

Behind The Beautiful Forevers Summary

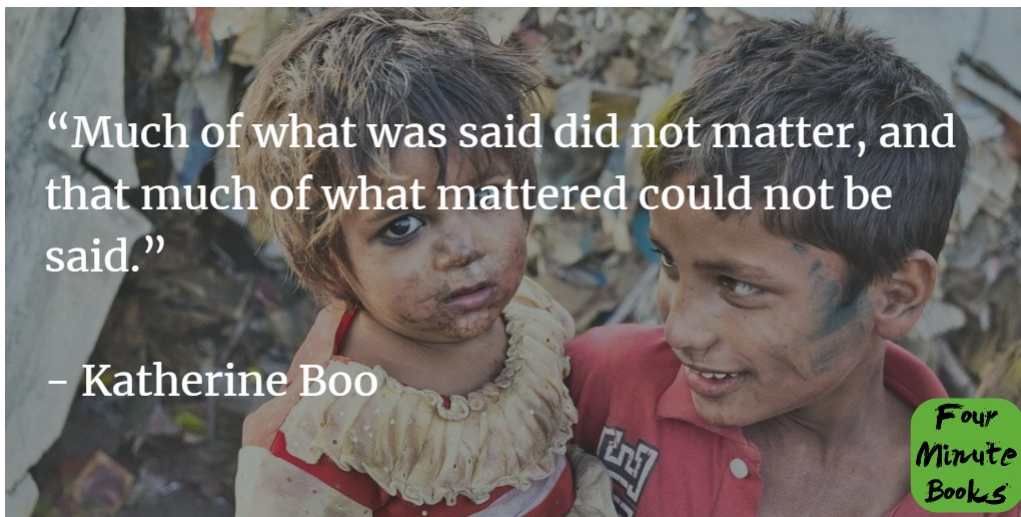


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1-Sentence-Summary: *Behind The Beautiful Forevers* will make you more grateful for what you have, look for ways to tear down corruption in the world, and help the poor by sharing the experiences of people living in the Annawadi slum in India.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Mumbai is one of the world's biggest and most complicated cities. It boasts luxury, Bollywood, and higher income per capita than the average Indian city. But in stark contrast, it also contains some of the worst slums. If you've seen the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, you have an idea of what a poor area of Mumbai is like.

The Annawadi slum is home to 3,000 people on a small patch of swampy land near the Mumbai airport. Hiding them from the view is a large concrete wall that borders the airport. The people here live in devastating poverty.

Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Katherine Boo spent more than three years here among the people. In her book *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity* she gives us a glimpse into this area and the people that live here. Many live with little to no shelter. Waste and rats surround them. Families live in desperation and must do what they can each day to maybe make a few dollars.

Here are the 3 most eye-opening lessons from this book:

1. People in the Annawadi slums live a dangerous life with almost no basic human rights.

2. Corruption is lurking around every corner and bribery is needed for everything.
3. Many dream of a better life, but can't escape what is beyond their control.

Let's jump right in!

Lesson 1: Life in the Annawadi slums is dangerous, and they live without basic human rights.

Danger is everywhere in these areas. This comes in the form of diseases, violence, and lack of protection from police, among other things.

Because the land that they live on is not a legal settlement, Annawadians don't have any sewer and are forced to dump their waste into a nearby sewage lake. Animals drink from the sewage waste and disease-ridden excrement all over, which gets the residents sick. Not only this, but the waste lake also breeds mosquitos with malaria and diseased rats.

When they do get sick or injured, access to medicine is a huge problem, because even the healthcare system is corrupt. Even when medicine should be covered by the state, hospitals charge the Annawadians and take advantage of their desperation.

Children of the slums are frequently hit by cars while crossing busy streets to get to school, and most often, the drivers do not even stop. When a child dies, the police don't even bother to investigate.

When a 15-year-old boy is killed, everyone around can see it was plainly murder. The cops call it tuberculosis so they don't have to investigate further. In cases of utter desperation, sick children may be killed by their own parents because they know they have no way to pay for their care. Others turn to suicide because they feel so trapped.

Lesson 2: Bribes are needed for almost everything because the people live among corruption.

Corruption is also everywhere.

An example we learn of this is the school the Annawadi children attend. It is funded through charitable donations, but unfortunately, these get misused.

The woman who runs it puts her daughter who is unqualified in charge of the school. And to make it as profitable as possible, she has her daughter only teach on days when the charity supervisor drops in to check on things.

Though the people long to take part in the political process and vote, the government makes it hard for them. This is because they are seen as criminals just for living in the slums. The only way they can get a voter card is to bribe the officials.

The people know the police will only help them with bribes. When one of the residents, Abdul, was arrested unlawfully for something he didn't do, the police beat him and try to terrify him into taking out a loan to pay them huge bribes. This is the only way he can avoid having the false charges filed against him.

Lesson 3: Annawadians dream of a better life, but one small setback can devastate all they have worked for.

We hear the story of the Husain family, who has hopes and dreams of one day leaving the slum. Through their garbage business, they are able to scrape together enough money to put a deposit down for a plot to build on a legal settlement.

People around them see their supposed wealth and become jealous, and one neighborhood argument is enough to ruin all they've worked for. When they accidentally shake some rubble into their neighbor's house by knocking into her brick wall, the mentally unstable woman claims her home is destroyed and they should compensate her.

The Husains' refusal sends the neighbor into a rage and she sets herself on fire. She is given poor care at the hospital and dies. The jealous neighbors accuse the Husains' of murder, and several members are arrested. They watch as their savings disappear because they have to pay bribes and lawyers, and they lose the plot of land which they now can't pay for.

Many people try to escape by getting an education, but even this is almost impossible. A smart young lady named Manju studies hard and gets a job selling life insurance. But though she does the training and gets exceptional grades, she struggles to make any money. The people of Annawadi can't afford life insurance, and anyone else refuses to do business with her because they consider her a slum girl.

The odds seem to be stacked against them, and very few can escape. Boo tells us, "for every two people in Annawadi inching up, there was one in a catastrophic plunge." But this doesn't stop them from having hope for their future.

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Behind The Beautiful Forevers Review

It sounds cliché, but reading a book like *Behind The Beautiful Forevers* truly changes your perspective on life. We complain of things like inequality and pollution, which are important, but that pale in comparison to what these people are dealing with everyday. Still, this one will leave you feeling inspired by their stories and their plight.

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Who would I recommend the Behind The Beautiful Forevers summary to?

The 48-year-old who enjoyed the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, the 22-year-old who is sick of the corruption in the world and wants some motivation to find out how to make a difference, and anyone that wants some reasons to be more grateful for what they have.