

## Two Must-Read Books on India

by Karine Schomer

If your business, job and life are connected to India in some way (and whose isn't in today's globalized world?), you may have read about "doing business with India." You may have tried to demystify the larger context by reading travel or "culture shock" guides, or an occasional news story about India. As helpful as these may be, they only scratch the surface of the complex and rapidly transforming reality of India in the 21st century.

Fortunately, recent years have seen a string of best-selling books about contemporary India aimed at the general public. First came the ground-breaking *India Unbound: From Independence to the Global Information Age* by Indian columnist and former Procter & Gamble India CEO Gurcharan Das. In 2005, we had *The New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman's *The World is Flat*, in which the narrative of India's current economic transformation figures prominently. That same year saw Nobel Prize economist Amartya Sen's erudite *The Argumentative Indian* on the modern relevance of India's long tradition of intellectual argumentation and pluralism of perspectives.

Early 2007 bring us two insightful and engaging books that will reward curious readers with a quantum advance in their cultural literacy regarding India today. Both provide a comprehensive overview of the vast and contradictory realities of changing India and make the case that India's future is of vital importance to the rest of the world. Both succeed admirably in conveying the subtleties and flavor of contemporary Indian life through vivid anecdotes of encounters with individuals from many walks of life.

### *In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India*

The author of this book, Edward Luce, is Washington commentator and former South Asia bureau chief for the UK's *Financial Times*. He covered India for many years as a journalist and is married to Indian development economist Priya Basu.

Luce's purpose in writing *In Spite of the Gods* is to provide "an unsentimental evaluation of contemporary India against the background of its widely expected ascent to great power status in the twenty-first century." He takes you through India's astonishingly rapid transformation in the wake of the 1991 dismantling of the "License Raj" system of controls and permits that had been in place since India's independence in 1947.

In a series of topical chapters, you go beyond the well-known story of India's juggernaut information technology, business process outsourcing and call center sectors to learn about many other aspects of India today: the many-layered character of modernity in India, the intricacies and internal tensions in India's "schizophrenic" dual economy and the rich-poor gap, the long tentacles and continued corruption of the government bureaucracy, the unintended consequences of well-meant economic development policies, the changing caste system and the rise of India's lower castes, the struggle between rising Hindu nationalism and secularism, the complex reality of India's many different kinds of Muslims, and India's key geopolitical role in the China-India-United States "triangular dance" of the future.



For Luce, India's great strengths for becoming a global power of the future are its scale, democracy, long experience with internal multi-ethnic diversity, the youth of its population and its newly released entrepreneurial dynamism. Within a generation, India will surpass Japan as the world's largest economy, outstrip China in population, and have more English speakers than the United States. "India isn't on an autopilot to greatness, but it would take an incompetent pilot to crash the plane." The country has been moving forward on a remarkably stable trajectory. It has huge opportunities as well as tremendous challenges. India's future is "hers to lose."

### ***Planet India: How the Fastest-Growing Democracy is Transforming America and the World***

This second book is by award-winning author and essayist Mira Kamdar, a senior fellow at the World Policy Institute and associate fellow of the Asia Society. Based in New York, she brings to her work a bi-national personal background and a life that has spanned India and the United States for over four decades.

*Planet India* takes you through many of the same topics and issues as *In Spite of the Gods*. It portrays an India that is technologically sophisticated, growing economically, culturally vibrant, a rising political power, and ready to take a leading role in the dawning "Asian Century." It also takes a hard, honest look at the extreme disparities between the "new India" and the "other India" of poverty,

### **About the Author**

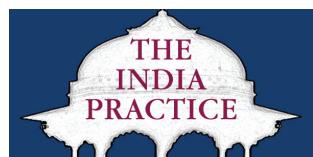
Dr. Karine Schomer is President of Change Management Consulting & Training, LLC, and leads the CMCT India Practice, specializing in cross-cultural training, change management, communication and management consulting for doing business with India. She has been involved with India for over 25 years, including 8 years living and working in India. She is fluent in Hindi and has in-depth understanding of Indian culture, values and business and social customs. She has been a University of California-Berkeley professor, dean at Golden Gate University, and Chief Operating Officer of the California Institute of Integral Studies. To contact the author, write to [schomer@cmct.net](mailto:schomer@cmct.net). For more information on the CMCT India Practice, visit [www.cmct.net/india\\_practice.html](http://www.cmct.net/india_practice.html) or call 510-525-9222.

disease, inadequate infrastructure, casteism, gender inequality, educational backwardness, political corruption and a looming environmental crisis.

What makes this book especially compelling is the rich detail in which the human side of India's transformation is related, bringing you intimately into the world of families, students, professionals, entrepreneurs, farmers, movie producers, politicians, shopkeepers and Indians of the "diaspora" residing in the United States. The day-to-day impacts on people of India's revolution in telecommunications, media exposure and consumer goods retailing are particularly revealing. Equally revealing is the sub-narrative of India's increasing impact on the life of people in the United States and the rest of the world.

Kamdar's message is even stronger than Luce's, focusing on why India's future matters not just to itself, but to the whole world. India is the world in microcosm; its challenges are the common challenges we all face. Yet something new is emerging out of India's demographic power, stark necessity for survival and the visionary energy of countless individuals in India who are daring to imagine a future based on new economic and social paradigms. India's success in finding innovative solutions to its problems could catapult it to the top of the new world order and save us all. "As goes India, so goes the world."

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