

Selection Day: A Novel Study Guide

Selection Day: A Novel by Aravind Adiga

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Plot Summary

Note: The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Adiga, Aravind. *Selection Day*. Scribner, 2016.

Selection Day is a novel following the story of the Kumars, a family living in Mumbai, India. *Selection Day* is set around present day, and its main character is Manjunath “Manju” Kumar, the younger of two brothers. His brother Radha is about one year older, and their father, Mohandas “Mohan” Kumar, has been training them as cricket players from a very young age. The Kumars are very poor, and they moved to Mumbai from a village in Western Ghats. Not long after moving to Mumbai, Mohan’s wife (Manju and Radha’s mother) left the family and went off on her own. The family grieved, but Mohan soon decided to focus his energies on training his sons to be professional cricket players in the hopes that they may be raised out of poverty. Mohan prays to the Hindu deity Subramanya, asking for Radha to become the best cricket batter in the world, and for Manju to become the second best. When the boys are in their early teens, they attract the attention of a man called Tommy Sir, who is a talent scout for the Mumbai Cricket association. He helps negotiate a sponsorship deal for them with a wealthy man named Anand Mehta. Mehta agrees to support the Kumars financially in exchange for a percentage of Radha and Manju’s future cricket earnings if they become professionals.

After a year of saving money from the sponsorship deal, the Kumars move from the Mumbai slum of Dahisar to the wealthy Mumbai suburb of Chembur. Manju and Radha continue to attend the Ali Weinberg International School and play for the school’s cricket team. One of their teammates, Javed Ansari, emerges as a significant cricket talent, rivaling Manju and Radha. However, Radha remains the best cricket player at the school, setting a new batting record for their age group. But meanwhile, further friction builds between the Kumar brothers and their father. When Mohan catches Radha with a girl in the house, there is a physical altercation between Mohan and his sons, and Mohan ends up in the hospital with a broken leg. Also, Manju secretly wishes to be a forensic scientist, and he forms a friendship with Javed Ansari, who encourages Manju’s non-cricket interests. Tensions among the Kumars rise even further when Manju surpasses his older brother’s cricket abilities and is awarded a cricket scholarship by the school over Radha. These tensions come to a head on selection day, when Manju and Radha try out for a professional cricket team. Radha, who desires only to be a professional cricket player, does not perform well enough to be selected, and Manju, who does not truly want to play cricket, despite his talent, performs quite well. Radha, in his frustration, attacks a fellow cricket player and must flee to his family’s old village to escape the police. Meanwhile, Manju flees to Javed’s apartment and says he will never play cricket again. Manju and Javed’s relationship almost becomes sexual, but then Manju runs away from Javed’s apartment to go home and continue to pursue cricket.

In the end, Manju is selected to play cricket professionally, and Radha is not. Manju plays in the Under-19 league for three years, and then for Mumbai’s professional cricket team for three years. However, he is then transferred to a novelty league, batting as a non-celebrity in a celebrity cricket league. He is finally fired on his 27th birthday and is



hired as a talent scout for the Mumbai Cricket Association. Radha returns to Mumbai not long after fleeing, and he remains generally unemployed, likely receiving financial support from Manju. Neither Radha nor Manju keep in close contact with their father. By this time, Javed has become a con man and a failing actor, and Tommy Sir has died of a stroke not long after Radha and Manju's selection day.



Pages 1 - 59

Summary

The novel opens with a short prologue in which Manju, as an infant, is exploring his surroundings by tasting things. His father, however, arrives and stops him. The main part of the novel begins when Radha and Manju are in their early teens. Pramod Sawant, a cricket coach with the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA), is speaking with an MCA talent scout called Tommy Sir. Pramod tells Tommy Sir that he has found two very talented young cricket players, Radha Krishna Kumar and his younger brother, Manjunath “Manju” Kumar. The next day, Pramod finds Manju practicing cricket against boys who are making fun of Manju’s father, a chutney salesman. Pramod tells Manju that he and his brother should report to the Mumbai Cricket Association because a talent scout is interested in seeing them.

In the next section of the novel, the narrative then shows a series of brief flashbacks concerning Radha, Manju, and their father Mohandas “Mohan” Kumar. In these flashbacks, Manju is watching his favorite show, “CSI,” when Radha returns home after being featured on a cricket-centric news show called “Young Lions.” The Kumars travel from Mumbai back to their old village to pray to their family deity, Subramanya, a Hindu god. Mohan claims to have a contract with this god that in exchange for tribute, Radha will become the world’s best cricket batter, and Manju will become the second best. Mohan is shown to be a very strict parent who allows his sons to do few things other than practice cricket and attend school.

Mohan and his sons go to the Middle Income Group (MIG) Cricket Club to meet with Tommy Sir and Anand Mehta, a wealthy man interested in sponsoring young cricket players. Radha and Manju demonstrate their abilities, and then Mohan meets with Tommy Sir and Anand Mehta in a nearby café. They negotiate a sponsorship deal, and Anand Mehta agrees to pay Mohan and Tommy Sir several thousand rupees each month in support of Manju and Radha’s cricket training. In exchange, Mehta is entitled to a certain percentage of their earnings if they are selected for a professional cricket team. Mohan then returns home to tell his sons the good news. At night, Radha and Mohan complain about their father’s invasive forms of discipline and agree that they will not share any of their cricket earnings with him if they become professionals.

In the next section of the narrative, the author shows a flashback to when Mohan first moved to Mumbai with his wife and sons. They moved from their village in Western Ghats, and not long after, the wife left with no explanation. Mohan became depressed, but then he decided to focus all of his energy into training his sons to become the world’s greatest cricket players. The book then jumps ahead one year. Anand Mehta is constantly hounded by calls from Mohan concerning Manju and Radha, but Mehta has other business concerns to look after. The narration reveals that Mehta used to be a stockbroker in New York City, but he moved back to Mumbai to become an entrepreneur. Unfortunately, none of his business ventures have worked out so far.



Analysis

One of the central character dynamics of the book is between the three Kumars: Radha, Manju, and their father Mohan. It is a central source of drama and tension in the novel, and the basis of the family's dysfunction is established early on in the narrative. Mohan is a very domineering father who gives his sons very little freedom. Radha and Manju seem to somewhat resent their father's invasive forms of discipline and control, but the boys never seek ways to disobey him. Because their father began training them in cricket at a very young age, Radha and Manju appear to believe that they have no real alternatives in life, and so they are willing to pursue cricket with all their focus and attention in order to follow the will of their father. This dynamic leads to great turmoil, as foreshadowed by the boys' desires to become professional cricket players and then leave their father behind, but for now, the dysfunction appears to be more subtle.

An important narrative episode in regard to the aforementioned family dysfunction involves the unexplained departure of Mohan's wife, the boys' mother. As a character, she is never named, but she decides to leave her husband and sons shortly after the Kumars all move to Mumbai. It is never explained why she does this, but her departure appears to be the catalyst for Mohan's obsession with his sons becoming cricket players. In this way, Mohan's cricket-related monomania appears to be an extended expression of grief for his abandonment by his wife. In turn, the wife's departure appears connected to the Kumars' move to Mumbai, as she leaves not long after they move to the city. In this way, the Kumars' relocation is highlighted in the narrative, indicating that their new surroundings may also be a contributing factor to the family's dysfunction.

In terms of structure, the novel appears to be developing Manju as the central character, as much of the narrative has been from his point of view in this section. This trend continues throughout the novel, but it is important to note that the book is told from many different perspectives in addition to Manju's. For example, after the prologue, the novel opens with a scene in which none of the Kumars are present. After this, the narrative spends several pages discussing the character of Tommy Sir before finally introducing Manju in the next scene. While many of the subsequent scenes are from Manju's perspective, several are from the perspective of other characters, such as his father, and even Anand Mehta. Structurally, this serves to slightly widen the scope of the narrative by including perspectives beyond just Manju's. Thematically, it helps develop the idea of many competing wills and desires, all of which affect Manju as he develops throughout the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the prologue and the opening scene of the first chapter. How do these scenes compare and contrast in structure and tone? How do they help to establish the tone, themes, and story?



Discussion Question 2

How do the Kumar brothers interact with one another versus with their father? How are their family dynamics and history portrayed, and how does this reflect upon the narrative?

Discussion Question 3

Consider Mohan as a character. How does his personal history affect his attitude and actions? What parts of his personality don't seem to be accounted for by his personal history?

Vocabulary

paunch, scavenge, supple, peon, autorickshaw, maidan, gymkhana, salient, allusion, syndicate, stint, cacaphonic, lunette, coax, bludgeon, camphor, lacerated, particulate, ingratiate, hoard, proverb, languid, monogram, queue, flourish, manacle, submerge, migrant, amoxicillin, pungent, flautist, cerebral, revenue, pedigree, melodrama, samosa, chaddi, consolation, cellophane, laterite



Pages 60 - 135

Summary

As this section of the novel begins, Mohan Kumar has saved a significant amount of money from Mehta's payments in the past year, so he decides that he and his sons will move out of their impoverished suburb, called Dahisar, to a wealthy suburb called Chembur. In their new apartment, they watch the newest episode of "Young Lions," which features a segment on Javed Ansari, a schoolmate of Radha and Manju at the Ali Weinberg International School. They see Javed the next day at school. Before class, Radha and Manju talk to a schoolmate of theirs named Sofia, and Radha flirts with her. Later in the school year, during cricket season, Tommy Sir brings a talent recruiter from the Mumbai cricket team to watch Radha and Manju. Radha and Manju take turns batting, and Manju attains a higher score than his brother.

