

## A Reader's Guide



### The Guru of Love

by Samrat Upadhyay

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### **About *The Guru of Love***

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From the acclaimed author of *Arresting God in Kathmandu*, *The Guru of Love* is the engrossing story of a fevered love triangle set in contemporary Nepal. Ramchandra, a quiet math teacher, reluctantly enters into an adulterous relationship, and soon his double lives disastrously converge. Ramchandra finds himself trapped — both in his house and in his city, Kathmandu, a crowded place where secrets are impossible to keep and family dictates. Ultimately, his only escape is to let go of someone he loves. Absorbing and psychologically acute, *The Guru of Love* radiates compassion and rare insight.

"A deeply woven tale of love and impermanence . . . Upadhyay's Kathmandu is as specific and heartfelt as Joyce's Dublin." — *San Francisco Chronicle*

"Poignant . . . *The Guru of Love* effectively weaves together the complicated dichotomies of man and mistress, love and lust, tradition and modernity." — *USA Today*

"A rare glimpse into the lives of ordinary Nepalese." — *Newsday*

### **About Samrat Upadhyay**

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Samrat Upadhyay was born and raised in Kathmandu, Nepal, and came to the United States at age twenty-one. His fiction has appeared in *The Best American Short Stories* and his first book earned him a 2001 Whiting Award. He lives with his wife and daughter in Bloomington, Indiana.

## Questions for Discussion

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We hope the following questions will stimulate discussion for reading groups and provide a deeper understanding of *The Guru of Love* for every reader.

1. Ramchandra has many opportunities to avoid a relationship with Malati. Why do you think he chooses to begin, and continue, their involvement?
2. Why do you think Goma reacts to Ramchandra's affair the way she does? Goma tells him that she will not return to him unless Malati moves in as well. Why do you think Goma makes this a requirement? What will this accomplish? What does it say about the relationships between the three characters?
3. Ramchandra is asked to speak to a teacher at his school who is suspected of having a relationship with a student. Why can't Ramchandra see the connection between his actions and the actions of the other teacher?
4. What are the various ways Upadhyay portrays the characters' inner states?
5. Each character in the novel has a different reaction to Ramchandra's relationship with Malati. Why does each one react the way he or she does? What do their reactions say about their places in society, or about the society itself?
6. Many things are changing in Ramchandra's family. What other changes are taking place in their city or culture? How does the upheaval in the Ramchandra household reflect the social unrest in the city?
7. Is the definition of "family" challenged in the novel? If so, in what way?
8. There are two portrayals of America in the novel: that of the idealized nation where anything is possible, and that of a disappointing nation that doesn't live up to the expectations of those who are looking for a better life. How is this theme reflected in the events of the story?
9. Ramchandra and his in-laws argue repeatedly over what is best for his family. Why do you think he will not accept money from them to build a house for his family?
10. How does the author present the realities of life in Kathmandu?
11. In the beginning of the novel Ramchandra has a very close relationship with his children, but by the end of the story he has grown distant from them. Is this a result of his affair with Malati? How did the events in the story affect his children?
12. Apart from physical location, what are the differences between where Ramchandra's family lives and where Goma's parents live? Or between Ramchandra's background and Malati's? How do these differences affect how the characters relate to each other?
13. A death in the family always causes significant upheaval in the lives of those left behind. How do you think events would have turned out if Goma's father had not died?

14. Were you surprised at the fates of the characters eleven years later? To what extent do you think Ramchandra's relationship with Malati affected where each ended up?

## A Conversation with Samrat Upadhyay

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**Q) Your previous published work was a story collection. What was writing a novel like after writing only short stories?**

**A)** *The Guru of Love* started out as a story that kept getting longer and longer, and because I don't use plot outlines with my stories, I didn't stop to outline its plot even after it had gone beyond 100 pages. I wrote the entire novel from my head. This helps the surprise element. Because I didn't know what was going to happen next, the story held my interest acutely throughout the process. I hope the same will happen to the reader.

**Q) The novel deals with the protagonist's struggle during the pro-democracy movement in Nepal. Why did you choose this particular setting?**

**A)** I was a student in the United States when the 1990 pro-democracy movement took place in Nepal. It was a momentous event in the nation's history, when the repressive monarchy suddenly crumbled and was replaced by a multiparty democratic system of government. As a writer, I was naturally interested in how it affected the lives of individual citizens, even those who hadn't participated in the movement, as many citizens did not. So the novel is basically about the struggles of an individual, with his own particular problems, and how they connect with the struggles of a nation that is undergoing a transformation of its own.

**Q) Several critics have praised your attention to detail and your rich imagery. What do you do in the process of writing to achieve that effect?**

**A)** I don't do anything particular. I think good fiction is made up of details, and to ignore the details is to ignore the very substance of life. Small details, when properly executed, can have what Raymond Carver called "startling power." A single detail — the flash of an earring, a silhouette in the window — can illuminate an entire work of fiction, making its meaning come alive for the reader at a level deeper than exposition or summary. For me, details are never mere ornamentation — they are the life and blood of fiction.

## For Further Reading

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The following books may be of interest to readers of *The Guru of Love*.

[Arresting God in Kathmandu](#) by [Samrat Upadhyay](#)

[Grass Roof, Tin Roof](#) by [Dao Strom](#)

[Interpreter of Maladies](#) by [Jhumpa Lahiri](#)

[The Woman Who Knew Gandhi](#) by [Keith Heller](#)