



The Ever After of Ashwin Rao

Padma Viswanathan

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

The Ever After of Ashwin Rao

Padma Viswanathan

The Ever After of Ashwin Rao Padma Viswanathan

From internationally acclaimed New Face of Fiction author Padma Viswanathan, a stunning new work set among families of those who lost loved ones in the 1985 Air India bombing, registering the unexpected reverberations of this tragedy in the lives of its survivors. A book of post-9/11 Canada, *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* demonstrates that violent politics are all-too-often homegrown in North America but ignored at our peril.

In 2004, almost 20 years after the fatal bombing of an Air India flight from Vancouver, 2 suspects--finally--are on trial for the crime. Ashwin Rao, an Indian psychologist trained in Canada, comes back to do a "study of comparative grief," interviewing people who lost loved ones in the attack. What he neglects to mention is that he, too, had family members who died on the plane. Then, to his delight and fear, he becomes embroiled in the lives of one family caught in the undertow of the tragedy, and privy to their secrets. This surprising emotional connection sparks him to confront his own losses.

The Ever After of Ashwin Rao imagines the lasting emotional and political consequences of a real-life act of terror, confronting what we might learn to live with and what we can live without.

The Ever After of Ashwin Rao Details

Date : Published March 25th 2014 by Random House Canada

ISBN : 9780307356345

Author : Padma Viswanathan

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Canada, Historical, Historical Fiction, India, Abandoned

 [Download The Ever After of Ashwin Rao ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Ever After of Ashwin Rao ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Ever After of Ashwin Rao Padma Viswanathan

From Reader Review The Ever After of Ashwin Rao for online ebook

Ruth Seeley says

While occasionally preachily written (there are definitely expository passages I would have cut), this is an important and compelling novel about a tragedy we as Canadians have ignored, the bombing of Air India flight 182 in 1985. I'm not sure I agree with the author that systemic and endemic racism are the reasons no one has written a novel about this act of terrorism before now. There's never been a novel written about the Swiss Air crash in Peggy's Cove (admittedly not an act of terrorism). Nor has there been a novel written (to my knowledge) about the boatloads of Tamil refugees who arrived in Chester, Nova Scotia in 1987.

The theme of psychological redemption through narrative reframing is a fascinating one and I plan to investigate it further. Meanwhile though, I'd highly recommend reading this novel. There are passages that will take your breath away. And they easily outweigh the clunky ones mentioned above.

Alexis says

This was a very hard book for me to read. I loved it, but it took me forever. I've been reading a lot slower lately, which is frustrating for me. I read this book slowly because of the subject matter. I was really affected by the stories of Air India, after spending 3 years researching the life of a Sikh man. I had to keep taking breaks from this book. The story is very lyrical, and traces a researcher who was affected by the Air India tragedy. Through his research, he becomes close to another family who also experienced the tragedy. I was quite affected by this book, but at the same time, I loved all the pop culture references, lyrical writing and Indian cultural references in this book.

Berkha Gupta says

Really great read - great balance of historical fiction with personality development of the primary character. Enjoyed reading a book that talks about an important Canadian South Asian history moment while balancing it with what was going on in Delhi. Would definitely want to re-read this book again many years later.

Karen says

This skilful author draws together topics such as psychology, the Air India plane crash and trial nearly twenty years later, religion and devotion, as well as relationships, including marriage and parenting. The character of Ashwin Rao, a psychologist from India, living in Canada, writes his patients' histories, providing insights that help them see their problems. If only he could do that for himself, as he desperately tries to connect to an Indo-Canadian family in Lokisharma, British Columbia. Recovering from losing his sister and her two children in the Air India tragedy, Ashwin pieces together stories from other surviving relatives and loved ones. And as he tries to solve his own problems, and write about the experiences of others, he finds redemption, as his friends face loss and growth, and solve a mystery of their own.

