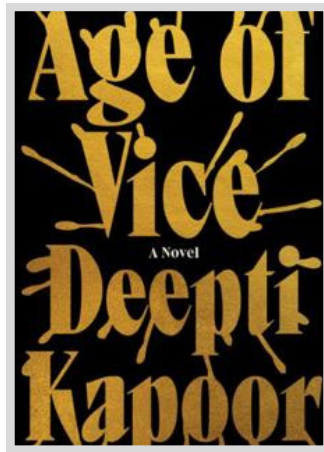


Age of Vice by Deepti Kapoor



Summary

New Delhi, 3 a.m. A speeding Mercedes jumps the curb and in the blink of an eye, five people are dead. It's a rich man's car, but when the dust settles there is no rich man at all, just a shell-shocked servant who cannot explain the strange series of events that led to this crime. Nor can he foresee the dark drama that is about to unfold.

In the shadow of lavish estates, extravagant parties, predatory business deals and calculated political influence, three lives become dangerously intertwined: Ajay is the watchful servant, born into poverty, who rises through the family's ranks. Sunny is the playboy heir who dreams of outshining his father, whatever the cost. And Neda is the curious journalist caught between morality and desire. Against a sweeping plot fueled by loss, pleasure, greed, yearning, violence and revenge, will these characters' connections become a path to escape, or a trigger of further destruction?

Equal parts crime thriller and family saga, transporting readers from the dusty villages of Uttar Pradesh to the urban energy of New Delhi, *Age of Vice* is an intoxicating novel of gangsters and lovers, false friendships, forbidden romance, and the consequences of corruption. It is binge-worthy entertainment at its literary best.

Courtesy of Penguin Random House

Age of Vice by Deepti Kapoor



About the Author

Deepti Kapoor grew up in northern India and worked for several years as a journalist in New Delhi. The author of the novel *A Bad Character*, she now lives in Portugal with her husband.

Courtesy of Penguin Random House

Age of Vice set off an international bidding war when the manuscript was first released. The rights to publish were snapped up in over 20 countries, and FX Studio locked it in for a television series. An early review of *Age of Vice* published in *The Guardian* called the novel "India's answer to *The Godfather*." Kapoor has said that *Age of Vice* is the opening act of a planned trilogy.

Excerpt from a January 15, 2023 article in *The Indian Express*

Discussion Questions

1. AGE OF VICE has been described as a family saga, a crime thriller and even a twisted, forbidden romance. How would you characterize it as a novel?
2. At the center of the novel is the wealthy, dangerously corrupt Wadia family. Theirs is a world where money buys loyalty, but what that loyalty looks like differs by the person. In what ways are loyalties tested and proven, and how do the outcomes vary?
3. Consider the novel's three main characters: Ajay, a servant born into poverty; Neda, an upper-caste, educated woman; and Sunny, the playboy son of a crime family. How do their worlds, rules, and expectations differ and intersect? What do these characters illustrate about the different social realms of India? How are they each changed when their fates become intertwined? Which world were you most interested in and why?
4. What does it mean to be a Wadia man? Did Ajay's transformation surprise you? What does he gain and what does he lose? Is it possible to change one's destiny?
5. Neda is a fledgling investigative journalist, torn between the allures of luxury and the social injustice around her. From where does Neda derive her values? How do they change? How are her assumptions and expectations different from Sunny's?
6. Sunny is accustomed to getting what he wants, yet struggles with his conflicting desire to impress his father and step out from within his shadow. How does his relationship with Neda complicate those desires?
7. Readers are offered a broad window on the landscape of contemporary India. What surprised you about the portrayal of these microcosms and the relationship between urban and rural life? What role does the change of setting play in the characters' story arcs?
8. By playing with point of view and jumps in time, Kapoor changes our understanding of the characters. What is achieved by beginning the novel with Ajay's car accident as opposed to his origin story? Why start the novel with Ajay and not Neda or Sunny? How did your initial views change over the course of the book?
9. Further complicating the power dynamics at play in the novel is the notion of the Indian caste system, in which status is endowed by birth. What role do birth/caste, inheritance, and social capital play in determining one's "wealth" in the novel? Is there an American equivalent to all of this?

Courtesy of Reading Group Guides

Professional Review

Publisher's Weekly (9/1/2022):

Starred Review In Kapoor's searing portrait of India at the turn of the 21st century (after *A Bad Character*), finely wrought characters go to great lengths to escape the bonds into which they were born. Ajay, from a desperately poor family and sold into servitude by his mother at eight in 1991, begins working for Sunny Wadia, an unhappy playboy and scion of a powerful family, in 2001. Sunny's father, Bunt, and mysterious uncle Vicky hold sway over whole swaths of the Indian economy and political landscape. Neda Kapur is a cynical journalist first drawn to Sunny by a corruption story she is writing, but is soon caught in the vortex of Sunny's lavish lifestyle of endless parties, drugs, and conspicuous consumption facilitated by the ever-present Ajay. Sunny dreams of creating new cities and carving a new path for himself, but he is emasculated by his father's hold on the family's empire. As Sunny and his friends' behavior becomes increasingly reckless, Ajay is made a scapegoat for a shocking fatal car accident, and Neda witnesses in full the ethical morass upon which the Wadias' success is built. Kapoor's violent and bitter story is deeply addictive; this spellbinder would be easy to devour in one big gulp, but it's worth savoring for Neda's uncompromising take on what she terms India's "losing age, the age of vice." The author possesses a talent great enough to match the massive scope of her subject.

Kirkus Reviews (01/03/2023):

Kapoor's sprawling second novel opens with a horrific scene: five day laborers lying dead on a New Delhi street, killed after being struck by a Mercedes. When the police arrive, they find Ajay at the wheel, an empty bottle of scotch nearby. Ajay comes from a "poor, less than poor" family. He worked for the farmer who bought him until the man died, then found work in a backpacker cafe where he met Sunny Wadia, a flashy playboy. Sunny offers Ajay a job working for him as a valet, butler, bodyguard. Ajay soon learns that the Wadia family is more sinister and dangerous than he thought and that he's being made to take the fall for a crime he didn't commit. Kapoor switches points of view and timelines throughout the book to great effect; it doesn't take long for the reader to become invested in the Mario Puzo-esque drama of the Wadia family. Fans of crime novels will find much to admire in this quite entertaining book. (review edited for length)