

Sleeping on Jupiter: A Novel Study Guide

Sleeping on Jupiter: A Novel by Anuradha Roy

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this novel: Roy, Anuradha. *Sleeping on Jupiter*. Graywolf Press, 2015.

The novel opens with a brief account by the main character Nomi concerning her childhood. She lived in a hut in India, but when she was young, soldiers involved in an unnamed conflict arrived and killed her family. She fled and was briefly taken in by a group of women, but their home was soon also destroyed by soldiers. The novel then transitions to the present day, where three elderly women—Vidya, Latika, and Gouri—are on a train heading towards the village of Jarmuli for a vacation. On the train, they meet Nomi, who explains that she is originally from India but now lives in Oslo and is heading to Jarmuli to do research for a documentary film company. The novel soon transitions to another of Nomi's flashbacks. Nomi recalls being taken in by a religious community called an ashram led by a spiritual leader called Guruji. There, Nomi befriended a girl named Piku who was similar in age to Nomi but lacked the ability to speak.

In Jarmuli, Nomi meets with an Indian man named Suraj who has been hired to help Nomi perform research on the local temples. However, when they attempt to tour a temple, Nomi is barred from entering by a tour guide named Badal, who says that women must be completely covered from the neck down if they wish to enter the temple. Nomi tells Suraj that he should go in without her. After the tour, Badal goes to an electronics store to buy a cell phone as a gift for a young man named Raghu, who is close in age to Badal and whom Badal only met two months prior. Badal recalls the kiss they recently shared in the countryside next to Jarmuli. Meanwhile, in the marketplace, Nomi walks by a tea stall run by a man named Johnny Toppo. Raghu is Toppo's employee.

The narrative transitions to another flashback of Nomi's. She recalls meeting the spiritual leader called Guruji, who at first seemed very nice. However, she then remembers the first time when Guruji called her to his room and forced her to touch his genitals and bring him to the point of ejaculation. Guruji claimed that this was part of a spiritual ritual about which Nomi should tell no one. The narrative then shifts focus to Suraj, who sits in his hotel room and laments the lack of traction in his filmmaking career and the impending divorce between himself and his wife. Nomi arrives and admits that she proposed the Jarmuli assignment to the film company because she was originally from near Jarmuli and wished to return and see it. Nomi recalls being eventually adopted by a foster mother who lived in England at the time and then moved to many different countries.

The next day, while Nomi and Suraj walk through the marketplace, they are spotted by Latika and Gouri who recognize Suraj as Vidya's married son and wonder what he is doing with a strange woman. They decide to say nothing to Vidya. Nomi realizes that Johnny Toppo reminds her of the ashram's kind gardener, Jugnu, and she asks him if he ever worked as a gardener at an ashram. However, Toppo's answers are evasive and



unclear. Later, Nomi hires a taxi to drive her around the outskirts of Jarmuli, and she finds a building that she thinks may be the ashram. It is abandoned now, but she meets an old man there who says he was a sculptor. Nomi recalls that there was a sculptor near the ashram. The narrative then transitions to another of Nomi's flashbacks. She recalls receiving her first period at the age of 12 and subsequently being locked in a hut for a week. Once her period stopped, Guruji entered the hut and raped her, claiming the act to be a spiritual ritual.

The narrative then shifts focus to Suraj, who attempts to drown himself due to despair over his professional failures and his impending divorce. However, he is unable to go through with the act. Later, Nomi and Suraj tour another temple, and after Nomi leaves on an unspecified errand, Suraj sees that she left her laptop computer behind. Suraj decides to look through her computer files. Meanwhile, Badal tries to converse with Raghu after giving him a cell phone as a gift, but Raghu acts as if they have never met. When Badal presses further, Raghu denies any romantic connection between them. In despair, Badal rides his motor scooter to the beach, where he sees Nomi. He offers to give her a ride back to the marketplace, after which he says he will leave Jarmuli forever. Later, Nomi goes to Suraj's hotel room to retrieve her computer. There, Suraj drunkenly assaults her, and she protects herself with Suraj's carving knife, leaving a cut on his arm.

The narrative transitions to another of Nomi's flashbacks. She recalls escaping the ashram with a girl named Champa, promising to return for Piku someday. Nomi and Champa escaped to an orphanage, from which Nomi was eventually adopted by her foster mother. The narrative then transitions back to present-day, where Vidya and Latika realize that Gouri has accidentally been separated from them, and they go out into a storm to look for her. About two weeks later, Nomi is still in India, apparently searching for Piku.



Pages 7 - 52

Summary

The novel opens with a story told by an unnamed narrator who is later revealed to be the character of Nomi. In the story, Nomi fondly recalls living in a hut in India when she was a young girl. Nomi lived with her parents and brothers, and their hut stood in the midst of a jungle. One day, a group of soldiers marched into the jungle and killed her father and brother. Nomi and her mother fled, but her mother was eventually taken away by a soldier. Nomi was then taken in by a group of women. One of the women gave Nomi a pair of earrings that used to belong to the dead woman's deceased daughter. Soldiers eventually showed up to the women's house too, forced everyone out, and burned the house down.

On page 18, the novel switches to a narrative set in the present day. Three elderly women—Gouri, Vidya, and Latika—are on a train headed for the Indian village of Jarmuli. Gouri asks to switch seats with a younger woman so that Gouri does not have to climb stairs to get to her assigned seat. The younger woman, who is called Nomi, agrees, and the three women make conversation with Nomi. Nomi appears to be from India originally, but she says she lives in Oslo and is in India to research temples in Jarmuli for an upcoming documentary. Nomi says that she was the one to propose the idea of this research to the film company that is making the documentary. Vidya comments that her son also works in the film business. When the train comes to a stop, Nomi exits at that station to stretch her legs. However, the train begins to pull away without her. The three elderly women witness Nomi running towards the train, and at the same time, she appears to be chased by an unknown man behind her. The train pulls away, apparently without Nomi, and the women accept that there is nothing they can do.

On page 34, the narrative switches back to Nomi's recollection of her childhood. She speaks of how, after she was displaced by the violence, she eventually ended up in a religious home/school called an ashram, where all the students were orphaned girls. Nomi believes that the ashram must have been in Jarmuli because her family's hut was near Jarmuli. Nomi recalls that the school was filled with pictures of a spiritual leader named Guruji. In the ashram, Nomi befriended a girl named Piku, who was similar in age to Nomi but who did not have the ability to speak.

On page 45, the narrative then switches back to the present day, focusing now on a young Indian man named Badal. Badal is a tour guide at an old religious temple in Jarmuli. Badal spends part of his morning meditating, and then he takes a hurried walk to the beach. There, he sees a tea stall run by a man named Johnny Toppo. Badal appears especially interested in the young man who works at the tea stall. This young man is named Raghu. Badal and Raghu appear to know each other, because when Badal goes to order a tea from Raghu, Raghu already knows what his order will be.



Analysis

The retrospective sections of the novel serve to shed light on the true motivations behind Nomi's trip to Jarmuli, as well as to help develop the overall themes of the novel. The first section of the novel is startlingly violent and appears to have no clear connection to the present-day narrative of the novel. However, the connections with regards to plot and theme gradually become clearer over the course of the novel. Although it is not evident at first, it soon becomes clear that Nomi is the narrator as well as the primary subject of the novel's retrospective sections. The traumatic events of Nomi's childhood appear to have led her back to Jarmuli under the pretext of a research project she has proposed to a documentary film company. Although it is not explicitly stated, Nomi appears intent on revisiting the geographical settings of her tumultuous childhood. In addition, the overt violence of the retrospective sections appears to share parallels with the less obvious but still present threat of violence that exists when Nomi returns to India. The scene on the train begins innocently, with Nomi speaking to three elderly women. However, she appears to be assaulted by a stranger on the train platform when she leaves the train to get some fresh air. This theme of violence against women is further developed throughout the rest of the novel.

The scene on the train serves to set up an ongoing narrative focus on the inevitable interconnectedness of the characters' various stories and struggles. The meeting between Nomi and the three elderly women seems fairly commonplace and inconsequential, but the scene actually contains instances of foreshadowing that connect to later coincidences that define the narrative. For example, after the train leaves without Nomi, it seems somewhat unlikely that Nomi and the elderly women will ever see each other again. However, they do end up meeting again amongst the crowds of Jarmuli. This event relates to the many coincidental incidents and encounters that serve to connect the characters of the novel. For example, Vidya mentions to Nomi that her son works in the film industry as well, and it later becomes apparent to the reader that Suraj, the man who helps Nomi with her research, is the very son to which Vidya was referring. The progression of this interconnectedness between characters serves to emphasize the communal origins of both the good and bad things that people experience. The characters all face struggles, and these struggles generally originate from societal phenomena and interpersonal relationships.

