Journal of Inventive and Scientific Research Studies (JISRS)
www.jisrs.com Vol: IV, Issue: 3 September 2026 ISSN: 2584-0630 (Online)

SELF-MAKING THROUGH ENTREPRENEURIAL AMBITION IN THE FICTION OF KARAN MAHAJAN

K. S. SOWMIYAN*, and P. KARTHI[2]

*Research Scholar (Ph.D.), Department of English, Gobi Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Karattadipalayam. **E-mail:** kssowmiyan7@gmail.com

[2]Research Supervisor, Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Gobi Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Karattadipalayam.

E-mail: con2karthi@gmail.com

Received: September 14, 2026, **Accepted**: September 28, 2026, **Online Published**: September 30, 2026

ABSTRACT

Self-making is a continuous process through which individuals construct and reconstruct their identities in response to personal aspirations and social circumstances. This study examines the relationship between self-making and ambition in Karan Mahajan's Family Planning (2008) and The Association of Small Bombs (2016). Using a qualitative close-reading approach, the paper analyses how selected characters attempt to define themselves within familial, social, political, and emotional constraints. In Family Planning, Rakesh Ahuja's political aspirations and Arjun's pursuit of music, romance, and personal independence represent contrasting forms of self-fashioning within a conflict-ridden family structure. In The Association of Small Bombs, Mansoor, Ayub, and Shockie pursue different forms of identity formation shaped by trauma, political involvement, survival, and violence. The comparative analysis shows that Mahajan does not present self-making as an entirely autonomous process or a straightforward movement toward success. Rather, individual ambition continually interacts with family expectations, social structures, political circumstances, and emotional vulnerability. The study argues that Mahajan's fiction presents identity as unstable, relational, and continuously negotiated. Self-making therefore emerges not as a completed achievement but as an ongoing struggle between individual agency and the external forces that shape personal choice.

Keywords: Self-Making, Ambition, Identity, Individual Agency, Social Constraints, and Karan Mahajan

Introduction

Self-making involves an internal process whereby people try to build, reshape and define themselves in terms of their own goals and social contexts. Identity does not always pass from parents to children, nor is it fixed and determined; it can change over time, as a result of personal decisions and choices, relationships, functioning and conflict, or reactions to alterative conditions. The literature is important as a place to explore this process because fictional characters are frequently caught between the selves that are imposed on them by family and society, and the selves they wish to be.

The struggles can be examined through the lens of fiction, with a deep focus on Karan Mahajan's work. His novels depict people in complex family relationships, in cities, in political situations, in emotional situations, and in situations of violence. Mahajan presents characters whose aspirations are constantly shaped by environments in which they navigate, rather than identity as independent of society.

Family Planning (2008) puts questions of ambition and identity in the context of family life, political aspiration, generational conflict, sexuality and personal independence. The Ahuja family is a particular contrast in the attempt to find self-definition; Rakesh Ahuja and his son Arjun. Rakesh wants power and a place on the stage whereas Arjun is trying to find his identity through music, romance and defying his parents' expectations via his rebellious spirit. They have different ideas about what they want to be, but they both show the conflict of their hopes and desires against family and society.

Questions of identity, on the other hand, are a central focus in the Association of Small Bombs (2016) in relation to the concepts of terrorism, trauma, political participation and violence. Mansoor, Ayub and Shockie take different paths, but all three characters reveal how things outside their own control can alter their identity. In this novel, the vision of self-making is thus complicated, as it is not always a free choice of conditions in which subjects form themselves.

This study compares these two novels to get a better idea of how Mahajan portrays the role of ambition in the formation and reformation of identities. It disputes the claim that self-making in Mahajan's fiction is an expression of his personal freedom. Rather, it arises from an unstable negotiation between individual agency and external factors.

Literature Review and Research Context

The three concepts of identity formation, self-fashioning, agency, aspiration, and social mobility have been used to talk about self-making in literary and cultural studies. These methods tend to focus on the link between personal

wishes and social contexts where identities are formed. Literary narratives are especially helpful here because they allow the reader to witness the character's discovery of him or herself as the character also discovers what external influences limit and/or circumvent the character's options.

In the initial sample of the present study, self-making was linked mostly to the entrepreneurial aspiration. But this kind of system is binding when it comes to the characters he has chosen for his novels of Mahajans. Entrepreneurship cannot be simply attributed to the political visions of Rakesh, to music and rebellion of Arjun, to trauma shock and retreat of Mansoor, to involvement in politics of Ayub or to his militancy of Shockie without a theoretical construct to establish the connection between entrepreneurship and its aforementioned attributes.

A better comparative approach is the perspective of the general idea of ambition and self-making. In this sense ambition isn't necessarily about making economic or business progress. It describes the characters' efforts to transcend a current state, gain recognition, exercise agency, gain personal independence and/or establish a meaningful identity.

Both chosen novels are written in very different narrative settings that address these concerns. Family Planning focuses on the individual in family, generational and political contexts, while The Association of Small Bombs focuses on the individual in the context of the impacts of terrorism, trauma, activism and political violence. Reading the novels together, then, will make it possible to analyze the self-making represented by Mahajan under various types of pressure.

