

## <<Temptations of the W>>

### 图书基本信息

书名：<<Temptations of the West: How to be Modern in India, Pakistan and Beyond (精装)>>

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### 内容概要

Old, new; rich, poor; rural, urban; Brahmin, Dalit; Hindu, Muslim - India is a country of contrasts, and "Temptations of the West" explores this diversity in all its forms. From the empty corridors of a grand but guestless western-style hotel to improvised shacks clustered along muddy roadsides; from the polite efficiency of stewards on board one of India's private airlines to overpopulated tenements and one-roomed school buildings where no teachers ever set foot; from sites of religious worship to those of mass burial; from road blocks to voting booths - as Mishra's travels take him from one part of India to another, and then beyond, to Pakistan and Afghanistan, he paints a clear and often alarming picture of disarray and disorder. All too often, superficial changes seem simply to paper over the cracks, and beneath modern facades, the old tensions still exist. A travel book unlike any other, "Temptations of the West" also offers a detailed and thought-provoking exploration of the histories, politics, religions and philosophies of India - and her neighbours.

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)

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."

Mishra, a literary journalist of conscience, follows his distinctive inquiry into Buddhism, *An End to Suffering* (2004), with a set of probing essays about strife and sorrow in volatile South Asia. There is as much history as reportage in Mishra's complex, sometimes long-winded, yet always striking analysis of the ongoing, often horrifically violent confrontations between Hindus and Muslims, the privileged and the destitute, entrenched authorities and renegade militants. Mishra does address the West's role in these intractable battles, as his title suggests, but he is primarily concerned with evoking the texture of daily life in the places he visits, and with tracing the insidious influence of hate and corruption. Mishra presents scathing interpretations of the legacy of Indira Gandhi, India's nuclear ambitions, and Hindu nationalism. He is even more intense in his shattering chronicle of the atrocities and paradoxes rife in contested Kashmir. Unusually insightful and eloquent, Mishra deftly deciphers forces political, religious, and economic; vividly profiles remarkable individuals; and, most resonantly, expresses compassion for all who are forced to live in fear.

Donna Seaman

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