



**Indian Council for Cultural Relations**

*Essay Writing*  
**Competition**  
**2020**



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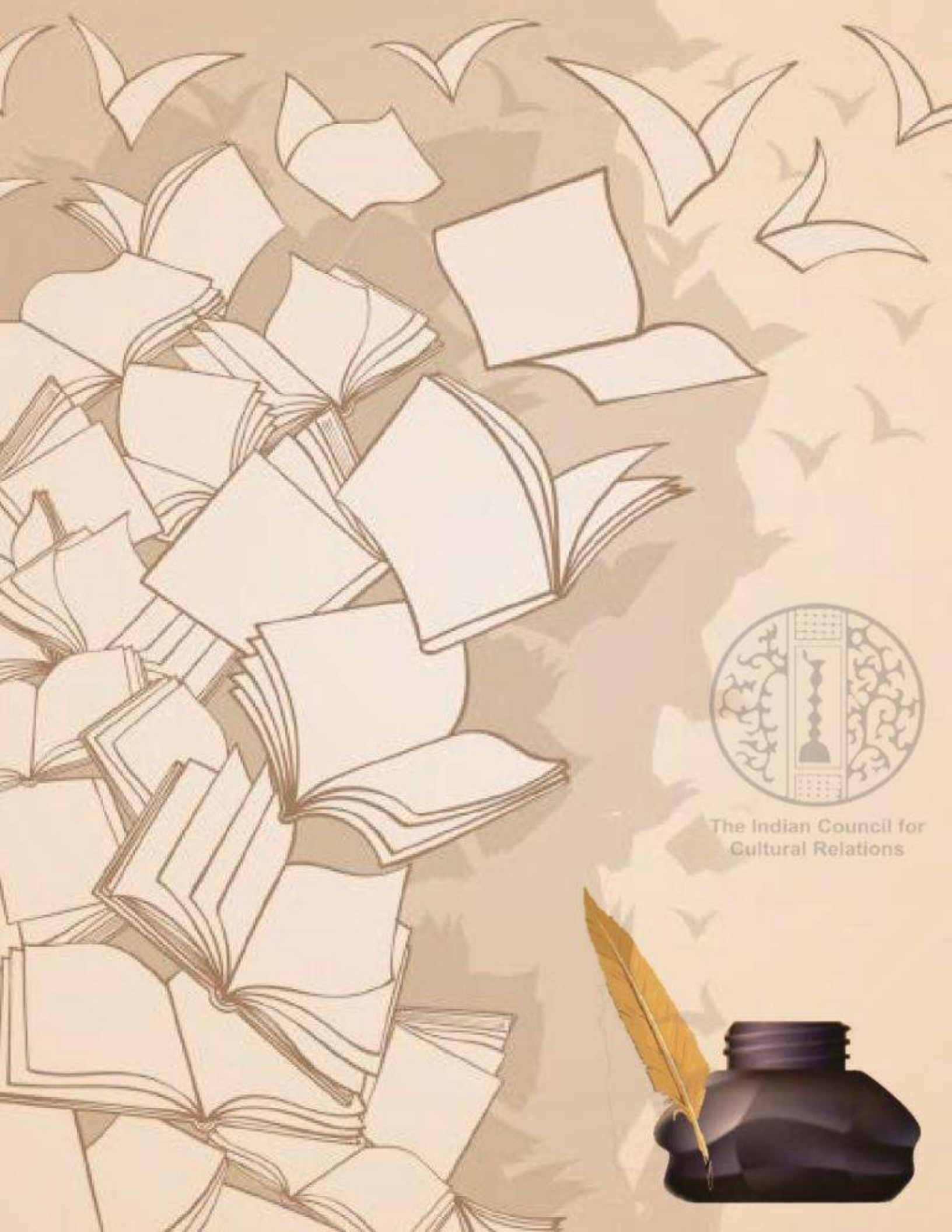
Indian Council for  
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The Indian Council for  
Cultural Relations





सत्यमेव जयते

सांसद

राज्य सभा

Member of Parliament  
Rajya Sabha

डॉ. विनय सहस्रबुद्धे  
Dr. Vinay Sahasrabuddhe



अध्यक्ष

भारतीय सांस्कृतिक सम्बंध परिषद्

PRESIDENT

INDIAN COUNCIL FOR  
CULTURAL RELATIONS  
(ICCR)



### FOREWORD

ICCR has been consistently working towards fostering and strengthening cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries and towards promoting cultural exchanges with other countries. The very essence of working towards cultural exchanges is intellectual interactions which assist in better understanding between ideas of different cultures to create affinity amongst them.

The world is facing an unforeseen Pandemic in the name of Corona Virus and it is imperative for ICCR to ensure that a conducive atmosphere is created where international students and the Indian Diaspora across the globe feel connected, because together we can sail through this adversity and may even turn it into an opportunity which may benefit human race.

While celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> foundation year of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations an opportunity of exchange of experiences and ideas was created through the conduct of the online Essay Competition. I am delighted to see the overwhelming participation and I wish to congratulate all those who participated in the competition. It gives me immense pleasure to see the compilation of the selective essays of the competition in the form of an e-book and hope such endeavors will continue in the future.

(Vinay Sahasrabuddhe)

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### MESSAGE

In order to give an opportunity for the global community to interact during the lockdown caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, an online Essay Competition was held on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> Foundation Day of ICCR.

This competition was in two parts, one for ICCR students and alumni, and the other for Indian Diaspora (both NRIs & POIs). We received over 1000 entries in both categories.

This competition showed the resilience of the human spirit which refused to succumb before the onslaught of the pandemic. The power of the mind and the skill of the pen brought out wonderful specimens of writing for which I would like to compliment not only the winners but each and every participant in this competition.

To ensure a wider reach and to give people the joy of experiencing the excellent writings, ICCR is digitizing some of the best writings (top 10 entries in each category) by creating this e-book. I am confident that this e-book would provide the readers an insight into the brilliant minds of ICCR students and alumni as well as the Indian Diaspora. We shall continue to endeavour to do more such initiatives in the future.

(Dinesh K Patnaik)

# ESSAY COMPETITION 2020

On the occasion of its **70th Foundation Day**, The Indian Council for Cultural Relations announced an online Essay Competition for the following categories:

## **Category 1**

ICCR students in India and ICCR alumni overseas

**Topic of Essay:** Studying in India- My Personality Growth, My Experience

**Word Limit :** 2000 words

## **Category 2**

Indian Diaspora (both NRIs and POIs)

**Topics of Essay:** Cultural Imprint; Retrospect and Prospects.

**Word Limit :** 2000 words

Last date of Submission of essays was: 30th April 2020

Essays were requested online in English Language.

The essay competition received a humongous response. More than 1000 entries were received under both the categories and were scrutinized in two phases.

This e Book is the compilation of the top 10 essay entries under each category. The top Three entries were awarded the first, second and third positions. ICCR congratulate each and every participants for their effort in making this competition a huge success. We congratulate the winner for making excellent effort and look forward for the overwhelming participation for our future such endeavours.

Take a cruise across the rich experiences and views shared by the participants and enrich your experience.



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# CATEGORY 1: STUDYING IN INDIA

My Personality Growth, My Experience

**PARTICIPANTS**



**Ms. Sheila Stephani  
Juárez Castillo**  
(Peru)



**Tenzin Kelsang**  
(Bhutan)



**Apsara Chhetri**  
(Bhutan)



**Mr. Aristénio Caluamba**  
(Mozambique)



**Olaf Antonio  
Ciliberto Gonzalez**  
(Venezuela)



**Beata Jakusovszky**  
(Budapest, Hungary)



**Ms Baigali Tsendbal**  
(Mongolia)



**David Jebarajah**  
(Sri Lanka)



**Ashit Baran Das**  
(Bangladesh)



**Sharen Thumboo**  
(South Africa)

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# STUDYING IN INDIA

## My Personality Growth, My Experience



**Ms. Sheila Stephani  
Juárez Castillo**



*Food Industry Engineer with experience in Higher Education, Research & Development and Quality Control. Yoga practitioner since 2015. I stayed in India during February-March 2020 in Prashanti Kutiram campus of S-VYASA University, to attend the Yoga Instructor's Course (YIC). This programme is a combination of theory and practical subjects based in the four streams of yoga: Jñana Yoga, Raja Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. The main activities included asanas, pranayamas, meditation techniques, kriyas, among others.*

All of us as human beings have dreams and goals to fulfill. Depending on our stage of life, we are actively working to achieve some of them, but we keep others floating in our minds to stare at them from time to time when we want to dream a little. Visiting India was one of them since my early childhood. I started practicing yoga five years ago and to be honest, I never thought that someday I was going to do a teacher training. In fact, when I heard about ITEC Scholarships I looked for an opportunity in my field, but I did not find a suitable training related to my background. It was simple curiosity that led me to the Yoga Instructor's Course (YIC) at S-VYASA and I thought that there would be no better way to get to know India than through a programme like that, in the world's first yoga university. Despite the doubts that always arise when a new direction appears in the way, I decided to apply because I felt it was the right time to take a further step in my spiritual path... and I was not wrong. The picture changed completely shortly before being told that I had been selected. In less than a month, I had no job and my boyfriend moved to another country to do a master's degree. Certainly, I was devastated but some might say that it is the hardest moments that bring out the best in us. In those circumstances, with the valuable support of my family, the most important journey of this lifetime began that to this day has no end... but I will talk about that later. For sure, it is challenging to summarise an experience like this in an essay. It would probably give even to write a book. But of all the lessons and memories, I chose to tell my story through some moments and persons that made this trip a milestone in my life.

After a long trip of two and a half days, I reached the farthest country I have ever been to. One of the first things I learned upon arrival was about the four streams of yoga: JñanaYoga - the path of knowledge, Raja Yoga - the path of willpower, Karma Yoga - the path of action, and Bhakti Yoga - the path of devotion. Of these four, the last one caught my attention due to its relationship with divine love and emotions, topics that for many years were hard to understand for me. There are five ways to express love (Bhavas) according to Bhakti Yoga and there is no order, no better or right way. Each one is a relationship between you and the Divine, between you and another person or simply you. In the end, all three are equal knowing that divinity lives within each of us. At least that is how I understand it.

The first one, Dasya Bhava, is the surrendering of a servant to his master. Probably one of the best examples was an old lady who was a kitchen staff member. Most of the time she was standing by the door to say hello and remind us (with a big smile, of course) to take off our shoes before entering the dining hall, especially during lunch time. However, every single morning her spot was in front of the entrance, next to Shiva and Annapurna statues, displaying a different act of worship by cleaning, praying, decorating with flowers, lighting some candles, etc. I observed this kind of practice in children, adults and elderly people across campus throughout my stay, but this lady melted my heart from the beginning. In a short time, I realised that in India, a guest is a sacred person and that attitude of service awakens in people the warmest feelings such as kindness and gratitude, making this an endless cycle.

The next one, Sakhya Bhava, can be defined as a true friendship in which the devotee treats divinity as his equal. Our group of 58 people included 19 nationalities from 4 continents, so the cultural differences were quite a few. Nevertheless, for the second week and incredible as it may seem, many of us already felt the effects of yoga and meditation on a daily basis. Sooner or later, each of us completely surrendered to that wonderful state of joy and love that led us to express endearment to people we hardly knew some days ago. I was shocked because in my entire life, creating bonds of affection and trust has never been so easy (How I loved that people!!). In addition to this, I was also intrigued watching both men and women holding their hands in public. Then I have been told that in India, this is a sweet gesture of friendship or camaraderie and I must admit that made me smile countless times so... why not hold hands in public being friends, relatives or partners? It

is a beautiful practice, so I highly recommend it.

Any of the group members would say that the YIC-ITEC coordinator, Mr. Raghu, behaved like a loving father to all of us. He is the absolute representative of Vatsalya Bhava, the parent's love to their children. He used to be with us during classes and his presence was so powerful that when he left the campus for a few days, his absence was more than evident. In his view, there is always something extremely good and unique about every individual on Earth, and it is only when we begin seeing and focusing on the bright side of people that "dealing" with others becomes simple. It took me a while to realise that this was the key to his infinite patience and kindness, which are only a couple of the valuable virtues that belong to any great mentor. Before our last Happy Assembly, he delivered an unforgettable motivational speech to make us feel supported and loved, just like when your parents go to see you at the school performance. I bet all my fellows felt like real stars that night because during the presentations, the entire audience applauded, cheered, and danced. Undoubtedly, Mr. Raghu is and will be a magnificent role model for all of us.

A few days later upon our arrival, we had the opportunity to celebrate Maha Shivaratri or "The Great Night of Shiva" inside the campus. The first activity was a pooja in one of the temples, very early in the morning. One of the biggest physical challenges for me during this training was getting used to sitting on the floor and I was worried because the ceremony would last an hour or so. After the first 15 minutes, my legs started to cramp so I had to stand up and leave my first-row spot because the pain was already unbearable.

Unfortunately, it was so crowded that I could not even enter the place again so, upset as I was, I came back to my room. Once there, I took a relaxing shower to slow down my thoughts and stop punishing myself due to my physical limitations. Next, I decided to take my breakfast right there, all by myself, watching the landscape from my balcony and enjoying that serene and peaceful feeling. That morning I experienced for the first time on that trip, the joy of solitude, far from any disturbance. That attitude of peace is called Santa Bhava.

The day passed calmly, and I was feeling content, thinking about the celebrations that would be seen in the evening. Owing to the unpleasant situation in the morning, I decided to place myself in a higher spot to take photos this time and where I could sit comfortably. While we waited for the ceremony to begin, my mates told me that the festival celebrated the union of Shiva and Parvati in marriage, which represents the love of husband and wife or Madhurya Bhava, the fifth type of emotion. I have no words to describe properly what happened next during the ceremony. All those signs of love and respect as Bhajans, mantra chanting, worshipping of lingam with milk, honey and water, offerings of fruit, sweets and flowers... At the end, the statue of Shiva decorated with colourful arrangements and

flowers was revealed and it was then that I burst into tears, overwhelmed by a powerful feeling of gratitude. Even writing about this moment, my throat has become a lump, remembering the people around me, their smiles, their hugs and our tearful laughter. I just could not believe that I had travelled so far not only to learn about yoga but about the greatest lesson of all, love in all its forms. Almost at the beginning of this story I mentioned that this journey had no end yet and this is due to the global pandemic situation. Hours before my departure from India, the state of emergency was declared in my country and international arrivals were blocked so I found myself stranded halfway, unable to get home. Fortunately, someone welcomed me and until today, I have food, shelter and a great company. I am alive and healthy, and my loved ones too, so I have got so many things to be thankful for. Sometimes I wonder how I would have faced quarantine if I had not lived that month in India... It probably would have taken me a little longer to adapt to this everyday uncertainty. For my part, I know that soon I will find a way to share what I have experienced during this travel because it is wonderful to learn how to live in the present moment but, to be honest, life is not the same if we do not think about the future... a future of dreams and goals to fulfill.



The Indian Council for  
Cultural Relations

# STUDYING IN INDIA

## My Personality Growth, My Experience



**Aristénio Caluamba**  
(Mozambique)

My name is Aristenio A. Nunes Guido Caluamba, Also Known As ALCY, I'm From Mozambique.

I Was ICCR Scholar in National Institute of Technology Warangal, in India, Graduated in Computer Science and Engineering!

My Duration of stay in India was 6 years. from 2013 to 2019.

I was 2 times Inter NIT Tournament athlete of the Year. I Also was part of The Best Indian Dance Reality Show called: DANCE PLUS from Star plus TV.

After being an exchange student in the United States of America for 1 year and get to learn the American culture, I can say that it was an amazing experience of life and when I returned back to my country in Mozambique, I said to myself that I was never going to get another opportunity to travel to another country and I was glad I got to visit the first and one country in my entire life.

While scrolling on Facebook I came across a post that talked about ICCR scholarships. I clicked the post, got all the information, and only people from the south of my country could apply for the scholarship and I lived very far in the northern region of the country. I didn't have any finances to travel to the south city of Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, to apply for it. So, I spoke to my mom about it but she didn't have the finances either; however, she made some loans, and was able to give me some funds to travel over 2000km to the south, specifically in Maputo city, Capital of Mozambique to apply for the scholarship.

Luckily enough, I was the only and first student from the north of my country to be granted the scholarship to study in India for a period of 4 years. Little did I know that those 4 years would turn out to bring the most "amazing", "challenging", and yet "impactful" and life changing experiences of my entire life!

I was so excited to travel to India that when the Indian Embassy in my country asked me when I would want to travel to India I just said "tomorrow", that's when they actually gave me the Indian visa on the same day and the next day I travelled to India. On the very first day that I arrived in India, in the town I was suppose to stay, I made my first mistake by paying an auto driver 500 rupees in around 1km distance, a very close distance to my college that I was supposed to pay only 50 rupees, and I thought the 500 bill was 50.

I got settled in at my Hostel at the National Institute of Technology Warangal, and the hostel was pretty organized and well maintained for the international students. My first experience in the food court happened the very same day I settled in, when I went for dinner, which is where I got my first culture shock on food: it was so spicy to me because in my country we don't eat spicy food, so that was a very difficult experience on the very first day of my stay in India.

