

# Delve Deeper into *The World Before Her*

A film by Nisha Pahuja

**This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Rachael Weyand of Portland Public Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *The World Before Her*.**

*The World Before Her* is a tale of two Indias. In one, Ruhi Singh is a small-town girl competing in Bombay to win the Miss India pageant—a ticket to stardom in a country wild about beauty contests. In the other India, Prachi Trivedi is the young, militant leader of a fundamentalist Hindu camp for girls, where she preaches violent resistance to Western culture, Christianity and Islam. Moving between these divergent realities, the film creates a lively, provocative portrait of the world's largest democracy at a critical transitional moment—and of two women who hope to shape its future.

## ADULT NONFICTION

**Basu, Tapan. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993.**

This book offers an analysis and study of the Hindutva movement, its ideologies and organizational aspects. Basu also explores the history of the the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and the Vishva Hindu Parishad through interviews conducted in various locations.

**Boo, Katherine. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*. New York: Random House, 2012.**

From Pulitzer Prize-winner Katherine Boo, this is a landmark work of narrative nonfiction that tells the dramatic and sometimes heartbreaking story of families striving toward a better life in one of the twenty-first century's great, unequal cities.

**Dallapiccola, Anna L. *Dictionary of Hindu Lore and***

***Legend*. New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, 2002.**

This book provides a number of accessible, informative and authoritative entries to answer major questions about Hinduism, its mythology, practices, customs and laws.

**Faleiro, Sonia. *Beautiful Thing*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2010.**

Sonia Faleiro was a reporter in search of a story when she met Leela, a beautiful and charismatic bar dancer with a story to tell. *Beautiful Thing*, one of the most original works of non-fiction from India in years, is a vivid and intimate portrait of one reporter's journey into the dark, pulsating and ultimately damaged soul of Bombay.

**Flood, Gavin and Martin, Charles. *The Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012.**

*The Bhagavad Gita*, the Song of the Lord, is an ancient Hindu scripture about virtue presented as a dialogue between Krishna, an incarnation of God, and the warrior Arjuna on the eve of a great battle over the succession to the throne. This new verse translation of the classic Sanskrit text combines the skills of leading Hinduist, Gavin Flood with the stylistic verve of award-winning poet and translator, Charles Martin.

**French, Patrick. *India: A Portrait*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.**

Melding on-the-ground reports with a deep knowledge of history, French exposes the cultural foundations of India's political, economic and social complexities. He reveals how a nation identified with some of the most wretched poverty on earth has simultaneously developed an envied culture of entrepreneurship. Even more remarkably, he shows how, despite the ancient and persistent traditions of caste, as well as a mind-boggling number of ethnicities and languages, India has nevertheless managed to cohere, evolving into the

world's largest democracy, largely fulfilling Jawaharlal Nehru's dream of a secular liberal order.

**Hansen, Thomas Blom. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.**

Thomas Hansen turns our attention to recent events in the world's largest democracy, India. Here he analyzes Indian receptivity to the right-wing Hindu nationalist party and its political wing, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which claims to create a polity based on "ancient" Hindu culture. Rather than interpreting Hindu nationalism as a mainly religious phenomenon, or a strictly political movement, Hansen places the BJP within the context of the larger transformations of democratic governance in India.

**Hundal, Sunny. *India Dishonoured: Behind a Nation's War on Women*. London: Guardian Books, 2013.**

*India Dishonoured* is an attempt to understand the contradictions at the heart of how India treats its women, and why the country is sitting on a cultural timebomb that may have only just begun to explode.

**Huyler, Stephen P. *Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.**

This volume seeks to enable western readers to witness the devotional practices of the Hindu people. It features photographs documenting the spirituality of common men and women in India, accompanied by definitions, descriptions and stories of Hindu individuals at worship.

**Johnson, W.J. *A Dictionary of Hinduism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.**

This is a comprehensive reference book on the subject, covering practices, festivals, beliefs, gods, sacred sites, languages, religious texts, and



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much more. Find authoritative information on all aspects of Hinduism, from Bhakti and Divali to Tantra and temples.

**Kapur, Akash. *India Becoming: A Portrait of Life in Modern India*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2012.**

Raised in India, and educated in the U.S., Akash Kapur returned to India in 2003 to raise a family. What he found was an ancient country in transition. In search of the life that he and his wife want to lead, he meets an array of Indians who teach him much about the realities of this changed country: an old landowner sees his rural village destroyed by real estate developments, and crime and corruption breaking down the feudal authority; a 21-year-old single woman and a 35-year-old divorcee exploring the new cultural allowances for women; and a young gay man coming to terms with his sexual identity – something never allowed a generation ago.

**Mehta, Suketu. *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*. New York: Vintage Books 2004.**

A native of Bombay, Suketu Mehta gives us an insider's view of this stunning metropolis. He approaches the city from unexpected angles, taking us into the criminal underworld of rival Muslim and Hindu gangs; following the life of a bar dancer raised amid poverty and abuse; opening the door into the inner sanctums of Bollywood; and delving into the stories of the countless villagers who come in search of a better life and end up living on the sidewalks.

