

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Fulbright Stories Project

ANAGHA KIKKERI

Interviewed by: Tom Selinger

Interview date: May 8, 2025

Copyright 2025 ADST & Fulbright Association

INTERVIEW

Q: I'm Tom Selinger with ADST. It's May 8th, 2025. We're here on behalf of the Fulbright Association to interview Anagha Kikkeri. Anagha, can you start by just telling us your name and spelling it out for us please?

KIKKERI: Yes, my name is Anagha Kikkeri and it's A-N-A-G-H-A K-I-K-K-E-R-I.

Q: And could you tell us your current occupation and employer?

KIKKERI: Yes, I work for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and I work on the executive team..

Q: Excellent. Tell us where you grew up and how you became interested in international affairs.

KIKKERI: I am from Dallas, Texas. I am a diehard Texas Longhorn. I went to the University of Texas for college. My first time living outside of Texas was for my work in DC. I've always been more domestically minded, focused on the US, but I'd heard about Fulbright. You know, everyone knows about Fulbright. I never thought I'd go abroad to spend a year; I never thought that was in the works for me. A few years after graduation, a friend called and said, 'You should consider this. You always talk about wanting to connect with your roots, and you're passionate about global affairs and geopolitics.' And I was like, "You're crazy. I am not leaving DC. I love it here." But then.. I actually did leave DC! I did leave.

Q: So, tell us what you did for Fulbright and when was it?

KIKKERI: I went to India for my Fulbright, where I conducted a research project on young women's political participation. As the world's largest democracy, India offered a compelling contrast to my experiences working in our great democracy, the U.S. It was an incredible comparative experience. I was able to enmesh myself in the country of my ancestors. I learned family history I never knew, met distant relatives, and essentially became a family historian along the way.

Professionally, I worked with many young women, especially in rural areas, and listened to their stories: what motivated them to enter politics, the policies they wanted to pursue, and the barriers they faced. It was incredibly inspiring. The experience really highlighted the power of mutual learning between two democracies, and I felt uniquely positioned as an Indian American to understand those worlds.

Q: And are there lessons from that that you carry forward into your daily life now?

KIKKERI: Absolutely. Tenacity is the biggest one. The women I interviewed showed incredible strength; they didn't take no for an answer. If there was a barrier, they found a way through it.

The second major lesson was the importance of family, community, and culture. I came back to the U.S. not because I didn't love my time in India, I did, but because my time there helped me realize how much my American community means to me. It strengthened my resolve as an American and deepened my commitment to U.S. democracy.

Q: Do you think your Fulbright made America safer, stronger, and more prosperous?

KIKKERI: Absolutely. India is uniquely positioned as a fellow democracy with different global alliances. The soft power of Fulbright, of Americans going abroad to learn, not to dominate, is invaluable. These cultural exchanges foster mutual understanding and trust, especially as India continues to grow as a major global player. Fulbright helps ensure that the U.S. is represented by people genuinely interested in partnership and shared progress.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add about why Fulbright is important to you or what you hope for Fulbright's future?

KIKKERI: Fulbright completely changed how I see myself, my confidence, and my connection to the global community. I never imagined I'd have this opportunity, and I'll be forever grateful. It's something that will shape me for the rest of my life.

End of interview