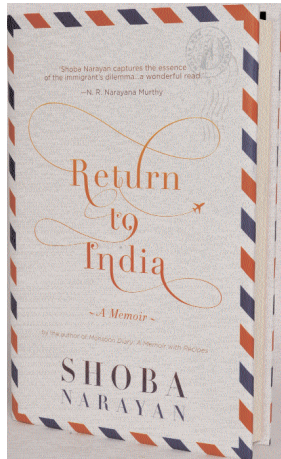


# The Long Distance Call

by r. balakrishnan



**RETURN TO  
INDIA A MEMOIR  
BY SHOBA NARAYAN  
RAIN TREE  
PAGES: 380  
PRICE: Rs 395**

## BROWSING



**Krishna Kumar  
Karwa**  
MD & CFO,  
Emkay Global  
Financial Services

Recent reads:

*The Argumentative Indian*  
by **AMARTYA SEN**

I recommend: *Integrity* by  
Henry Cloud, *The Ascent Of  
Money* by Niall Ferguson  
and *When Genius Failed* by  
Roger Lowenstein

On my shelf: *Men Who  
Inspire India* by Zakia Sha-  
kir, *Maverick* by R. Semler,  
*Success Built To Last* by  
Porras, Emery and Thomp-  
son, *The New Market Wiza-  
rds* by Jack Schwager, *Our  
Iceberg is Melting* by John  
Kotter, *How To Think Like  
Benjamin Graham And In-  
vest Like Warren Buffett* by  
Lawrence Cunningham, etc.

**M**OST young Indians desire to build a career abroad. Surely, most of them prefer the US, for its quality of life and merit-based system. Almost all of them would love to escape the uneven education system here and complete higher studies in the US. But not many can afford the hefty fees. The other way to make it to the US is to get scholarships. Once you finish studies, you take up a job; and get green card. The next step for many is to find a culturally compatible partner and jell with the Indian community in the US. And life goes on; dreams get bigger and the stay prolongs. Much later, at some stage, as children grow up, the dilemma of 'return to India' confronts everyone. And there begins another journey.

Narrated crisply, **RETURN TO INDIA** is Shoba Narayan's solemn and spirited testimony of the entire journey. The relevance of the book lies in the fact that Narayan represents a vast multitude of Indians who goes through the back-home dilemma day in and day out. The author, coming from a conservative family, records the conflict from departure to return. The family elders who did not want her to go abroad, her determination to go, and the campus life are all recorded honestly. Emotions play a big role throughout. The style is appealing; she conveys emotions through a simple narrative of events. One only needs to read between the lines. At each stage, Narayan prompts you to pause, think and take a call on which side to take.

Narayan also captures the change in her life once she enters the wedlock. She had accepted

her parents' choice of spouse. The arrival of children brings across the conflict between the material things in life and cultural values. The author went to the US after she had spent her formative years with family members in India. And far out in the States, when your children start on their journey in life, the conflicts begin. Should one leave the children to grow up with life in the US or should one return home so that the children grow up with 'home' culture and values? This is the eternal conflict and resolving it is not easy. Till the family emerges, you live life chasing your own dreams. Once children come on the scene you devote all your energies to them. You want to take a hard call on return to India. These are personal calls and each one may react differently. Narayan, very aptly, does not pass any value judgements here.

The author's love for New York comes through very well. Obviously, staying in the Big Apple also implies a level of status that not all émigrés to the US will enjoy. To this extent, the memoir steps clear of any economic challenges that an Indian with an average or below average pay packet would face out there. That said, at one level, the memoir also tells us a thing or two about the financial security of a middle class Indian. Though the education system in India drives the cream away, they get to the top of the economic ladder in the US and that gives them the freedom to make choices. Given the prudence of most Indians, they attain financial freedom early enough to be able to make a choice on whether they should go 'back home'. Along the way, the US citizenship gives the children the flexibility to follow the path their parents took. Of course, one also has the option of not returning and let the children grow up there and be a citizen in the true sense. The author does talk about her friends who chose that option.

The memoir is also about how we handle our urge for 'freedom'. The societal mores and pressures makes us want to 'get away from it all' and seek greener pastures. After doing that, we find the same threads we wanted to cut off continue to pull us. The reason for our escape also becomes the reason for our return. And that's reason enough for this reader to recommend it for all children who want to leave our shores in search of a 'better' life.

---

*Balakrishnan is a Chennai-based writer*