passage and of the large secrets this young girl already kept from both her mother and her father. For instance, her father has no idea that her mother allows her run of the campus and had since she was in third grade, but they kept it from her father because Bela knew he would worry. She remembers getting old enough to get her own cereal or toast, and how she'd check in before leaving by knocking on her parent's door and then how she'd learned that her mother slept in her office rather than in the bedroom with her father.

Subhash tells Bela about Udayan when she asks, and he shows her a bit of the place he grew up. Once they saw a wedding group and knowing that they may not even know each other, like her father and mother, Bela asked him what happens if they don't like each other. Subhash tells her they still try. On her twelfth birthday, Subhash takes her to a friend's house where she is allowed to swim in the pool and even ride a pony. She wants to stay, preferring it to her grandmother's house, but Subhash takes her back, saying she should rest. There is only one week left of their six week trip.

Analysis

Age and time are powerful themes in the beginning of the segment and involving most, if not all of the characters in one way or another. Bijoli remembers her life and the choices she and her husband had made that brought her to this point in her life. She is alone now, being cared for mostly by Deepa now who puts chains across the door to keep Bijoli from wandering. Bijoli's life has been condensed to the son she used to have, and the widow that she is. Her primary concern seems to be to keep Udayan's stone free from garbage, taking little interest in her granddaughter or Subhash.

Bela sees the chronology of life, much as her mother always has, taking note of situations with an understanding beyond her years. These two chapters show Bela's visit to her grandmother mostly from her perspective, and reveals the similarities between her and her mother as far as how her mind stores and retrieves information.

Bela is also learning about the differences between relationships. Before even leaving Rhode Island she discovers that her parents slept in separate rooms, and her experience with relationships continues when she talks to her father while in Tollygunge after seeing a wedding celebration. Her view of intimate relationships so far is confined to arranged and estranged marriages. She listens to the differences between her mother and her father. Her mother, who spent more of her time with her dissertation than with her daughter, seems to have more concern for its safety than Bela's. Gauri spent hours behind closed doors working on her manuscript while Bela was encouraged to roam the campus grounds unattended. Subhash takes his role as her caregiver more seriously. He worries about Bela and Bela knows instinctively that he would not approve of Gauri's neglect.

Visiting with her grandmother, Bela is surprised to learn that she is not allowed to leave the house without permission, or even go to the roof or into the courtyard. She chafes at the confinement, and is not even permitted to get herself a glass of water, let alone



make herself a meal like she would at home without thinking. In her grandmother's house, she must ask for everything, and feels trapped when she is left behind as Subhash teaches a class or attends a lecture. At home, she and another girl her age, Alice, had roamed the campus since the third grade without restraint. They considered it to be a huge playground and spent their time in and out of the greenhouses, botany building, library and more. Gauri taught her to listen to the chime of the clock to know when to return.

The familial theme is also touched on as Subhash shows Bela a large Banyan tree. He explains how the tree begins its life sprouting from the crown of another tree. Aerial roots hang down like rope – twisted strands that will encircle the host tree if it dies. This tree is like a metaphor for Subhash's life, where the host (Udayan and his father) had died and the offspring gather around them like the roots of the banyan, carrying life forward.

Discussion Question 1

What is Bijoli's general demeanor with Subhash and Bela?

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the main differences Bela is aware of between her life at home and her time in Tollygunge?

Discussion Question 3

In what way is a Banyan tree comparable to Subhash's relationships with his family?

Vocabulary

accumulation, eradicate, deprivations, meticulous, auspicious, tributaries, dissertation



Part V: Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

After a long trip home, Bela and Subhash arrive to find the grass in the yard is as tall as Bela. Inside, Subhash finds a note in Bengali from Gauri telling him that she's accepted a job in California and that he is a better parent and is rightfully the one that should raise Bela. She no longer cares what he tells her about Udayan.

Bela starts seventh grade, and Subhash hopes that the new school will be enough of a distraction for her, and for a while it seems to be, but then Bela begins to retreat into herself. She no longer seems to seek out his company, and becomes more and more like Gauri in temperament. He notices that she is beginning to develop a blossoming beauty. One day she asks to change rooms and move into Gauri's study. Rattled, he helps her to move her things, but just a week later she changes her mind and moves her things back.

His 41st birthday comes and goes without a word or so much as a card from Bela. Soon after, Subhash is called by her school. She is not thriving in the upper-level classes they thought she would in; she is withdrawn; and has joined no extracurricular programs. Subhash takes Bela to see a psychologist recommended by the guidance counselor. Subhash is kept from any part of these sessions, but afterwards Bela's tears fall when he asks her if she wants to get in touch with Gauri. By the following year, Bela is beginning to come out of her shell. She begins to socialize, her grades improve and she begins to take an interest in the world around her. She volunteers her time, joins band and starts menstruating. While her activities take her further from Subhash, he can hardly complain about her activities. When she completes high school, and gets her license, she begins distributing food to local shelters, and gets work that enables her to be outside.

When Deepa sends word that Bijoli had suffered a stroke, Bela asks to remain behind. He makes the arrangements, in a way relieved that he won't have to take her there again. His mother has lost her ability to walk, and is now confined inside. Her mind exists in an earlier reality, and often Subhash isn't sure if she knows who he is. For three years, he returns yearly to her, feeling a sense of responsibility to her. During his last visit, his mother's heart had given out, and she'd died in the hospital.

Bela decides to go to a small liberal arts college in the Midwest and Subhash drives her there, meeting her roommate and her parents before leaving. Her major is in environmental science, and her senior thesis covers the adverse effects of pesticide runoff in local rivers. Graduate school doesn't interest Bela. Instead, she takes a series of jobs on farms around the country. More and more a pattern emerges. Bela would come home briefly now and then, chiding him for his food choices, and educating him on how our consumption decides what we support. She opposes eating food that is



transported long distances and Subhash begins to do his part. He became conscious of eating things in season and learned to accept Bela for who she was.

Analysis

Upheaval is the theme that is strongest in this segment as Bela and Subhash arrive home from Tollygunge to discover that Gauri had left them and taken a job in another state. Her confusion is almost as painful to Subhash as the fact that instead of being the one to help her through the ordeal, Bela was the one who comforted him, telling him she wouldn't leave him. That simple statement foreshadows the fact that she will do exactly that, and likely much sooner than Subhash is ready for.

Parenting and the responsibilities attached to being a parent are explored as Gauri deserts her family while they are away in Tollygunge. Though the marriage was one of convenience for Gauri and nothing more, Subhash had always thought that they would raise Bela together before going their separate ways. Subhash took his responsibility as a parent seriously, even though he isn't Bela's natural father. Gauri, however, surprised by the pregnancy to begin with, never really bonded to Bela like a mother would to her daughter.

Gauri left little behind. Beyond the freckled pigment in two places Bela has that are a sampling of her mother's skin tone and a shadow that she notices for the first time on her wall that resembles her mother's profile, Bela has nothing but memories. Gauri's note to Subhash 'leaves Bela to him' in return for all that he had done for her, but the truth is much simpler. Gauri had no desire to be a parent, then or now. The only common ground they ever found was in spending time apart from each other, and Bela learned at an early age that to please her mother, all she had to do was go away. Sadly, that didn't provide Bela with any armor against the fact that Gauri had left her without leaving her so much as a note to explain.

Loss is the ongoing theme for Subhash and Bela, who both deal with this in different ways. Subhash is lonely and feels a lack of self-worth while Bela becomes withdrawn, socially inept and her grades fall. Most days she hardly speaks to him and Subhash feels responsible for having taken Bela to Tollygunge and giving Gauri a chance to run away. Subhash feels lost, and questions his ability to be her father. This loss is exemplified in him when his 41st birthday comes and goes without a word from Bela. This year, there is no card, no attempt to bake a cake, and no small token of her love. Instead, he feels an overwhelming sense of indifference.

Anger only rears itself briefly in Subhash after Gauri leaves, but the anger has nothing to do with the fact that he left her. Instead, he is angry because by leaving, she had somehow managed to take Bela away from him to. He resented her for that, wanting to call her and share his frustration and anger with her, but he didn't even have her number. Instead, he is forced to reveal the fact that Gauri abandoned them to the school; and take Bela to a psychologist.



Discussion Question 1

What is the impact on Subhash when he arrives home with Bela to find Gauri's note?

Discussion Question 2

How does Bela's anger and sorrow manifest itself in school and at home?

Discussion Question 3

How does Subhash feel about the fact that Bela must see Dr. Grant and why?

Vocabulary

deciphering, conspicuous, apparition, spontaneous, indifference, impenetrable, uncovetous



Part VI: Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

Gauri dreams of Udayan as he was in Tollygunge before his death. Prisons swell with people dragged from their homes or off campuses; confessions extracted using cigarettes, hot wax and even metal rods. She sees Udayan in his 20s like she last saw him while in her dream, she is 56, her current age, but he doesn't seem to notice.

At first, she fears that either Subhash or Bela will show up but in 20 years, that hasn't happened. No one called her to come back, and she'd been given what she wanted – freedom. Gauri travels from one job to another, going from Santa Cruz to San Francisco, but then returns to southern California. The school is small and well run, but impossible for her to remain anonymous at. She is expected not only to teach, but to mentor her students as well. She is also asked to oversee new students from India. Well liked, she receives invitations to their weddings and gets notes from them on holidays. Gauri manages to publish three books; one of them growing out of her dissertation for which Professor Weiss had been proud to read.

Gauri feels at home in California, the weather and even some of the plants familiar to her. Gauri continues to adopt a western style of clothing and keeps to herself, wearing her wedding band to maintain a safe distance. Eventually, desire pushes to the forefront and she alternates between being alone and having more than one lover at other times. The only relationship that broke through was her unexpected tryst with a graduate student named Lorna although she'd never had any interest in women before. Their unexpected relationship lasts until her dissertation is complete, and Lorna takes a job in Toronto.

Gauri wonders why she hasn't seen Bela, but in fairness she had made no effort to contact her either. She understood now that severing that connection was the same as killing her relationship with Bela. She hoped that Subhash was happy, grateful to him for taking her away from Tollygunge.

Subhash spends his free time these days walking along the new path that was created out of the easement of the Kingston to Narragansett Pier rail spur. There was a time when he'd picked Bela up from the platform on occasions when she'd visited. Meandering through the largest southern New England forested wetland, he is amazed by the changing landscapes and open spaces. Signs along the way tell him it was the site of a great battle, and later he looks it up on his computer. A marker commemorated the event, but Subhash was unable to find it. Over sixty years of age now, he'd lost the adventurers spirit he once had.

