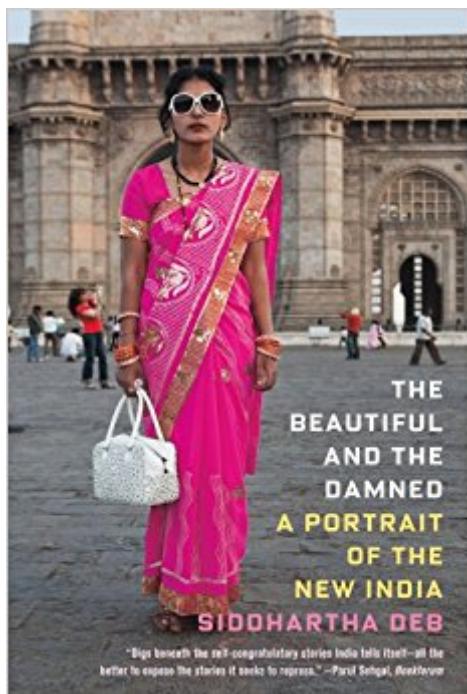


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The Beautiful And The Damned: A Portrait Of The New India



Synopsis

Siddhartha Deb grew up in a remote town in the northeastern hills of India and made his way to the United States via a fellowship at Columbia. Six years after leaving home, he returned as an undercover reporter for The Guardian, working at a call center in Delhi in 2004, a time when globalization was fast proceeding and Thomas L. Friedman declared the world flat. Deb's experience interviewing the call-center staff led him to undertake this book and travel throughout the subcontinent. The Beautiful and the Damned examines India's many contradictions through various individual and extraordinary perspectives. With lyrical and commanding prose, Deb introduces the reader to an unforgettable group of Indians, including a Gatsby-like mogul in Delhi whose hobby is producing big-budget gangster films that no one sees; a wiry, dusty farmer named Gopeti whose village is plagued by suicides and was the epicenter of a riot; and a sad-eyed waitress named Esther who has set aside her dual degrees in biochemistry and botany to serve Coca-Cola to arms dealers at an upscale hotel called Shangri La. Like no other writer, Deb humanizes the post-globalization experience—its advantages, failures, and absurdities. India is a country where you take a nap and someone has stolen your job, where you buy a BMW but still have to idle for cows crossing your path. A personal, narrative work of journalism and cultural analysis in the same vein as Adrian Nicole LeBlanc's *Random Family* and V. S. Naipaul's *India* series, *The Beautiful and the Damned* is an important and incisive new work. *The Beautiful and the Damned* is a Publishers Weekly Best Nonfiction title for 2011.

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (September 18, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0865478732

ISBN-13: 978-0865478732

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 19 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #421,475 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #86 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > India & South Asia #174 in Books > Travel > Asia > India > General #415 in Books > History > Asia > India

Customer Reviews

“Splendid . . . Similar to F. Scott Fitzgerald . . . Deb works largely within the format of the profile, which allows him to closely inspect the dents made by modern India in his characters’ lives. . . There is a nuance to even the direst of Deb’s pessimisms--an acknowledgement that India’s lives are newly precarious precisely because they could swing either the way of opportunity or the way of ruin.”¹ Samanth Subramanian, *The New York Times* “Siddhartha Deb is a marvelous participatory journalist, a keen observer of contemporary India. In *The Beautiful and the Damned* he dives head-first into the places where change is happening, temporarily inhabiting these evolving, often confusing sub-worlds, talking to those benefiting from (and victimized by) said changes, and explaining in prose both highly personal and sociologically insightful how India’s people and culture are coping . . . Much like fellow participatory journalist George Orwell . . . Deb is a distinctly sympathetic firsthand observer of the contradictions between rich and poor . . . Anyone wanting to understand contemporary India’s glaring contradictions, its juxtapositions of glittering boomtowns with horrific slums, should read Deb’s wonderfully researched and elegantly written account.”² Chuck Leddy, *Minneapolis Star Tribune* “[An] incisive new look at life on the subcontinent . . . One of Deb’s most stunning achievements is the way he deconstructs India’s IT industry. With remarkable clarity, he describes a business dominated by Brahmins (India’s ruling caste) in which, contrary to common perception, call center workers struggle to eke out a sustainable living, and where even for those who do succeed there lies at the end of the road little more than an ersatz version of suburbia . . . For those who have never been to India, the book will be an eye-opening read. For those more familiar with the country, it will be essential.”³ Nitin Das Rai, *The Daily* “This brave book strikes a rare note--as a work of journalism and as an interpretation of India’s maladies. The Beautiful and the Damned digs beneath the self-congratulatory stories India tell itself--all the better to expose the stories it seeks to repress.”⁴ Parul Sehgal, *Bookforum* “This is a brilliant and sensitive book that succeeds in shifting our gaze from the dazzling glass and steel towers of the business park to the collateral damage suffered by people caught in the age-old tensions between economic mirage, constricting cultural tradition and overbearing social expectation.”⁵ Stanley Stewart, *The Sunday Times* “In his subtle, sometimes startlingly intelligent narrative, Deb is drawn to the idea of pretence, and to pretenders, of which he--writer, confidant, friend, provincial, global traveller--is one himself . . . In these pages, Deb is quickened by his extraordinary feeling for the texture of lower middle-class life, as well as his unerring sensitivity to the way a country yet again transforms itself.”⁶ Amit Chaudhuri, *The Guardian* “A compelling read. The author’s experience as a journalist ensures that he hardly wastes a word, his local knowledge gives

