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Sandesh

“The Message”

A Newsletter from IndUS of Fox Valley

From Editors' Desk

Due to unavoidable circumstances we have not been able to bring the last two issues of **Sandesh** to you. Our apologies.

For this issue of **Sandesh** we approached some young people of Indian origin, who grew up in the Valley, to write a short piece reflecting on “What does it mean to be an Indian-American?” These reflective pieces describe the unique opportunities and challenges presented to those who grow up in two cultures, and the deep personal ways in which the facets of these cultures culminate into an ‘Indian-American’ identity. We hope that you will find the voices of these young Indian-Americans intriguing, inspiring, and as providing a forum for reflecting upon your own identity.

Sandesh

An IndUS of Fox Valley

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The views expressed in the articles are not necessarily those of the Editors or IndUS of Fox Valley

Letter to my two children - on growing up

Indian-American

By Dr. Subhasis Chatterjee

I want you both to read this while still young, as you look to the future, and then again later in life looking back. In the end, it is the height of arrogance to think that I or anyone else has all the right answers about being Indian-American. You will find your own way and have my support.

Your grandparents succeeded in preserving their Indian culture and assimilating into America. As a second generation Indian-American and with both of you still under the age of three (a third generation), I know that identity is complex. The dual identity of being Indian-American means both being Indian in America and being American in India. But this dualism has given me a sense of heritage, where I fit in America, empathy and tolerance of others to see different perspectives.

I am a hybrid of both Indian and American. Not completely one or the other. Even though I looked like my cousins in India, it was apparent that I was quite different from them. English was my native language. I liked American food, TV, and sports. On the other hand, I was also different from my American friends and classmates. My family spoke Bengali and ate Indian foods at home, my parents had an accent, and we worshipped differently. Obviously, we looked different.

But you can be both Indian and American. I don't know anyone who knows the right ratio of “Indianness” to “Americanness” – as if there could be such a formula. No one group has a monopoly on good or bad values. Studying hard is not an Indian or an

American virtue.

It's a virtue. Period. I've seen many combinations of Indian-Americans. Some are almost ashamed of their Indianness, taking a sort of

pride in their complete renunciation and ignorance of their heritage. They are an orphan of sorts. Many Indian-Americans are very knowledgeable about both low brow (latest Bollywood gossip from the pages of Stardust) and high brow topics (history & politics, art films, literature, Indian classical music and dance) or more of one and less of the other.

Going to India was a reassuring experience when I was young to see that I did not look different from anyone else. When we do visit India as a family, I want you to see the real India and not just a sanitized version of historical monuments or Westernized urban areas with Indian versions of the Gap and Pizza Hut. After visiting India, writer Elisabeth Bumiller observed that, “rather than coming to the periphery of the world, I had come to the center.” I want you to come to the center.

I hope you will see India from American eyes, and see America from the eyes of others. Do not feel ashamed of India's shortcomings; recognize the opportunity to help. Yes, there is poverty and suffering in India that shocks sensibilities. In 2009, a beautiful movie about the resilience of the human spirit set against the backdrop of



cruel poverty won eight Oscars. Yet, I met many Indians virulent in their criticism of "Slumdog Millionaire". "Why do they have to show all of this poverty?" and "People will think that all Indians live like this" were their objections. It revealed their own shame of India – that somehow, if the rest of the world doesn't see India's poverty then it doesn't exist. Indeed, it also underestimates the Western audience thinking they are so gullible that watching one movie would allow them to judge an entire country. And even if they do, so what?

I remember visiting India in the run-up to the Iraq War of 2003. It was as if I was on a different planet. I realized how uncritically uniform the American media had been pounding the drumbeat of war. And how deeply unpopular this was elsewhere in the world. On the other hand, I have found myself to be a much more vocal defender of the US in the face of leftist critics who see the US as the world's villain. Have your basic ideas questioned and examined -- you'll know why you think the way you think.

Having multiple perspectives can be helpful and insightful. For example, take the issue of affirmative action. I'm a member of an ethnic/racial and religious minority in the US while being a member of a historically privileged caste in India. In America, I sympathize more with the unfavorable position of disadvantaged racial groups and see affirmative action as an attempt to level the playing field. When white men complained about being its victims, I didn't hold much sympathy for them. Then I went to India where affirmative action is in the form of caste-based quotas. There I saw the frustration of my cousins who felt that lesser qualified people were taking educational and employment opportunities away from them. I know the legacy of the caste system in India is similar to the legacy of slavery in America. Could I really be on one side of the issue in America and on the other side in India and still be consistent? I didn't think so.

I was typically the only Indian in a high school of nearly a thousand students. It's OK to be different from others. A friend

of mine once thought he was complimenting me when he told me that he thought of me the same way as he did all of his other white friends. I told my friend what he had really done was "whited me out" to fit in with everyone else. I wanted our friendship and I wanted our differences.

