

# INDIA BECOMING

## A Portrait of Life in Modern India

by Akash Kapur

### ***India Becoming***

Penguin-Riverhead, March 15, 2012

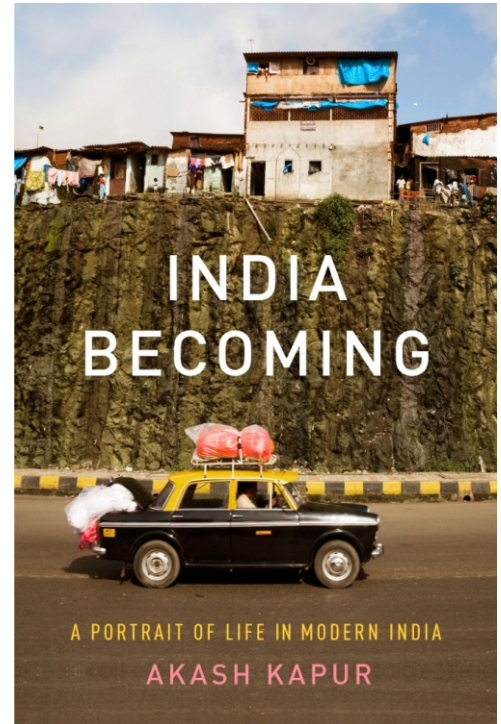
Excerpted in *The New Yorker*

The son of an Indian father and an American mother, Akash Kapur was raised in India but educated in the United States from the age of sixteen. Then, in 2003, having made a life in the West, he returned to his birth country for good, eager to be a part of its exciting growth and modernization. What he found was a nation even more transformed than he had imagined, where the changes were fundamentally altering Indian society.

To further understand these changes, he sought out the Indians experiencing them first hand—young and old, across classes, in the city and in the countryside. The result is a rich tapestry of lives being transformed—for better and often for worse—by rapid economic growth, and a particularly sensitive portrait of change in rural India, where new prosperity has been accompanied by the decline of agriculture and a collapse in traditional ways of life.

*India Becoming* is a rare insider's look at the process of development, a ground-up portrait of massive economic, social and cultural transition. Akash Kapur eschews the broad sweep of policy tomes, opting instead for a close look at the villages, towns, and lives being swept up in India's great leap toward modernity. The book covers some of the biggest stories of our age (rapid economic development, inequality and environmental depredation, the rise of emerging markets and a rebalancing of the global order), but with an intimacy, level of detail and nuance rarely encountered in contemporary writing about India.

A PORTRAIT OF INCREDIBLE CHANGE AND NEW PROSPERITY—A GROUND UP VIEW OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, A STORY OF SOCIAL AND NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION TOLD THROUGH INDIVIDUAL LIVES.



***“Lucid and searching”***

-Pico Iyer, *Time*

***“Remarkably absorbing”***

-Amartya Sen

***“[A] beautifully sketched portrait of modern India”***

-*The Financial Times*

***“Acutely observed and crammed with well-drawn characters”***

-*The Economist*

***“A wonderful writer”***

-Philip Gourevitch

***“The remarkable debut of a distinctive new talent”***

-William Dalrymple

***“A gripping book [that] describes the dark side of the boom—and the opportunities”***

-*Der Spiegel*

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Sebastian Cortes

Akash Kapur is the former 'Letter from India' columnist for *The International Herald Tribune* and the online edition of *The New York Times*. He has also written for *The Atlantic*, *The Economist*, *Granta*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times*. He holds a BA in Social Anthropology from Harvard University, and a doctorate in Law from Oxford University, which he attended as a Rhodes Scholar. He lives outside Pondicherry, in South India.

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*"Beautifully written...Akash Kapur celebrates the gains and mourns the losses, conveying a complex story through the ups and downs of the lives of some fascinating individual women and men."*

—Kwame Anthony Appiah, author of *Cosmopolitanism*

*A fascinating look at the transformation of India, with broader lessons on the upside and downside of progress."*

—*Booklist* (starred review)

*"Kapur...is an excellent ambassador to explain the dynamic of change in India, what the nation is becoming. Any reader who would like to understand the country better would do well to give him a read."*

—*The Daily Beast* (a "Nonfiction Must Read")

*"There have been many books now on the new India, but almost all of them concentrate on urban north India. Akash Kapur's marvelous book is unique in looking mainly at the south and in a detailed and intimate way at village life. He shows how the old rural world depicted and romanticized by R.K. Narayan is fracturing and breaking apart to reveal a very new, more unstable world. Sharp-eyed, insightful, skillfully-sketched and beautifully written, India Becoming is the remarkable debut of a distinctive new talent."*

—William Dalrymple, author of *Nine Lives*

*"A gripping book [that] describes the dark side of the boom—and the opportunities."*

—*Der Spiegel*

*"[R]eadable, acutely observed and crammed with well-drawn characters... Mr Kapur offers a corrective to a simplistic "new, happy narrative" of a rising India. That is welcome and he does it well."*

—*The Economist*

*"There are many virtues of Akash Kapur's beautifully sketched portrait of modern India. The book reads like a novel. Kapur's skill is to get people talking and to weave their stories into a necessarily messy debate about India's future."*

—*The Financial Times*

*"Akash Kapur is a wonderful writer: a courageously clear-eyed observer, an astute listener, a masterful portraitist, and a gripping story teller. His voice is as sure and as intimate as his subject is chaotic and immense, and he proves himself the perfect guide to the enthralling promise and the terrifying menace of a society in the throes of colossal, epochal, all-encompassing change."*


—Philip Gourevitch, author of *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families*


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*“Through a series of deft character sketches, Akash Kapur captures the contradictions of life in modern India—between city and country, technology and aesthetics, development and the environment, greed and selflessness, individual fulfillment and community obligation. His writing is fresh and vivid; his perspective, empathetic and appealingly non-judgemental.”*

—Ramachandra Guha, author of *India after Gandhi*

*“Impressively lucid and searching.... When he trains his zoom lens on individuals caught in the country's million mutinies [Kapur] reveals the subtler challenges that have accompanied economic gain. In his clarity, sympathy and impeccably sculpted prose, Kapur often summons the spirit of V.S. Naipaul.”*

—Pico Iyer, *Time* magazine

*“Lively, anecdotal look at the people who have been vastly changed by the entrepreneurial explosion in India... An honest, conflicted glimpse of a country ‘still sorting through the contradictions of a rapid, and inevitably messy, transformation.’”*

—Kirkus Reviews

*“Akash Kapur lives in and writes out of an India that few writers venture into. Curious, suspicious of received wisdom, and intellectually resourceful, his writing has established him as one of the most reliable observers of the New India.”*

—Pankaj Mishra, author of *Temptations of the West*

*“[Kapur] has a fluency that outsiders—even those of us who claim some genetic tie—lack... Kapur’s writing is deceptively simple. He hardly ever draws attention to himself, and he does not insert himself into his interviews. He listens and asks a few—not leading—questions. He is patient, and he gains his subjects’ trust.”*

—The New Republic

*“This is a remarkably absorbing account of an India in transition—full of challenges and contradictions, but also of expectations, hope, and ultimately optimism.”*

—Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate and author of  
*Development as Freedom*