As the narrative continues, Tommy Sir speaks to Manju after the exhibition to give him faint praise on his performance. Tommy Sir also notices that Manju's thumb is broken and suspects that it has something to do with the boy's father. Back at home, the Kumars read a newspaper article containing an interview of Javed Ansari. In the interview, Javed subtly insinuates that Mohan broke Manju's thumb by accident during practice. This is the truth, but the Kumars are still outraged. Later, during a school exam, Manju leaves early to go to cricket practice, during which time he and Radha write insults on Javed's equipment. Manju is sent to the principal's office. Instead of punishing Manju, Principal Patricia simply laments her failed writing career and warns Manju that some people just don't have the talent to be successful at certain things.

Back at home, the Kumars watch a TV news report that tells of Radha having scored 300 runs in one day's play, a record for his age group. After school, Radha and Manju ride around with Sofia in her chauffeured car. They go to the mall for a bit before going back to the Kumars' house. Mohan eventually arrives and catches Radha with Sofia, despite the fact that Mohan forbids his sons to date girls. Anand Mehta, meanwhile, is meeting with foreign investors, but his meeting is interrupted a phone call telling him to go to St. George Hospital immediately. There, he finds an injured Mohan. Apparently, an argument with his sons turned physical, and Mohan's right leg was broken, although the details the narrative gives are scant.

In the conclusion of this section, Radha, Manju, and Javed all participate in a Cricket exhibition called the Harris Shield. Manju scores the most of the batsmen, setting a new record for his age group: 497 runs. Later in the week, Manju and Javed meet in person. Manju accuses Javed of getting out on purpose because the bowler's father had supposedly died recently. They talk about their interests, and Manju confides that he wants to be a forensic scientist. Javed says that Manju should go to Ruia College, since they have a good science program. In the coming weeks, Manju notices that his father has grown more listless, occasionally pausing midsentence and then simply sitting silently for hours. One day, Karim Ali, cofounder of the Ali Weinberg International



School, visits the school and addresses an assembly of the school's cricket players. He announces that Manju will be awarded a scholarship to travel to England and train with cricket players there for six weeks. Radha grows angry and throws a fit at home, saying that the scholarship should rightfully be his.

Analysis

This section represents the beginning of the rift between Radha and Manju, as Manju appears to surpass Radha in cricket skill. First, Manju outperforms Radha in front of a talent recruiter, then Manju outperforms Radha at the Harris Shield youth cricket competition and even sets a new record, and finally, Manju is picked over Radha for Karim Ali's special cricket scholarship. This creates such drama between the brothers because, as the elder son, Radha had always been expected to be the better cricket player. For most of their childhood, Radha had been the more skilled of the brothers, but now the roles appear to be reversing, and Radha is very upset because it seems as if Manju is usurping his rightful position. This tension continues for most of the book and adds another dimension of family dysfunction, with each of the Kumars feeling dislike or animosity for the others.

Another significant development in this chapter is the beginning of a friendship between Manju and Javed. Manju's father would certainly not approve of this friendship since Javed is technically a competitor against the Kumar brothers. However, Javed's relaxed and empathetic personality seems to provide a stark contrast to Manju's strict and controlling father. Manju is even able to confide in Javed about his secret desire to become a forensic scientist, and Javed encourages Manju in this pursuit, recommending Ruia College as a good place to continue studies after Manju graduates from Ali Weinberg. Even in its early stages, this relationship represents the formation of a life for Manju away from his father and brother, with Javed helping to nurture Manju's other interests. This relationship becomes more significant as the novel progresses.

The altercation between Mohan and his sons represents another major shift in their familial relationship, in that the quality of the father-son relationship becomes even more strained. The reader is never told explicit details of what happens, but it likely occurs when Mohan discovers Radha with Sofia. Mohan's broken leg may have been accidental, or the boys may have even injured their father on purpose, but they appear to show no remorse either way. It is important to note that this altercation arises because Radha attempts to exercise personal freedoms outside of his father's established rules, and thus the violence that follows seems to represent a major shift towards the boys' independence and rejection of their father's control.

Similarly to the altercation between Mohan and his sons, the circumstances of Manju's broken thumb are never fully revealed, only implied, but it still reveals much about his relationship with his father. Although Manju's broken thumb was likely due to an accident while practicing cricket with his father, it quickly comes to represent the abusive aspects of the Kumars' father-son relationship. Both Tommy Sir and Javed notice the injury and indirectly comment upon it with disapproval, but at home, Manju



expresses his unwavering loyalty to his father. This relationship is soon overturned by the altercation between Mohan and his sons, further emphasizing the abusiveness and turbulence of the family dynamic.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the role of socio-economic class in the story. How do the Kumars' lives appear different after receiving a sponsorship? How do the lives and goals of the wealthier characters compare with those of the Kumars?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Manju's broken thumb and Mohan's broken leg. Why does the novel keep the circumstances of these injuries so ambiguous? How does that ambiguity affect the narrative and the reader's experience? What appears to be the actual causes of these injuries?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the role of media in the story. How do the Kumars' interactions with television and print media affect their lives? What is the narrative significance of making such media so prominent in the story?

Vocabulary

physiotherapist, cherish, camaraderie, neurotic, noncommittal, prawn, boisterous, rekindle, expound, quiescent, premature, ornithologist, jaundice, truncate, fragrant, clime, embroider, cordon, intone, endow, anaerobic, sovereign, de facto, bisect, imbibe, marigold, exude, mildew, baroque, precedent, devour, centurion, rummage, equity, paratactic, intrinsic, narcotize, dexterous, sangfroid, paterfamilias



Pages 136 - 194

Summary

As Radha continues to grow, his batting skills continue to worsen since his new proportions throw off his batting technique. Manju grows little, and his cricket skills continue to improve. Mohan asks Manju to refuse the scholarship from Karim Ali, but Manju says that he plans on accepting the scholarship. Meanwhile, Tommy Sir sits in his apartment and struggles to make progress on the history of cricket he is writing. He is distracted by thoughts of Manju, whom Tommy Sir thinks may very well possess the talent to be the next great cricket player. The novel then jumps ahead several months to after Manju has returned from England. He says little about his trip other than that it was enjoyable. Anand Mehta wants Manju to join the Indian Premier League as a mascot in order to make some money, but Tommy Sir says it would be an unnecessary distraction for Manju. Mehta goes home, becomes very drunk, and then has his chauffeur drive him to the Kumars' home in the middle of the night. Mehta bursts in and demands to see Manju. Mehta eventually leaves. Manju wants to report the incident to the police, but neither his father nor his brother supports this idea. Manju then feels as if he is completely isolated, even in his pursuit of cricket.

Manju goes to the mall with Javed, and Javed asks Manju about England. Manju doesn't say much about it, as he appears to have done little in England other than practice cricket. Javed says that Manju still acts like a slave to his father, and Javed convinces Manju to shave as an act of rebellion. Mohan has forbidden his sons to shave until they are 21, as Mohan believes shaving releases distracting hormones. Javed helps Manju shave in the mall bathroom. When Manju gets home, Mohan does not comment on Manju's shaved face, and Manju believes it is because his father is now scared of him. Javed then convinces Manju to see a career counselor. The counselor, Jignesh Seth, warns Manju against blindly following his father's orders, and urges him to determine what path will truly make him happy. Later, Javed tells Manju that he plans on quitting cricket. Javed says that cricket is a form of mind control and urges Manju to quit as well.

At home, the Kumars watch a news report about a young cricket player named T.E. Sarfraz Khan, who has far surpassed Manju's batting record. Radha goes on a date with Sofia, but on the train, he suffers embarrassment at the hands of passersby who overhear Radha's banter with Sofia and mock him for it. Later, Radha lashes out against Manju, accusing him of being a homosexual since he spends so much time with Javed, who is rumored to be homosexual. Manju soon becomes aware of two conflicting influences battling for his future, his father on one side and Javed on the other. Rather than making a firm decision about his future, Manju determines to study hard for college entrance exams while simultaneously keeping up with his cricket training. Manju is accepted to Ruia, and the narrative then jumps ahead to his first year of college. Selection day is only three months away, and Manju is widely believed to have a good chance of being selected for a professional cricket team.



Analysis

During the narrative arc of this section, the relationship between Manju and his father is degraded even further. Mohan seems to feel that he can no longer exercise the same type of control over his sons. For example, when Manju shaves his face in direct defiance of Mohan's rules, Mohan says nothing. This may be in part because Mohan truly has begun to fear his sons, but Manju's cricket skill may also be a factor in Mohan's newfound deference to Manju. Mohan may be willing to give Manju more liberties as a way of maintaining some of his more talented son's loyalty. Consequently, Manju continues to take advantage of his father's relative aloofness by exploring other interests, such as science and forensics. However, Manju still does not seem to break fully away from the path his father has laid down for him. Manju maintains his commitment to his cricket training, as he seems to feel that cricket may turn out to be his only viable option in the end. In addition, he has been so heavily influenced by his father all of his life that he has trouble fully believing that cricket might not be what he should dedicate his life to.

