



Serving Crazy with Curry

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Between the pressures to marry and become a traditional Indian wife and the humiliation of losing her job in Silicon Valley, Devi is on the edge—where the only way out seems to be to jump. . . .

Yet Devi's plans to “end it all” fall short when she is saved by the last person she wants to see: her mother. Forced to move in with her parents until she recovers, Devi refuses to speak. Instead, she cooks . . . nonstop. And not the usual fare, but off the wall twists on Indian classics, like blueberry curry chicken or Cajun prawn biryani. Now family meals are no longer obligations. Devi's parents, her sister, and her brother-in-law can't get enough—and they suddenly find their lives taking turns as surprising as the impromptu creations Devi whips up in the kitchen each night. Then a stranger appears out of the blue. Devi, it appears, had a secret—one that touches many a nerve in her tightly wound family. Though exposing some shattering truths, the secret will also gather them back together in ways they never dreamed possible.

Interspersed with mouthwatering recipes, this story mixes humor, warmth, and leap-off-the-page characters into a rich stew of a novel that reveals a woman's struggle for acceptance from her family and herself.

Serving Crazy with Curry Details

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From Reader Review Serving Crazy with Curry for online ebook

Kerry says

This book begins with Devi, 27 year old, American-born Indian daughter of Avi and Soraj, writing a list of the pros and cons of committing suicide. The pros win and, with careful consideration and planning, she fills her bath tub, climbs in and equally carefully slits her wrists. All the planning in the world is ruined by her mother, who comes calling, lets herself in with the key Devi has long wished she hadn't given her, and finds her daughter in time to save her life.

On her release from the hospital, Devi goes back to live with her parents and her grandmother Vasu, who is visiting from India. Unable to face the things that drove her into the bath tub in the first place, or the explanations everyone wants of her, Devi simply stops talking. And she soon starts cooking. To Soraj's horror, she invades her mother's perfect kitchen and starts creating her own curious brand of fusion cooking - dishes such as blueberry chicken curry. As she cooks, she begins to heal. And around her, her mixed-up, confused family begins to rediscover itself, from her sister Shobha and her failing arranged marriage to Soraj's hurtful relationship with her own mother and a whole lot more in between.

This comes to a head when a stranger arrives at the door to reveal Devi's most painful secret, the one that was the final straw that drove her into the bath tub. As her family faces this, everything cracks apart so that it can come together again in a new, better way.

This sounds like it should be a depressing book. It isn't. It's bright and thoughtful and just a bit crazy like its title. I truly can't remember how I found out about it, but I'm sure it came from browsing around the internet. One of my nice librarian friends tracked down a copy for me and I devoured it in a couple of days. Now I want to share it with everyone, especially my mother and my Indian "sister" who I think would relate to quite a bit of it.

It's written in an occasionally non-linear fashion, where it can take a moment to work out if the current anecdote is current or in the past. However, I didn't have any real troubles with that. While Devi is the main protagonist, the book doesn't focus solely on her. Instead, all the characters get a share of the limelight, usually giving the reader secret knowledge the other characters don't share and thereby making everyone a little more honest.

The things you might expect to find are in here, especially the clash of cultures and generations as Soraj tries to live her Indian life in America and keep her daughters, who think of themselves as American, Indian. We see how Soraj's own childhood with Vasu has shaped her into the person she is, and how her own raising of Shobha and Devi has shaped them. All in all, this book is about love. The love for one's husband or wife, one's lover, one's family, one's heritage. The different characters have all found different kinds of love to be their first priority and each is shown to be neither less nor more than any other, but all their choices gave a profound affect on the people around them.

Then there's the appendix at the end where the author has a chat with her characters, which is just delightful.

This is a delightful book; go out, find a copy, read it and then share it with your friends.

[Copied across from Library Thing; 25 September 2012]

Rehan Abd Jamil says

i simply love this book!

Denise says

5.0 out of 5 stars Serving up a great read!!, December 3, 2004

This review is from: Serving Crazy with Curry (Paperback)

Amulya Malladi is a master storyteller. This book, the third novel focusing on the lives and times of Indian women in crisis, is a fabulous study of family dynamics. Relationships are at the center of a Malladi novel -- between mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and daughters, sisters and sisters -- and this one is a powerful discussion of a family reacting to a member's attempted suicide.

Devi is a mess. She has managed to screw up her life and feels that her only way out is through suicide. She chooses the time and the method, plans it all out, and puts her plan into motion -- only to be thwarted at this as well: nosy mom happens to come by and lets herself in with her key to find Devi in the nick of time. Devi does not consider this "saving" to be a favor. She stops talking completely and, after discharge from the hospital, takes over her mother's kitchen -- cooking new dishes that are nothing like those ever produced in her home. Her emotions come out through her cooking -- extra spicy when she is angry, milder when she is mellow. Her family -- mother, father, sister Shobha and brother-in-law Girish don't know what to make of this. Truths long held inside are revealed as the family recovers from Devi's suicide attempt. A dead marriage is revived but another one is abandoned. A mother's love is finally accepted, and the sisters learn how to accept each other. In short, this is a wonderful story and one you will remember long after you put the book down. A reader's circle guide with discussion questions is included as well as a whimsical conversation between the author and her characters. ENJOY!!!

