India Becoming - A Portrait of Life in Modern India

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A New Republic Editors' and Writers' Pick 2012 A New Yorker Contributors' Pick 2012 A Newsweek "Must Read on Modern India" “For people who savored Katherine Boo’s Behind the Beautiful Forevers.”—Evan Osnos, newyorker.com From the author of Better To Have Gone, a portrait of the incredible change and economic development of modern India, and of social and national transformation there told through individual lives Raised in India, and educated in the U.S., Akash Kapur returned to India in 2003 to raise a family. What he found was an ancient country in transition. In search of the life that he and his wife want to lead, he meets an array of Indians who teach him much about the realities of this changed country: an old landowner sees his rural village destroyed by real estate developments, and crime and corruption breaking down the feudal authority; a 21-year-old single woman and a 35-year-old divorcee exploring the new cultural allowances for women; and a young gay man coming to terms with his sexual identity – something never allowed him a generation ago. As Akash and his wife struggle to find the right balance between growth and modernity and the simplicity and purity they had known from the Indian countryside a decade ago, they ultimately find a country that “has begun to dream.” But also one that may be moving away too quickly from the valuable ways in which it is different.

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A New Republic Editors' and Writers' Pick 2012 A New Yorker Contributors' Pick 2012 A portrait of incredible change and economic development, of social and national transformation told through individual lives The son of an Indian father and an American mother, Akash Kapur spent his formative years in India and his early adulthood in the United States. In 2003, he returned to his birth country for good, eager to be part of its exciting growth and modernization. What he found was a nation even more transformed than he had imagined, where the changes were fundamentally altering Indian society, for better and sometimes for worse. To further understand these changes, he sought out the Indians experiencing them firsthand. The result is a rich tapestry of lives being altered by economic development, and a fascinating insider's look at many of the most important forces shaping our world today. Much has been written about the rise of Asia and a rebalancing of the global economy, but rarely does one encounter these big stories with the level of nuance and detail that Kapur gives us in India Becoming. Among the characters we meet are a broker of cows who must adapt his trade to a modernizing economy; a female call center employee whose relatives worry about her values in the city; a feudal landowner who must accept that he will not pass his way of life down to his children; and a career woman who wishes she could "outsource" having a baby. Through these stories and many others, Kapur provides a fuller understanding of the complexity and often contradictory nature of modern India. India Becoming is particularly noteworthy for its emphasis on rural India—a region often neglected in writing about the country, though 70 percent of the population still lives there. In scenes reminiscent of R. K. Narayan's classic works on the Indian countryside,
Kapur builds intimate portraits of farmers, fishermen, and entire villages whose ancient ways of life are crumbling, giving way to an uncertain future that is at once frightening and full of promise. Kapur himself grew up in rural India; his descriptions of change and modernization are infused with a profound-at times deeply poignant- firsthand understanding of the loss that must accompany all development and progress. India Becoming is essential reading for anyone interested in our changing world and the newly emerging global order. It is a riveting narrative that puts the personal into a broad, relevant and revelational context.

**India Becoming - A Journey through a Changing Landscape**

India has changed dramatically in recent years, but what does all this change mean for the lives of ordinary Indians? In this gripping and often moving book, Akash Kapur follows a handful of men and women in the villages and small towns of South India as they confront the ups and downs of life in a nation in transition.

**Better to Have Gone - Love, Death, and the Quest for Utopia in Auroville**

A spellbinding story about love, faith, the search for utopia—and the often devastating cost of idealism. It’s the late 1960s, and two lovers converge on an arid patch of earth in South India. John Walker is the handsome scion of a powerful East Coast American family. Diane Maes is a beautiful hippie from Belgium. They have come to build a new world—Auroville, an international utopian community for thousands of people. Their faith is strong, the future bright. So how do John and Diane end up dying two decades later, on the same day, on a cracked concrete floor in a thatch hut by a remote canyon? This is the mystery Akash Kapur sets out to solve in Better to Have Gone, and it carries deep personal resonance: Diane and John were the parents of Akash’s wife, Auralice. Akash and Auralice grew up in Auroville; like the rest of their community, they never really understood those deaths. In 2004, Akash and Auralice return to Auroville from New York, where they have been living with John’s family. As they reestablish themselves, along with their two sons, in the community, they must confront the ghosts of those distant deaths. Slowly, they come to understand how the tragic individual fates of John and Diane intersected with the collective history of their town. Better to Have Gone is a book about the human cost of our age-old quest for a more perfect world. It probes the underexplored yet universal idea of utopia, and it portrays in vivid detail the daily life of one utopian community. Richly atmospheric and filled with remarkable characters, spread across time and continents, this is narrative writing of the highest order—a heartbreaking, unforgettable story.