Lynn says

A psychologist who list his sister and her kids in the Air India crash comes to interview the victim's family. But really it's about one particular family who lost some friends. Goes back and forth in time and gets lost in family details

JoAnne says

Almost made it to the 100-page mark; but the story just isn't advancing at a fast enough pace for my liking. "How or why did some absorb loss into life's floodplains, while others erected a dam?" Page 41
"..both my daughters turned vegetarian again when they found out where meat came from." Page 59

Tracy Morton says

Interesting historical perspective of Indian political unrest. I enjoyed the book but didn't feel much of an emotional attachment to the characters. Sometimes the non linear way the story is told was distraction.

Connie Paddle says

I found this book very interesting until it started going off topic and then it became very boring.

Shilpa says

On June 23, 1985, an Air India Boeing 747-237B operating on the Montreal-London-Delhi route was blown up by a bomb at an altitude of 31,000 feet (9,400 m).

It crashed into the Atlantic Ocean while in Irish airspace. It was the first bombing of a 747 jumbo jet. A total of 329 people were killed, including 268 Canadians, 27 British citizens and 24 Indians. The majority of the victims were Canadians of Indian ancestry. The incident was the largest mass murder in Canadian history, Who were these people who were on board the 747 jumbo jet? Who were their families? How did they cope a loss so personal, so tragic?

In her new novel *The Ever After* of Ashwin Rao, Padma Viswanathan explores the stories that weren't told.

It is 2004. Almost 20 years after the brutal bombing and two suspects are on trial. Ashwin Rao, an Indian psychologist trained in Canada, returns to Canada to do a study on comparative grief, interviewing people who lost a loved on in the Air India bombing. What he neglects to mention is that he too had family members on the plane.

As he interviews the families, he becomes embroiled in the lives of one family caught in the undertow of the tragedy. In the process, he is forced to deal with his own emotional turmoil.

Padma Viswanathan is a Canadian playwright and fiction writer, and in *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* does a phenomenal job covering the multiple layers of grief, and manages to take us on the its long winding path to recovery.

In addition to bringing a human side to a historical disaster, which is the author's strength in her publication, we have in *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*, Padma Viswanathan's (perhaps) audacious attempt to tackle issues of societal change: identity and one's place in the social fabric; the baggage of colonialism; class divisions that refuse to wither away; bringing the conflicts of the past into the present and into a new homeland; and what does it mean to be a "Canadian" when the immediate marker of skin colour marks one perceived as "the other."

The story starts off with strong momentum, but just like a plane on a trajectory that is overly ambitious it feels like it may stall halfway. In the same vein one can be critical in surmising that *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* is on its own flight of Icarus in attempting to touch upon ideas beyond the scope of the book's strengths—that characters and their stories—however, in the light of the recent plane crash in Malaysia, the story and the sorrows become resoundingly relatable to us once more, despite a tragedy that occurred over almost three decades ago.

Review: sukasareads.com
@ShilpaRaikar
@SukasaReads

Michelle says

3.5*

Ben Babcock says

I read, and greatly enjoyed, *The Toss of a Lemon* years ago. Now Padma Viswanathan is back, this time with a Giller Prize nomination, again with a book connected to India, but now one firmly grounded in Canada's history and conflicted mixture of cultural obligations as well. *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* is every bit as complex and emotionally sensitive as one might expect from a literary award nominee. While it didn't quite engender the same lasting sense of enjoyment that I seem to recall *The Toss of a Lemon* creating, it still manages to be a marvellous work of fiction.

Despite its title, I'd argue that *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* is not, actually, about Ashwin Rao. He is the nominal protagonist and the first-person narrator for most of the book. And, true, Viswanathan spends a lot of time developing him as a character: the events of the book affect him, and we seem him coming to terms with his own losses. But over time, the story of Seth's family overshadows Ashwin's own narrative. Viswanathan shares details he couldn't have access to—though, I suppose, there is an argument to be made that all of these details are actually part of a narrative Ashwin wrote, as part of his narrative therapy

procedure, and do not actually reflect what happened. How's *that* for an unreliable narrator?