The main concern of this study is on the connection between ambition, individual freedom and social restriction as they are developed in the two novels. Self-making is interpreted not as limitless personal growth but as characters' efforts to build their identities while also being shaped by family relationships and environments, political contexts, emotional attachments, and wider social contexts.

Research Objectives

The study seeks to examine the representation of self-making in Family Planning and The Association of Small Bombs; analyse how personal ambition contributes to identity formation; investigate the influence of family, society, politics, trauma, and emotional relationships on individual agency; compare the different forms of self-making represented in the two novels; and demonstrate how Mahajan complicates the idea that identity can be constructed entirely through individual choice.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative textual-analysis methodology, primarily using close reading and comparative interpretation. The primary texts are Karan Mahajan's Family Planning and The Association of Small Bombs.

The analysis concentrates on selected characters whose experiences demonstrate different processes of self-construction. In Family Planning, the analysis focuses on Rakesh Ahuja and Arjun. In The Association of Small Bombs, the study focuses on Mansoor, Ayub, and Shockie.

The study examines the characters through three interconnected dimensions: personal ambition, individual agency, and external constraint. The study interprets their aspirations in relation to family relationships, political environments, emotional experiences, social expectations, trauma, and violence.

The comparative method enables the study to identify both similarities and differences between the forms of self-making represented in the two novels. Rather than assuming ambition necessarily leads to successful self-realization, the analysis examines how Mahajan presents identity as a process that circumstances beyond individual control can redirect, disrupt, or transform.

Self-Making and Individual Ambition

Ambition is an important aspect of self making as it reflects the difference between what the person is and the person he/she wants himself/herself to be or what he/she wants himself/herself to be like. The ambitious person is envisioning another scenario and trying to go for it.

But Mahajan makes things complicated. His characters don't act in isolation for their aspirations. They come from specific families, social settings, political contexts, emotional connections, and historical contexts. In this way, self-making is no longer only an individual process but is also relational.

It is significant because this does not equate self-making to personal success. Some characters try to define a professional or political identity, others try to define their emotional independence, find recognition, belonging, ideological purpose, or survival. The results of these attempts are also variable.

Ambition is therefore enabling and limiting as Mahajan notes. It provides characters with the ability to envision themselves differently, but the process of changing their aspirations to identities is continuously met with forces that the individual cannot entirely control.

Self-Making in Family Planning

For the course of Family Planning, self-making occurs in the complex interplay of family, politics, individual wants and

generational conflicts. Two different examples are Rakesh Ahuja and Arjun.

Rakesh attempts to create a public image and a political persona. His aspirations are not restricted to the domestic realm, and are an expression of his wish to make a visible social mark. Politics becomes his way of asserting himself outside of the family.

But the boundary between public and private identity is not clearly defined. He is constantly involved in his family's life and his desires and wants constantly clash with his family relationships. Mahajan thus challenges the stereotypical thinking about the ‘self-made man.In doing so, Mahajan complicates the conventional notion of the ‘self-made man'. Rakesh can attempt to build a public image, but he can't divorce that image from the private ones and responsibilities that envelop him.

Arjun is a very distinct form of self-making. He has hopes of youth, music, romance, rebellion and personal independence. Rakesh sees the political, while Arjun attempts to detach himself from his family, which has formed his identity.

The difference between the father and the son is therefore noteworthy. Both try to make themselves other than what they are in, but in different ways. While Rakesh desires to be known in public, Arjun desires a more private and emotionally independent life.

This difference in generations is also exemplified by their clashing desires. Authorities or achievements of one eneration can be restrictions for another. Consequently, self-making becomes a conflicted process in the family.

The novel thus implies that it is not the family alone that serves as the basis for the construction of identity. One of the main mechanisms by which identity is negotiated. Personal aspiration develops in dependence, authority, love, struggle and expectation relationships.

Self-Making in The Association of Small Bombs

The Association of Small Bombs presents a much darker context for identity construction. Terrorism, trauma, political ideology, grief, and violence influence the lives of the characters and complicate the possibility of autonomous self-making.

Mansoor's trajectory demonstrates how identity can be reconstructed in response to traumatic experience. His self-making cannot be understood simply as the pursuit of success. Survival itself becomes part of the process through which the individual attempts to establish continuity after disruption.

This is fundamentally different from the ambitions represented in Family Planning. Whereas Rakesh and Arjun struggle within family and generational structures, Mansoor's identity develops through experiences whose consequences

extend beyond ordinary personal aspiration.

Ayub introduces another dimension of self-making through political involvement. Political commitment offers the possibility of purpose and collective identity. Yet it also complicates the boundary between personal agency and ideological influence. The individual may believe that political involvement provides a meaningful identity, while the surrounding political environment simultaneously shapes the possibilities available to that individual.

Shockie represents an even more disturbing relationship between identity and violence. His trajectory demonstrates that self-making is not necessarily ethically positive. The desire for purpose, recognition, belonging, or ideological certainty can also become tied to destructive action.