The introduction of Badal and Raghu seems at first to be a major digression from the other storylines that have been set up so far in the novel, but the relationship between Badal and Raghu ties in significantly with the plot and themes of the other storylines, beginning with this first scene containing these two characters. In a book that spends much of its attention on male threats against women, Badal and Raghu's budding romantic storyline is unique for involving no women. The only thing that is apparent from their first scene together is that Badal seems to be attracted to Raghu, and they seem to know each other already, at least casually. This scene gradually develops into a story of thwarted romance over the course of the novel, and it provides a relatively innocent counterpoint to the novel's darker aspects. The relationship between Badal and Raghu makes contact with the other storylines because they all take place in Jarmuli. However,



Badal and Raghu's relationship, while ultimately heartbreaking, emphasizes the emotional risks of love rather than the physical dangers created by male sexual appetite.

Discussion Question 1

Compare the first chapter of the novel with the train scene that immediately follows it. What are the similarities and differences between these sections? What are the significances of those similarities and differences?

Discussion Question 2

Compare the instances of violence in the novel's first chapter with the instances of security. How does the novel juxtapose these contrasting tones, and what significance does the narrative draw from these contrasts?

Discussion Question 3

What happens to Nomi after she leaves the train, and how does the novel present it? What appears to be the thematic and narrative significance of this event?

Vocabulary

fierce, veranda, scold, berth, agile, glimpse, cascade, reluctance, madcap, obtuse, conspicuous, keel, stationary, inscribe, exude, sari, phial, homeopathic, restive, stagnant, refuge



Pages 53 – 102

Summary

At the Jarmuli temple, one of the other tour guides asks Badal to cover for him on one of the tours. Badal agrees to do so in exchange for payment. The people who wish to tour the temple are Nomi and a man named Suraj. Badal sees that Nomi's clothing is rather from-fitting, and part of her legs are exposed. He says that Nomi cannot enter the temple unless she covers herself with a sari. Nomi becomes irritated and points out that half of the men standing around the temple are shirtless. Nomi, indignant about the special restrictions on women and unwilling to buy herself clothes, asks Suraj to tour the temple without her so that they can stay on their research schedule. Badal and Suraj enter the temple, but Suraj has trouble focusing. He instead thinks about how little traction his film career has gained since graduating film school, and he resents having to work as a research assistant for people like Nomi from foreign film companies.

Beginning on page 63, Suraj gives Badal money in exchange for the tour, and Badal uses this money towards the purchase of a new cell phone as a gift for Raghu. Badal recalls when he first met Raghu about two months prior. Badal and Raghu had commiserated over the beatings they regularly received, Badal from his father, and Raghu from his employer. They had walked among the outskirts of the village, and at one point, they had shared a kiss. Before Badal goes to give the cell phone to Raghu, he goes home to nap, and after he wakes up, he realizes that he must return to the temple to give a tour to three old women who have booked a tour.

On page 71, the narrative shifts to focus on the three old women, who are taking a moment to relax in their hotel room. Gouri looks out the window and frets about her mental ineptitude, referring specifically to her habits of losing things and forgetting things in her old age. Gouri goes to rouse Latika and Vidya so they can go to the temple. Meanwhile, Nomi wanders by Johnny Toppo's tea stall and hears him singing. His song reminds her of her days living in the ashram. She recalls meeting Guruji for the first time when he came to visit the ashram. She recalls how calm and kind he seemed that day, and how he wished only to make Nomi feel protected and secure.

On Page 83, the narrative then shifts to an extended flashback about Nomi's life in the ashram. She recalls how Guruji came to live at the ashram for an extended period of time, and how he took a great interest in the wellbeing of the girls. One day, Guruji called her into his room and conversed with her. After a few minutes, he asked her to hold his erect penis. Nomi, not understanding what was happening, and not wishing to disobey Guruji, complied. Guruji soon ejaculated, and he told Nomi not to tell anyone about the encounter. In the present-day narrative, Badal gives the three old women a tour of the temple before leaving to go find Raghu. Badal sees Raghu with another man, possibly flirting. Badal loses his nerve and leaves.



Analysis

Nomi's interaction with Badal by the temple helps to place the foundations for the novel's exploration of the misogyny in Hindu and Indian culture. Nomi is barred from entering the temple because she is supposedly not covered up enough and is therefore immodest. Nomi becomes frustrated and points out the fact that the men are not required to be covered up like the women. This dynamic helps to highlight the facets of Hindu and Indian culture, especially since this interaction depends on the religious temple's rule and proximity. Throughout the novel, the narrative creates similar juxtapositions between spheres of spirituality in Indian culture and their oppressive attitudes towards women. Nomi acts a suitable subject for the exploration of these forms of oppression because she has grown accustomed to a different culture while growing up in Norway. Nomi is a willful and independent woman, and she therefore takes issue with oppressive rules such as the fact that she must cover herself completely in order to enter the temple. Badal stands at the other end of this interaction, and it is important to note that he contains no malice. He simply wishes to uphold societal norms so that he does not lose his job. However, in this way, Badal represents the general complicity that holds these types of social norms in place.

The novel's exploration of the connection between religion and misogyny is deepened by the examination of Guruji's relationship with the ashram where Nomi used to live. Earlier in the novel, Nomi recalls how she saw Guruji's photograph all around the ashram, and in this section, she recalls when she met Guruji in person. Guruji appears to have been a respected spiritual leader, and he also appears to have been quite charismatic. When Nomi first met Guruji, she was quite taken in by his serene demeanor, which gave Nomi a sense of security. However, this relationship sharply contrasts with Guruji's sexual abuses that are later revealed. The scene of sexual abuse is suffused with connections to spirituality and oppression of women. Nomi was too young at the time to understand the nature of Guruji's command. However, when he asked her to touch his erect penis, he claimed that it was part of a spiritual ritual. After he ejaculated, he said, "You are the chosen one" (93), implying that the whole event was part of some sanctified spiritual ritual. Guruji's abuses have caused Nomi major emotional trauma, and they appear to be a major motivating factor behind Nomi's pilgrimage back to Jarmuli. Moreover, Guruji stands as yet another figure in the book of oppression towards women in India's religious spheres.

Badal's storyline continues to develop in this storyline as a way of connecting the themes and content of the storylines surrounding it. Badal gives tours to many of the major characters in the book, and he has connections with the other characters, namely Raghu and Johnny Toppo. Badal's relationship with Raghu is developed in this section with the revelation that the two young men appear to share some nascent romantic connection. As a tour guide, Badal continues to represent the traditional values and beliefs of that part of India. However, his homosexuality clashes with the social norms that he must represent each day in his line of work. In contrast to the lust and aggression that Nomi encounters repeatedly throughout the novel, Badal's love for Raghu appears to be innocent and pure, thus further emphasizing the wrongness of the



sexual aggression to which Nomi falls victim. Badal's storyline thus enhances the novel's themes through counterpoint, and as a character, Badal functions as a structural connector between the other characters.

Discussion Question 1

How does the novel characterize Nomi and Suraj's initial relationship? What are the most important characteristics of their rapport, and what important commonalities appear to exist between their backstories?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the relationship between Badal and Raghu. How does this relationship appear to connect to the rest of the novel in terms of narrative and theme?

Discussion Question 3

How does the narrative function of the old women evolve over time? What appears to make their presence in the novel necessary, both in terms of the narrative and the themes that the novel seeks to explore?

Vocabulary

transistor, promenade, crystalline, euphoria, nonchalant, welt, luscious, devour, tarmac, fragrant, wisp, caustic, tranquility, georgette, voluble, clamorous, gravelly, elaichi, slate, anorak



Pages 103 – 151

Summary

Beginning on page 103, Suraj checks in to a hotel and thinks about the last night he spent with his wife, Ayesha. He recalls the fights they had and tries not to think about their impending divorce. Nomi comes to his room to talk about the research. They share drinks, and Nomi admits that she came up with the idea of making a documentary about the temples so that the film company would pay for her to go to Jarmuli. Nomi admits that she may have been born in or near Jarmuli. Nomi asks about the knife and tools laid out on a table in the room, and Suraj says that he uses the tools to make model boats. He says he will name one after Nomi, but Nomi says she would rather have a plane than a boat.

On page 113, the narrative describes the fall of night and notes Johnny Toppo and Badal going home for the day from their respective jobs. Badal carries the phone he bought for Raghu. In her hotel room, Nomi thinks about being sent from an orphanage where she lived to the home of her foster mother. She fondly remembers moving from India to England, where her foster mother lived at the time, and enjoying the relative peace of her new home and her new neighborhood. On page 119, the narrative then transitions to another of Nomi's internal monologues. Unlike Nomi's previous sections in the novel, this appears to be a rather abstract and general monologue about the feeling of pain and trauma in her life rather than a specific recollection from her past.

