

After the Tsunami by Annam Manthiram

Reading Guide

1. Do you think the title, *After the Tsunami*, is fitting for the story? Can you think of a different title?
2. If the characters (Siddhartha/Yrimal, Goli/Golicchio, Prakash/Puni, Ganesh, Nirmal/Peepa, and Jagadesh/Jaga-Nai) had been given different nicknames or names, would that have changed their personalities, and perhaps their relationships? How so?
3. How do the vignettes of Siddhartha's adult life inform his past in the orphanage and vice-versa? How would the novel be different without them?
4. Why do you think the chapters that discuss his present life are so short?
5. Siddhartha meets his wife at a pro-life demonstration. Why is this important?
6. In the first chapter, Siddhartha says, "I need to remember. I need them to come back to me." Why are his friends' memories so critical to him? Why does he need to relive this painful past?
7. In Chapter 3, Siddhartha talks about how he was adopted by a woman from the United States, and when he asks her why she adopted him, she answers, "I saw strength in you." What does she mean?
8. Who is your favorite character and why? Who did you despise?
9. In Chapter 11, Siddhartha says "A rug in Amma's house always made me think of Jaga-Nai," and how he now keeps it in his closet, so he can "remember him in the mornings while I am in that half-conscious dreamscape where anything seems possible." Why does the rug remind him of Jaga-Nai?
10. There are repeating themes in the novel that may make some readers uncomfortable. There are many scenes that deal with death, blood, feces, sickness, abortion. Why are these themes repeated so often, and do you think it is gratuitous? Or does it serve a greater purpose? What other themes have you uncovered?
11. Is Headmistress Veli a completely unsympathetic character? Toward the end of the novel (Chapter 47), Siddhartha remarks that "her self-loathing was so sovereign that it was like a disease." Why would he say that?
12. In Chapter 25, Siddhartha asks his wife, "Do you think that I am evil?" How would you answer?

13. In Chapter 27, Siddhartha mentions that “I prefer the outdoors.” Why?
14. In a surprising scene concluding Chapter 28, Puni reveals that he is perhaps more insightful than the others give him credit for. In response to Golicchio’s question, ““Who is protecting us now?”” Puni responds, ““We have each other, that’s all we have.”” Do you think that is true? Ultimately, do you think this is a truth that the boys all believed in?
15. In Chapter 32, Golicchio makes the observation, ““We always know what’s right or wrong. That’s not something that our parents teach us. That’s what we already know.”” Do you believe in this statement? What specifically is Golicchio saying about inherent morality, and how does his utterance illuminate the novel’s greater meaning?
16. Siddhartha describes in Chapter 34 how a mishap with his sister, Smita, and a razor blade resulted in violence. Describe Siddhartha’s relationship with his father. Was he a good father? Do you think Siddhartha is a good father?
17. Golicchio is a master storyteller, but in Chapter 35, he denies that he believes in what he says and tells Siddhartha, ““A story is only true if the listeners believe it. What’s the point of fabricating when no one is seduced?”” Do you agree with Golicchio’s assertion?
18. Siddhartha says in Chapter 37 that “I had to be reduced to nothing in order to gain everything,” and later, in Chapter 39, he tells his daughter that ““in the nothingness, there is everything.”” How are the two statements linked? What do his beliefs say about him?
19. Do you think there is any significance to the book that Siddhartha is reading (*Revelations*)?
20. Did you feel justice was served when the newspaper clipping in Chapter 43 reveals that Headmistress Veli had burned to death? How do you think Siddhartha feels?
21. What do you think has happened to Peepa and Aruna after they are presumed to have run off together?
22. Is Headmistress Veli’s relationship with Siddhartha entirely one-way, or does he gain something from it too?
23. Which of the boys do you think has the closest friendship? Jaga-Nai and Siddhartha? Golicchio and Peepa? Ganesh and Peepa? Golicchio and Siddhartha? Puni and Siddhartha? Or are their friendships an illusion?
24. Why does Peepa drink so much alcohol? What is he trying to forget?
25. Why does Headmistress Veli dupe Jaga-Nai by writing him pretend letters from his mother? Is it possible that he knew all along, but refused to believe it? Why?

26. In Chapter 52, Peepa and Golicchio both agree that ““Delusions prevent us from getting hurt.”” How does this tie in with question #24?
27. Do you think Siddhartha will ever tell his children everything about his past?
28. Why does Ganesh respond so angrily to his sister’s return (Chapter 60)?
29. Siddhartha remarks that he feels “a loss so profound that I am speechless” when he discovers that a new building has been erected over the old orphanage site in India (Chapter 61). Why?
30. Siddhartha rapes Headmistress Veli in a scene so horrid it is difficult to read (Chapter 66). Why does he do it? And why is he unable to reconcile this violent act with who he is now?
31. Does Golicchio really become insane when Peepa is locked away in the Poor Man’s Closet (Chapter 68)?
32. What does Siddhartha mean when he says in Chapter 70, “I hoped things would be different this time around, but sometimes we had a difficult time escaping the fate that was meant for us”?
33. Were you satisfied with Siddhartha’s reunion with Golicchio at the end?
34. Why does Golicchio say, ““You are home now”” and Siddhartha responds, ““Yes””?
35. Did you feel that this book was hopeful or desolate and why?