Adapting to the food was a little bit hard, but after a few months I was already used to the spicy food, and I started to actually love almost all the Indian dishes, from panipuri, biriyani, butter chicken, butter naan, chapati, etc, I can sincerely say that I love Indian food now. Another difficult thing to adapt to was the weather. It was very hot and humid, and even the fans that we had in our room couldn't help much, even some of the electric coolers could only blow hot air in the room; that sometimes made it very hard to concentrate whenever I was studying.

Now talking about studying, that was also one of my biggest difficulties I found in the very first few months of my stay in India. Learning the lectures at my College was very tough for me, given that NITs Academic level is very advanced compared to my country, thus it was very tough for me to understand a lot of lectures, that in my very first Semester, I was failing in a lot of the subjects. I even reached a point where I wanted to quit college. I called my mom literally crying and telling her that I couldn't handle the pressure and the advance level no more and I wanted to go back home. But she tried to encourage me, although I had made my mind that I was done with college. A very close friend of mine called Harsh, whom I'd shared the story with, taught me something that I will never forget in my life. He said: "Brother, no matter what the problem is that you are facing right now, we can always find a way to hack it!" And this "Jagaad" saying, boosted me up for not quitting and ultimately motivating me to find a way to overcome this difficulty. After that, I started working hard with the help of my friend Harsh, which is something that really made me love my Indian friends, as they had compassion and love towards me. As time went by, I recovered all my failing subjects (backlogs), and I was doing great in college.

After few months settled, I Joined a Dance and Dramatics club, because I love dancing. I remember my first dance performance in my college big auditorium was super amazing that everyone in my college, including the teachers, were talking about me like "that there is a NRI student from Africa that is very talented in our college" and because of that they opened some space for me so I could teach them my style of dancing to students and even my teachers' kids, and that was an amazing experience that really helped me connect more with my Indian friends.

I am also very talented in sports like football, basketball and Athletics. I was the best athlete in my college and they used to take me for one of the biggest INTER NITs Football and Athletics Tournaments, and I always won many Trophies and Gold medals for our college as the best 100 meter sprinter, best triple jumper, best long jumper and the best high jumper and Overall best athlete of the Tournaments. That opened a lot of doors for me, other students from different NIT colleges started connecting with me and asking me about my country, about my life, etc., and I used to love these opportunities to share about my experiences and tips about the skills that I have.

I got a lot of opportunities to share about my culture and some skills to my college friends, but I also learned a lot from my college friends. My college friends and India in general thought me a lot of their culture, but I know I didn't even grasp 50% of the Indian culture, because I know India is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world.

From language to food to religion, dance to music, architecture and customs differ from region to region within the country. There is a lot that I learnt from the Indian culture and if I have to mention the words won't be

enough, but one thing that the Indian culture thought me is compassion and unity; despite having so many cultural diversities, Indians have "unity in diversity".

Another important thing that India thought me is the respect for elders, even respect to anybody. I say that because in every religious festival, like Diwali, Holi, Christmas, and Eid-al-Fitr we used to always celebrate together and there was no division in our college and even in the other cities that I used to travel within India, Unity was always there!

Dance is what I love to do and Bollywood has a lot of dancing! I became so interested in Bollywood dances and TV shows that I even learned a bit of Hindi, and I used to watch some hindi movies and TV shows and even dance to few Bollywood songs. In my last semester of college, I received a call from a STAR PLUS TV Production team asking me to audition for The Biggest Indian Dance Reality TV show called Dance Plus Season 5.

I remember saying to myself "This show is for Indians only", but they said they were trying to expand the TV show and that they loved seeing my Bollywood dance video that I had posted on YouTube. Additionally, they were trying to have the First Foreigner in their TV show. I was shocked with too much emotion and I just told them I would be pleased to audition for it; that's when they told that I had to finish my college, first. As soon as I graduated from my College in August 2019, they got in touch with me to get a new visa and I had to go back to my country. I got the new TV Show Visa and went to Mumbai for the Auditions. And I got selected to be in the Biggest Dance TV Show in India. I got to perform on TV where millions across India and millions across the world watch the Show.

I made History by becoming the First

Mozambican and African to participate and appear in any Indian Dance TV Show ever! It was such a proud moment for me and my country, that even the news in my country talked about this historic moment and my dance video performance was all over the media and the news in my country, from TV shows to individuals, everybody started contacting me to schedule interviews for as soon as I returned to Mozambique from the Dance TV Show in India.

This opportunity completely opened so many doors for me that I could have never imagined. After the TV show I got the opportunity to go around New Delhi, Goa, Pune, Mumbai and Bangalore for dance workshops and to become a judge of dance competitions in many Indian Colleges and events. After returning back home, I went on to attend the interviews I had scheduled on many local entertainment TV shows, and I had the opportunity to share about my experience of studying in India, as well as the history that I made.

Nevertheless, I can easily say that studying in India has so far been the greatest experience of my entire life, as it completely changed my life and made me grow mentally, physically and spiritually. It really changed my life for the greatest, it was an experience that I loved it; I will never forget and will treasure it forever.

And because I understand what it feels like to come from an underprivileged community, I plan on using this life experience that I gained studying in India to help my community, my country and if ever possible, the world. I will always share this experience with my family, friends, people around the world and even my future kids, as I believe and know that in some way it will have positive impact on everyone.



# STUDYING IN INDIA

## My Personality Growth, My Experience



**Baigali Tsedenbal**  
(Mongolia)



Mrs. Baigali Tsedenbal is a Ph.D. research scholar from Mongolia, under Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarship. Baigali pursues her Ph.D. degree in the field of International Relations in the Department of International Relations, Goa University, India. She has experience working in the International Study Abroad Program and the Government University. Therefore, she has professional experience in both multicultural international organizations and domestic academic institutions. She has BA in English and Information Technology and MA in International Relations. Baigali is doing her research

COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE CAN BE EVERYWHERE,  
BUT WELL-BEING IS IN INDIA

People who come for the first time to India, tend to get distracted over small things in the beginning. Those distractions can be the crowd of people, poor hygiene in the service areas, and insects in the rooms etc. Sadly, even before coming, most people already perceive those images in their mind with what they had seen on media about this country, though they are aware of what media exaggerates the most to entertain and to get attention.

Depending on individual's knowledge, values and belief systems, those first impressions change differently for every individual. I am from the most sparsely populated country in the world, Mongolia. In the beginning, I felt that difficulty of crowd in public areas as most people do, but soon after I understood that this crowd was not everywhere. Similarly, those issues aforementioned are not throughout the country. Indeed, India is rapidly developing democracy, and a prosperous country ruling over a billion population successfully.

### **Better me...**

I have become less consumeristic. Right before coming to India, I had the opportunity to visit and explore the USA through the government scholarship. Everything looked great, enticing, qualified and big in size at the beginning.

After a while, my attitude towards their lifestyle turned out to be very critical. I found out that the way of life there is tremendously extravagant and unhealthy. Those excessive inappropriate consumption lead to many social issues and public health problems. Furthermore, public mentality is inaccurate; when things are excessively available, people do not really mind and care about others, and the future of this world.

India is just opposite to what I mentioned above. In the beginning, one may find things are tardy, poorly developed and small in size. The others may even feel the inadequacy of basic needs. But, after a while, the more people experience and adjust to life here, they understand that the lifestyle in India is the most economically and environmentally friendly way of living. Let me take a few everyday examples; there is a coke costs 20 RMB, it looked too small and funny in size.

Nonetheless, I realized that was the best size for a one-time use. Literally, people do not want things more than their requirement, they just want a little taste and feeling of something. Also, in most parts of India, typical household items, furniture and utilities used are very humble and minimal, however those things can give the feeling of natural, authentic, simple and down to earth living. Another good example can be taken here is I always had a strong greed for materialistic things. Here, I have just three kurtas which are comfortable, comfy and enough for my daily use. I feel satisfied. Living in India affects me in positive way of living less consumer. Factually, typical Indian people are not very materialistic. Once people do not have intense desire for wealth, their life becomes peaceful. This is to say that from the surface, typically India seems underprivileged and not luxurious, but once people have the opportunity to experience life here, they assume this is the best way for a peaceful living.

### ***Everyone's life is dear to them.***

I now understand the meaning of coexisting and compassion towards other living things. We are not the only living creatures in this planet. Living in India made me understand it is everyone's world. Right after my arrival in India, I was so distracted by the small animals like lizards and snakes in the yard and insects in the room. I was complaining about how dangerous living here and how I was irritated by the other creatures around. One of my professors listened to me patiently and replied "They are not living around you or in your room. Indeed, you are living in their place". That was the thought-provoking. My selfish attitude is changing. Every morning, I wake up listening to birds singing in my university campus. Every living things has right to coexist in this world.

### ***Eating less meat***

I tremendously reduced the consumption of meat in my life. For Indians, it could be something very easy. But for Mongolians, it is hard to imagine even one-time meal without meat. I realized that I used to consume a lot of meat. Here in India, most people are mindful eating meat excessively. Even if they eat, the portion of meat is very less. Before, I thought it was impossible to cook a real meal without meat. Indeed, I found much better alternatives here. Now, I feel good to see the restaurants mount a sign saying "PURE VEGETARIAN". Unconsciously, I choose to go to them. Naturally, you feel guilty to eat excess amount of meat among vegetarians. Eating less meat make me feel lighter, healthier and more humane.

### ***Now, I am healthier.***

I observed a noticeable mental and physical health improvement in myself. For over the last ten years, I was suffering from intense back pain. I even had surgeries twice due to unbearable pain. Thereafter, I was still feeling the uneasiness and that gave me a thought that I need to go for surgery again. One day, I found Sadguru's talk, one of the living wisdoms in India. He said "Healing one's body starts from healing the mind. Sickness is in the mind". From there on, I am trying to meditate every morning to bring positive thoughts, and doing some simple yoga exercises. India is not only developed in contemporary medication, but also is advanced in traditional way of healing. For the last three months, I have seen improvement in my concentration level, and I did not feel any uneasiness in my back. I became healthier with the help of Indian philosophy and traditional way of healing.



## **Experienced me ...**

Indians are more humane. Recently, while I was chatting with my friends on the balcony which offers a good view, I said "India is beautiful". Everyone agreed by saying "yes" and nodding their heads. A French girl asked me "Do you know what makes India beautiful?" I promptly answered "Nature is beautiful". She said "No, there are even more beautiful places around the world" and she added "People make this country beautiful".

That's the country where humanity exists more than any other part of world. In our country street dogs are rare and we think they are dangerous to be around. We teach our kids not to interact and touch them. Sometimes, they become extinct due to seasonal shooting. I had been bitten by a street dog when I was a kid. Therefore, I am scared of dogs.

In India, street dogs are everywhere, but they are considered to be loved and cared. And they are not dangerous, indeed very friendly towards humans. It can be observed most Indians treat kindly. During this quarantine, I heard many incidents such as people feeding and taking care of them. Recently, I saw the hostel girls call the animal care to take care of the newborn puppies and they were evacuated to the animal shelter immediately. What I understood is how you treat them is how they will react to you.

## **Diversity, not racism**

This is my second opportunity studying in India. 2 years ago, I came to India for a short-term training under the Indian government scholarship. I met many international friends and leaders. India gives lot of opportunity for foreign students. For instance, ICCR has given scholarship to the international students for over 70 years. India provides with immense fund for

education field, but also it is the country where massive immigrants from neighboring countries who work and sustain their life. In our campus, most of the security staffs are Nepalese. This is the country where diversity exists rather than racism. I have a typical asian mainland look and I have never encountered any discrimination in this country. Indeed, I am touched by the Indian hospitality and warmth.

## **Religious diversity**

Unofficial statistic states there are over 500 gods in India. In our hostel, there is a Muslim, a Christian, a Hindu, and an atheist in one corridor. There is not any hesitant to communicate with one another. Everyone understands each other's beliefs and values. Recently, I visited one of the biggest Buddhist institution in Karnataka state. I admired the enormity and aesthetic look of the temple. That gave a thought "how India generously fund and nurture the Buddhism, even though there is only 0.7 of the population is Buddhist". This the example this country respects the freedom of religious belief. India is a religious diversified country.

## **Women are respected**

Many people think India is not safe country for women. I vividly remember the incident 2012 Delhi gang rape. After watching the news on TV, my first impression about this country was very negative. It projected an adverse image of the country to the world. When I came to India, my family members and friends were very much concerned about my safety. But, is there a country that is 100 percent safe for women? We can never say that. India is taking systematic measures to offer security to women. It is going pretty well for a country with over a billion population. Most places are comparatively safe for women, especially, Goa is the safest place for women in India. In general women in the society are

against sexual harassment on the walls of the buildings. In the bus, even older men offer their seats to women, if they see women are standing.

### ***Incredible Indian Culture***

Ancient Mongolians were nomadic. Therefore, tangible historical remains are rarely left in Mongolia. India is one of the oldest sedentary nations and the country itself is like museum for us. 32 of the UNESCO World heritage sites are in this country. I am excited to explore the incredible India in the next three years, while I am studying here.

I am not certain if people know Indian music is even more wonderful than the world wonder Taj Mahal? In general, I cannot really stand with old music. Here, even old music is soulful to me. I feel both the musicality and spirituality in Indian music. Sometimes, it makes me forget time and travel virtually to different places.

When I was a child, there was only one national channel which broadcasted Indian movies every Thursday. There were not many movies so they repeat it many times, I was never tired of watching them again and again. Recently, I watched "Tube light" and "Dangal", and I recommended everyone I know to watch it.

### ***Educated me ...***

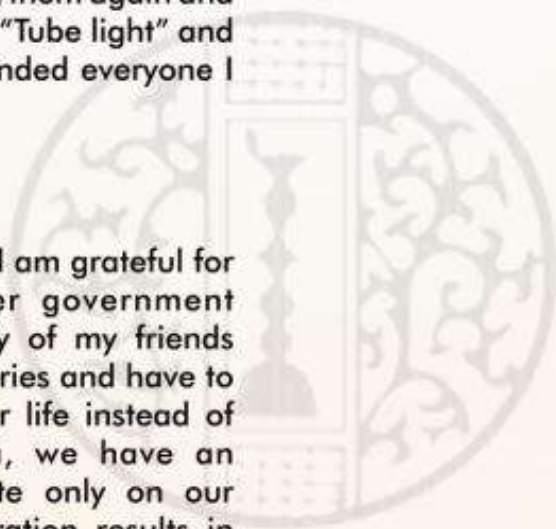
Every morning, I wake and am grateful for studying in India under government scholarship. I know many of my friends chose to go to other countries and have to work hard to sustain their life instead of studying. Here in India, we have an opportunity to concentrate only on our studies. This full concentration results in successful and qualified education. Many Indian universities hold top rankings in the

world. Thus, studying in India means becoming qualified as a global professional. From the time I came here, I can see a lot of improvement in my English proficiency and academic achievement. I am certain that I will be improved a lot in the next three years. I am doing my Ph.D. in India-Mongolia security and development relations. The outcome of my study will definitely encourage the relationship of our countries.

I believe India will lead Mongolia and other Asian countries in the advancement of new era of technology, industry and development in this century.

Staying in India gives me an opportunity to expand my outlook of the human and nature and bring me the mental and physical well-beings. Moreover, I am getting educated as a global level professional.

***For me, living in India is a privilege.***



# STUDYING IN INDIA

## My Personality Growth, My Experience

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**Tenzin Kelsang**



I started my college when I was 18 in Delhi Technology University in 2019. I am currently studying Bachelors in Technology. I have always loved the fusion of culture within and without the college. I have travelled a lot more since then to many amusing places within India and hope to find amazing journeys as such. I am also great-full for the scholarships provided by ICCR that gives many people around the world the chance to pursue their passion of learning.

Time-the imaginary fourth coordinate that is the principle mandate for the existence of life and the galactic beauty we have long discovered. It moves on no matter the circumstance, being universally linear and having the ability to rapture us, and make us get lost in the wonder of it all. Its knowledge seems to be what quantifies every moment we live and every memory our brain can recall and remember from each reminiscence. This uncanny coordinate seem to be what led me to the beginning of my college days in Delhi accompanied by five other of my high school friends and three seniors.

Human are equipped with the beautiful and mysterious gift of premonitions. If you listen and look forward to what you feel with a decent amount of expectations it seems to unravel itself in the least expected ways. Mine said, and if I recall correctly, that my life was going to take a turn and there were new adventures waiting. It's not that I haven't been to India before, but this time it was different. I was no longer with my family on a pilgrimage. This time was different, and I had to remind that to myself repeated number of times with each passage of days that seemed too short to live in.

In August, Delhi's temperature was a hot thirty degree or above. Since we come from a country where the hottest temperature all year round wouldn't exceed twenty five, the heat was striking us, but all that seem to be in the background of my mind as I scanned the people and the surrounding I saw myself in after two and half hours of a daunting flight. After all the heat was like a free sauna. Once the brief colloquy with the seniors who came to pick us up ended, they amused us with the tales of the wildest of things they have experienced in a year along their journey.

Seeing impressive technology is one thing and experiencing it a whole different thing. I still remember the first time I stepped into a metro station. The punctuality in the timing and the unimpressed faces of the people riding it made it even more of a fascination for me. It was certain that I have entered a metropolitan era where every people had somewhere to be accompanied by a strict timing to follow. The scanning of the card to the mapping of the destination seemed too bizarrely complicated for me at first. That was when I realized that the place where I come from really was frozen in time and if I am wrong then it certainly was taking its time with development, and that was when the thought of our purpose of being here daunted upon me. The timelessness of the developing technologies all over the world seemed too fast but it was something worth chasing.