One day he crosses paths with Richard riding his bike in the opposite direction. Richard is surprised that Subhash stayed in Rhode Island and they spend some time catching up. Richard, now a grandfather, is married and recently bought a house in



Saunderstown near Subhash. Still full of plans and ideas, he tells Subhash that he and Claire are planning a trip to Asia. Subhash tells him the bare bones of his life's progression; his wife who'd left him; and his daughter Bela who was now grown and gone. Richard even asks about Udayan, and they exchange phone numbers and email addresses. They go fishing, and their friendship is as easygoing as ever. One morning Claire phones to tell him that Richard had died of a blood clot a few days earlier and for the first time ever Subhash enters a funeral home. Afterward, he attends the reception and talks to their neighbor Elise Silva, listening to her memories of Richard. Talking further, she learns his name and asks if he is related to Bela Mitra. He admits he is her father and tells Elise that Bela is a bit of a nomad which doesn't surprise her. They talk for a while and then she moves on after inviting him to a tour the next weekend and he is surprised when he realizes it is the house he and Richard shared in the beginning.

Subhash struggles to get a decent night's sleep, which seems to elude him these days. He is consumed with memories of the past and aware of the changes that have occurred in his life. The one troubling thought is that he had yet to admit to Bela that he was not her natural father. It was what he thought of as the 'greatest unfinished business' in his life.

He attends the open house, seeing Elise and talking to her briefly. Busy with the tour, she doesn't single him out again, and he leaves after deciding that she had only invited him to help the historical society. A few days later, she calls him however, and invites him to join her and the hiking club on a walk at the Great Swamp.

Analysis

Regret and loneliness are strong themes in this segment as Gauri dreams of her life before with Udayan. In her dreams he loves her as he always had, but she sees herself at her current age. Seeing herself naked with him is like having a son in bed with her. Still, she thinks about what her life might have been like now had he lived; imagining how he might look with encroaching age. Her life with Udayan is one of the only secrets she has. No one but Otto Weiss and Subhash know the truth about Udayan, Bela and her former life.

Subhash also has much time for regret and loneliness as his life wears on. He is alone now, Bela grown and gone and no special interests in his life. He has too much time to think, often lying awake long into the night, his body and mind refusing to rest.

Fear is also a prevalent theme in Gauri's life. She spent the beginning of her life with Udayan fearing that she would wake and discover her life with him had all been a dream; then feared that he would run afoul of the law. She feared her pregnancy, unsure that she wanted the child that Udayan and she began; and feared allowing Subhash to take over as her husband when she lost Udayan. Her fears didn't end there however. She continued to fear almost all aspects of her life. She was afraid that she was incapable of being a good mother, and afraid that Subhash was usurping her as a parent. She had been given the freedom she wanted.



Subhash is becoming more fearful with age as well. He no longer ventures off the beaten path alone, and thinks more about the end of life and what it will mean. He fears that his life has left little impact on the world.

Guilt and shame round out the themes in this section as Gauri remembers her trip, and escape from her life with Subhash and Bela. She thinks about the black mountains and the desert she'd seen from the air as a buffer zone between herself and them, and arriving in Los Angeles she finally felt as though she could disappear in the throng.

Her desire for anonymity foreshadows the coming of entanglements, and she is faced with them both on a professional front and in her personal life despite going out of her way to avoid it. At first, she avoids any situations where the issue might present itself, even continuing to wear a wedding band whenever she was out in public. She enjoys the isolation, but then desire creeps in. Gauri kept her personal life simple, but nothing prepares her for Lorna who unravels her and then leaves her behind as she gets on with her life.

The ever present loyalty to Ubayan continues even to her new life however and she clings to her country of origin legally, but the impracticalities of doing so as she ages is beginning to wear on her. Soon she will have to commit the ultimate betrayal to Ubayan and forego her citizenship to become an immigrant of status in the United States.

Abstinence seems to be the strongest theme as this segment closes. After Lorna leaves for Toronto, Gauri pares her existence down to the very basics. She wears a uniform of her own creation – dark slacks and tunics; owns little beyond the laptop and books required to do her job; a car to get her there; and the bed she sleeps on. She has few things that might be considered frivolous; plants on her patio and a teapot she brought with her to California. She breaks her routine and buys a teak table for her patio, and the peppery smell of the wood when it arrives is enough to transport her back in time to her brief life with Udayan and the furniture they had. By owning nothing in the way of possessions, Gauri has managed to avoid memories or attachments, her decisions and changes in life as final as she can make them.

Subhash has been alone as well, but unlike Gauri, it is a way of life he isn't particularly fond of. He misses the simple sounds that signify that someone else is in the house. Now the silence pushes in on him. There was a time when he might have gone out to see the stars or read a book when sleep eluded him, but now he just lies there thinking about the past. Meeting Elise at Richard's funeral foreshadows a change in his future, however.

Discussion Question 1

What consistencies exist in Gauri's life after she leaves Subhash and Bela?



Discussion Question 2

What breaks through the carefully structured life Gauri creates for herself and why is this a surprise to her?

Discussion Question 3

How are Gauri and Subhash's life similar, and what are the most obvious differences between them now?

Vocabulary

sedition, disjuncture, ineptitude, ineluctable, paucity, disparate



Part VI: Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

Bela's nomadic life suits her. She finds a shared accommodation in a house in Brooklyn and walks to a dilapidated playground she is working on turning into a vegetable garden. She teaches teenagers and seniors alike, supervising and overseeing. She lives with ten others, sharing time, space and occasional meals with them. A house nearby is being renovated by workmen from Bangladesh, and she slows down to listen to the nostalgic familiarity of the language although she doesn't understand much of it now.

Noel and his girlfriend Ursula also live in the house with her, along with their daughter Violet. Noel stays home with Violet while Ursula works and Bela can see how different they are from how her parents were. The time they spend together is joyful, and they often invite Bela to join them. She does on occasion, but finds it hard to be around people who remind her that she is still alone. Instead, she makes friends wherever she goes, and leaves them behind when she moves again.

Bela continues to visit Subhash on her terms, surprised the last time to discover that he is dating one of her history teachers from school, Mrs. Silva. Their relationship is obviously better than what her mother and father had. Bela can tell that they are already more united than her parents had ever been and wonders if one day they'll marry. Bela is nearing her 34th birthday. For a long time, she'd blamed her father when her mother left for not doing all that he could to keep her there, or bring her back. Now, when visiting Rhode Island, she could feel herself unraveling and so spends little time with Subhash. Bela is old enough now to understand that she lives her life the way she does because of her mother and how she was raised.

Subhash is feeling his encroaching age more and more. In July he learns that Bela is coming to visit, and cleans her room, putting up the air conditioner and changing the sheets. When he goes to pick her up at the airport, he is assaulted by memories of the previous times he'd been there. Bela asks about Elise, and tells him she'd missed New England. At home after dinner he asks how long she will stay, and she is evasive at first, but finally admits she is pregnant. The father is no one important and doesn't know he will be a father. Now, four months along, she wants to move home and raise her baby like he did with her.

Later, she wants to go and watch the sunset, and tired, he lets her go alone. He sits by himself in the growing dark, feeling the weight of his one big secret crushing him. When she returns, he finally tells her that he is not her father. Angry, she rails at him for telling her, for not telling her sooner, and when Subhash can no longer keep his eyes open, he goes to bed, leaving her to think everything through. In the morning he wakes and she and her bags are gone. He tries to call her, but she doesn't answer. Bela finally begins to understand her parents and their relationship. She understands why her mother left,



and why they were never close. She also wonders whether or not her child will feel the same way about her one day. For days, he hears nothing. He calls in sick and spends most of his time in bed, wondering if he should retire. When Bela calls, he almost doesn't answer, thinking it is just Elise checking in on him, but Bela's voice startles him almost as much as when she calls him Baba like always. She asks if he can pick her up or whether she should take a cab home, and in the next few days thanks him for his honesty. In the fall she gives birth to a daughter, and tells him that she loves him even more now, understanding the depth of what he'd done in her life.

Analysis

In this segment Bela's life is revealed and the theme of relationships is examined. Bela's attitude towards relationships is fleeting and insubstantial. She chooses partners only for base needs and doesn't form emotional commitments of any kind. Even regular friendships seem too difficult to manage. Bela prefers to reestablish herself everywhere she goes, finding new friends and meeting new people, wiping the slate clean behind her emotionally. Bela can't imagine being involved in a relationship, and in fact has never had one but doesn't resent it when she sees it in others. She doesn't even really mind when she sees it in Subhash and Elise although she does experience a twinge.

Bela's relationship status is also a consideration for Subhash, although Elise suggests he don't inquire. Subhash comes from a culture where it is normal for a father to consider his daughter's options for matrimony, but Bela was raised in the United States and doesn't share the ties from his country. Since Bela is a product of two people who thrived alone and secretively, and had only really collided long enough for her conception, her legacy was inherited from them. She stubbornly remains single and nomadic.

Bela's emotional history is also up for self-examination as she compares herself to those around her. Seeing healthy relationships doesn't make her want one, but it helps her to further understand that her own family was not normal. She had worked through some of these feelings with Dr. Grant who had warned her that she would always feel her mother's absence. In that regard, she is right, and Bela lives her detached lifestyle as a testament to her parents and this.

The familial theme continues strongly throughout this segment as Bela begins to search herself for answers to the questions of why she is the nomad without ties that she is. She thinks about her mother often, wondering how she could simply stride out of their lives without a backward glance, and tells herself that she is made of similar fabric. It is why she visits with her father are so infrequent as well. Subhash looks forward to the upheaval she brings with her when she comes and for him the visits are always over too soon. He misses her company and the time alone is filled with reflection. Ongoing with the familial theme, Bela tells Subhash she is pregnant and that the father is not in the picture. She believes that she can raise a child on her own; pointing out that it was nothing Subhash hadn't done quite nicely.



The truth is another important part of this segment as Subhash finally tells Bela that he is not her birth father. Bela is furious at first, but regardless of the outcome, the fact that Bela was now expecting her first child made this information even more important and he knew he had no choice.

Discussion Question 1

What prompts Bela to return to Rhode Island and live for a while, and what coincidence does Subhash immediately see?

Discussion Question 2

How does Bela respond when Subhash tells her that he is not her father?

Discussion Question 3

In which ways do Bela's change after she learns Subhash is not her natural father and why?

Vocabulary

tranquility, periphery, surreptitious, compunction, insurmountable, disheveled



Part VII: Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

Gauri sits with her laptop, and considers how technology had changed things. Now information was available at the click of a mouse, and anyone could access it. Her profile is on the website for the college, listing her accomplishments and contact information. She searches and finds Subhash in Rhode Island and even looks for Udayan on a whim but there is no trace of him on line. She finds nothing of Bela either. Manash contacts her, asking how she is and whether she will ever come back. She tells him she's left Subhash, and invents a life for Bela claiming she is grown and married. Occasionally Gauri still searches for her, but doesn't dare ask Subhash about her.

A former student, Dipankar Biswas contacts her, asking if she would be willing to contribute to a book he is writing about the history of students in Presidency during the Naxalite movement. He wants first person accounts, and knowing she went there, is hoping for her thoughts. She agrees to talk to him, but not to have her personal information used. They have lunch together, and she fabricates a history that erases Udayan, his involvement in the movement and his subsequent death. He tells her that Kanu Sanyal is dead and when she looks him up at home later, she learns that he hung himself. One story even contains video in which Sanyal can be seen still hanging in the background. The image is so disturbing that it stays with her, and distracted she falls on her way to her car, spraining her wrist. She heals slowly, going to a hotel for a few days so that she didn't have to cook and could relax.

