

# LOOKING BACK ON INDIA AS A MODERN NATION

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The modern Indian nation serves as a paradigmatic example of a progressive democratic state. Considering the fundamental defining aspects of a democracy, it appears to be living up to the expectations and systematically abides by the Indian Constitution to a great extent. But if we look closely, it severely fails at fulfilling the expectations of a common citizen of the country.

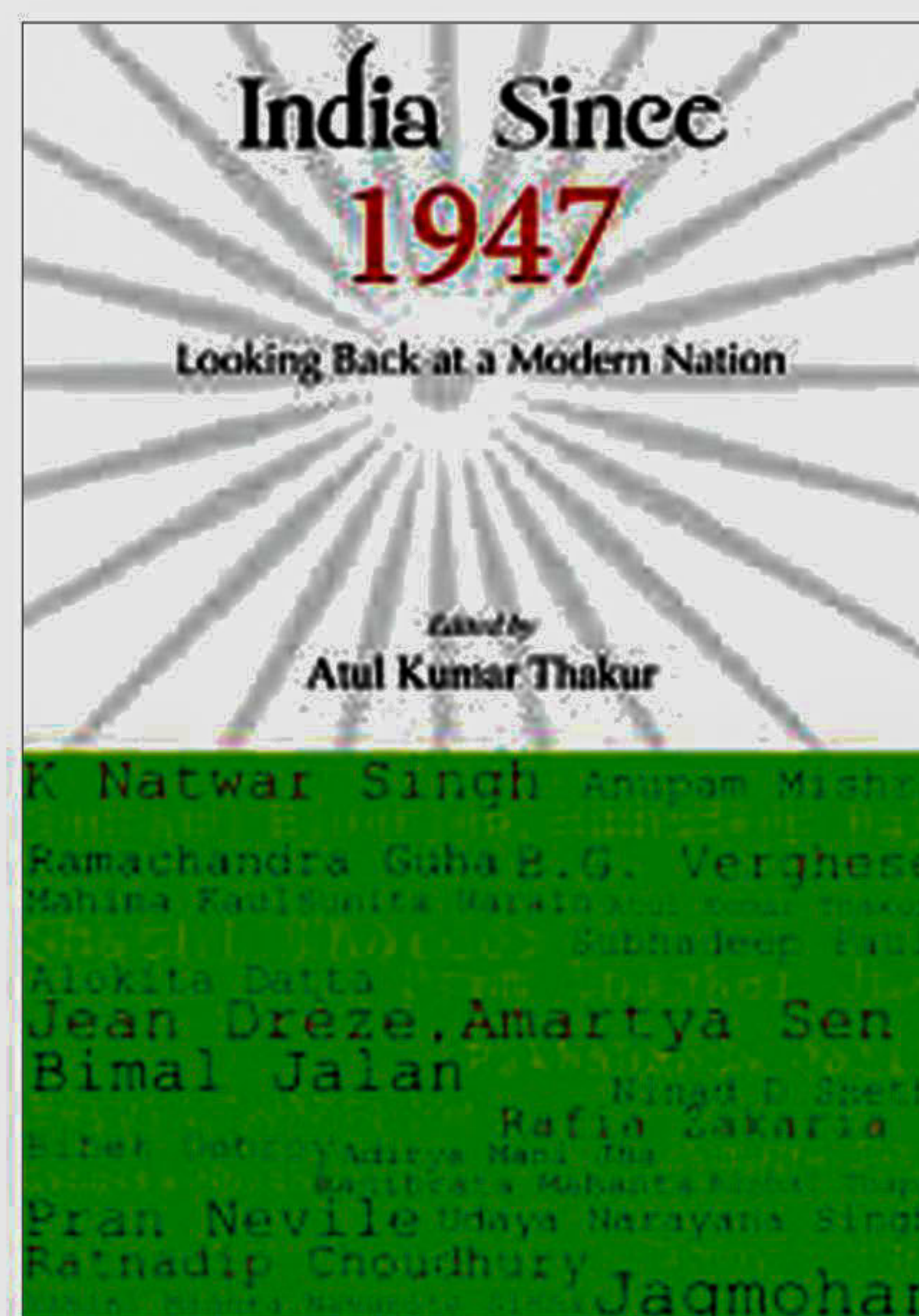
The objective is to effectively bridge the gap between these two contradicting facets of the Indian democracy in order to make it a beneficial asset not only for a section of the society, but also for the poorer citizens of the country.