On page 123, the narrative transitions to the third day of adult Nomi's trip to Jarmuli. The narrative first presents the three old women in their hotel room, where Vidya is suffering from an unexplained upset stomach. Vidya tells Gouri and Latika to go out without her so she can spend that day resting. Near Johnny Toppo's tea stall, Gouri and Latika see Badal. Gouri and Latika purchase tea and biscuits from Johnny Toppo. Soon after, Gouri and Latika see Suraj walking about with Nomi. It is revealed to the reader that Suraj is Vidya's son and that the old women do not yet know about Suraj's impending divorce from his wife Ayesha. Gouri and Latika decide not to tell Vidya about seeing Suraj with another woman.

Beginning on page 135, Nomi recalls more things from her past. She recalls how, when she met her foster mother for the first time, her foster mother gave her a shell necklace as a gift. Out of anger and fear with regards to her new circumstances, Nomi intentionally broke the necklace and threw it away. Nomi then recalls a kind man named Jugnu who lived near the ashram and who made gifts of fruit to Nomi and the other orphan girls. Nomi also recalls when the chief minister of the state, who was a disciple of Guruji, came to visit the ashram with other followers of Guruji's. The narrative then transitions back to the present-day narrative, where Vidya and Latika find Gouri missing from the hotel room, having apparently left her address cards behind. However, Gouri returns to the hotel on her own, revealing that she was just out for a walk and she had brought an address card with her.



Analysis

The hotel room scene between Nomi and Suraj helps to develop the characters' separate identities, as well as to foreshadow the complicated and problematic relationship that they form over the course of the novel. Suraj has already been illustrated as being somewhat unfortunate with regards to his career, and this misfortune is compounded by the revelation that his marriage has essentially come to an end. The narrative draws a stark portrait of Suraj's internal pain with lines like, "The recollection sent a stab of pain to his chest. Was this how heart attacks began?" (104). In addition, Suraj is further humanized by his interest in model boats. Meanwhile, Nomi's character is further developed with regards to her mission in Jarmuli. She admits that her assignment really arose out of a ploy to have the film company send her back to the possible site of her childhood home, and this revelation bears a strong connection with the narrative's repeated visitations to the events of Nomi's past. This connection hints that Nomi is attempting to reconcile herself with the traumatic events she suffered in her childhood. In this scene, Suraj and Nomi appear to form a highly amicable relationship of mutual understanding. However, the tableau involving the two of them in Suraj's room with the carving knife foreshadows the rather violent events that end their relationship by the end of the novel.

Nomi's recollections in this section not only continue to characterize her trauma, but they also help to characterize the nature of the relationship that she still has with regards to those past events. One significant piece of information that is conveyed in this section is the surprising extent of Guruji's popularity and influence. For example, Nomi mentions that the minister of the state in which the ashram was located was a disciple of Guruji. This raises the concern that even if Nomi was able to tell someone about Guruji's sexual abuses, people may not believe the accusations. This section also alludes to the fact that Nomi was adopted from an orphanage in India by foster parents in another country. The narrative implies that Nomi must have either been sent from the ashram to an orphanage or have escaped the ashram herself in order to reach an orphanage. Nomi's descriptions of her foster mother paint the foster mother as a kind and caring woman, explaining how Nomi seems to have grown into a well-adjusted woman from a kind adoptive family. However, this implication seems slightly weighted down with Nomi's fixation on her past and her desire to revisit the places where she suffered much trauma. This dynamic implies that Nomi has never been able to entirely escape the traumatic memories of her childhood.

In this section, the three old women take on multiple narrative functions with regards to developing the world of the story and adding different perspectives on the narrative's themes. The surprising revelation that Suraj is Vidya's son helps to emphasize the importance of coincidence and interconnectedness amongst the novel's various storylines. The fact that Gorui and Latika see Suraj with Nomi helps to add further tension to these two storylines and to emphasize uncertain and transitional nature of Suaj's life at that point. The fact that he has not yet told even his mother about his impending divorce sheds light on the recentness of this development and the familial tension it may cause. In addition, the moment of panic regarding Gouri's supposed



disappearance helps to emphasize the possible dangers that the women in the novel either encounter or are under the threat of encountering. Gouri's case is made even riskier by her age and supposed forgetfulness, but she proves in this instance to be rather self-reliant.

Discussion Question 1

What is Nomi's true motivation for visiting Jarmuli, and what appear to be the most important factors behind this motivation? How do these motivations affect the portrayal of Nomi as a character?

Discussion Question 2

What are the literal and metaphorical significances of the cell phone that Badal buys for Raghu? Why does Badal seem to invest so much importance in the phone, and how does this help to develop his character?

Discussion Question 3

How does the structure of Nomi's flashbacks compare with the structure of the present-day narrative? What is the narrative purpose of revealing Nomi's past recollections in limited and separate sections?

Vocabulary

induce, antiseptic, whetstone, rucksack, inert, bonemeal, pretext, remorse, anguish, sandalwood, minuscule, mesmerize, scour, intuit, weal, potent, hovel, stricture, shoal, serene



Pages 152 – 197

Summary

On Page 152, the narrative shifts to focus on Badal, who walks to work and thinks of Raghu. Badal decides that he will never abandon Raghu, despite having seen Raghu possibly flirting with an older man the previous day. As he walks, he sees a lost young girl, and he helps her find her father in the crowd. During the day, Badal finds that he is rather content as he works. Meanwhile, Nomi goes to Johnny Toppo's tea stall, and she realizes that he reminds her of Jugnu, the kind gardener of the ashram where she lived. She asks Johnny questions in an attempt to assess whether or not he is Jugnu using a new name, but Johnny Toppo does not wish to answer questions about his past. Nomi begins to feel doubt as to whether or not she should have come to Jarmuli at all.

Beginning on page 162, Nomi hires a taxi to drive her around Jarmuli. She directs the car to drive towards the outskirts of the village, and she asks the driver to stop when she see a place that she thinks might be the ashram where she lived. The ashram appears to be deserted and decrepit, and she spends some time looking around the grounds, and she sees an old man nearby. The man claims to be a sculptor who lived there for many years. Nomi asks if he knows what happened to the people who lived in the ashram, but he says he does not. To herself, Nomi recalls that a sculptor used to sit near the grounds of the ashram and make small stone idols. This then segues into a series of Nomi's recollections, including Piku's bullying at the hands of other girls in the ashram, and a girl named Champa, who ran away from the ashram twice and was brought back by the police both times. Nomi also recalls being locked in a hut after having her first period at the age of 12. Jugnu, the gardener, tried to break her out, but he was caught and badly beaten by followers of Guruji. About a week after Nomi was locked away, Guruji entered the hut and raped her, saying that Nomi "was a nun in the service of God" (173).

On page 175, the narrative transitions back to the present-day narrative. Suraj decides to go for a swim. The swim relaxes him a little, but it also fills him with fresh grief for the failures in his life. He tries to drown himself by swimming, but he is unable to force himself under the water for long enough. Meanwhile, Johnny Toppo notices that Raghu has a new phone, and he accuses Raghu of stealing it. Raghu frantically explains that a tour guide named Badal gave it to him. Meanwhile, the three old women are out in the streets, as Vidya is feeling better, and Vidya sees her son Suraj with Nomi, whom she recognizes from the train. Vidya is predictably shocked and confused. Suraj and Nomi tour a religious temple filled with ancient erotic paintings and sculptures, and a tour guide explains, "In ancient India no barrier between life and love. Erotic is creation, so it is celebrated in our temples" (193). Soon, Nomi says that she has to go take care of something, and she asks Suraj to wait in the car for her.



Analysis

Nomi's further revelation of Guruji's sexual abusiveness helps to develop the extreme nature of Guruji's unethical behavior and the perverse ways in which Guruji attempted to contextualize these atrocities as part of religious practices. Previously in the novel, Nomi recalled touching Guruji's genitals at his command, and in this section, Guruji's sexual predation is revealed to be even more extreme. Not only does Guruji lock Nomi in a hut after she receives her first period, but he then rapes her after her period has stopped. The novel presents this event in such a way as to imply that Gurji regularly rapes the young girls in his care. Similar to the scene of sexual abuse, Guruji frames the rape in religious terms, saying to Nomi that she was "was a nun in the service of God" (173). This perversion of spirituality appears to function as Guruji's rationalization for his sexual predation on young girls. Moreover, this juxtaposition helps the novel further develop its examination of the connection between religious customs and misogyny in Indian culture. Guruji's frames his sexual predation as part of his spirituality, and he is also protected from the consequences of his awful misdeeds because his is such a widely respected spiritual leader. For example, Champa later reveals that during the times she escaped from the ashram, she went to the police and told them of Guruji's crimes, but they did not believe and instead simply returned her to the ashram.