One day a letter arrives from Subhash, sent care of the University. Written in Bengali, he tells her that he wants to sell the house in Tollygunge, saying that she still has some claim to it. He is seventy now, he admits and entering that stage in life where anything can happen. He wants to resolve things by the end of the year, and bearing her no ill will, he tells her that they can do this either by mail or in person as she desires. Gauri realizes that Subhash is asking her for a divorce.

Gauri thinks about the day she married Udayan and how she can to live in his parent's home with him. She remembers how his parents treated her, and how Udayan had promised her that one day Subhash would come home to marry and there would be another wife with whom to share these tasks. She thinks about how he involved her in his activities, asking her to run errands, or deliver messages. She also thinks about the two children he asked her to tutor, and surreptitiously watch a policeman on his route past the house. Udayan wanted to know his schedule; when he passed the house and what days he was in uniform or not. After a few weeks, Gauri is certain that the policeman has Thursdays off, on those days walking his son home from school. Udayan looks at her strangely when she tells him, asking her again if she is sure it is his son, and she assures him it is. After Udayan's death, and just before leaving Tollygunge to go to America to be with Subhash, she once again retraces her steps to the house the policeman lived in. His son is outside and his mother joins him, wearing the white sari of



a widow and looking as shell-shocked as she felt about Udayan's death. She leaves, knowing she had a hand in his death.

Analysis

Access to information and technology is examined in this section as Gauri considers how computers have affected the ability for students to learn any subject. She also thinks about how the internet has taken much of the surprises out of life. Now, anyone can look up any subject or place, examining and planning so that nothing is left to chance. She looks herself up as well, and now and then seeks Subhash and Bela as well. Subhash is easy to find, his life tied to computer access as much as hers is, but Bela is nowhere to be found. Her life has been devoted to the betterment of those around her, not to the pursuit of knowledge.

Gauri's past life rears itself again when a former student sends her an email, asking her to contribute to a book he is writing. In this segment, her marriage to Udayan is covered up and hidden by her marriage to Subhash, and she insists that she had little to do with the political movement of that time. Gauri's history continues to be an ongoing theme throughout this segment as she considers her life with Udayan, his death, and her part in the politics he involved himself in. Dipankar Biswas tells her that Kanu Sanyal had killed himself, and she looks this up on the internet later at home. His death by suicide disturbs her and her mind brings the images back again and again.

Encroaching age presents itself now as Gauri loses her balance one day and falls, spraining a wrist. Although the injury heals, it serves as a reminder to her that she is not getting younger. Subhash brings age to the forefront again when he writes to her asking that they complete their separation of assets as well as divorcing each other. He tells her that he bears her no ill will, and is willing to end things by mail or in person. Subhash is aware of his age more and more, and Richard's death only highlights the fragility of his own life.

The family theme continues as it has throughout this story. Gauri is acutely aware of the fact that she has no one in her life when she is taken to the hospital after a fall. Asked for her next of kin, she has no choice but to put Subhash's name down, and going back to her apartment alone only serves to amplify the fact that there is no one in her life that is willing or around to care for her. Her search for Bela and Subhash indicates that she has some desire to have contact, but her sense of shame for leaving has not diminished enough that she will take the risk of contacting either one.

After Gauri's meeting with Dipankar, she is reminded of her brief time with Udayan. Dipankar's questions regarding Naxalbari bring back memories of her involvement, however tenuous, in the revolution of the time. Guilt is especially strong in this segment as she considers Bela and wonders about her life; and when she thinks about the errands she ran for Udayan before his death. Gauri confirms her part after Udayan's death, taking a rickshaw to the home of the students he'd asked her to tutor. At the same time, she was to mark the comings and goings of a policeman. Before leaving for



America, she returns to that region, confirming for herself that the policeman had died when she sees his son and his widow outside. This segment foreshadows that her actions may yet come to light in some way.

Discussion Question 1

What rituals did Udayan's parents ask of Gauri when Udayan brings her home as his wife for the first time?

Discussion Question 2

What part does Gauri play in Udayan's revolutionary activities, and what effect do her actions have?

Discussion Question 3

What secrets does Gauri withhold from Dipankar and why is she compelled to lie to him so many years later?

Vocabulary

harrowing, revolutionary, refutations, passivity, transgression, auspicious



Part VII: Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

Bela's daughter Meghna is four and will begin kindergarten in the fall. Bela is working now, so Subhash drops Meghna off at the summer program she attends in the mornings. Bela works on a farm she remembers visiting as a child on field trips and with her father for pumpkins. After taking Meghna to the beach one afternoon, Bela notices corn for sale. She stops and finds the stand unmanned, a coffee can left to collect a dollar for each three ears. A price list reveals other items in the cooler and she purchases some vegetables, putting her bills in the coffee can provided. She stops again the following week and still no one is there. Finally she goes on a Saturday and she talks to the man who introduces himself as Drew. He lets Meghna pet the lambs in his truck, and soon brings in other animals for her. One day he invites them to the farm, and Bela begins seeing him more regularly. Bela keeps Drew company on occasion at an outdoor market, when he's making deliveries, or collecting seaweed for mulch. She learns he was married, but has no children and is now divorced. She introduces him to Elise and Subhash, but tells him her mother is dead. It was the way she'd chosen to cope with Gauri's desertion.

Drew soon makes it clear that he wants more. He wants Bela to stay with him, and he wants to be a father to Meghna if she'll let him. Bela tells him the truth about Gauri, and how she shaped Bela's emotional realities; how despite being nearly 40, she didn't feel able to give him what he wanted. Bela tells him how her mother's leaving affected her, and then finally tells him about Udayan. She describes her life as created by two in love but raised by two without. Drew holds her, assuring her he's staying.

Gauri flies to Boston and drives to Providence, telling no one that she is coming. She'd tried writing to Subhash and just giving her assent to his requests, but couldn't do it. For reasons she couldn't understand, she needed to see him now. To her surprise, his requests though reasonable had rattled her. She was going to a conference in London and since that took her over the east coast, she decided to arrange a lay-over and sever their ties in person as he'd suggested.

She pulls into a bed and breakfast she'd booked and a woman named Nan signs her into her room. After freshening up, Gauri goes out to the car and is about to call Subhash when she realizes what an intrusion her presence might be. She convinces herself that since her flight to London wasn't until the next night, she had lots of time and somehow the next day would be better. She drives around a little, reminiscing and then takes herself out for dinner. Afterward she drove past Subhash's house and is surprised to find two cars in the driveway. She goes back to the inn, exhausted.

The next morning Gauri packs and settles her bill. With nothing left to do, she drives to Subhash's house again. This time a single car is there when she arrives. She sits in the car for a moment, remembering, considering how it might upset him when she just



shows up. It reminds her of how she'd sought out the mailbox of the policeman's home in Jadavpur, knowing what she'd find, but needing to confirm it. She considers leaving the papers in his box, but doesn't. She wants to thank him for all he'd done for her; and for Bela. The real truth was that she wanted to find Bela. She wanted to know if Bela would be open to contact from her, so she got out of the car and walked up to the door.

Analysis

The family theme opens this segment as Bela and Subhash share the responsibilities of shuttling Meghna to a pre-school program. Bela works on a farm, leaving early and welcoming the simple purity of working her muscles toiling in the soil while Subhash picks up the slack during the times when Bela is gone. The theme continues when Bela brings Drew home to meet Subhash and Elise. Subhash approves of him immediately, making it easy for them to spend time together by offering to look after Meghna for Bela.

It is a continuity of Bela's personal idiom that has her pulling over to buy corn from a roadside stand, and returning to it until she finds the owner there one day. Meeting Drew foreshadows the end of Bela's life alone as their similarities will undoubtedly draw them together while their different experiences will be enough to keep things interesting. Bela rejects his desire for a closer relationship, but despite that she finds it easy to be honest with him about her history – something she hadn't done with anyone to date.

This leads to the relationship theme as Bela is drawn closer to Drew and he makes it obvious that his interest in her is long term, and of a variety she hasn't known as yet. Drew is gentle, patient and shows an avid interest in Meghna as well as Bela right from the start. While he admits to having been married in the past, no children were produced in that union and they are long since divorced. Although Bela has always considered herself to be a solitary creature like her mother, time spent with Drew is happy time, and Drew appears to be enough to foreshadow a change in Bela's opinion of relationships.

Propriety and decorum are themes that are completely ignored when Gauri creates a lay-over in Boston so that she can give her consent to Subhash's requests in person as he'd suggested. On her first night in town, she stays at a bed and breakfast, and after checking in drives over to Subhash's house, but she notices two cars in the driveway and for the first time considers his feelings in what she was doing. She realizes the impropriety of her actions, but rather than call and give Subhash some warning as to her arrival, she postpones her visit simply walking up to his door the next morning.

Motivation is an important sub-theme in this section on two fronts. It is important to note that Subhash initiates contact with Gauri so that he can get a divorce from her. While the thought rocks Gauri to some degree, she has to accept that he must be motivated by more than just encroaching age. She decides she needs to see him to consent in person, telling herself she needs the closure right up until she gets there at which point she admits to herself that she has no care for Subhash's feelings, and her real motivation is contact with Bela.



Discussion Question 1

How is Drew's relationship with Bela and Meghna like or unlike the relationship that Bela remembers between herself, Subhash and Gauri?

Discussion Question 2

Which actions of Gauri's indicate her lack of love or feelings for Subhash?

Discussion Question 3

Based on Bela's behavior as an adult, what is her likely reaction to Gauri's arrival and why?

Vocabulary

collusion, deviance, undulating, egregious, indiscretion, conspicuous



Part VII: Chapters 5 - 6

Summary

Meghna tells Bela that someone is at the door. Elise and Subhash were out for breakfast and Bela was doing dishes when Gauri interrupted. Bela can't see who is there, so she opens the door. The storm door was recently fixed and when Bela sees her, she reaches out and locks the door. Meghda approaches with curiosity, asking who the lady is and why the door isn't open. Bela's extremities operate with a will of their own as they open the door despite every fiber of her being.

Struck dumb, Bela is unable to answer questions Gauri asks, so Gauri turns to Meghda instead, asking her how old she is and who her father is. When Meghna asks Gauri who she is, Bela speaks for the first time telling her daughter that Gauri was a friend of her grandmother's that Bela hadn't seen since the day her grandmother died. Gauri accepts and plays a game of tic-tac-toe with Meghna, her questions never stopping until she learns that when Meghna's grandfather gets married to Elise, Meghna will have a grandmother. Gauri pales.

Bela sends Meghna outside to pick flowers and as soon as she is outside, Bela closes the door and turns on Gauri. She never raises her voice, but hisses her feelings with a clarity that leaves Gauri speechless now. Bela tells Gauri never to return, making sure that Gauri knows that she is dead to her. After Gauri leaves, Bela gathers herself, glad that her father was saved from Gauri's visit.