In order to trace India's journey since the advent of its independence in 1947, there is a dire need of books written with a historical perspective which collaborate together all the major advancements in the country since then. "India since 1947: looking Back at Modern Nation" is one

such attempt and has come out as a very promising book.

Edited by a young journalist Atul Kumar Thakur, the book contains a collection of 31 essays, written by 34 different proficient writers who happen to be pioneers of the intellectual domain. The book looks back at the immediate past of the country with the intent of planning a better future for the ever developing nation. Each of the 31 essays has been very carefully chosen and deals with the pressing socio-economic issues of the modern India, tracing the root cause of the problems and suggesting the plausible solutions for eradicating them.

The book attempts to describe the radical changes which took place in the socio-economic order of India post partition, and how the country handled the trauma which came with it. The opening essay of the book is Ramachandra Guha's *The Rise and Fall of the Bilingual Intellectuals*, a piece which studies the



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Looking Back at a Modern Nation  
by Atul Kumar Thakur (Edited)  
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impact of the shift following the decline of dominance of more than one language in the intellectual circle. *India: where Democracy has Gone Wrong*, an essay by veteran journalist Prem Shankar Jha, deals with corruption deeply embedded in the system and studies its chronic effects.

Former diplomat, politician and scholar K Natwar Singh's *The First Sixty-five Years of India's Foreign Policy* descriptively describes India's foreign policy since 1947. Shashi Tharoor's *Politics and Indian Middle Class* crisply deals with the issue of meagre participation of the Indian youth in politics. Veteran politician Jagmohan, who served as the Governor of Kashmir when the state was in its most vulnerable phase, narrates the experience in his essay *Kashmir: Past, Present and Future*.

The piece by BG Verghese, *Revisiting Public Service Broadcasting* covers the past, present and future of Indian broadcasting system quite efficiently. Economist and former governor of the RBI, Bimal Jalan focuses on the state of governance in the past few decades in India in his rendering *India's Polity: Crisis of governance*. Jean Dreeze and Amartya Sen's *Putting Growth in its Place* supports the theory of inclusive growth of Indian economy which has remained elusive till date.

Bibek Debroy talks extensively about the various trends in the Indian economy in his essay *The Time Ahead of Indian economy*. Anupama Mishra (*Saadhya, Sadhan aur Saadhna*) and Sunita Narain (*The Decade of Environmentalism of the Poor*) talk about the various environmental issues of India.

The editor of the book, Atul Kumar Thakur has very strongly presented his viewpoints about the genesis, growth and the present state of the radical movements in India in his piece *Underlined in Red*. Atul's take on the present scenario is a sharp attack on the lackadaisical attitude of the government towards development. All in all, the piece is quite informative and insightful from the reader's perspective.

Ninad D Sheth's *India Adrift: Great power aspiration without grand strategy* discusses at length about India's defence strategy, incorporating important details.

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Bishal Thapa's *In Search of India's Destiny* draws the sharp contrast between the self-dependent and poverty-stricken India. Sumana Roy talks descriptively about Siliguri, the connecting link between the north-eastern states and the rest of India in her essay *In the Chicken's Neck*. Ratnadip Choudhary's *The Seven Sisters* also deals with the affairs of the north-eastern states of the country.

Rakhshnada Jalil's *Looking Back: 64 years of Independence*, Pran Nevile's *KL Saigal's Legacy with Sublime Effects* and Rafia Zakaria's *A Woman Named Honour* are other resourceful additions to this anthology. Udit Narayan Singh's *Another India: Voices from the Periphery* talks in minute detail of the lingual interface in a socially complex structure like India. Banibrata Mahanta's *Canvas of Diversity: The Indian Novel in English* and Saugata Ghosh's *Litany of Lost tongue* talks about the diversity in Indian literature. Benoy K Behl's *Art and the Nation* significantly captures the state of art in modern India.

Mayuri Mukherjee's *Mapping India's Engagement with the World in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Alokita Datta's *Love, Loss and Longing: A Capital Affair and Shantanu*

Banarjee, Subhadeep Ray's *Hunger on Celluloid: Through Satyajit Ray's Ashani Sanket and Beyond*, are commendable essays which add much to the credibility of the anthology. Child literature (Aditya Mani Jha's *Immortal Picture Stories: Growing up with Indian Comics*), sports (Subhadeep Paul's *India's Tryst with Destiny in Sports*), digital inclusion (Mahima Kaul's *Connecting India*) are amongst the other subjects articulately covered in the book.

This is a book meant for readers having genuine interest in India's post-independence development story. The large number of themes covered, the lucidly written informative essays make the book a must read.

*The reviewer is a New Delhi based literary critic.*