him depth and empathy, while his status as a novelist seems to protect him from intrusive literary flourishes . . . While computer boffins may be the new Brahmins, many of them are actually the old Brahmins. Such points are generally overlooked by those keen to promote the newness of the new India, and Deb generally offers a shrewder, more humane perspective than most travelogues.â• ªRoderick Matthews, *Literary Review*â• ª“Siddhartha Deb has gone under cover to write a hands-on account of India’s vigorous capitalism . . . Deb’s perception is that starkly unequal social, political and economic conditions have developed in India over the past quarter century. As a first-hand report, this is authentic, assured and absolutely engrossing, acutely pinpointing the aspirational tragic-comic ironies of modern India.â• ªClain Finlayson, *The Times (London)*â• ª“Siddhartha Deb is one of the most distinctive writers to have emerged from South Asia in the last two decades.â• ªPANKAJ MISHRA, author of *The Romantics*

Siddhartha Deb, who teaches creative writing at the New School, is the author of two novels: *The Point of Return*, which was a 2003 *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year, and *An Outline of the Republic*. His reviews and journalism have appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *The Guardian*, *Harper’s Magazine*, *The Nation*, *New Statesman*, *n+1*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*.

â• ªThe Beautiful and the Damnedâ• ª by Siddhartha Deb, who grew up in India, lives in the US, wrote the book right here on a Radcliffe fellowship, and often returns to â• ªthe newâ• ª India. He wrote two novels and has the story-telling ability of a novelist, but these stories are real: He spent four years recently being with and interviewing people in India about their lives and work: business entrepreneurs, software engineers, farmers, migratory factory workers, and women in service jobs (likely a page turner for you---their lives). I really think it tells the story of all humanity today, with all peopleâ• ªâ„¢s hardships, hopes, differences, partial triumphs, and disappointments. And with it the poignant West-East confusions. And for students: This book is NOT a novel. It is an account of real life, based on four years of connecting and spending much time with real people, not fictional. But Deb can tell a story, so his accounts are very readable, like youâ• ªâ„¢re â• ªright thereâ• ª. And yes, he does interlard his journalistic dialogue with personal and even political impressions, but there is nothing â• ªtextyâ• ª about the book---itâ• ªâ„¢s more like a movie. But Iâ• ªâ„¢ve had a lot of experience in different parts of the world with different kinds of people, and with some understanding of regimes.

So this book fleshes out the globally typical circumstances and lives of representative people of different classes, especially those who are mobile: classwise, culturally, and geographically. In other words, yes, it directly illustrates “conflicts in India” as well as “reflecting on problems worldwide” on the ground. I would recommend it as a companion reading for texts you may have been assigned.

This is a remarkable book. It takes the reader through five narratives of contemporary India, painting a vivid portrait of a country in transition. I'm really impressed with the clarity with which Deb accomplishes this and would rate this book as far more informative (and written in much better prose) than any other book about the ongoing socioeconomic transformation in India. It's not nostalgic, it doesn't romanticize the country or pay tribute to any specific cities: it focuses on the people (an impressive variety of them), not the places or the practices. (Perhaps this was not the author's intent, but if you're planning to do business in India, or have been assigned to travel there on work, read the first two essays, they give you a good idea of the rich tapestry of Indian aspirations. While I grew up in India, I have lived in the United States for over 15 years, and although I travel to India every couple of months for work, it is hard to see the range of what this book tells you even if you are a frequent visitor.) The nod to F. Scott Fitzgerald goes beyond his choice of title: the first narrative draws explicit parallels between Arindam Chaudhuri and Gatsby, the nouveau rich outsider with a questionable academic past. But Deb is not simply more readable than Fitzgerald, he also rises to the challenge of describing a far more complex society, and one that is going through fairly radical change. It is hard to peg this book as being of a specific "type". There's a mix of relevant history and astute social observation, and a good range of context. Perhaps it is a very readable ethnography, one that anyone interested in India should read. I couldn't put it down once I started it. Then I read it again. postscript: I discovered earlier this week while in India that the version being sold there does not contain the first chapter "The Great Gatsby", which has been removed following a civil case filed by Chaudhuri's IIPM. (It was published in the magazine "Caravan" back in February 2011.

This book provides good insight into the economic transformation in India during the last two decades. While the IT boom and outsourcing has provided opportunities to many, life remains hard for the majority. The author shares the stories of five people illustrating the divide among the newly wealthy, the burgeoning middle class, and the continuing plight of the village farmer and the poor. I

appreciate that the book is a narrative and does not judge or imply a conclusion on any of the people sharing their stories. At times I found the writing hard to follow due to word choice and was thankful for the dictionary feature on my Kindle.

Found this has so much information that clarified my recent stay in India. I stayed with a family and was puzzled by some of the cultural differences and I have been to India eleven times but never staying in a family home.

I'd have rated it a full 5 stars but I felt it ended a little abruptly. I liked the structure and the flow of the narrative. It was pretty well thought out and sounded neutral rather than biased. I'd say, read this to get an idea of the underbelly of the great Indian growth story

With all the "India Shining" hysteria, good to read something hard-hitting yet empathetic. Will recommend to all with an interest in India.

Deb is a keen observer. His writing is crisp. The book reads more like a fast paced novel. The first chapter on Arindam itself is worth the price

Reading it. So far: read it. Great portrait of India and lots of humour.

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