The novel further develops the connection between religion and misogyny in Indian culture through the presentation of art and history at the Jarmuli temple. When Suraj and Nomi view erotic paintings and sculptures in the temple, one of the guides says, "In ancient India no barrier between life and love. Erotic is creation, so it is celebrated in our temples" (193). This idea seems innocent on its own, but the novel demonstrates how this idea is twisted by culture and misogyny to create very dangerous circumstances for women. For example, the fact women are not allowed in temples unless they cover themselves indicates the distinct treatment between men and women with regards to religious and social customs. Thus, the power dynamic with regards to eroticism in Hindu and Indian culture becomes lopsided, with the men holding power over the women. The novel appears to argue that this lopsided power dynamic results in a dangerous culture for women, resulting in Guruji's predation and the sexually motivated assault that Suraj perpetrates against Nomi later on in the novel.

This section further develops Nomi's motivations behind returning to Jarmuli by illustrating several distinct sources of significance that her past holds over her. For example, her interaction with Johnny Toppo is quite significant in that it relates to one of her few positive relationships in the ashram. Nomi believes that Johnny Toppo might actually be Jugnu, the friendly gardener from the ashram. However, Nomi is unable to confirm or discredit this theory from her conversation with Johnny Toppo. In conjunction with the current abandoned state of the ashram, Nomi appears to be profoundly affected by the transitory nature of her past. Moreover, the revelation of the horrific aspects of life in the ashram combine with the few positive aspects to create a powerful formative experience for Nomi, who was so young and impressionable during her time in the ashram. Ultimately, the novel presents Nomi's time in the ashram as a somewhat unresolved experience, and that appears to be a motivating factor behind Nomi's



pilgrimage back to Jarmuli. She still feels the pain of her old traumas and the modest solaces of her old friends, but her attempts to reconnect with and resolve any facets of that time in her life appear to be repeatedly thwarted during the trip.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Nomi's belief that Johnny Toppo may actually be Jugnu? What is the significance of the conversation that Nomi then has with Johnny, and how does it affect Nomi's outlook?

Discussion Question 2

What appears to have been the nature of the connection between Nomi and Piku? What drew the girls together, and how did their friendship affect Nomi's experience in the ashram?

Discussion Question 3

How do Guruji's sexual abuses connect thematically with events of the present-day narrative? How do sexual violence and violence against women factor in to the present-day narrative, and how do Nomi's past traumas affect her experiences in adulthood?

Vocabulary

persist, wayward, hermit, barrow, basin, derelict, vandalize, unnerving, chisel, apsara, inure, goad, piety, kennel, cobalt, atonement, flail, unison, stupor, ingratiate, oblige



Pages 198 – 250

Summary

Beginning on page 198, Badal goes to Johnny Toppo's tea stall and finds Raghu there. He tries to strike up a conversation with Raghu about the cell phone, but Raghu acts like he has never met Badal before. Eventually, in desperation, Badal asks, "Can't you see how things are between us?" (201). Badal makes allusions to the kiss they shared, and he tries to explain that the cell phones are meant to connect them to each other. However, Raghu refuses to acknowledge having any type of acquaintance with Badal, and Badal goes home to cry about this development.

Meanwhile, at the temple, Suraj sits waiting for Nomi to return from her unspecified errand. He goes to the car he hired, and he finds that she left her bag and computer in the car. The driver says that they should go back to the hotel because it is getting late. Suraj agrees, and during the ride, he looks through the files on Nomi's computer.

Beginning on page 211, Badal leaves his house and rides his motor scooter out to the beach, where he decides that he will move away from Jarmuli. After some time, he sees Nomi. They attempt to converse, but there is too much of a language barrier between them. Badal notices that Nomi wears many earrings. He offers to give her a ride back to the Jarmuli marketplace, after which he says he will leave Jarmuli for good. In the marketplace, Nomi sees Gouri, who apparently wandered off from Vidya and Latika. Nomi and Gouri recognize each other from the train, and they decided to share a taxi back to the hotel.

On page 225, Nomi arrives at Suraj's hotel room to retrieve her bag and laptop. Suraj admits that he went through Nomi's computer and read everything she wrote about Guruji and the ashram. He teases her about it, believing it to be a work of fiction she is writing. They begin arguing, and Suraj grows angry. He begins to hit and grapple Nomi. In a fit of anger and sexual aggression, he forces Nomi into the shower. She slips and hits her head, after which she runs out from the shower and grabs Suraj's carving knife with which to protect herself. Nomi cuts Suraj on the arm in self defense and runs out of the room. The narrative then transitions to another of Nomi's recollections. This one is addressed directly to Piku. Nomi explains that Champa asked Nomi to escape the ashram with her. Nomi wanted to bring Piku, but Champa said that Piku would be too conspicuous due to her random fits of yelling. Nomi and Champa escaped by sneaking onto a delivery van. Champa said they could not go to the police because Guruji was too widely respected, and the police would just return them to the ashram like they did to Champa twice before. Instead, they escaped to the orphanage from which Nomi was eventually adopted.

On page 241, the narrative transitions back to Latika and Vidya. They are at the hotel, and Gouri once again is not there. A storm starts to pick up outside, but they go out together to look for Gouri. The novel ends with a short scene that takes place 18 days



after Nomi returned to Jarmuli. The scene describes Nomi biking along the coast with a compass, apparently still exploring India.

Analysis

The resolution of Baal's storyline, though rather sad, represents the achievement of adulthood and the commencement of a new stage in Badal's life. Throughout the novel, Badal harbors an obsessive passion for Raghu, who appears to represent the only opportunity for true romantic love for Badal in all of Jarmuli. Jarmuli is a small village governed by traditional social values, and thus Badal's homosexuality is a part of himself that he feels like he has to keep secret. However, in the wake of his kiss with Raghu, Badal felt as if he had someone with whom to share his love and the secret parts of his life. For this reason, Raghu's ultimate rejection of Badal is extremely heartbreaking for Badal. Raghu appears to be motivated in this rejection by an unwillingness to be truly open with anyone about his homosexuality due to social taboos. However, Raghu may also simply be motivated by a general lack of romantic interest in Badal. Badal feels very defeated by this rejection, and he seems to realize that Jarmuli no longer contains any opportunities for true happiness for him. Jarmuli's decision to leave Jarmuli, while initially motivated by great sadness and disappointment ultimately represents a hopeful change for Badal, as he may find greater fulfillment outside of the small village of Jarmuli.

The storyline of the three old women also ends on an uncertain note, although the uncertainty of their situation is less hopeful and more concerning, thus highlighting the dangers to women in society at large. The storyline of the three old women is generally the most innocent and cheerful storyline of the novel; the three women go to Jarmuli to have a fun vacation and enjoy themselves. However, the end of their storyline is very dark, with Gouri missing and the other women braving a possible storm to look for her. The possible threats against the women include the weather and assault from any number of strangers. The novel utilizes the contrast between the cheerful beginning of their storyline and the somewhat dark ending to highlight the idea that no one is completely safe from uncertain dangers, especially women. The uncertainty contained within the end of this storyline forces the reader to worry about the fate of the women and speculate about the various outcomes. Moreover, it urges the reader to acknowledge the responsibility of others to help those in need. Vidya and Latika must search for Gouri on their own, and while strangers certainly pose a possible threat to these women, no strangers seem willing to help them.

The resolution of Nomi and Suraj's storylines help drive home the novel's ideas of the omnipresence of sexual threats against women. Even when Suraj is faced with evidence about Nomi's history of sexual abuse at the hands of Guruji, he is unable to realize the true implications and dismisses the evidence as fiction. Then, he assaults Nomi, apparently driven in part by his lust for her. Nomi's defense of herself, though violent, is portrayed as completely justified in response to Suraj's aggression. The novel uses this scene to illustrate how physical and sexual threats are possible in many different types of situation, and that women must go to extremes in order to protect



themselves. The novel also points out that Suraj's drunkenness and personal frustrations in no way excuse his invasive and aggressive actions towards Nomi. Nomi's defense against Suraj not only functions as a literal defense against the aggressive man in the room, but also as an expression of all the pain and fear that Nomi felt at the hands of the predatory Guruji. In this way, the novel seeks to bring Nomi's storyline to a tonal and thematic crescendo to emphasize its points about violence against women.

Discussion Question 1

What could potentially be the motivating factors behind Raghu's cold behavior towards Badal? Why are his motivations never made explicit? How does Badal's response to Raghu's behavior develop Badal's character and storyline?

Discussion Question 2

How does the novel present the physical struggle between Suraj and Nomi? How does this struggle relate to Nomi's past and the larger themes of the narrative?

Discussion Question 3

What appears to be the implication of the final scene of the novel? What does this scene seem to imply about Nomi, her connection to her past, and her wishes for the future?

