

## My experiences of US in 1970s – lessons for present generation

[Anil K Rajvanshi](#)  
[Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute \(NARI\)](#)  
Phaltan, Maharashtra  
[anilrajvanshi@gmail.com](mailto:anilrajvanshi@gmail.com)



I went to USA in 1974 to do my Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering at University of Florida (UF), Gainesville. I stayed there for 7 years-first to finish my Ph.D. and then to teach at UF for nearly two and half years. In late 1981 I came back to rural India to run an NGO called [Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute \(NARI\)](#) in Phaltan, Maharashtra.

America in 1970s was a very nice, open and courteous society and I thoroughly enjoyed my stay in the U.S. and have written about it in a book entitled [“1970s America-An Indian Students Journey”](#).

There were two major lessons I learnt in my U.S. stay. I feel those lessons are as valid today as they were during my time, almost 40 years ago.

One was that a student should maximize the learning experience in whichever university he/she goes to. Very often the Indian students have the tendency to think that the professors or teachers should give them all the material and assistance. Part of the reason is the “exam passing” tendency that Indian students exhibit. The Indian education system is heavily dependant on simply passing examinations and not focused on learning. This does not allow the students to think and thus everything becomes an issue of passing exams and not solving real life problems.

Therefore, the main focus of students going abroad is to finish their degrees as fast as they can and then get a job. There is not much desire to imbibe knowledge, learn about other academic areas, or maximize the learning experience.

During my UF days, I was curious about many subjects and thus would take courses in various departments to maximize my knowledge. Though I was doing mechanical

engineering, I took courses in chemistry, electrical engineering, materials science and even courses in sleep and dreams and film appreciation! All these helped me to get a well-rounded education. Besides one learns a lot by taking courses and is much better than only focusing on research.

The US University environment in those days – just like now, had a great atmosphere for scholarship and offered excellent opportunity to get knowledge in various areas at one location.

Thus I started attending seminars in various departments to learn about various subjects. These seminars on various topics like quantum physics, UFOs, out of body experiences, theory of chaos, etc. given by outstanding authorities, further added to the knowledge.

Thus the biggest lesson for students going to U.S. or European countries is to have tremendous curiosity because it fuels learning. Since most students nowadays fund their own studies abroad their focus should be on maximizing the learning process.

The second biggest lesson I learnt was that one should absorb as much as possible the experience of American way of life and explore America.

Too often I have seen that Indian students going to U.S. universities stay in Indian ghettos; every University town has a “Mahatma Gandhi Road” where most of the Indians stay. They only mix with other Indians, eat only Indian food and have very little to do with Americans. This way they rob themselves of gaining rich experience of living in a foreign country. Thus the work ethics in America; how they keep their cities and small towns clean; why there is so little noise pollution, etc. are some of the things among others that need to be learned from them and that can only happen when Indians mingle with them.

When I and my wife were students we mostly mingled with Americans and had many more American friends than Indians. This made us much more aware about American Society; got us involved in the local milieu and shielded us from the constant discussion of “how to make more money”, that most Indians indulged in.

Most of the Indians who go to U.S. opt to stay there permanently and rarely return to India. Hence it is all the more reason to be a part of the U.S. society. They will then be

welcomed by the locals and not feel alienated. I feel one can become a better Indian by knowing much more about the American people and society. Americans by and large are friendly people and it is very easy to mix with them and they easily accept Indians as friends. Nevertheless the process of assimilation is already taking place with more and more first and second generation Indians getting into positions of power in industry, academia and in state and federal government. However this process needs to be accelerated.

And the last thing that I would like to suggest to Indian students going to U.S. is to explore America by going to its national parks. American landscape is incredibly beautiful and by visiting these areas of natural beauty one gets a better appreciation of the country, its greenery and how they have maintained these parks so nicely.

During our student days we visited many such parks like Grand Canyon, Yosemite National Park, Carlsbad caves, etc. Even today when we go to U.S. we mostly visit the places of natural beauty rather than the cities. There are hundreds of beautiful national parks in US.

Most Indians however have the tendency of visiting only cities and do shopping. America is quite a homogenous society with most of the cities having similar landscape; with similar shopping malls and places to eat. So if you have visited one city then it is as good as visiting most other cities.

The real beauty of America lies in its varied natural landscape from Alaska to Florida and from California to New York State and Eastern United States and that should be explored.

We thoroughly enjoyed our education and stay in U.S. in 1970s and would recommend that students should go to U.S. to learn and widen their horizon but should come back to India and apply here the lessons learned in U.S.

[HOME](#)

September 2016