So when you are judged by the "content of your character and not the color of your skin," it does not mean that all differences disappear. It means that we respect our differences - whether black, Latino, gay, disabled, richer, or... Republican. This journey of discovering and defining your identity is unpredictable and uncertain. But it will make your life fulfilling. Good luck to you both. □

Subhasis and his wife Archana have their hands full with their son Ishaan (2½ yrs) and daughter Imani (5 months). He is beginning his practice in cardiothoracic surgery at the North Shore University Hospital and the University of Chicago Hospitals. They live in Wilmette, IL.

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Being a "Young" Indian

By Asha Sharma



It is hard to capture my experience as an Indian-American in few words, I can give only a partial snapshot. It feels natural to be a blend of both Indian and American and has been a source of richness and meaning in my life, although sometimes a cause of tension with my parents and other older Indians.

I spent part of my childhood in India in a loving, extended family. When we moved to Fox Valley in 1970, we were fortunate to grow up in a warm and inclusive circle of aunts and uncles. There were very few Indians in the Valley then, and we stuck closely

together, a diverse group of Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Muslims from all over India. It saddens me to see Indians in America now splintering off into little regional and religious groups.

The Indian community worried about us younger ones forgetting our roots. Through the India Association and the Puja Group, we children formed lifetime bonds with each other and also learned to respect and love Hinduism and Indian culture. I continue to have a passion for Indian culture – its food, clothes, literature, philosophy, music, and especially, dance.

Although the older generation was adventurous and broke with tradition by moving thousands of miles away to live in America, as anxious parents they seemed to discourage adventure in their children and to promote safe conformity.

In the 1970s, it was expected that young Indians attend college, immediately advance to graduate school, and then enter acceptable careers like medicine or engineering. Travel or other distractions were discouraged: "Go to graduate school first. Europe will always be there!" My otherwise strict parents, however, were quite open-minded on this score, letting us choose our educational and career paths.

I became a journalist, then an attorney, traveled all over India, and became a Kathak dancer in a new extended family of the dance company. Dating and marriage were the biggest challenges for our generation. Most of us were not allowed to date when younger, even other Indians, whom we were taught to regard as brothers and sisters. Not surprisingly, many of us married non-Indians.

Some Indians pressured their children to marry within their region or caste – a tradition that may have some value in India, but which I feel in this country is impractical and useless.

Uncles and Aunties asked us a little too often “So, when are you getting married?” as if nothing else mattered. Of all people, my elderly grandmother in India was very understanding, wisely noting that happiness doesn’t come from marriage but from within ourselves. I eventually got married in my 40s to a Jewish American.

As an “Auntie” now myself, my advice

to young people is: avoid rushing into marriage, take time off before grad school, travel and have adventures, and just enjoy being young.

My parents have mellowed with time – and so have I. I wish I had quarreled less often about wearing shorts, going out with friends, dating, and other issues. Living in India after high school and college helped me understand and appreciate Indian culture and my parents more. My grandparents told me, “Your parents left here in the 1950s and are still living in the 1950s.” I understand how difficult it must have been for my

parents to raise four children amidst a culture intrinsically different from theirs.

Ultimately, having two cultures is enriching and I’ve been very fortunate to grow up with love and understanding from my extended family in India and in the Fox Valley. □

Asha Sharma was born in Milwaukee, lived in India for a few years, and was raised in the Fox Valley. She now lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, and dances with Katha Dance Theatre and works as an attorney in Social Security Disability law.

I was raised by three parents: the Indian culture, the Muslim culture and the American culture.

By Sofia N. Majid-Swanton



When I think about identity, I feel that it has been with me since my earliest memories. Like a beautiful crescendo of self awareness playing in the

landscape of my life. It’s hard not to think about one’s identity while growing up as an Indian Muslim American in Appleton in the 1970’s. Being a minority made me reflect upon my identity in a more pronounced way than if I was raised in India or a Muslim dominated country. At that time, the only image of Indian beauty was witnessed through looking at my mother and the other Indian aunties in our community. Otherwise, my world was permeated with blond Barbies, blond newscasters, blond actresses. You get the idea. My favorite book was the “The Wonderful School” where a little girl with chestnut skin tone and jet black ponytails bounced along each page. I could not articulate why I liked that book so much. Looking back it is obvious...she looked just like me!

Some of my fondest memories are of my sister, Sarah, and I waiting in the

living room for my mother and father to get dressed to go to one of our typical Saturday night Indian parties. My mother would glide down the stairs in one of her brilliantly colored saris, pleats swaying, a radiant burst of color. She was an orchid, petals bursting. I felt a swell of pride at this woman, my mother and knew that someday I would adorn myself with the same pride and flowering yards of silk. It was at these parties that I forged friendships with other Indian girls and knew that yes...I was not the only Indian girl in Appleton. We shared our deepest secrets, joys and challenges in balancing these beautiful cultures.

We made many trips to India and during those trips I was handed the same question over and over again. “Which do you like better, beti...India or America?” I would always respond “Both.” However, inside I found this question totally unnecessary. I mean really...it’s like asking a child if they liked their father better than their mother. Like my parents, these cultures both lovingly raised me. Like my parents, they are both so beautiful but yet so different. I would never compare or criticize them for being who they are...for just being themselves. I will love them unconditionally.

