

Too many people with little to tell

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This is a tale of Moosa. Born in the slums of Dharavi, he charts out a story of "success" that involves forging friendships and appointing trusted lieutenants in different businesses, many of which fall foul of the law. There is illegal international trade in gold, for instance, and once money is in abundance, the men branch out into the newspaper industry and software too. So this is one tangled web of a tale, with a mix of characters and locales spanning the globe. Along the way, you'll be pardoned for losing the plot—so many characters make their debut just a few pages from the end of the novel.

Jyoti Menon, the author, is an engineer who turned to Human Relations "because of her passion for people," the paperback's back cover tells us. Is it that passion for people that explains the profusion of characters in this novel? There is life's hard experience that the author attempts to portray: the drudgery of Dharavi, the friendship between Bhaskaran and Moosa, the forging of life-long bonds. In short spells, the book



The Angel of God
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might lift you into the world that it creates. But set in so many different geographical locales, the author spends too many words explaining settings. Menon's prefatory comments reveal that writing, for her, is almost a mission: "We perceive, we make judgments, we make decisions based on our perceptions..."

It's the life of Bhaskaran, Moosa's trusted aide, that provides the novel its catharsis: a wastrel in his early years, he befriends Moosa who thrusts his own unfulfilled ambitions on the young boy. And Bhaskaran is not one to disappoint: from IIT Madras to further studies at a very sought-after campus in the US, he does it all. Not one ambition has he fallen short of; he's successful as an entrepreneur he marries the ideal girl, he plays dutiful son to ageing parents. Such a picture of perfection, you're bored.

The Angel of God is ambitious in scope: it spreads out a large canvas for itself, but the paints run out. Sometimes, a painter might undo his picture and reuse the canvas. That, woefully, is not an option here.