



In Light of India

By Octavio Paz

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Uncertainty stalks Octavio Paz. *In Light of India* is Paz's return to issues addressed in his poems of India that were inspired by his residence there three decades earlier. The paradoxes of a troubled nation are persistent, and Paz revisits the unfathomable facets of India with an eye on his Mexican homeland. Beneath the sensuous veneer of modern India lies a complex lattice of religious tendrils that reach into and influence Indian history, society, literature, and art. Paz follows these tendrils as well as anyone can, piecing together a nation of beauty, profundity, and enigma. Profundity aside, if Paz were writing about dust particles, he'd be worth reading.

From Library Journal

The Nobel laureate and ambassador to India in the Sixties, Paz infuses these three essays on India's history and culture with "perceptive comparison...between India and his native Mexico."

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From Kirkus Reviews

A personal discourse on India, broaching topics cultural, spiritual, and historical, by the Nobel laureate. While employed as a diplomat, the Mexican-born poet lived in India for six years during the 1960s. Neither a memoir nor a scholarly treatment, Paz's work is instead a meditative response to "the question that India poses to everyone who visits it." The question for Paz in particular: "How does a Mexican writer, at the end of the twentieth century, view the immense reality of India?" Answering the question, he works most fruitfully when drawing comparisons between Mexican and Indian habits. His range is instructive. For example, Paz writes about the uses of chili peppers in Indian and Mexican cooking, observing the kinship between mole sauce and Indian mola, a type of curry. Later, thinking on a larger scale, he compares the historical sense of each nation: "Neither the Indians nor the Mexicans deny their past; they cover it over and repaint it. It is a process that is not entirely conscious, and that is its effectiveness, as a protection from criticism. It is a psychological vaccine." Paz also considers literary and religious matters at length, writing provocatively about eros in classical Sanskrit poetry and the paradoxes of Hindu morality: "Indian tradition cannot conceive of freedom as a political ideal or incorporate it into the fabric of society. Not only is such freedom incompatible with the caste system; India lacks a tradition of thinking critically." This quote also illustrates the drawbacks of his approach, though, which include a tolerance for cliché, and a grandiosely oracular intellectual swagger. Some of his more cerebral explorations here also suffer from hubris, intermittent condescension, and an unconcern for triteness of expression (in translation, at least). One pines, perhaps wickedly, for a candid Indian response to Paz's intelligence and his bombast. -- Copyright ©1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

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