



Authors of **INDIA**

A Collection of Book Recommendations from a
Summer's Travels





Elliot's Beach, Besant Nagar, just a short walk from the TOM Office.

Hi, my name is Courtenay

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During the summer of 2018, I travelled to Chennai, India, as an intern with the University of Victoria's Centre for Asia Pacific Initiatives. As part of the Queen Elizabeth Scholars Crossing Borders Programs, I was able to spend three months with The Other Media, a social and environmental justice organization in Southern India. Whenever I travel, I love to collect book recommendations from new friends, so as my Capstone Project I've compiled a list of novels by Indian authors, as recommended by new friends, colleagues and neighbours here in Chennai. I've also included some recommendations provided by other CAPI interns in my cohort!

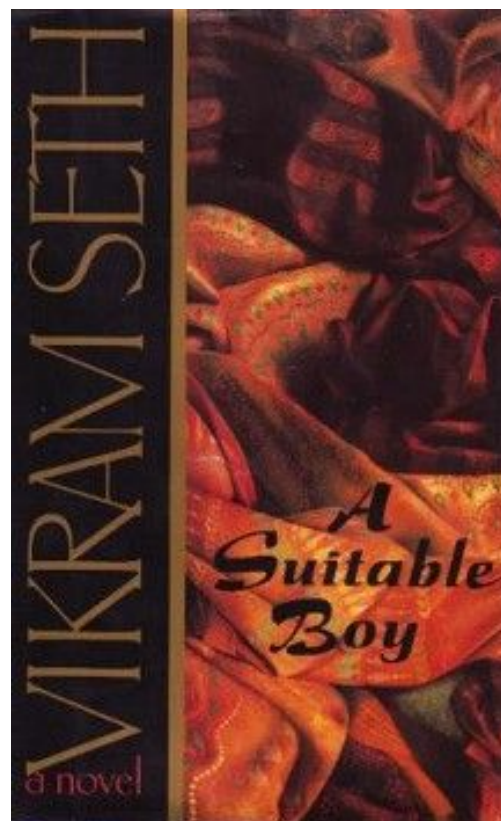
Title: A Suitable Boy

Author: Vikram Seth

Plot: First published in 1993, *A Suitable Boy* follows the stories of four families in post-Independence India, focusing on Lata's love story. A nineteen-year-old university student, Lata struggles with her mother's determination to arrange her marriage to a suitable boy while she navigates through relationships influenced by family pressures, religion, caste and countless other issues.

About the Author: Born June 20, 1952, in

Kolkata, India, Vikram Seth is known for his poetry and novels. In addition to *A Suitable Boy*, Seth has published two other novels, *An Equal Music* and *Two Lives*, and six books of poetry.



Recommended by: My Mother

During the summer of 2016, my parents travelled to the Yukon to visit while I was working as a research assistant in Kluane. We stopped at the Free Store in Haines Junction, where usable items are stored in a shed next to the dump. The title caught my mom's eye, and said it was something she had started to read long ago. The book is hefty, and it wasn't until the summer of 2017 that I finished. Since reading this book, I have dreamt of eating mangoes in India. This novel spark my interest in travelling to India.

Author: Devdutt Patnaik

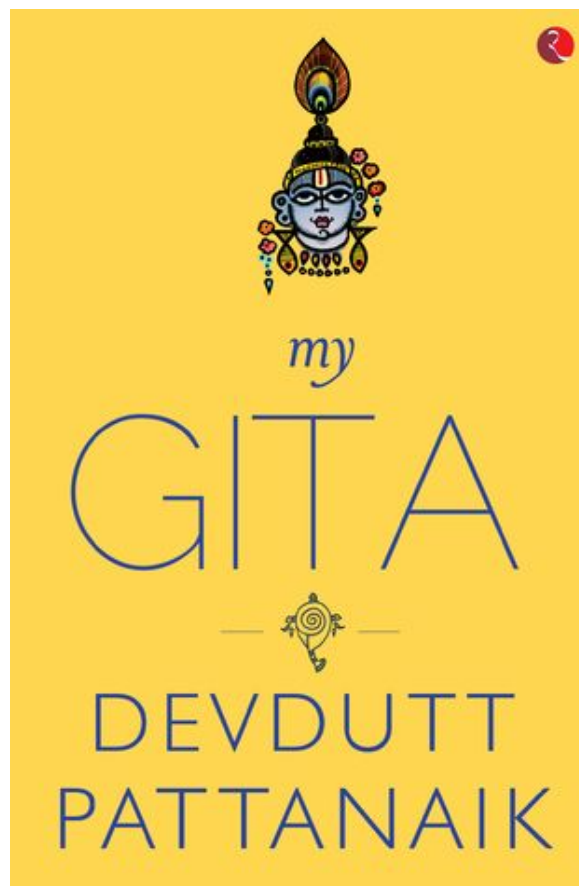
Novels: Patnaik writes about the relevance of Hindu mythology in modern times, focusing on its pertinence to management, government and leadership.