Jessikah Stenson says

A funny story about a culture I knew little about. Fast-paced, funny and with a strong balance of emotion.

Pattie says

I really enjoyed the first two-thirds of this book, and then the last third was more than disappointing! I liked the whole idea of the old culture meeting the new in this Indian family. The added cooking theme was interesting and fun. I knew I was reading a book about a dysfunctional family and was eager to see how some issues would be resolved and some wouldn't. The "whys" of the characters issues were explained but not resolved in a realistic way at all. I was just soooooo disappointed with the author when the "deep-secrets" came out, and with what she had chosen them to be. Really?? There were so many other directions she could have gone. And if it had been a true story you couldn't of tied that neatly up with a bow!

Irene says

Once I start a book, I have to finish it and this one was so painful to get through. To my surprise my husband who is an avid reader thought this book was entertaining - mind you he skimmed through the book. He liked the idea that the story line took place in the bay area.

I found it to be as cheezy and as poorly written as a TV serial/soap opera. The characters are one dimensional, the plot is predictable. The book is made of stereotypes that would make non-Indians cringe. Just plain awful!!!

Emmie says

A light read about a three-generation migrant family who tries to make sense of their relationships with one another. Each member gets on with his or her life despite stale or failed relationships with their spouses or partners. Malladi touches on the theme of marriage and happiness which usually don't go hand in hand. So what's the next best step? One either tries to make it work or leaves the marriage altogether to seek ultimate happiness. The theme of female subversion is also prominent here in the form of old Vasu who has divorced her husband and has had an affair with a married man despite society's disapproval of her actions. The shocking truth that each member of the family gradually reveals to one another in the novel adds a layer of complication to the characters' lives and emotions and creates a web of intricacy to the family fabric. All in all, this book centers on the lives of 3 generations of women who have gone through different experiences in life and try to make the best of it.

Donna says

Devi feels like a failure. She has no husband, no children, and now she's lost her job too. She compares herself to her older sister Shobha, who appears on the surface to be the ideal traditional Indian wife, and finds herself wanting. She decides that life is no longer worth living, and carefully plans her suicide, an event that she wishes to proceed as painlessly and neatly as possible. But something goes awry:

“Death was supposed to have happened. She had chosen to die, but now she was alive, a survivor. What exactly had she survived? How was she supposed to deal with the failure to end her life as well as the failure of not being able to live it with any dignity?” [p. 34]

Serving Crazy with Curry is about Devi and her family. When Devi's suicide plot fails, she adopts a vow of silence, returns home to live with her parents and begins to cook. Saroj and Avi immigrated to California from India many years ago, and Saroj has never truly settled here and still yearns to return to her homeland. Saroj's mother Vasu comes to visit once or twice a year. The story is mostly about the relationships between these four closely connected women: Devi, Shobha, Saroj, and Vasu. Malladi did a wonderful job of painting these characters individually, giving them each a vibrant personality of their own. She seamlessly weaves in a compelling backstory for each of them that helps us to understand who they are and why they manage their lives the way they do. I was disappointed that the book was set in the U.S. (I was hoping it would be set in India), but Malladi brought plenty of rich Indian culture to the mix. Devi shops, prepares, and cooks fragrant

and flavourful recipes, using techniques learned from her mother but always incorporating her own ideas for unusual ingredients. The author deals with Devi's recovery in a sensitive and thoughtful fashion, delving deftly into the psychology of suicide and the dangers and obstacles that surround a survival. There were numerous times that I felt that the author was so close to grasping onto something truly deep and meaningful in this book, but somehow it quietly eluded her pen each time. Malladi, however, definitely has a talent for description and wordplay:

"She had to go. She could feel it all the way inside her where the small sparks of light were playing, trying to stimulate her heart, which was slowing down making her free, unfettered." [p. 227]

I enjoyed reading *Serving Crazy with Curry*, but I frequently felt that this young author fell just a bit short of writing something magnificent, instead of something merely good. There was much to sink myself into, and yet the plot that floated around the main character often felt somewhat contrived and manipulative.

"I feel like a walking mass of pain, unable to understand my actions, yet feeling little remorse, which makes me feel guiltier. This is a vicious cycle I can't break free of." [p. 231]

This is the third of Malladi's five published novels, which she's been producing more or less annually since 2002. At only 33 years of age, I suspect that she has many more good novels to come, and that her skill will only increase. Definitely an author to watch.