Vocabulary

kerosene, forage, wayside, strident, stealth, confluence, molten, evasive, foliage, abyss, droning, riptide, voluptuous, incantation, whimsical, fringe, reprisal, simultaneous, sodden, trundle



Characters

Nomita “Nomi” Frederiksen

Nomita Frederiksen, generally referred to as Nomi, is the central character of the novel. Nomi was born in India, but her family was killed by soldiers during an unnamed military struggle within India. Afterwards, she was taken in by a religious school called an ashram, but the ashram's spiritual leader sexually abused Nomi and the other girls. Nomi eventually escaped from the ashram and went to an orphanage where she was adopted by a Norwegian couple. Nomi went to live with the Norwegian couple in Oslo, Norway.

During the present-day narrative of the novel, Nomi returns to Jarmuli, India, to search for the ashram where she used to live. Despite growing up in India, Nomi finds that much of Indian culture is alien to her when she returns to the country.

Suraj

Suraj is an Indian citizen and an aspiring filmmaker. He assists Nomi with her research while she is in Jarmuli, and he quickly develops romantic and sexual feelings for Nomi. Suraj has training in film, although his career has not gained any traction. He once almost sold a screenplay to a group of producers, but the producers ultimately turned him down. Suraj is the son of Vidya, although he does not know that Vidya is in Jarmuli at the same time as him.

Suraj is still technically married, although he and his wife are in the process of divorcing because she has fallen in love with a good friend of Suraj's. Towards the end of the novel, Suraj sexually assaults Nomi, and in response, Nomi takes necessary violent measures in order to defend herself.

Gouri

Gouri is an old Indian woman who travels to Jarmuli with her friends for a recreational trip. Gouri suffers from minor physical and mental ailments in her old age. Gouri's suffers from mild joint pain and age-related muscle weaknesses, as well as issues with memory and cognition. Her friends, Vidya and Latika, often worry about her safety and autonomy, so they take precautions to make sure that she is safe in case she gets lost or wanders off. Gouri does wander off on her own multiple times over the course of the novel. The second time Gouri wanders off, Latika and Vidya go out into a gathering storm to look for her, but the novel does not say what happens to the women. Gouri's vulnerability as a woman helps to develop the novel's overall theme of misogyny and threats towards women. However, Gouri has a generally positive attitude and is determined to enjoy her trip with her friends despite the risks.



Vidya

Vidya is an old Indian woman who travels to Jarmuli with two of her good friends for a fun recreational trip. Vidya is very maternal and protective towards her friends. Vidya is the mother of Suraj, although she does not know he is in Jarmuli at the same time as her until she sees him in a crowd there. Vidya also does not know that Suraj is in the process of divorcing his wife, so she is confused and perturbed by the sight of Suraj spending time in public with another woman (Nomi.) Vidya has a generally nervous disposition, and she often frets over the wellbeing of Gouri, who has suffered cognitive problems in old age. When Gouri goes missing, Vidya becomes frantic and worried until Gouri is found again.

Latika

Latika is an old woman and the third member of the group of women taking a recreational trip to Jarmuli. Latika is generally calm and reserved, balancing out Vidya's anxieties and Gouri's physical and mental issues. When Latika sees Suraj with Nomi, she tries to keep this information from Vidya, but Vidya eventually sees Nomi and Suraj on her own. Latika is judicious and self-possessed, often assuming a leadership position in the group during times of stress. When the women witness Nomi running after the train after it begins to pull away without her, Latika remains calm and acknowledges to her companions that there is, unfortunately, nothing they can do.

Guruji

Guruji is a Hindu spiritual leader and was the chief authority of the ashram where Nomi lived as a girl. During Nomi's time in the ashram, she was repeatedly sexually abused by Guruji. Guruji also sexually abused the other girls who lived in the ashram. Guruji is well-known and highly respected. When Nomi escaped from the Ashram, she wanted to tell as many people as possible about Guruji's sexual abuses, but she realized that no one would believe her because Guruji is so well-known and respected. When Nomi returns to Jarmuli as an adult, she seeks out Guruji in order to confront him, but she is unable to find him, and the ashram appears to have been abandoned long ago.

Piku

Piku was a young Indian girl whom Nomi befriended in the ashram. Although Piku was similar in age to Nomi, Piku was unable to speak except in inherent moans. Piku was generally shunned by the other girls in ashram, except for Nomi. Nomi and Piku generally relied on each other for emotional support while in the ashram. When another girl approaches Nomi about escaping from the ashram, Nomi wishes to bring Piku with them. However, the other girl convinces Nomi that Piku would be too much of a liability. Nomi reluctantly agrees to leave Piku behind, and she greatly regrets this decision and feels guilt about it.



Badal

Badal is a young Indian man who works as a tour guide at the Jarmuli temple. Badal falls in love with Raghu, a young man who works at Johnny Toppo's tea stall. Prior to the present-day narrative of the novel, Badal and Raghu shared a kiss in the countryside by Jarmuli. Badal saves up his money for a cell phone to give to Raghu as a sign of love and connectedness. However, when Badal interacts with Raghu, Raghu does not seem to acknowledge their previous romantic experience, and he does not seem to imbue the cell phone with the same significance that Raghu does. Badal ultimately experiences great heartbreak with regards to Raghu who acts as if he and Badal had never had any romantic connection.

Raghu

Raghu is a young Indian man who works for Johnny Toppo at Johnny Toppo's tea stall in Jarmuli. Raghu is the object of romantic desire for Badal, the young tour guide. However, despite the fact that he and Badal once shared a kiss, he acts coldly towards Badal in public. When Badal tries to interact affectionately towards Raghu in public, Raghu acts as if he has never met Badal. Raghu also does not acknowledge the significance of the cell phone that Badal gives to him as a gift. Raghu is often harried by his employer, Johnny Toppo, and Raghu expends much of his energy attempting to appease Johnny Toppo's foul temper while working in Johnny Toppo's tea stall.

Johnny Toppo

Johnny Toppo is a man who runs a tea stall in Jarmuli. When Nomi sees him, she believes that he is someone she knew from the ashram where she used to live. However, when Nomi asks Johnny Toppo about this, he vigorously denies this idea. It is unclear whether Johnny Toppo really has no connection with the ashram or whether he simply wishes to sever all ties to his past. Johnny Toppo is surly and often overly stressed, and he often takes out his stress and anger on his employee, a young man named Raghu.



Symbols and Symbolism

Grapefruit Tree

The grapefruit tree from Nomi's childhood symbolizes innocence and the concept of home. Before Nomi describes the attack by unidentified militant forces on her childhood home in India, she describes various idyllic aspects of that home. One of the main images on which her description focuses is a grapefruit tree that stands nearby her family's hut. The grapefruit is presented as a source of joy and general communion for the family. The roots of the grapefruit tree correlate to the sense of rootedness that Nomi experienced in that home. However, when the soldiers attacked, her home was destroyed, along with the grapefruit tree that she loved so much.

Earrings

Earrings symbolize solace in times of difficulty and uncertainty. After Nomi's family was killed by soldiers, she was taken in by a religious community of caretakers and other orphaned girls. One of the caretakers gave Nomi a pair of earrings that belonged to the caretaker's deceased daughter. Nomi comments on how the earrings made her feel somewhat more secure, protected, and loved. During the novel's present-day narrative, Nomi wears the earrings along with several other pairs. The earrings seem to serve as a reminder to Nomi that love and security may still be found in difficult and uncertain times.

Cell Phone

The cell phone that Badal buys for Raghu symbolizes love and thwarted hopes. After Badal and Raghu share a kiss in the countryside near Jarmuli, Badal harbors an intense love for Raghu and perceives an irrevocable connection between the two of them. Badal buys a cell phone as a gift for Raghu and wishes to present it as a symbol of their newfound connection. However, when Badal gives the phone to Raghu, Raghu does not seem to recognize the significance of the gift, nor does he acknowledge their previous romantic tryst. Badal is sorely disappointed by this turn of events.

Boats

Boats symbolize loss and forced transitions between lives. After Nomi's family was killed, she became a refugee and was forced onto a boat that carried her to her new and horrible life in the ashram. Whenever other characters mention boats to adult Nomi, she becomes skittish and nervous, as if remembering the dark chapter of her life to which she was born in a boat. To Nomi, boats represent the beginning of that dark period in her life from which she just barely escaped. While not averse to travel, Nomi



says that she greatly dislikes boats and prefers planes instead, although she never explicitly states the reason.

Guruji

Guruji symbolizes hypocrisy and sexual predation. Guruji is a spiritual leader and the chief authority of the ashram where Nomi lived. Guruji often sexually abused the girls who lived in the ashram, Nomi included. In adult Nomi's memory, Guruji stands as a symbol of sexual aggression and abuse, and she attempts to face down the trauma of her memories by searching for the ashram. Guruji also represents a perversion of the supposed connection between sexuality and spirituality in Hindu beliefs, as he abuses his spiritual position to take sexual advantage of vulnerable young girls.