Regardless, my point is that this book is about so much more than a single man working through his grief. Viswanathan's careful creation of an Indian–Canadian psychologist who is looking to create a book of interviews and stories about those grieving over the Air India Disaster, when he himself lost a sister and niece and nephew in the disaster, is clever and heartwrenching to equal degrees. She fixates upon one of the most prominent and tragic events in recent Canadian history, yet she manages to capture the most human elements and reactions to it. Although the trial of the alleged perpetrators is ongoing in the background, it never takes the forefront—it is just setting, a way of establishing the atmosphere and tone in which Ashwin does his work.

As humans (sorry, aliens and robots who are reading this in the far future when my reviews are the only remaining corpus of human writing), we all have some kind of experience with grief. We know that grief has strange, unforeseeable and lasting effects on individuals. We handle it in different ways. Some people gather their grief close to their chests, hoarding it as if the feeling alone can somehow compensate them for their loss; others want to share and open up and form new connections as compensation for ones they will never feel again. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, provided your grieving process is right and healthy for *you*.

Ashwin isn't interested in the grieving process, however, so much as he is interested in the aftermath of that process. With twenty years passed since the disaster, he wants to know how well families have “adjusted” to what happened. The immediate feelings of grief are gone—and what is left? This is the “ever after” of the book's title: the harsh and inescapable truth that, when people die, we keep going. And like a ripple propagating forward through time after a time-traveller inadvertently steps on a butterfly, this grief has profound but subtle influences on the people it touches.

For me, the highlight of this book is not so much any individual's portrayal as it is the way Viswanathan contrasts Indian and Canadian cultures. Ashwin, Seth, Venkat, and Lakshmi are all Indians who immigrated to Canada (though in Ashwin's case, he then moved back to India)—they have a “Canadian experience” that has affected them, but they were essentially raised Indian. Seth and Lakshmi's daughters, on the other hand, are Canadian by birth, Indian by heritage. Their conceptual framework is quite different—and they were so young when the disaster struck that their reactions differ in that respect as well. Viswanathan is sensitive to these differences in her characterization, making for a rich tapestry of human emotions and behaviours.

Ashwin draws parallels between the Air India Disaster and the Golden Temple massacre in India, where Indian military forces stormed a Sikh temple that was under the control of resistance forces. This led to massive fallout: Gandhi's subsequent assassination at the hands of her Sikh bodyguards, and then mob-conducted pogroms against Sikh families in India to which the government and police turned a blind eye. Later in the book Ashwin continues to ruminate on the complicated, fragmented nature of Indian religious consciousness: how Britain divided its colonial possession along Hindu and Muslim lines, leaving the Sikhs out in the cold. Do the Sikhs “deserve” or “need” their own nation? Is it even right or reasonable to silo people by religious identity? Even though I am capable of comprehending and considering these questions from an abstract perspective, it's impossible for me to understand them in the context that a character like Ashwin, who grew up in India, does. I was reminded, once again, of how my own life and upbringing and privilege to live in a “stable” and “boring” place like Thunder Bay, Canada has influenced my perception of what the world is like.

Of course, the Air India Disaster was not really an *Indian* disaster but a Canadian one, even if our government didn't seem to take that point at the time. The victims were, by and large, Canadians—that they

happened to be of Indian descent, on an Indian-owned airline, was beside the point. The perpetrators, too, were likely Canadian—albeit influenced by Indian–Sikh radical ideologies, sure. But as Viswanathan and my own Wikipedia-fuelled research indicate, it's not like CSIS and the RCMP were totally ignorant of potential threats. They just didn't act on them. Then, in the years that followed, a strange silence and reluctance to admit wrongdoing. Two decades before a trial.