Javed becomes a significant influence on Manju in terms of Manju's desires and self-image. Javed quickly becomes the primary source of motivation for Manju to act against his father. He encourages Manju to develop an alternate life plan from that of cricket, namely pressing his interest in forensic science. Javed gives Manju the necessary motivation to apply to Ruia College and successfully gain admittance. However, in spite of all of this encouragement and guidance from Javed, Manju is not able to fully convince himself that one path or the other is the correct one. Manju does not seem truly passionate about cricket but he is unable to give up his training since he also harbors some doubts regarding forensic science. Manju and Javed's relationship is also significant in that it raises questions about Manju's sexuality. The text often hints that Javed is likely homosexual, and thus the text implicitly raises the idea that there may be a possible romantic dimension to their relationship.

Meanwhile, Radha's storyline continues to move in a rather pessimistic dimension. His cricket skills continue to worsen as his body grows, and as a result, Radha seems to feel increasingly alienated from those around him. He does not speak much to Manju other than to taunt or lash out at him, nor does he seem to have any meaningful interactions with his father. In the scene on the train, Radha attempts a show of bravado and confidence in front of his girlfriend Sofia, but he is quickly deflated by the taunts of strangers. Radha sees himself through the eyes of the strangers as a boy from the slums with no real potential or meaningful future. This self-reflection seems to represent Radha's growing fear that he may have no future if he fails at cricket.

This section also devotes some time to the novel's supporting cast, mainly Tommy Sir and Anand Mehta, portraying them as fearful and alienated, much like the Kumars. Mehta's drunken belligerence appears to express his general discontentment with how his business affairs are going. Manju seems to represent the one faint glimmer of hope that he currently possesses. Tommy Sir, meanwhile, is rather isolated from people, even from his own daughter, and his private endeavors to record and research history no



longer seem to truly interest him. Tommy Sir also places his hopes in Manju, for want of any other tangible goal in his life.

Discussion Question 1

What major changes occur within the Kumars' family relationships? What are the causes of these changes, and what are their narrative significances?

Discussion Question 2

How does Manju's relationship with Javed evolve over time? What appears to be the nature and cause of their relationship, and what is their relationship's narrative significance?

Discussion Question 3

Tommy Sir and Anand Mehta have persisted in the narrative as recurring supporting characters. What narrative purposes do they serve, and how do their story arcs compare and/or contrast with those of the more prominent characters?

Vocabulary

banyan, chastise, circumambulate, bougainvillea, filigree, adjacent, obscene, maverick, encroach, prehensile, pantomime, pallor, promenade, quicksilver, brio, misanthropy, iridescent, brazen, zygote, enlightenment, proprietor, bantamweight, sardonic, palpable, volumetric, superlative, magniloquent, controversy, vindication, subcontinent, congeal, amphitheater, cataract, grandeur, excruciating, chivalry, spume, lungis, lather, reflexive



Pages 195 - 242

Summary

Manju and Javed meet at a restaurant and discuss their respective experiences at college. Manju attends Ruia College in Mumbai, and Javed attends college in Navi Mumbai. Javed casually admits that he is in fact homosexual, and he implies that he thinks Manju is as well. Manju flees nervously and tells his father that he will practice cricket every day until selection day. The day before selection day, Sofia gives Manju a ride to school in her chauffeured car. She says she knows Manju is homosexual and supports him in it. Instead of responding, Manju simply opens the car door and jumps out to walk the rest of the way to school. Later, Manju finds Radha practicing on a cricket field and confronts him, asking Radha why he has been saying that Manju is homosexual. Radha says he did it out of jealousy, and he also demands Manju to fail on purpose during selection day.

On selection day, Mohan wakes to find that Manju has already departed for the tryouts. Mohan is worried that Radha will not be selected, but he waves away these doubts. However, when Radha goes up to bat, he is eliminated after scoring only 20 runs, which is far fewer than the necessary number to secure his selection. Tommy Sir lightly chastises Radha and then attempts to calm him, but Radha bursts into an uncontrollable rage. He storms off, and when he happens to run into the fielder who got Radha out, Radha beats the player savagely with a cricket bat. The narrative cuts to Mohan and Manju going to see Anand Mehta in his hotel room. Mehta says Radha is currently on the run from the police after his attack on the other cricket player. Mehta bemoans the failures of all of his other business ventures. He also says that the parents of the player Radha attacked have threatened to sue for 75,000 rupees, and that he expects the Kumars to be responsible for that sum.

Later, while Manju is walking about town with Javed, Javed once again urges Manju to give up cricket. He says that Manju can stay with him in Navi Mumbai, but he adds that Manju should not contact him until he is ready to give up cricket for good. Meanwhile, Radha is on a bus back to the Kumars' old village, where he will hide from the police. Radha reflects on his relationship with his father and how dysfunctional it truly was. Later, Tommy Sir meets with Manju, wanting to make sure Manju will agree to play professional cricket if he is selected. Manju does not give a clear answer. Back at home, Manju does not wish to talk to his father about that day's cricket tryouts. Mohan says that Radha is in their village, working in the fields. Mohan goes to a bar by himself, laments his sons' fates, and prays to the god Subramanya one last time, begging for at least one of his sons to become a professional cricket player.

The narrative jumps to the week after selection day. Manju has fled to Navi Mumbai to live with Javed. Javed expresses concern that Manju will change his mind and return to Mumbai, but Manju says he will not. Javed confiscates Manju's cell phone so that Mohan and Tommy Sir cannot contact him. The next day, Javed introduces Manju to



one of his new friends, Ranjith. Ranjith appears to be a troublemaker, and Manju notices that Javed acts differently around him. Manju later accuses Javed of not being himself. Meanwhile, Mehta is meeting with a foreign investor who expresses interest in his cricket sponsorship program.

Analysis

In the scenes leading up to selection day, the novel explicitly explores Manju's character through questions of sexuality. The book juxtaposes two scenes in which Manju's sexuality is questioned by other characters, first by Javed and then by Sofia. This is the novel's first direct address to a question it has posed only through subtle implications before. Manju's lack of interest in girls and his close friendship with Javed have acted to raise questions about Manju's sexuality. However, when Manju is finally confronted directly about the matter, neither he nor the narrative gives any direct conclusion. Manju appears to fear the question, since in both instances he simply flees the premises. At first, this may seem to represent Manju's fear at having to admit to being homosexual, but the novel never makes a definitive statement on Manju's sexuality. Thus, these scenes seem to be representative of Manju's general fear of intimacy. This may be connected to the abuse and dysfunction Manju has suffered at the hands of his father, but the novel waits until later to address that dynamic in more depth.

On page 208, Mohan awakes at the beginning of selection day and fears that the deity Subramanya has made a mistake, giving Radha the desire to be a cricket player without the talent, while giving Manju the talent to be a cricket player but not the desire. While Mohan tries to ignore this thought, it actually functions as an apt articulation of a main source of tension between the two brothers. Both Radha and Manju have been conditioned by their father to want nothing but to become a cricket player, but Radha is never able to rise to the necessary skill level, and Manju is never able to fully feel as if cricket is truly what he wants to pursue in life. This three-way dynamic of dysfunction appears to come to its climax in this section, as Radha fails to be selected, takes out his anger on another player, and then must flee to the Kumars' old village to hide. Meanwhile, Manju attends the tryouts and then flees Mumbai the following week. It is important to note that Manju flees only after completing the selection day tryouts, giving him the option of going back to Mumbai if he is selected. This seems representative of Manju's chronic inability to make an active decision regarding his own future.

One brief but significant scene in this section regarding Javed is the interaction between Javed and Ranjith that Manju observes. Up to this point, Javed has been the character that most starkly embodies independence and independent thinking. He constantly urges Manju to think for himself and not constantly obey his father. Javed quits cricket of his own accord and says he will no longer be controlled. However, when Manju observes Javed interacting with Ranjith, Manju notes that Javed's personality and behavior seem significantly altered by Ranjith's presence. In this way, both the reader and Manju are shown that Javed may not understand his own identity and desires as much as he says he does. This foreshadows Javed's ultimate character development as



someone who constantly struggles with identity, despite his constant declarations that he is independent and confident in his identity.

Discussion Question 1

How has the relationship between Radha and Manju evolved over the novel? What are the characteristics of this relationship leading up to selection day, and how does that reflect upon each of the brothers as characters?

Discussion Question 2

During the actual selection day, how are the events of the day presented? How are the events structured, and what details are included or omitted? How does this affect the reader's experience, and how does it affect the narrative function of the selection day itself?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss what happens to each of the Kumars on selection day. How do these events fit in to their character arcs, and how do these events reflect on the theme of those arcs? Also, how do they reflect upon the Kumars' relationships with one another?