I hold warm memories of singing the national anthem of India on stage with all my Indian childhood friends for India’s Independence Day, dancing and playing the flute for the Indian Association talent show year after year. My parents, along with other immigrant parents, worked harder to create these cultural moments for their children to soak in.

As a Muslim, I was also a religious minority in my community. During my first grade Christmas play, I was so proud to be chosen to be the Christmas tree. Behind the cardboard cut out, I wore a lehenga of shocking pink and emerald. My mother and teacher thought it was vital for me to talk about what religious holidays I celebrated: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Looking back I am sure my mother wrote that speech for her five year old daughter. I am impressed that my mother and teacher made deliberate efforts to foster pride in my identity and religious and cultural understanding among my peers.

During Ramadan, I remember waking with my father and sleepily eating our morning meal before fasting. I loved that quiet time of day. The whole world was still asleep except for my father and me. While visiting India, I relished

hearing the azan, call to prayer for Muslims, as my cousins confessed that they often took hearing it for granted.

Throughout my life, I was still an all American girl. I played tennis at the parks and for my high school team, watched my favorite cartoons, savored eating pizza as much as biryani, and loved watching Fourth of July fireworks. If anyone in India made sweepingly negative comments about American women or African Americans I would come to their defense; trying to break these stereotypes. I would do this with the same passion as I would educate

Americans when they would make negative comments about Indians or Muslims.

It is often difficult for others to understand how one would navigate the cultural challenges of different cultures. This is how I always love to explain this marriage. I feel that I was raised by three parents: the Indian culture, the Muslim culture and the American culture. To deny one of my parents is to deny who I am. I am proud of all three and they made me who I am today. As the years pass, I've noticed that my identity has become more fluid. Now

I've joyfully added the titles of volunteer, counselor, wife and mother to my name. Who knows what tomorrow will bring. My pride in who I am is essentially a love letter to my parents. Shukria Ammi and Daddy. Shukria, shukria, shukria. □

Sofia N. Majid-Swanton was raised in Appleton, WI. She is a vocational rehabilitation counselor with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in Waukesha, WI where she counsels individuals with disabilities. She is married to Craig Swanton, has one son, Zain, and resides in Sussex, WI. She can be reached at Sofia.MajidSwanton@dwd.wisconsin.gov

Desi Girl

By Malika Chatterji



“Picture it: Sicily, 1924!” I mean there we are at Subway, eating some pizza and drinking orange juice, a typical scene in any Indian city: doting aunt and adorable

nephew. Except, the location is Neenah, Wisconsin. Being Memorial Weekend, most of the local stores are closed but for the franchises. Hence, Subway is full of high-spirited children and tired parents and grandparents looking for a quick lunch. So, there I am sitting and feeding adorable nephew, amidst kind, appreciative smiles from the crowd, when Akhil asks in his loudest tenor, “where is my daddy?” I answer innocently, “In Texas,” when it dawns on me that my ringless hand that feedeth the child might be assumed to belong to a single mother, and worse, someone whose baby’s “daddy” has fled south! So, I declare in my clear alto, “and your mother is at home with your brother!”

Growing up desi is a complicated thing! It comes home to one at the oddest moments of inter *and* intra-cultural contact; some can be shared, others utterly not.

In my teens and collegiate years I would

have written a different story: something motivational about how growing up different in a small town far from your ancestors’ home builds character. How playing classical violin and speaking fluent Spanish rather than understanding Satyajit Ray in his native tongue define a second generation desi girl’s ability to carve out a unique identity, outside of tradition, custom or expectation. Not to discount the average quota of teenage rebellion, alienation from such a white town, and misgivings about why gym shorts are necessary before the legal age (in your house) to shave!

Yet, it always felt cooky, often fun, but somehow non-organic to perform my Indian identity in non-Indian settings. In my most charitable moments, I venture to think that the immigrant parent tries hard to pass on values and stories from home, and interwoven with his/her own nostalgia, sense of place, and family ties, recreates the imagined identity of home. But separated from the geography of those memories, and the sounds and scents of those distant lands, the second generation kid relies on the imaginary: the imagined identity of Indian. Against the reality of the deciduous, temperate, which means nine months of winter, climate and environs of Wisconsin! My favorite example where these two identities converged organically, in other words, where my communal feelings felt tethered to the ground below, is camping

out with the community in Devil’s Lake. Scaling rocks and stepping stones in the water by day, ghost stories and marsh-mallows by night, I rose the next morning to the sound of a pooja already in full-swing. There, in a tree-filled campsite, ladies decked out in colorful dupatas, the tablas kept beat to a beautiful morning raga, and ever so briefly, it did not contrast sharply with carpeted floors and the Green Bay Packers playing on mute on the flat-screen television.

