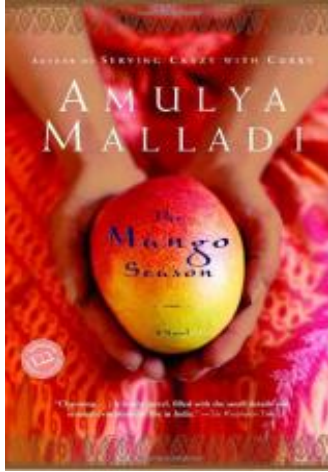


# The Mango Season

by Amulya Malladi

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## About the Book

From the acclaimed author of **A Breath of Fresh Air**, this beautiful novel takes us to modern India during the height of the summer's mango season. Heat, passion, and controversy explode as a woman is forced to decide between romance and tradition.

Every young Indian leaving the homeland for the United States is given the following orders by their parents: Don't eat any cow (It's still sacred!), don't go out too much, save (and save, and save) your money, and most important, do not marry a foreigner. Priya Rao left India when she was twenty to study in the U.S., and she's never been back. Now, seven years later, she's out of excuses. She has to return and give her family the news: She's engaged to Nick Collins, a kind, loving American man. It's going to break their hearts.

Returning to India is an overwhelming experience for Priya. When she was growing up, summer was all about mangoes --- ripe, sweet mangoes, bursting with juices that dripped down your chin, hands, and neck. But after years away, she sweats as if she's never been through an Indian summer before. Everything looks dirtier than she remembered. And things that used to seem natural (a buffalo strolling down a newly laid asphalt road, for example) now feel totally chaotic.

But Priya's relatives remain the same. Her mother and father insist that it's time they arranged her marriage to a "nice Indian boy." Her extended family talks of nothing but marriage --- particularly the marriage of her uncle Anand, which still has them reeling. Not only did Anand marry a woman from another Indian state, but he also married for love. Happiness and love are not the point of her grandparents' or her parents' union. In her family's rule book, duty is at the top of the list.

Just as Priya begins to feel she can't possibly tell her family that she's engaged to an American, a secret is revealed that leaves her stunned and off-balance. Now she is forced to choose between the love of her family and Nick, the love of her

life.

As sharp and intoxicating as sugarcane juice bought fresh from a market cart, **The Mango Season** is a delightful trip into the heart and soul of both contemporary India and a woman on the edge of a profound life change.

## Discussion Guide

1. What is the significance of the title **The Mango Season**? How about the title of the prologue, "Happiness Is a Mango"? Why does Amulya Malladi constantly refer to mangoes, and how does this symbol resonate within the novel as a whole?
2. How is the constant reference to food significant to the unfolding of the story? What does the inclusion of recipes add to the "flavor" of the book?
3. In which ways does Priya embrace America upon her arrival there? Which cultural traditions does she eschew?
4. Contrast Priya's relationship to her mother with those she has with her father and brother. Why do you think she finds it easier to relate to the males in her family? What sets Priya and her mother at odds?
5. Do you think that Priya should have told her family about her engagement right away, perhaps even before her arrival in India? Why doesn't she? What larger problems does her reluctance to discuss her romance indicate about Priya's relationship with her family?
6. What is your impression of Nick through Priya's rendering of him via her memories and their e-mail correspondence? What characteristics are appealing about him?
7. What are Nick's fears about Priya returning to India? Why does he want to go with her? How are his worries borne out?
8. Why does Malladi disclose Nick's race only at the end of **The Mango Season**? What hints does she sprinkle throughout the book that he is black? Does this disclosure make a difference in your understanding and perception of the novel?
9. How are Priya's female relatives constrained by their places in society? How do they chafe under these restrictions? Do any rebel, and if so, how? What effect does Priya have on them, and in turn, how do they influence her?
10. What spurs Sowmya to exact promises from her future husband before she's married? Does this surprise you, based on Sowmya's characterization at the beginning of the book?
11. "What can we do when someone takes your trust and throws it away?" asks Priya's mother (p. 39). How does this theme of establishing --- and losing --- trust thread through the book? How do Priya's relatives trust and distrust her? In which ways has their attitude infantilized her, and how has it made her stronger and more independent?
12. "Happiness is such a relative term that it sometimes loses definition," Malladi writes (p. 56). How does Priya's

definition of happiness evolve as the book unfolds? How would her parents define happiness differently from her?

**13.** Priya refers to the "two people inside me" (p. 69). How does Priya seek to reconcile the two halves of her personality? Which aspects of her character derive from her Indian upbringing? Which from her choice to embrace America?

**14.** Is Nate indulged more than Priya by their parents? How does he adapt to the strictures of Indian society, and within the family structure in particular? How is he a modern figure, and how does he feel a link to the past?

**15.** "Behind the façade . . . we were strangers to each other," Priya says of her family (p. 98). Is this statement an accurate representation of her familial relationships? With whom in the family is Priya most herself?

**16.** Why does Priya go through with the bride-seeing ceremony? What about her might be attractive to Adarsh? What are the benefits and disadvantages to having an arranged marriage?

**17.** How does Priya envision love and marriage? In which ways is this an "American" view, and how is it influenced by her Indian heritage? How does it contrast with the vision of her family in India?

**18.** How does Thatha view Priya's refusal to marry a handpicked Indian beau? Do you believe that their relationship will ever recover? Why were they close in the first place, despite their differences?

**19.** "You cannot make mango pickle with tomatoes," Thatha says to Priya (p. 170). How does this sum up his view of her relationship with Nick? Does it also apply to any other relationships in the book?

**20.** "I had to start living my own life on my own terms," Priya says (p. 142). Is this goal easier to accomplish when Priya is in the United States? Why? Does being in India stifle her sense of self?

**21.** How does the theme of sacrifice thread throughout the book? What sacrifices is Priya prepared to make for love? How does her mother hold up her sacrifices to Priya, to force her daughter to accede to her wishes? Ultimately, is this an effective technique?

**22.** How does racism, both against Indians and within the Indian culture itself, influence the perceptions that the Indian characters in the novel have of Americans? What else informs their perception of blacks, whites, and "foreigners"? What slights do you think Indians have felt based on the color of their skin?

**23.** Malladi deliberately leaves the ending of the novel ambiguous. Why? What do you envision occurring once Priya's family receives the photograph of Nick?

## **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

"Amulya Malladi has the ability to get so close to ordinary life that her words effortlessly transform themselves into art with pitch perfect prose fed by an observant eye and a warm heart. . . . Malladi is a born storyteller with an expansive and satisfying vision of the meaning of love."

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**Publication Date:** October 26, 2004

**Genres:** Fiction

**Paperback:** 272 pages

**Publisher:** Ballantine Books

**ISBN-10:** 0345450310

**ISBN-13:** 9780345450319