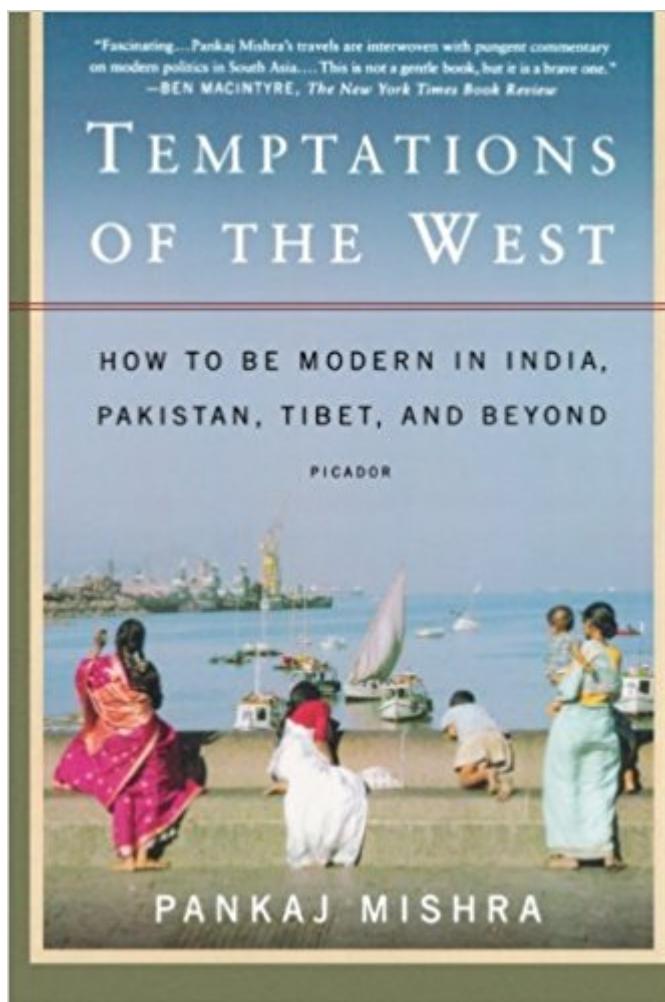


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Temptations Of The West: How To Be Modern In India, Pakistan, Tibet, And Beyond



Synopsis

A New York Times Book Review Editors' ChoiceIn Temptations of the West, Pankaj Mishra brings literary authority and political insight to bear on journeys through South Asia, and considers the pressures of Western-style modernity and prosperity on the region. Beginning in India, his examination takes him from the realities of Bollywood stardom, to the history of Jawaharlal Nehru's post-independence politics. In Kashmir, he reports on the brutal massacre of thirty-five Sikhs, and its intriguing local aftermath. And in Tibet, he exquisitely parses the situation whereby the atheist Chinese government has discovered that Tibetan Buddhism can be "packaged and sold to tourists." Temptations of the West is essential reading about a conflicted and rapidly changing region of the world.

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Customer Reviews

Mishra eloquently expresses his indignation at folly and injustice in these eight travelogues and profiles illuminating the challenge of Western-style globalization in South and Central Asia, where the pull of the West is countered by the politics of nationalism. In "Allahabad: The Nehrus, the Gandhis, and Democracy," Mishra weaves bitter commentary on the postcolonial dynasties into his observations of the "uneven" process of democracy at work during the 2000 elections in the "decaying" North India city of Allahabad. Mishra draws a complex portrait of successful Bollywood filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt in "Bollywood: India Shining," whom Mishra is prepared to find reprehensible but comes to afford grudging respect. Mishra brings the same eye for character to "Kashmir: The Cost of Nationalism," about the brutal "cycle of retribution" between Muslims and

Hindus in the contested region. On meeting a pro-India renegade commander who epitomizes an "unthinking preference for violence and terror," Mishra watches the man's "movie star glamour and... brute power" fall away as the commander demands a "free hand" in dealing with Muslim guerrillas. These instances of vivid description and personal reaction provide moments of clarity in this dense, well-written book (after *An End to Suffering*). (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Mishra, a Hindu, has been accused in his native India of "pandering to white pro-Muslim audiences in the West"; a notion that, he points out, was "optimistic" even before September 11th. In this acute survey of South and Central Asia (including Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Tibet), he reports on how countries are facing the crisis of modernization, hobbled by political corruption, poverty, and the abiding hatred of one tribe for another. Particularly illuminating is his chapter on Nepal, which, despite a veneer of regular elections, has long been mired in a battle between monarchy and Communism, both anachronisms in the West. Mishra cautions us not to underestimate "the rage and despair of people who, arriving late in the modern world, have known its primary ideology, democracy, only as another delusion." Copyright © 2006 The New Yorker -- This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The book contains treatises on the author's travels through India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal and Tibet. Pankaj Mishra provides honest, fearless reports from the areas he visits. The incidents and conditions that he reports are hardly covered or purposely censored in the mainstream media. Reports from Kashmir, Pakistan's play in Afghanistan and the political reasons on events and the governments responses, are well covered. He also mentions the threats he and his family have received due to his frank coverage. The book is recommended to anyone who wants a honest, on-the-ground view of things.