**Better to Have Gone - Love, Death, and the Quest for Utopia in Auroville**

'Better to Have Gone' blends memoir, history, sociology, and politics. It probes the under-explored yet universal idea of utopia, and it portrays in vivid detail the daily life of one particular utopian community striving to create a better world. Above all, it is a love story about two doomed and idealistic dreamers, wrapped in the longing of the daughter who has lost them.

**English, August - An Indian Story**
Agastya Sen, known to friends by the English name August, is a child of the Indian elite. His friends go to Yale and Harvard. August himself has just landed a prize government job. The job takes him to Madna, “the hottest town in India,” deep in the sticks. There he finds himself surrounded by incompetents and cranks, time wasters, bureaucrats, and crazies. What to do? Get stoned, shirk work, collapse in the heat, stare at the ceiling. Dealing with the locals turns out to be a lot easier for August than living with himself. English, August is a comic masterpiece from contemporary India. Like A Confederacy of Dunces and The Catcher in the Rye, it is both an inspired and hilarious satire and a timeless story of self-discovery.

**Crossing the Bay of Bengal**

For centuries the Bay of Bengal served as a maritime highway between India and China, and as a battleground for European empires, while being shaped by monsoons and human migration. Integrating environmental history and mining a wealth of sources, Sunil S. Amrith offers insights to the many challenges facing Asia in the decades ahead.

**The White Tiger - A Novel**

SOON TO BE A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE The stunning Booker Prize–winning novel from the author of Amnesty and Selection Day that critics have likened to Richard Wright’s Native Son, The White Tiger follows a darkly comic Bangalore driver through the poverty and corruption of modern India’s caste society. “This is the authentic voice of the Third World, like you’ve never heard it before” (John Burdett, Bangkok 8). The white tiger of this novel is Balram Halwai, a poor Indian villager whose great ambition leads him to the zenith of Indian business culture, the world of the Bangalore entrepreneur. On the occasion of the president of China’s impending trip to Bangalore, Balram writes a letter to him describing his transformation and his experience as driver and servant to a wealthy Indian family, which he thinks exemplifies the contradictions and complications of Indian society. Recalling The Death of Vishnu and Bangkok 8 in ambition, scope, The White Tiger is narrative genius with a mischief and personality all its own. Amoral, irreverent, deeply endearing, and utterly contemporary, this novel is an international publishing sensation—and a startling, provocative debut.

**Bitwise - A Life in Code**

"[A] ... memoir and ... polemic on how computers and algorithms shape our understanding of the world and of who we are"

**India - A Portrait**

A monumental biography of the subcontinent from the award-winning author of The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V. S. Naipaul. Second only to China in the magnitude of its economic miracle and second to none in its potential to shape the new century, India is fast undergoing one of the most momentous transformations the world has ever seen. In this dazzlingly panoramic book, Patrick French chronicles that epic change, telling human stories to
explain a larger national narrative. Melding on-the-ground reports with a deep knowledge of history, French exposes the cultural foundations of India’s political, economic and social complexities. He reveals how a nation identified with some of the most wretched poverty on earth has simultaneously developed an envied culture of entrepreneurship (here are stories like that of C. K. Ranganathan, who trudged the streets of Cuddalore in the 1980s selling sample packets of shampoo and now employs more than one thousand people). And even more remarkably, French shows how, despite the ancient and persistent traditions of caste, as well as a mind-boggling number of ethnicities and languages, India has nevertheless managed to cohere, evolving into the world’s largest democracy, largely fulfilling Jawaharlal Nehru’s dream of a secular liberal order. French’s inquiry goes to the heart of all the puzzles that modern India presents: Is this country actually rich or poor? Why has its Muslim population, the second largest on earth, resisted radicalization to such a considerable extent? Why do so many children of Indians who have succeeded in the West want to return “home,” despite never having lived in India? Will India become a natural ally of the West, a geostrategic counterweight to the illiberal rising powers China and Russia? To find the answers, French seeks out an astonishing range of characters: from Maoist revolutionaries to Mafia dons, from chained quarry laborers to self-made billionaires. And he delves into the personal lives of the political elite, including the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, one of the most powerful women in the world. With a familiarity and insight few Westerners could approach, Patrick French provides a vital corrective to the many outdated notions about a uniquely dynamic and consequential nation. His India is a thrilling revelation.