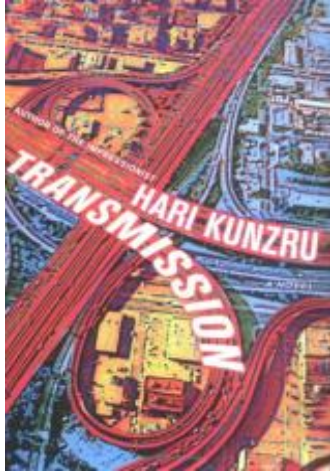


Transmission

by Hari Kunzru



About the Book

A taut, darkly funny novel about life in the Internet Age, **Transmission** tells the story of Arjun Mehta, an Indian computer programmer who comes to Silicon Valley in search of the online-age version of the Great American Dream: Starbucks, Gap Khakis, MP3 players and baseball caps with software company logos embroidered on them. But unlike the Bollywood epics upon which Arjun models his dreams, things don't quite unfold in song-and-dance-routine style. The company he thinks will lead him to riches and software euphoria is little more than a digital sweatshop and the Dream Girl he seeks is hardly waiting at the local strip mall convenience store.

When both disillusionment and corporate downsizing threaten Arjun's new American existence, he turns to desperate measures and unleashes a computer virus named and modeled after his favorite Bollywood actress, Leela Zahir. Events quickly spiral out of control. The author's razor wit and sharp social commentary, as well as his gentle touch with a truly complex and engaging character of Arjun, create a novel that is as engaging as it is timely.

Discussion Guide

1. **Transmission's** Indian protagonist, Arjun, has specific ideas of what life in America is like. Where do these ideas come from? How realistic are they? Discuss how America might be viewed by someone in a completely different (non-Western) culture. What preconceived notions do Americans have about foreign cultures?
2. The world of Indian filmmaking plays a key role in the novel. What impact does "Bollywood" have on Arjun's life? Discuss the impact - both large and small - that mass media has on your life.

3. Arjun is hired by Databodies the same day his sister, Priti, is hired by an Australian call center. The way their parents respond to the news (from both children) is telling about the female societal roles in India today. How do you think the novel would have changed if their roles had been reversed?
4. Arjun's innocence is magnified by how literal he is - he doesn't understand English-language nuance and thinks people mean what they say. He believes job security exists, and thinks having girls who are friends mean girlfriends. Contrast this with the character of Guy Swift, who makes his living selling brand concepts.
5. Kunzru alternates the story of Arjun with subplots involving Guy Swift and Gabriella Caro. Why are their stories important to the novel? The differences between their lives stand in stark contrast; how are the lives of Arjun, Guy and Gabriella similar?
6. Compare and contrast Arjun's workplace at Virugenix and his boss, Darryl, with Guy's company, Tomorrow*.
7. Discuss the role Chris plays in the novel. Does she have an impact on how Arjun views the world? In what way?
8. The Leela virus strains, originally unleashed by Arjun, have major global economic impact. Have you ever been struck by a computer virus? What kind of damage was incurred? How did it make you feel? Did you think the level of impact and the types of response elicited by the Leela viruses were realistic?
9. Think about all the things you rely on personal computers and/or the Internet to accomplish. Would your life change if the Internet suddenly stopped working? In what ways?
10. Another subplot of the novel involves Leela Zahir, an Indian actress, and her relationship with her mother. What kind of relationship do they have? Why do you think their relationship is important to the novel?
11. Kunzru loads **Transmission** with a great deal of specific language about the Internet economy, computers & computer viruses. What effect did this have on you as a reader? Did you feel this level of detail was critical to the authenticity of the novel?
12. The last third of the novel spends a great deal of time on location with Leela in Scotland, with Gabriella and Leela's co-star Rajiv. What role does the Scottish setting play in the novel? What point is the author making with this setting?
13. Discuss Guy's transformation at the end of the novel. Do you think his change is sincere, or a way of creating a different "brand"?
14. What happened to Arjun and Leela?
15. Recently there has been a great deal of press about offshoring, or the exporting of jobs with American employers - particularly technical jobs - to foreign countries because of decreased labor costs. What impact do you think offshoring will have on the United States economy in the coming years?
16. In this country there is a lot of emphasis on pop culture and pop stars are treated as heroes. Reading **Transmission** readers see that the same trend is found in India. What do you think about the way we deify and celebrate celebrity. Does

it have an effect on values?

Author Bio

Hari Kunzru is the author of BLUE RUIN, RED PILL, WHITE TEARS, THE IMPRESSIONIST, TRANSMISSION, MY REVOLUTIONS and GODS WITHOUT MEN. He is a regular contributor to *The New York Review of Books* and writes the "Easy Chair" column for *Harper's Magazine*. He is an Honorary Fellow of Wadham College Oxford, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and has been a Cullman Fellow at the New York Public Library, a Guggenheim Fellow, and a Fellow of the American Academy in Berlin. He teaches in the Creative Writing Program at New York University and is the host of the podcast "Into the Zone" from Pushkin Industries. He lives in Brooklyn.

Critical Praise

A fast-paced up-to-date British novel..."--- *The New York Times*

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