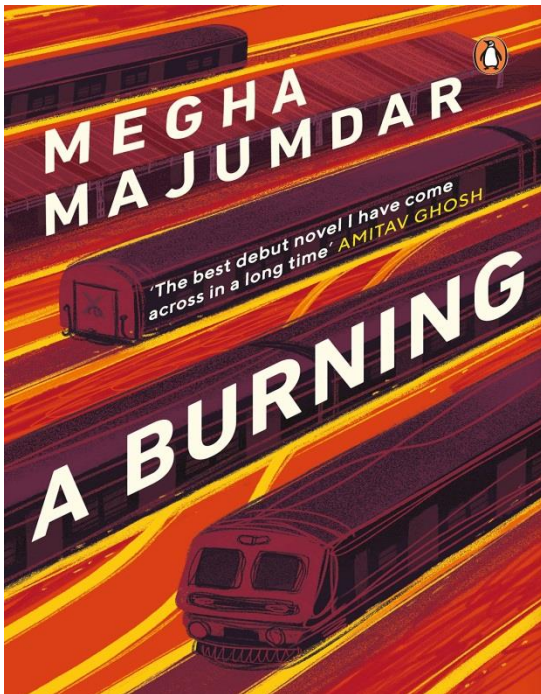


*A Burning*

Author: Megha Majumdar

Book Review

Reviewer: Riyaj Hussain



Book Title: *A Burning*

Author: **Megha Majumdar**

Publisher: Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd

List Price: 599 Format: Hard cover, 293 pages

Publication date: 2020 ISBN: 978-0-670-09379-3

Reviewer: **Riyaj Hussain**

Research Scholar  
Department of English  
Rajiv Gandhi University

Review Date: April 2020

### Introduction of the Book

Megha Mazumdar is a widely acclaimed Indian author. Her name effulgence as bright as that of Siddarta Singh, Kota Neelima, Arundhati Roy in the realm of Indian Writing in English. She received the Yuva Puraskar for her debut novel *A Burning*. She stormed into popularity with the publication of her first book *A Burning* in 2020. The novel brings out variety of contemporaneous issues which is afflicting our society such as communalism, judicial apathy, media trials, mob lynching, corruption and the politics of hatred. It also portrays the grim reality about forced eviction and unearths the unbearable and excruciating pain and suffering of the

marginalised section of society and, their experience with fragmented and mutilated identity and then their ceaseless struggle for survival in a world heading towards religious extremism.

The story is about a 22-year-old Indian Muslim girl, Jivan who for her livelihood works at a clothing store. *Despite her fierce intelligence, she has discontinued school to assist herself (and her parents) by working at the clothing store. After seeing a terrorist attack which leaved more than a hundred people dead in a nearby train station, she posts a controversial comment on Facebook by questioning the the then government about the handling of the terrorist attack,*

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? ( Majumdar 5,6)

Her question spreads across social media like forest fire which draws official attention as well. A few nights later , police comes to her home and drag her to jail. She finds herself accused of conspiring against the state. Jivan was seen at the railway station caring some kind of bulky package in her hand on the day of the accident, clothes soaked in kerosine are also recovered at her home, chatting online with someone multiple times the local police declare as a known terrorist turning her into the main suspect and hence also branded her as a terrorist. Charged with the heinous crime, she is sent to prison, awaiting a trail that will not occur for a year.

### **Overview of the Book's Structure**

There are no chapter division in the novel . Instead the novel is sectionalized characterwise. There are also sub-plots in the main story which are all interlinked. The novel is written in a fast-paced prose that shed light on the slums, courthouse as well as prisons where the story is centered. The narrative is linear and coherent. There is no shifting of events from here to there. The plot is not following any standardized formula. The author is seen starting with an idea of character and situation and the plot progresses on the lines she conceives to be the logical development of the idea.

### Strength of the Book

Every piece of literature has some strength and some shortcomings. *A Burning* is no exception of this. The strength of the book include-

- 1) So far as the story is concerned, it is easy to read and can be read in a single sitting because it is coherent, propellant and captivating from the beginning till end. The novel is thought provoking and gripping.
- 2) So far as the Language is concerned, the language is easy. Although some native nuances are there, it never fails to convey the feelings and thoughts of the writer.
- 3) So far as the characterisation is concerned, she is very real. Her characters are lifelike and realistic. They are thoroughly human in their likes and dislikes. They are the mouthpiece of the author.
- 4) The novel is rich in details. She has given a true picture of contemporary India. The life which she depicts is put before us with a wealth of detail and accuracy.

### Weakness of the Book

I don't have that intellectual capability to point out the pitfalls or weakness of such a great book by such a great author. But what I have found disappointing about the book are -

- 1) The plot left me wanting for more. It is not clearly mentioned about how did Jivan land up in the current situation as well as what happened to the actual terrorist who were responsible for the attack. There is no mention of them.
- 2) The writer tries her level best to be authentic but lack of understanding of the communities (Muslim and hijras) she talks about makes the book somewhat unrealistic.

### Recommendation

*A Burning* is dark. It is the lack of melodrama that darkens the mood and tone of the book. The novel is a stark, unnerving tragedy. It is grim and poignant. It overwhelm us with deep anguish. The novel is not recommend for all sorts of readers because it is a highly political novel and we

see a lot of agitation , communal violence, hatred , chaos and so on. Hence it is recommended for only adult readers.

### **Conclusion**

Megha Majumdar is a new voice in the realm of Indian Writing in English. She is a realist in the true sense of the word. She points out the maladies of our society and paints the picture with such artistry that we forgive her uneven style and it makes us see the truth. She is very very real in her portrayal of contemporary situation and scenery. Her *A Burning* is replete with governmental violence and shortcomings, as well as the power that social media outlets can have on the political process as well as on the lives of the powerless. She is writing as if she is seeing the sight and situation through her eyes. She narrates her story so poignantly that the curiosity of the readers is aroused to know what happens next.

\*\*\*