The parapet picture that I have seemed to have built came tumbling down slowly. Since Delhi is not the safest place to be in, the restrictions set in front of me before I even set forth were upsetting. With time, I have seemed to outgrow my fears with each travel that I set on alone. The attention you get when you look different from the rest is flattering and at times appalling but I believe it's how you digest that attention which really matters as I believe looking different is a crime committed in the eyes of the blind.

My college friends were from all over the continent and beyond due to which I had a lot to talk about to my folks back home as well. It was a fun experience to get to know the different cultural backgrounds of my colleagues, but the first few weeks, the people of the same country seemed to stick together. After the timid weeks of getting settled, I interacted with the Indian and the international students and realized that though we seem to have the chasm in our culture, we all had one thing in common-humanity.

Academic learning was hard to catch up to at first and the anxiety of failure only seemed to build up. This was a challenge emotionally and intellectually. Our country had only one common exam to get into colleges unlike that in India. Most of my Indian friends had tried for IIT institutions and had impressive grades in their examinations where they had already studied the first year college course. The other international students were also well equipped in academics where some had advanced studies in higher education in their country and some had already studied a year of college in their country. As was quoted by a wise man once, 'Most people mistake the level of education to intelligence'. My misconception of people with high grades to intelligence was realized when I started to score better than my last. I realized that intelligence isn't even

half of the things you learn for an examination, but it is the ability to understand the underlying truth to every equation put forth by mankind.

Success isn't about having a monotonous repeated schedule for each day and knowing what you are going to do tomorrow; instead it is breaking the monotony of life and being able to foresee your potential beyond it. Every boulder blocking your way is a class teaching you something new or reminding you of a principle that the busy hurdle of life made you forget. I began to go out of the presumably safe cocoon that I have seemed to live in since I reached here. Me and my friends went to play basketball and made a lot of new friends in the court. It was always refreshing to play and get tired during anxious times. I learned that studies aren't the only thing that a man should hope for expertise in, it is finding your passion and boldly reaching out to it and that for me defined success.

My friends and I visited a lot of places during the weekends that for the first few weeks it almost seemed like a necessity. We went to many places like Red Fort, Humayun's Tomb, India Gate, the infamous Sarojni Nagar that all of my Indian friends seem to love to talk about giving credit to the affordably bizarre price tag on the fashionable merchandise it had to offer and many other places including huge shopping precincts. My favorite would be the visit to the historical dwellings and the aristocratic palaces of the former emperors and sultans that had ruled Delhi and the tales the walls bring from centuries back that you can almost feel the essence of the times these monuments had lived through by the echo against the domes and the intricate architecture that held it all together. Seeing all these places entombed in time only fueled my imagination of the era India has been through, leaving me want to douse in the remarkable history India had to offer.

By visiting many of the places via metro, I also began to decode the art of travelling by the metro without feeling lost and apprehended. I guess the fear only lives in the mind that doesn't want to grow.

To experience the magic of coexistence was to actually experience it. Of all the places, 'Majnu ka Tilla' was the first we visited. It was a place where the coexistence of cultures cast a spell on one leaving you wanting to only dwell in it more. It is a place which was largely occupied by Tibetan refugees that now seem to hold citizenship in India. The Tibetan vendors sold merchandise and traditional foods like momos and laphings. The place is filled with cafes that offer the exquisite zing of the fusion of western, Tibetan and Indian culture and handicrafts that sell traditional westernized cultural goods. I was reminded of the days of my family pilgrimages by the prayers flags and monks meeting their old friends with rosaries entangled round their wrists. The old people in their traditional dresses reciting prayers and the young in western attires around the small Buddhist temple was a sight that tells one many things if one has the patience with the time to listen to it. The Tibetans here had the freedom to practice their devotion and cultural heritages which is still considered a forbidden fruit for the people in their homeland being under the oppression of communist rule. I realized that it's not the people who are to blame for cultural blasphemy but the perceptions that are rooted in their minds. The harmony in the coexistence of different cultures weighed upon the world the unfathomable beauty and questioned the accusations of the tapered minded.

As George Bernard Shaw once quoted, 'There is no sincere love than the love for food', the richness in taste of the food that Indian culture offers is appetizing and succulent enough for a person from a different culture to fall miserably in love with

it. To the international students that I know who haven't found their way to the flavorsome journey yet, I only pray that you find your way sooner. I wasn't a novice to Indian food before I came to Delhi since it has been savored in my house long before, but somehow eating it in India had a different savor to it. The flavor of the intricate mixture from the variety of spices and the sweet desert that always accompanied the food is like a magical palate that always deems success in casting a spell upon me.

Communication is a key to learning about the world out of your own. My country being the next door neighbor of India has the Indian influence much larger than the western. Most of the people in my country can speak Hindi and it comes out as a revelation to my Indian mates when I utter a Hindi word. At first I wasn't too keen on revealing my knowledge on the languages I can speak, although not fluently. Then with time I realized that it was more comfortable for my Indian friends to speak in Hindi than English. It did feel like I fit in for a while as it seems to make them forget I am from a different country with a population lesser than this state itself, but every time I forget a word, it seems to remind them. Now I don't want to fit in at all, instead I humbly admit to the fact that I can speak and understand a bit of five languages which soon will be six with Deutsch which I am still learning in my college.

Delhi is a mix of many people from all around the world and each had a different and enrapturing linguistic ability to communicate with the rest of the world.

I wanted to see more places in India so for winter vacation I decided to stay in India than going back to my country as it felt like there was more to see than my eyes had laid its sight on. My family came to Delhi and I went to pick them up via the Airport metro express.

I took them to visit my college campus and my favorite canteen which served 'alu paratha' that was my absolute favorite. I took them for a tour around Delhi via India's deepest metro station-Hauz Khas and I got to relive the first moments when I went on the metro, looking at their expression to see the engineering science that they only had known virtually. We went to Kerala for pilgrimage to heed His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings where I bought a Tibetan traditional 'chuba' and had the opportunity to wear it on the main occasion. We then went to journey the famous Golden Triangle that connects Delhi, Jaipur and Agra. The monuments and the story each place had to tell were overwhelming and profound.

In the eight month journey I had the opportunity to challenge the steady plateaued life I once lived and I am grateful for my decisions to do so. As I type to conclude my piece, presently in quarantine in my country, I only wish I had more memories to write about as is the sin of a

man to desire. The journeys that the metro accompanied me to would be a memory to find comfort in at this challenging time the world faces at present. I have been taught a lot and the lessons come not only from the classrooms of my college but also the historical journey that each monument sent me to; the finding of the heritage that the rest of the world deems to be consumed with its lost land and the connection that I now have with people from all over the world that speak in volume of the common humanity we share despite the chasm in our cultural background. Like the novice on the metro, I am learning to decode myself in a place where everyone seems to have understood what they want in life or rather how to ride the linear rails of the metro.

I would like to thank the ICCR committee for upholding the value of the importance of exchanging the ethos each culture has to share by offering students scholarships in various fields almost like a free ticket to tread the path where people live as one.



The Indian Council for  
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# STUDYING IN INDIA

## My Personality Growth, My Experience



**Apsara Chhetri**



I am Apsara Chhetri, 23 years old, from the landlocked country of Bhutan. I am a final year BAMS scholar, pursuing my degree from NIA, Jaipur. This four years of stay in India has been one of the most fascinating part of my life, with Ayurveda as a right platform to mould myself into a better being. Being a girl born and raised in the foothills of the Himalaya, I was mesmerised upon seeing the plains of Jaipur city. I was astonished by its erstwhile charm and awe-inspiring architectural structures in its vicinity. Living in India has inarguably helped me to get out of my shell. I feel so fortunate that I will be taking many unforgettable moments of happiness, kindness, joy, thrill and warm life-long fellowships from others in my life. The Indian culture, values, ethics and experiences might be antique but they have unquestionably revitalized my personality and perspective towards life. One thing is certain that it is impossible to leave India with the same person as when I arrived here, and I am very much excited to meet my brand new version. Indians truly abide by the popular mantra "Atithi Devo Bhava" and divine values like "Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam".

" India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend and the great grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and most constructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only". – Mark Twain.

It may sound poetic, but my experiences are far more than this romantic expression. India is truly a land full of wonders. When I first visited, I was stunned by the richness of the land, by its lush beauty and exotic architecture, people's humble nature and hospitality, love and affection to all, patriotism in their blood, and by its ability to overload the senses with pure intensity of its colours, smells, tastes and sounds. It was as if all of my life I had been under the clouds of fields and forest concealed by the blanket of dullness. However, being in India has added brilliant colors to my mundane world, and reassured that life is more beautiful. I was more of a cocoon yet to be hatched, someone who hasn't seen much of life, but my journey to India was more of unrolling myself into a magical butterfly, giving wings to my dreams, in a whole new world with new horizons to pursue, a hundred and thousand things to see, and with Ayurveda as the right platform to mould myself into a better being.

It was in the summer of 2016 that I steered up my courage to fly away from the comfort of my home to the beautiful pink city of India- Jaipur, to start the next phase of my life as a medical student. After crossing miles, I finally landed to that place which kept me fascinated from the very first glance. I landed in Jaipur in the witching hour, with the coldest of air brewing over the city's sky. The entire city was asleep by then. Though things weren't visible much then as my eyes were drowned in sleep, nevertheless I was astonished by its erstwhile charm and awe-inspiring architectural structures in its vicinity. Being a girl born and raised on the foothills of Himalaya, in a land locked country, I was mesmerised upon seeing the plains of Jaipur city, where the pleasing pink colour still welcomes.

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The concept of Ayurveda was a whole new thing for me, yet I was thrilled with joy to devote myself and drink-in the essence of Ayurveda. Ayurveda is one of the oldest system of medicines originated in Indian subcontinent about 5000 years ago. It is a holistic approach to medical science and combines profound thoughts of medicine and philosophy. It is the science of life and longevity. Moreover, it is a completely naturalistic system of medicine that depends on diagnosis of the human body based on the body humours termed as vata, pitta and kapha.

However beautiful the Ayurveda journey was, the hurdles were still challenging . Learning Ayurveda, by no means was a cakewalk. Ayurveda texts were all in Sanskrit, and I knew nothing about this ancient Indian language. I was at complete loss, felt low and was afraid that I will fail in exams. That's where my friends and teachers came to my rescue. My Sanskrit teacher gave all his time and energy and guided us to learn the tricky secrets of Sanskrit. Thanks to their kind hearts, I always received a great jolt of energy to keep on going. This particular phase of time taught me to help others as much as I can, because helping others never does any harm.

Amidst the busy lives and sounds of automobiles hitting our ears, the roadside "Chai" blended so well in rich flavours dipped in with the biscuits that comes in a variety of taste. This cup of "Chai" everyday after class was a lovely excuse to bond with friends and deepen the friendship. Also, India is quite famous for its diverse multi-cuisine, which is reminiscent of unity in diversity. Trying out the various Indian dishes were a treat to self as it reflects a perfect blend of various cultures and ages. Throughout India, spices are used generously in food, and that every single spice carries loads of nutritional as well as medicinal properties.

My stay in India was more of a vacation with innumerable events taking place. It was when I was on the verge of completing my first academic year, we had a big day in our college. The Rastriya Ayurveda Yuva Mahotsava (RAYM-2017) was being held in our college, but this was not it. What stole the headline was when we unitedly set the Guinness World Record for giving 'Nasya-Karma' treatment to maximum number of individuals simultaneously. Apart from that, we had series of cultural events. My seniors and friends encouraged me to actively participate in this event. That day I donned my Bhutanese dress "Kira" and it made me feel proud to represent my country. This event worked as an ice-breaker as many people came up to me asking about my dress, and the culture and traditions of Bhutan. I was deeply warmed with their friendly gesture.

The " Hindu Heritage Foundation" trip was in itself a big achievement. Getting to meet the legendary figure like Baba Ram Dev, attending the sacred ritual at River Ganga, celebrating the 'International Yoga Festival' , experiencing the festival of 'Holi' for the first time, was in itself a dream come true. Adding more to it, this trip taught me the divine values that the Indians abide by, like "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"( the world is one family) and "Atithi Devo Bhava"( guests are equivalent to god). These phrases particularly were so very reassuring, cheerful and solacing. This was my first ever solo trip and it gave me a unique experience and a great opportunity for self-reflection and moving at an individual pace. It enabled me to be independent, make decisions, boost up my confidence and step out of my comfort zone.

Our college is plagued by many international students and this in a way creates a platform of interactions and cultural exchange.



Being with friends from various countries made me realize that connecting with communities from all around the world will ensure that you get to really embrace diversity. I can't deny how I practised to learn Hindi, Sanskrit, Thai and Persian, although I couldn't chisel it to perfection. One of the most memorable part of college are the festivals, which indeed gifts you with a massive package of memories. Despite belonging to different countries and different backgrounds, we learned to live unitedly. Greeting people with colours of love on Holi, lighting up lanterns in the Diwali nights, attending the glorious Indian weddings, trying up the 'Saree' and 'Lehenga', rushing to the church for the 'Christmas carols', having feasts on 'Eid-nights', and of course the birthday celebrations which remained incomplete without the ritual of plastering cake on the faces. All these little things gave us opportunity to view the world from a different lens. It broadened one's horizons and increased the tendency of acceptance. I was lucky to witness many Indian festivals. I love the vigour and enthusiasm of Indians with which they make every festival a grand event. In this world where people grow distant with time, Indians under pretext of festivals bring people more closer to eachother. I enjoyed these festivals all the more by their kindness, love and incredible hospitality. They truly abide by their popular mantra "Atithi Devo Bhava". It was during my stay in India where I learned to embrace the uncertainty and have fun with it.

Of all the Indian monuments, forts and palaces are most fascinating. The state of Rajasthan is home to numerous forts and palaces. Words are too small to portray the splendid architecture that beautify India. Visiting the historic places like Amer Fort, City Palace etc. in and around Jaipur, getting to see the pleasing "Golden temple" in Amritsar, having glimpses of the very majestic "Taj Mahal" in Agra were priceless. In addition, touring around cities in India,

enjoying a camel safari, educational tours to new places, paragliding, and moments like walking in the desert sand and soaking up the sun were amongst my bucket-list, and milestones were achieved.

I learnt a great deal from the Indian way of living. It is in India where I learnt the real difference between empathy and sympathy. Empathy is a classic quality of a doctor, but here I learnt as a human to share the emotions of another human. Another sentiment that I learned from India is, the devotion and love for the family. Indians place their families above everything else. They taught me how to truly care and share in a family. Certainly now, I have a very invaluable family in India. Furthermore, living on my own have made me better at knowing what the right move is, and spotting new opportunities. Also, I should admit that many a times I had financial crisis which in return taught me the art of budget management. Most of all, India gave me that platform to rise, explore, learn and grow to built-in a vision for a better tomorrow. Furthermore, I have learned the values like love, gratitude, integrity, forgiveness and courage, which were the very essential building blocks I needed at this very crucial phase of life.

Being a medical student, I meet many people from different walks of life. As my college is government aided, most of the patients here come from poor socio-economic sections. Vast majority of Indian population are living under grinding poverty and social barriers. Yet, they live happily with contentment. What makes them so? I wondered, but people here made me realise that you should keep striving hard for your dreams but always be grateful for what you have.

India also taught me how to modernise and update my personality in the wake of this competitive world, but still never loose your roots.

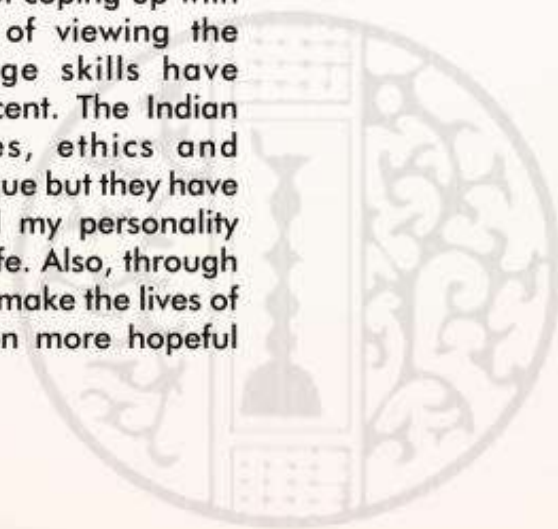
Indians are the epitome of modern yet old school thoughts. Even under strong western influence, Indians still have strongly hold on to their age-old customs and beliefs.

Moreover, studying Ayurveda, a part of Vedas have made me realise that the old, logical doctrines are the key to survive in today's cut-throat world.

While living in India, I came across an interesting phenomena. Nothing sums up Indian innovation so well as the word 'Jugaad'. Jugaad is the Indian way of creating your own make shift solutions. Their "keep it simple" attitude makes them believe more on their minds and hands than any sophisticated machine. They know very well how to get their things done in the hours of necessity. I now definitely know that sitting defeatedly is not an option, rather take the matter in your hands, ponder and improvise to make things work for the time-being.

