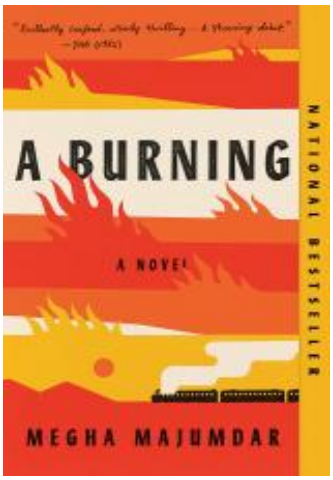
# A Burning

by Megha Majumdar




## About the Book

**For readers of Tommy Orange, Yaa Gyasi and Jhumpa Lahiri, A BURNING is an electrifying debut novel about three unforgettable characters who seek to rise --- to the middle class, to political power, to fame in the movies --- and find their lives entangled in the wake of a catastrophe in contemporary India.**

Jivan is a Muslim girl from the slums, determined to move up in life, who is accused of executing a terrorist attack on a train because of a careless comment on Facebook. PT Sir is an opportunistic gym teacher who hitches his aspirations to a right-wing political party, and finds that his own ascent becomes linked to Jivan's fall. Lovely --- an irresistible outcast whose exuberant voice and dreams of glory fill the novel with warmth, hope and humor --- has the alibi that can set Jivan free, but it will cost her everything she holds dear.

Taut, symphonic, propulsive and riveting from its opening lines, A BURNING has the force of an epic while being so masterfully compressed it can be read in a single sitting. Majumdar writes with dazzling assurance at a breakneck pace on complex themes that read here as the components of a thriller: class, fate, corruption, justice, and what it feels like to face profound obstacles and yet nurture big dreams in a country spinning toward extremism. An extraordinary debut.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** In A BURNING, Jivan?s social media usage ultimately leads her to become a victim of the state. Consider her statement: ?If the police didn?t help ordinary people like you and me, if the police watched them die, doesn?t that mean...that the government is also a terrorist?? (pp. 5?6). How does this messaging reverberate throughout the novel? How is social media used both as a tool of activism and as a tool of repression in our current society? Have you ever felt at risk expressing your opinions on social media?

**2.** Why do you think Lovely dreams of becoming a movie star? How does this ambition relate to the instances of

disrespect she faces in public, as well as to the ceremonies at which she is welcomed?

**3.** Shortly after her arrest, Jivan states: ?A woman like me is never believed? (p. 22). Discuss the import of this statement for the overall narrative. What assumptions are made about Jivan based on her religion? Her socioeconomic standing? How does she try to defy societal expectations throughout her life?

**4.** Consider your initial impression of PT Sir. How would you describe his day-to-day life before he attends the rally? How did the rally change his point of view on political engagement?

**5.** Consider the two interstitial chapters that are written from the vantage point of Jivan?s mother and father. Why do you think the author chose to include these two brief scenes? How do they contribute to the emotional impact of the narrative? Describe Jivan?s relationship with her parents.

**6.** Discuss Jivan?s choice to involve a journalist in sharing her story. What are her initial impressions of Purnendu? Describe her childhood and the incidents that Purnendu chose to highlight. What does the tone of the final article imply about truth and narrative?

**7.** Consider the conditions of Jivan?s imprisonment. How does she conduct herself in her day-to-day life? Describe her relationship with the other incarcerated women. How does Jivan?s decision to bribe Americandi weigh on her conscience?

**8.** Throughout A BURNING, there are scenes and moments in which a culture of violence against women is brought to the forefront. How do women in the novel navigate this expectation of violence and misogyny? How do they resist it?

**9.** Education plays an integral role in A BURNING. How is the education system described? Consider PT Sir?s role within it and Jivan?s experience in his school. How does the act of learning English become a form of empowerment for her? For Lovely?

**10.** Discuss ?Interlude: The Villagers Visit the Beef-Eater.? How did this scene affect you as a reader? Consider how anti-Muslim rhetoric and action is depicted in the novel. What does the state?s indifference to this violence imply about the relationship between justice and power?

**11.** At several points in the novel, Jivan discusses her aspirations to become middle class. Describe the conditions of her childhood and how they are depicted in the narrative. What are some of Jivan?s earliest moments of class consciousness? What does being ?middle-class? mean to her at different points in her life?

**12.** On page 98, Lovely states: ?In this life, everybody is knowing how to give me shame. So I am learning how to reflect shame back on them also.? When does Lovely feel most comfortable in her identity? At what points does she seem to feel the most shame in the novel?

**13.** At several points in the novel, the reader witnesses characters become morally flexible as they strive to achieve personal goals. Who, in your opinion, is the most morally reprehensible?

**14.** What was the most surprising aspect of the novel? How did your understanding of various characters change over the

course of the novel?

**15.** A BURNING is a novel that meditates on issues of power and agency. How does power change PT Sir? Lovely? At what moment is Jivan most empowered? Did you find that this book helped you think about injustice, power and agency in your own life and community? How so?

## Author Bio

Megha Majumdar is the author of two bestselling novels.

GUARDIAN First Book Award shortlist; Publishing Triangle Ursula K. Le Guin Prize for Fiction; Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Award; longlisted for the National Book Award; Women's Prize for Fiction shortlist; American Library Association Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence. GUARDIAN First Book

*New York Times* notable book, a *Washington Post* notable book, and one of the 10 best books of the year per *The Atlantic* and TIME Magazine.

Her debut novel, A BURNING, was a "Read with Jenna" Book Club pick and longlisted for the National Book Award, among other

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