Being political, my imaginary desi identity intensely committed itself to the American democratic project. I dreamt of big visions and plans for subaltern women and their participation in all progressive endeavors. And so, not unsurprisingly, I am now a big city lawyer and I call Los Angeles home. We are mostly a black and brown town and my Spanish is just as useful trying to buy Indian spices (to try my hand at Indian food, another story) from the Mexican grocers (who have appreciable Hindi chops) who stock the shop, as landing a job in a firm where your boss is bilingual. And once again I find the pull of the land, the place around me, changing that elusive identity. My imagination is now caught up with the excitement, challenge and movement of inter-racial solidarity. In eclectic and racially conscious LA, my cohorts are forging a new sense of place, a greater sense of citizenship, and are

beginning to participate in the movements and, finally, ground our ever-shifting identity firmly to a place. □
 hope to speak boldly about both culture and race, build institutions, and join

Lawrence University, and completed her J.D. at UCLA School of Law. She currently lives in Los Angeles with her dog, Poncho.

Malika Chatterji received a B.A. in government and environmental science from



Who Am I?

By Anu Varma

"You don't sound Indian," they say, as if it's a compliment
 Am I supposed to say "Thank You"
 Am I supposed to say "I am glad you noticed, I try hard"
 What I want to say is "What does an Indian sound like?"

"You don't look Indian," they say, as if to mean that I'm beautiful
 Am I supposed to say "Thank You"
 Am I supposed to say "I am glad you noticed, I try hard"
 What I want to say is "What does an Indian look like?"

If I wear a *sari* and put a *bindi* on my forehead, does that make me Indian?
 If I say "I don't understand what you are sayin" in a thick accent, does that make me Indian?

Or then again,
 If I wear blue jeans and a T-shirt, does that make me American?

If I say "How y'all doin" in a thick southern drawl, does that make me American?

Not when I am looking for a job it doesn't!
 Not when I am looking for equality and respect it doesn't!

So what do they think I am?
 Am I Indian or am I American?

It seems they change their minds with the direction of the wind.

I am Indian when the wind says "Too many foreigners in America"
 I am Indian when the wind says "Foreigners are taking our jobs"
 I am Indian when the wind says "If we don't watch out, there'll be half breeds running all around"

I am American when it is time to fight a war and I'm needed on the front line
 I am American when a job needs to be done that no one else wants to do
 I am American when a job needs to be done that no one else can do
 I am American when a candidate for public office knows that my vote counts

So, I could wear a pair of faded Levis, a cowboy hat and eat an entire apple pie
 And I would be an American to some, but just another damn foreigner to most. □

January 1994

Anu Varma lives in Appleton with her daughter Shanti, a beautiful, fun and inspiring 13 year old. Her passions include writing, reading, learning and the issues related to women are of especial concern for her.

Indian-American : An Amalgamation of Values

By Srikanth Reddy



I am happy to share my perspective of what it means to be an Indian-American. I was born and raised in the Fox Valley. I attended college and law school in

Asian fads to come into the American culture.

One specific area that has come to shape my understanding of what it means to be an Indian-American is the appreciation I have found in the amalgamation of my parent's values and the values one learns by growing up in a unique place like Wisconsin. In short, to me, being an Indian-American has had a profound effect in forming my own personal set of values since those values are derived from my parents as well as the community I grew up in.

My parents came to this country over 30 years ago with little more than ambitions and a shared desire to achieve their version of the American dream. Through them, my brothers and I gained an appreciation of the traditional values they brought with them from India: hard work, a strong sense of duty to each other and their family and an unending willingness to sacrifice for the good of their children. While these values are not themselves "Indian" or "American"

my parents' unique spin on those positions that formed their ethos instilled upon my brothers and I an undying appreciation for everything they have done to make us who we are.

In a similar vein, being raised in the Fox Valley we learned the special values inherent in growing up in a truly special place like Wisconsin. To me, chief among those values are a sense of community, humility and taking pride in everything you do. Again, while these values are not uniquely "Indian" or "American" they *are* the values espoused by the vast majority of Wisconsinites.

The combination of these values has come to shape my interpretation of what it means to be an Indian-American. In the end, the values I learned from my parents in conjunction with the values learned from my community will forever shape my perception of what it means to be an Indian-American. □

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the Chicago area, and now live in Boston where I am an attorney at Goodwin Procter LLP specializing mostly in intellectual property litigation. My two older brothers – Srinu and Sridhar – and I grew up on the mean streets of Kaukauna and Appleton in the 1980s and 1990s. Being an Indian-American is about a lot more than just excelling at math, wanting to grow up to be a doctor (both of my brothers as well as my sister-in-law Mandip are doctors which will have to suffice for my parents) and having an inherent ability to impersonate a South Asian accent. It's also about more than being a resource for questions relating to Indian food, henna tattoos, chai tea or any of the other latest South

Defending myself against cultural laziness—was an important practice for me.

By Akhil Bhatt

My name is Akhil Bhatt and I was born in Manitowoc, WI. I've just graduated Boston University with a BS in Communications, concentrating on Film and Television. In addition to being a student, I write and play music in an experimental rock band named Banana Phonetic (www.myspace.com/bananaphonetic), as well as other aliases (www.reverbnation.com/akhilbhatt). I also helped start and currently write for an Independent Music Weblog called IndieMuse (www.indiemuse.com). You should read it. I also make short films and videos, one day I'll ask you for money. I enjoy reading, writing, filmmaking and music. I plan on pursuing creative projects in Boston for the next year while working for

Lunchpail Productions and Guitar Center Inc.

