



Being Indian

By Pavan K. Varma

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Being Indian By Pavan K. Varma

In the 21st century every sixth human being will be Indian. India is very close to becoming the second largest consumer market in the world, with a buying middle class numbering over half a billion. The Indian economy is already the fourth largest in terms of purchasing power parity. It is in the top ten in overall GNP. Yet at least 200 million Indians remain desperately poor. Illiteracy rates are high. Communal violence is widespread; corruption endemic. Brides are still tortured and burnt for dowries; female infanticide is common. The caste system has lost little of its power and none of its brutality. How are we to make sense of these apparently contradictory pictures of India today? And how can we overcome the many misconceptions about India that are fed by western stereotypes and Indians' own myths about themselves. Pavan Varma turns a sharply observant gaze on his fellow countrymen to examine what really makes Indians tick. How, for example, does the indifference of most middle-class Indians to the suffering of the poor square with their enthusiasm for parliamentary democracy? How can a people who so supported Mahatma Gandhi's strategy of non-violence during the struggle for independence burn young brides for their dowries and beat domestic servants to near-death? Why do Indians have a reputation for being spiritual and 'other-worldly' when their traditions so exalt the pursuit of material well-being as a principal goal of life? Drawing on sources as diverse as ancient Sanskrit treatises and Bollywood lyrics, Pavan Varma creates a vivid and compelling portrait of India and its people. Being Indian is an essential book for anyone who wishes to understand Indians, and for Indians who wish to understand themselves.

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Being Indian By Pavan K. Varma Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #243208 in Books
- Published on: 2006-09-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .70" h x 5.50" w x 8.40" l, .49 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 238 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"* 'Pavan Varma is one of India's most admired and widely-read writers of non-fiction, and in Being Indian he has excelled himself. The book is a brilliant exercise in mythocide. Varma shows how India's self-image has been distorted by simplistic myth-making, and sets out to find instead what it really means to be Indian at the beginning of a new century which is likely to see India grow into a major world power.' William Dairymple * 'A well-researched and urgent inquiry that is informed as much by allusions to Hindu mythological texts as it is by a knowledge of current affairs and popular culture.' New Statesman * 'A stimulating and readable polemic' Sunday Times * 'Elegantly written... Being Indian is one of the most subtle recent attempts to analyze the continent-sized mosaic of India' The Economist"

About the Author

A member of the Indian Foreign Service, Pavan K. Varma has served in Moscow, in New York and in Cyprus. He has been Press Secretary to the President of India and is currently director of the Nehru Centre in London.

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