

Corona by Bushra Rehman
Discussion Board Questions, Part 1 (through p 80)

1. Place

Consider the various settings in *Corona*. How does Rehman present Corona? What are the defining characteristics of Raiza's childhood neighborhood? What is her attitude toward it? How might it be experienced differently by children than by adults? Also consider the other places Raiza's adventures take her upon leaving Corona – Salem, San Francisco, Florida. What associations can you make to these places that add meaning to Raiza's attempts at self-discovery/making and experiences there? How does Raiza feel in and about each place? Why?

2. Religion

How does religion shape Raiza's life as a child? As an adult? How does it influence her sense of identity (think identification as well as disidentification – that is identifying with or against) and her decisions? Also consider how religions other than Islam – Puritanism in "Pioneer Spirit" and Christianity in "The Grass Pulled Up"--function in the novel. How does Raiza relate to these religions? What points of similarity or connection does she become aware of? What larger ideas or themes about religion, then, might the novel be developing?

3. Freedom

In "Crabs," Raiza explains her refusal to marry according to her parents' arrangements and instead to run off with Eric: "I thought I was choosing freedom" (36). This simple statement attests to the complexity and elusiveness of freedom. What did Raiza seek freedom from? Or is it rather a freedom to..., in other words freedom to do, say, act? Does Raiza achieve this freedom? If so, at what cost? If not, why not? What does Raiza learn about freedom that changes her perspective on her choice? (Pay attention to tone: *I thought I was choosing...* suggests she wasn't fully aware of the meaning or implications of her choice.)

4. Humor

Raiza is not only our protagonist but also our narrator. Her story then is formed through her perspective and style – witty and humorous. Raiza finds humor in the most unexpected moments and experiences. How does Raiza use humor to engage and understand the world? What does humor allow her as a character AND/OR Rehman as an author to do in regard to making meaning, mediating experiences, and affecting reader identification? (Please don't confuse character and author – character acts out of personality and situation; author acts strategically with character in mind to enact writerly effect in developing story and themes). When in this first half of the novel (be specific), in your opinion, is humor most effect? most jarring? most necessary? Why?

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Discussion Board Questions, Part 2 (p 81 through end)

1. Structure

The novel has a spiral structure where stories from Razia's childhood are interspersed with her life as an adult. How did this structure affect your understanding of Razia's life and character? Were there any juxtapositions that were particularly unexpected, meaningful, or effective for you? Why? Why do you think she ends with "The Abandoned Bread Truck," a return to childhood after a substantial focus on her adult life in the 2000's?

2. Shame

After their road trip to D.C. for the Bhangra competition, Razia reflects on being called Besharam by Qasim's family. "But Besharam," she wonders, "being without shame. Is that really such a bad thing?" (106). Explore this question in relation to Razia's experiences of shame throughout the novel (i.e. including the first half). When and why does Razia feel shame? Is she ashamed or shamed? What is the difference? In what way is being "without shame" re-envisioned by Razia as a positive thing? Do you believe that it is or can be? Why?

3. The Men in Razia's Life and 9/11

In Razia's adult life after returning to NY (New Rochelle and then Brooklyn), she develops meaningful relationships with Tony and Valerio, the Italian father and son from whom she rents a room in New Rochelle, and Ravi, which whom she is romantically involved. What attracts/endears Razia to these men? What does she want/need/get from each? In what ways are these relationships with these particular men unexpected? Why? How do they challenge or change Razia's perceptions of others and herself?

To complicate matters more, 9/11 and America's war on terror plays a role in these relationships. How does 9/11 influence these relationships? her relationship with the world around her? Do the stories of this time in the novel influence your perception of this historical event? Do they relate to and/or influence your perception of our current moment regarding the ongoing war on terror, Islamophobia, etc.? Explain.

4. Family

Describe Razia's relationship with her parents. How does the break from her family, especially from her father, haunt her for the rest of her life?