

Fiction and Nonfiction about India

Fiction

Badami, Anita Rau. ***The Hero's Walk***. Algonquin Books, 2001.

The middle-aged Sripathi Rao, a copywriter living in a small Indian city, travels to Canada to bring back his 7-year old granddaughter, orphaned when her parents died in an automobile crash. The bereft child, mute with unhappiness, enters a household turbulent with emotion and unsatisfied desires. Badami has penned a moving story of family struggle, filled with loss, longing, and hope.

Ghosh, Amitav. ***The Hungry Tide***. Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

Piya, an American woman of Indian descent comes to the rural Sundarbun archipelago in the Ganges delta, to study the dolphins. From this simple premise, Ghosh weaves a tale with a compelling cast of characters that combines history, romance, folklore, and the conflict between wilderness and civilization.

Mistry, Rohinton. ***A Fine Balance***. Knopf, 2001.

A Dickensian story of Indian society in the 1970s, involving four characters trying to “maintain a fine balance between hope and despair” as they become victims of the corruption around them. This is tragedy with social commentary, a haunting tale of the resilience of the human spirit.

Seth, Vikram. ***A Suitable Boy***. HarperCollins, 1993.

Don't be put off by the length of this book--it is a completely absorbing, unforgettable panoramic novel of modern India, filled with beautifully delineated characters and framed by a mother's search for a good husband for her daughter. Seth's depiction of a variety of families and castes of Indian society--Hindu and Muslim--is brilliantly done.

Scott, Paul. ***The Raj Quartet***. Reprint: Everyman's Library, 2007.

Scott portrays the effects of the British Raj on Indians and British in these four novels filled with heartbreaking characters. Don't be daunted--read the first novel--***The Jewel in the Crown***--and then see if you can stop. Even if you've seen the BBC production, read these masterful and absorbing novels.

Additional fiction:

Ghosh, Amitav. ***Sea of Poppies***. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

Markandaya, Kamala. ***Nectar in a Sieve***. Reprint: Signet Classics, 2002.

Roy, Arundhati. ***The God of Small Things***. Random House, 1997.

Sidwaha, Bapsi. ***Cracking India***. Milkweed Editions, 1991.

Umrigar, Thrity. ***Bombay Time***. Picador, 2001.

Nonfiction

Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. ***The Story of My Experiments with Truth***. Reprint: BN Publishing, 2008.

Gandhi developed his philosophy of nonviolent resistance, satyagraha, in South Africa in response to discrimination against the Indian population. His autobiography is rich in spirituality and humility, providing food for thought for contemplative readers.

Jaffrey, Madhur. ***Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India***. Knopf, 2006. Food and family are deliciously intertwined in this nostalgic memoir set in and around Delhi in the 1940s and 1950s by the woman who introduced Indian food to Western palates. Her fond memories of banquets, legendary mountain picnics, and Indian street food will have readers hungry to try the recipes she includes. Jaffrey also describes how the turbulence surrounding India's independence and the Partition of Pakistan affected her family.

Shepard, Sadia. ***The Girl From Foreign: A Search for Shipwrecked Ancestors, Forgotten Histories and a Sense of Home***. Penguin Press, 2008.

Growing up in a diverse household--her father was a white Presbyterian and her mother a Pakistani Muslim--Shepard was stunned to learn that her Muslim grandmother grew up Jewish in Bombay, part of the two thousand year old Bene Israel community. Shepard traveled to India to learn about the remnants of this Jewish community.

Umrigar, Thrity. ***First Darling of the Morning: Selected Memories of an Indian Childhood***. HarperPerennial, 2008.

Novelist Umrigar grew up in a middle-class Parsi family in Bombay, surrounded by her father's extended family, well-loved but caught in the undercurrents of family quarrels and jealousies. Umrigar tells how she navigated these difficult waters, but the joy of the memoir is in her exceptional ability to show us her intellectual development--how she became politically aware and discovered the wonders of literature, art, and music.

Von Tunzelman, Alex. ***Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire***. Henry Holt, 2007.

A fascinating account of how India won its independence from England and the turmoil that ensued, written from the point of view of the major personalities involved: Viceroy Louis Mountbatten, his wife Edwina, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah.