

out to paint an exhaustive portrait of modern volunteers, and “help practitioners better recruit, train, motivate, and retain volunteers.”

The book examines volunteers’ motivations and backgrounds—including race, gender, and socioeconomic resources—and addresses subjects such as recruitment and types of service various groups favor. But the authors’ sweeping approach encounters a not-uncommon problem: Many of the studies mentioned contradict one another. So we are left with forehead slappers such as “In the opinion of many scholars, organizations will recruit volunteers only if they appeal to their values and beliefs” and “There is quite convincing evidence that volunteers are more empathic people than non-volunteers.” You don’t say.

Many recruiters won’t be surprised to learn that their best volunteer prospects are affluent, white, churchgoing women. (While women do not contribute more hours than men, they volunteer at a higher rate.) To be fair, people in each of these categories are the most likely to be asked—41 percent of white Americans, for instance, have been asked to volunteer, compared with 33 percent of blacks, and nearly two-thirds of Americans with household incomes over \$75,000 are asked compared with one-third of those earning less than \$25,000. Being asked is a strong predictor of who volunteers.

From amid the obvious conclusions and the sociological jargon, however, an engaging narrative begins to emerge, of Americans’—especially American women’s—relationship to labor. “In capitalist societies,” the authors write, “volunteers are often admired as people, but their work is devalued. We tend to assume that if a job is really worth doing, it will be paid for.” Often, the volunteer work that women do is “society’s ‘dirty work,’” similar to household duties—caring for children and the elderly, preparing meals, book-keeping. Men tend to have “more desirable” leadership roles in the public domain: coach, firefighter, board member. This imbalance led many in the feminist movement of the 1970s to resist volunteering. Activist Doris Gold put it

bluntly: “Voluntarism is clearly exploitative—in its implication that social justice for all classes can be achieved through the moral ‘service’ of some who are expendable, albeit out of choice.” From this perspective, our nation of do-it-yourselfers is a place where we are emphatically *not* all in this together.

Reading *Volunteers*, I wondered what would happen if Americans stopped being quite so gung-ho about signing up to help out. What if women took a break from the “dirty work,” and instead people were paid to do it? The warm-fuzzies sector might shrink, but the resulting jobs would allow those who couldn’t afford to volunteer to have a bigger role in helping others, even as—per the American way—they helped themselves.

DARCY COURTEAU, a writer living in New Orleans, has spent thousands of hours volunteering in education programs in the United States and India.

## Spouse Hunt

Reviewed by Renuka Rayasam

RECENTLY, I DESCRIBED WESTERN dating to an uncle in India who is trying to arrange marriages for his two daughters. After sharing his own troubles finding suitable young men, he ruefully

concluded, “Getting married here is one type of hell, but getting married there is another.”

Anita Jain has suffered the worst of both worlds. Fed up with the “emotionally excruciating uphill battle” of dating in New York City, Jain, a world-traveled financial journalist, returned to the country of her parents’ upbringing and her own birth. *Marrying Anita* chronicles her search for a husband when she moved to Delhi at the age of 32.

Jain, who grew up in the United States, figured that focusing her search for a year in India, where she believed men were more marriage oriented, would improve her odds of finding a husband. Besides meeting potential husbands in flashy Delhi bars and on Indian dating websites, Jain took a second stab at arranging a marriage

**MARRYING ANITA:**  
A Quest for Love in  
the New India.

By Anita Jain. Bloomsbury. 307 pp. \$24.99

through an ad her father placed in *The Times of India*. (She wrote in a 2005 *New York Magazine* article about the first attempt, which failed but left her more appreciative of the traditional Indian way of finding a mate, who is selected by one's family.)

Unfortunately, Jain seems more interested in stringing together amusing dating anecdotes than in making a sincere attempt at cross-cultural understanding. Many of the people she encounters in America and India read like caricatures. British journalists are “rapacious conversationalists”; men from Ohio are too earnest. Indian mothers care only about marrying off their daughters, while every unattached female New York professional spends her evenings poring over the “disturbing minutiae” of dating.

Jain's sharply trained reporter's eye is best used when she describes the rapid changes juxtaposed with the traditionalism encrusting Indian cities. She had been to Delhi before, but when she returned in 2005, “it was different.” Young, educated, tech-savvy professionals were transforming the ancient city through their demand for Western luxuries. Upscale coffee shops, Italian restaurants, nightclubs, and malls abutted centuries-old forts and open-air bazaars.

Searching for an apartment, Jain was shocked to find that many Delhi landlords didn't like renting to single women, fearing they might be prostitutes or at least would entertain males. She finally moved into a renovated flat with a view of the city's ancient landmarks, and herself became another dissonant element of the landscape. “I now marvel at the incongruities and ironies that abound in this country each day,” she writes. “I'm able to install Wi-Fi, allowing me to check e-mail from bed, but my cook, Amma—a small dumpling of a 70-year-old woman—who prepares fresh *sabzi*, *dal*, *chapatias*, and rice each day, extracts the utterly baffling third world rate of \$18.20 a month.” Cheap labor makes cooks and cleaners commonplace even in India's lower-middle-class households.

It's too bad the insight Jain exhibits when

describing modern India falters when she focuses inward. Often, she blames her romantic failures on the overused emigrant's complaint of neither fitting in here nor there—too liberated for Indian men, but not free enough for American ones. To Western ears, she says, her urge to settle down sounds “atavistic in nature, a throwback to a time when women couldn't financially support themselves.” Yet her own view of partnership is pretty dismal: She looks down on female friends who married right after college and disdains women who choose marriage over a career.

Jain decided to leave New York for Delhi after attending a Central Park picnic at which she was the only person not part of a couple. Fleeing in tears, she vowed not to become “that proverbial single thirtysomething female propped up at the bar waiting for her ship to come in.” But then she landed in India, only to find that the “razzle-dazzle” new country had created waves of the “young cads” she had hoped to escape. Same bar, different scenery.

RENUKA RAYASAM is a Washington, D.C.-based writer. Her work has appeared in *Condé Nast Portfolio*, *INC Magazine*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *Fortune*.

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## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

### Fear Itself

Reviewed by Evelin Sullivan

IN THE LAST CHAPTER OF his eminently readable exploration of our allegedly dangerous world, Daniel Gardner describes a cemetery in Ontario where a headstone commemorates the six children of one couple, all killed by diphtheria within less than a week

in 1902. Far from marking a freakish occurrence, the headstone is a reminder of the vast toll contagious illnesses took on children in the dark days before vaccines all but eradicated such diseases in the industrialized world. It is the final proof of what Gardner argues throughout *The Science of*

#### THE SCIENCE OF FEAR:

Why We Fear the Things We Shouldn't—and Put Ourselves in Greater Danger.

By Daniel Gardner.  
Dutton. 339 pp. \$24.95