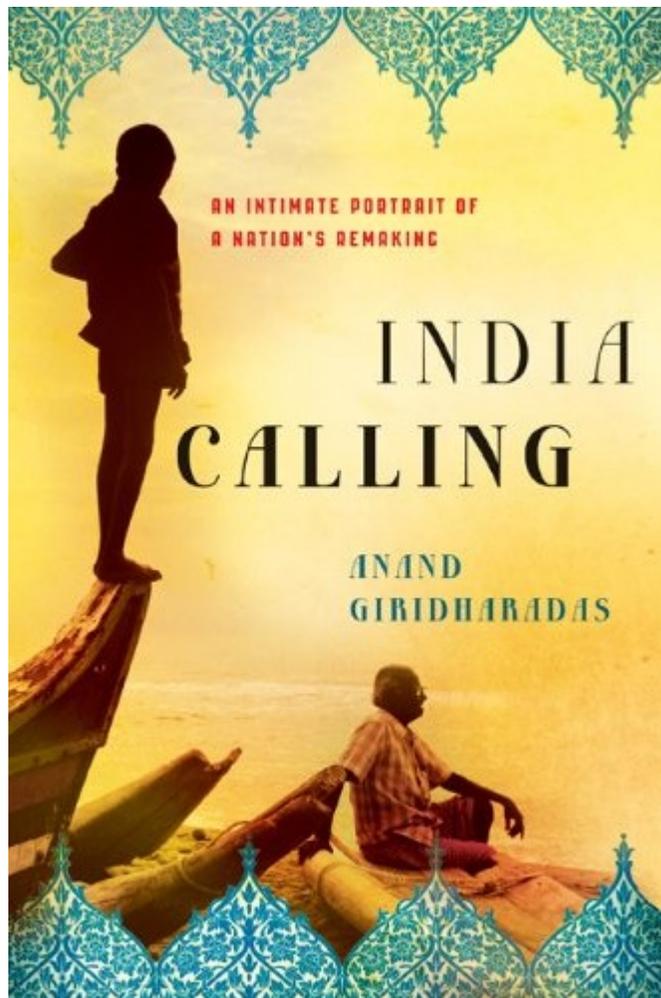


The new, old India

By [Debra Bendis](#)

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In Review



India Calling

by Anand Giridharadas

Times Books

"In the ordinary course of human affairs countries churn slowly. . . and then there are moments of special upheaval, when empires depart, when ideologies rotate. . . . India was in the midst of such a moment. The meanings of destiny, family, love, class--of what it means to be Indian--were being defined anew by millions of people, all at once."

Author Anand Giridharadas is describing today's India, a country that's predicted to pass up China in economic growth (9.4 percent in 2010) even as 80 percent of its more than 1 billion people live in persistent and grotesque poverty (less than \$2 a day).

An Indian American, Giridharadas is well positioned to explain India to the western world. In *India Calling* he weaves together the story of his grandparents, who were professionals in India; of his parents, who left India in the '70s for the U.S.; and of himself, an American with a vague and mostly secondhand picture of India. Seeking to remedy this, to get to know this country, in 2003 he moved to Bombay as a consultant and then began writing for the *International Herald Tribune*.

Giridharadas sees a country that is very much in flux and yet very much the same; a country that is bringing sudden riches to some and leaving others without hope. As one of many young-adult Indian American "stepchildren" who've chosen India over the United States, he's caught between the old, anglicized India of his grandparents and the high-speed entrepreneurial class that is redefining the culture with a "slow-burning privatization of attitudes," best explained to Americans as a belief in the individual instead of in the individual's submission to caste, village or family.

Poised between the past and the future, Giridharadas's observations remove a layer or two of India's mystery, only to reveal more layers, more mysteries and more to learn about this vast, ancient, crowded, dynamic "new India."

I wish that Giridharadas had said more about the political concerns and religious conflicts that also characterize this country. But I expect we'll hear more from him. I doubt that there's any writer today who is a

more acute observer of "the new India."