Vocabulary

excavate, tarpaulin, resurrect, ebony, mutton, turbulent, glottal, preempt, demarcate, brahmin, ocher, pennant, sari, bylane, epithet, sanction, regimen, jetty, substantiate, euphoria, mandate, deity, garland, spitfire, endocrine, commensurate, titration, litmus, pandal, devotee, prerogative, coolie, oblivious, avert, exultant, henna, remuneration, docile



Pages 243 - 285

Summary

Javed's father, a salesman of textbooks, shows up to Javed's apartment one day and enlists Manju's help in moving about some textbooks. They talk, and Manju soon realizes that Javed quit cricket to prove a point to his "sweetly manipulative father" (245). Javed's father no longer dares to tell Javed what to do ever since Javed's brother killed himself. Meanwhile, Javed sits by himself at the mall, composing poems and wondering where Manju is, as they were supposed to meet at the mall that day. After Javed's father leaves Javed's apartment, Manju contemplates returning to Mumbai and to cricket, apparently somewhat shaken by his interaction with Javed's father. In the Western Ghats, Radha works in the fields in the Kumars' old village. Manju is able to contact Radha by calling the cell phone of an uncle of theirs who lives in the village. The brothers express mutual anger for their father, and Radha says he wants to go back to cricket, saying it is all he is good for. The narrative then briefly moves to Tommy Sir, showing him lamenting the fact that when he finally found a great cricket player in Manju, Manju did not seem to have the true desire to play the sport.

Manju and Javed go walking about Navi Mumbai. Javed senses that Manju is thinking about returning to Mumbai, and Javed warns him against it. Manju seems hesitant to state a decision one way or another, but he finally swears that he will not leave Javed. That evening, back at Javed's apartment, Manju tells Javed to go to the nearby store and get some condoms, heavily implying that he wishes to have sex with Javed. However, when Javed leaves to buy the condoms, Manju finds himself trying on his cricket equipment. Javed returns to see Manju wearing a cricket helmet and holding a cricket bat. Javed yells in anger at Manju. Manju yells back and storms out, heading for the train station to return to Mumbai. The narrative then cuts to Anand Mehta, who has returned to Mumbai after the failure of his latest business venture. He sees in a newspaper that Manju has been selected to play for the Mumbai cricket team. Mehta calls Tommy Sir to tell him the news, as well as the fact that Manju has apparently returned to Mumbai and now has a girlfriend, Sofia. Mehta then fires Tommy Sir as Manju's trainer before hanging up. Mehta revels in the apparent victory of Manju's selection, believing he has "set a man free" (266).

The novel then cuts to eleven years later. Manju is 27 years old. He played for the India Under-19 cricket team, then for the Mumbai cricket team, and then he was transferred to a novelty cricket league before finally being fired just after turning 27 years old. Manju goes to meet Radha in a bar and tell him the news of his firing. Radha has been generally unemployed in the last decade, likely with financial support from Manju. Neither of them keeps in close contact with their father. The brothers briefly discuss Javed, who has become an actor and con man to support himself. They also mention Tommy Sir, who died of a stroke not long after Manju's selection day. Lastly, Manju tells his brother that he will be employed by the Mumbai Cricket Association as a talent scout, just like Tommy Sir.



Analysis

In this final section, Manju is finally forced to make a firm and lasting decision regarding his future, and he defaults to cricket as the path of least resistance and the least intimacy. At one point, Manju appears to be on the cusp of making the opposite decision. He says he will not leave Javed, and he even declares his intention to begin a sexual relationship. However, in the end, the idea of intimacy becomes too much for Manju to bear, and he flees back to cricket as a way of escaping Javed. Manju's repulsion against all forms of intimacy, especially sexual, becomes even more explicit later on. At age 27, he is a virgin who has never been in a real relationship. This self-imposed isolation appears to be a result of the abuse he suffered at the hands of his father during his childhood and adolescence. Thus Manju finds himself unable to form a true relationship with either himself or others. He does not pursue his passion of forensic science, and he does not pursue relationships with others. Cricket becomes a way for Manju to constantly withdraw from others, never being forced to face intimacy or self-reflection ever again.

The extended section regarding Manju and Javed also provides important insights into the character of Javed and his own demons. When speaking with Javed's father, Manju comes to the conclusion that Javed quit cricket not out of true independence, but simply to rebel against his father. It becomes somewhat clear that, despite Javed's constant advocacy for the ideas of freedom and independence, Javed seems somewhat lost in terms of how to properly apply these principles to his own life. Manju begins to see Javed as a boy who is still struggling with his identity. This interpretation is supported by the portrayal of Javed in the novel's final chapter. As an adult, Javed still seems to struggle with his identity. He has not found a steady profession, instead piecing together a living as an actor and con man. This represents Javed's continued inability to comfortably inhabit an identity. In terms of theme, this dynamic between Manju and Javed establishes a salient question of identity. Javed purports to be free, but his commitment to his idea of freedom leaves him somewhat adrift. Meanwhile, Manju relinquishes his own freedom and attains a steady profession, but he is quite isolated and averse to self-reflection.

Despite the novel's comic moments, the ending of the book seems very tragic in that the various character arcs all seem to end in rather bleak places. Radha is chronically unemployed; Javed struggles with establishing a stable life for himself; Manju is forever stuck in a profession that he is not sure he truly enjoys; and Mohan is now estranged from his sons in addition to being estranged from his wife. Meanwhile, Mehta is never shown to have any substantial business success, and Tommy Sir dies without achieving his dream of finding the world's next great cricket player. In this way, the novel seeks to drive home the point that it deals with themes of great tragedy despite its often comic tone. The story of the Kumars, in the end, is one of family abuse and dysfunction, and one of the book's overarching themes appears to be that of failure. In one way or another, all of the characters fail in their dreams, and the novel finds a bittersweet thematic resolution that failure is simply a part of life.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the evolution of Manju and Javed's relationship. What changes does it undergo, and what appear the factors that lead to its dissolution?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the end of the novel. How do the characters' various failures reflect upon the themes of the novel? Do any of the characters appear to have had any successes? What are the thematic significances of those successes or lack thereof?

Discussion Question 3

In the end, what does the novel seem to say with regards to the Kumar family? How does the arc of their family dynamic reflect upon the book's themes and the idea of family in general?

Vocabulary

primeval, relinquish, lament, shroud, dilute, rustic, aniseed, cyclostyle, convergence, filial, immaculate, madrassa, diminish, valorous, decadence, bestiary, tinge, effluent, ancillary, veranda, luminous, paratha, arrogant, codex, apprise, alloy, carnal, embellish, chappals, soliloquy, reimburse, cull, tableau, obscure, egret, obviate, recede, chikoo, sated, impunity



Characters

Manjunath Kumar

Manjunath “Manju” Kumar is the main character of the novel. He is the son of Mohan Kumar and the younger brother of Radha Kumar by about one year. Like his brother, Manju spends most of his free time practicing cricket, in accordance with the will of his father, in the hopes that he may be selected as a professional cricket player and raise his family out of poverty. However, while Manjunath is willing to obey his father’s wishes, he does not truly desire to play cricket. He secretly wishes to attend college, study forensic science, and become a crime scene investigator like in his favorite television show, “CSI.”

Manju attends Ruia College, but he ultimately drops out to play cricket professionally. He has a middling career and is fired from professional cricket at the age of 27, when he then becomes a professional talent scout. Throughout the novel, Manju struggles with his sexuality, but he never enters a relationship or has a sexual encounter with anyone, ultimately choosing to be alone.

Radha Kumar

Radha Kumar is Mohan Kumar’s eldest son, older than Manju by about one year. While Mohan wishes for Radha to be the best cricket batter in the world, and for Manju to be the second best, Radha’s cricket skills are diminished after a growth spurt he has, and Radha is not selected as a professional cricket player.

Radha becomes jealous of Manju’s superior cricket skills, especially since Manju does not truly wish to play cricket, and Mohan had always favored Radha, since Radha was the older son. Radha is devastated by his failure in cricket after devoting so many years to it, and when he fails to be selected for a professional team, he attacks a fellow cricket player out of rage. He then flees to the family’s old village to temporarily hide from the authorities. He eventually returns to Mumbai, but he never plays cricket again.

Mohandas Kumar

Mohandas “Mohan” Kumar is the father of Manju and Radha Kumar. He moved with his wife and sons from their village in Western Ghats to Mumbai when the boys were little. His wife left him soon after, and in order to overcome his grief, he resolves that his boys will become the best cricket players in the world and commits to training them.

To make a living, Mohan sells chutney in the streets of Mumbai until the boys receive a training sponsorship from the wealthy Anand Mehta. Mohan is obsessed with ideas of his sons becoming great cricket players, and he gives little thought to the boys’ mental,



emotional, and physical well-being. Ultimately, his relationship with his sons completely deteriorates, and they don't keep in regular contact with him when they are adults.

Tommy Sir

Narayanrao Sadashivrao Kulkarni—nicknamed “Tommy Sir”—is a cricket talent scout with the Mumbai Cricket Association. He is an old and misanthropic man who is obsessed with cricket and with finding cricket players talented enough to play professionally. After seeing Radha and Manju play, he helps negotiate a sponsorship deal for them with the wealthy Anand Mehta. He helps with their training and wishes them to succeed, if only to fulfill his own desire of discovering the next great cricket player.