My Gita – Patnaik’s take on the Bhagavad Gita, one of the most popular texts of Hinduism

About the Author: Born and raised in Mumbai, India, Patnaik is the author of 30 books and over 600 columns. He trained in medicine and worked in the healthcare and pharma industries for fifteen years before focusing full-time on writing.

Recommended by: Dharmesh

Dharmesh recommended Patnaik's novels for those interested in mythology, as he tells of Hindu mythology from different viewpoints, such as a feminist perspective or the perspective of a left-wing radical.



Title: One Part Woman

Author: Perumal Murugan

Plot: The novel centers on the lives of Kali and Ponna, a childless couple living in a small farming community in the Kongu region of southern India. Unable to conceive, the annual chariot festival celebrating the god Maadhorubaagan may be the answer to their problems. On the eighteenth night of the festival, the rules of marriage are relaxed, and childless women are permitted to sleep with men other than their husbands in the hopes of becoming pregnant. On this night, all men are considered gods, and any child conceived would be semi-divine



About the Author: Born in 1966 near Thiruchengodu, a town in northern Kongu Nadu, Tamil Nadu, Perumal Murugan is a writer of Tamil novels, short stories, and poems. Murugan has also been a professor of Tamil literature at various colleges.

Recommended by: Archanaa

Interested in women's issues in India, Archanaa recommended this novel, which also was the subject of some controversy in 2014 when some local caste-based and religious-Hindu groups objected to a fictional portrayal of traditions at the Temple in Thiruchengodu.

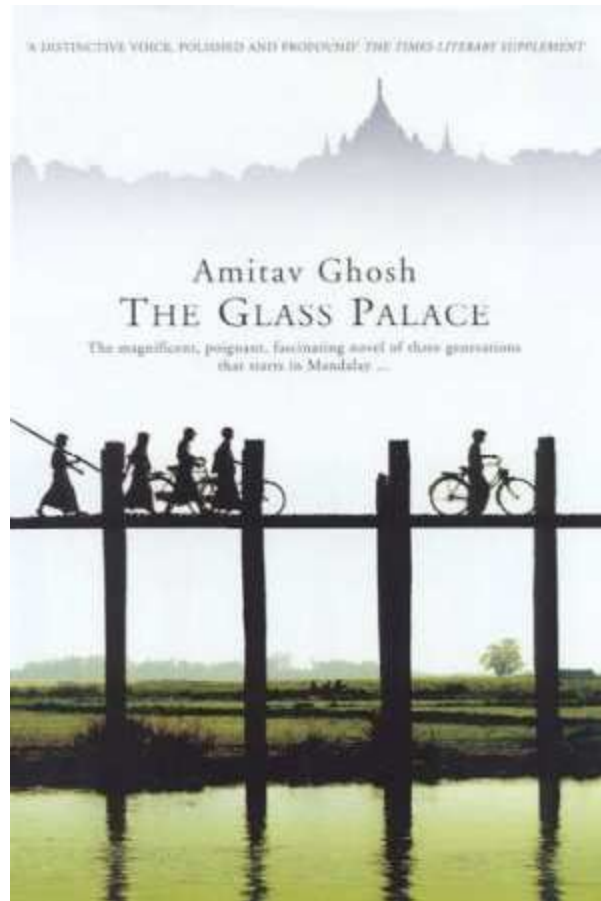
Title: The Glass Palace

Author: Amitav Ghosh

Plot: Set in Burma and India, *The Glass Palace* explores a broad range of issues during World War II and India's struggle for independence. The novel details the life of Rajkumar, only a boy of eleven when he travels from India to Burma as the last surviving member of his family.

