

These Americans

Jyotsna Sreenivasan

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The crafted stories of Jyotsna Sreenivasan's collection *These Americans* offer the perspectives of immigrant and native-born Indian Americans as they balance Indian culture with the expectations with American life.

"Mirror" begins with a birth at an Ohio hospital in 1967; the mother, Prema, is a recent immigrant with her husband. Beyond the stress of labor, Prema is upset that her obstetrician is a man. In India, she complains, only women doctors assist with childbirth. Prema is given a mirror to watch the baby emerge—a notion that she finds unnerving and immodest. However, once she allows herself to witness the delivery, she feels empowered and delighted by the arrival of her "princess."

As seen in Prema's story, immigrants in the period before the internet had greater difficulty transitioning to American life; outside of urban areas, Indian groceries were difficult to find, and cultural accommodations were rare. But subsequent stories feature later generations and more assimilation; their characters are often resistant to Indian traditions. In "Mrs. Raghavendra's Daughter," Anjana hides her relationship with her American lesbian girlfriend, and wishes that her mother would stop trying to arrange a conventional marriage. In "Revolution," twelve-year-old Anita refuses to travel to Bangalore to visit her father's family, hoping to go to summer camp in Michigan instead.

Though there are instances of racism, most of the characters in the book are welcoming and supportive. There are notable moments of humor, as when a teenager tries to discuss the influence of Mahatma Gandhi with his mercurial Indian grandfather. And there is the poignant "Hawk," in which an accomplished doctor reflects upon her life, her relationship with her daughter, and her devastating diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease.

Though there are subtle variations in tone and setting, the stories of *These Americans* form a cohesive, captivating collection.

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