Selection Day  
By Aravind Adiga  

Discussion Questions:  

1. Selection Day opens with a young Manju thinking about the darkness of kattale, secrets, and his mother (p. 1). On page 23 Manju describes his “secret gift, this mind-reading power, [that] had come to him from his mother.” How do Manju’s secrets and his and Radha’s mysterious, absent mother set the stage for the novel?  

2. Mohan tells his boys that “if you really want to understand the life that waits for you as adults, this is the only proverb you need: ‘Big thief walks free. Small thief gets caught’” (p. 29). What does this mean and why is this a key proverb for Mohan? How does this saying play out in the rest of the story?  

3. “All batting—all good batting—starts with superstition” (p. 73). How do superstitions affect each of the Kumars, on and off the cricket pitch?  

4. Both Mohan and Tommy Sir have a deep distrust of the male body, and they believe cricket helps boys to master it and ignore filthy urges. Why are they so suspicious of the boys and their natural instincts? How does cricket factor in?  

5. Tommy Sir, whose one great ambition is to find the ultimate cricket player, also believes that “only failure—the right kind of failure—has tragic grandeur,” and failure excites and arouses him (p. 141). What does this reveal about Tommy Sir and his pursuits?  

6. After Radha begins to falter at bat, he rails against the sea. “Someone up there was rewriting the promised contract, and Radha Kumar, who could do nothing to undo the changes to the script, who 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, bludgeoned the waves around him” (p. 182). What is the difference between “only a man” and “fully a man”? How does this difference characterize both Radha and Mohan?  

7. On page 185, Manju says Javed is his “real father.” What does he mean by that? What would Javed think of that statement?  

8. Sofia influences both Radha and Manju’s lives. When she picks Manju up in her car to talk to him about the rumors that he’s gay, in the background is Durga Puja, the festival of the Mother Goddess (p. 199). Is Sofia a mother figure in the novel? A goddess? What roles does she play?
9. Tommy Sir comes to believe that “a great sportsman is a kind of monster” and that Manju’s hatred—for his father, for Tommy Sir, for cricket itself—makes him a great batsman (p. 224). What does this hatred change for Manju as an athlete, as a man? How does hatred fuel other characters in Selection Day?

10. After Manju talks with Javed’s father, he sees that Javed’s many personalities, built up and then discarded, are a reaction to his father’s manipulations (p. 245). Why does Javed create these personas and destroy himself in this way to get back at others?

11. “Out there, Manju thought, with regret—a regret he would feel so keenly for the rest of his life—there must be fellows who are actually proud of their fathers” (p. 246). Why is this such a painful realization for Manju? Does this play into his decision not to be a father himself (p. 284)?

12. In Hindu mythology the world is thought to rest on the backs of four elephants who stand on the shell of a turtle. Elephants are often masculine symbols, while turtles are feminine. Turtles appear throughout the novel—Manju and Radha observe them near their home in the slum, Radha imagines a turtle speaking to him in his dreams, and Manju imagines seeing turtles that become Mohan, Radha, and Tommy Sir, as he gazes into Javed’s batting helmet (p. 261). What do turtles signify for Manju? For Radha? Why are they important?

13. Why does Manju ultimately reject Javed (p. 262), and with the words “you homo” that he and his brother had previously taunted Javed with?

14. Selection Day ends with Radha and Manju meeting for Manju’s birthday, and Radha finally pinching Manju until he agrees to fight “till one of us falls” (p. 297). How does this closing scene reflect the novel as a whole?

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