not a great book

The problem with journalistic sketches such as these is that they are forever becoming obsolete. Since many of these essays take the reader only to 2004, one is left wondering, for instance, what is happening today in Bollywood, with India's BJP party, in Kashmir, in Musharref's Pakistan, and in Nepal and Tibet. Events in these parts of the world are moving faster than Mishra can write about

them. But the great value added here is Mishra's untangling of the tortured web of historical events and personalities from which India, Kashmir, and Pakistan stumbled their painful way into their current predicaments. Often one is left trembling with despair. For instance, Mishra gives us a detailed retelling of the decades of ubiquitous injustices and murders rampant in Kashmir. And the deeply solidified hatreds and passions that have emerged from the power-hungry ambitions of men throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, from the British on, leave one feeling hopeless for any reasonable resolution to the India/Pakistan Muslim/Western miasma engulfing us today. Indeed, one wonders at the subtitle of this book, "How To Be Modern in India, Pakistan, Tibet, and Beyond." It seems to be something of an ironic joke, since Mishra is never at a loss to point out the hypocrisy of corrupt Indian "modern" politicians who live in a self-imposed bubble and ignore the suffering of millions. He also gives us an insider's look at Bollywood's lightweight "modern" movie stars and movie makers whose financial backing comes from criminals. And in general he sees the cup here as definitely more than half empty. Perhaps that viewpoint is from his many interviews at the ground level, with the suffering masses, the pathetic, powerless victims, and the poverty-stricken illiterate. I recommend this book for those naive Westerners, like Thomas J. Friedman, who think "shining India" is the focal point of the modern world. Not quite.

Other reviewers have justly criticized the book's title and subtitle. Giving Mishra the benefit of the doubt, it is possible that the title was conjured up by the publisher, and, more likely, by someone who had not read the book. Reading it, I suspected that the publisher failed due diligence, as it apparently did not even assign an "editor" who was competent at the sentence level. Such objections aside, the book provides a provocative insight into the complexities of the Indian subcontinent, with some helpful historical background and some fascinating first-person encounters with people involved in the events of the period during which the author did the journalistic investigation that was built into it. As the events of the area are even today matters that should concern U.S. citizens, Mishra's book, for all its faults, is useful background reading, since much of what he describes is STILL being played out, disastrously for all concerned.

Mishra is an Upper Caste Hindu Journalist who tries to show us the conditions of the States of the Indian Subcontinent as a result of Globalization and Modernization through his eyes and experiences. We follow him as he interacts with people in different castes, politics, Bollywood Entertainment, the Police, the Military, Militias, education, and simple peasants. We get a history of Indian/Pakistani Politics since 1948 from his experiences. We get a simple understanding of how

India has flourished while Pakistan has floundered. Of how the Congress party of Nehru and the Gandhi's have been overcome by the rise of Hindu Nationalist parties like the BJP. He visits the Kashmir and we can see how it became India's Northern Ireland with the exception that both sides are armed with nuclear weapons. The Troubles there are similar but the killing is magnified 10 fold as no human rights groups monitor the Indian nor the Pakistani armies for human rights violations. We get a glimpse of the Bollywood scene in Mumbai. How it is similar to the Hollywood Studio system of the 40's (maybe the 30's as each film seems to have a song and dance number). We get an understanding of what is acceptable on film in that culture and why there was such a hue and cry recently over Richard Gere's kiss in public. Mishra's strength is that he lets his subjects tell the story of their lives and how the World has changed around them. His most compelling sections are where he relates his own life experiences. I recommend the book as an excellent glimpse into the cultures of South Central Asia.

I loved *The End of Suffering*, Mishra's previous book, which looked at the progress of the historical Buddha in northern India 2500 years ago. Mishra effectively intertwined autobiographical details with that story, and he does the same, to powerful effect, in this closely observed look at nationalism, extremism and modernity in India, Pakistan, Tibet and Afghanistan. Mishra conveys what it feels like to be a citizen of the countries he visits, whether it's the aspiration and anxiety of movie industry hangers-on in Bombay or the bleak outlook of a family in the crossfire of Afghanistan. This book is at the standard of the best non-fiction by VS Naipaul, though I find Mishra's take on Hindu nationalism to be more accurate than the Nobel laureate's.

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