Tommy Sir often extols the great values and merits of cricket, but he privately believes that it takes a type of monster to find a great cricket player, as well as to be one, which is why he is often so harsh to his players. He dies of a stroke shortly after Manju is selected for a professional cricket team.

Pramod Sawant

Pramod Sawant is a coach associated with the Mumbai Cricket Association. He is the person who originally brings Radha and Manju to Tommy Sir's attention. He is very excited by Radha and Manju, believing them to have the potential to become great cricket players. Pramod is not very present in the plot after Radha and Manju are first introduced to Tommy Sir, but Pramod's optimism and enthusiasm provide a counterpoint to the bitterness and skepticism of the elderly Tommy Sir.

Anand Mehta

Anand Mehta is a businessman from a wealthy Mumbai family. He originally moved to New York City to work a desk job in the finance industry, but he grew bored and returned to India to become an entrepreneur. Anand is highly unsuccessful in all of his business ventures. Anand becomes interested in cricket and decides that he wants to sponsor some young cricket players through financial support.

Tommy Sir convinces him to sponsor Radha and Manju, so Anand agrees to give the Kumars a set amount of money each month until selection day. In the end, this pays off moderately when Manju plays cricket professionally, but Anand generally fails in most of his business ventures. In terms of personality, he is somewhat unpredictable, especially when he drinks. He grows very pessimistic about India in general and the difficulty it presents in both making money and helping the poor.



Javed Ansari

Javed Ansari is a schoolmate of Radha and Manju, as well as a fellow cricket player. Javed is a very talented cricket player, but he eventually quits the sport out of disinterest. He comes from a very comfortable financial background. His father is a textbook salesman, and his brother committed suicide, leaving his father very reluctant to do anything to displease Javed, his only remaining son. Javed is very strong-willed, but he never has a truly firm sense of his own identity or what he wants in life.

Javed attends college in Navu Mumbai, and he gives Manju a place to stay after Manju flees his father. Javed is sexually attracted to men and attempts to begin a relationship with Manju. Manju agrees at first but then rebuffs Javed and goes back to his father. Javed is a kind person as a youth, but as an adult, he makes a living as a con man and failing actor, representing his continued inability to comfortably inhabit an identity.

Sofia

Sofia is a schoolmate of Manju and Radha. She is described as having spots on her neck, which is likely a symptom of vitiligo. She does not play cricket, and she finds cricket players amusingly eccentric. Radha takes a romantic interest in her, and they begin dating. They eventually break up, and she forms a relationship with Manju after he is selected to play cricket professionally. However, Manju does not really love her, and he eventually breaks off the relationship. She and Manju never have any sexual encounters, as Manju does not wish to do so with anyone. Sofia represents the only significant feminine influence in the lives of Radha and Manju, but she is unable to significantly influence either of them.

Karim Ali

Karim Ali is one of the founders of the Ali Weinberg International School, which Radha, Manju, Javed, and Sofia attend. Karim Ali believes cricket to be an important tool for empowering the people of India, so the school gives cricket players special allowances to allow them to focus on the sport. Karim Ali even awards Manju a full scholarship to go to England for six weeks and train with cricket players there. This drives a wedge between Radha and Manju.

Jignesh Seth

Jignesh Seth is a student counselor at Ruia College, which Manju attends after graduating from the Ali Weinberg International School. Manju meets with Jignesh Seth at the request of Javed. Jignesh Seth is a very cheerful and optimistic man, and he tries to persuade Manju to think for himself. He realizes that Manju may only be pursuing cricket due to the wishes of his father, so he encourages Manju to consider other options and think about whether he would truly be happy as a cricket player. Even

though Manju does end up as a cricket player, Jignesh Seth's counsel does appear to influence Manju somewhat.



Symbols and Symbolism

Cricket

Cricket symbolizes different things to different characters, but for the most part, it represents an ideal form of success. Most of the novel's characters believe that success in cricket is the ideal form of mastery over one's destiny. Mohan believes that if his sons succeed in cricket, it will lift them out of poverty and make up for his wife's departure from their lives.

Manju and Radha, raised to value success in cricket over everything else, have no choice but to view professional cricket as their ultimate goal. Tommy Sir articulates success in cricket as mastery over one's baser nature; Karim Ali sees cricket as a way to empower the people of India; and Anand Mehta sees it as an avenue for financial success. The unifying theme for these views is that success in cricket appears analogous to success in life.

Money

Money symbolizes personal worth and achievement. The Kumars come from a poor farming background, and they come to Mumbai in order to improve their economic situation. Mohan is seen as an embarrassment when he must resort to selling chutney on the streets in order to scrape together a meager living, but when his sons secure a cricket scholarship, the money allows them to move to a better neighborhood and take pride in their improved circumstances. Even characters that already have a comfortable financial situation, such as Anand Mehta, view money as a measure of personal achievement. Despite his fortune, Mehta wishes to prove himself a worthy businessman by creating successful business ventures. His inability to do so causes him to view himself as a failure.

“Young Lions”

“Young Lions” symbolizes the brutal competitiveness that necessarily arises between potential cricket players. In the novel, “Young Lions” is a television show that features news coverage of promising young cricket hopefuls. Radha and Manju are featured on the show, as are the players who represent their competition. Being featured on “Young Lions” gives the Kumars hope, but they are still nervous about the strong competitors that the show also features. This fear and competitiveness drives them even harder in their pursuit for cricket greatness, which unfortunately leads to personal disappointments for each of them. Radha is not selected for a professional cricket team, and Manju is selected, but it does not seem to be what he truly wants.



"CSI"

The television show "CSI" symbolizes Manju's true passion, which is ultimately thwarted by his need to pursue cricket under the compulsion of his father's obsessive coaching. "CSI" stands for crime scene investigations. "CSI" refers to the general practice of criminal forensic science, and it is also the title of a popular American TV franchise that Manju watches regularly. Through the television show "CSI," Manju develops a deep interest in forensic science, and because of this interest, he applies himself rigorously to his science studies at both the Ali Weinberg International School and Ruis College. Manju appears to have the drive and intelligence to become a competent forensic scientist, but he ultimately leaves college and gives up his private dream in order to pursue cricket.

Religion

In the novel, the Kumars' religious practices symbolize their hope and faith that what they are doing is the right thing. When Mohan begins training his sons to be cricket players, he makes a deal with the Hindu god Subramany that Mohan will donate money to religious institutions if his sons become great cricket players. Mohan and his sons pray regularly for success in cricket, and Radha and Manju believe that their father has a secret contract with God that ensures their success. However, when their family relationship deteriorates along with their hope with regards to cricket, the boys realize that this contract was not real or substantive. Their faith in religion is shaken along with their faith in their father.

Family

In this novel, the concept of family mostly symbolizes dysfunction and lost opportunities. The Kumars' family relationship is central to the narrative, but their family story is a tragic one. Mohan's wife abandons him and their sons not long after they move to Mumbai, and this creates a deep pit of grief in Mohan that he tries to fill by training his sons in cricket. Consequently, Mohan's obsession not only leads to the deterioration of his relationship with his sons, but it also appears to cause long-term trauma for Radha and Manju. They both devote their entire beings to the sport, but Radha ultimately lacks the skill, and Manju lacks the desire. This causes them to hate themselves and their father. Thus, the story of the Kumar family is representative of many missed opportunities to build a loving family unit, from the departure of the mother onwards.

Secrets

Secrets symbolize barriers and gaps of understanding between friends and family. For example, the novel opens with a prologue in which infant Manju explores the world through taste and mentally tabulates his secret observations. His father soon forces him to stop putting things in his mouth, and thus Manju seems to learn that he should not



disobey his father or keep things from him. However, Manju does guiltily entertain dreams of become a forensic scientist, and he does not talk to his father about his sexual confusion. These secrets represent a rift between Manju and Mohan that eventually widens enough to completely dissolve their father-son relationship.

Antibiotics

Antibiotics represent Mohan's obsession with control over his sons and their fates. He says that illness is a major obstacle for athletes, so he attempts to teach himself pharmacology; he uses antibiotics like amoxicillin and azithromycin as methods of keeping his sons healthy. His sons see this as a sign of their father's competency and intelligence, but as they grow older, they realize that it is really just posturing and that their father does not really know what he is doing. As their cricket aspirations die, so too does their confidence in their father and his methods of controlling fate.

The Magician and the Elephant

The magician and the elephant symbolize Mohan's view that no one is born free, and that freedom is won through hard work and determination. The magician who visits Mohan's village appears to use mind control to make his elephant do tricks for entertainment. For Mohan, this comes to represent the invisible shackles that are inherent to all people. He sees his sons' cricket potential as a method of possibly breaking these shackles, overcoming poverty, and to forge their own paths through life. However, no character in the novel appears able to completely break free of the various shackles that bind them.