About the Author: Born July 11, 1956, in Kolkata, India, Amitav Ghosh was raised in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. He studied in Delhi, Oxford and Alexandria, and has taught at many universities, including Delhi University, Queens College, Columbia, and Harvard. When *The Glass Palace* was named the Eurasian regional winner for the 2001 Commonwealth Writers Prize, Ghosh withdrew his novel from consideration for the final prize, citing his objection to the classification of books under the term "Commonwealth Literature".

Recommended by: Dharmesh

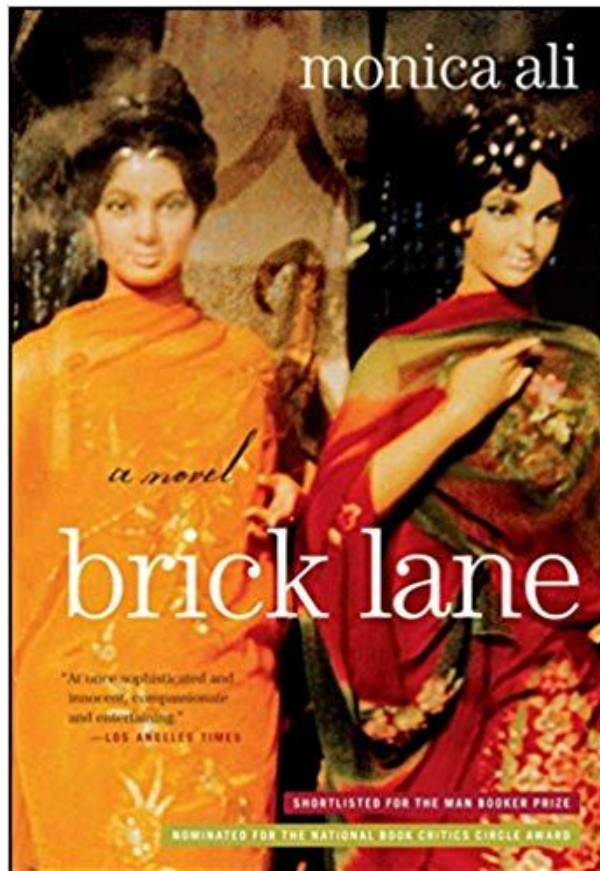


Title: Brick Lane

Author: Monica Ali

Plot: Brick Lane tells the story of the lives of two sisters. Nazneen moves from a Bangladeshi village to London at the age of eighteen for an arranged marriage to a man twice her age, but finds herself entering into an affair with a handsome young radical and exchanging letters with her sister, Hasina.

About the Author: Born in Bangladesh, Ali moved to England at the age of three. Ali's *Brick Lane* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and was adapted for a movie of the same name in 2007.



Recommended by: Shweta and Dharmesh

Dharmesh: "What about Brick Lane? It's good?"

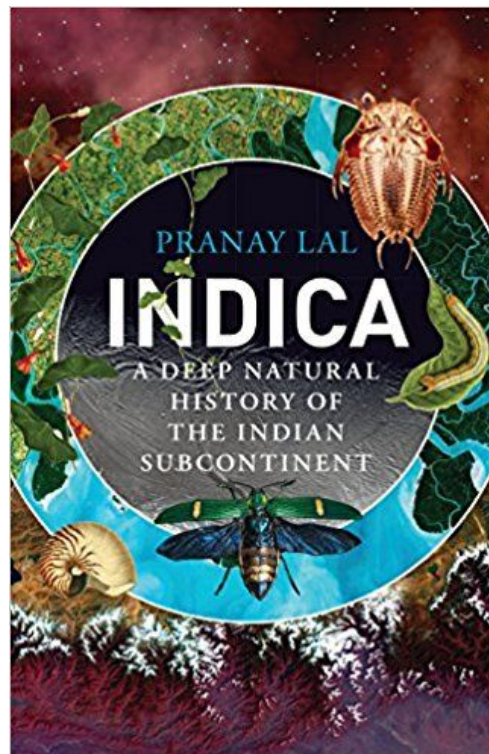
Shweta: "Good if you want to be depressed"

While the novel might be heavy, the recommendation stands.

