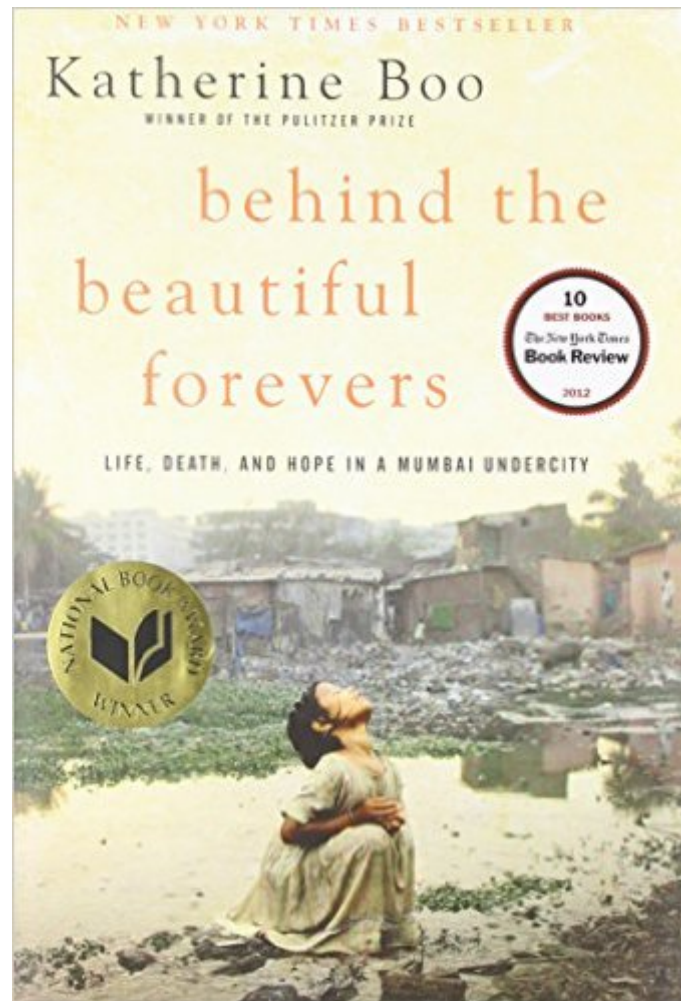


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Behind The Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, And Hope In A Mumbai Undercity



Synopsis

In this brilliant, breathtaking book by Pulitzer Prize winner Katherine Boo, a bewildering age of global change and inequality is made human through the dramatic story of families striving toward a better life in Annawadi, a makeshift settlement in the shadow of luxury hotels near the Mumbai airport. As India starts to prosper, the residents of Annawadi are electric with hope. Abdul, an enterprising teenager, sees a fortune beyond counting in the recyclable garbage that richer people throw away. Meanwhile Asha, a woman of formidable ambition, has identified a shadier route to the middle class. With a little luck, her beautiful daughter, Annawadi's most-everything girl, might become its first female college graduate. And even the poorest children, like the young thief Kalu, feel themselves inching closer to their dreams. But then Abdul is falsely accused in a shocking tragedy; terror and global recession rock the city; and suppressed tensions over religion, caste, sex, power, and economic envy turn brutal. With intelligence, humor, and deep insight into what connects people to one another in an era of tumultuous change, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, based on years of uncompromising reporting, carries the reader headlong into one of the twenty-first century's hidden worlds—and into the hearts of families impossible to forget.

Winner of the National Book Award | The PEN/John Kenneth Galbraith Award | The Los Angeles Times Book Prize | The American Academy of Arts and Letters Award | The New York Public Library's Helen Bernstein Book Award

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"A book of extraordinary intelligence [and] humanity . . . beyond groundbreaking." —Junot Díaz, *The New York Times* Book Review

"Reported like Watergate, written like *Great Expectations*, and handily the best international nonfiction in years." —*New York*

"This book is both a tour de force of social justice reportage and a literary masterpiece." —*Judges' Citation for the PEN/John Kenneth Galbraith Award*

"[A] landmark book." —*The Wall Street Journal*

"A triumph of a book." —Amartya Sen

"There are books that change the way you feel and see; this is one of them." —Adrian Nicole LeBlanc

"[A] stunning piece of narrative nonfiction . . . [Katherine]

Boo's prose is electric. "O: The Oprah Magazine" is inspiring, and irresistible . . .

Boo's extraordinary achievement is twofold. She shows us how people in the most desperate circumstances can find the resilience to hang on to their humanity. Just as important, she makes us care. "People

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Embedded journalism" is often applied only to military journalists, but it's not a new style at all. Author Katherine Boo basically embedded herself in this slum of Mumbai, India, so readers could see, hear, and - to a degree - understand the lives of the residents. Her 'characters' face daily lives that I don't think an American could deal with for five minutes. The book succeeds because it lacks sympathy - which is a good thing. The girls, boys, men, women are fully-realized people, not caricatures of "poor, pathetic Indians." In an author's Q+A, Boo says conveying that was important to her, and she did succeed. So the narrative is harsh, depressing, uncompromising, and sad - but it's uplifting, because the girls, boys, and adults in Boo's book are going to keep on living the best they can. They aren't begging for my or your help - they're getting up in the morning and doing what they can do to make it through each day, though some don't make it. I felt like I learned about their individual stories and lives, and about the Mumbai slums - a place I'll never see - at least a little bit, and without being preached at. The details came from Boo's close observations of events she witnessed, and hundreds of interviews after the fact. An argument could be made, "how reliable could interviews with slum dwellers be?" Well, how reliable are you, when somebody asks about

your life? People are people, and I'm sure once they got used to Boo's presence, they liked having somebody new to talk to. I've embedded with the military as a journalist, and after a few days even soldiers who dislike the media stop seeing reporters as the "press," and as just another guy. I'm sure it was the same here.

The interwoven stories of some of the 335 families in a tiny half-acre slum surrounded by luxury hotels at Mumbai's international airport reach out and grab the reader and pull you right in for a ride that I found to be intense and at times very painful. The author did intensive years-long research, interviewing, videotaping, finding records, and hanging around until she was just part of the environment. She makes herself invisible, not injecting her presence, which I really enjoyed. Her point of view is clear, however. The people in these slums are mostly from other states in India besides Maharashtra, where Bombay is located, and many are either of the untouchable caste, or Muslim. Rather than forming a community to try to fight to survive and prosper, the adults fight among themselves, trying to cheat and steal from each other. The young people seem less vicious and corrupt, as they have more hope and less understanding of how calamities can come out of nowhere, just as things seem to be getting better, and tear everything down again. The police, the local government, and the poor people are alike in their corruption, demanding money from the desperate to fix things. The lack of compassion and any sense of justice was distressing. The condition of the women and girls was horrible. A serial killer may have been picking off garbage scavenger boys, but the police record their deaths as being from illness, so they don't have to bother looking for a killer. Children are not allowed by law to work, even if that's the only way they can eat. The law is only enforced as a way for the police to extort money from them.

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