The circumstances of my upbringing were anything but ordinary. It was an insignificant Indian community nestled into a rich, rural Wisconsin background, where our concepts of what it was to be Indian, took on a unique shape. I was a Hindu in a serious Christian community, a brown child in an unmistakably white world, I was the only one like me. My family, our history, our lineage, our values and our customs had little grounding outside of my home. This idea, that we were truly the only examples of our kind, became both an empowering and vital aspect of our lives as well as a point of contention between my perception and society at large. It

gave justification to the lifestyle choices we made as a family but on the other hand, it brought insecurity to my role in *American* culture.

Having a particularly small Indian community around me made it hard to understand how our Indian culture was supposed to fit and thrive in the midst of what seemed an opposite chaos. A few Indian families would drive hours to meet and casually mingle, while their children would attempt to entertain themselves. It was usually an awkward



moment, looking into the other children's eyes, completely bewildered, and seeing that same sparkle of controversy. The question became "Why do I need to sit in this car and drive for hours to do the same things I do at home? Is it supposed to be more fun because they are brown like me?" Sure, there was a chance a few kids had broken Gujarati to practice or some song from a Bollywood movie to share, but usually we traded Beastie Boys CD's, had fake wrestling matches, the girls memorized lines from *Chueless* and we would play more video games than anyone I knew. While my distinction between two seemingly opposite worlds grew more confusing, my pride in myself as a minority—that is to say, a unique individual with a concrete opinion—began to grow exponentially.

Asking myself that question from time to time—defending myself against cultural laziness—was an important practice for me. Later in life I would be faced with many moments of necessary judgment, and would thank my culture for my confidence. It made me ultra-conscious of what it means to be an individual. Luckily, I actually had parents that nurtured these creative urges. While many of my peers would deal with some alien feeling of cultural-guilt at the thought of truly indulging their more "free-spirited" instincts, my

family promoted finding a point within one's culture to help them identify—be it an Indian tradition or otherwise. While everyone decided on med-schools, I was making a blind leap into film-school, where I felt my unique world-view would emphasize beauty in my work. All these parts worked in tandem and I found myself being drawn to my culture organically! The important lesson to be learned is that, though your culture influences your perspective, it does not control it. It allows you a unique lens in which to view the world. As second and third-generation Indians in Wisconsin, we have to understand our culture as a benefit, and a tool for lossless approach to an increasingly conformed and linear society.

Some of my peers use their cultural inheritances as a replacement for their own identities, though the ones who have impacted me and truly made an effort to connect with me as a *person* have become beacons of strength for me. Our cultural position is certainly an advantage and we should be proud of our view, happily resting between cultures taking and learning from two sides at once. This is a tool that stays sub-conscious in most of us. In a society that is obsessed with picking sides and lives in fear of making a bad decision, many times it feels like you need to pick a team—the fear of failure never greater.

The real truth is that we get to work outside of the system with our dual-cultural-sensitivity. It is my Indian heritage that drove me as hard as I've come. Perhaps the most profound result of this upbringing is how I understand my Indian heritage. It has never been a burden, though diversity can be a dividing force. All these aspects of my culture and my resulting personality, I am proud of. In order to understand the impact of such a special situation without resentment or pretention it is crucial to become aware of the constantly changing nature of culture. We know full well that it is nearly impossible to exist in a cultural bubble without reaching a point of confusion, rather, it is the confidence we must draw on while embracing the stimulation.

The coming years will be some of the strangest and fantastic in history. We will draw upon our Indian-American upbringing with pride and continue to lead our culture into new territory with integrity and respect. These are the important lessons, minus the guilt. The big picture will never fit inside our homes, no matter how big they get. Remember to spread your reputation with confidence—you did not choose to be born into such a gift. □

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"What does it mean to be an Indian-American?"

By Kunal Patel

To address "What does it mean to be an Indian American?" one must first ask "Who is an Indian American?" On the surface, the answer is simple – an American who is of Indian ancestry. However, more dimensions arise than initially meets the eye. My own example is of a 27 year old resident physician who was born and raised in Mumbai, India, moved to the United States at age 12 with family and attended high school, college and medical school in the US. I am now happily married to a law student who was born and raised in Wisconsin, is Caucasian by ethnicity and happens to have beautiful red hair! The radically traditional person might argue that I have

denied my Indian ancestry by marrying outside my ethnic group. Meanwhile, the inclusive-minded person might argue that I best fit the definition of an Indian American – one that embodies the importance of assimilation while keeping the cultural values of the Indian ancestry. In the next few paragraphs, I aim to share a few experiences that invoke important Indian cultural values and their effect on the search for my own cultural identity in America.

