

Clients often berate us for not writing enough about India.

The truth is that our knowledge on the country is not as deep as it should be.

Clients who want to find out more about India's exciting story should pick up a copy of [\*In Spite of the Gods\*](#). It is both a very entertaining, and enlightening, read.

### In Spite of the Gods, by Edward Luce

One of the more recurrent gripes amongst our clients is that we do not spend a tenth of the time studying, and writing about the trends that are re-shaping India then we do about China. Meanwhile, equity returns in India have, over the past decade, been far superior, and more consistent, in India than they have in China.

Our typical, cop-out, answer is that a) there are only so many hours in the day and GaveKal's resources are, unfortunately, not limitless and b) we know a lot more about China than we do about India so we naturally gravitate towards what we are most comfortable with, c) we have so many clients who are so knowledgeable about India that we are always scared of getting called out if we write anything too controversial, and d) it is hard to write simply and succinctly about India anyway because the country is simply so multi-faceted. Which brings us to this week's book review: Edward Luce's [\*In Spite of the Gods\*](#).

Most countries tend to be stuck with one, maybe two stereotypes at most. For example, my home country of France is always described to me as either a) amazingly beautiful or b) shockingly rude. But as far as India goes, there are probably as many visions of the country as people who inhabit it! For example, some Westerners will view India as a spiritual, otherworldly place. Others will be amazed by the recent successes of India's thriving IT & service industries. Still others will describe the country as the world's largest democracy and a country on the verge of superpower status. Others will focus on the country's volatile relationship with Pakistan. Some will be compelled to mention the shocking poverty one encounters in the streets of the big cities or in the countryside. And others will find it hard to move beyond the country's bloated, and corrupt administration and political class... The good news is, all these India's are in Edward Luce's books!

Edward Luce was the FT's South Asia bureau chief, based in New Delhi, between 2001 and 2005 and then took a year off to research, and write [\*In Spite of the Gods\*](#). This was time well spent. Indeed, the book is the best account we have yet read of both the opportunities and the challenges inherent in India's growth. Through personal anecdotes, high and low level contacts, and a beautifully crafted narrative, Luce draws one of the best portraits of the country we have read.

In the introduction, the author states his aim to "*provide an unsentimental evaluation of contemporary India*" and, in our view, that goal is undeniably met. But still, it is hard to completely check in one's sentiments at the door and it is obvious that the author struggles with some of the corruption, and consequent poverty, which afflict hundreds of millions of people around the country. Thus, the book turns out to be a helpful wake-up call to anyone who, like us, can have a natural proclivity of getting carried away by exciting growth prospects.

In the book's first chapter, the author reviews the great strides taken by India's economy in the past decade and sheds light on some of the most glaring contradictions of India's development. In the following few chapters, Luce draws an overall unflattering portrait of India's political and administrative class, reviews the bewildering caste system and dwells onto one of India's bigger issues: the relationship between Muslims and Hindu and the country's relationship with Pakistan. In the seventh chapter, the author argues that the evolution of the country's relationships with both the United States and China could end up profoundly reshaping the XXIst century while the final two chapters are devoted to India's opportunities and challenges over the coming decade.

All in all, we found [\*In Spite of the Gods\*](#) to be a great primer on the forces driving India (both forwards and backwards!) today. Clients with little knowledge, but a great curiosity of this emerging giant could do a lot worse than pick up this highly entertaining and easy, yet informative, read.