Wendy says

Devi lost her job, was having an affair with a married man, and had a miscarriage and wanted to end her life. Feeling like she had failed at life, she was ready to die, only she could not even do that right. Her mother comes to her rescue and soon Devi finds herself living with her parents and visiting grandmother with her family all around her offering their support and yet struggling through their own emotions and personal issues. Devi, refusing to speak, turns to cooking to soothe her pain, finding comfort and peace in the kitchen.

Ms. Malladi provides a look into the hearts and minds of each of her characters, allowing readers to better understand them and their motives. As I read, I wished each of the characters could share openly with each other all that they felt and thought in order to clear up the misunderstandings and heal some of the hurt they had caused each other over the years. How much like real life! A book about love and family, this is a story involving complex characters and is written with much depth.

AngryGreyCat says

Serving Crazy with Curry is a book about Devi, an Asian Indian young woman who attempts suicide and is saved by chance. The effects of Devi's suicide attempt ripple through her family and each member deals with it in their own way depending upon their circumstances. Devi's path to recovery begins in her mother's kitchen as she starts to cook and prepare meals unlike the food her family has eaten before. There was a lot to enjoy about this book in the cooking sequences and Devi's thoughts about recovering, however the big "secret" behind Devi's suicide attempt became obvious rather early on and is not something I sympathize with. I also did not find her sister's reaction to the reveal realistic at all.

Sheryl Sorrentino says

Mothers and daughters and lovers, oh my! *Serving Crazy with Curry* is an entertaining and well-paced read. It's not especially "moving" or "deep" given the subject matter, but I loved the way the family rallied around Devi after her attempted suicide and during her recovery.

The "big reveal" at the end was rather predictable, but the depiction of family relationships and the story's glimpses into Indian culture carried the day. And if you're interested in Indian cooking, you can attempt to replicate Devi's creations with the simple recipes at the end of each chapter.

Barbara says

Four women - each very different - brought together by a suicide attempt. Indian grandmother Vasu is a retired army officer who shocked her society with a decades long affair with a married man after her husband killed himself. Indian-born but living in California, her daughter Saroj is a 'traditional' Indian wife, despite having a love marriage. Saroj's two daughters, Shobha and Devi, are American born but each very different from the other. Shobha is an IT specialist, a VP in a tech company by the time she's 30 and she asked for an arranged marriage after messing up a love affair. Her sister Devi has lost a lot of jobs, lost a lot of men and lost something else that drove her to try to kill herself.

The book follows the four women - and two of their husbands - through the aftermath of the suicide attempt. Devi can't explain and won't explain so she becomes an elective mute, communicating with the family through the food she cooks. Her drastic action seems set to either drive the family apart or knit them back together - the book takes us through that process.

I have a loathing of novels that attempt to shove recipes down the readers' throats but Amulya Malladi handles the inclusion of recipes very well by making them barely recipes at all. Devi's recipes are 'a bit' of this and 'some' of that, cooked for 'a while' - no 'half a cup' or 20g at 180C - so it's clear we're not supposed to attempt to emulate them. It was a first for me that I actually READ the recipes as I usually just flick through and fume about the pointlessly over-used technique of using them.

It's a sweet story, one I enjoyed, and I came to like each of the women in their own special ways. Undoubtedly the Indian diaspora does bring inter-generational challenges but Malladi twists these by giving each of the women their own choices of how they break the rules in different ways so it's not a simple case of the young women being too 'modern' and the older ones too 'traditional'.

The shock revelations are not particularly shocking or revealing - I guessed most of the twists - but there was a satisfaction rather than a disappointment in finding I was right.

I've read a lot of AM's books and have a couple more to go. I like this one better than most.

Amber Myott says

Crazy alright ! yes there was a lot going on in this book , but I really enjoyed it and it was a great summer read

Book Concierge says

Devi can't stand the pressure (to marry and as a result of losing her job in Silicon Valley), so she commits suicide - but is saved by her meddling mother and forced to live with her parents as she "recoveres." She refuses to speak but begins cooking - nonstop - new twists on traditional fare (blueberry curry chicken or Cajun prawn biryani). When a stranger appears her secrets begin to come out. And the entire family's "tradition" of miscommunication further complicates things.

I enjoyed this story and would like to read more of Malladi's work.

Anna says

This was the first work by this author I read, and it started my fascination with American ethnic subculture literature (e.g. the new explosion of Indian literature written for American audiences, exploring themes such as family, change, love, and social acceptance). I think Jane found it at duty free in Canada on the way to Morocco. The story is about a South-Indian family living in the San Francisco Bay Area, which is something I immediately could relate to. A great storyteller once said "stories tell us how to live and why." Malladi's literature not only fulfills those two roles, but give me a peek inside Indian and Indian-American cultures that have real meaning, not just another travel guide or history/sociology book.