Living in India has inarguably helped me to get out of my shell. I feel so fortunate that I will be taking many unforgettable moments of happiness, kindness, joy, thrill and warm life-long fellowships from others in my life. My social skills, my ideas of coping up with problems, my spectrum of viewing the world, and my language skills have improved a gazillion percent. The Indian people, culture, values, ethics and experiences might be antique but they have unquestionably revitalised my personality and perspective towards life. Also, through Ayurveda I am learning to make the lives of people in difficult situation more hopeful

and joyful. India has become very dear to my heart. I think it is much more pleasant to repay people with the same joy as I got from them as it resonates within your heart much stronger. One thing is certain that its impossible to leave India with the same person as when I arrived here, and I am very much excited to meet my brand new better version. Knowing India would take you through years and centuries, for India is a land of diversity, and within my three and a half years of stay, this is the story from my lens.



The Indian Council for  
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# STUDYING IN INDIA

## My Personality Growth, My Experience



**Olaf Antonio  
Ciliberto Gonzalez**

Olaf Antonio Ciliberto Gonzalez is a corporate consultant in educational planning in PDVSA. He was born and lives in Venezuela. Mr. Ciliberto obtained the law degree in Santa Maria University, with a certification in teaching competences for higher education by Simon Rodriguez Experimental University, and diploma in project management by Venezuelan Association of Project Management. He also accomplished the international programme: Project Management Training and Certification (PMTC), with a certified recognition as a group leader, by the National Institute for entrepreneurship and Small Business Development.

In social matters Mr Ciliberto has participated (in the role of operative and /or facilitator) in several grassroots organizations, fostering the defense and application of human rights, in order to empower the working population. His performance made him a member of the Venezuelan delegation in international events, as well as being invited as a speaker in forums, such as the IV International Meeting on Political Economy and Human Rights, held in Argentina.

In 2018 he was selected to participate in the international training programme PMTC, sponsored by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

Incredible India: an experience of contrasts. A sample of a new and old world.

India is one of the most ancient societies of human kind, and I was privileged to be selected by ITEC because I got the chance to appreciate the old and new world in this amazing country. When persons ask me: "How was it?" My answer is: "I went to another planet and came back to earth". So, I want to write about living in India during the Project Management Training and Certification Program.

First impression

I want to try to quote what I told my friends and family a few days after I returned to Venezuela:

"When I landed at the Indira Ghandi International Airport, I was amazed by the infrastructure, technology, decor and care of the facilities. Then, NIESBUD personnel picked me up from the airport to escort me to the institution. While I was being driven on a very big highway, totally new images appeared around me: motorcyclists with ladies as passengers with Muslim or Hindu dresses, in both cases seated in the same way, with the legs to one side of the bike. But I was even more surprised when we left the highway and entered the crowded streets, where I saw cows and buffalos that came and went throughout the blocks, and a small group of them, eating or searching for food in piles of garbage in different corners. It was something like seeing street-dogs here in my city, but they were bigger and well treated."

With that first impression, I started my encounter with India...

India's culture and people

The everyday behavior of Indians was mostly kind. And while remnants of British colonialism is evident in the side of the road that vehicles drive on, the fact that the English language is known by a small portion of the population and regularly used as a formal language alongside Hindi, and perhaps in the tea time practice, most of the behavior of the people in India is definitely from Indian traditions.

There was this strange, yet "peaceful relationship" that flowed everywhere I went. It was not common to see the people arguing, but every now and then some guy made a strong complaint (even yelling) to another, and in every case the other person did not react in a defensive manner. I am not sure if it was submission or a way to elevate the person's soul by avoiding violence. Who knows? Either way, I observed how humility fosters peace among the people of India.

Another unique behavior I noticed is how Indians move their heads to say: "yes", "no" or "maybe". In most of the countries that I have had the opportunity to visit, moving the head up and down means "yes", and moving the head from side to side means "no". But for Indians, every movement with their heads in response to a yes or no question could be "yes", "no" or "maybe"! And the funniest thing is that if you repeat the question, the answer will surely be the same! No words, just the head apparently doing some kind of circle and a facial expression that seems to be polite, but didn't help me to understand any better.

The English language can be a big help to communicate in India, but sometimes I needed more than that to achieve effective communication: hands, songs, pictures, and every tool I had to get an address, for example.

In a sense it was difficult to connect with the people, but they still made a positive mark that keeps them in my heart. They establish a "bond", usually by doing a commercial service or giving attention more than once. If you see them again, they surely will express care for you. It's actually like you matter to him/her. In fact, your life is important to that person! At least, that is how I felt. There was a profound kindness by the way they treated me, by the way they asked me about my life.

I noticed other patterns of conduct from the people of India. Men are more open to express their feelings than women, and women seem to be more cautious when they

are on the streets, in terms of how they react to awkward situations. Children and poverty are often related. Almost in every place, deprived children were asking for money or food, selling stuff, or just watching how the world continue moving while they are just waiting.

When I went shopping, I noticed an obvious contrast between street markets and big malls. In the street markets there were "rivers" of people, not flowing harmoniously. Among this entire crowd, I enjoyed a colorful parade of traditional Hindu and Muslim apparel for men and women. I could see traditional jewelry (genuine or artificial, it didn't matter!) on young and adult girls, normally with clothe that covered most of their bodies. There is much chattering, most persons selling are eager to convince potential customers to buy their products, and the act of bargaining can be funny or frustrating, for an instant, then, the river goes on and take you to the next shop.

Big malls are very western like in the architecture. But there was something more. Most of the people inside didn't look like those walking through the market. Women were dressed with western clothe that showed their bodies, and I could see women whose bodies look like they were sculpted by plastic surgeons. Something I didn't see in the street markets. There was no "river" of people walking through the halls, and there was not a talkative environment among strangers. Big malls in India, in Venezuela, in the US, may all be very similar.

There is a specific point at which the Indian and western culture collide and produce a wonderful chaos: the "western" order dictated to drivers versus the way most people drive and walk in lanes and avenues. Horning and yelling among drivers is common, and they also compete to cross first at an intersection, even though there are traffic lights!

Drivers (most of the times with “tuck tuck”) do U turns with any chance they have, no matter where they are. Pedestrians randomly walk across lanes and avenues, maybe because sidewalks are not common alongside the roads.

### Site seeing

Having completed every assignment, fulfilled my obligations to the NEISBUD team, and done all that was required of me, I ensured that I used the rest of my time in India to see the exotic sites that this beautiful country has to offer. I visited places in Agra, Lucknow and Delhi as part of the NEISBUD program; plus Jaipur and Mathura separately. Each city has its own charm and all of them share some patterns: amazing constructions from kingdoms previous to the English conquest, some British landmarks, 20th and 21st century exuberant infrastructure, and places with visible underdevelopment, even social exclusion. Let's take a glimpse of each city:

**- Agra and the marvell's tomb of marble:** Taj Mahal. After a very long line to entry, I saw a long red wall with a big entrance that hides the marble's jewel. The complex, with “the crown of Mahal” as its main building, is a magnificent piece of art. I was impressed by the reverence Indians gave to Mumtaz Mahal's tomb, she is like a spiritual symbol. And it was very funny to listen the instruction of “no photo” from police surveilling the place, since the visitors (my guess, who were mostly Indians) immediately started to take pictures, which obviously sparked the curiosity of foreigners to do the same!

**- Mathura, a spiritual city:** Here the spirituality has more presence. Even though locals use less English, the communication flowed with creativity. It will be hard to forget the mantra “Rad he” commonly used between them. It seemed to me that they were using a powerful word to substitute others (e.g: hello). When I realized that Jama Masjid was so close to Janma Bhoomi

Mandir, it was hard to understand why there was such conflict in recent history between the followers of Hinduism and Islam. Another surprise was in comparing the traditional construction of the temple where Lord Krishna was born, which has some air of humility, with the all modern Goverdhan temple, which has a touch of ostentation.

### - Lucknow, a hopeful city to progress:

The influence of history and traditions are evident, with places like the Bara Imanbara and the Turkish Gate. But there are three facts I could refer to that give the idea that a new and better society might come out from the history of casts, conquest and colonization:

1. Dr. Ambedkar Park, impressive facility, maybe representing the magnificence of this independence leader and his effort to leave behind the traditions of inequality and exclusion, as well as rebel to the views of the religious spirituality, political participation and welfare in the Indian population.

2. Lucknow Municipality Corporation's project called “smart city”, which give us a sense of social order based on respect for environment and better use of resources.

3. SEWA, an organization created to protect and give dignity to women that were economically exploited, by helping them to use the ancient art of embroidery (chikankari) to earn an income.

**- Jaipur, a city of realms:** Every palace I visited was greater than the previous one. It is hard for me to tell which was the finest. Hawa Majal is luxurious, with so much sophistication and dedication reflected on every window. Amber palace is another magnificent manifestation of beauty, and riding an elephant to reach the hill where the main entrance is located gave me an unforgettable impression. Jaigarh Fort is maybe less attractive in detail, but it can easily compete with the others with its landscape and history.

### **- Delhi / New Delhi, city of integration:**

New Delhi has advanced technology and civic order compared to the regular chaos in the rest of the city. Even police seem to be different: I saw them in good shape and armed in New Delhi unlike in the rest of the city, where I saw unfit men with big sticks that are suppose to make people respect the law...

Then there is Qutub Minar which makes me feel so small because of its size and how long it has survived.

Akshardham is a mixture of religion, spirituality, modernity, technology and devotion. I was stunned by how a concept of a religious belief could compete with a Disney Park.

I can also refer to Buddha temple and the mystique connection I felt, the powerful India Gate and the walk through the Rajpath into the President's state with the wonderful twin ministry buildings, the emotive and motivating Mahatma Ghandi Park, with the eternal flame, and Humayun's tomb that blew my mind with the design that inspired the Taj Mahal.

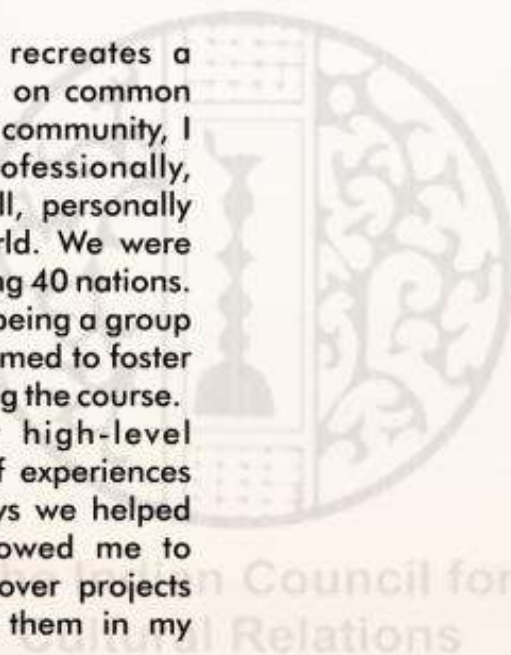
### **The educative experience**

Thanks to ITEC, NEISBUD recreates a community of nations, based on common interest. Participating in that community, I tried my best to share professionally, academically, but most of all, personally with citizens around the world. We were almost 80 students representing 40 nations. In fact, I had the challenge of being a group leader, chosen by my pairs, aimed to foster harmony and motivation during the course. The knowledge given by high-level professionals, the diversity of experiences among students and the ways we helped each other to succeed, allowed me to increase my technical view over projects and visualize how to apply them in my country.

### **My conclusion, my connection**

The legacy of India and its present is huge and awesome in many forms. I could see what was left behind, how Indians worship their past and their ancestors, but I could also see their younger generations hoping for a better future and some eager to help to shape a better and more inclusive India.

A country of contrast, where the extreme and opposite circumstances can converge at the same time and space.



# STUDYING IN INDIA

## My Personality Growth, My Experience



**Beata Jakusovszky**

I studied Environmental Engineering within the Faculty of Chemical Engineering at Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BUTE). After taking my final exams I began to work in different Hungarian and International laboratories as a toxicologist, chemical engineer, laboratory technician.

After my first visit to India in October 2006 as a tourist I was completely charmed by the country and decided to learn more about it. Since then I am interested in India, principally in Indian people and culture. The Embassy of India in Budapest organizes Hindi language courses in co-operation with ELTE University, so in September 2007 I began to learn Hindi language there. In the meantime I went back two times to India as a tourist, once in 2009 for two weeks to South India and once in 2010 for three weeks to the Northern part of the country. Then I won the ICCR scholarship, and from August 2010 till April 2011 I studied in the Sansthan and got Diploma in Hindi Language Proficiency.

My hobbies (travelling, reading, listening to music, dancing) are connected to India, as I often listen to Indian music, reading books and articles on topics related to India, I learn Bollywood and Kathak dance, and I am a regular visitor in India either as a scholarship holder or as a tourist. In 2013 I won a Hindi language competition organized for non-Hindi speakers by Aksharam (an Indian organization promoting Hindi at international level). The prize was very appealing, a 10-day visit to India. In 2014 I won an ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation) scholarship for three months in Delhi and I got a Diploma in Communication English, IT and Networking Skills. After these amazing opportunities in 2018 and 2019 I visited the country again as a tourist for one-month.

Today an old memory popped up on my social media account from nine years ago. It says: "Exams finished, yippee! Travel from tomorrow. :)" In 2010, I won an ICCR scholarship, and I got the unique opportunity to study Hindi and Indian culture at Kendriya Hindi Sansthan (Central Institute of Hindi) in Agra, India.

The story goes back to 28th July, 2010. I sit in my office, which is actually an electrochemical laboratory with many noisy instruments, when my telephone rings. It's Mr Mohan from the Indian Embassy, Budapest. Not being a sentimental person, he informs me in an official tone that I won the scholarship to Agra, I have to leave on 1st August. My heart is beating like after a heart attack, I'm so happy, I feel like running at least five kilometers around the block, telling everyone that I go to India for eight months, but... Wait a minute! On the 1st of August? This year? That's in 3 days! Mission impossible! I don't even have my passport ready! I expected to travel earliest in September if I win the scholarship. I have to do so many things at home and at work as well! First of all, I have to arrange my passport. This task turned out to be the easiest, I made it in two days. But my job! The management didn't allow me to take an unpaid leave for eight months. There is no other choice, I have to quit. No problem. In the middle of the big financial crisis and an ongoing bankloan, I leave my job for a dream. Because studying and living in India has been my dream since the first time I stepped on the ground of Delhi Airport in 2006. And I am daring enough to follow my dreams. Finally, I manage to depart on 25th August. My adventures begin already in Budapest. The lady at the check-in desk tells me that something is wrong with my flight ticket, it's not visible in the system, I should visit the office of the airways company. Thank God, they can solve the problem, so I can check in. My father just sees me off when I hear a familiar voice behind me: "Beata, wait, I come with you!" – just like in a Bollywood movie.

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The owner of the voice is Pramod Ji, the lector and Hindi teacher of ELTE University in Budapest. His contract has expired, and he goes back to India with the same flight. What a lucky coincidence! I am pleased to get such a companion for the journey. I can practice... my English, because my spoken Hindi is very poor. I am really proud that when Pramod Ji came to Agra a few months later to teach in the Sansthan, we could chat in Hindi. I have become fluent in a couple of months.

But let's get back to the adventures. In Delhi with Pramod Ji's help it's easy to find the driver who drops me to Agra. But I'm not the one and only passenger that night! In a car that seats seven people travel thirteen of us. Although six of them are children, for me it's still a bit shocking. One child sits in my lap during most of the journey. In addition, we get a puncture about halfway and extra tyre is nowhere. So, we have to wait for another car. No worries, I am in India after all! My little fellow travellers enjoy testing my slight knowledge of Hindi, showing me different things and ask: "Ye kya hai? (What is this?)" They are happy if I know the answer but even happier if I don't. They make me repeat the words that I just learned. The best way to memorize. We spend one or two hours like this, then another car comes to take us to the Sansthan.

Student life in Agra is quite different from that in my home country. Annoying and funny at once. For example, one morning I keep hearing a sharp buzz in my ears. In both of them at the same time. Slowly, I am becoming conscious that my brand new roommates are waking me up this way. There are at least five of them, all bloodthirsty. Where are my lovely friends, the geckos now? Anyway, it's 7 a.m., I have to get up because the Yoga class begins. I don't know what these mosquitoes are up to, they must have been stuffing themselves all night either with South-Korean or Hungarian blood. I get the proof when I successfully send one or two to the Nirvana.

They leave traces on my palm, pillow and the wall. The noise awakens my human roommate, as well. She doesn't attend Yoga classes but she usually jogs in the inner yard, so I don't feel remorse for waking her. Well, she looks at me disapprovingly, she may not go jogging today? There is no time to think, a little Yoga early morning is better than anything else. And then the well deserved breakfast. Is there anyone who doesn't love samosa, this salty, spicy, fried Indian snack, stuffed with potatoes and peas? It's not the first time I have been to India, and I guess it's not the last either. I've eaten samosa many times, it's supposed to be like an omelette, it cannot be spoiled. Well, it can...

After breakfast just a short nap, and the lessons begin. In regard to the great heat, the fountain in the school yard is turned on at 10 o'clock in the morning. Our window faces towards it, so we have a pleasant, cool feeling. Akbar's Court must have been like that, although perhaps with more delicious samosas served. Rumor has it that the fountain is turned on just because the principals and various managers of the school arrive at work at about this time, who like to see how healthy and beautiful the environment is. But I know it's all for the students, it only serves to increase our comfort level.

Our first class is "Pathavali", which consists of learning lessons from a textbook. The various lessons expand our knowledge by means of essays, poems, novel and play abstracts, short stories and fairy tales.