That idea that the Air India disaster was not the Canadian government's responsibility because the passengers were of Indian descent is the potent descendent of a much more overt and noxious colonialist streak that runs through our history. Viswanathan invokes the *Komagata Maru* incident, reminding us that Canada was very much “for white British subjects only” well into its time as sovereign country. I don't know if it's because of or in spite of our stereotypical reputation for politeness and fairness that we don't want to talk about, acknowledge, or make amends towards those sorts of missteps in our past ... despite our pretensions towards humility on the world stage, we are not so different from that country to our south (Canada's sweater), and the close ties we maintained with mother Britain occasionally meant we were worse. The fact that, in 1985, these people didn't receive better posthumous treatment because of their ethnicity and heritage speaks to the continued conflict within Canada about what it means to be Canadian, to be a citizen, to have “a Canadian culture.” That is a conflict that remains as-of-yet unresolved.

This is probably why the book is so affecting, why it's so difficult to read despite being, on its surface, placid and perhaps even dull in its lack of events to punctuate its equilibrium. It evokes so many ideas, especially uncomfortable ones. I dragged my heels reading this—it's a reasonable-length book, and I'm reading one that is arguably longer now in about the space of two days—but you need to take your time to let the feelings sink in.

I said earlier I didn't enjoy this as much as Viswanathan's first novel. That shouldn't be taken as criticism of this one. *Enjoyment* probably isn't the most appropriate term for a book like this. And they are different types of stories: one is a sprawling, multi-generational look at changing attitudes, while the other is a more constrained attempt to chart the vicissitudes of grief. It's difficult to compare them or judge one against the other, so I don't want to try. Both are probably worth reading, if this sort of fiction—Indian-Canadian, semi-historical, emotional and literary in tone and breadth—is what you're in the mood for. It's heavy; I should have gone for a definitely-lighter book afterwards but seem to have ended up with a similarly moving title instead. Such is life.

I don't want to go into spoiler territory discussing the twist or the denouement that follows. Suffice it to say, I'm not sure I understand the impulse that led Viswanathan to do that—but I understand the sentiment behind those closing pages. We spend so much of our life at the mercy of chance events, of others' actions, of unforeseen consequences that influence our own opportunities. There is an impulse in all of us to act, to move, which can either manifest itself as lashing out or as reaching out, depending on our emotional pique of the moment. Above all else, there is that fundamental and unshakeable truth: time marches on. We can't go back. We can't revisit loved ones long gone; we can't undo mistakes—ours or others'.

Like Seth, heading along the beach and into the ocean, we have only one choice: do we walk or do we run into our future? Do we cower, or do we embrace it with open arms?

Shirley Schwartz says

I'm not sure how to rate this book, or even what to say about it. This was a Giller prize finalist last year, and it was the last of the six shortlisted books that I read. I found the book was extremely well-written, and Ms. Viswanathan is an author of some skill. But I found the book pretty hard slugging at times. There is a lot about East Indian religion that I found slowed down the book's pace considerably. The book is ostensibly about the surviving family members of the 1985 Air India plane crash. It certainly shows that home-grown terrorists and radicalized local terrorists are not a 21st century issue. They have been with us for some time. The book is certainly sad and heartrending, and often difficult to read since I'm afraid our Canadian government and CSIS, both past and present, don't come out looking very proactive. In fact, it doesn't appear that either took the bombing seriously when it occurred. Even though 329 people died in this bombing, no one has ever been charged with the crime, and the only person who was put on trial for it received a not-guilty verdict. The timeline for the novel is actually 2001 - 2005, but Ms. Viswanathan manages to bring 1985 and the aftermath right after the disaster to the forefront for us through the eyes and pen of Ashwin Rao . Rao is writing a book about some of the victims families twenty years after the crash. He interviews some of the families who lost loved ones in the crash. I think the main thing that I took away from this book is that people touched by tragedy, especially sudden, violent tragedy, never really fully recover. At the very least they are forever changed by the event. This is an important book for Canadians to read.

Nitya Sivasubramanian says

Again, way too depressing to read right now. Perhaps most importantly because the themes of systemic racism and a misunderstanding of terrorism, especially of the homegrown variety, are still so current in my life.