Model Vehicles

Suraj's model vehicles represent his loneliness and isolation. During the present-day narrative of the novel, Suraj feels lonely and isolated due to his impending divorce from his wife. He attempts to form a connection with Nomi, and in their conversations, he mentions the model boats he builds and says he will name one after her. Nomi says that it would have to be a plane instead of a boat. However, Suraj's relationship with Nomi ends due to an act of sexual aggression by him towards her. Suraj habitually places secret notes to his deceased father in each boat. He plans on making a plane in Nomi's honor despite her rejection of him.

Address Cards

The address cards that Gouri carries symbolize an acknowledgement of danger. Much of the novel examines the dangers that women face in India, and Gouri's susceptibility to possible violence is increased by the symptoms of her old age. Gouri is forgetful and suffers from various physical ailments. Recognizing the risks posed by her condition, Gouri's friends Vidya and Latika ask her to carry address cards so that she can receive help finding her way back to the hotel if she wanders off and becomes lost. Although Gouri does become lost, she comes to no harm. However, the threat of harm remains ever present.

Tea

Tea symbolizes the struggles of everyday life. As the owner of a tea stall in Jarmuli, Johnny Toppo is under constant stress to sell as much teas as possible in order to maintain his livelihood. Johnny Toppo takes this stress out on those around him, especially his employee, Raghu. Ironically, Johnny Toppo remains ignorant of the struggles and stories of those around him because he is so focused on his own everyday problems.

Jupiter

Jupiter symbolizes the desire to find shelter from the dangers and problems that plague one's life. Although Jupiter is referenced in the book's title, the only place that Jupiter actually appears in the text is in a single instance of narration: "When [Badal] wanted to be out of reach of his aunt and uncle, he dreamed of living on Jupiter and sleeping under its many moons" (214). The characters of the novel are all looking for shelter from their fears and problems, and the connection between this quotation and the title helps to emphasize the universality of that desire amongst these characters.

Carving Knife

Suraj's carving knife represents misogyny and male sexual aggression. Suraj carries about an unnecessary carving knife with him almost as a reminder of his own masculinity. He sometimes uses it to make carvings, but never during the actual narrative of the novel. Suraj views the knife as a strictly male tool, thus marking a tendency in him to make distinctions between male and female gender roles. When he sexually assaults Nomi in the hotel room, the knife is present as a symbol of male aggression. However, Nomi picks up the knife and is able to use both the knife and her pepper spray in order to turn Suraj's aggression back on him in a series of self-defense efforts.



Settings

Jarmuli

Jarmuli is a fictional village in India. It is the location for most of the novel's major events, both during Nomi's girlhood and her adulthood. When Nomi is a girl, she is sent to live in an Ashram in Jarmuli, and when she is a woman, she travels from her home in Oslo to visit Jarmuli. Jarmuli is the place of convergence for all of the novel's characters during Nomi's trip there from Oslo. Jarmuli contains a religious temple that attracts many tourists. Nomi tours the temples with Suraj in order to perform research for a film company, but when she is on her own, she searches Jarmuli for the old ashram where she used to live.

The Temple

The Jarmuli temple is an old religious building dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva. Badal works as a tour guide in this temple, and it is there that he meets Nomi and Soraj. Nomi and Suraj tour the temple in order to conduct research for a documentary film company based in Norway. When Nomi first arrives at the temple, she is denied access for not wearing clothing that does not cover her body entirely. In addition to religious shrines, the temple contains many sexually explicit statues and murals, which tour guides state are a representation of the connection between religion and sexuality in Indian culture.

The Ashram

The ashram is a religious community where Nomi is kept as a girl after being displaced by violent conflicts in India. The ashram is operated as a Hindu institution, and all of the children and teenagers who live there are orphaned girls. The chief authority of the ashram is a widely respected religious leader called Guruji. Guruji sexually abuses the girls, although this fact is not known by anyone other than Guruji and the girls. Nomi eventually escapes the ashram with one of the other girls, and they flee to an orphanage center from which Nomi is eventually adopted by a Norwegian couple.

Oslo

Oslo is the capital and most populous city in Norway. Although none of the novel's scenes actually take place in Norway, Oslo is still an important location in the book's narrative. After Nomi escapes from the ashram, she is adopted by a Norwegian couple, and she goes to live with them in Oslo. As an adult, she returns to India in order to do research for a Norwegian documentary film company. Oslo represents a safe and welcoming home for Nomi, but it also represents the lingering tension between her new life and the traumas of her past, as Nomi is compelled to briefly leave Oslo and return to Jarmuli.

Train

The train to Jarmuli is only the setting for one scene in the novel, but the scene is pivotal for the overall premise and setup of the novel. On the train to Jarmuli, Nomi meets Latika, Vidya, and Gaori, who are three female friends of advanced age going on a recreational trip to Jarmuli. Nomi converses with the three women, but when Nomi leaves the train to use the restroom, she becomes separated from women when the train almost leaves without her. Nomi and thee women are eventually reunited by chance, thus emphasizing the centrality of coincidence and interconnected social relationships among the characters of the novel.

Themes and Motifs

Violence

From the very first scene of the novel, the narrative is punctuated with many instances of startling violence, and these violent episodes serve to highlight the dangers that hide beneath every type of social structure and interpersonal encounter. The novel begins with an idyllic description of Nomi's childhood home in a hut in India, and then this idyllic scene is quickly cut down with a brutal description of soldiers murdering Nomi's father and brother: "They slammed his face at the wall again and again. The whitewashed wall streamed red...One of the men lifted an axe and brought it down on my father's forehead" (10). These brutal acts of violence are described on the second page of the narrative, and they help to establish the underlying violent tensions of the novel. These tensions occasionally manifest into violence out of seemingly banal social situations, and this first scene of violence helps to establish the idea that truly horrific and unforeseen violence may arise unexpectedly at any time.

Although the deaths of Nomi's father and brother are the only murders in the narrative, the story portrays many other acts of violence that arise unexpectedly in order to explore the sources and consequences of societal and interpersonal dangers. For example, on their respective trips to Jarmuli, Nomi and the three old women realize that they must maintain constant vigilance against possible threats to their person. Vidya and Latika constantly worry about the possibility of Gouri becoming separated from them and lost, as they realize that dangerous circumstances may arise towards any helpless individual among strangers. Meanwhile, Nomi maintains constant vigilance against physical and sexual predators, for she has been well acquainted with the trauma of predation in her childhood, and she must fight off assailants at multiple times during her trip to avoid falling under similar harm to the harm she experienced as a child.

The narrative also recognizes violence as a necessary mechanism of defense, and these instances of violent self-defense also help to highlight the seriousness of various predatory social behaviors. For example, on page 31, when a stranger attempts to grope Nomi's chest, she immediately throws hot tea in the man's face and kicks him repeatedly. This behavior seems very startling at first, but as the reader comes to understand the horrific sexual abuse that Nomi suffered at the hands of Guruji, Nomi's self-defense comes to represent the necessary precautions that women must take in order to protect themselves from profound abuse. This dynamic also helps to recontextualize everyday behaviors of aggression as symptomatic of horrific desires and intentions.



Misogyny

Although the novel explores many points of view, the narrative gives particular focus to female points of view and seeks to explore both the origins of misogyny and the effects that misogyny has on those who must suffer through it. The experience of misogyny is primarily explored through the perspective of Nomi, who suffered greatly at the hands of men in her childhood, and who, as an adult, may examine the nature of gender relations through the lens of multiple cultures. When Nomi visits Jarmuli, she willingly points out forms of misogyny that seem to stand out against her European background. For example, she becomes outraged when she is disallowed from entering the Jarmuli temple because her clothes are supposedly too revealing. Nomi protests, “I’m covered from neck to knees!” (55) and says, “I can’t stand it, these temples, all these men laying down the law...Half those men around the door aren’t even wearing shirts” (56). This encounter sets the tone of oppression against women that Nomi must face during her visit to Jarmuli, and it parallels the horrific mistreatment she suffered as a girl living in the ashram.

The novel’s retrospective sections serve to detail even further extremes of misogyny and demonstrate how mistreatment of women may be symptomatic of widespread societal problems. When living in the ashram, Nomi discovers that Guruji, the ashram’s spiritual leader, regularly sexually abuses the orphaned girls who live in the ashram, and she suffers sexual abuse at his hands as well. Guruji’s followers are portrayed as complicit in these atrocities, as they either turned a blind eye to Guruji’s abuses or else refused to entertain the possibility that any wrongdoing persisted at the ashram. Thus, the oppression of these young girls persisted unabated, and the novel juxtaposes this oppression with the threats that Nomi and other women face in modern-day Jarmuli as well.