**Rosen, Steven J. *Essential Hinduism*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006.**

With its complex nature and many forms and practices, Hinduism is one of the world's most elusive religions for outsiders to understand. In *Essential Hinduism*, expert Steven Rosen aims to make the facets of this faith clear. *Essential Hinduism* explores this rich tradition through its history, literature, arts, and people.

## ADULT FICTION

**Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger: A Novel*. New York: Free Press, 2008.**

Balram Halwai is a complicated man. Servant. Philosopher. Entrepreneur. Murderer. Over the course of seven nights, by the scattered light of a preposterous chandelier, Balram tells the terrible and transfixing story of how he came to be a success in life -- having nothing but his own wits to help him along.

**Mukherjee, Bharati. *Desirable Daughters: A Novel*. New York: Theia, 2002.**

Mukherjee follows the diverging paths taken by three extraordinary Calcutta-born sisters as they come of age in a changing world. Moving effortlessly between generations, she weaves together fascinating stories of the sisters' ancestors, childhood memories, and dramatic scenes from India's history.

**Mukherjee, Bharati. *Miss New India*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011.**

Taken under the wing of an expat teacher for her ambition and talent, Anjali Bose hopes to escape unfavorable prospects and falls in with a crowd of young people in Bangalore, where she endeavors to confront her past and reinvent herself.

**Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1998.**

This is the story of Rahel and Estha, twins growing up among the banana vats and peppercorns of their blind grandmother's factory, and amid scenes of political turbulence in Kerala. Armed only with the innocence of youth, they fashion a childhood in the shade of the wreck that is their family: their lonely, lovely mother, their beloved Uncle Chacko (pickle baron, radical Marxist, bottom-pincher) and their sworn enemy, Baby

Kochamma (ex-nun, incumbent grand-aunt).

**Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children: A Novel*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006.**

Saleem Sinai is born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, the very moment of India's independence. Greeted by fireworks displays, cheering crowds, and Prime Minister Nehru himself, Saleem grows up to learn the ominous consequences of this coincidence. His every act is mirrored and magnified in events that sway the course of national affairs; his health and well-being are inextricably bound to those of his nation; his life is inseparable, at times indistinguishable, from the history of his country. Perhaps most remarkable are the telepathic powers linking him with India's 1,000 other "midnight's children," all born in that initial hour and endowed with magical gifts.

## NON-FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

**Brown, Alan and Andrew Langley. *What I Believe: A Young Person's Guide to the Religions of the World*. Brookfield, Conn.: Millbrook Press, 1999.**

An introduction to Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Shinto, and Taoism through the eyes of young members of those faiths.

**Gavin, Jamila; illustrated by Amanda Hall. *Tales from India*. Somerville, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2011.**

A collection of Hindu tales, including the birth of the gods, tales of creation, and the arrival of humans, accompanied by exquisite artwork, which reflects the influence of both classical and contemporary Indian art.

**Sen Gupta, Subhadra. *A Flag, A Song and A Pinch of Salt: Freedom Fighters of India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2010.**

A poet who led a protest march, a revolutionary who became a



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saint, a man who walked for weeks to make salt - read the amazing stories of the great men and women who inspired generations, united a nation and led its people to freedom.

of a rare young woman, who even when cast out into a brutal current of time-worn tradition, sets out to forge her own remarkable future. The book is inspired by a newspaper article about real teenage widows in India today.

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## FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

### **Daswani, Kavita. *Lovetorn*. New York: HarperCollins, HarperTeen, 2010.**

Shalini is new to L.A. Not new like from New York City new—or even Kansas new. New like from India new. And in the U.S., she has it all wrong: the way she dresses, the way she talks, the way she wears her hair. And then there is the ring, which makes her way different from everyone else—because Shalini has been engaged since she was three to Vikram, back in India.

### **Lal, Ranjit. *Faces in the Water*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2010.**

What do you do when you discover an unspeakable truth about your parents? The Diwanchand family boasted of having only sons, no daughters. The water from a magical well in their farmhouse was the reason behind this 'good fortune', they said. One day, fifteen-year-old Gurmi sets out to look for the well and what he sees changes everyone's world forever. *Faces in the Water* is the story of lives lost to appease Indian society's insatiable hunger for male children, and the price families pay for its sake.

### **Whelan, Gloria. *Homeless Bird*. New York: HarperTrophy, 2001.**

Gloria Whelan's National Book Award-winning novel chronicles the breathtaking story of a remarkable young woman who dares to defy fate. Like many girls her age in India, thirteen-year-old Koly faces her arranged marriage with hope and courage. But Koly's story takes a terrible turn when in the wake of the ceremony, she discovers she's been horribly misled; her life has been sold for a dowry. In prose both graceful and unflinching, this powerful novel relays the story

