



America Calling: A Foreign Student in a Country of Possibility

Rajika Bhandari

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The compelling memoir America Calling argues that foreign students should be welcomed into the United States.

America Calling is the insightful memoir of Rajika Bhandari, an Indian student abroad; it's interwoven with relevant history and is fortified with research.

Although many Indian students aspire to study STEM subjects abroad, Bhandari writes that she was not one of them. She migrated for love instead, following her then-fiance from Delhi to North Carolina. In the South, she pursued a doctorate in social sciences. Her memoir illuminates the hurdles that she surmounted to further her education in another country.

At a gradual pace, Bhandari found appeal in the United States. Her text remarks on its relative freedom and respect for women. Still, she endured multiple, drawn-out visa applications, uncertainty around employment, and fears brought on by 9/11. She also worked through a break-up and the challenges posed by a volatile roommate who sharpened saws in the communal kitchen.

The book's stories about small cultural differences, such as a strange reaction from a server in a restaurant when Bhandari requested ketchup for her pizza, lighten the tone. But the book's later references to a daughter lead to curiosity about the evolution of Bhandari's personal life; the book's focus becomes increasingly more about the experiences and impact of students studying abroad.

Bhandari eventually graduated, obtained a green card, and found work in New York City, across the street from the United Nations. She writes about applying the tools at her disposal to gain further insights into the experiences of foreign students in the United States and their effects on the country. On such topics, the book delivers statistical data in laypeople's terms to contradict common misconceptions, such as the belief that foreign students are often subsidized by American taxpayers. Research reveals, the book says, that US education is one of the country's top six service exports, and that it generates more income than exported cars and medicine.

Arguing that the continuing decline in students from abroad will have a negative impact on the American economy, and the country's influence on the world, the book also points out some of the important contributions made by immigrants to the United States in the sciences—a field shunned as “nerdy” by many American students. For better or worse, it says, India's brain drain becomes America's gain. It works toward an upbeat and hopeful ending, leaving the impression that cultural exchanges are beneficial for all involved.

Through personal anecdotes and just the right amount of scientific data, Rajika Bhandari's compelling memoir *America Calling* argues that foreign students should be welcomed into the United States.

SUZANNE KAMATA (August 11, 2021)

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