D.G. says

The best things about this book are the title and that it's short (234 pgs.)

I don't know that I've ever read a book with so many unappealing, self-serving, spiteful, uninteresting characters. I definitely wouldn't wish any of them as members of my family or friends because I'd be bound to get stabbed in the back and then get blamed for it.

The problem I had with this story was not the shitty characters – the world is full of nasty people, after all – but the way the conflict was resolved. The book dealt realistically with difficult relationships in marriages and between mothers and daughters so there was a LOT of unpleasantness, cruelty and deliberate viciousness. But at the end, everything was tied with a bow and they were all closer, even though one of the sisters betrayed the other in one of the worst ways you can think of. No matter the circumstances, I could never imagine instant forgiveness, especially between two sisters that were really envious of one another - at one point (view spoiler), something I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. What a great sister!

So if you feel tempted to pick up this book anywhere, just slap your own hand and run in the opposite direction.

Esha says

Things I didn't like about this book:-

*Its cover. OK I read an ebook but every time I logged into goodreads I had that silly cover staring at me.
Note to authors:- You can write a book on Indians without henna/ Indian girl in colourful outfit especially when the book is set in America.

*Its characters. Never have I read of such unrealistic, annoying characters with non redeeming characteristics. Ok maybe 'never' is an exaggeration but I just didn't buy such a hippie Indian grandmother, an annoying/ needy mother, and such stereotypical girls.

*The ending. The book for me dragged on towards the end.

Things I liked:-

* Recipes & food references.

Manman821 says

This book. I just can't even formulate a response.

Something about this was just the perfect mix of everything. Maybe it's because I'm Indian, too, but really, all the problems, all the characters, even the dialogue resonated with me.

This somehow answered a lot of the questions I formulated myself, and the characters' ambition, hopes, attitudes were like putting a mirror up to myself.

The story starts with a young Indian girl who attempts to suicide but fails upon her mother finding her and 'saving her'. (Honestly, this was one of the best suicide scenes I've ever read. The feelings were captured almost perfectly, as were the conflicts in the narrator's head. Her actions, such as registering the heat of the bathtub and then realizing it doesn't matter anymore. Or her feeling that her failure at life extends to her failure to end life because she failed to die. It was all so well written, something I could definitely understand even if I don't agree with her course of action.)

However, instead of trying to show directly how wrong Devi was in trying to suicide and giving up a life she could have had, the character does not immediately bounce back - instead there is a bout of escapism, where Devi returns to her childhood response of refusing to communicate while she sorts out her emotions.

Through a long, incremental process, Devi sees her screwed up family in a new light, appreciating her mother, understanding her grandmother who breaks all social norms, and breaking through her sister's tight facade of a successful VP who is driven by her work life. She takes up cooking to stream her identity and create a fusion of food, a mix of culture that represents her.

Shoba's ambition is literally what I want for myself in the future, and I constantly battle the fear of losing my social life and everything else I value by pouring myself into the drive for this. Reading this, I answered some questions, raised others, and otherwise really thought about where my life can go from here.

In terms of the Indian culture throughout the book, I felt that the honor, values, traditions, and attitudes were all portrayed very well. Usually, reading these books, I'm wary of how exaggerated the culture is, or I feel insulted to be related to such whiny, uptight people and want to scream out that not everyone is like that. The stereotypes, however, managed not to permeate this book. It was uniquely its own, something that showed individual people, the life of an Indian living in the Silicon Valley, constantly struggling to maintain her roots and keeping face with some of the more conservative views of the older generation, while acknowledging that after living here her whole life, she truly is an Indian American.

The cultural identity helped me look into myself and realize some things that I couldn't contemplate previously. Divorce, a negatively connoting shame to an Indian, is addressed through Shoba's relationship to her husband and the loveless marriage. Meanwhile, arranged marriages, a long-standing tradition that continues to baffle me, manifests in Saroj's relationship and it truly shows the effect of perseverance, trying again, and enduring. The judgmental older generation and the importance of impressions in the Indian community makes more sense to me.

Overall, this book just makes sense to me, and holds great personal value, a trove of vicarious experience. I definitely recommend this for the depth of the novel, the accurate portrayal of a culture, and the general values beyond the culture, including suicide, family, recovery, love, lineage, passion, etc. Well-written, polished, and enjoyable, this book has entered my list of favorites, and hopefully it will enter yours too!

Lavanya Sunkara says

I absolutely loved this book! I recommend it to all women out there :)

Teresita says

Nice book, it isn't a page turner type of book. Explores the aftermath of what a suicide attempt does to a family. Discusses the complexities of marriage, love, and relationships within a family. Also uses food in an interesting way to bring family closer together. Second book I've read by this author, will probably read some more of her stuff.