Gauri leaves Bela's home feeling shell-shocked. Half way to London she changes her mind and her destination flying home instead. She lands in Mumbai and spends the night there before going on to Kolkata. It is Durga Pujo and the city is overflowing but Gauri manages to secure a room in a guesthouse. She didn't bother to call the people who organized the conference to tell them she wouldn't come, none of it seeming important to her now. She checks in and sleeps until five. At seven a maid arrives with breakfast and a paper and by eight there is a car waiting outside for her.

Gauri tours her old neighborhood, but when she arrives at Manash's house, she is told he is in Shillong to see one of their sons. His wife welcomes her, surprised by her unexpected visit. They call Manash and he asks her to come to him for a few days, or wait and he'll come to her. She tells him she'll try, and Manash adds that she is the only sister he still has. Manash hopes to meet Bela too, and Gauri assures him of the possibility, without telling him the truth. When she leaves Manash's family, she asks the driver to take her to Tollygunge. When Gauri gets to the house she shared with Udayan and his family, she is surprised by the changes. The ponds are gone and in their place, families live in new homes. She wonders if anyone remembers what happened there, and wonders if the plaque commemorating Udayan's life is also gone. Being there reminds her of what she'd done and how her actions had ended a man's life.



Gauri remembers her last night with Udayan. He'd been ill, and hadn't slept well, but in the morning he'd awakened clear headed and asked her if she would mind if they never had children, telling her that he couldn't see himself as a father – not after the things he'd done. He wouldn't say any more. Back at the guest house she warms the meal left for her, and then lies there in the dark. She wakes with the dawn and stands looking out the window, a sense of desperation coming over her. She thought of how Kanu Sanyal had taken his life, and her own life plays as the new day begins. She watches the street vendors set up, and decides that at the end of the week she'd go home.

Months later in California again, Gauri gets a second letter – this one in English. The letter from Gauri tells her that Meghna is asking about her and that although it is too soon now, when she is older Gauri planned to tell her the whole truth. If she wanted to see Gauri then, Bela said she would facilitate it.

Analysis

The family theme continues in this segment, but there is no warm reunion waiting for Gauri when Bela answers the door. Bela is as angry as she was the day Gauri walked away without a word, and speechless, Bela can do little beyond reaching out and locking the door. There are tears on Gauri's face as she recognizes Bela, but had Meghna not been there, Gauri would never have been given access to the house. Gauri talks to Meghna instead of Bela when Bela refuses to answer any of her questions and when Meghna asks who the woman is, Bela tells her it is an old friend of her grandmothers. When Bela's daughter goes outside she berates Gauri for showing up unannounced, invading their lives and pushing herself on them. Bela tells Gauri to leave, and not to ever come back. She tells her she hates her, and has no room in her life for her, finally able to share some of the anger she's carried with her for more than half of her life. Finally, she tells Gauri that she knows why she left, and that she is Udayan's daughter and that she is as dead to Bela as Udayan is. The only real difference is that Gauri chose to leave.

Innocence is also a prevalent theme as Meghna becomes the conduit that bridges the gap between her mother and grandmother. With the innocence of youth, she asks personal questions of Gauri and questions her mother's response to their visitor. In this way, she forces Bela to confront Gauri – a confrontation that has been a long time coming. Somehow, Meghna sees through the anger and forgiveness and intuits the tie that binds them all together.

Change is the next overwhelming theme for Gauri. After leaving Bela and Meghna, Gauri gets on the flight to London, but half way there she changes her mind. Instead, she decides to fly home to Manash, needing to feel connected to something. Some things are familiar to her, but the city has changed and even the name – Kolkata – is new to her. When she arrives at Manash's, she learns that he isn't there. He is visiting a son in Shillong so the family calls him. Gauri is amazed at how his voice has changed, deeper now and weaker than she remembered. Now, he sounds old and his voice is choked with emotion when he talks to her. More changes await Gauri when she decides



to go to Tollygunge next and sees the changes that have occurred there as well. The mosque is still there, but now the homes that were older had become derelict now and there was no empty space where children could play. Even the two ponds had been filled in and had houses on them. Even the lowlands are gone, the tract now difficult to distinguish from the rest of the area.

Guilt rears itself once again as Gauri considers her actions when Udayan was alive. She thinks about the policeman and how Udayan had protected her. Overwhelmed with guilt Gauri thinks about how she orchestrated the policeman's death, and how she had left Subhash and Bela without so much as a goodbye. For a time she almost follows in the footsteps of Kanu Sanyal but as she considers her life, the sidewalk outside fills with vendors and makes jumping to her death impossible.

Forgiveness is a foreshadowed possibility after Gauri returns to California. Months pass since her visit before a letter from Bela arrives. In it, she tells Gauri that she will be honest with Meghna when she is old enough, and she will be able to make up her own mind as to whether or not she wants to see Gauri. Perhaps by then they will both be ready to try to meet again, she tells Gauri.

Discussion Question 1

How does Gauri cope with the outcome of her visit with Bela and Meghna?

Discussion Question 2

In which ways is the visit to India cathartic for Gauri and why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Bela write to Gauri, and what does her letter foreshadow?

Vocabulary

indulgence, presumptuous, eradicate, reconcile, peripheral, resplendent, diminutive



Part VIII: Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

On the peninsula of Beara in Ireland, Subhash and Elise spend their honeymoon wandering about the countryside, hand in hand. They rent a house in a tiny town that isn't much larger than the enclave Subhash and Udayan had grown up in. At night, Subhash wakes in the bed he shares with Elise, and quietly getting up, he steps outside. The moonlight shines a path on the water and the stars seem to have a new beauty. Subhash is grateful for this time in his life, for the beauty of life on earth and his chance to be part of it all.

Subhash and Elise had married before friends and family in a small red and white church in Rhode Island. The union had increased his family by two sons, another daughter, and seven grandchildren. Although spread out, they would all know each other and he finds that he is looking forward instead of backward in life now. Subhash doesn't think about what might have been had he met Elise earlier. He knows that he would not have been ready for her any sooner.

They walk hand in hand, enjoying each other's company, stopping to eat when they are hungry. Subhash gathers a handful of perforated shells, thinking how they will make a nice necklace for Bela. They see stones that were placed in the Bronze Age, their purpose religious or commemorative perhaps. Placed with purpose, they have been visited for centuries now, many leaving offerings or trinkets behind them. He looks up and Udayan is with him. They walk in his memory together in Tollygunge, carrying a putting iron and golf balls. Subhash stumbles over a stone – a marker of the end of a journey.

Udayan hadn't heard the van come into the enclave, but he saw it. He was on the roof and from there he can see that there are too many paramilitary there and by the time his father opens the gate below, he is going out the door at the back that led to the garden. He climbs the rear wall and eases himself into the deepest section of the water where the hyacinth was thickest. He submerges himself and, pinching his nose, goes under water.

When he finally can't hold his breath any longer, Udayan emerges to find two paramilitary policemen standing in front of him with their guns raised. The lowland was surrounded, and they had his family under guard. He thinks about how it all started; how he'd met members of the Marxist student wing and how they organized a strike in 1966 at Presidency, shutting down Calcutta University for over two months. He'd seen and experienced poverty first hand, seeing how they'd suffered. He remembered meeting Gauri; and wondering if she'd consider being his wife.

After Subhash left for America, Udayan had married Gauri and then written letters to Subhash that sounded as though he'd given up on the revolution and was enjoying



married life. From then on, he lived a double life. Then he remembers the policeman's face as the knife plunged into his chest. He hadn't been the one to hold the dagger, but he'd been the lookout, and Gauri had revealed the schedule that allowed them to get to him.

Now his parents are pleading with the police, but the last time he sees them is when he bent down to beg them to pardon him. The police push him into the van, but after driving just a short distance, they open the back again and tell him to get out. They untie him, and tell him to walk to his family, but he knows already he will never get to them. The explosion that tears through him sounds like a torrent of water or water gushing. Then he is no longer alone. Gauri is with him, and they are about to go in to the theater. He sees the sunlight on her hair.

Analysis

Love finds its way to the forefront in this segment as Subhash finally knows a peace and love he has never known before. His marriage to Elise gives him something to look forward for and suddenly every day is a gift. Their marriage adds children and grandchildren to the family as well, creating a foundation with roots and strength. Love is also a theme in the segment where Udayan narrates the story of his death. Udayan accepted that his life was going to end, and understood that this was the inevitable outcome to his participation in the death of the policeman; his thoughts in the end were not of revolution or his part in it. Instead, all of his thoughts are of Gauri, of her touch, of the way the sunlight plays on her hair and of all that he will miss.

Family values remain strong throughout this story, despite the fact that both Udayan and Subhash broke away from their family and traditions in order to seek their own paths. Udayan's path took him from the world when he was still a young man, but during his short life, he understood the value of family, and knew that his work with revolutionaries would make having a family with Gauri impossible. He understood that his actions cost him the life he could have had with her, and inevitably would take him from her. For this reason, he didn't want children and told her so on the morning he died.

Subhash wanted a family from the beginning. Although he would have been content to let his parents choose a wife for him, and that was his intention for the future, he didn't plan for how he would feel about Gauri. His offer to take her away from Tollygunge is an escape for Gauri, but for Subhash it is the ready-made family he always wanted. He hopes that Gauri will grow to love him, but Gauri has no capacity to love either him or her daughter. All that she wanted in life died when Udayan did, and emotionally, she shut down at that time, letting few beyond her veneer for the rest of her life. For a time, it almost seems as though this move to America; and his offer to take Gauri and her unborn child under his wing were a mistake. When Subhash marries Elise in his senior years, he is no longer looking back on his life. Instead, he looks forward, enjoying the fact that this union adds two sons, a daughter and seven grandchildren to fill the days and years in the future, finally helping him to feel complete.



When Gauri leaves Subhash to raise Bela on his own, she rejects the family life he tried to build for them, but Subhash still does all that he can to give Bela a good family life even though she resented him and blamed him for her mother's desertion. It takes until Bela has a child of her own, and learns of her genetic history before she finally understands the depths of the love Subhash has for her, and the degree of sacrifice he made for her. Bela is somewhat soured on the idea of long term relationships because of her parents, but when she discovers she is expecting, she returns to the one place she felt safe – with Subhash. Then she learns the truth about her heritage. Giving birth to Meghna creates a bond with her life that enables her to understand Subhash and his connection to her. Her resentment of Subhash finally fades away.

Gauri comes to realize the importance of family at the end of this story as well. She has lived her entire life detached from everyone, but now that she is reaching the age of retirement, she realizes that she has no one in her life that cares about her, and her desire to seek Bela out intensifies. She can no longer ignore the desire she has to be part of her daughter's life.