Our teacher is the strict but fair Janki Ji. My textbook gets a little soaked while passing by the fountain. Luckily, they don't turn the fountain on in the evenings, otherwise where would we put our food and drink at various parties, which are always held next to the fountain? Quite interesting topics come up at the Speech Exercises class, such as recipes of Indian foods. Since this class is held personally by our director, we can deftly steer the conversation to the college canteen. Today's breakfast pops up too, even though samosas belong to the better dishes. Of course, I haven't heard about a good college kitchen yet, but since the college experience itself has been left out of my life so far, my basis of comparison is the Hungarian canteen, so I think I'd better join the queue of complainants. Our last lesson before lunch is Hindi Grammar with Ramlal Ji, who is a real "peacetime" teacher, I think one of the best in Santhan. His classes are funny, enjoyable but also enlightening. Due to his advanced age, Guruji is a little hard of hearing, so we can practice the beautiful, loud Hindi speech in his classes. Sometimes he starts reading out the roster of another class but this only resulted in some complication at the beginning when even we didn't know each other well, so it was not before the fifth name that the penny dropped that we were hearing another roster and not everyone was "sick". He regularly pronounces my name as "Beta" instead of Beata, evoking great amusement from my classmates. "Beta" means "(my) son" in Hindi. I feel honoured to have that nickname but by the end of the year, Guruji also learns the correct pronunciation. By then, however, everyone calls me "Beta".

I wouldn't rate our lunch (maybe it's even impossible). Sometimes there is also soup, which is eatable when enhanced with a chili seasoning and salt "swiped" from a neighbouring pizzeria. I take it only for hydration, rather than to satiate my hunger, let alone for pleasure.

In Writing Practice classes we can digest peacefully, Pramod Ji says nothing if any of us is not as active as usually but sometimes he gets angry if we don't study properly. Our last class every day is History of Hindi Literature with the beautiful and well-educated Shalini Ji. As she is a fan of Hindi movies, a Bollywood quote or song lyrics sometimes slip between two "chayavadi" writers. Fortunately, Shalini Ji also thinks that this can broaden both our Hindi way of thinking and our lungs. By the way, the most remarkable difference in the course of lessons as compared to Hungary is that breaks are simply spared here, so the classes are sequential, each lasting for 50 minutes, and the fact that we have the same classes every day is also a peculiarity.

The afternoon Kathak classes are always the highlight of the day. Without them one could get easily played out. They are optional, and beside dancing we can also learn singing and playing the tabla. To my great sorrow, our director didn't allow anyone to take all three, or even two opportunities although I would love to have them all. So, I had to prioritize at the beginning of the school year and since I am fond of dancing I chose that. Exhausted though happy, the flock of girls rushes to take a shower after the dance class because we have to hurry if we want to go shopping or to the tailor's etc. The girls have a daily leave of absence till 7 p.m., and it's half past six by the time the dance class is over. Usually girls grumble about this rule but after a month or two I totally understand why: foreigners, especially girls, are more noticed by Indians. And unfortunately, not always in a good sense... This is especially valid for Agra, particularly for the area where our famous school is located. Anyway, the evening power outage starts at exactly 7 p.m. and lasts until 9 p.m. There is electricity between 9 and 11 p.m., and then comes the next electricity gap, which stretches into the night.

Sometimes the power outage is shifted to between 5 and 7 p.m. If it occurs in the morning at school (and that happens quite often), everyone suffers even more noticeably in the hope that the teacher's going to take pity on us but the teaching must go on, of course.

In the dark night all kinds of creatures start fumbling around simultaneously. My roommate is afraid of everything, even geckos. Once on a bright day a tiny squirrel came into our room, and she was scared to death! Anyway, I close the door of our balcony, I'm not interested in uninvited guests either. Since my eyes get tired soon of studying by candlelight, I yield to the call of dreams and postpone writing my homework until next morning. I wake up at night to a weird noise. It's coming from the corridor. Still half asleep, I peep through the door. "Ah, just the dog, he upset the dustbin

again, searching for chapati pieces. But how strangely this dog moves: so sluggish and as if he had long legs. He just looks like a... MONKEY!!!" If it wasn't dark and an electricity gap again, I would immediately prepare my camera, but so I'm just watching idly as our visitor flips the trash, turning the already immaculate corridor into a battlefield. Unfortunately, the moonlight isn't strong enough to shoot a good video. After looking the supply over and finding nothing to eat, the stealthy burglar leaves for another floor to try his luck there. Relaxed that our mosquito net entrance-door can be locked, I lie back on the bed. I wouldn't be happy if one of these beasts had a party among our clothes.

Once again, half asleep, I wonder what kind of adventure awaits me tomorrow. But that's already another story.



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# STUDYING IN INDIA

## My Personality Growth, My Experience



**David Jebarajah**

I was an ICCR Scholar from 1999 to 2002 studying for Bachelor's degree in Business Management (BBM) at Miranda Institute of Management Studies affiliated to Bangalore University. I returned to Sri Lanka and secured employment in a bank as a Corporate Banker. I migrated to Australia in 2006. On completion of my Master's degree in Accounting at University of South Australia I worked in SME sized organisations as a senior finance professional and currently establishing my own business concern. I have made Adelaide, a beautiful city in southern Australia, my home.

It was around 2 pm in the afternoon the train arrived at Majestic Station in Bangalore City on 05th August 1999. Though oblivious at that time, that moment opened a chapter in my life that would define me as a person in later years. Mr Venugopal was there to meet us and his infectious smile and warmth instantly alleviated the pain of home sickness and the fear of the unknown.

I was barely a twenty-year-old who had finished my schooling in Colombo Sri Lanka and was exploring opportunities to go abroad mainly to indulge in youthhood that may not meet the approval of my parents if I did while at home. I was told about a scholarship scheme granted by Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) to study in India and after a quick research I picked Bangalore as my choice. A decision I would never regret. Few weeks later I had an interview with Mr. Elango from Indian High Commission Colombo. One day not long after I received a letter that changed my destiny. I was granted admission to read for bachelor's degree in Business Management at Bangalore University along with Rajendran Sureshkumar Harsha Maldeniya Kalpana Siriwardena and Tharsini Rajaratnam.

Suresh, Harsha and myself decided to stay together and the senior batch of Srilankans came to our aid to find accommodation. We found a one-room apartment down a tree-lined street in Thippasandra which became our home away from home for the next three years. While bachelorhood presented so many positives a good relationship with your landlord generally was not one of them (for obvious reasons). We, on the other hand, enjoyed a very cordial relationship with our landlord and the fact that we stayed all three years in that house and even after we left our juniors continued to stay there stand as testaments to that. I am very proud to say that we are still in touch with them.

India for me was not "love at first sight". It was an arranged marriage where the relationship got better by the day. I could not see the beauty of India until my mind was clouded with home sickness and the anxiety that comes along with leaving home for the first time. As I settled gradually, I started appreciating the diverse music I hear at homes and shops nearby, the different aromas I smell as I pass each Sagar or food cart, the omnipresent chatter of people, the cool breeze that touches the ear in the mornings as I walk to College. Slowly I was falling in love with this art of living. I consider myself to be privileged to have spent three years of my life in Bangalore soaking up on the natural beauty it offered in terms of greenery and the climate. I remember walking down MG Road on a winter rainy evening with the backdrop of colonial style buildings on one side and tall green trees on other thinking to myself that "surely it cannot be any different in Europe"

The slogan Unity in Diversity was true in every aspect of life. Due to the disparity in wealth distribution there are so many classes of people. The positive is every income class has successfully created an environment that is affordable and achievable to its level. There were cinema theatres that charged INR 40 for a movie. Then there were cinema theatres that charged one rupee for a movie. There was Chikpet market and Commercial Street for the lower and middle strata of the society respectively and then MG Road and Brigade Road as you worked your way up. The same book which sold for INR 300 at Gangarams sold for INR 30 on the pavement (ofcourse a lesser quality print which did not comply to copyright requirements

Today in the western world where all your needs are met in ample depression is a common problem. However, India on the contrary taught me happiness is a state of your inner being and not dependant on external factors. I see poverty-stricken children playing rolling tyres on the road beaming with happiness. I see women coming together to share whatever they have, to provide one square meal for their family.

Our association with ICCR opened many doors for us and enabled us to interact with many notable personalities of the day (Admiral O S Dawson, Mr Pascal Alan Nazareth, Mr. Peter Sinai, Mr K Ravishankar to name a few) on a one to one basis. These experiences endowed us with the confidence to face the corporate and social worlds that awaited us as we walked out of university into the 'real world'. Some treated us like family. I was one of the students invited for Mr Ravishankar's daughter's wedding reception at plush 5-star hotel. Every Friday ICCR would host a cultural event from various parts of the globe at Yavanika Auditorium. It could be music, it could be a dance or it could be a discussion on a subject pertaining to

culture. It was not only a treat to our ears but also enriched our knowledge of diverse cultures globally.

Mr. J W Lobo was the Regional Director of ICCR Bangalore and the current Regional Director Mr. P Venugopal was the Programme Officer then. I have too many fond memories of our visits to the ICCR office down Sankey Road. We were always warmly welcomed with a cup of tea and treated with dignity. It was a treat to draw on Mr Lobo's knowledge and experience. After a well-mannered respectful act in Mr Lobo's office we would walk into Mr. Venugopal's office to loosen up a bit and have a good laugh before we return home.

It was during our time that Federation of International Student Associations - Bangalore chapter (FISA-B) was formed with representation of over 70 nationalities and had some outstanding individuals as founder members; Rajendran Sureshkumar, Sushil Chand Ram, Patrick Ojwando Aboud Jumbe to name a few.

While India had already a lot to offer in terms of diversity of culture, language, religion and ethnicities being part of FISA-B opened a new realm of exposure to different nations all while being in Bangalore. One could not ask for more.

At this juncture I like to narrate an incident which happened in 2001. FISA-B was organising the International Students Day scheduled for 11th November 2001. Traditionally all ICCR functions take place in Yavanika Auditorium. The incumbent committee of FISA-B under the able leadership of Cultural Secretary Sureshkumar wanted to plan the event in grand scale.

Suresh requested Mr Venugopal to hire Chowdiah Memorial Hall which had substantially larger seating capacity.

Though Mr Venugopal was not very convinced that we will be able to rally a crowd that can justify a bigger hall he was willing to take the risk since he trusted the ability of the committee. It was a huge success. 15 minutes into the programme guests were standing as all the seats were taken. We had an event where 2 representatives of 67 nationalities present on that day walked to the stage while their respective national anthem was played, and the audience joined to sing "We are the world". It was a poignant moment of display of world harmony which resonated very well with everyone present since it was 2 months to the date of World Trade Centre attack in New York. That night we served dinner to a record breaking 683 guests.

We went on to form an Association for Sri Lankan students Living in Bangalore (ASLIB) and the honor of being the founder president was thrust upon me. We successfully celebrated the 54th anniversary of Independence of Sri Lanka in Bangalore in the august presence of the then Sri Lankan Deputy High Commissioner HE Sumith Nakandala, ICCR officials, well wishers and all the Sri Lankan students studying in Bangalore at that time. The unwavering support of fellow students Chaminda Ranasinghe, Sureshkumar and many others made this event a grand success.

India with its sprawling land mass and a world's largest train network gave us the opportunity for us to travel. I have travelled for both studies and leisure. I have travelled the length and breadth of India. I have travelled in a train for continuously 4 days. It was a trip from Bangalore to Tinsukia (Assam) via Chennai. Every town offers an insight into different cultures, different flavours and different climatic conditions. I remember a sweltering day in Delhi followed by next night in Shimla in freezing cold. Even the climate in India practised Unity in Diversity.

I have stood in awe at Taj Mahal looking at the architectural wonder. I have marvelled at the structures of palaces in Jaipur, Udaipur and Mysore. I have been dazed by the natural beauty of Ooty, Kodaikanal, Cherrapunji caves and Shimla. I was impressed by the scientific advancement of India in the middle ages at Janta Mantar in Jaipur. I have done skiing in the Himalayan belt of Rohtang Pass.

As part of the Industrial tour we visited Coca Cola, Atlas Bicycles and Hero Honda factories. As a youngster embarking on life's journey these experiences shaped and moulded my outlook of the world and raised the bar for me to attain in terms of achievement.

In summary India taught me;

- You don't have to be rich to give (you don't need to look further from ICCR Scholarships for this)
- You don't have to lose your identity to impress someone. Be yourself but courteous and accepting of other forms of living
- Do not judge a person's intellect by his/her appearance.
- Happiness does not depend on how financially rich you are. Its an inner sense of contentment.
- You can carve a life for yourself based on your abilities and passion without being lured by the "carrots" this world offers
- Challenges and opportunities are two side of the same coin
- There is always something to learn from someone
- Free does not mean cheap
- Confidence to interact with colleagues and superiors in professional and social settings. (This is one trait that we clearly stand out from our peers)
- Reading makes a man perfect. (In public transport you will see every commuter with a book in their hand. India is an ocean of reasonably priced books and magazines that encourages the habit of reading.

I am eternally grateful to the Indian government and people who gave me the rare opportunity to live and study there while mingling with so many Indians and students from other nationalities who had been invited like me to study in India. It was a global village. It was an exposure that cannot be compared to any other.

India while having its own struggles was and is magnanimous to offer scholarships to students from all over the world and when these students return, they take a part of India with them that will never die. That way India has conquered the whole world with love. I call this the Ahimsa Colonisation.

On my return to Sri Lanka, in any social gathering I was in, invariably the conversation will be steered towards my experiences in India and I did not realise this until one of my friends pointed out that most of my sentences start with "When I was in India.....". I shared this experience with Suresh who appeased me by saying "Don't worry, at work they call me Mr. Bangalore".

Long live India: Jai Hind



The Indian Council for  
Cultural Relations

# STUDYING IN INDIA

## My Personality Growth, My Experience



**Ashit Baran Das**

Mr. Ashit Baran Das was born in 6 January, 1970 and brought up in a remote village of southern part of Bangladesh. He has obtained Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree in Finance from R. A. Podar Institute of Management in Jaipur, in addition to his previously completed Masters in Commerce (Accounting) from University of Dhaka.

While studying in India, Mr. Das got acquainted with local, diverse and vibrant cultures and communities along with India's uniqueness as the largest democracy in the world. He also achieved the vital experience of using empirical insights and applying them to real-life scenarios. In a nutshell, studying in India was an unparalleled opportunity to enhance Mr. Das's professional skills.

Mr. Ashit Baran Das, Associate Director (Finance & Accounts) – BRAC, has been playing a key role in ensuring the best strategic, financial and operational decisions.

With over 20 years of experience as a diversified finance professional, Mr. Ashit Baran Das has seasoned himself to lead, motivate and perform in the financial management area. Moreover, Microfinance and Sustainable Social Businesses, are other key sectors where he has excelled in his career trajectory.

“By education, I mean an all-round drawing of the best in child and man in body, mind and spirit”- is a prominent quote of Mahatma Gandhi that has inspired me throughout my life. This is because I believe that our life is a long and continuous journey that will not end even after our passing if we add some value to it. The only way to lead a life that genuinely adds value is to devote the betterment of humanity. From my childhood, I have always cherished the vision of the world where no sufferings exit. Such thinking may sound far-fetched at first, but great souls have shown us time and again how even one individual can make a big difference. Undoubtedly, the land of such great souls is India, where people like Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel were born. India is truly a sanctuary of diverse cultures and beliefs. All these factors have immensely influenced the personality I have developed today. My chance to study in India has made this possible.

### Motivation behind studying abroad

Studying abroad can be a baffling experience, especially if someone has never lived far from home before. Initially, one might be consumed with the feeling of uncertainty, fear and even promise. However, some factors and events led me to make the decision to study in India. But if I have to highlight one key factor, I would say, it was a milestone that I wanted to achieve since adolescence. I wanted to venture into an uncharted territory beyond the comfort zone of my home and gauge my ability to survive on my own. Hence, I made up my mind to study abroad to experience personal growth. I have always considered myself as a global citizen. Therefore, I wanted to challenge myself and transform into a more independent, self-reliant and confident person. I knew moving abroad would allow me to navigate my way around a completely different lifestyle and view life from newer perspectives.

### The journey from rural Bangladesh to India

I grew up in a remote village in Bangladesh, which was still a least developed country. Though I had limited opportunities, I decided to go for a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) in India. Hence, I was preparing

myself in every possible way to pursue my dream. Fortunately, I got the chance to chase my dream. Thanks to the Indian Government for providing me with a scholarship in the 1995-96 session. I still remember my excitement upon hearing that I had been awarded the ICCR scholarship to pursue the MBA Programme at Rajasthan University, Jaipur. As I boarded the plane to leave Dhaka, I felt the thrill of flying to a foreign country for the first time in my life. A remarkable experience of life was waiting for me in Rajasthan. As it is well known, India helped Bangladesh to gain independence in 1971, and now both countries have excellent relations between them. Therefore, we should express our highest gratitude to the Indian Government as well as to the people of India for extending such tremendous help during those turbulent and uncertain days. Here I would like to express my warm regards and gratitude to the Indian Government and people of India as I also took refuge in West Bengal with my parents during the liberation war at the very childhood of my life. India and Bangladesh aim at promoting coordinated efforts, sharing experiences and taking joint actions for furthering the cause and interest of sustainable development in all sectors. As one of the non-political entities and inter-governmental bodies, ICCR has been helping to promote collaboration between these two friendly neighboring countries. Moreover, India is not only our neighboring country but also has a reputed education system that is acknowledged globally. I always tried to think beyond boundaries and approach difficult questions regarding poverty, development, radicalism, gender or racial discrimination, and also a cogent allocation of resources. Studying in India gave me the perfect opportunity to experience diverse communities and find solutions to these pressing issues.