Kattale

Kattale is a Kannada word meaning darkness, and it symbolizes despair and alienation. Manju often thinks about the concept of kattale, describing it as a deeper kind of darkness than any word in English can describe. Manju's life is filled with personal hardships and alienation, and he often thinks of the idea of kattale in his times of despair. Manju's interpretation of kattale appears to affect most characters in the novel, as they each suffer alienation and other difficulties in their personal and professional lives. Ultimately, most characters in the novel appear marked by kattale as they fail to achieve the goals they set out to meet.



Settings

Mumbai

Mumbai, also known as Bombay, is the capital city of the Indian state of Maharashtra. With approximately 12 million inhabitants, it is the most populous city in the country and one of the most populous cities in the world. The Kumars move to Mumbai from their village in order to pursue economic opportunities afforded in the city. Mumbai is also the location of the Mumbai Cricket Association and the base of the Mumbai cricket team. Mohan makes a living as a chutney salesman in Mumbai while training his sons in cricket in the hopes that they will be selected to play for the Mumbai cricket team. Mumbai is a hectic and crowded urban center that presents many difficulties and chaotic situations for the Kumars and other characters.

Western Ghats

This setting is a mountain range that runs parallel to India's west coast. The Kumars were originally from a rural farming village in Western Ghats before they moved to Mumbai. After Radha attacks a fellow cricket player, he flees to the village to escape capture by the police. He is given shelter by the members of his extended family who still live there, and he spends his time helping with farm work. The attention to the Kumars' rural origins helps to illustrate important social dynamics within India, as well as within the Kumar family. Much of Mumbai's poorer residents have relocated from farming communities, and the Kumars' position among these poorer residents adds urgency to their attempts to escape poverty.

Dahisar and Chembur

Dahisar and Chembur are two suburbs of Mumbai. Dahisar is a very impoverished neighborhood, while Chembur is a relatively wealthy one. The Kumars first move to Dahisar when they come to Mumbai, but they then move to Chembur once they secure a cricket sponsorship from Anand Mehta. The Kumars' move to Chembur represents the social mobility that cricket affords them, but this mobility is revealed to be somewhat limited when Manju and Radha's cricket aspirations fall short of their ambitions and expectations.

Navi Mumbai

Navi Mumbai is a planned township off the west coast of Mumbai. It was established in the 1970s, and it is where Javed Ansari resides while he attends college. Manju flees to Navi Mumbai after selection day in an attempt to flee his father's influence for good. Manju also struggles with his sexuality while staying with Javed, but this struggle ends without resolution when Manju decides to return to Mumbai and the life his father



planned for him. Navi Mumbai represents the life of freedom that Javed constantly advocates for and appears to have achieved in his relative independence from his own father.

Ali Weinberg International School

Manju and Radha attend the Ali Weinberg International School and play on the school's cricket team. Karim Ali, one of the school's founders, believes in cricket as a means of empowering the people of India, so the school places great emphasis on the importance of the sport. Karim Ali even awards Manju a scholarship to spend six weeks in England training with English youth cricket players. This causes a considerable rift between Manju and Radha.

Ruia College

Ruia College is located in Mumbai and is one of the most highly reputed colleges in India. Manju is accepted to Ruia and enrolls, but he is eventually forced to drop out in order to pursue cricket. If Manju had given up cricket and stayed in college, he likely would have been able to pursue his secret interest in forensic science. Ruia therefore represents the path in life that Manju attempts to forge for himself, but which he ultimately gives up in favor of cricket and his father's wishes.

England

Although none of the scenes presented in the novel actually take place in England, it represents an important location in terms of the narrative. Manju spends six weeks training in England on a cricket scholarship from Karim Ali, co-founder of the Ali Weinberg International School, which both Manju and Radha attend. Manju's selection for the scholarship over Radha represents a major turning point in the deterioration of their relationship. In addition, Manju's time in England ironically represents a significant moment for Manju's character in how uneventful his time there is. This foreshadows his inability to broaden his horizons and break away from the will of his father.



Themes and Motifs

Family

One of the main sources of drama in *Selection Day* is the persistent dysfunction amongst the members of the Kumar family, as the novel explores the nature of family responsibilities through the friction and tension between Mohan and his sons. From early on in his sons' lives, Mohan takes it upon himself to direct Radha and Manju's activities and life paths, disciplining the boys strictly and dictating what their futures are to be. In part, this is supposedly a means of lifting the family out of poverty, focusing on the practice of cricket as a means of eventually improving the family's financial position. However, Mohan's total control over his sons restricts Radha and Manju's ability to determine their own paths in life and explore other interests. They are left with no options beyond pursuing cricket, and thus Manju gives up his interest in forensic science, and Radha is left chronically unemployed after failing to be drafted. Moreover, Mohan's methods of maintaining control over his sons are portrayed as abusive and manipulative. Mohan is thusly portrayed as failing in his duties as a father despite supposedly wishing to improve his family's position.

The novel also portrays how this tragic dysfunction, which stems from faults of the father, infects and destroys the bond of brotherhood between Radha and Manju. In their shared oppression, suffering together under the invasive control of their father, Radha and Manju maintain a close and supportive relationship, fulfilling a brotherly responsibility of mutual protection. However, because they have been so ingrained by their father to believe that Radha is supposed to be the more skilled of the two brothers, Radha and Manju's relationship deteriorates when Manju surpasses his older brother. Radha grows scared and jealous, so he acts aggressively towards Manju. As a result, they grow distant and lose their relationship of mutual support. Fortunately, they are able to repair their relationship after they separate themselves from their father, but the deterioration of their brotherly relationship remains a key source of drama and tension in the narrative.

Overall, this dysfunction is partially framed as a result of the departure of the unnamed matriarch of the Kumar family, Mohan's wife and Radha and Manju's mother. Her abandonment of her husband and sons is presented as a failure of family responsibility that contributes to the failures of responsibility discussed above. Mohan's cricket-related monomania is in large part a response to his grief for the departure of his wife; in order to distract himself from the pain and keep himself active, he directs all his attention to training and controlling his sons. As established above, this control leads not only to the deterioration of his relationship with Radha and Manju, but also to the deterioration of Radha and Manju's relationship with each other. The mother's departure not only causes and foreshadows this family dysfunction, it also casts the novel's chain of events in an even more tragic light, the mother's absence casting an even deeper pall over the dissolution of the Kumar family.



Thwarted Aspirations

By the end of the novel, all of the novel's central characters and supporting cast find that they have each fallen far short of their aspirations, having sacrificed much and gained little. Despite being drafted for a professional cricket team, Manju's cricket career is relatively short and mediocre. Moreover, Manju never truly wished to be a cricket player, having a greater interest in other areas, like forensic science. Meanwhile, Radha completely fails in his one dream to be a cricket player, and Mohan finds himself completely alienated from his sons in addition to his wife. Tommy Sir never discovers the next greatest cricket player; Anand Mehta never becomes a successful businessman; and Javed Ansari finds himself free and independent but unable to establish a firm identity for himself. The ubiquity of failure creates a pessimistic atmosphere in the novel that helps to highlight the apparent foolishness of the various characters' monomania. In the end, the truly arbitrary nature of the characters' goals is revealed and is starkly contrasted with the relationships and personal potential they sacrificed in their single-minded pursuits.

The lack of true success in the narrative creates a thematic argument against sacrificing love and relationships in favor of an arbitrary dream, for the characters end up quite isolated as well as disappointed in the face of their failures. Much like the misanthropic and embittered Tommy Sir, the main characters find themselves cut off from one another, despite the many potential relationships the novel presents. Radha and Manju's relationship is mostly reestablished by the end of the novel, but it is nearly destroyed by their extreme sibling rivalry. Mohan's monomania, which acted as a response to the departure of his wife, tragically results in Mohan's alienation from his children as well. By the end of the novel, Manju finds himself willfully withdrawn from all substantive relationships with people around him, including Javed, with whom he almost initiated a romantic affair. This sense of widespread isolation serves to highlight the steep price of single-mindedly pursuing one goal.

The recurring nature of failure in the novel appears to highlight both its inevitability and value. The book's characters find themselves with very little to value in their lives because they never prepared themselves for the possibility of failure. The unavoidability of failure is strongly foreshadowed when Manju speaks to Principal Patricia, on page 88. Unprompted, Principal Patricia begins to speak of her failed dreams of being a writer. This portent connects directly with the thwarted dreams of the book's characters, who count on the success of their specific goals and then find themselves adrift and unable to adapt when circumstances thwart their efforts towards those goals. In this way, the novel acts as a cautionary tale to the reader that specific plans almost never work out without problems, so a person should not sacrifice all other things of value in their life in pursuit of a specific dream.



Identity

The struggles of the novel's central characters are in various ways struggles for identity. Manju struggles to choose between two conflicting life paths; Radha struggles to fulfill the identity that has been thrust upon him by his father; Mohan struggles to maintain a chosen direction in life in order to forget his absent wife; Anand Mehta struggles to reinvent himself as a successful entrepreneur; Javed struggles to create a self-image outside of cricket; and Tommy Sir struggles to leave a legacy as a great talent scout. In each of these cases, the characters struggle with either fulfilling a specific identity or deciding who they believe themselves to be. Each of the characters' goals is anchored in a desired self-image. Ultimately, when these characters fail at fulfilling a specific identity, they are left to occupy what the novel represents as a lack of identity, stagnating and making no strides towards any form of personal fulfillment.