Everyone she knows has children, and grandchildren – a busy family life filled with people who love them. While Gauri is content with herself for company, as her life passes, she realizes that there is a void that impersonal relationships simply can't fill. As such, she throws caution to the wind and goes to Subhash. She doesn't expect to find Bela there, and Meghna is another surprise, but what she least expects is the anger and resentment from Bela. While she realizes that Bela might be indifferent to her, she doesn't expect the degree of anger Bela displays, all but throwing her out of the house.

Forgiveness is also a large part of this story in the end. Subhash learns to forgive Gauri for leaving him and Bela without warning; Bela learns to forgive Subhash for not chasing her mother down and finding a way to bring her home again; and Bela learns to forgive Gauri for leaving and accepts the fact that Meghna may want Gauri in her life one day. As such, she is willing to help facilitate that. Finally, Gauri manages to forgive herself for her part in the death of the policeman in Tollygunge, accepting and admitting her part in the plan despite how at the time she'd told herself they would simply get him out of the way, not end his life. Now she accepts her part in his death, and lets it go, finally moving on with her life.

Discussion Question 1

Could it be said that love conquers all in this story and if not, why not?

Discussion Question 2

What part of Subhash's honeymoon to Ireland reminds him of Udayan and why?



Discussion Question 3

How does Bela's life reflect Gauri and what is foreshadowed that will change this path?

Vocabulary

perforated, incongruous, vertigo, penetrated, travesty, expulsion, contingent



Characters

Subhash Mitra

Subhash is 13, and older than his brother by 15 months. Despite that, his sense of personal identity is tied to Udayan and without him, Subhash feels incomplete. Subhash is like his brother in many ways. They are the same size, sharing clothing with each other; have the same complexion and hair. Subhash has always been the kind of child who didn't stray far from his parents. He enjoys his mother's company, watching as she cooks or embroiders, and helps his father to plant vibrant dahlias in courtyard pots. The times Subhash enjoys most are the times that he is by himself. He also enjoys solitary pursuits like collecting insects so that he can watch them under a screened dome or searching for frogs. When company came, or relatives visited, he was quiet and withdrawn. Subhash wonders if his parents see his lack of creativity as a failing and to gain their approval, he made it his mission in life to be obedient.

Subhash leaves Calcutta on a student visa to study marine chemistry in the United States. Sharing a small wooden house on Rhode Island, Subhash is acutely aware of his visitor status. He keeps mostly to himself until he meets Holly on the beach. Holly and Subhash become close, and she is the first woman he sleeps with. Subhash is reluctant to tell his family about her for two reasons. The first is that after Udayan got married without seeking their guidance, he'd promised his parents that he would allow them to choose his wife for him, and the second reason is that Holly is older than he is; has married and divorced already; and has a son. Subhash knows his family won't approve. Fortunately for Subhash, Holly decides to go back to her ex saving him the issue of telling them anything.

When Subhash learns that Udayan was killed, he flies home to support his parents. Udayan's widow, ignored by his parents, is expecting and Subhash's parents hope that she'll have the child and then leave, allowing them to raise it. Subhash can't stand idly by, and in a moment of chivalry, he offers to take Gauri to America - as his wife of course. She agrees and they marry at the courthouse like Udayan and she had. She flies to America and soon after gives birth to a baby girl, naming her Bela. Gauri provides the bare essentials for Bela, but little else. Subhash enjoys being Bela's father, and loves spending time with her, but Bela is not unaware that there is little love between him and Gauri. When Subhash's father dies, he takes Bela back to Tollygunge with him. When they return, Gauri is gone, leaving a simple note that gives ink to her lack of desire to be either Subhash's wife or Bela's mother.

Bela blames Subhash, although he stoically continues to look after her and arrange his life around her. He continues to teach, and eventually Bela leaves home as well. She continues to visit off and on until one day she comes back and tells Subhash she is expecting and the father is not in the picture. Subhash finally tells her that he is not her natural father, and once the initial shock wears off, she admires him and appreciates the love and commitment he had.



Subhash meets Elise, and finally asks Gauri for a divorce. She agrees, and in his 70s he marries Elise, gaining children and grandchildren in the union. Now, Subhash looks ahead, and looks forward to the life still to come.

Udayan Mitra

Udayan and Subhash are alike enough that they are able to wear each other's clothing. Udayan was born on the 20th of March and died when he was just 26 years of age. Like his brother, Udayan has a light and coppery colored complexion, and shares his double jointed fingers and wavy, thick hair. Even the sharp cut of their features is the same. Beyond that, the brothers are quite different however. Where Subhash enjoys staying close to his parents and home, Udayan is more outgoing. His favorite game is 'hide and seek', often playing it spontaneously, vanishing on his mother without notice. He would hide either inside or outside, and not answer when his mother called him, forcing her to stop whatever she was doing to go and find him. Udayan loved to impress or surprise his parents and a constant reminder of that can still be seen in the walkway where his footprints in the cement are a permanent reminder of how he'd lost his balance when the cement was still wet.

At the age of 23, Udayan is slim built and tall, looking slightly older than his age. He is clean shaven, and generally wears unbuttoned European-style shirts, untucked with the sleeves rolled up past his elbow and the tail hanging out at the bottom. The style is similar to the kurtas which he is also frequently seen in. Like the rest of him, his arms are lean and his fingers seemingly too long to comfortably use the small cups that Gauri's family served tea in. When he speaks, his hands are usually in motion, accentuating his opinions. His top teeth overlap his bottom ones slightly, appearing almost as though he had an extra one on top and his eyes are dark and languid. Udayan has a slight tremor in his hands that eventually grew so insistent that his teacup rattled in its saucer when he held it. Finally he sought help, and learned after a blood test that he had an overactive thyroid gland and simple medication would solve the problem, although he was warned that it could take time to be effective, and had to be taken consistently. Hyperthyroidism could cause moodiness and irritability, the doctor warns.

Udayan becomes a Naxalite - the third communist party established in the region, and was an active member who joined the party shortly after completing his extended education. He believed in the party, and the rhetoric they preached regarding equality and parity for the farmers and sharecroppers who were pushed from their lands and lived in abject poverty. Udayan attended rallies, and painted slogans like 'Long live Naxalbari' on walls at night, once even when Subhash kept watch for him.

Udayan begins teaching science in a technical high school while his brother applies to Ph.D. programs in America. He tries to talk Udayan into joining him, but in a rare moment of honesty, Udayan tells him that he is the other half of him and without him, he was nothing. Subhash still goes and Udayan's radical associations increase. He begins building bombs, one exploding and taking the fingers of his right hand. Raids became



commonplace, searches conducted at random. Udayan is gone for 14 days after this incident, knowing that his injury would single him out as being involved. When he came home, he had to stay hidden, unable to leave the house and keeping to the back rooms. He had trouble hearing because one eardrum had been damaged in the explosion as well, and there was a dizziness and a high-pitched noise that never left.

A week before Durga Pujo, Udayan insists his family behave normally, sending his mother and wife out to shop for the holidays. When they return, the police are at their home with orders to arrest Udayan who is hiding in the pond under the hyacinths. Holding his family at gunpoint, they call him out. When he shows himself, they let his family go and then march him to the front of the ponds in full view of his family. They tell him to go home, but shoot him in the back when he begins to walk forward. Udayan's body is taken away, and the family never sees him or his body again. The police and government never acknowledge his death in any way and all that remains is a marker put in the spot where he died by some of the members of the Naxalites.

Gauri

Gauri is a young woman that Udayan sends Subhash a photograph of, telling his brother that he has known her for two years and felt it was time he introduced her. She comes from North Calcutta, and lives with her brother as both of her parents are dead. Gauri has a deep complexion and wears her long hair in a braid that she pulls over the front of one shoulder. Though not exactly pretty, her face is compelling. Gauri prefers reading books to wealth and possessions. She is the girl Udayan chooses to marry, and he does so without the arrangement of their parents which would be the assumed course of action. Udayan tells their parents about his marriage after the simple ceremony of civil registration. Though upset, they live under the same roof now.

Gauri was born in 1948, her sisters already teenaged girls. She lived with her family in the countryside until she was five years old. Her mother had tuberculosis of the spine, and unable to look after the younger Gauri and Manash, they were sent to the city where their grandparents, aunts and uncles raised them. When Gauri was 16, her parents were killed in an automobile accident on a mountain road. Though upsetting, the death of her grandparents hit her harder.

When Udayan is killed by police, Subhash returns home and after discovering that Gauri is pregnant, he offers to marry her and take her to the United States with him. She accepts, and a few months later Bela is born. Gauri is less than enthusiastic about motherhood, feeling smothered more often than not. Eventually, she leaves Subhash and Bela without warning, taking a job in California. As time passes, she ages and her body begins the breakdown that occurs as the years speed towards old age. She has a broken blood vessel in one eye, molars that need work, and feels her imperfections. She begins to feel the absence of family.

Subhash asks her for a divorce, and Gauri decides to stop in and give him the signed paperwork in person. She has ulterior motives of course, hoping to get contact



information for Bela while she is there. The first night she is in town, she drives to his house but seeing two cars in the driveway unnerves her and she returns to the guest house without stopping in. The next day she works up the nerve to knock, having found only one car in the driveway this time. Bela is stunned to see her mother's face, and while she lets her in, her reaction is anything but friendly. Gauri tries several times to question her about her life, but when Bela doesn't answer, she begins to talk to Meghna instead. When Meghna asks who she is, Bela claims she is a friend of her grandmothers that Bela has not seen since her grandmother died. Bela accepts the answer, and calmly states that when Babu marries Elise, she will have a new grandmother. Gauri is shaken by the announcement, giving Bela time to send Meghna outside to pick flowers for the table. When the door closes, she rounds on her mother and lets some of the betrayal and anger show, telling her to leave and not come back. Stunned silent, Gauri leaves. Then, instead of continuing on to London for the conference she was booked at, she changes her flight and returns to Calcutta.

When Gauri gets to her destination, she goes to visit Manash only to find that he is visiting his son. She sits with his family for a while, and then tours the area of Tollygunge where she lived with Udayan and where his life ended. She returns to her room feeling empty and despondent, and for a brief time considers throwing herself out the window, but as she stands there contemplating, time marches forward. The next time she looks around, street vendors have set up beneath her making her plan impossible. She decides to return to work. Several weeks after she returns, a letter from Bela arrives telling her that when Meghna is old enough, she will tell her the truth and if she wants contact with Gauri, she will allow and facilitate it.

Bela Mitra

Bela is the product of a brief marriage by Gauri and Udayan Mitra. Udayan is killed before he even knows that Bela exists, but his brother Subhash steps in to help Gauri raise her. Gauri's pregnancy was not planned, and she had little desire to nurture or share that much of herself with anyone else, let alone someone dependent on her. As such, when Bela is still a child, her mother leaves her and her father. Bela grows up in Rhode Island with her father, a part of her hating him because he did nothing to make her mother return to them.