### **My learning experience in India**

The moment I stepped in the Rajasthan University campus in 1995, after a memorable journey by Rajdhani Express from Howrah to Delhi and a stopover in the Jawaharlal Nehru University with a senior fellow ICCR scholar, I observed some differences. I was habituated with the huge, vibrant crowd as a student of Dhaka

University with a wide variety of vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods. However, the serene, sparsely populated, well-disciplined and enormous campus of this new destination, along with its vegetarian food habit, appeared as a sweet shock to me. Nonetheless, I got successfully habituated with all kinds of foods in Rajasthan. Even after long years of return to Bangladesh, some of the items still remain on my family's dining menu.

During my academic stint, I learned about business concepts to develop solid foundations to understand big or small problems. But realizing the obstacles or finding new solutions is just half of the journey. Implementing winning ideas in a real-world scenario is the most challenging task. This is where the experience of local, diverse and vibrant communities comes in as a crucial element.

In fact, my academic experience has developed me personally, too. This was the first time I was living outside of my country, living on my own and independently. At home, I was dependent on my parents for even basic necessities. Even though India is a neighboring country with similarities in culture and practices, I have had my fair share of struggles. I was born and brought up in a remote village in Bangladesh where we had to wait for access to electricity till 1999. Accommodating the new environment had certainly been challenging. I adjusted with the new situation due to the warmth of the student body and the local community. Starting from finding a place to live and make new friends, it was a totally new experience and helped improve my ability to adapt to different circumstances. I learned to be mindful of public sentiments without losing my values or individuality. I did not get rattled by the new environment; rather, I used my curiosity to know about the deeper significance of culture, tradition and rituals. This, in turn, enabled me to introduce my fellow companions to different views and led to the mutual experience sharing. Being humble and letting my work speak for itself proved to be effective in this respect.



This experience taught me to manage myself amid all adversities. Regardless of the challenges, I tried to walk in the shoes of others in the local community, see their rationale and logic before forming my judgments. I realized the importance of learning about people and empathizing with them while working to improve their lives. Even now, I get goosebumps recalling how various community people ranging from higher officials to security guard asks me for favor in their issues as they strongly believe that I can help them even though I am no one near to their native. I still remember my close association with the ever punctual librarian Mr. Dipak, the gigantic-figured security guard Mr. Sadhuram and many more.

### **How the learning has helped me grow**

Yet, I am ceaselessly using my advanced knowledge of higher learning in my job and career. I always recall the faces of my revered professors who taught me there and helped me come to this stage of development. At the University of Rajasthan, I still remember the teaching style of some of my distinguished professors and faculties. I would like to mention one of the professors named K K Mohershi, who graduated from Allahabad University in 1942-43. He was a real hero with the highest patriotic zeal and enthusiasm who took part in the historic Allahabad movement. A distinguished fellow and disciple of Nehruvian Philosophy, he taught me many things. Among his many teachings, I can remember how he used to describe India's uniqueness as the largest democracy in the world. He described those four tenets, which helped India to be one of the most advanced and more civilized nations in the world and those were; Democratic Culture, Free and Fair Media, less corruption in Judiciary and vast professionals produced by the Indian education system. It is noteworthy that my country is endeavoring towards the same goal following the glorious example of India. Also, my academic training in

business has endowed me with capabilities that allow me to leave my mark in the private and development sectors in Bangladesh. As a professional in my field, I see scope to change business regulations going forward in emerging countries like Bangladesh. I envision that this will take center stage of global development within the next decade as development-oriented public initiatives will be revamped. Through my work, I have achieved the crucial experience of using empirical insights and applying them to real-life scenarios. However, the learning experience in India has given me a global exposure while keeping me grounded and aware of the similar problems faced by both my native country and India. Furthermore, it gave me unparalleled opportunities to enhance my professional skills. Learning skills such as developing business cases, understanding client perceptions and business analytics were a learning curve for me. Contingency planning, problem-solving and organizing capacities have eased my transition into the academic leadership as well. I believe I thrived in the environment of cultural diversity where each student came from different countries, states, cultures, backgrounds, religion and personal experiences. It made me more considerate and empathetic toward other people's conditions and views.

My experience of studying in India exposed me to a community that is highly valuable for Global South practitioners, innovators, policymakers and investors. This unique opportunity has positioned me at a place from where I can positively influence the Global South business discourses and interventions. My academic and personal experiences of business research have drawn me to India. Questioning the status quo and diligently working to make business-driven social impacts are my professional goals. In this respect, India's approach is something that will enable me to gain essential insights.

## **What sets the experience apart**

One thing that sets my MBA study in India apart from other experiences is its relevance to similar issues in Bangladesh. Furthermore, India as a multiracial, multicultural country where we could feel the flavor of "Unity in massive diversity" as well as "Diversity in unity". I was immensely surprised to observe how Indians, despite their extremely heterogeneous cultural milieu and fabric, were homogenously attuned to some basic principles and aforementioned four unique tenets. My exposure to these has allowed me to apply academic learning to real-time business challenges faced by client organizations. In addition, it has been my pleasure to learn from inspirational business gurus. Finally, the global community in India, the exposure of SMEs, experienced mentor and alumni network have greatly benefitted my quest to master business interventions and ventures.

## **Concluding remarks**

My Experience of studying in India proved to be a turning point in both my professional and personal life. It was not only limited to academia; instead, it was a holistic life experience and a transformative event. It helped me understand and appreciate the diverse and massive cultural dynamics of the largest democracy in the world. The education I received enabled me better to comprehend the different mechanisms of business and economics. It facilitated my understanding of the issues which I always aimed to study. I could draw insights and learning from the practices in India and relate them to issues in Bangladesh, given the strong similarities the two nations have. It was indeed the learning experience of a lifetime for which I shall always be grateful. Since I came back, I have been on a constant growth trajectory, building a strong network while continuing to develop myself

to become a leader who can now make a significant difference.



International Council for Cultural Relations

# STUDYING IN INDIA

## My Personality Growth, My Experience

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**Sharen Thumboo**

Sharen Thumboo is a Master's Degree in Mass Communication and Journalism student at Bangalore University. Having over a decade of experience in digital and social media, she researches social media for social justice and cyberbullying and online victim shaming. She's a fourth generation Indian born and raised in South Africa

I pen this essay on my 37th birthday, 6892 kilometres away from home during a global pandemic, locked down in country where Covid-19 cases escalated to over 20 000 by midday. Despite the fear that lurks in the distance, I am filled with immense gratitude to share birthday cake with my Indian housemates and building neighbours, who I now call family in this little community of mine, just a few metres away from Bangalore University.

On what the British called 'special assignment' my grandfather arrived on a ship in 1806 at the tender age of 22, as a cook for the Royal Hotel in Durban, South Africa. My maternal and paternal grandparents were natives of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. They were listed as Muslims, Christians and Hindus and came in search of the promised African dream.

I am Sharen, a fourth generation Indian origin girl, born and raised in South Africa, where at most times I was often

told to 'go back home'. Where was home, when South Africa was all I knew, was a question I would often ask myself.

I made my first journey to India when I was 33 years old. Just before sunrise, on the morning of December 23, 2016 Ethiopian Airlines flight E610 landed safely at the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport and the minute I got off the airplane, and reached immigration, I knew an adventure was about to begin and I was ready. Over the years, my love for India grew deeper and I found myself returning year after year, enjoying the cruises on the backwaters of Kerala, volunteering in the slums of Varanasi, tracing my roots in Chennai and shopping in the markets of Mumbai!

When I was awarded a scholarship with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), my joy knew no bounds and accepting the offer allowed me to return to a place that I have already fallen in love with. Right in the middle of life, in the middle of my great career, I was given a new chance and a new adventure and I was not going to let it pass by, so I quit my government job without benefits and left my family behind and prepared to leave South Africa for two years within two days with two suitcases!

I arrived in Bangalore in August 2018 on a public holiday. The ICCR offices were closed and we had no contact, until we found a mobile number of an official. He was kind and compassionate and asked our cab driver to take us to the nearest hotel. He then advised that we should get some rest and meet them the next morning. All the formalities that followed, which now seems

like a long time ago, were smooth and easy to process. Under the concerned guidance of the ICCR Bangalore Director, in the sudden downpours of the Bangalore rains, Venugopal Sir, as he is fondly called, went beyond his duties to secure temporary hostel accommodation for us until we were ready to move into paying guest houses or rented apartments.

The Head of Department for Journalism and Mass Communication at that time, Dr Ashok Kumar welcomed me heartily into his department, setting aside important meetings to ensure that my documentation was signed and processed. With great anxiety I entered my class. The last time I wrote an exam, my classmates were attending their first class at pre-school. I was as old as some of their parents and judging from movies, I was hoping that I wouldn't be ridiculed. What followed was nothing, but amazing! Over the months, these kids became my kids, they became my friends and not before long, we addressed each other as family.

I decided early on, that I was not here as a tourist – I was here to embrace the culture of my great grandparents and if I had to succeed, I will need to adjust and adapt to my surroundings. So my everyday chicken burger or cheese pizza lunch at fast food joints soon turned into curd rice and lemon rice with a side portion of vada and chutney at the local canteen, sitting joyfully under tamarind trees with my new family - my classmates.

While my international friends were finding housemates from their own countries and sticking to their own cultures and traditions, I found Indian housemates who welcomed me in like my family would. Daily, I learn about their traditions and their customs and while I practice my own, I willingly participate in theirs too! I visit their families in their villages and sit at the feet of village elders and listen to stories of old while they listen in return with wonder at my story. I am yet to meet an elder who is not confused by the sound of my voice when I open my mouth or the blue streaks in my hair or my fashion sense of torn jeans and t-shirts!

I am not here to have a South African experience, I am here to have an Indian experience and visiting my friends' families

in their home towns have opened my eyes to the beauty and simplicity of livelihood in this glorious country. I have learned that in South Africa, we might have the origin of India in our family history, but we have lost the essence of what it truly means to be Indian.

My experience in India, as an ICCR scholar has taught me that being Indian is to be brave. My classmates all live outside Bangalore and make the long journey alone into the City for an education, some live in hostels, while in South Africa; we get dropped and picked at the campus gate. I have learnt that small homes can make happy families. I shared a bedroom floor with an entire family in a little village on the Karnataka border and I listened to the family speak about their time away from each other and laughed at silly jokes until we all fell asleep on a straw mat on their tiled floor.

I have been the recipient of kindness from auto drivers, cab drivers, shop keepers, street vendors and medical staff. A few months ago when I fell off the staircase in my building and crashed into a wall, spraining my ankle and unable to move, the kindness of my neighbors, some from nearby buildings who I have never met, rushed to my cries and helped me get to the nearby hospital, ensuring I was taken care of, given the best treatment and even accessed my phone to contact my housemates. That night, as my 75-old neighbor, who I fondly call 'thatha' applied medicine and wrapped my foot in a bandage; I retired to bed in pain but with deep gratitude. I do not speak his language, we barely understand each other, but in that moment he understood my pain and he understood healing and he understood me. With a group of seven young women, I travelled far into a remote village to learn a technical skill that at one time only men were trained in. I watched those professors and industry specialists change the face of Indian women. Their training and skills showed us that Indian women are no longer pregnant, barefoot and in the kitchen. We are doctors, engineers, lawyers and journalists. Into the unknown, we women ventured out into a nearby city to explore the attractions that the city offered. We travelled in safety with the help of kind strangers along the way.

I have vowed early on, that I will return kindness to my fellow Indians. I am patient with my impatient auto drivers, I give the benefit of doubt to street traders who escalate their prices when they hear my voice and I help my classmates to see the world with new eyes by challenging any prejudices that they encounter.

Living in India has changed my perspective on the way I view the world. My eyes have seen that life goes on with sambar and rice made with love. I have come to learn that co-existing with different religions, castes and creeds is possible and if done right, it is harmonious.

Once you see the sun rise over India, or witness the sudden monsoon rains, once you see her green leaves, turn brown and her flowers turn into the most beautiful artwork God has ever made, you will never be the same again. It is true; one cannot decide on India, India will decide on you! And India decided on me.

Two hundred and twelve years ago, my ancestors went in search of the African dream. I have no idea what their dreams

were, what they hoped to achieved and whether they had any intention to return home some day but what I am sure of, is that they longed for new beginnings, the security of an education, the hope of a place they can call home.

Two hundred and twelve years later, their granddaughter took a gamble on life in search of the Indian dream, but she knew what she hoped to achieve. She has found the magic in a new beginning, gained quality higher education and found a place she calls home, a place where its people claim her as their daughter. She is me and I am living my grandparents wildest dreams.

I came to India as a student and all I did was say "hi" to strangers and today I am their daughter, their sister, their friend. I am the granddaughter of brave indentured laborers, who were resilient in pursuing their dreams. They survived arriving as strangers in a new place. They made friends and they made families. I am them and they are me. I am South African by birth but Indian by heart. India, Vande Mataram (Mother, I bow to thee).



The Indian Council for  
Cultural Relations

## CATEGORY 2: CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS

# PARTICIPANTS



**Sh. Ishwar Purushotham**  
(France)



**Swetalin Dash**  
(Japan)



**Neha Vidyashankar**  
(Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia)



**Malvika**  
(Mexico)



**Ms. Anjana Ramkumar**  
(Singapore)



**Advay Deb**  
(Lomé, Togo)



**Ms. Soumya Ranjan Behera**  
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**Dr. Ziya. A. Pathan**  
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The Indian Council for  
Cultural Relations

# CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS



**Ishwar Purushottam**

Ishwar is an Indian Data Scientist Engineer currently based in southern France. Ishwar holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Toronto, Canada and a master's degree from Université Jean Monnet, France and has lived in North America, Europe, Southern Africa and Asia. Ishwar is multilingual in English, French, Hindi and Kannada and his personal interests include understanding culture and the human condition.

Regarding the social media links, I would like to avoid publicizing my social media profile if it is ok.

My heart echoed the sound of a beating drum while I was sitting in the sparsely furnished room, waiting to be interviewed by the visa officer of the Canadian High Commission. It was the last step in my escape to a land of an apparently better promise. All my documents, from the letter of admission to the sanction of my education loan, neatly bound in a crisp manila folder stood as testament to my life's accomplishment, all of which I had expected to dazzle the officer with and get the green stamp of approval on my application form.

I felt like the Iranian tribe that had fled to India about a thousand years ago for asylum from religious persecution. The tribe landed on the western coast of India and received a royal audience. With no common language to communicate in, the tribe fell to knees to symbolize their tribulations. But the King, who was in no mood to take on more responsibility or burden, started pouring milk into his empty goblet. The tribesmen watched the milk fill up the goblet, and when it began to spill out, they understood the message - the kingdom was already overcrowded.

As the despondent tribesmen began to accept their fate, their elder slowly approached the King. In pindrop silence, the elder sprinkled sugar into the goblet full of milk, which quickly dissolved without the milk spilling over. The message was clear – that the tribe was adding value to the kingdom and the subjects. The king, impressed with the quick wit, allowed them pass and live in his kingdom.

I had decided to share this famous story with my visa officer, to encourage the acceptance of my student visa. However, when I was finally called in for the interview, I sat in front of a middleaged officer who seemed more interested in filling out his paperwork than interacting with me.

With a few short questions and with a couple glances up at me, he sighed his approval of my visa application and I was ushered out before I could even strike up a more insightful conversation with him. So, with that, commenced my journey into the western world. Back then, I had no bearing over my cultural identity and the undercurrents of a battle between competing cultural philosophies.

It has been over a decade since the interview, and now when I reflect over the incident, what comes to mind is not the interview itself, nor my zeal and preparation, but rather how coldly furnished the waiting room was - antithetical to the grandeur and luster of the Canadian High

Commission. It aptly symbolizes what lies beyond the masks and facades - an empty core. It's rather funny how our own pride and vanity makes us believe that we have ascended beyond the heavens in our accomplishments. But it is in objective hindsight and perhaps with a shudder of embarrassment running down our spine that we realize how miniscule they really were in the larger canvas of our lives, and identify that, it is our cultural bonds and values that build character, and not material possession and arbitrary accomplishments.

Over the years, I have had the privilege to live extensively in several countries across the world. In some places, I was fortunate to connect and integrate with a strong Indian diaspora, whereas in others, the Indian community, though visible, was scattered. It had become quickly apparent that the strength of the community determines the extent of which we are able to preserve and maintain our cultural identity; and the degree of our impact on the local culture. With careful introspect, we come to realize that it is only our cultural bonds that bring meaning to our lives.

The Indian culture is as vast as its ocean, dating back to the social constructs of the ancient civilization, and growing therefrom ever since. Culture as a whole is difficult to conceptualize. Perhaps it may be easier to describe it as a composite of the tangible, intangible and the comprehensible. The tangibility of culture is through arts, crafts, statues and so on; the intangible aspect would include the cultural mannerisms, the languages and values, which are transferred socially over the course of time; and the comprehensibility of culture is in the form of our academic knowledge and genealogy of the culture. It is the proliferation of our culture in foreign countries, measured in the way it affects the lives of the people - be it through the senses, the mind or the values - that determines the extent of our imprint in their society. Conversely, the proliferation of western cultures on the Indian diaspora determines the extent of their cultural imprint. The cultures although distinct are not mutually exclusive, and for many people, elements of both cultures have become subsumed into their personality, although at varying degrees and extent.

