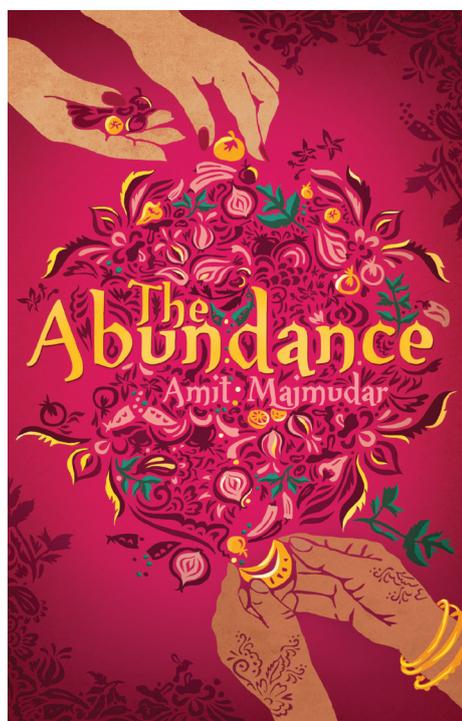




Oneworld Readers' Guide

The Abundance



The Abundance

Amit Majmudar

A luminous, bittersweet novel of India, immigrants and their first-generation children, and the power of cooking to bridge the gulfs between them.

An unnamed Indian mother living in Ohio is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Anxious to avoid disrupting her children's lives and spoil what precious time they have left together – particularly their upcoming Christmas visit – she is reluctant to tell Mala and Ronak. However, her daughter quickly becomes suspicious and soon the truth comes out. As her health deteriorates, she reflects on her life: remembering Ronak's and Mala's childhoods; how she fell in love with her husband Abhi; and the deaths of her parents. She reminisces about India, and the life her children would have led had they stayed, and regrets failing to pass her medical exams. But she rejoices in the love of her children and grandchildren.

She expresses this love in the food that she cooks for her family, and this prompts Mala to set down her mother's recipes. But when Ronak flies out to visit and announces that he has got a book deal for his mother's cookbook - which will focus on his mother's illness - Mala is furious. His mother refuses to participate and Ronak is outraged at their reaction. He only agrees to stay at his parents' after much doting, which Mala resents. But these sibling tensions lessen when it becomes apparent that their mother is increasingly frail. When she is unable to cook Mala and her sister-in-law Amber take over in the kitchen, using the cookbook Mala has compiled from her mother's recipes. The novel ends with Abhi carrying his wife onto a neighbour's trampoline, and as they jump together she is filled with joy and peace.

'I have so much trouble answering the questions I am asked, maybe I should write a book. That would give me distance. Everyone's eyes would be on the words, not on me. I could hand over a copy and say, "It's all in there. Read it later. Talk to me about something else for a while."

Whoever read it would think, in frustration, where is it? Where has it spread? How long do you have? I would have my answer ready, if I chose to answer. This is not a book about dying. This is a book about life.'



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About the Author

Amit Majmudar is the author of *Partitions*, chosen by *Kirkus Reviews* as one of the best debut novels of 2011 and by *Booklist* as one of the year's ten best works of historical fiction. His poetry has been published in the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*, and Best American Poetry 2012. A radiologist, he lives in Columbus, Ohio.

Discussion Points

1. The novel is divided into three parts: Abundance, Famine, and Seedtime. Why do you think they were given these names?
2. When Mala talks about writing her diary, she says she would like to write a book about her mother's experience and 'would write it from [her mother's] perspective.' Who do you think is the narrator of this novel and how reliable a narrator do you think they are?
3. What effect does switching between the past and present tense have when reading the novel and how do you find this informs your understanding of India and America?
4. Do you feel that it is fair to hide one's illness from loved ones? Is Mala's mother treated differently after her illness is made public?
5. How do characters' differing attitudes toward food reveal their personalities? For example, Mala sees cooking as servitude, whereas her mother sees her role as 'the giver'?
6. Discuss the cultural differences between the parents, first-generation immigrants, and Ronak and Mala, and how it impacts their different parenting styles and their relationships with their children.
7. The two most successful marriages in this story are arranged. What do you think this says about love and relationships?
8. This novel is written by a man in his thirties. How well does he manage to represent the character of an ageing grandmother?
9. 'This is not a book about dying. This is a book about life.' Why do you think the novel ends where it does?



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Suggested Further Reading

A Cupboard Full of Coats by Yvonne Edwards

White Teeth by Zadie Smith

Brick Lane by Monica Ali

Levels of Life by Julian Barnes

The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry by Rachel Joyce

A Passage to India by E.M. Forster