Although the novel accepts the idea that misogyny originates and is sustained from negative societal norms, the narrative also examines how socially sanctified ideas such as spirituality may be used as a guise for the continued support of misogynistic practices. For example, when Guruji sexually abuses Nomi, he always claims that it is part of a righteous spiritual ritual. It is unclear whether or not Guruji actually believes this himself, but it is clear that Guruji potentially sees this perverted form of religiosity as an excuse for the immense trauma he inflicts on the young girls of the ashram. Similarly, the temples in Jarmuli stand as monuments to the connection between misogyny and religion in Indian culture, as women are disallowed from entering unless they are completely covered.

Sexual Aggression

The novel portrays sexual aggression as one of the principal manifestations of misogyny, and the narrative explores how this aggression causes widespread degradation of societal wellbeing. Throughout Nomi’s childhood in Jarmuli and her return to Jarmuli as an adult, she must face repeated acts of sexual aggression, and



these acts serve to both traumatize her and perpetuate further cycles of such aggression. Nomi's childhood is in many ways defined by the sexual predation she suffers at the hands of Guruji. As an adult, she is far more prepared and able to protect herself from these instances of aggression, but the sinister and destructive nature of such aggression is not diminished by Nomi's capabilities. Not only does such aggression pose a constant threat to women, but in the novel even presents the aggression as a threat to both the physical and psychological wellbeing of the perpetrators. For example, the man who attempts to grope Nomi on the subway platform suffers considerable physical punishment from Nomi, and Suraj suffers similar punishment for aggressing upon Nomi in the hotel. Thus, the novel portrays societal tendencies towards sexual aggression as very self-destructive in terms of society at large.

In terms of the nature of sexual aggression, the novel examines how such dangers arise out of the intersection between social emphasis on the erotic and disproportionate power dynamics between genders. When Nomi and Suraj tour a temple in Jarmuli, a tour guide expounds upon the nature of the erotic art in the temple, saying, "In ancient India no barrier between life and love. Erotic is creation, so it is celebrated in our temples" (193). While this celebration of the erotic may seem innocuous on its own, the novel shows how it is connected to misogyny by a thread of spirituality in a way that encourages toxic gender relations. To elaborate, these same temples that celebrate the erotic also seem to endorse misogyny, as women are not allowed inside unless they follow specific strictures enforced by men. Therefore, the erotic and the misogynistic appear to join in a dynamic that encourages men to take control of the erotic over women.

The novel also explores how atmospheres that encourage sexual aggression serve to destroy relationships that may otherwise have been positive and constructive. The main example of this dynamic in the story exists between Nomi and Suraj. Due to his impending divorce, Suraj finds himself in a place of great sadness and loneliness, and Nomi appears to be the first connection he has made in a long time that has helped to alleviate that loneliness. Suraj and Nomi appear to form the beginnings of a friendship, possibly even a romance, but their nascent friendship is ended by Suraj's sexual aggression towards Nomi in his hotel room. Suraj suffers not only the end of this potential friendship but also the injuries that Nomi inflicts on him in self defense. This shared character arc thus stands as a firm example of how sexual aggression and the environments that encourage it are very toxic for positive interpersonal relationships.

Relationships

Despite all the dangers that arise from social interactions in the novel, the narrative also strongly argues for the importance of positive social relationships in one's life, portraying such relationships as not only necessary for one's survival and growth, but also for one's personal fulfillment based on the merits of the relationship itself. One of the most significant relationships in the novel is between Nomi and Piku, who depended on one another for solace and companionship as they suffered through the horrors of the



ashram. Nomi and Piku each mutually benefitted from their relationship, and in fact, Nomi's friendship with Piku appears to be one of the primary motivating factors for Nomi's return to India. As young girls, Nomi found herself drawn to Piku despite the peculiarities that made other girls shun Piku. They provided mutual emotional support for each other in the ashram, and Nomi clearly never forgot the benefits of this support. Thus, their relationship helps to demonstrate the necessity of positive interpersonal relationships in the face of hardship.

Through the relationship between Badal and Raghu, the novel explores how relationships may often cause pain but may still help personal development in spite of that pain. The story of Badal and Raghu's relationship is told entirely from Badal's point of view. The arc of this storyline essentially concerns Badal's infatuation with Raghu, Badal's subsequent disillusionment, and his resolution to broaden his horizons in response to this disillusionment. Although Badal's story is one of heartbreak, it is also in many ways a coming-of-age story. Badal believes that there is a connection of true love between himself and Raghu, and when he is ultimately rebuffed by Raghu, it is shocking and disappointing for Badal. However, this shock gives Badal the drive and new perspective to pursue a life outside of the small town of Jarmuli. Thus, the novel explores through their relationship how even the negative aspects of a relationship can help a person to grow and discover their true self.

Ultimately, the novel treats relationships as a barometer for the overall health of a society. The novel explores how the overall social atmosphere of a place can either promote or stunt the formation of relationships, and thus positive social atmospheres will beget further positivity through the formation of healthy relationship, while negative social atmospheres will beget further negativity through the prevention of healthy relationships. For example, although Nomi and Suraj form the beginnings of a possible friendship or even a possible romance, this relationship is thwarted due to Suraj's sexual aggression, which is representative of the overall social atmosphere. In contrast, Nomi had an extremely positive relationship with her original family because they were isolated from many societal ills such as violence. However, their idyllic family life was disrupted by the external violence of the unidentified soldiers. The novel thereby examines how the quality of social relationships reflect the quality of the social structure in general.

Religion

Although the novel does not decry religion, it does examine how religion may be twisted in order to excuse or even endorse negative social behaviors. One of the most extreme examples of this idea manifests in the person of Guruji. Guruji repeatedly sexually abuses the young girls in his care, and he uses a veil of religion as an apparent endorsement of these atrocities. For example, after his first instance of abuse towards Nomi, he said, "Say nothing. I do not reveal myself in this form to anyone else. You are the chosen one. Not a word about this. I will call you and you will sit on my lap again" (93). Similarly, Nomi notes that after the first time he raped her, "[Guruji] told me I was a nun in the service of God. I was the chosen one" (173). In both of these instances,



Guruji uses religious language as a rationalization of his atrocities, as well an apparent method to keep his horrific acts secret. The novel does not argue that this dynamic is inherent to religion, but it does demonstrate how religion may be misused in this way.

The novel also explores the close association between religion and social values, arguing that societal views of divinity reflect and help develop general social priorities. For example, as one of the tour guides states about the presence of erotic art in Hindu temples, “In ancient India no barrier between life and love. Erotic is creation, so it is celebrated in our temples” (193). The tour guide’s description equates eroticism with creation and thus positions the erotic as part of the divine. In this way, the celebration of the erotic in this temple reflects a type of religious reverence that then translates to everyday values. In other words, the religious reverence of eroticism appears to translate to the celebration of eroticism in art and every day life. It is impossible to say whether these religious beliefs inspire these values or whether the values inspire the religious beliefs, but the novel demonstrates how such values may be exploited for bad purposes, Guruji being an example of this.

Similar to the novel’s examination of the importance of good relationships, the novel appears to argue for the importance of mindful religious practices with regards to positive social values. The novel demonstrates how religious values may be twisted for negative purposes, but in recognizing the connection between religion and social values, the novel also makes a case for the positive effects that religion may have on a society. For example, the tour guide’s above observation about the celebration of eroticism may easily be interpreted as a celebration of the positive effects of communion between people, but the novel demonstrates how this idea is often twisted to give men more power in romantic and sexual relationships. Thus, by presenting both the religious idea and the negative interpretation of that idea, the novel also leaves the idea open for the positive potential interpretations.



Styles

Point of View

While the novel's retrospective sections are told entirely from Nomi's perspective, the novel's present-day sections alternate between several different character perspectives. The novel's retrospective sections concern Nomi's childhood and are told from Nomi's first-person point of view. The novel's present-day sections are told in the third-person, but the narration in these sections is limited to one character's perspective at any given time. The point-of-view characters in these sections are Nomi, Suraj, Vidya, Latika, Gouri, Badal, and no other characters. In these sections, the narration is always limited by the perspective of the point-of-view characters and, therefore, never includes any information of which these characters are not aware. The narrative always limits its point of view to the experiences of the characters to emphasize the importance of their personal struggles, their thoughts, and their sequences of emotions as reactions to external forces.

The story's alternating perspective helps to develop the novel's themes through inclusions of many points of view, and the added focus on Nomi's perspective via her flashback sections helps to emphasize the fact that all of the perspectives in the novel function—at least in part—to serve the thematic implications of Nomi's personal narrative. The many perspective of the present-day narrative serve to develop the larger social structure in which Nomi finds herself, and Nomi's personal recollections serve to steer the novel in a specific thematic direction with regards to violence against women in Indian culture.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is generally spare and plain, with the narration functioning in a rather brisk and utilitarian fashion without an abundance of ornamentation. For example, when Nomi describes the murder of her father and brother at the beginning of the novel, the brutal scene is described with fairly simple language, and Nomi's narration eschews overly complex or emotional language. Nomi's emotional devastation is slightly observed through her shedding of tears, but for the most part, the reader is left to imagine Nomi's emotional state for themselves. Similarly, during the present-day narrative, the narration is straightforward and leaves the reader to imagine the characters' emotional states based on their experiences in the narrative and the facts of their backstories. Even when the third-person narration explores a character's psychology or emotional state more deeply, the descriptions of these thoughts and emotions are somewhat indirect, using abstruse languages and mental images to guide the reader towards characters' inner truths without stating them too bluntly.