When Bela discovers she is pregnant, she decides to come home. She tells Subhash that she is expecting and wants the child, but that the father is not in the picture. Subhash uses this opportunity to tell Bela who her real father is for the first time. Stunned and angry at first, Bela leaves and is gone for a week, but then returns having had a chance to gain some perspective on the situation. Bela gives birth to a girl; and allows Subhash to name her Meghna.

Bela returns to what she loves, working with her hands when Meghna is old enough to begin preschool. She and Subhash share the responsibility for picking her up and dropping her off. One afternoon, after swimming with Meghna, Bela stops at a roadside vegetable stand. Unmanned, it relies on public honesty. Bela passes it several times



before meeting Drew, the man who stocks it. They are very compatible, and Drew makes it clear that he would be happy to have Bela around all the time, and raise Meghna with her.

Soon after, Bela and Meghna are home alone when Gauri shows up. Stunned at first, Bela actually lets her in, but as soon as she recovers herself, she sends Meghna outside to pick flowers, and tells Gauri to get out, and not come back. Later, having given it some thought, she writes to Gauri to tell her that she will be honest with Meghna when she is old enough and if she wants contact, she will allow it.

Bijoli Mitra

Bijoli is the mother to Udayan and Subhash Mitra. She is a proud and strong woman who values her place in the community but who loses her stamina when her youngest son dies. Bijoli youngest son Udayan was killed by police for suspicious and extremist behavior and her husband died a year later in his bed having long since crawled into his own shell of isolation. Bijoli also carries the shame for having alienated her eldest son and his wife, Gauri, liking her no better than she did when Gauri was Udayan's wife, but now regretting the loss of contact with her only granddaughter and Udayan's only offspring, Bela.

Bijoli slowly loses her mind as time passes, her only concern seeming to be keeping the memorial tablet of Udayan's free of garbage. When the ponds become so polluted that keeping his stone clear is impossible, she begins to clear out the garbage around it. She packs away loads of trash, despite an awareness that her appearance and behavior probably scares the neighborhood's children. Deepa goes to get her and finally takes her home. After that, Deepa keeps a closer eye on Bijoli, not allowing her to go out alone.

Deepa continues to care for her until her last days but she never recovers the losses she suffers.

Deepa

Deepa is a capable teenager who looks after Bijoli and her household before and especially after the death of her husband to help to support her five siblings. She handles all aspects of the household finances as well. Deepa even uses the sewing machine to make extra money, hemming and altering clothing now as Bijoli once had for the family. Deepa wears saris and has a gem in one nostril. She has a face that is heart shaped, and is strong despite having a lean and wiry frame. She sleeps in the room next to Bijoli and looks after her.



Meghna Mitra

Meghna is named by her grandfather Subhash; the name coming from a river running into the Bay of Bengal. She is an intelligent girl and lives with her mother and grandfather.

When Meghna meets Gauri, she seems to sense that there is a larger connection, and after Gauri leaves, she asks about her. Bela decides that when Meghna is older, she will tell her the truth.

Holly

Holly and her son Joshua live in Matunuck, near a salt pond, and she likes to come to the campus to walk their dog, Chester. She usually works in a small hospital in East Greenwich as a nurse. Born in Massachusetts, she'd lived in Rhode Island for most of her life, but her family was French Canadian. Knowledgeable about seabird, she teaches Subhash how to tell the differences between pintails, terns and gulls, and shows him sandpipers that run to the edge of the water and back again. Holly and her husband have been separated for almost a year. Subhash guesses her age to be about 35.

Subhash becomes very fond of Holly and her son, and is beginning to believe they might have a future together when Holly pulls the rug out from under him, telling him that she is returning to her husband. Hurt and angry, Subhash refuses to talk to her, arranging his own transportation home. The next time Holly sees Subhash is in the grocery store when he is shopping with Bela. Holly is with her no longer ex-husband.

Joshua

Joshua is 9 years old and has just started summer vacation when he meets Subhash for the first time. They get along well, and Subhash entertains the notion of becoming his step-father, but his mother Holly has other plans. Soon she and Joshua will be back together with his natural father.

Dr. Emily Grant

Dr. Grant is the psychologist that Subhash takes Bela to when Bela struggles to cope with the fact that Gauri had left them. Emily is short, has brown hair and a pale face. She wears clothes that would be suitable on a teenager.



Lorna

Lorna is a tall woman who is a graduate student at UCLA. Well-dressed, with hair parted in the center, Lorna has a long neck and abbreviated brows. Her eyes are clear and gray, and her earlobes are small. Lorna is in her late 30s when she and Gauri meet. Having read everything Gauri had written, she introduces herself hoping that Gauri would read her dissertation of a study of relational autonomy, and offering to research, grade papers or do almost anything in return. It had taken her almost a year to work up the nerve to approach Gauri about it.

Otto Weiss

Otto is the professor that teaches the class Gauri is taking in philosophy. He has a slow manner of speech and is short with wire rimmed spectacles. He has an accent that is thick and his hair is curly and rust colored. Professor Weiss dresses impeccably with leather shoes well-polished; a jacket and tie complete with tie clip. Born in Germany, as a child he'd been taken to a camp, but he prefers not to talk about it. His shirt and jacket cover the tattoo on his arm, and he is about ten years older than Gauri. He had done his doctorate in Chicago, and made it clear to his students that he had no desire to return to Germany ever.

Central Reserve Police

The Central Reserve Police are who arrest and shoot Udayan for terrorist activities two weeks after he blows his fingers off while making a pipe bomb.

Manash

Manash and Udayan met at Calcutta University, both in graduate programs in physics. As a young child, Manash attended Calcutta Boys' School. Manash and Udayan are good friends and spend a great deal of time together. Manash even arranges time for Udayan and his sister Gauri to get to know each other.

He becomes Udayan's brother-in-law when Udayan and Gauri are married. He is the only family member that will still acknowledge Gauri after her wedding. Manash marries himself and has sons and grandchildren the next time Gauri tries to see him, and while he sounds older on the phone, he sounds happy.

Narasimhan

An economics professor, Narasimhan is from Madras and is married to a woman named Kate and with her has two sons. He wears bell-bottomed jeans and has heavy sideburns. Narasimhan was born in Calcutta.



Narasimhan is the first person Subhash meets that comes from his part of the world, and serves as an example to him later when he considers marrying an American woman.

Richard Grifalconi

Richard is the Ph.D. student that Subhash shares a kitchen and bathroom with in a white wooden house on Rhode Island. Richard studies sociology and is an editorialist for the newspaper at the university. Originating from Wisconsin, Richard came from a Quaker family. He has long dark hair that he wears tied up in a ponytail, and wire rimmed glasses. Studying to become a professor, Richard had just turned 30. As an undergraduate, he'd traveled South to protest segregation, and as a result had spent two weeks locked in a Mississippi jail. Richard is opposed to the war, but rather than embracing Communism, he chooses to side with Gandhi – a hero to him. Richard protests the Vietnam War, wearing a black armband and preaching through a megaphone from the top of a van at the university.

Richard teaches Subhash how to drive and even sells him his car when he accepts a teaching job in Chicago. Richard comes back to Rhode Island, running into Subhash again. He still wears his hair in a ponytail, but there is less of it. He and his wife Claire buy a house in Saunderstown and is making plans for a trip to Vietnam. He exchanges emails with Subhash and they go fishing a couple of times and promise they'll get together for dinner.

Richard dies of a blood clot in his leg that traveled up and into his lungs the day after a bike ride with his wife.

Sinha

Sinha is the medical student who assumed a professor's role at the meeting Udayan took Subhash to. He is a wispy haired student who speaks quietly but whom Udayan seems enthralled with.

Charu Majumdar

Charu was a lawyer's son who came from a landowning family. A college dropout, Charu was a frail looking man with bushy hair, a hooked nose and a bony face. Charu was asthmatic who by the time he was 50 had suffered a heart condition that kept him confined to his bed. The Marxist-Leninist theoretician was often thought of as a madman by senior communists.



Kanu Sanyal

In his late 30s, Kanu was a Brahmin and a disciple of Majumdar's who learned the tribal dialects. Refusing to own property, Kanu devoted himself to the poor in rural areas. Kanu met with the land revenue minister, who promised that he wouldn't be arrested. A negotiation was promised but backed out of at the last minute.

Kanu Sanyal is an active leader of the Naxalites and was one of the original organizers of what had happened in Naxalbari. Raised near Naxalbari like Charu Majumdar, whom he'd met in prison, they are dissidents of the CPI(M).

At the age of 78, Kanu hangs himself.

Ajoy Mukherjee

Ajoy ran the United Front, a left wing coalition running in West Bengal. He was largely responsible for putting communists in the cabinet, and assured people that a government based on peasants and workers would be established and brought Congress leadership to an end after almost two decades.



Symbols and Symbolism

Egrets

Tall white birds that stand in the monsoon waters quietly waiting for prey to provide food, egrets arrive with feathers darkened by the soot of the city. They are dependent on these rainy seasons for their survival.

Partition

A political change that occurred a decade previously, Partition caused the mass exodus of Hindus from Dhaka, Rajshahi, and from Chittagong most of them relocating to Calcutta and the surrounding region.

Golf Balls

Golf balls are a source of income for caddies like Bismillah who sell the abandoned or lost golf balls from the Tolly Club. They are sometimes so damaged that their rubbery pink interior can be seen.

Kerosene Tins

Subhash and Udayan use kerosene tins to stand on, giving them the height needed to sneak into the Tolly Club. They leave one behind, attracting the attention of a police officer who waits in the shadows for them to return.

Shanties

Shanties are shelters created using thatch or canvas, using walls made from woven bamboo. There have no electricity or sanitation, and are largely responsible for the fact that the Adi Ganga in southwest Calcutta has become little more than a sewage canal. They are one of the reasons that the club keeps increasing the height of the walls surrounding it.

Paise

A paise is a unit of currency in India, equaling one hundredth of a rupee.



Cannonball Trees

A cannonball tree is a softwood tree in India that is considered to be sacred. Indigenous to the rain-forest, this tree can grow to be up to 75' in height. It is known to be beneficial for easing toothaches, treating colds, curing skin diseases and disinfecting wounds.

Mangrove Trees

Mangrove trees grow dense in swampy environments, their roots containing special pores that gather air, growing above the water line. They have seedlings that are elongated like cigars and called propagules that will reproduce if they drop when the tide is low. If the tide was high however, they would drift for as long as a year before they would begin to mature in an environment that was suitable.

Communist Party of India, Marxist: CPI(M)

The CPI(M) is a group that is sympathetic to China and is a breakaway group that came into being in 1964 after a dissent with China with regards to the border two years previously.

Charulata

Charulata is a show that was released in 1964 in cinema halls.

United Front

The United Front is a left-wing coalition running in West Bengal and led by Ajoy Mukherjee. Promising to establish a government of peasants and workers, and ensure the abolishment of large landholdings, they brought almost 20 years of leadership by Congress to an end. The United Front did not back the rebellion.

People's Daily

The People's Daily is a Peking publishing that accused the government of West Bengal of suppressing the revolutionary peasants.

Liberation

Liberation was a periodical published in English with reproductions of Chinese Communist articles.



