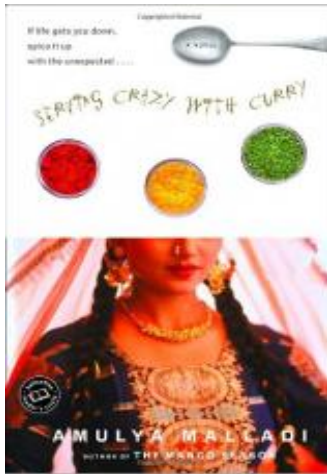


# Serving Crazy With Curry

by Amulya Malladi

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## About the Book

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.

## Discussion Guide

1. Why does Malladi choose to open the book by discussing the "day it would happen," specifically delineating Devi's plans for suicide? What tone does this choice lend to the narrative? Why do you think the author presents Devi's decision-making process, instead of opening the book with the suicide attempt itself?
2. What does Devi's list of reasons to live and die indicate about her values and the problems she faces? Why do you think she commits suicide?
3. Saroj admits that she often "thinks of leaving her family without warning" (p. 15). What holds Saroj back, but propels



Devi forward? How are the two women more similar than either of them would like to admit?

4. How is Saroj traumatized by the discovery of Devi's almost lifeless body? How does she present her role in foiling the suicide attempt as an accomplishment? Why does Saroj shift the focus to be "all about her"?

5. What is Saroj's attitude toward each of her daughters? How does she project her own unhappiness upon them? How does each woman deal with the prospect of failure?

6. The comparison between Shobha and Devi literally begins at birth. How does this constant assessment influence each woman's conception of herself? How does it color their relationship with one another? Why does Saroj value Shobha for being "easier"?

7. "Instead [they] stood as adversaries," Saroj says of her marriage (p. 25). Why has her marriage with Avi crumbled? How are other interfamilial relationships similarly adversarial?

8. How does the relationship between Saroj and her mother, Vasu, compare with the rapport Saroj has with her own daughters? Why does Saroj resent her mother? What is her attitude toward her father?

9. Why does Devi decide to stop talking? How does this decision mirror the actions she took as a small child? In which ways does her silence liberate her, and how does it hold her back?

10. Why does Devi decide to stop talking? How does this decision mirror the actions she took as a small child? In which ways does her silence liberate her, and how does it hold her back?

11. At first, what about Avi is so endearing to Saroj, and vice versa? How have they both changed since the early years of their marriage?

12. "Life is so much fun," writes Avi in an unsent letter to Devi (p. 69). How has each character in **Serving Crazy with Curry** fallen away from embracing the good things in life? Who comes closest to reclaiming a sense of joy in the book?

13. Much to her mother's dismay, Devi takes over cooking duties from Saroj after she moves back in. What does the kitchen represent to both mother and daughter? Why does Devi start to cook? Do you think that she's always wanted to? How is it a collaborative process for each of them, and how is each proprietary over the act?

14. How is adjusting to the United States difficult for Saroj? Does Avi feel the same way? In which ways are their children traditionally "Indian," and how do they identify more with their American contemporaries?

15. Why does Saroj blame America for all her problems? How does she idealize India? How does she embrace all things traditional, from the relationship she wants with her son-in-law to the food she cooks?

16. In which ways do Shobha's feminist beliefs belie her feelings about love? How is she a risk-taker, and in which ways would she prefer to play it safe? How does Shobha's firing jar her "perfect world"? What about this event spurs her to break up her marriage?

17. In which ways do Shobha's feminist beliefs belie her feelings about love? How is she a risk-taker, and in which ways



would she prefer to play it safe? How does Shobha's firing jar her "perfect world"? What about this event spurs her to break up her marriage?

**18.** Vasu refers to Saroj's photographs as depicting a "contrived family." What comprises Saroj's vision of a perfect family unit, and how does this dream differ from reality? How is Vasu's conception of family more unconventional, and how has this both strengthened and weakened her family bonds?

**19.** How do the characters in the book identify themselves by what they do, and by what they have accomplished or stand to accomplish? How do each of them react when they are at loose ends occupationally? Why doesn't Saroj work? Do you think she regrets the decision to not finish her education?

**20.** How does Saroj become a more sympathetic character as the novel unfolds? What do you learn about her that makes her less of a one-dimensional "nag," as Devi classifies her? Why does Saroj confront Avi about the problems in their marriage? What does this accomplish?

**21.** Were you surprised to learn of Devi's miscarriage? How does her family react to the news? Do you think she could have told them about it before she tried to commit suicide? Why or why not?

**22.** Were you surprised to learn that the father of Devi's baby was Girish? What do you think might have happened if she had carried the baby to term?

**23.** Are you surprised by Shobha's reaction to Devi's affair with Girish? Do you think Shobha's attitude will change over time, or have the sisters really breached a chasm in their relationship?

**24.** Do you think that Devi will ever tell the rest of her family about her affair with Girish? In which ways are Shobha and Girish well suited for one another? Devi and Girish?

**25.** How is writing cathartic for Avi and for Devi? Why does Devi write down the ingredients of her recipes? Is this just a cookbook journal or is it more?

**26.** What do you think will happen after the story ends, especially in the unfolding of relationships? Do you think that there's any chance of a Devi-Girish pairing? Why or why not?

## **Author Bio**

Amulya Malladi is the bestselling author of eight novels, including *THE COPENHAGEN AFFAIR*, *A HOUSE FOR HAPPY MOTHERS* and *THE MANGO SEASON*. Her books have been translated into several languages, including Dutch, French, German, Spanish, Danish, Romanian, Serbian and Tamil. She won a screenwriting award for her work on "Ø" ("Island"), a Danish series that aired on Amazon Prime Global and Studio Canal+. Currently living in California, she is a Danish citizen who was born and raised in India.



## Critical Praise

"A refreshingly candid portrayal of the Indian immigrant experience in America. At times darkly comic, at others profoundly moving, the characters will linger in your mind long after you turn the final page."

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