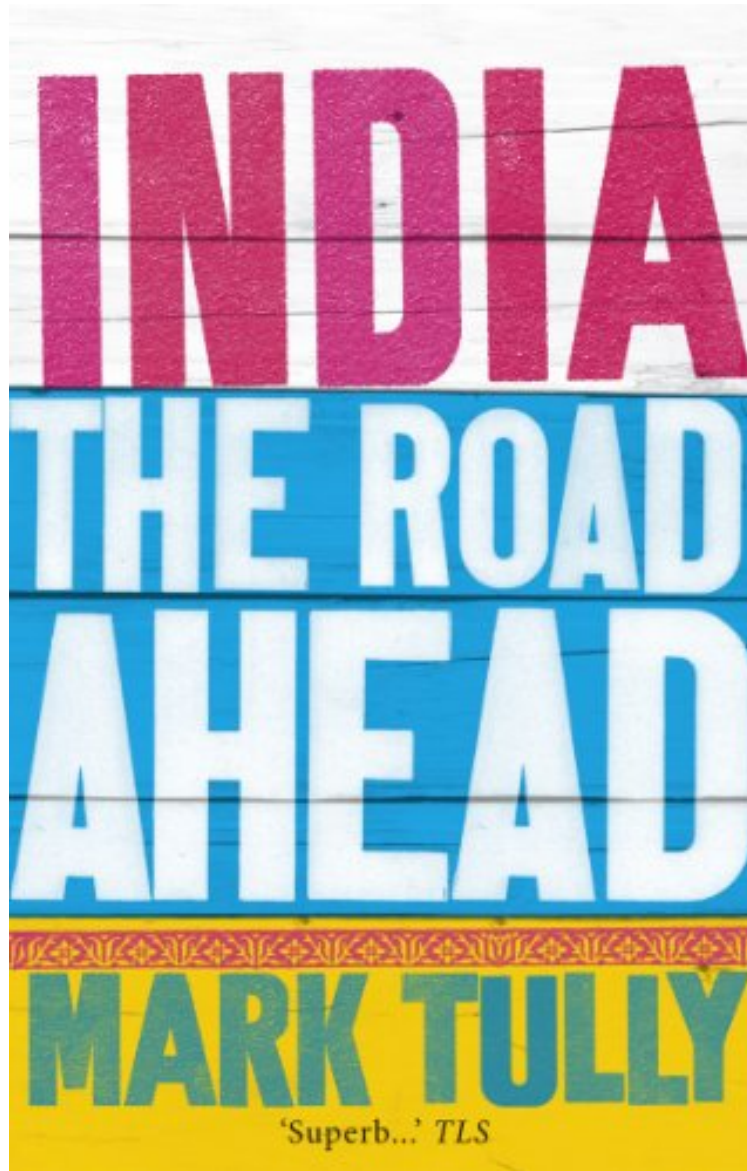


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India: the road ahead

Mark Tully

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Mark Tully : India: the road ahead before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised India: the road ahead:

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may believe most economic publications, it is a certainty that India will become in the 21st century one of the economic superpowers. Mark Tully, who has been for years the reporter for the BBC in India and lives now in Delhi, discards this naive optimism: according to Tully India still will have to confront some important problems which it will have to tackle head-on, 'muddling through' as this country has mostly done in the past will not do. As a broadcaster he is used to write short reports and Tully is well aware that writing a coherent book requires a specific approach. India. The Road Ahead consists of ten chapters, which de facto are short self-contained texts, each focusing on one specific current issue which will also be relevant in the future. These chapters follow a similar pattern: Tully first describes the issue (e.g. the Naxalites, the situation of the lower castes...) sometimes giving some historical background, whereby he demonstrates his great knowledge of Indian society (it is quite indicative that the book has only a very short 'select' biography), subsequently elaborates on this subject with conversations or personal experiences and on basis of this finally draws some conclusions and makes some personal suggestions. Over the last decades Tully has earned himself an excellent reputation in India (he was knighted in 2005 and gained also important Indian distinctions) and he has built an extensive network. When he wants to look into how Indian private enterprises see the challenges of the future, he spends two days in Bombay House, the headquarters of the reputedly discrete Tata conglomerate and discusses with several executives. For conversations on democracy and caste-voting, he visits a friend, a former Chief Minister of Bihar... However Tully does not only focus on the mighty, as the plight of the tribal people, the Dalits, the Muslims is also one of his concerns. His knowledge of Hindi enables him to discuss matters with ordinary people, who often say very wise and profound words. Tully knows and obviously loves the country and its people and never lapses into caricature. One can criticize of course this approach whereby far-reaching conclusions are drawn on basis of limited personal or anecdotal experience. Some of the conclusions border on cliché: the 'success' of the Naxalites which demonstrates the failure of the Indian democracy and a lack of governance, some very important issues are not mentioned... However this book is clearly not a grand attempt by an overambitious writer who aims to explain and solve the numerous difficulties with which India is confronted. Tully is in his seventies and apparently only wants to give his personal view on some matters he judges important. I did like the originality of some of the topics: One chapter questions the impact of the pre-eminence of the English language on the 'other' Indian languages (interesting point: a Dalit-campaigner sees the 'un-Indian' language English as a way to get rid of the caste-system, which he considers as imbued in the native Indian languages). I appreciated very much the chapter 'A Forgotten Land' in which Tully wonders about the consequences of development on the tribal life-style in Arunachal Pradesh, a state well... mostly forgotten. I learned some interesting facts as well, for instance that the state of Uttar Pradesh runs an opium factory... Despite the fact that this book confronts hard issues, it has an overall positive and hopeful tone. For instance in conversations with the Dalits it turns out that they do consider that their situation in Indian society has improved substantially over the last decades.

Since the Indian economy was liberated from bureaucratic, socialist controls in 1991, it has developed rapidly. A country once renowned for the backwardness of its industries, its commerce and its financial market is now viewed as potentially one of the major world economies of the twenty-first century. But there are many questions which need to be asked about the sustainability of this rapid economic growth and its effect on the stability of the country. Have the changes had any impact on the poor and marginalised? Can India's democracy contain the mounting resentment of those left out of the new economic order? Can a high growth rate be sustained with India's notoriously corrupt and inefficient governance? Can the development of its creaking infrastructure be speeded up? How is India going to feed itself unless agriculture is reformed? This timely book will answer these questions through interviews with industrialists and cricketers, God men and farmers, plutocrats and former untouchables. Full of fascinating stories of real people at a time of great change, it will be of interest to economists, business people, diplomats, politicians, as well as to those who love to travel and who take an interest in the rapid growth of one of the world's largest countries, and what this means to us in the West.

"Superb... The book's key strengths are its readability, its determination to look beyond the obvious, and Tully's ability to think laterally across a number of issues simultaneously." —Times Literary Supplement
"A rounded and balanced account of the real India... incisive... each story reveals [Tully's] knowledge and insight." —Time
About the Author Mark Tully was born in Calcutta, India in 1935. He was the Chief of Bureau, BBC, New Delhi for 22 years and is an acclaimed author and the regular presenter of the contemplative BBC Radio 4 programme Something Understood. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2005, and was knighted in the New Year Honours list in 2002. In addition to his distinguished broadcasting career, he has written several books about India, including No Full Stops in India, India in Slow Motion (with his partner and colleague Gillian Wright), and The Heart of India.