Further, culture, expressed in terms of language, music, art, science, philosophy, religion and spirituality is so dynamic and ever-evolving that even attempts of documentation becomes challenging. But a striking feature that threads across our cultural fabric is inclusivity and the innate desire to connect with one another as social beings. Even independent India is a fusion of several western political systems with our diverse cultural heritage, which had been uniquely blended to reflect individual identity. As a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic, we boast a Constitution that truly exalts the Indian cultural identity by enshrining the values of justice, liberty and equality at its core. So, unsurprisingly India's cultural imprint in foreign nations is inexorable. Our culture is so vibrant and colourful that it permeates across even the most conservative international arenas. This is perhaps the reason why the Indian communities across world have thrived and become so prominent in their endeavors. However, there is indeed a significant challenge for Indians in balancing their culture with that of their foreign counterpart.

Our cultural citizenship defines our core ideals and develops the intrinsic values that shape us as principled individuals. It is a concept that matured over time until I realized it. Back in my formative years, buckling down to the social pressures of my peers, I had carried my heritage as a liability, always looking for ways to become dissociated from it. It took maturity to realize that it is one of my greatest assets. Indians, as an ethnic minority in foreign countries often become targets and social pariahs. It is thus ever so important to preserve the cultural values, traditions and bonds, no longer our own sake, but for our successive generations, who are slowly losing touch with their roots and conforming to the western cultures. Indian children become excluded from social groups on the basis of their ethnicity and cultural idiosyncrasies, creating an unnatural desire to shed away from their roots and assimilate the western cultures. First generation Indians are raised in their hometowns and then migrate to a foreign country. They find it difficult to adopt to the local culture and become rather oblivious to the social dynamics.



Their children are caught in a struggle of balancing the cultural ideals propagated by their parents with that of the ambient environment. Many ultimately adopt the foreign culture just as fidelity to cultural roots diminish. The third generation tends to become more homogenized with the local culture, and live with a diluted understanding of their cultural origins and values. This may not be inherently deleterious, but it does have long-term implications in character development. With rapid globalization and technological advancement, cultural values and ideals - both western as well as Indian have started to diminish. The youth is concerned more with the joys of materialism than that with finding intrinsic happiness from kindness, compassion and magnanimity - epitomes of our culture. Fault also lies with the modern media, which homogenizes our goals, ambitions and desires leading to the slow fading away of our culture.

Simultaneously, there has been a progressive shift in lifestyle. The traditional joint family household is no longer prevalent in the Indian diaspora. Families are becoming nuclear, and consequentially the transmission of the traditional arts from generation to generation is reduced.

Bollywood film industry is a sizeable cultural export and the medium is in Hindi. It has also been noticed that children now only learn one or two languages, and that there is a systemic shift to Hindi. Even though traditional and regional languages are taught to children, many are able to only speak their native language. Elsewhere, some households in the Indian diaspora forgo teaching their mother tongue, be it Kannada, Tamil, Telegu, Sindhi, Punjabi, in favor of Hindi. We must exercise caution in ensuring that it does not blanket the Indian cultural variety.

Thus, the need of the hour is cultural preservation. While the Indian cultural imprint has been quite deep in the Indian diaspora and has had a radiating impact on the local communities, it is disappearing amongst the younger generations. The ambient culture has a stronger imprint on them. The simple and effective solution, lies in inclusive and engaging cultural education. Without a teacher there cannot be any students. Classical music, traditional

and folk dance, exhibitions, trade fairs and other cultural events form an important part of making a strong cultural imprint. But, truly speaking, it is learning by doing that has been a tried and tested method of cultural preservation. Watching a performance may entertain a person for a while, but learning how to perform will last for a lifetime. Cultural troupes could perhaps include demonstration classes to engage the youth and draw their interests into the classical arts. Cultural institutions, in the form of Community Centers, Temples, Mosques, and even the Indian Embassy become the focal points in unifying the Indian diaspora. The strength of the community will be consequentially linked with the activity of these forums. Language, music and dance classes for the youth will not only instill and reinforce their cultural heritage in the foreign countries, but will also allow the community as a whole to become more close-knit with one another and through mutual discourse, proliferate our culture.

It is equally important to promote cultural traditions and events in a widely publicized and an inclusive manner. The cultural programs should be peppered with the participation of the local communities as well, and not be solely confined to the Indian diaspora. Further, endeavors must be made for active engagement of the youth. Prominent figures and social influencers should also be invited to partake in the events so as to foster a genuine interest in our culture and make a lasting imprint. Attending these cultural events should no longer be seen as a compulsion, but rather as a festivity and an opportunity for the Indian and local communities to felicitate each other. In my travels, I have witnessed a strong Indian diaspora in places like Birmingham, Durban, Bangkok and even far away cities such as Lilongwe.

Promotion of Indian culture is also critical in helping the country inch towards the helm of the global front. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the pre-conceived notions of a first world country and third world country have been erased. Simultaneously, Indian medicine and natural wellness through Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy form an important aspect of our cultural heritage.

With continuing and unified action, the world over will recognize the importance and significance of the Indian culture and endeavor to adopt and harmonize it within their own cultural subsets.

We may find immeasurable success in our lives, but our biggest failure would definitely be in leaving behind a generation with

missing cultural identity. However, the silver-lining is that our time has not yet run out and we still have the promise of tomorrow to preserve and cherish our cultural heritage.



The Indian Council for  
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# CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS



**Malvika  
Padinharayil**

Malvika Padinharayil was born and raised in New Delhi and moved to Mexico at the age of sixteen. She completed high school in 2019 and currently studies in London, UK. She is studying neuroscience and in her free time, she enjoys reading, boxing and socializing with her friends. She identifies with the pride and joy of being a part of the Indian diaspora while also recognizing its challenges and with this sentiment in mind, she writes for her university magazine directed towards those of different diasporas from around the world.

Cultural imprint can be defined as the impact culture has on the wider world. It is no secret that India has been a major part in shaping the global culture we now partake in the twenty-first century. From Bollywood to Chai, much of what Indians enjoy and consider their own has been adapted by the larger global society and used for their pleasures as well. But how did this happen? And what can we speculate about what will follow? What more do we have to offer? This essay will explore the themes of Indian impact on the globe and the sharing of cultures due to globalization through the example of Mexico, a country with more connections with India than what initially meets the eye.

Indian culture cannot be defined and boxed into one standard generic archetype. Indian culture encompasses more than hundreds and thousands of different tribes belonging to one of the 29 different states or the 8 union territories, all with their distinct customs and traditions. This is part of the charm of India. Not even the general population of India can claim to have engaged in all the cultural splendour that India has to offer, yet all these cultures have managed to make an impact in western society in their own large or minuscule ways.

Indian culture in the west is a term that is often used to group south Asian cultures together, namely Indian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani. While this is a practice rooted in misconception and ignorance, it started due to Indian immigrants being present in western society much before the division of India into these different nations.

Indian immigrants can hence be given an appreciatory presence in creating India's current cultural imprint on the globe. This is because Indians see it as a matter of pride to be Indian, and rightfully so. Priya Krishna, the author of *Indian-ish*, a cookbook inspired by the American-Indian food prepared in her family and home growing up, odes to her parents immigrating 'with very little, and finding a way to thrive through their tenacity and work ethic without losing sight of where they came from'. This is the story of Indian immigrants who have managed to leave their mark on western society which can be seen in the Indian families in the western world who even after generations of having assimilated with their respective countries choose to hold on to traditions and values, not because of compulsion, but rather out of respect and admiration for the culture India calls its own.

I live in London now and even there, I have found a community reminiscent of my days in New Delhi. From the South Indian restaurants in East Ham to the Indian themed university events for festivals like Diwali, Indians have brought a piece of India with them to this foreign land.

I remember feeling homesick one of my first nights at University. My flatmate, a Dentistry student with Indian roots dating back three generations sat down with me and taught me the trick of buttering Khakhra for a smooth, yet crunchy taste that reminded me of home. From that day on, it became a ritual to eat buttered Khakhra whenever one of us was feeling homesick.

We Indians are backed by a rich history of ingenuity, valour, and a strong moral compass, a path that can be traced from the times of the Harappan and Indus valley civilizations. In the past two centuries, India has been subject to attempts of colonization by every imaginable European superpower due to its richness in resources and abundance of wealth and yet we once again managed to hold our own using the same ingenuity and valour and became an independent state in the year 1947. Mexico was the first Latin American country in 1947 to recognize this.

These two countries reside on opposite sides of the globe, where the sun never shines on both landmasses together. Yet an inexplicable link can be felt between the two cultures by anyone who cares enough to observe. When my mother tried to buy oranges for the first time in Mexico, she was pleasantly surprised to know that they are called 'Naranjas' in Spanish, a word very similar to its Malayalam counterpart 'Naranga'. The Spanish and the Portuguese brought these words to Mexico and Kerala respectively in the early 16th century. The Indo-European family of languages has been key in the development of communication around the world. It is strange to think that the great works of writers like Shakespeare, Earnest Hemmingway and Albert Camus all wrote their works in languages that derive part of their roots from Sanskrit- the language that holds the wisdom of the Vedas. Thus comes my first link, both countries were prized possessions of their respective colonizers, and have hence suffered the good, the bad and the ugly under their regime.

Ancient India was a sought after prize; when the Spanish set sail for India, they stumbled upon Mexico and the New World. The Aztecs of Mexico, therefore, were mistaken for being 'Indians' by the Spanish and till date, the term is used to describe the

indigenous people of Mexico. Hence through European colonisers, our first link had been established, before the Mexican people even knew of India's existence.

The Mexican 'china poblana' dress is a traditional attire that is rumoured to have originated from Catarina de San Juan the Indian slave that was brought to Mexico after being kidnapped from the shores of Cochin in India by Portuguese pirates.

Catarina de San Juan (originally Meera) went on to become an important pious figure in her community in Mexico and she was regarded as a popular saint until the holy inquisition of the Spanish prohibited this. She is venerated till date in Puebla, with her former Jesuit church being renamed to La Tumba de la China Poblana in her honour. Whenever I step out onto the streets of Mexico wearing a lehenga or a salwar kameez I am met with smiles and wide eyes, reminiscent of the same expression I sported when I saw Mexican embroidery on white skirts with beautiful flower patterns. In wider Mexican society, there is great regard and curiosity for India and its people and cultures. This is reflected in the upmarket shops in the country's capital hosting everything from Indian eateries to cafes with chai on their menus and Indian inspired outfits in clothing stores.

Indo-Mexican relations have come a long way since prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Mexico in 1961. The two countries are part of the G-20 major economic countries and have numerous bilateral agreements, the most notable of which is the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation which came into effect in 1975. Now, both countries have embassies in their counterpart capitals and boast of a growing immigrant population on either side- a symbol of mutual recognition and admiration of greatness.

In my personal experience, Gurudev Tagore Indian Cultural Centre in Mexico City has been a major proponent of this. With a yoga class boasting of over a hundred pupils and disciples of dance forms of Kathak, Mohiniattam, Bharatnatyam, Odissi and further Tabla and Sitar students it is evident that the Mexican population has an appetite for Indian culture.

In the future, we can look forward to this establishment growing and strengthening the already steady bond between the two nations. India will leave more cultural gems in Mexico, the most foreseeable of which include the growing number of Indian restaurants, Yoga studios and exchange and study abroad programmes.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, this institution continues to support its students with online classes and by building a community that cares for the welfare of its members. My mother has hosted Mexican friends in her ancestral home in Kerala which was an experience that has been thoroughly enjoyable for everyone. My grandmother especially enjoyed feeding them achaar and dhal and other Indian

delicacies. They shopped for souvenirs for their friends and family back home, helping to give back to the smaller Indian tribal and folk art communities.

It would be an understatement to say that India's cultural imprint in both retrospect and prospect is admirable and promising. I have found an Indian influence on every part of the world that I live and visit- from the British people's enthusiasm for Indian cuisine to the Mexican people's fondness for our art forms. India's cultural diversity and warmth gives it much to offer and teach the world so as to facilitate co-operation and add to the globalization of a culture that has transcended both time and geographical boundaries.



The Indian Council for  
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# CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS



**Soumya Ranjan Behera**

I am basically by profession a project manager in electrical and working for a Spanish company IDOM since the last 4 years. Presently in Peru for a steel project job. Having a professional experience of more than 12 years in electrical project consultancy, erection and commissioning based on all technology available in the world. Born and brought up in Dhenkanal, Odisha and feeling proud always to do more good work so that people will remember my country for good work.

Associated with Indian community and our community is doing very good work in Lima, Peru.

Max Mueller, a great German scholar and philosopher wrote:

'If I were to ask myself from what literature we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of the Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw the corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human a life... again I should point to India.'

India is an amalgamation of varied beliefs, ideologies and religious prophecies. From the intertwining of its complex history with the contemporary society, its culture over throughout its history is attributed to the unity in diversity, depth in culture and a harmonious blend of spiritualism and scientific temperament. This mosaic is extraordinary and has been a point of inspiration for many cultures since ages.

Retrospections on the holistic imprint of Indian culture lead to highlighting a defining era for this tremendous impact. This period, as mentioned by the historian William Dalrymple, is the 'Golden Era' that ranges between the fourth and twelfth centuries AD. Being the monumental inspirations by the central and middle-east Asian countries, this cultural impact spread from Afghanistan to Japan via China and South East Asia. Some of the greatest temples and monuments arose from that cultural impact, from the giant Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan to the temples of Prambanan and Borobudur in Indonesia, from Angkor Wat in Cambodia to the Buddhist caves in Dun Huang.

Odisha was a major take-off point for seafarers to Indonesia, taking Hinduism and Buddhism with them. By the 4th century AD, Hindu kingdoms were flourishing in Java and Bali. Indonesia has 21 Jagannath temples recalling its Odisha connection.

Powerful Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms arose in Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia. The two religions spread peacefully through traders and priests, although many Hindu kingdoms later became militarily powerful. The Ramayana became the national dance of Indonesia, and remains so despite the country getting a Muslim majority.

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Thailand's greatest ancient city was Ayutthaya, a variation of India's Ayodhya. The Hindu-Buddhist Ayutthaya Empire (1350-1767 AD) viewed both religions as one. Thai kings were viewed as avatars of Hindu gods such as Vishnu, and also as Bodhisattvas. The Thai national epic, the Ramakien, is an adaptation of the Ramayana. Scenes from it are painted on the walls of many temples as well as the Grand Palace in Bangkok.

Buddhism was taken to China by a South Indian called Bodhidharma. There are different versions of his life, but a widely revered version says he was a son of the Tamil Pallava King Simhavarma. He was well-versed in martial arts and took to Buddhism. He renounced his rural lineage and went to China to spread Buddhism there. He is reputed to have established the martial arts (Kung-fu) in China's famous Shaolin Temple. Another Indian guru, Padma Sambhava, took Buddhism to Tibet. Traders and priests also spread Buddhism via the Silk Route from India to China and beyond to Japan. The Ajanta caves are India's most famous Buddhist caves, but are tiny in size and numbers compared with the great painted Mogao caves at Dun Huang in the Gobi Desert, a major transit city along the Silk Route. Many more Thousand-Buddha caves full of statues dot the Silk Route.

With the advent of globalization and the cross migration across political and physical borders, India's cultural imprint also traversed and made an indelible mark in the global arena. In the contemporary period, one of the most prominent influences is that of yoga which is now acknowledged as the key to attain a sound body and mind. Popular exercise regimens such as Pilates have been influenced by ancient Indian spiritual exercises. Also, Indian traditional dance forms like Bhangra (a North Indian folk dance) has been incorporated into gym workouts. For

instance, Sarina Jain, the Indian American creator of The Masala Bhangra Workout in the United States, prides herself on the fact she's "the first to bring Indian dance to the U.S. fitness industry at a global level."

Indians possess an unparalleled attribute of hospitality and warmth for its guests. This is in line with a symbolic phrase from the Upanishads, 'Atithi Devo Bhava': worshipping our guests and meeting their needs meticulously. Spiritualism is yet another concept from India that the world emulates and preaches. This ancient Vedantic technique to reach inner peace has been popularized by Indian gurus who have spread the practice throughout the West; one transcendental meditation organization claims to have taught more than fifty thousand students across the United States, Latin America and Africa during the past two years alone. The bestselling book "Eat, Pray, Love" has further popularized the use of meditation to tame the mind. Julia Roberts, who plays the protagonist in the film, even identifies herself as a Hindu who regularly meditates.

Other Vedantic influences on daily life include reciting mantras, and the popularization of words such as "guru" and "pundit" to describe people with expertise. The idea that all of your actions, whether good or bad, produce consequences that shape your future is a common theme in many cultural value systems, but the term "karma" captures that concept in one word and has become used throughout the English-speaking world, as well as elsewhere.

Billions of people around the world also value the concept of ahimsa — non-violence — as popularized by Mahatma Gandhi. His ideas strongly influenced Martin Luther King Jr. Ahimsa also explains why many Hindus and Jains are vegetarians.

The belief that what you eat affects your behavior, and that a vegetarian diet can help tame the mind, has been popularized worldwide by Indians, who are known for their exquisite vegetarian cuisine.