This distinction is crucial. A study of self-making should not assume that every attempt at identity formation constitutes personal improvement. Mahajan's characters demonstrate that individuals can construct identities through paths that are psychologically, socially, or morally destructive.

Through Mansoor, Ayub, and Shockie, The Association of Small Bombs therefore expands self-making beyond conventional ambition. Identity is shown to develop through responses to trauma, political commitment, vulnerability, social circumstances, and violence.

Individual Agency and Social Constraints

Comparing the two novels reveals a persistent tension between agency and circumstance.

The characters possess desires and make choices, but they do not operate in a social vacuum. Family expectations, political structures, emotional attachments, traumatic experiences, and social environments influence what they can imagine and become.

In Family Planning, these constraints appear prominently through family relationships and generational conflict. The individual struggles to establish autonomy while remaining embedded within a network of domestic obligations and expectations.

In The Association of Small Bombs, the constraints become more explicitly political and traumatic. Violence interrupts ordinary life and transforms the circumstances within which identity develops. Political ideologies also give characters frameworks for interpreting themselves and their relationship with society.

Mahajan's representation of self-making consequently challenges an excessively individualistic understanding of identity. The characters do not simply decide who they want to become and then achieve that identity through determination.

Their aspirations continually encounter structures and events that influence, limit, or transform them.

The self that emerges is therefore neither completely self-created nor completely socially determined. It is produced through negotiation between the two.

Discussion

The comparative reading shows how Family Planning and The Association of Small Bombs have very different narrative contexts in which they attempt to work on self-making but share a focus on the constraints of individual agency.

Ambition is closely linked to desire to change, escape from roles in family and society in Family Planning. Rakesh's political goals and Arjun's quest for personal identity represent two inter-generational struggles for identity.

The Association of Small Bombs challenges this model by de-centering identity from trauma and political violence. Mansoor, Ayub and Shockie represent various reactions to difficulty. Their experiences show them that self-making can be a struggle for survival, an ideological identification, political engagement and destructive transformation.

This comparison thus shows an important evolution in Mahajan's portrayal of the individual. Self-making does not appear as a sequential process from limited to successful. Rather, it is ambiguous and may be contradictory.

Ambition can lead to opportunities for change, but it can also lead to conflict. Political commitment can give meaning, meaning can also bring the individual under the influence of ideology. Opposition to family expectations can lead to independence but at the same time cause emotional stress. Trauma can also limit the person's ability to act and make choices, and forces him or her to rebuild a fractured sense of self.

The two novels thus raise a question about the “self-made” individual's narratives. Mahajan's characters actively build themselves but identities are also erected by relationships, institutions, politics, and random events.

Findings

The study finds that self-making recurs across the selected novels but takes significantly different forms depending on the characters' social and political circumstances. In Family Planning, it is primarily associated with political ambition, generational difference, personal independence, music, romance, and resistance to family expectations. In The Association of Small Bombs, self-making becomes closely connected with trauma, survival, political involvement, ideological commitment, and violence.

The analysis further shows that Mahajan does not present ambition as an

uncomplicated route to fulfillment. Individual aspiration can motivate characters to resist predetermined roles, yet external circumstances continually intervene in their attempts at self-definition.

A further finding concerns the relationship between agency and constraint. The characters exercise personal choice, but family structures, social expectations, political environments, emotional vulnerability, and traumatic circumstances condition their choices. Identity therefore develops through interaction between individual intention and external influence.

Finally, the comparative analysis demonstrates that self-making in Mahajan's fiction is continuous rather than complete. His characters do not arrive at permanently settled identities. Their sense of self changes as their relationships and circumstances change.

Conclusion

In this research, the concept of self-making and ambition has been explored in the context of Family Planning and The Association of Small Bombs by the writer, Karan Mahajan. While the subject matter and story settings in both novels are quite different, both seek to create an identity in a situation that is not entirely under their control.

Rakesh Ahuja and Arjun are two contrasting characters of Family Planning. Their quest for identity is defined by political ambition, music, love, rebellion, family and generational conflict. Their experiences show that personal ambition is intertwined with the personal fabric of the home and society.

Association of Small Bombs offers self-making in more destabilizing settings – the world of terrorism, trauma, politics, violence. The novel illustrates the ways in which people try to meaningfully construct identity and meaning in the aftermath of or in the midst of significant upheaval, through the characters of Mansoor, Ayub and Shockie.

Together, the novels imply that self-making is not a totally private process or a totally social one. Mahajan's characters have agency but it exists in a web of family, politics, social expectations, emotional relationships and history.

The novels therefore do not accept the very simple definition of the ‘self-made man' as one who makes his own identity through ambition and determination. Rather, Mahajan's idea of identity is relational, unstable, and negotiated. Self-making becomes an active enterprise as people envision themselves in other ways, and react to forces that make, limit, and sometimes radically transform those possibilities.

References

Mahajan, Karan. The Family Planning. Penguin. 2008.

----------.The Association of Small Bombs. Penguin, 2016.