Sandra says

Strong read, very interesting story, with a good grasp of the "historical" context (Bombing of Air India Flight 182 over Irish airspace).

Very well written and very interesting.

Sarah says

I really enjoyed this book. It deals with the Air India bombing of 1985, and I felt that the author used this as a way to explore more current terrorist actions in a very tactful manner. I loved the blending of Canadian and Indian cultures. I loved the way she lets the death of loved ones truly affect the lives of her characters 20 years later. Very well written.

Connie says

Krista says

The Ever After of Ashwin Rao has a promising premise: On June 23, 1985, Sikh terrorists planted a bomb on Air India Flight 182, and while en route from Montreal to Delhi (via London), the plane exploded over Irish airspace, killing all aboard, including 268 Canadian citizens. As a percentage of our population, this was Canada's 9/11 moment, but it failed to provoke national mourning, and as Padma Viswanathan writes in this book, Canadians saw it as "an act of brown-on-brown terrorism that a (nearly entirely) white government failed to prevent or even properly to investigate." As she reminds us, the Canadian Prime Minister at the time, Brian Mulroney, called the Indian Prime Minister to offer condolences -- as though this was their tragedy, not ours. Eighteen years later, as two suspects are finally being brought to trial, Ashwin Rao -- an Indian psychotherapist who was trained at McGill -- returns to Canada to interview the families of the Air India victims. Rao is a practitioner of Narrative Therapy:

My therapeutic interest is in framing individuals' maladies as stories within stories within stories, the way people themselves are nested within families and societies... My challenge is to tell the story on the individual's terms, giving a nuanced sense of his problems' origins -- in himself, in his community, in societal expectations.

What this means is that Rao is trained to listen to a person's discourse, and then with some practised intuition, can write the person's story out, adding all of the background and surroundings details that they might not realise are contributing to their current problems, and then he shares the fictionalised version, collaboratively tweaking details where necessary. With the start of the trial, Rao intends to write a book about the lives of the families of the Air India victims in the style of this Narrative Therapy; declining to share with his interview subjects the fact that he, too, lost family in the explosion; his sister and her two children.

That's what the beginning of this book appears to be about -- and I was intrigued to learn more about the Air India bombing and thought the format would lend itself well to exposing the Indian-Canadian community's grief and outrage -- but after showing Rao interviewing his former brother-in-law, the therapist's account jumps to the town of Lohikarma, B.C., and becomes centered on one family that Rao encounters there (noted as the fourth town, seventh family, although we don't meet any of the others). Through his encounters with Dr. Sethuratnam (known as "Seth", a physics professor who reminds Rao of his own father) and his daughter Brinda (who reminds Rao of his dead niece), Rao is mindful of his own life story and "the three lightning strikes" that spared him (which are the three Indian-on-Indian tragedies that affected him without harming him). Most of the rest of the book alternates between the telling of Rao's biography and Seth's growing attachment to a guru (whom he thinks of as God-on-Earth), and it was never clear to me whether Seth's experiences were real or merely Rao's fictionalised imaginings as he performed Narrative Therapy on himself. If they *were* meant to be Seth's literal story, they took up a huge chunk of the book for uncertain purposes -- the character is even peripheral to the Air India tragedy -- but being a physics professor, he is able to introduce Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and multiverses to the Hindu worldview (a connection I always like to read about, but doesn't really move the story forward).

As Rao looks at the big picture and tries to establish root causes for Sikh terrorism -- the Air India bombing

was a response to anti-Sikh programs in India, following the assassination of Indira Gandhi following the storming of the Golden Temple...going back to the Punjab at the dawn of the sixteenth century -- he seems to be making the case that this *was* "brown-on-brown terrorism" that just happened to have been perpetrated from Canadian soil and that seemed to undermine any useful point this book could have been making.