Education: Indians have high educational qualifications compared to mainstream America. In my own field of Medicine, I regularly interact with more

Patels than Smiths. Nearly 1 in 2 Indians has a Masters, Doctorate or Professional degree, 5 times the national average. Educational achievement is highly valued in Indian culture and allows Indian-Americans to be a valuable part of the workforce. Unfortunately, this deep-rooted value can occasionally result in excessive pressure on children in some families to pursue studies in science-based fields such as Engineering and Medicine at the expense



of Arts, Liberal Studies, Music, etc. Thankfully, my family encouraged me to pursue diverse interests, a task that I relished; for instance, I enjoy playing the guitar and studied Political Science and Religious Studies in addition to Neurobiology in college. These experiences better allowed me to prepare for my eventual professional choice.

Marriage: The decision to marry my high school sweetheart was easy on a personal level. On a cultural platform, however, the decision was loaded with many difficult pressures. There is a strong cultural message to marry within the Indian community for a young Indian person. There is an implication that marrying outside the community equates to loss of our cultural identity at the aggregate level in mainstream America. However, if we are to exist peacefully in a multicultural and diverse America, even the most traditional person must have basic respect for interracial relationships. In fact, I continually share

my cultural teachings with my wife as she shares hers with mine. Our children will grow up with two strong cultural influences, something I see as an advantage.

Food: A privilege of growing up in an Indian household has been the joy of eating my mother's home cooked meals! Who doesn't enjoy at least some elements of the delicious and diverse elements of Indian food? (if you don't, you're either on a strict diet or have just overstuffed yourself at an Indian buffet!) Food is a fundamental aspect of Indian culture and a central part of daily traditions of many Indian families. Growing up, my family always ate dinner together – the time we shared at dinner allowed us to connect with each other during otherwise busy individual schedules. Additionally, healthy nutrition is highly valued in the Indian culture (although our reliance on Ghee still puzzles me). My parents and grandparents taught me the lesson of

healthy nutrition from a young age. This has led to a personal desire to eat healthy and has allowed me to properly counsel patients about proper nutrition.

There are numerous other issues too large to tackle in this article. In particular, issues of friendship, politics and religion deserve mention by name. In sum, these aforementioned life examples have embodied how Indian cultural values have both strengthened and challenged my cultural identity search in America. I sincerely hope your search has been as fruitful as mine! □

Kunal Patel was born and raised in Mumbai, India and moved to the US at the age of 11. He graduated from UW-Madison majoring in neurobiology and Political Science. He is currently finishing second year of residency training in Diagnostic and Interventional Radiology at the University of Minnesota. He is married to Dana Patel, his high school sweetheart. They live in Minneapolis with two fun, energetic dogs. He can be reached at patel085@umn.edu



News ...

IndUS: Changing of the Guard



Sandesh is pleased to announce Dr. Sandhya Sridhar as the new president of IndUS of Fox Valley. She is a founder member of IndUS and has served the organization in many capacities with a high degree of dedication and devotion. We are sure the IndUS will benefit greatly under her leadership. We wish outgoing President, Dr. Mahendra Doshi a well deserved respite from

these duties. Under his able leadership IndUS has been able to sustain growth to achieve its goals and fulfill its mission.



Colors of Culture

On June 12, 2008 IndUS was invited to participate in the event *Colors of Culture* at the Boys and Girls Club Oshkosh. Kamal and Badri Varma made a multimedia presentation on history, geography, political system and various aspects of Indian life. It was attended by High-school students.

India Heritage Day, Midwest iChild Conference, Green Lake

iChild is an organization of American families with children adopted from India. Every year families of Midwest iChild meet in Green Lake, Wisconsin over a three day weekend. They travel from Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Michigan and some from farther distances. IndUS volunteers join them for India Heritage Day to create a sense of awareness and pride in their Indian heritage. This year it was held on July 12, 2008. The day was a great success. Morning started with outdoor games like Langadi, Cricket and Dog-and-the-Bone. While children played, their moms and dads participated

in cooking demonstrations of pakodas and masala dosas. By popular demand this year, we had Bollywood dancing too. Afternoon session on "Know your India" involved interactive sharing of information about India, particularly states of their origin, languages and culture. When the sun got hot, the children played Indian board games like Chess, Snakes and



Ladders, Dyuta (Indian Parchesi) and Shells. Some enjoyed getting henna designs. The day ended with catered Indian dinner for which the



families of 75 children dressed-up. After dinner for the finale they danced Raas, Indian folk dance with dandiya sticks,

painted by the children themselves as part of their craft project.

Foods of All Nations

Many IndUS volunteers were involved in the event as members and chairs of the steering committee in Foods of All Nations, annual fund-raiser for Fox Cities Rotary Multi-cultural Center



(FCRMC), which was held on August 23, 2008. Indian culture is represented both in the

menu and cultural entertainment. A group of dancers from University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point presented Rajasthani folk dance and a fusion dance with Indian and Arabic themes. Manish Raj was the winner of this year's poster contest.

Sense of India: Presentation at Menasha Public Library

On October 4, 2008 Menasha Public Library staff collaborated with IndUS with special book display and a multimedia presentation on India and its people. It was a well attended event and several members of IndUS were there to answer the questions.