Manju undergoes one of the most important identity struggles in the novel, as he is the central character, and he struggles between two ideas of himself and his future. On one hand, he feels a persistent sense of loyalty to his father's wishes, and on the other hand, he experiences influence from his friend Javed, who encourages him to resist his father and pursue non-cricket interests. Manju's two possible identities are directly at odds with one another, for whether he decides to pursue cricket or pursue studies in forensic science, choosing one path precludes the ability to pursue the other in the future. Manju also struggles with identity in terms of his sexuality, implicitly feeling sexual attraction towards Javed but ultimately being unable to act on his attraction. One could argue that, in the end, Manju actually forgoes the task of creating an identity for himself, rejecting both Mohan and Javed, choosing to play cricket, but only as a form of isolation. This isolation is also a method of avoiding coming reflection upon his sexual identity, instead simply keeping his distance from people. With regards to both his life pursuits and sexual identity, Manju avoids true self-reflection and thereby appears to reject the idea of identity altogether.

Another major way in which the narrative explores identity is directly through the character of Javed. Javed rejects the idea of creating an identity through cricket, as well as relying on the wishes of his family for direction in life. When speaking with Manju, he consistently extols the value of freedom and self-determination. However, this idea is complicated in the fact that Javed never seems to establish a clear and stable identity for himself. Manju witnesses the lack of stability in Javed's identity when Javed interacts with Ranjith. Around Ranjith, Javed acts appeasing and overly masculine, unlike how he acts when he is just with Manju. Moreover, at the end of the novel, Javed is a con man and a failing actor, both professions requiring the use of many different personas. Javed's struggle to maintain both freedom and identity serve to add depth, complexity, and higher stakes to the identity struggles of all of the novel's characters.



Relationships and Intimacy

Through Manju, the novel explores the tragedy of being unable to connect to other human beings. At the end of the novel, Manju notes that “his excellence, his uniqueness, was not in cricket, not in batting, he had discovered—but in withdrawing. He could pull back from human beings like the ocean” (280). The trauma and difficulties of his childhood have left him unable and unwilling to form truly intimate connections with any person. He remains in regular contact with his brother, but this appears to be partially due to Radha’s inability to support himself financially. As a teenager, Manju maintains relationships with his father, his brother, and his friend Javed, but his father’s abuse appears to have destroyed Manju’s ability to connect with others. The dysfunction caused by Mohan’s dictatorial parenting seems to scar Manju and lead him to prefer a life of solitude rather than one of companionship; the trauma of Manju’s turbulent relationship with his father and brother leave him averse to emotional intimacy for fear of suffering similar trauma in the future.

One of the most significant instances of Manju’s social withdrawal is the dissolution of his relationship with Javed. Javed attempts to be a supportive friend, and there even appears to be the potential for a romantic relationship between them. However, when Manju tells Javed he wishes to consummate their relationship physically, the prospect of intimacy quickly becomes too frightening for Manju, and he runs away to a life of playing cricket and remaining isolated from others. This aversion to sexual intimacy is foreshadowed in Manju’s general aversion to discussing sexual subjects, and his fear of physical intimacy appears to be an extension of his fear of emotional intimacy. This connects to the overly strict and invasive practices of Mohan Kumar, who would often invasively inspect his sons’ genitals as a way of measuring their health and making sure they were not sexually active (45).

Dysfunctional relationships and lack of intimacy also markedly affect the narrative arc of the book’s other characters. For example, Tommy Sir, the embodiment of self-sacrifice for the sake of ambition, maintains a very cold relationship with his wife and is not very close with his daughter. Meanwhile, Anand Mehta is always portrayed as highly occupied with his business ventures and does not seem to spend much time attempting to connect emotionally with friends and family. Most importantly, Mohan and Radha also suffer from a lack of intimacy due to the dysfunction of the Kumar family. Mohan’s monomania arises after his wife abandons him, and that same monomania eventually leaves him abandoned by his sons as well. Meanwhile, even though Radha does seem to value friends and romance as a teenager, he leads a quite solitary and indolent life as an adult, likely for reasons similar to Manju’s.

Adulthood and Independence

For the novel’s younger characters, the narrative functions as a coming-of-age story, with each maturing teenager grappling with the approaching responsibilities of adulthood. This struggle is expressed both in the characters’ relationships with their



parents and the characters' relationships with themselves. As Radha and Manju grow older, their relationship with their father becomes increasingly strained and complicated. As young boys, both Radha and Manju looked to their father for guidance, but as they age, their willingness to blindly follow their father's orders slowly disappears. After rejecting their father's authority, Radha and Manju are left with only their own personal wills as methods of decision-making. Javed finds himself in a similar situation after quitting cricket as a statement of independence directed towards his own father. The three boys exercise their own wills to vary degrees of success, remaining out of the control of their fathers, but largely failing to establish satisfying paths as adults. Through these hardships and frustrations, the narrative demonstrates the true price and difficulty of independence and adulthood.

The novel also explores the difficulties of adulthood and independence through the characters that have already entered before the beginning of the narrative. The three most important adult characters are Mohan Kumar, Anand Mehta, and Tommy Sir, and despite large degrees of independence, each of them struggles bitterly with the perceived demands of adulthood. Anand Mehta, for example, is not content to be a salaried employee in New York, but rather wishes to establish his independence and personal importance by pursuing his own independent business ventures. However, he ultimately sees little success in these endeavors. Tommy Sir, meanwhile, considers it his adult responsibility to find and refine young cricket players, but he never achieves this to his highest satisfaction. Most significant to the narrative, however, is Mohan's struggle as an independent adult and single father. He attempts to maintain a firm hand and choose a useful direction for his sons, but he ultimately fails, making his sons miserable and driving them away. The failures of the adults in Selection Day directly parallel those of the teenagers with regards to adulthood and independence. In this way, the narrative illustrates that the struggles of adulthood and independent action do not cease once one has entered adulthood, but rather the struggle continues and often ends in various failures. Manju is the only character shown to achieve some semblance of stasis and stability, being granted a stable long-term job, but his concessions to isolation and lack of self-determination are set to shape the rest of his life.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is related by a third-person narrator with focus on several different character perspectives, mainly Mohan, Radha, Manju, Anand Mehta, and Tommy Sir. However, the most prominent perspective is that of Manju, as he is quickly developed as the novel's central character. In many ways, the novel is an ensemble piece, building its themes through the thoughts and actions of several different characters. However, Manju's struggles and tribulations increasingly become the novel's main focus as the story progresses. On one hand, the novel explores interpersonal relationships, especially among the Kumars, and to do so, the narration inhabits different perspectives to explore each character's thoughts and motivations. However, the main drama of the novel centers around Manju and the decisions he struggles to make regarding his future. Therefore, the largest share of narrative attention is given to Manju's perspective and experiences. The experiences of the other characters help to develop the circumstances surrounding Manju's tribulations, as well as to develop the themes of Manju's character arc and of the novel overall.

It is important to note, however, that the novel is never told in first-person. Despite the fact that the narration always assumes a specific character's point of view, the narration remains in third-person throughout the novel. This allows the novel to delve into the thoughts of the various point-of-view characters while also providing exposition regarding the larger setting of the narrative. Allowing the narration to alternate between focusing on one character's perspective and also examining the character's larger patterns and habits allows the novel the flexibility necessary to cover a large period of chronology, since the bulk of the novel takes place over three years. This also allows the novel to tie the themes of specific character arcs into a larger thematic whole. Lastly, the use of third-person allows the narration to be somewhat detached, giving the novel's subject matter an often humorous treatment. The novel is then able to subvert that humor when focusing on specific tragedies, especially towards the end of the narrative.

Language and Meaning

Selection Day deals with many dark themes and subjects, such as family dysfunction, shattered dreams, and even varying degrees of child abuse. However, the tone of the narrative is often light and even humorous. The story covers a long period of time, moving along briskly and often with satirical narrative comments on the actions of the characters. Because the novel's scenes are so short and the narration remains somewhat detached in third-person, the darker subject matter is often obscured beneath humor and satire. However, the dark subject matter remains persistent throughout the novel and ultimately becomes the most prominent tonal aspect. As each character is defeated in one way or another by their own personal obstacles and demons, the reader cannot ignore the tragic outcomes. The end of the novel is very



disheartening in many ways, with very few characters receiving anything they truly wished for. This creates a sharp swerve towards the tragic, which retroactively highlights the themes of tragedy and sadness in the novel. On one hand, the humor serves to help bear the reader through to the end of the sad narrative, but it also serves as a comment on how humor can often obscure serious problems.

