

★ **This Is Not Your Country: Stories****Amin Ahmad**

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The poignant, masterful short stories in Amin Ahmad's *This Is Not Your Country* describe the experiences of Indian immigrants struggling to find meaning and fulfillment in America.

These powerful stories capture both the hard-won successes and liminal emptiness of life as an outsider. Their characters are educated, savvy, and often brilliant, yet they strain to connect with their communities, jobs, and even their own families. In one tale, a D.C. think tank worker has a hard time letting go after his wife is killed; he maintains a perpetual online “video chat” with his ex-mother-in-law in Mumbai, listening to the “mynah birds chirping, the silvery tinkling of bicycle bells, the faint beeping of motor scooters.” In another, a struggling architecture student in Boston is infatuated with his elusive Sri Lankan roommate; she loves someone else, but she still helps him uncover his latent talent, “an amalgam of modern architecture and [his] memories of India.” In another tale, an arrogant doctor struggles to understand his unhappy wife and shrewd, alienated daughters while they plan a family wedding in Calcutta.

The endings of these rich, detailed stories are often clouded and unresolved. It's an apt limbo, as people grasp at wistful memories and fleeting perceptions. In one moving story, a reluctant girl accompanies her father, an eccentric computer genius from India who just lost his job, as he breaks into his former boss's office in New Jersey, rifling for evidence of the company's failure without him. Years later, she is haunted by the memory of how, after a traumatic night, she saw her father with clarity for the first time, as a “small, shabby alien.” The “realization ... flooded her heart with a tidal surge of love.”

The beautiful stories of *This Is Not Your Country* depict both the tenuous triumphs and the heartbreaks of those caught between worlds.

KRISTEN RABE (November / December 2021)

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