Multicultural Fair at Highland Elementary School

On November 6, 2008 at the fair young elementary school age children flitted like butterflies among booths of various countries around the world. They tasted new foods, tried on



colorful costumes and watched entertainment with enthusiasm so natural to their age. IndUS offered a taste of pakodas and three different chutneys. Young boys and girls wore Indian clothes and had their pictures taken. They also admired musical instruments, Indian currency and other art and craft items on display. One of the highlights

of the evening was Indian dances performed by young children, coached by Sonia Beherawala. It was a great idea to expose young minds to cultures around the world.

An art exhibit on Music and Dances of India

Co-sponsored with Appleton Art Center this exhibition was open and free to public from November, 10-24, 2008 in downtown Appleton. This was a first of its kind. The exhibition displayed various musical instruments, dance paraphernalia and select posters from the past decade of IndUS celebrations, representing various classical and folk forms of dance and music. Our viewers tell us that the exhibit was esthetically pleasing and quite informative.

Lunch & Learn

Kaukauna High School invited IndUS to share information about India and Indian culture. Faculty, staff and student leaders of Diversity Club participated in the event on November 14, 2008. Kamal Varma and Sandhya Sridhar shared information over sumptuous Indian lunch. The participants attended the program in two consecutive sessions. Information sharing was followed by interesting questions-answers and a lively discussion. Some of them commented upon the value of such programs that create greater awareness of needs of cultural minorities.

IndUS-2008: Fusion FUNtastic!

Like previous years the tenth annual event, IndUS-2008 was a stunning success and oversold with 450 people attending. It was celebrated on November 22, 2008 and the new venue Radisson Paper Valley was very welcoming. The theme Fusion Fantastic highlighted the interplay between Indian and American cultures that we experience, often without being fully aware of it.

The exhibition represented the confluence of the two cultures through visual exhibits and interactive music and dance performances. Since it was the tenth anniversary of the annual event, the guests walked through the *Memory Lane* experiencing the evolution of these

banquets over the period of ten years. The section *Visual Exhibits* highlighted fusion in music, dance, literature, fashion, food, and culture. In the section *Interactive Live Fusion Music and Dance*, guests experienced performances



by local and invited artists and also participated.

Per Indian tradition, the event opened with the welcoming lamplighting ceremony. Reflecting our commitment to diversity and to promoting Indo-American friendship and goodwill through social, cultural, educational and charitable activities, those organizations and corporations were honored who have supported IndUS in this endeavor for last ten years. Neenah Joint School District, Affinity Health System, Secura Insurance, The Post-Crescent, and Time Warner Cable were honored for helping IndUS to raise funds for disaster relief at home and abroad; Brand M, United Healthcare, and Schneider National, Inc were honored for sponsoring annual IndUS celebrations; Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, and Georgia Pacific Foundation were recognized for sponsoring IndUS concerts by visiting Indian artists; and finally, Kimberly-Clark Corporation and Thrivent Financial for Lutherans Foundation were acknowledged for providing support to IndUS almost from its inception to promote better understanding and acceptance through culture.

At the banquet guests savored fusion cuisine prepared by Chef Peter D'souza, Professor of Culinary, UW- Stout. East met west in many creative ways with menu items such as Paneer Tikka Pizza, Chicken Masala Almandine and Penne Pasta Primavera with Curried Béchamel Cheese Sauce.

The cultural program was *Honeymoon*, a play that showcased cultural fusion. This

undoubtedly was the shining highlight of the evening and audience enjoyed its humor, satire, and joyfulness.



The Silent Auction returned this year with several articles and services to entice a broad range of interests and price levels. Proceeds from the ticket sales, sponsorships, and Silent Auction will support "Investing in Children Fund", an early intervention program aimed at preparing very young children for schools in the Fox Valley.



The organizing committee was chaired by Ms. Aruna Shet and Ms. Kamal Varma. IndUS extends many thanks to the dedicated committee chairs and hard working volunteers who so generously gave their time and talents to this event's planning and execution. Their talents and hard work really showed!

MLK Essay Contest

Like previous years IndUS of Fox Valley was a proud co-sponsor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebrations with United Way of Fox Cities and Toward Community: Unity in Diversity in Appleton and with United Way of Oshkosh in Oshkosh. IndUS provided prizes to winners of MLK essay contests.

Diversity Day at Hoover Elementary School, Neenah

Holidays and Festivals was the theme for Diversity Day at Hoover Elementary on March 2, 2009. The day began with an assembly for the whole school. Volunteers representing various countries were introduced to the stu-

dents. The students were then divided into smaller groups to learn about different cultures. IndUS volunteer Ritu Subramony made a presentation on holidays and festivals of India. Sandhya Sridhar helped with henna tattoos, bindis and clothes to dress up for pictures.



IndUS Annual General Body Meeting

The annual general body meeting was held on April 25, 2009 at Fox Cities Rotary Multicultural Center. In addition to presentation and acceptance of annual reports by different committees and accounts interim election were held. Since the current President Dr. Mahendra Doshi decided to step down, Dr. Sandhya Sridhar, the current Vice-President was elected President and Mr. Yogesh Maheshwari was elected Vice-President to fill her position.

