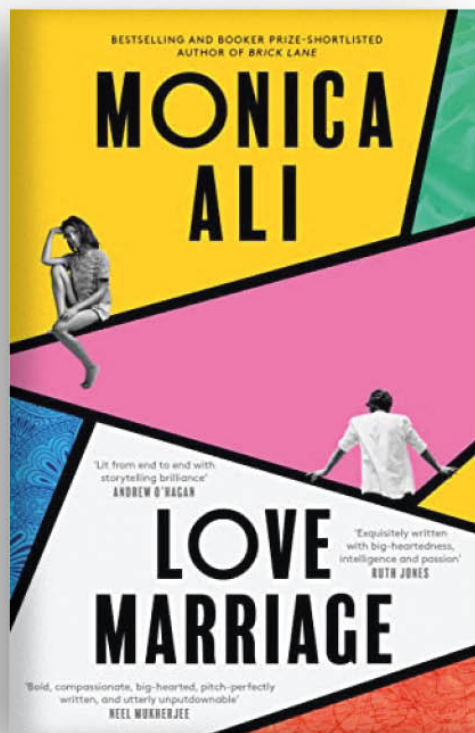


# Monica Ali is back to her satirical best

In her new novel, Ali subverts the traditional marriage plot

[Madeleine Feeny](#) Madeleine Feeny is a critic and editor



*Reviewed here*

*Love Marriage*

*by Monica Ali*

Virago

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A decade after her last novel, Monica Ali is back. *Love Marriage* marks a return to the domestic milieu and themes of her Booker-shortlisted debut *Brick Lane*: British Muslim identity, discrimination, privilege, sexual repression and awakening. Over 500 compulsive, tightly plotted pages, it explores the conflict between duty and desire, family and freedom.

Ali subverts the traditional marriage plot to illustrate the pitfalls of taking people, including oneself, at face value. She knows from experience that “life is not simple”—controversy over *Brick Lane*’s depiction of the Bangladeshi community crystallised questions over representation and creative freedom that infuse *Love Marriage*.

It centres on the impending wedding between Yasmin Ghorami, a junior doctor living with her “chaste” Bengali family in southeast London, and Joe Sangster, a registrar living with his feminist provocateur mother in Primrose Hill. Ali has fun parachuting the Ghoramis into NW3, to be studied, in Yasmin’s mind, like “some anthropological specimen.” Although Yasmin mocks her mother’s ensuing “journey of self-discovery,” the novel’s dramatic irony hinges on the fact that she is on a parallel journey herself.

Her parents emerge with almost painful vividness, as do the tragi-comic hospital scenes. Ali prizes entertainment over realism, and her penchant for debating issues through her characters means some verge on caricature. Nevertheless, *Love Marriage* reveals a master storyteller playing to her strengths: a satirical eye that deftly navigates the fine line between humour and pathos; a wicked ear for dialogue; and a flair for conjuring illicit passion. It highlights how ineluctably we are shaped by our families and the secrets they keep.