Title: Indica: A Deep Natural History of the Indian Subcontinent

Author: Pranay Lal

Plot: This story explores and narrates the natural history of India from the beginning of time to the arrival of *Homo sapiens* on the banks of the Indus. The narrative describes the formation of India's geographic features and the evolution of India's wildlife, and is accompanied by images, illustrations, and maps.



About the Author: A biochemist and artist, Lal travelled with scientists across the country and researched wide-ranging scientific disciplines over a twenty year period while writing this book. Lal is a public health professional, and is interested in both public and environmental health.

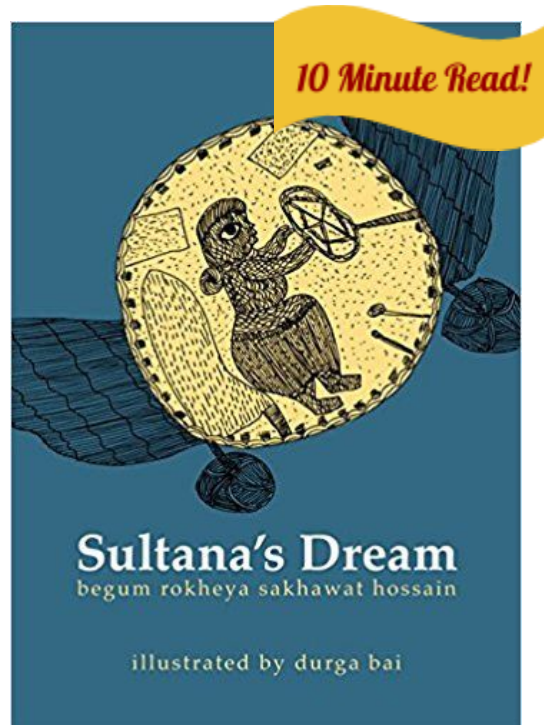
Recommended by: Dharmesh

Explains the ecological history of India - why things are the way they are.

Title: Sultana's Dream

Author: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

Plot: A feminist utopian story first published in 1905 in the Madras-based *The Indian Ladies Magazine* in English, Begum Rokheya's story explores a female-dominated society called Ladyland where men are kept indoors, mirroring the traditional practice of purdah.



About the Author: Begum Rokheya (1880-1932) was born in the village of Pairabondh, present-day Bangladesh, in what was then part of the British Indian Empire. She was a Bengali writer, social activist, and advocate of women's rights. Writing novels, poems, short stories, satires and more, Begum Rokheya advocating for the equal treatment of men and women, noting the importance of the education of women. She is recognized as one of the first Islamic feminists.