Diversity Fair at Neenah High School

IndUS volunteers helped create long-lasting memories for impressionable young teenagers. Annual Diversity at Fair Neenah High School, which was



held on May 1, 2009 was a tremendous success. IndUS booth was certainly one of the major attractions. Hundreds of students stood in long lines for henna. They enjoyed bindis, wearing sarees, tasting snacky tidbits, and looking at curios.

Presentation on India at Edna Ferber Elementary School, Appleton

On May 6, 2009, a kindergarten class at Ferber Elementary School, Appleton enjoyed a presentation on India by Sridevi Buddi, assisted by Richa Mehro-



tra and Sandhya Sridhar. It was age-appropriate with lots of pictures on various aspects of Indian life – people, animals, nature, schools, cities, villages, dances, sports and more.

Curious kindergartners had lots of questions. After the presentation, they enjoyed dressing up, henna tattoos and tasting mango juice, chakalis, sev, and gulab jamun.

Volunteer Recognition Dinner

This informal fun get-together held on May 9, 2009 at UW-Fox Valley, is our way to say thank-you to our volunteers for making IndUS what it is. Our volunteers contribute in many ways from serving food to the homeless, to packing medical supplies for the needy, to creating awareness of Indian culture and



promoting goodwill in the local community. Volunteers selected Textiles and Jewelry as a theme for our next showcase event



of the year IndUS 2009. This year the dinner was held

Rakesh Kaushika led the event. Tim and Jonna Higgins had people involved playing games. B. S. Sridhar led them in selection of the theme.

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(*Chief Editor, Sandesh*)

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Ms. Kavita Shet (*Representative, Fox Cities Rotary Multicultural Center*)

Visit our website at

www.indusfoxvalley.org

Contact us at
indusfoxvalley@yahoo.com

Gardens of the World



A program by Gardens of Fox Cities was held at Memorial Park on May 16th, 2009. IndUS table had an attractive display of rare Indian vegetables, tea ensemble, spices, cookbooks, recipe handouts and samples of spicy snacks. A team of IndUS volunteers was ably led by Manjari Chatterji. We thank Laxman Kailas of India Groceries for their generous donation of vegetables and snack samples.

IndUS-2009

IndUS - 2009, the annual banquet and exposition is scheduled for Saturday, November 21, 2009, from 4:30 to 9:30 p.m. It will be held at Radisson Paper Valley Hotel, Appleton. The event will feature an interactive exhibition, a sumptuous, delectable banquet followed by a cultural program.

This year's theme is entitled: *The Glorious Tradition of Indian Textiles and Jewelry*. As in the past, the theme was selected by the volunteers of IndUS.

The earliest evidence of textiles and jewelry in India were found in the excavations of Indus Valley civilization (2600–1900 BCE). A wide variety sophisticated aesthetic and craftsmanship has evolved of in different regions of India both independently as also



under the influence of several external cultural influences. Silk weaving is most popular in Assam, Banaras, Mysore, Gujarat, and Kanchipuram. Weavers of Chanderi, Paithan, Hyderabad, and Gadwal specialize in very fine cotton. *Kinkhwab* (fabric of dreams) from Varanasi, *chikan* from Lucknow, *phulkari* from Punjab are simply breathtaking.

Similarly, epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, and *puranas* are replete with rich descriptions of magnificent jewelry made of gold, silver, diamond and other precious stones adorning the gods and goddesses, the royalty and the nobility. The frescoes and carvings found in the caves of Ajanta and Ellora, the

temples of Khajuraho, Konark, Belur Halebeed, Madhurai and Rameswaram are a testimony to a rich cultural heritage of jewelry.

Textiles and jewelry continue to play



important role in India's economy. No wonder that U.S. accounts for 25% of all textiles exported by India (\$10 billion) Textiles account for 4% of Indian GDP, employing 19% of labor forces. Indian love gold! While the US government holds 11,000 tons of gold, the private gold holdings in India are estimated at 29,000 tons! Surat, a medium sized city in Gujarat accounts for 90% of all diamonds cut in the world!

So, are you ready for a glittering event that will feature and celebrate textiles and jewelry in all its resplendent variety and beauty? Come and feast your eyes, feel the beautiful textures, taste the remarkable creations of Chef Peter D'Souza and enjoy the cultural program. All



these, in celebration of the glorious traditions of Indian textiles and jewelry. Every one of the last ten IndUS annual events has been sold out! To avoid disappointment, mark your calendars, and purchase your tickets as soon as they go on sale in August.

Join the IndUS team

We cordially invite you to become a member of IndUS. Please mail your completed form and check to:

IndUS of Fox Valley
3600 N. Shawnee Ave.
Appleton, WI 54914
Phone: 920-749-4911

Name	
Address	
Telephone	
E-mail	
List Family	
Annual Membership Dues (Check One)	
Individual	\$10
Family Member	\$20
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IndUS Of Fox Valley
3600 N. Shawnee Ave.
Appleton WI 54914

IndUS of Fox Valley

Presents

IndUS-2009

Saturday, November 21, 2009

4:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Radisson Paper Valley Hotel

Appleton

Exhibition

Social Hour

Authentic Indian Cuisine

Cultural Program

Details to come