

Abby Spencer Goes to Bollywood

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Who knew that a severe allergic reaction to coconut flakes could be a blessing in disguise? For thirteen-year old Abby Tara Spencer, a trip to the hospital forces Abby and her mother to dig up Abby's genetic history and therefore acknowledge her absent father figure, who in her imagination is a gentle, middle-aged Indian dad. After scouring the Internet for a clue about her father, Abby discovers what her mother had only recently found out: it turns out that Naveen Kumar, the teenage heartthrob and the face of Bollywood, is Abby's dad. By the time her mother finally manages to contact Naveen, both Abby and her mom are beginning to feel betrayed and deliberately ignored. However, their fears are quickly dispelled by Naveen's eagerness to reunite with the family he did not know existed. He immediately requests Abby visit him in Mumbai, just in time for the premiere of his own movie.

Through living with her father in Mumbai, Abby is introduced to a lifestyle that surpasses that of a typical middle-class American household, as well as a culture that fuses modern styles and technology with the country's rich history, which sets the depths of poverty against unimaginable luxury. Abby also meets her grandmother and a cute boy who she sees as a potential boyfriend. She begins to perceive India as a second home. The family there is welcoming and doting, and there is no lack of excitement in a foreign country's in which Abby is the daughter of their famed Bollywood celebrity. Soon, Abby feels split between her two lives, one in America and one in India, yet she is unwilling to relinquish either side or family and friends that accompany each.

Abby Spencer Goes to Bollywood mashes the struggles of a typical pre-teen girl into one charming book with a happily ever after ending. It introduces readers to the Indian culture from the perspective of a young girl who despite her heritage, feels detached from it. Bajaj calls to attention the predicament numerous children are facing today, and connects her characters with actual problems kids confront. She also includes problems they wish they had, such as having a celebrity father, which lends the book its enticing quality. However, the fame and fortune element of the plot seems like an impossibility in reality, and therefore the book is limited to being a fun piece of fiction. Furthermore, Abby's character, is framed to fit a young girl, and emphasized by her loud personality, which overshadows that of the other characters'. The plot revolves solely around her, which does not allow the other characters to develop as much as Abby. This book is interesting as it takes on the American-born Indian culture through a person who can associate with it, but not know its customs at all, which is becoming much more common now than ever before.

Within *Abby Spencer Goes to Bollywood*, there is family drama, a boyfriend dilemma, and the ultimate long-distance problem or two. The book is built around the world of a pre-teen girl, touching on family, friends, and a self-identity, and Abby's confident demeanor and genuine character establishes a positive outlook on these areas that might be the source of stress for many others. Books I would recommend reading include *Esperanza Rising* by Pamela Munoz Ryan, *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, *Judy Moody Gets Famous!* by Megan McDonald, and *Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great* by Judy Plume.