And as for the writing, there were some poetic passages, that while lovely, seemed out of place:

One upon a time -- here, I cannot be specific -- Hinduism arose, perhaps on the soil south of the Indus; perhaps brought by Northern invaders. Without Hinduism, there would not have been Sikhism. Without India, could there be Empire? Without Empire, could there be radicalizing? Without Canada, could there have been a bomb?
Once upon a time: poetry, syncretism, mysticism, death.
Once upon a time: evolution, matter, being.
Once upon a time: time.

And more than once, as Rao is telling his own life story, he'll say something like, "Count on a therapist for a fancy prose style" or apologises for "yet another laboured metaphor", and unless this is a reminder that Rao is a Narrative Therapist (and is meant to alert the reader to the semi-fictionalised nature of his methods) then it's unnecessarily self-conscious and distracting. And don't get me started on the surprise near the end -- talk about unnecessary.

I know it's pointless to be disappointed when a book doesn't turn out to be what I was expecting, but this feels like such a lost opportunity. At least Viswanathan attracted the attention of the Giller Prize judges with this effort.

Lauren Simmons says

Okay, so the twist at the end is good, and some parts (mostly Ashwin's parts) are really interesting and I like the voices, but this book took too long to get anywhere interesting for me. Not a Giller contender when placed next to TGWWSN and AMPS tbh.

Kathleen McRae says

I liked this book but I found it intense throughout and so it kind of lost its impact. It was well written and captured the aftermath of tragedy and the impact it has on families and individuals for years after it happens

Maxine says

On June 23, 1985, Air India Flight 182 en route to London, England from Toronto, Canada exploded off the coast of Ireland. All 329 passengers and crewmembers were killed. Of those dead, 268 were Canadians. Yet,

this tragedy received little outrage in Canada – these dead may have been Canadians by birth or choice but the colour of their skin marked them as ‘other’. To too many Canadians, this was an Indian disaster, not a Canadian one – Brian Mulroney, then Prime Minister of Canada, phoned the Indian President to offer his condolences. It would be almost 20 years before suspects were finally brought to trial. Although, there were several suspects, only one man would ever be convicted and then only of manslaughter and perjury. Author Padma Viswanathan uses this lack of outrage by the larger Canadian population as well as the lack of closure for the victims as the backdrop for her novel, *The Ever After* of Ashwin Rao.

Ashwin came to Canada in 1969 to study medicine and psychology. He settled into Canadian life with a growing practice and a Canadian girlfriend. However, when his father falls ill, he returns to India and accepts a job there. It is a period of political unrest in India. When Indira Gandhi is assassinated in 1984, Sikhs are blamed, leading to violence against them. As the violence spreads to their neighbourhood, Ashwin and his father hide some of their Sikh neighbours but witness the murder of two men at the end of their street. In 1985, Ashwin’s sister plans a trip to India with her two children. Ashwin last speaks to her just as they prepare to leave to catch their flight on Air India Flight 182.

As the 2004 trial of the suspects finally begins for the bombing, Ashwin returns to Canada to do a psychological study of the survivors and their grief. He decides to keep his own loss a secret as he conducts the interviews. The novel deals mainly with two families: Venkat, a university professor, whose wife and son died in the crash, although only his son’s body was recovered and Seth, who worked with Venkat and whose family has taken responsibility to help Venkat as he slowly disappears into his grief. Ashwin’s own story becomes entwined with theirs.

The narrative shuffles back and forth from India to Canada as well as to Ireland and in time from before the bombings to the trials. It deals with the differences between Canadian-born Indians, those who immigrated to Canada, and those who remained in India in regards to issues like marriage, children, grief, and faith. It also contrasts the attitudes of other Canadians to the tragedy with the Irish who lived close to the crash site. Yet, despite the real disaster and its aftermath that are the background for this novel, this is neither a revenge story, a story of victimization, or a rejection of Canada despite its sorry attitude towards the crash and its victims or its tepid efforts to bring the guilty parties to justice. Viswanathan manages to give a nuanced look at what led to the tragedy as well as a very empathetic picture of how it affected survivors. Most surprising given everything that happened both in the reality of the disaster and in the novel, she provides a hopeful ending to the story.