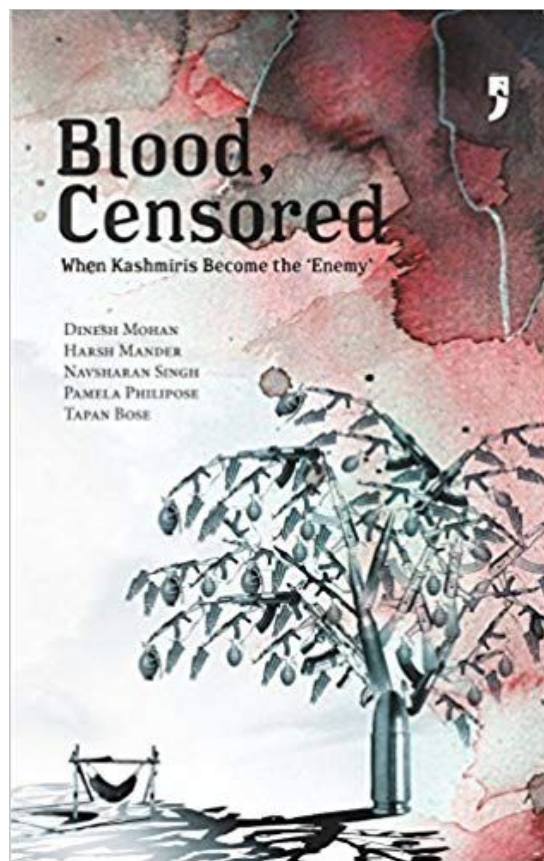
Recommended by: Archanaa

Archanaa is an activist with many interests. While her work with TOM focuses on environmental justice, she is also immersed in gender equality and feminist issues, travelling to England in the Fall of 2019 to start a Masters program in Gender Studies.

Title: Blood, Censored: When Kashmiris Become the 'Enemy'

Author: Dinesh Mohan, Harsh Mander, Navsharan Singh, Pamela Philipose and Tapan Bose

Plot: This novel aims to provide a concise history of conflict in the Kashmir valley. The authors travelled across the valley in 2016, and recount stories of war, violence, and instability. Their novel also contains a plea for humanity and justice for the residents of the valley.



Recommended by:

A participant from Northern India who took part in a conference on social and environmental justice movements in India, held in Chennai, August 2019.

Additional Recommendations from the 2018 CAPI Intern Cohort

Malaysia

In the Garden of Evening Mists, *Tan Twan Eng*

"Eng is one of Malaysia's most well known authors. I saw this book online when I was researching Malaysia prior to my departure and picked it up at a used book store before I left Canada. It is a beautiful, descriptive story that also taught me some about Malaysia's history of occupation by the Japanese. I would definitely recommend it to the next interns if they enjoy fiction."

Other Recommendations:

"While I was here I also read *The Rice Mother* by Rani Manicka. People who enjoy family-saga style fiction would probably enjoy this one. It's personally not my cup of tea, but it was fun to read about everyday things that I was simultaneously learning while living in KL, such as food, religious practices, cities, etc.

A book I didn't get a chance to read yet but really want to is Tash Aw's non-fiction piece, *The Face: Strangers on a Pier*.

Also, this is not a Malaysia recommendation, but for one of our visa runs we went to Cambodia and I picked up *First They Killed My Father* by Loung Ung. It is an emotional read, but important. I would recommend to people who are interested in rounding out their Southeast Asia reading list."

South Africa

28: Stories of AIDS in Africa, *Stephanie Nolen*

"My supervisor recommended that I read this book as it makes you think differently about people with AIDS. There is such stigma attached to an AIDS diagnosis but this book provides a more personal and relatable perspective."

Other Recommendations: Born a Crime, *Trevor Noah*

The Elephant Whisperer, *Laurence Anthony*

Endings and Beginnings, *Redi Tlhabi*

Indonesia

This Earth of Mankind, *Pramoedya Ananta Toer*

"First of the famous Buru Quartet! Came across it while researching Indonesia"

Indonesia, etc: Exploring the Improbable Nation, *Elisabeth Pisani*

"I bought this book randomly in a little bookstore recently. By a British journalist who's lived in Indonesia for years & follows her most recent crazy trip to every corner of the country, as well as her reflections of living here. It's amazing and has been super relatable for me. Craziest of all it actually turns out that the author is a good friend of Rainer, the Director of CIPS!"

Other Recommendations: Laskar Pelangi (The Rainbow Troops), *Andrea Hirata*

Japan

The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea, *Yukio Mishima*

"Set in Yokohama, where I lived for my placement."

Other Recommendations: Norwegian Wood, *Haruki Murakami*

Wind-up Bird Chronicle, *Haruki Murakami*

Wind/Pinball, *Haruki Murakami*

Really anything by Murakami

India

Behind the Beautiful Forevers, *Katherine Boo*

"Many people recommended this book to me before I came to India. When I left Ajmer, I gifted the book to my friend and co-researcher because the book is kind of a story told based on anthropological research in Mumbai. My friend is really passionate about research and said she has really liked the book, and has lent it to her mother to read as well who is from Mumbai and is really enjoying the book. I love how books can connect people like this."

Other Recommendations: The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, *Arundhati Roy*