Deshabrati

Deshabrati was a periodical published in Bengali which reproduced Chinese Communist articles.

President's Rule

In early 1968 after the United Front collapsed, West Bengal is placed under President's Rule.

Student Visa

Subhash obtains a student visa so that he can study in America.

Spartina

Spartina is what the marsh grass is called in the U.S. It is usually covered with crystals that come from special glands it has for excreting salt. Snails use their stems as a migration route, and the root systems stabilize the shorelines. Growing for over millennia, spartina propagates by spreading its rhizomes much like the mangroves that thrived once in Tollygunge.

Kurta

A kurta is a long collarless shirt typically worn by males of all ages and originating in Persia.

Corporation Tank

In India, a corporation tank holds water that is released twice a day for use in the home.

Kestrels

Holly and Subhash take a ferry to Block Island to watch the kestrels as they begin their migration south for the winter.

Durga Pujo

Durga Pujo is a holiday celebrated in India symbolizing the return of Durga to Calcutta to stay with her father, Himalaya. She descends to earth with her four children,

relinquishing her husband Shiva for the duration of the days of Pujo. Hymns recount how Durga was formed and weapons provided for her ten arms.

Wills

Wills are the brand of cigarettes that Udayan smoked and that Subhash smokes when he is in the city.

Barsha Kal

In Bengali, the monsoon season is called 'barsha kal'. It is the time each year when the wind direction changes and instead of blowing from land to sea, it blows from sea to land. This happens because the Himalayas trap the clouds which then rise and cool but cannot retain their moisture and clear the mountain range, so instead they release enough water that the streets flood and water collects in the lowlands.



Settings

Tolly Club

The Tolly Club is a Golf Course with a clubhouse, stables, tennis courts, swimming pool, and restaurants that cater to the affluent. Billiards and bridge can be played in rooms set aside for that purpose, where tea is served from silver pots. Bartenders serve special drinks like gin fizz or pink ladies while gramophones play a variety of music in the background. Around the club, boundary walls are built ever higher to keep nonpaying guests from enjoying the ambiance, although wire fencing is still the only thing that separates one group from the other along the western edge. The Tolly Club was originally owned by Richard Johnson who was the General Bank of India's chairman. In 1785, he built a Palladian villa and imported trees that were foreign to Tollygunge from subtropical regions of the world.

Deshapran Sashmal Road

Deshapran Sashmal Road is a road that splits into two parts east of the Tolly Club.

Calcutta

Calcutta is a city in India and is the homeland of Subdash and Udayan Mitra and their family.

Tollygunge

An outskirt section of Calcutta, Tollygunge became an unofficial refugee region for people who fled from Rajshahi, Dhaka, Chittagong and places similar after Partition. This displaced population was accepted but largely ignored by the residents of Calcutta. Tollygunge was built on land that was reclaimed, originally a swamp choked with mangroves. Tollygunge came into being in 1770 when the English began clearing the jungle and laying out streets and suburbs.

Adi Ganga

The Adi Ganga is the name of the river that once flowed where paddy fields now grow, and that the British sailed on to the delta.



Technician's Studio

The Technicians' Studio is where Pather Panchali was shot by Satyajit Ray, and where Bengali movie stars spend their days.

Dhaka

Dhaka is one of the places from which Hindus fled to Tollygunge after Partition.

Rajshahi

Rajshahi is one of the places from which Hindus fled to Tollygunge after Partition.

Chittagong

Chittigong is one of the places from which Hindus fled to Tollygunge after Partition.

Bengali Medium School For Boys

The Bengali Medium School for boys is the school that both Subhash and Udayan attended. Subhash could have started a year earlier than Udayan, but Udayan had been unhappy that Subhash was going without him, so Subhash waited and they both went the following year together.

Presidency College

This is the college that admitted Udayan to study physics.

Jadavpur College

This is the college that admitted Subhash to study chemical engineering.

Srinagar

Srinagar is the city in which riots between Muslims and Hindus occurred after a relic kept in the mosque was stolen.

Calcutta University

Calcutta University is where Udayan continues his postgraduate studies.



Rhode Island

Rhode Island is where Subhash moves to in order to continue his university education in the United States. He shares a white wooden house with another student, sharing the kitchen and bathroom.

Narragansett Bay

Most of Subhash's classes are held on the oceanography campus which overlooks the Narragansett Bay. The views of the Bay show the Jamestown and Newport Bridges.

Block Island

In September, Holly takes Subhash to Block Island to watch the kestrels as they begin to fly south for the winter.

Howrah Station

Howrah Station is the last place that Subhash had seen his brother alive, when they said goodbye as he was leaving for Rhode Island.

Tailor's Shop

Subhash and Udayan (until Udayan's death) traveled almost yearly to a distant cousin in the city who owned a tailor's shop where they would be measured for the next year's clothes.

New Bedford

New Bedford is where Subhash finishes his post doctorate, and where he was invited to join a group doing an environmental inventory.

Nursery School

Gauri takes Bela to the university nursery school every morning beginning when Bela is four years old.

Ganges River

Bijoli's husband begins to travel to Babu Ghat after Udayan dies where he bathes in the Ganges River.



Themes and Motifs

Love and Trust

Love and trust can begin with a feeling; a simple meeting; a glance across a room. They are both freely given and increase in strength and depth exponentially with time and experience and when the emotion is returned. By the same token, when love or trust is betrayed, it can never be regained completely.

This story provides several examples of love and trust, and how easily those feelings can be damaged or destroyed. Gauri loses faith and trust in Udayan when she realizes that he involved her directly in the policeman's murder by having her track his schedule. In all likelihood, this contributed to Udayan's execution - a vision that surely replays itself again and again in her mind. With his death, Gauri is betrayed again, her husband choosing his country over her. The morning of his death, he tells her that he does not want children - unwilling to face them after what he'd done. It is the final insult to the ego of a woman who later realizes she is carrying his child.

Subhash loved his brother, despite their differing political ideals. When he returns to Tollygunge after his brother's death, he meets Gauri for the first time. Discovering that she is pregnant, neglected by his parents who are scheming to take her child from her when it is born, Subhash honors his brother and Gauri by offering to marry her and take her to America. Unable to resolve the issues at hand, she goes damaged into her future with Subhash, giving birth just months later to Bela. The strangeness of it all is suffocating and what she really wants to do is escape. Eventually, she manages to do so and in the process does irreparable damage to her daughter's trust. She betrays them by leaving, and leaving Bela in his care, and then compounds the betrayal by returning without warning when he asks her for a divorce. In truth, Gauri is merely giving in to the loss and betrayal she feels, unable to open up to Subhash or her daughter with the love they deserve.

From that day forward however, Bela will punish her father; and her love and trust for her mother are so damaged that thirty years later Bela is still unprepared to forgive her.

Meghna, raised by two loving influences and still able to trust questions her mother about Gauri somehow understanding her importance to the family. Her questions convince Bela to write to Gauri and promise only that one day she will tell Meghna the truth and she can decide for herself. Perhaps they will be able to talk then, she allows foreshadowing a healing that begins from a relationship born and nurtured with love trusting that they can resolve things in the future.

Evolution of Revolution

The Lowland provides two clear examples of revolution. The first begins with Naxalbari. In this case, the poor are rising up against the privileged few, fighting for their very



survival. With clubs and sticks, they take to the streets, protesting and demanding some version of equality. Of course clubs and sticks are no match for the guns carried by police, so the revolutionaries are driven underground. They begin ransacking schools; defacing portraits and covering Calcutta with pictures of Mao. They become increasingly violent as well. killing traffic police at intersections; attacking educators and members of the rival party alike. The revolutionaries take control of entire neighborhoods, setting up safe houses, and killing anyone who is in the way. As a result, new legislation passes that renews an old law allowing police to enter homes without a warrant, and arrest young men without charges. A house-to-house search followed and resistance quelled.

The days of protesting with sticks and clubs are over in America however. In Rhode Island, Subhash has an opportunity to see a different style of protest. In America, while there are mistakes made by government, protesters generally take a more organized approach. In America, protesters may hold rallies, block traffic, hold sit-ins, or hunger strikes. They involve politicians, collect signatures from like minded individuals, and if a particular protest gains enough support, the protesters may gather in public areas to gain media support and attention. Subhash watches as Richard uses a megaphone to protest America's involvement in Vietnam, and is nervous, worried about being seen with a group of protesters for fear that it will jeopardize his status. All in all, it is unlikely that in this form of revolt there will be any loss of life while Udayan's form of government protest cost him his life.

Arranged Marriage

Subhash and Udayan grow up in Tollygunge with family values set by his parents and common to the region. They are expected to obey their parents; participate in educating themselves; respect their parents and create grandchildren for the cycle of life to continue. The parents maintain the right to select a wife for their sons to marry; and will usually provide a place in their home for the newly married couple to live. Despite being raised with these values, both brothers struggle with the realities involved.

Udayan meets and marries Gauri without parental approval, knowledge or consent. He presents them with a choice to accept her, or face the fact that they will make a home together elsewhere. The parents capitulate, but not happily, as is evident by the letter they send to Subhash soon afterward, asking him not to make the same mistake. They resent Gauri for usurping their right to select a wife for their son and make it clear that they want to select a wife for him, and for him to come home to marry her.

Much like his brother, Subhash goes against all customs when he meets Gauri and decides to rescue her from his parents who are only waiting on the arrival of their grandchild. Before that can happen, Gauri and Subhash are married at a registrars office, and once again his parents are denied their rights to make these decisions. By denying them this, Subhash snubs his parents and they return the sentiment, shutting him out of all but the most important aspects of their lives. Subhash will not hear from home again until his father dies. Then, despite their history, Subhash returns to



Tollygunge as is his responsibility to mourn his father's passing. His marriage to Gauri fares no better however as while he is visiting, Gauri is leaving him.

Both bothers snubbed convention and they did so with the same woman. It was an act bordering on unforgivable but both brothers share the opinion that selecting a mate is a custom best carried out by the prospective partner, not his or her parents.

Naxalites

Naxalites came into being on April 22, 1969 - Lenin's Birthday. Launched in Calcutta, it is the third communist party to emerge and their name is chosen to honor those in Naxalbari. Naxalbari, in the northern tip of West Bengal, is a village of tribal peasants who earn their livelihoods by working on large tea plantations. They live under a feudal system unchanged for years, pushed from the fields they cultivated and denied the revenue they earned from the crops they grew. Some died from lack of food after being deprived of subsistence wages and being preyed upon by those who lent money. One March a sharecropper tried to plough land that he was illegally evicted from. He was beaten and his plough and bullock taken. The police turned a blind eye. Soon groups of sharecroppers began burning deeds and records from transactions in which they were cheated. That May, reports claim men and women killed a police inspector with bows and arrows. The next day police tried to quell a riot and when the crowd refused to leave, eleven people died.

