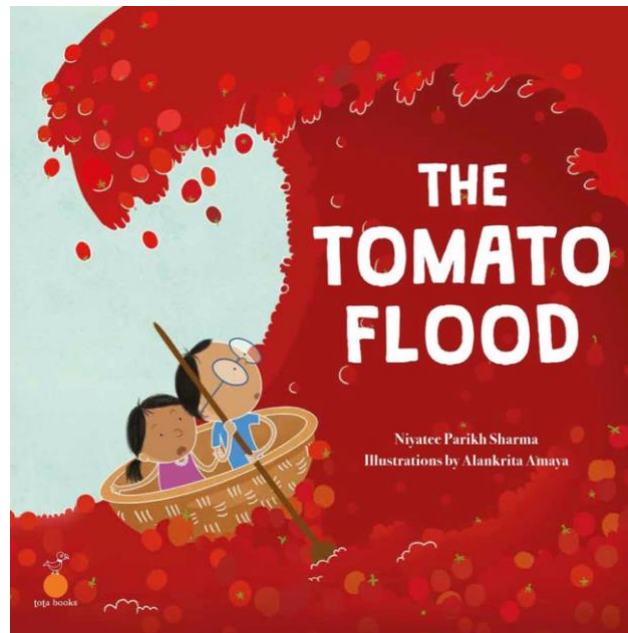


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Review of *The Tomato Flood*
Written by Niyatee Parikh Sharma &
Illustrated by Alankrita Amaya

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Usree Bhattacharya
The University of Georgia, Athens, GA
Student Reviewer: Kalika Haddad, Pre-School



Sharma, N. P., & Amaya, A. (Illustrator). (2018). *The tomato flood*. New Delhi, IN: Tota Books.

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Adult Review: Usree Bhattacharya

The Tomato Flood is a delightful picture book that centers around two little mischievous siblings, Veer and Ananya, who squash tomatoes into the garden soil during a play fight. The tomato seeds later grow into plants and end up taking over their garden—resulting in a “tomato flood.” Their hapless parents try to cook tomatoes into as many dishes as possible, and give many of them away, but they continue to struggle with the deluge of tomatoes. Finally, Veer manages to sell most of them at the local farmer’s market. Only one tomato remains, finally, and the siblings, to their mother’s terror, threaten to squash it into the ground in order to start another “flood.” The unique narrative is accompanied by striking, colorful illustrations; the vibrant red of the tomatoes, in particular, is nothing short of spectacular. The book is imaginative and innovative, building in an easy-to-understand horticultural section on how to grow tomato plants. It also provides a fascinating and memorable glimpse into everyday family life in India.

On our trip to India this summer, we picked up several books published by Tota Books. This particular book has a companion book, *The Tomato Thief*, which Kalika, our 3.5 years old daughter, seemed to enjoy a lot. Thus, we actually bought this book as part of a collection. I really like that many Tota Books have a recognizably “Indian” aesthetic and voice, bringing to life stories, characters, and plots that resonate deeply with me. I love that *The Tomato Flood* features brown-skinned Indian people, with Indian names, engaged in everyday activities, often wearing “ethnic wear,” grounded in Indian settings, and eating Indian foods. Given our bicultural existence, I definitely value intriguing children’s books that allow me to share my Indian identity in readily accessible ways with Kalika.

To provide context, Kalika has a rare and serious neurological disorder called Rett Syndrome. She is drawn to vibrant colors and sharply outlined faces

with big eyes. The book contained both, so that also motivated my decision to buy it. Kalika uses an eye-tracking device—she triggers speech by looking at words she wants to say, using intentional gaze—and it’s very gratifying that through this cutting-edge technology, she has the opportunity to express her reactions to books she reads. Kalika is bilingual in Bangla and English, and those are the languages in which we negotiate her responses. In the video review, there is the circulation of Hindi (in the form of words in the book, as well as in the Bollywood song she’s listening to) and Southern Indian languages (as words in the book, e.g., dosa, sambar). In this manner, the act of reading this text allows us to experience a part of the linguistic diversity that is deeply woven into the fabric of Indian life and is so very meaningful for the both of us.

I think the book will appeal to a lot of children who are drawn to: colorful illustrations, narratives that draw on diverse contexts, science, and stories about mischievous little children. The back cover tells you how to grow your own tomato plants, and this will appeal to parents as well as children. Unfortunately, Kalika has extremely limited functional hand use and thus cannot participate in the gardening steps that the book suggested. Kalika said she did not like the book, but she may grow to like it someday. I am not giving up!

There are words that will be unfamiliar either because they are in a local language (e.g., maali means gardener) or because they are part of Indian English (“watchman uncle” means security guard). There are questions regarding class that may arise, since the family featured employs a cook and a gardener. There are also Indian foods featured, and easy Internet searches should yield assistance with pronunciation/background.

Student Review: Kalika Haddad

I don't like this book.



To access Kalika's video of book review, please see:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uNGK4ncJpi-B1Dvol7Xu2XcS45E1-mAv/view>