When dealing directly with the darker and more tragic aspects of the narrative, the narration remains generally restrained, allowing the reactions of the characters to supply the reader with a sense of pathos. For example, as Radha flees Mumbai after his failure on selection day, the narration does not simply tell the reader that Radha is in a state of sorrow, or even describe any symptoms of sorrow such as tears or sobs. Instead, the narration simply describes how Radha observes a nearby man tending to an infant child, Radha seeing this as a direct contrast to his own upbringing under a harsh and controlling father. This creates a far more powerful sense of pathos in that it characterizes Radha in that moment as looking back with regret on his entire childhood, not just his failure on selection day. While the narration often gives insights into the characters' thoughts, it deals with their feelings more indirectly, allowing the reader to imagine the characters' emotions as they face various failures and crushing disappointments. This helps to further highlight the salience of tragedy amidst the narrative's often light and humorous tone.

Structure

Selection Day generally follows a linear structure, with occasional flashbacks to provide character history and background. The novel begins when Manju and Radha are 13 and 14 years old respectively, and the main part of the novel covers the next three years of their lives. The final chapter jumps ahead to Manju's 27th birthday, meaning Radha is 28 years old at that time. The novel does not often mark time very specifically, other than to mention Manju's year in school to signal a significant chronological movement forward. However, when discussing the particulars of Manju and Radha's daily lives, a general chronological focus is implied. In other words, if a specific amount of time between events is not stated, it appears that the events occur relatively soon, one after another. This lack of chronological specificity helps eliminate needless repetition when describing the characters' habits and routines, and it also helps prevent the narrative from becoming too focused on details when trying to examine character arcs over a relatively long time period.

Regarding the novel's few instances of nonlinearity, flashbacks are generally found towards the beginning of the novel as a way of giving character background and history. The Kumars' family history is instrumental in explaining Mohan Kumar's motivations, as well as the Kumars' social and economic circumstances. In order to fully understand the Kumars' story, it is crucial to know of their relocation from Western Ghats to Mumbai and the departure of Mohan's wife. However, in order for the novel to maintain its chronological structure, this information must be woven into the novel's forward action. In addition, flashbacks and exposition help to develop the motivations and narrative arcs of supporting characters such as Anand Mehta and Tommy Sir. The sparing use of

flashbacks and exposition allow the novel to maintain its linear forward momentum while delivering the necessary background information on each member of the narrative's ensemble.



Quotes

Except to grow a thin black mustache—a 'statement,' [Mohan] declared, of protest against his ill luck with women—he never complained; he never again looked back; he simply transferred all his hopes in life onto young Radha Kumar.

-- Narration ("Three Years Before Selection Day, Eighth Standard")

Importance: This quote comes at the end of an extended anecdote regarding the permanent departure of Mahan's wife. While this event is addressed earlier in the book, this quotation uses it to contextualize Mohan's obsession with making his son Radha the best cricket batter in the world. Mohan appears to use it as a way of giving himself a goal in life. The fact that this determination comes from the trauma of his wife leaving gives Mohan's obsession a tragic dimension, although Mohan is still presented in many ways as an antagonist.

Manju was now batting to protect his father.

-- Narration ("Ninth Standard Continues")

Importance: In light of the quickly deteriorating relationship between Manju and his father, this statement gives a powerful characterization to their early rapport. Manju is embarrassed by his father, but he still wishes to bring glory to himself and his family through achievement in cricket. However, this desire, along with Mohan's obsession, quickly leads to the ultimate ruin of their father-son relationship. This contrasts greatly with the early dynamic that this quotation reveals.

Cricket is a triumph of civilization over instinct...When the short-pitched ball comes screaming, and every instinct of panic tells you, close your eyes and turn your face, you must do what does not come naturally to you or to any man: stay calm. Master your nature, play cricket. Because a man's body, when all is said and done, is a loathsome thing.

-- Tommy Sir ("The Harris Shield Begins")

Importance: In the moment it is presented, this quotation appears to be idyllic and uplifting. However, as the narrative progresses, the attitude Tommy Sir advocates for in this statement becomes progressively more problematized. Radha and Manju's continual willingness to deny their instincts in pursuit of cricket greatness ultimately seems to destroy them as people and deny them the chance to discover what makes them truly happy or fulfilled.

He was going to be the best in Mumbai today. For Manju was now batting to protect himself.

-- Narration ("One Year Before Selection Day, Tenth Standard Begins")

Importance: This statement represents a fundamental shift in Manju's relationship with those around him. By the end of the novel, Manju is very isolated, and this moment appears to foreshadow Manju's fate. Manju is no longer batting to protect his father from



shame, but rather to protect himself from his father and other threats. Manju's tribulations up to this point have made him feel isolated, but he does not know how to diverge from his set path, so he continues on as a way of attempting to put distance between himself and others.

When anyone says, you must do this, you must make money, must play cricket, just say in response: 'My life is not limited by your imagination.'

-- Jignesh Seth ("Tenth Standard Continues: The Kanga League Starts")

Importance: Jignesh Seth, a counselor at Ruia College, tells this to Manju when they meet for a counseling appointment. The idea Jignesh articulates represents an ideal of self-determination that Manju struggles to fulfill. Unfortunately, throughout the novel, Manju remains dominated by the will of others, primarily his father, and he is never able to forge a future for himself that lies outside of the imaginations of other people.

Cricket is just brain control; and no one is going to brain control Javed Ansari. You went to England, but I was the one thinking for six weeks.

-- Javed Ansari ("Tenth Standard Continues: The Kanga League Starts")

Importance: Here, Javed Ansari provides a frank outsider's view on the relationship between Mohan, Manju, and Radha. Javed characterizes the Kumars' cricket aspirations as a form of control that the Mohan and the other adults are exercising over the boys. This statement further develops Javed as a representation of freedom that the Kumars are unable to attain. However, Javed's supposed freedom is often presented as an illusion, as he still struggles to affirm a comfortable identity, and his personal situation at the end of the novel is not a very enviable one.

Radha Kumar...had learned—as his father had—what it meant to be only a man before he had learned what it meant to be fully a man.

-- Narration ("Tenth Standard Continues: The Kanga League Starts")

Importance: This quotation elegantly articulates a main source of tension between Radha and his father. Both characters are born into very difficult circumstances and suffer several major defeats before they are able to find any truly solid footing in their lives. Both are hounded by their misfortunes and shortcomings, and this appears to stunt their emotional capacities as well as their ability to gain any consistent control or peace in their lives.

[Manju] realized that for all these years, his father had not had a face. All these years, there had been no secret contract with God, no scientific method, no antibiotics, and no ancient wisdom: Just fear.

-- Narration ("Selection Day")

Importance: This quotation represents a major moment of disillusionment for Manju. For his whole life, he believed that his father knew exactly what he was doing and toiled under a divine blessing. However, as the Kumars' family situation steadily deteriorates, so too does Manju's confidence in his father. This moment foreshadows Manju and



Radha's eventual rebellion against their father, whom they realize had abused and manipulated them for years.

My father never did that for me; never held me up like that so I could roar over the noise of the world.

-- Radha Kumar ("Selection Day")

Importance: After Radha's failure during selection day and subsequent attack on another boy, Radha flees Mumbai, and the distance appears to give him space to reflect upon his father. Radha observes father on the bus lovingly attending to an infant, and Radha, as shown in this quotation, finds himself unable to find any analogous moments in his relationship with his own father. This represents a major shift in Radha away from his father and their dysfunctional relationship.

Let him say Tommy Sir was a monster...And if they ask me, I'll say, a great sportsman is a kind of monster. This was the final discovery of my career as a talent scout.

-- Tommy Sir ("Selection Day")

Importance: This quote acts as a counterpoint to Tommy Sir's earlier idyllic descriptions of cricket and its character-building potential. Tommy Sir is a highly misanthropic individual, representing the underlying truth of the horror that cricket's competitive nature ultimately represents. This quotation acts as Tommy Sir's private admission of the cruelty and competition that the world of cricket represents.

What if doing good in India was like going against the current? You can barely make a buck here, and in earning it, what if you end up screwing the poor, the people you imagined you would help a bit in your spare time?

-- 241-242 ("One Week After Selection Day")

Importance: Like most of the novel's characters, Anand Mehta falls short of his ambitions. He wishes to make money and help the poor, but he finds himself stymied by the social conditions of India. This quotation helps to develop the characters' environment as a contributing factor to their disappointments. The unpredictability of the characters' environment manifests in personal relationships as well as larger societal norms, and Anand's reflection on this unpredictability helps to universalize that problem among all the characters.

For this, too, is hell: Knowing you are not—and can never be—as good as you want to be.

-- Narration ("One Week After Selection Day")

Importance: The novel deals heavily with the theme of thwarted ambitions, and this quotation acts as an acknowledgment that most of the characters have to settle for less than their original goals. Moreover, it establishes the idea that failed ambitions are due in large part to factors that the characters cannot control, both internal and external. This quote presents these factors as insurmountable, no matter what the characters attempt in order to overcome them.



I want to be alone every day.' His excellence, his uniqueness, was not in cricket, not in batting, he had discovered—but in withdrawing. He could pull back from human beings like the ocean.

-- Manju ("Eleven Years After Selection Day")

Importance: This quotation represents an affirmation of Manju's alienation from those around him. This alienation seems to be a result of his mistreatment by his father, evidenced by the distance that grows between them over the course of the novel. Manju's sustained withdrawal from other people seems to mark the tragic conclusion to his turbulent youth under the domineering influence of his father.