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## THE EVER AFTER OF ASHWIN RAO

by Padma Viswanathan

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Some topics to consider while reading *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*:

- Global tragedies vs. personal tragedies
- Relationships within families and communities
- The long-term effects of migration
- The role of religion in everyday lives
- Attitudes towards life and death

*The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* is a novel set among families of those who lost loved ones in the 1985 Air India bombing, registering the unexpected reverberations of this tragedy in the lives of its survivors. Ashwin Rao is an Indian psychologist who returns to Canada, where he was trained, almost twenty years after the Air India bombing to attend the trial of two suspects in the crime. He conducts a study of what he calls comparative grief, and is soon deeply involved in the lives of one Indian-Canadian family. This novel examines grief, and what people can live with and what they can live without.



### About Padma Viswanathan

Padma Viswanathan is a fiction writer, play writer and journalist from Edmonton, Alberta. Her writing awards include residencies at the MacDowell Colony and the Banff Playwright's Colony, the Amazon.ca First Novel Prize, and the Pen Center USA Fiction Prize. She received her MA from Johns Hopkins and her debut novel *The Toss of a Lemon* was published in eight countries, a best-seller in three. [www.padmaviswanathan.com](http://www.padmaviswanathan.com)

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- 1 Ashwin's profession as a psychologist is in conflict with his dislike of most other people. What does this say about him as a character?
- 2 Ashwin recalls his Sunday afternoon with Vijaya, saying that 'it was that day with my widow that I felt in full my loneliness.' Is Ashwin's tendency for solitude over society part of why he cannot work through his grief?
- 3 'We never act authentically if we have this level of self-consciousness' (p. 158). Are there any points in the story where Ashwin's actions seem authentic as opposed to carefully controlled? Does his statement apply to Seth's actions?
- 4 How much does the political aspect of the tragedy affect the character's abilities to cope with their loss?
- 5 What roles do objects play in the narrative? I.e. the *mangal sutra* (wedding necklace), the *japa mala* (Shivashakti rosary), various books, etc.
- 6 'I needed the guilt. I hoarded and treasured it. It had been so long since I had been close enough to anyone to cause pain' (p. 90). How much do you think guilt drives Ashwin's actions in the years following the plane crash?
- 7 Ashwin comments that 'Indian men are raised to be cared for' (p. 173). Is there a pattern in the way the female characters deal with their grief as opposed to how the male characters deal with it?
- 8 What is the significance of Seth's journey with the drug dealers?
- 9 The image of the ouroboros, the snake or dragon eating its own tail and representing eternity in self-regeneration, appears several times in the novel: the town sign for Lohikarma, Brinda's tattoo, the images of Shivashakti. What is the significance of this image? How is its meaning reflected in the ending of the story?
- 10 Ashwin notes that the disasters he has experienced occurred in a set of three. Can you identify three corresponding disasters in Seth's life? Or are Seth's disasters more personal than global?