The general secretary of the party was Charu Majumdar and the party chairman was Kanu Sanyal. Together they helped to organize the tribal peasants and it was this escalation that likely caused the death of these eleven people, but it provided the platform for the new party and its agenda to dismantle the large landowners and redistribute the wealth.

Durga Pujo

The largest celebration of the year, Durga Pujo is a five day fest that begins on September 30th and lasts till October 3rd. In Tollygunge the Mitra family celebrated by exchanging gifts and each year Subhash could look forward to sandalwood soap, Darjeeling tea, and kurtas that were too thin.

When Subhash thinks about Durga Pujo, he remembers All India Radio playing Mahalaya; how people across West Bengal would get up in the dark to listen to the voice as it invoked the Goddess Durga and her four children. Hindu Bengalis believed that she came to stay with her father Himalaya at this time of the year. Songs are sung that tell of Durga's formation; each of her ten arms being given weapons. A lion at her feet helps her to conquer the demon.

It is the week before Durga Pujo when Gauri and her mother-in-law come home with gifts to find police who are searching for Udayan. When Subhash goes to Tollygunge after hearing of his brother's death, he is presented with the gifts that were purchased

for both brothers. He received two sets of striped material for shirts; two sets of gray material meant for trousers. Subhash gives his mother a shawl he buys there.

Styles

Point of View

The *Lowland*, written by Jhumpa Lahiri, is written from two points of view, each emerging dependent on whether the author is discussing an earlier time period; or telling the ongoing story in its current time line. In the flash backs used to create context, the narrative is an omniscient perspective. When the story returns to its natural time line, the author uses an omniscient first person perspective, examining the multiple viewpoints of the main characters.

In the flashbacks, the author reveals details about Udayan's death from Gauri's perspective as she remembers her brief life with him. The story of their relationship is intertwined between the chapters that cover her relationship with Subhash; the birth of her daughter Bela; and her desertion of them both.

Regardless of the time line that is being discussed, the author consistently uses a present tense rather than a more conventional past tense even at the end when Udayan's death is relived through his eyes. This reliable narration gives the reader a sense of immediacy in the time line that brings the story to life regardless of the period being discussed. Each character is strong and distinct, and each chapter is limited to the emotional perspective of the character it begins with, maintaining the reliable narration from beginning to end.

Language and Meaning

The *Lowland* is a novel that divides itself between the lives and loves of the Mitra sons, Udayan and Subhash and the political upheaval of the 1970's Naxalite movement. The story begins with a brief look at the childhood and family life that Udayan and Subhash had in the first three chapters, and in the next three chapters of part one, the reader is introduced to Naxalites and All India Radio broadcasting the political upheaval of the time and an overview of the tribal peasants of the region and the feudal system they live under.

The author does the upheaval of the time credit, describing the beginning of Udayan's involvement in the Naxalite movement, and his growing desire to affect change in his country. The different parties are explained and their genus revealed in enough detail that the content is understandable at the same time as it is educational for the reader. For example, in part one, chapter four Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal are introduced as the two Bengali communists that were instrumental in organizing the sharecroppers. Dissidents of the CPI(M), they have nothing but contempt for the current leadership in India. Charu is referred to by some as a madman while Kanu was a Brahmin disciple of Majumdar's who was so devoted to the rural poor that he refused to own property and learned the tribal dialects to better organize the sharecroppers.



Throughout the rest of the novel, the author describes the lives and loves of brothers Udayan and Subhash. Much reflection is done where Udayan's death is concerned, particularly since Subhash marries his widow and dedicates himself to raising Udayan's daughter. The woman who marries them both ends up with neither.

While this story centers on the politics and lives of two men from Tollygunge; the author manages to insert just enough culture without adding so much that the reader is bogged down by it. For example, the celebration of Durga Pujo is discussed and the history of the holiday explained without indulging in so much history and culture that the story drags.

Structure

The Lowland is a novel of 325 pages, that is divided into eight parts each containing between two and six chapters each. The first part contains six chapters in which the reader is introduced to the Mitra family, and specifically to the brothers Udayan and Subhash. This part reveals their childhood and schooling; interests and political leanings. In this section Udayan and Subhash separate - Udayan leaving home first, and Subhash leaving to continue his Ph.D program in America. This segment also introduces the reader to the political upheaval in the region in the 1970's.

In part two, Udayan's relationship with Gauri is revealed, and Subhash meets Holly. This section covers the timeline of Subhash's relationship with Holly, taking it from first meeting to its inevitable conclusion - separation. At the end of part two, Udayan's death is revealed.

Part three covers Subhash's return to Tollygunge and his first meeting with Gauri. In this segment, he learns of Gauri's pregnancy, and his parents' intentions to take the child from her when it is born. This section also reveals the political activities that led to Udayan's arrest and death. Subhash marries Gauri so that he can save her from his parents and help her to raise her child.

Part four begins with Gauri's arrival in Boston; Bela's birth and after much time, the beginning of the physical relationship between Gauri and Subhash. This section also reveals Gauri's desire to continue her schooling while Subhash is hopeful that they might consider having a second child sometime soon. As Bela grows, Gauri leaves her to her own devices more and more, allowing her run of the campus while she sits in the office with her books. Gauri begins spending more and more time apart from them, and shows no joy in their family unit.

Part five reveals life in Tollygunge as Subhash's mother continues to tend the memorial tablet for Udayan. Subhash and Bela travel to Tollygunge to pay their respects after the death of Subhash's father, and when they return to Rhode Island, they discover that Gauri has left them. She has taken a job in California. Bela struggles with this betrayal and rejection and her grades suffer. Bela overcomes this, finishing school and striking out on her own, only visiting Subhash occasionally.



Part six recaps Gauri's life and Subhash's life without Bela and meeting Elise. Bela comes home and tells Subhash she is pregnant. He decides to tell her the truth about her father. Subhash asks Gauri for a divorce.

Part seven begins with Gauri meeting a former student who asks her to contribute to his book about Naxalites. The subject is a sensitive one, and she declines. She remembers her short time with Udayan, and how he involved her in the death of the policeman. Meghna is four and attends a summer program while Bela works on a farm. Bela meets Drew. Gauri decides to fly to Boston to finalize her divorce to Subhash in person. She drives to his home to find Bela and Meghna there instead. The visit does not go well and Bela asks her to leave and not come back. Meghna asks Bela about Gauri, and Bela decides to write to Gauri to tell her that when Meghna is old enough, she will tell her the truth about who Gauri is, and then Meghna can decide if she wants contact.

Part eight begins with Subhash and Elise's honeymoon. Udayan's last day is recounted through his eyes.



Quotes

Should I stand guard on this side while you explore?

-- Subhash (Part I: Chapter 2 paragraph 16)

Importance: This quote reveals the difference between Udayan and his brother Subhash. While Udayan is adventurous and outgoing, Subhash is more careful and reserved. He is willing to stay behind and maintain their security to keep the others safe while they enjoy the Tolly Club without him.

You're the other side of me, Subhash. It's without you I'm nothing.

-- Udayan (Part I: Chapter 5 paragraph 49)

Importance: Udayan tells Subhash this when Subhash tries to convince him to go to America with him. Udayan tells him this with love in his heart, but Subhash hears it as a command instead, and refuses to hear the emotion in his heart until much later. The quote is significant because it is the only time that Udayan admits that Subhash is a critical part of his life and that he is much more with him than he is when they are apart. Udayan predicts that if Subhash leaves, he will never return home to live again, and in this he is correct. Shortly after this, Subhash will leave for America and he and Udayan will not see each other again.

We hope when the time comes, you will trust us to settle your future, to choose your wife and to be present at your wedding.

-- Subhash's Parents (Part II: Chapter 2 paragraph 12)

Importance: This quote is part of a letter that Subhash's parents send to him after the marriage of Udayan and Gauri. In it, they make their wishes clear, and equally clearly manage to convey their disappointment in Udayan for going against custom and deciding to marry Gauri. It might not have been as large a violation of their trust had they known about Gauri first, or had Udayan attempted to involve them in his wedding. Udayan's parents want their sons to have the kind of wedding that friends and family come to witness, and join in celebration with afterward. They often see remnants of such events, and their last hope is that Subhash keep to tradition and allow them their involvement.

We are under orders to locate and arrest Udayan Mitra, said the soldier who seemed to be commanding the others.

-- Commanding Soldier (Part III: Chapter 2 paragraph 14)

Importance: This quote reveals what the Mitra family was told as they were taken from their home at gunpoint. The soldiers had the area surrounded and made it clear that they knew he was in the area and that he would not get out. The quote, and Udayan's subsequent death is a turning point in many character's lives.



The eyes that greeted her were kind by weak; the weakness, she suspected, that had led him to marry her, and to do her the favor he'd done.

-- Narrator (Part IV: Chapter 1 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote reveals Gauri's feelings for Subhash from the beginning. She sees him as weak and questions her decision to marry him, foreshadowing a separation in their future.

She slept with him because it had become more of an effort not to.

-- Narrator (Part IV: Chapter 6 paragraph 5)

Importance: This line reveals how little Gauri has bonded with Subhash, and reinforces the chances that she will not stay with him much longer.

In exchange for all you have done for me, I leave Bela to you.

-- Gauri (Part V: Chapter 3 paragraph 17)

Importance: Gauri's last line in her goodbye letter to Subhash, she 'gives' Bela to him as her way of thanking him for all he'd done for her. This 'gift' is something she has no right to give, but by doing so she reduces Bela to a possession which reveals how shallow her feelings for them both really were.

He had his daughter; alone he maintained the knowledge that she was not his.

-- Subhash's Thoughts (Part V: Chapter 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote reveals just how reluctant Subhash is to tell Bela that Udayan was her father. Subhash fears losing the only female in his life who hasn't already left him by revealing the truth to her.

We're meeting at the Great Swamp next time, so I thought of you,' she said, before asking if he wanted to come along.

-- Elise (Part VI: Chapter 2 paragraph 99)

Importance: This is the second time that Elise invites Subhash to join her in an activity; the first time being a historical open house that she invites him to. This invitation emboldens Subhash and leads to a deeper relationship between them.

He (Drew) came by the house on the morning of her birthday so they could all meet.

-- Narrator (Part VII: Chapter 3 paragraph 30)

Importance: This quote is significant because it represents the first time that Bela has ever introduced anyone to Subhash, and reveals not only that she cares about Drew but that Subhash's opinion matters to her.

When Dadu marries her I'll have a grandmother, Meghna said.

-- Meghna (Part VII: Chapter 5 paragraph 44)



Importance: This seemingly innocent comment from Bela puts Gauri squarely in her place when she realizes the reality of a few things. First and foremost, Meghna knows nothing about her; Bela has no intention of changing that; Subhash is getting married and as a result there is no chance that Gauri will find her way back into this family - a notion she had vaguely entertained.

The years the couple have together are a shared conclusion to lives separately built, separately lived.

-- Subhash's Thoughts (Part VIII: Chapter 1 paragraph 12)

Importance: This comment reveals Subhash's thoughts and his awareness that life before now is the past. He now has a future that he is looking forward to.