It is also important to note the ways in which the narrative voice shifts slightly throughout the novel. For example, during Nomi's retrospective sections, the narrative



voice stays consistent because her perspective is consistent throughout. However, in the present-day sections, the narrative voice changes based on the character whose perspective the narration has adopted at any given time, as well as the mood and thought process of that character at any given time. For example, the narration adopts an air of morose bitterness when Suraj sulks by himself in his hotel room, and it takes on a cheerful exuberance after Badal buys a gift for Raghu, with whom he is in love.

Structure

The novel is comprised of two alternating storylines, each of which progresses in a generally linear fashion. The novel switches back and forth between Nomi's recollections of her childhood and the present-day narrative of Nomi's return to Jarmuli. Nomi's recollections span from the death of her family to her escape from the ashram, with occasional brief references to her post-ashram life. The present-day narrative spans from Nomi's train ride into Jarmuli to about two weeks afterward, although most of that narrative focuses on the few days following Nomi's arrival in Jarmuli. One of the main effects achieved by switching back and forth between the narratives is the slow revelation of the significance of Nomi's memories and their thematic implications with regards to the present-day narrative. As the reader gains more insight into Nomi's past experiences, they gain insight into the true motivating factors behind Nomi's return to Jarmuli. Furthermore, the thematic elements of violence against women in her memories help to highlight the more covert threats of violence in the present-day storyline.

Although Nomi is the central character of the novel, the story is in many ways structured as an ensemble piece, giving considerable amounts of focus to the stories and struggles of Badal, the old women, and Suraj. In this way, the novel seeks to give depth to the world and relationships that Nomi inhabits, thus examining the social origins of the dangers and difficulties that Nomi must face. Moreover, the wider scope of the present-day narrative contrast with the very narrow scope in Nomi's memories caused by her confinement to the ashram. The open and complex presentation of Jarmuli when adult Nomi visits stands in sharp contrast to the very limited world in which Nomi was trapped as an abused child.



Quotes

I looked at myself in the mirror and said in a whisper, 'Chuni, Chuni, I'm wearing your rings. I will never take them off.'

-- Nomi ("Before the First Day")

Importance: In this quotation, Nomi admires the earrings that she received from a woman who took her in after Nomi's family was killed by soldiers. This scene helps establish Nomi's earrings as a symbolic talisman of protection against hardship, thus correlating to Nomi's obsession with earrings as an adult. It also helps to establish Nomi's inner strength and the motif of small pieces of solace that help Nomi to endure the many hardships she suffers in her childhood.

He brushed an arm against her breasts. [Nomi] stepped backward and...kicked his shin and his crotch as his hands flew to his face.

-- Narration ("The First Day")

Importance: This quotation comes from a scene on the train platform that the three old women witness from their place in the train. It describes an act of sexual aggression against Nomi by a man she does not know, and it describes Nomi's actions of self-defense. This scene helps establish the theme of violence against women that occurs throughout the novel. Moreover, Nomi's violent reaction foreshadows the revelation of the immense trauma from sexual abuse in her past.

I remember the ashram very well although I cannot remember a single thing about what was around it.

-- Nomi ("The First Day")

Importance: In this quotation, Nomi thinks back to her time as a resident in a religious community after her family was killed by soldiers. The fact that Nomi cannot remember any of the surroundings implies that Nomi was not allowed any freedom to roam outside of the ashram, thus foreshadowing that Nomi's true status within the ashram was essentially as a prisoner. Nomi's lack of knowledge about the surroundings also contributes to her difficulties in relocating the ashram as an adult.

I can't stand it, these temples, all these men laying down the law. Don't wear this, don't wear that. Don't do this, don't do that. Half those men around the door aren't even wearing shirts.

-- Nomi ("The Second Day")

Importance: In this scene, Nomi and Suraj are standing outside a temple with Badal, their tour guide, who informs them that all women must be completely covered from the neck down before entering the temple. Nomi becomes outraged, and the articulation of her outrage helps to develop the novel's examination of the oppression of women in Indian and Hindu culture. As Nomi notes, the men enforce strictures that only seem to apply to controlling the behavior of women.



It was hopeless. [Gouri] knew her friends were right about her ineptitude. She lost things, she forgot things.

-- Narration ("The Second Day")

Importance: This quotation represents Gouri's inner thoughts regarding the effects that old age has had on her cognitive state. Vidya and Latika have already expressed concern about Gouri in previous parts of the novel, but this quotation helps to more explicitly state the ways in which Gouri's old age has negatively impacted her. This information implies that Gouri may become lost in the village, which would give rise to many risks, thus further emphasizing the presence of danger towards women in the novel.

Say nothing. I do not reveal myself in this form to anyone else. You are the chosen one. Not a word about this. I will call you and you will sit on my lap again.

-- Guruji ("The Second Day")

Importance: This quotation is a statement from Guruji to young Nomi after an episode of sexual abuse by Guruji towards Nomi. Guruji attempts to excuse this abuse by declaring that it is part of a spiritual ritual. He also appears to use this logic as a way of convincing the young Nomi not to tell anyone of his abuse. This dynamic also acts as a further exploration by the novel of the ways in which misogyny and sexual violence arise from abusive dynamics between men and women in Hindu culture.

[Guruji] told me I was a nun in the service of God. I was the chosen one.

-- Nomi ("The Fourth Day")

Importance: This quotation is from a recollection by Nomi regarding her time at the ashram. The specific interaction that Nomi describes occurred after Nomi was locked in a hut for a week by Guruji for receiving her first period, and right before Guruji raped Nomi. This scene further explores the horrific trauma and sexual abuse that Nomi suffered as a child, and it also further explores how Guruji perverts ideas of spirituality as a way of attempting to excuse his horrific sexual abuses.

I remember how Piku was punished for not going to Guruji. They tied a big bag of dung to one of her ankles and she had to drag it with her wherever she went.

-- Nomi ("The Fourth Day")

Importance: This quotation describes another example of abuse suffered by the girls of the ashram. The example of abuse in this quotation is distinct from other examples of abuse in that it is abuse in which all of the faculty of the ashram are complicit, not just Guruji. This abuse and complicity helps develop the cruel and widespread nature of female oppression in the name of spirituality. The novel explores this dynamic as it appears in Indian and Hindu culture, and this dynamic leaves many scars of trauma upon Nomi.

In ancient India no barrier between life and love. Erotic is creation, so it is celebrated in our temples.



-- Tour guide ("The Fifth Day")

Importance: In this quotation, a tour guide attempts to explain the significance of erotic art found in ancient Indian temples. He states that ancient Indian culture treated sex and eroticism as part of the divine due to their procreative capabilities. This idea, when coupled with the misogyny that the novel portrays as pervading Indian culture, creates dangerous circumstances for women in Indian social structures. The power disparity between men and women leads to sexual aggression by men when coupled with this emphasis on the importance of eroticism.

I will drop you near the market in Jarmuli...And then I leave. I won't go back there ever again.

-- Badal ("The Fifth Day")

Importance: In this quotation, Badal expresses his drastic and somewhat startling intention to leave Jarmuli and never return. This decision appears motivated by Badal's rejection at the hands of Raghu. Badal appears to have decided that Jarmuli contains no promise for him, and although his decision is motivated by rather unfortunate circumstances, his decision appears to represent a major positive shift in his character. Badal begins to cast his gaze beyond Jarmuli in search of a better life.

Piku, I promised I would come back for you.

-- Nomi ("The Fifth Day")

Importance: This quotation potentially reveals another motivation behind Nomi's return to Jarmuli. When escaping the ashram, Nomi was forced to leave her friend Piku behind at the behest of Champa, who helped Nomi escape. Nomi apparently rationalized this action by promising that she would come back for Piku, and perhaps her return to Jarmuli represents an attempt to make good on that promise. This quote also potentially contextualizes the final scene of the novel as Nomi's continued search for Piku.

She looks up to orient herself: one side of the opal sky is turning pink. She swivels the spindle until the arrow points north.

-- Narration ("The Eighteenth Day")

Importance: This quotation is located at the very end of the novel, concluding a chapter in which Nomi appears to still be traveling through India long after her arrival in Jarmuli. This quotation depicts Nomi using some type of compass to find her bearings and determine where the next stretch of her path should be. Nomi's brief orienteering session implies that she is traveling long-distance across India, potentially in search of Piku, the one true friend she had at the ashram.