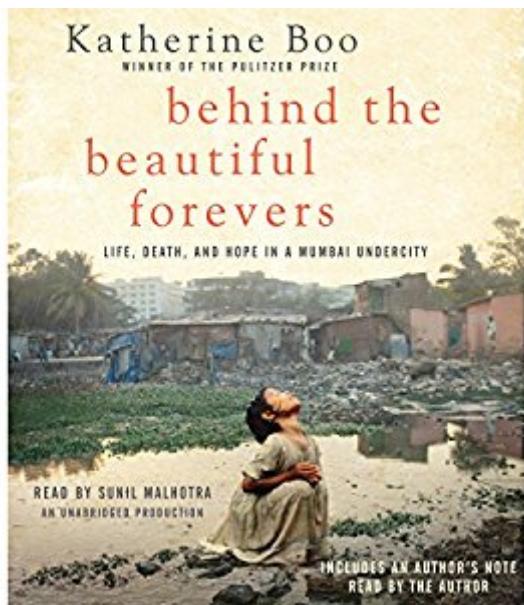


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# Behind The Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, And Hope In A Mumbai Undercity



## Synopsis

National Book Award, Nonfiction, 2012 From Pulitzer Prize-winner Katherine Boo, a landmark work of narrative nonfiction that tells the dramatic and sometimes heartbreaking story of families striving toward a better life in one of the 21st century's great, unequal cities. In this brilliantly written, fast-paced book, based on three years of uncompromising reporting, a bewildering age of global change and inequality is made human. Annawadi is a makeshift settlement in the shadow of luxury hotels near the Mumbai airport, and as India starts to prosper, Annawadians are electric with hope. Abdul, a reflective and enterprising Muslim teenager, sees "a fortune beyond counting" in the recyclable garbage that richer people throw away. Asha, a woman of formidable wit and deep scars from a childhood in rural poverty, has identified an alternate route to the middle class: political corruption. With a little luck, her sensitive, beautiful daughter-Annawadi's "most-everything girl"-will soon become its first female college graduate. And even the poorest Annawadians, like Kalu, a fifteen-year-old scrap-metal thief, believe themselves inching closer to the good lives and good times they call "the full enjoy." But then Abdul the garbage sorter is falsely accused in a shocking tragedy; terror and a global recession rock the city; and suppressed tensions over religion, caste, sex, power and economic envy turn brutal. As the tenderest individual hopes intersect with the greatest global truths, the true contours of a competitive age are revealed. And so, too, are the imaginations and courage of the people of Annawadi. With intelligence, humor, and deep insight into what connects human beings to one another in an era of tumultuous change, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* carries the reader headlong into one of the 21st century's hidden worlds, and into the lives of people impossible to forget.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a wonderful and enlightening book. The story is familiar - living in one of the slums of a large city in India - but it is timeless and still inspiring. A worthwhile reminder of how poverty is so widespread even as the large cities of India continue to develop and the middle class grows. The country is so large that any group is still going to consist of vast numbers of people, and I cannot imagine how many years it will take until the lower classes so well described in this book are able to rise to a more hopeful life. It takes a while until the basis for the title of the book becomes clear. It turns out that the road alongside the airport, taking people from their arrivals and departures and leading to the modern hotels and relative wealth of the city, is lined with large signs, advertisements that say 'Beautiful Forever' as part of the products slogan, again and again. It is behind these road signs, erected not only to promote the product but also to block the view from the roadway to the slums, so that travelers and other more fortunates are not disturbed by such sights as they pass by. I enjoyed this book as well as learned from it, insights into some of the day to day details of life for these people, and how they manage within their own sub societies to scrape out a living. Imagine, if you can, earning money by foraging through garbage for any small scraps of metal or plastic that could be of value and could be sold to recyclers or scrap agents, at best earning pennies each day and at times not having enough money for even the simplest meal. It is a life that is hard to imagine even when reading about it, but it exists and is very real to those who live there today and will continue to live in these circumstances for the foreseeable future.

A roller coaster of a story made all the more compelling because it's true - I was disappointed when this book ended, could have read about the denizens of Annawadi for many more hours. Most of the characters show an amazing resilience in the face of abject poverty & deplorable living conditions. While our lives are so different from theirs, the common themes of hope, despair, resignation, inventiveness, social standing, life and death (too many deaths) expose a common humanity. How the characters negotiate life within the slums of Mumbai is both heartwarming & heartbreak. I was angry at the treatment of females and endemic corruption which make their lives even more difficult, but inspired by their ability to cope with their situation. Birth control could alleviate much suffering. Ms Boo shows that every life matters.

I've driven past this area many times over the past 20 years and each time wondered how people

could manage there -- while thanking God it wasn't me. This is a very insightful peek into a way of life far different and more difficult than anything the average American can imagine. If you found the film "Slumdog Millionaire" interesting, this could be a book for you. It's a well written, relatively easy read that pulls few punches. Not for the reader who isn't willing to engage his or her brain.

Not for the feint of heart. But refreshing to read about the realistic coping mechanisms of those who would be good. I am the adult walking past the dying beggar and now I see something more of why. I'd seen Katherine Boo interviewed a few years ago as the book was just coming out and bought it for my dad, thinking he'd like it. I never heard from him about whether he did or not, but when I was alerted to the book's reduced price, I got it for myself and found it quite the page turner. I just now learned from her Author's Note of her adventure with the abridged dictionary. Like many who suffer serious life threatening injury, a solo act no matter who else is around, I may understand how her preexisting doubts about life direction and risk acquired a shift in clarity. She chose to commit this brave act of observational journalism and I am very glad she did.

Katherine Boo has researched and written a masterwork in this account of life in a Mumbai slum. The plot centers on a family that earns its living in buying, sorting and reselling trash to recyclers, and surrounding community. Behind the Beautiful Forever reads like a novel, but reflects the author's four years of interviews with her subjects, much of which was captured on video. The book is multi-layered, revealing individual personalities, family and social structures, and economic and political forces animating modern India. The finished work is riveting and provides an in-depth exploration of the best and the worst of this rapidly developing nation. Had Dickens turned to non-fiction set in Mumbai, it would have resembled this rich and absorbing volume. Highly recommended.

The storyline was spotty, jumping from one character to the next and never leaves you with full closure of how everything turned out for the reader. However, it does feed you some sense of living life in the slums and the realistic obstacles people go through just to maintain. If you want an idea of what life in poverty is like, this story certainly touches that narrative. It hones in on the concept of "hope for the best, but plan for the worse".

It is daily life for the very bottom rung of society in the sub-continent of Asia aka. India as we really "don't know" it! Talk about a "hard scrabble" existence! Over crowding, starvation wages, poor

housing, lack of sanitation, disease, horrendous pollution, non-existent healthcare or government services, combined with totally corrupt officials, (particularly the police). Yet despite these daunting odds, the "untouchables" of Mumbai still manage to maintain their dignity, and cling to dreams of a better life for themselves and their children. A testament to the resiliency of the human spirit!

Disturbing yet uplifting at the same time!

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