

PAVAN K. VARMA: A PROFILE

Writer-diplomat Pavan K. Varma is a graduate in History from St. Stephen's College, after which he took a degree in Law from the University of Delhi. He joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1976. He has been Press Secretary to the President of India, the Spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs, Joint Secretary for Africa, High Commissioner for India in Cyprus, Director of the Nehru Centre in London and Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi.

A writer of depth and insight, he has written over a dozen books including the highly successful *Krishna: The Playful Divine* on India's most popular deity, the critically applauded biography of the Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib, *Ghalib: The Man, The Times*, and the *Havelis of Old Delhi*. His first book on a contemporary subject was the path breaking *The Great Indian Middle Class* (published also in French), followed by the astoundingly successful *Being Indian: The Truth About Why the 21st Century Will Be India's* (Viking/Penguin 2004). *Being Indian* was described by *The Economist* as "one of the most subtle recent attempts to analyse the continent-sized mosaic of India and simplify it for the general reader." It was published by Random House, in the United Kingdom, as *Being Indian: Inside the Real India* in March 2005. The Japanese, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian translations of this book were very well received. Another recent work is a witty adaptation of Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra*. This volume, *Kama Sutra: The Art of Making Love to a Woman*, was published early in 2007 by Roli Books and has been translated into French and German. Mr. Varma has also translated the poetry of Kaifi Azmi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and Gulzar, all published by Penguin.

His latest book titled: *Becoming Indian: The Unfinished Revolution of Culture and Identity* (Penguin-Allen Lane) was launched in February, 2010 and deals with the pivotal issues of culture and identity for postcolonial societies, particularly in an age of aggressive globalization where co-option is the sub-text in the field of culture. A Hindi translation has been published, and a French edition has just been published.

Mr. Varma's first work of fiction *When Loss is Gain* will be launched in January. It is a powerful story dealing with life and death, loss and gain, happiness and fulfillment, the physical and the spiritual, the rational and the inexplicable, and the perennial dialogue between dukkha or sorrow, the key word in Buddhism, and ananda or joy, which animates most of Hindu philosophy. The book will be the first to be launched by Dadiv Davidar's new publishing collaboration with Rupa Books.

Mr. Varma's second volume of translations of Gulzar's poems entitled *Neglected Poems* is scheduled to be launched at the Jaipur Literary Festival in January. Gulzar's translation of Mr. Varma's epic poem *Yudhister & Draupadi* (alongwith the published original in English) is also due for release in March 2012. Both books will be published by Penguin.

Mr. Varma was conferred an honorary doctoral degree for his contribution to the fields of diplomacy, literature, culture and aesthetics by the University of Indianapolis in 2005. A widely admired public speaker, Pavan K. Varma, is currently the Indian Ambassador to Bhutan.