India's cuisine is at its zenith of popularity and is craved for its richness of spices and balance of nutrients. Worldwide, flavorful Indian spices and seasonings have increased the appeal of vegetarian food. India produces over four million tons of spice, and exports around 180 spice products to over 150 nations. The Indian Spice Board is currently planning to set up three promotional centers in, respectively, Dubai, Chicago and Europe.

Spices are also of special interest in the alternative health community, where they are viewed as anti-inflammatory agents that can help the aging brain and play a role in cancer prevention. Turmeric and several other spices are part of the Indian Ayurvedic system. Ancient Indian epics like The Ramayana reference Ayurveda, a holistic approach to health that fuses the forces of mind, body, senses and spirit. To this day, about thirty companies are leading the way, with a million dollars or more per year in business to meet the growing demand for Ayurvedic medicine. The larger Ayurvedic medicine suppliers have also moved into the businesses of toiletries — soap, toothpaste, shampoo — which use traditional herbal ingredients. For example, L'Oreal has been reported to be looking into purchasing an Indian Ayurvedic skin care brand, and companies like Estée Lauder have created their own Ayurvedic spa treatments.

But even more wide-spread is India's music and dance scene. The sitar, first popularized in the US by Ravi Shankar, has been used by artists from the Beatles to Janet Jackson. The most powerful Indian cultural export, though, has long been its film industry, nicknamed Bollywood, which is generally

believed to produce the largest number of feature films in the world. Bollywood makes more ticket sales than Hollywood does, though revenue figures are much higher for the latter. Sometimes dubbed in local languages, these films, filled with colorful costumes, dances, music, and love stories are watched in Kuwait, Nigeria, Russia, Scandinavia, the Caribbean and even Fiji. Through television, Brazil has been particularly touched by India. Brazil's 2009 Emmy Award-winning soap opera, *Passage to India*, introduced Indian culture there on a broad scale. Such was the popularity of the show that even a truck driver knew that the cow is considered sacred in India, and was newly aware of the Indian custom of arranged-marriage. Another result of the show's popularity has been that Brazilians are now fascinated by Indian clothing. We find instances of malls consistently had at least one Indian themed store selling kurti tops – Indian style blouses which are popularly worn over skinny jeans or tights. I also saw men wearing t-shirts with pictures of Indian Gods and Goddesses, and saw them printed on swim suit cover ups. Of course, we rarely see Indians wearing this kind of garment, since; many consider these displays on clothing to be somewhat offensive.

The modern Indian culture has its fulcrum on a scientific temperament; however the very foundation of this scientific spirit is rooted in the Vedas which inspired so many renowned scientists and academic geniuses of our time. As W. Heisenberg, a famous German Physicist puts it:

*"After the conversations about Indian philosophy, some of the ideas of Quantum Physics that had seemed so crazy suddenly made much more sense."*

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In an effort to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, more people, including global leaders, are using the Indian greeting of 'namaste'. The world is now emulating what the Indians have been practicing for ages and has embraced the no-contact way of greeting. Recently, the US President Donald Trump tweeted how he greeted the PM of Ireland with a Namaste and President of France, Emmanuel Macron decided to greet all his counterparts with a namaste too. Besides, rudimentary practice of removing shoes before entering one's home is now being emphasized upon.

There are many other aspects of Indian culture that have spread on a global scale. However, globalization has beyond doubt transformed Indian culture and added quintessential reforms necessary for justice, liberty and equality. Gradually, the Indian cultural paradigm has also evolutionised into progressive thoughts and a globalised mindset. Technological changes are abreast, and socially there is a hint of westernization in Indian cultural practices. Some of these changes are certainly welcome such as the support to the LGBTQ community and institutionalization of same-sex marriages.

Yet the core Indian values like compassion, respect for democracy, sustainable practices for ecological change, net neutrality for seeking global peace and a shared spirit of brotherhood transcending religious barriers continue to prevail and are preserved. The entire planet is drawn to Indian culture and soft power. The global community looks to us for solutions to international problems – be it combating terrorism, money laundering or climate change. In a globalised world, our responsibilities are also global and this is the new culture India is adapting to from the instilled values of the past. Hence, the prospect of India's cultural impact is very intriguing and fulfilling. From currencies to computer programs, self-realization to the arts, and well beyond, we are seeing its influence and will continue to witness for a sustainable period of time. To sum up, India's rich cultural imprint has a prosperous trajectory to complete and a positive impact to make in the years to come.



The Indian Council for  
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# CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS

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**Swetalin Dash**

I belong to Odisha. I have done my Btech in Information Technology. By profession I am an HR. With that I am a national level classical singer and have represented my school (kendriya vidyalaya) in national level sports (Badminton). We came to Japan in 2018. I am currently on a professional break which inspired me to write this essay on such a wonderful topic. I love travelling and nature photography as well.

Vasudhaiva kutumbakam is a phrase that we Indians have grown up listening to! Households running in a joint family system preaches us that the "World is one family". From the hundreds of years of foreign rulers invading us, to giving away alms when we encounter a poor man on a street, it further vouches for the fact that we accept everyone as our own.

Discrimination and differentiation are a far cry for us. We Indians are known to be a classic example to demonstrate "Unity in diversity" or in other words "Anekta mein ekta".

From the beautiful valleys of Kashmir- the crown jewel of my nation to Kanyakumari- where the majestic seas and ocean pleasantly touch my motherland's feet, from the Aravalis, the Rann of Kutch, the majestic valleys in the West to the beautiful 7 sisters states in the North East are evident that we are one, despite a change of taste of water in every mile and a subtle variation in the language we speak, which changes every fourth mile! India is a secular country where many cultures and religions are flourishing with peace and prosperity because the culture and tradition in India is deeply rooted within the minds and hearts of the people which they have gained from their rich culture.

The glorious past of my motherland India, then, referred to as "Sone ki Chidiya" or the Golden Bird with a Midas touch. The fertile land, the greatest river basins, the Gangetic plains, the southern plateaus have tremendously contributed to making our nation a progressive one. Traditional Indian food, arts, music, clothing vary significantly across different regions. These components are influenced by various factors like geography, climate, culture and rural/urban setting.

India- the name that binds us together, embraces our languages, our food preferences, our religions, various dance forms, music, architecture and customs and unfurls the whole entity's greatness by giving us one National Flag- The Tirangaa, that binds us with all our differences to our glorious history. It is a country that boasts of a rich culture with reference to a collection of minor unique cultures comprising of clothing, festivals, languages, religions, music, dance, architecture, food and art. Most noteworthy, Indian culture has been influenced by several other cultures throughout its history and is influencing many foreign cultures in today's world. The history of Indian culture is several millennia old. We have preserved our belief in the Vedas, as well as have launched successful missions into the space. It wouldn't be wrong to say that India is one of the rarest of nations to have economically and scientifically progressed, whilst holding its cultural heritage close to its heart. Consequently the presence of so many diverse religions has given rise to tolerance and secularism in Indian Culture.

Another feature is the depth of culture, which contrasts with the newness of the nation in its present form. There has been over 4000 years of philosophical and cultural development in India, going back to the early Aryan civilisation. Since then, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism and many other influences have left deep imprints on the society. Every Indian, even the poorest, illiterate can tell stories of myth and history, a consciousness of a great civilizational heritage which is usually widespread. The modern state of India is only 34 years old approximately and its development must be understood in the context of trying to impose a national framework on old cultural patterns. The consciousness of the great past and the newness of the present sometimes produces an abrasive reaction.

The culture of any country does not only portray the region and language but it starts with the mind set and mentality of the residing citizens. India is a bouquet of flowers varying religion, dialect, edibles, tradition, custom, music, art and architecture bundled into a single unit of patriotism and unity. Born into a family where both the parents worked for the Government of India, I consider myself to be blessed enough to have got a chance to roam across the length and breadth of the country while my parents were posted for their call of duty!

I so vividly remember the day my husband and I packed our bags to move our base to Japan- the land of rising sun. The family bondage and the feeling of nostalgic kept sinking within me, until I landed in this beautiful island country. From then I have been comparing how the two countries are similar in many ways. How I always feel that everything here has something inscribed from Indian culture. I then realized the immense contribution that Japan had made to my country during India's struggle for freedom. Japan and India have so much common culturally, despite being contrasting is what makes it even more fascinating. A little walk down the memory lane, into the history of both the countries, we realize the strong bond between us, based on Buddhism- combining its heritage with a clear path to lead a beautiful life. Given a chance to retrospect, both India and Japan have a strong commitment to the ideas of democracy, open societies, tolerance etc.

I cannot help but recollect the fact that Japan was one of the earliest nations to have partnered with India to help them fight freedom. It is here that the Azad Hind Fauj was created under the able Japanese mentorship, and the most noted freedom fighter Lt Shri Subash Chandra Bose led the freedom movement of Indian National Army from here and laid down his life for India's freedom movement. The history of modern Indian settlement in Japan goes back more than a century. As early as 1873, a few Indian businessmen and their families, primarily Parsis and Sindhis, had settled in Yokohama as well as Okinawa. In 1891, Tata, then a small trading firm, established a branch in Kobe. Post-independence, Japan was one of the earliest nations to have supported India in economic growth in the form of foreign investment. The momentum has since grown only in a positive trajectory. Japan has been a host to many successful movies of Bombay Film Industry in earlier days and that has positively impacted in the popularity of Bollywood and Indian movies among the Japanese crowd. Not to forget the fact that the famous Actor from the South of India Mr. Rajnikanth is as much loved and celebrated by Japanese fans as he is loved by Indians.

Whether it is Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore or Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, many great Indians have been associated with Japan and have become admirers of the Land of the Rising Sun. There is a reciprocity too and it is not a coincidence that the Japan-India Association was set up 111 years ago in 1903. It is today the oldest international friendship body in Japan. According to one of the reports by the Ministry of External Affairs, throughout the various phases of history, since civilisational contacts between India and Japan began some 1400 years ago, the two countries have never been adversaries.

Our culture has influenced everyone around the globe. India's earliest documented direct contact with Japan dates from 752 CE when the Todaiji Temple in Nara was consecrated by an Indian monk, Bodhisena, who performed the eye-opening of a statue the Buddha Sakyamuni.

The joint family system is the prevailing system of Indian culture. All of the family members live together where the eldest one is the head of the family who passes the age old traditions and varied culture to the younger ones likewise Japanese are taught from their infancy days that life is all about duties and responsibilities and not pleasure- this is one take away for me to be inculcated not only in my country India, but every other nation of the world. Another deep connection between India and Japan dates to the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore days. Incidentally, one of the oldest Indian Universities -Visva-Bharati established a Japanese department in 1954 under the guidance of Probohd Chanda Bagchi. This made Visva-Bharati the first Indian university to introduce Japanese language courses. Culturally speaking again, Japan had a huge influence on The Mother- the French collaborator of Shri Aurobindo Ashram and she inculcated few Japanese virtues in her way of life when she finally settled down in Pondicherry ashram in India.

India celebrates a huge number of festivals. These festivals are very diverse due to multi religious and multi cultural Indian society. Indians greatly value festive occasions. Above all, the whole country joins in the celebration irrespective of the differences. From Holi to Diwali, it's worth seeing the cultural heritage that is imbibed in us, is being openly accepted and celebrated in Japan, without any biases. For example the world famous "RATH Yatra" or the Car festival of Lord Jagannath along with his brother Lord Balaram and sister Lord Subhadra originating from my native place Puri, is celebrated here in an emphatic manner. People across the globe dress in Indian attire and jewelleries and dance in Indian music dedicating everything to god! Also not to forget the International society for Krishna Consciousness widely known as ISKCON which we have in every corner of the world! makes us realise how foreigners are getting attracted to our culture and completely surrendering themselves to Lord Krishna!

The cultural exchanges between Indian and other countries have created many parallels in their respective folklore and tales. Modern popular culture based upon this folklore, such as works of fantasy fiction in Manga for example, sometimes bear references to common deities, demons and philosophical concepts from Indian mythology. The Indian goddess Saraswathi

for example, is known as Benzaiten in Japan. Lord Brahma- known as 'Bonten', and Yamraj- known as 'Enma', etc and are also part of the traditional Japanese Buddhist pantheon being influenced from the Indian mythology. In addition to the common Buddhist influence on the two societies, Shintoism, being an animist religion, is like the animist strands of Hinduism, in contrast to the religions present in the rest of the world- where only one solo God or Super powerful one is believed and worshipped. Sanskrit, a classical language used in Buddhism and Hinduism, is still used by some ancient Chinese priests who had immigrated to Japan in much earlier times, and the Siddha script is still written to this day, despite having passed out of usage in India. It is also thought that the distinctive "Torii" gateways at temples in Japan, may be related to the Toran gateways used in Indian temples. Even though we cannot formulate a predictive theory, however, these references help us connect the dots that establish the Indo-Japanese cultural connect.

Another fascinating thing about India is that I truly admire and believe all Indians and other nations should imbibe them is their responsibility as a citizen towards fellow people and the nation. As we say all Indians are my brothers and sisters! Indian Culture has been an inspiration to many writers. India is certainly a symbol of unity around the world. Indian culture is certainly very complex. Furthermore, the conception of Indian culture results from some internal forces. Above all, these forces are a robust constitutional, universal adult franchise, secular policy, flexible federal structure etc.

Indian culture is characterised by a strict social hierarchy. Children are taught their roles and place in the society from an early age. Probably many Indian believe that gods and spirits have a role in determining their life. In India manners and etiquettes, the style of communication, values and beliefs are vital components of the culture. Similarly Japanese are famous for their willingness to work very hard. Their children are taught to show respect for others, especially parents and bosses. They learn to do what's best for their family or company and worry less about their own needs. This is something that is synonymous with Indian family and social practices.

Coming to Indian foods, it is loved and accepted in every corner of the world. Foreigners love Indian spices which typically originates from decades ago! Eating pattern varies from mile to mile and person to person. These also are contrasting when we compare the ancient, medieval and modern India. Ancient Indians food came from the nature in the form of fruits berries where as now days its improvised form of those that were eaten then. Fruits gifting is a common practice in Japan and the host as well as the guest consider fruits to be the best gifting options. Who knows it better that we Indians, who have been practicing this since ages? We consider guests as "Athithi Devo Bhava" - Guest is like God and we offer them fruits and sweets like we would offer to the almighty while doing prayers and rituals. Contrastingly The Indian "Biryani" is loved by Japanese!

Continuing with my emphasis on prayers by folding hands to show respect and gratitude is a practice being followed in India since time immemorial! We are glad to observe the Japanese traditional practice of bowing down instead of shaking hand when we meet someone. From strangers, to colleagues to State guests, everyone is given a traditional "Ojigi" - A practice that

we Indians feel connected to.

From geographically distant located to the belief systems, food habits, socio-cultural aspects and more, India and Japan are poles apart. However, there is a strong bond of friendship that connects its people and the love and respect that we have received here makes me find this country a home away from home.

Due to globalisation and advancement in technology things have changed and today people are living and working in a global market place where they are eating Indian food, wearing Chinese garments, driving German cars and working in American companies. The world is changing at a tremendous pace and so is India. To sum it up, even though India has accepted the modern means of living and people have improved their lifestyles but the traditions and values are still the same and the culture of India is one of the oldest in the world. Many Indians still stick to the traditional culture inspite of rapid westernisation which makes us a very unique community. Indians have demonstrated strong unity irrespective of the diversity among them. Thus as said in the beginning Unity in diversity is the ultimate mantra of Indian culture.



The Indian Council for  
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# CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS



“**Neha Vidyashankar**

I am Neha Vidyashankar, born in Chennai, India and am currently residing in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. I am studying Grade 10 in Global Indian International school, Kuala Lumpur. My hobbies include reading books, poetry and art work. I am a trained classical dancer and my parents encourage me to participate in various competitions that interests me.

I like travelling to India and have visited many places within India, the most liked were Mussoorie, Ooty and the holy place of Rishikesh.

I thank my English teacher who had motivated me to take part in this competition. Many thanks to the ICCR for this initiative and encouraging Indians abroad to be part of cultural relations.

Jai Hind and salutes to the various warriors fighting this COVID epidemic!

Migration is a universal phenomenon in the contemporary world. It acts as a catalyst in bringing together a cultural imprint in this era of globalisation. According to the dictionary, cultural imprint refers to the impact of social, religious and cultural factors which mould a particular nation. People explore and move around the world for better living conditions simultaneously spreading and blending their socio-cultural characteristics with the others. Indeed, there are historical events of people spreading culture in a particular society. Such people or migrants are collectively known as diaspora.

Derived from Greek, the term 'diaspora' means scattered or dispersed. A common instance of a diaspora is that of the Indians. In a historical point of view, Indian migrants were better known as gypsies who emigrated towards the northwest and Eastern Europe during the ancient and medieval period. A cultural amalgamation can be traced with the architectural style of the Greek and the use of building materials, language and literature, fine arts and performing arts. Philosophically and spiritually, ancient holy books and scriptures like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were preached across the world and the books had many linguistic publications. Numerous

esteemed saints like the Sufis and Bhakti saints travelled around spreading their religious traditions, customs and ideas synthesising culture in all spheres. Indians developed their own sense of culinary art influencing the cuisines of countries like Portugal, China and Central Asia. The Europeans always manifested the Indian food as delightful and heavenly, something close to what Gods taught of ambrosia.

In no way is modernised culture a subordinate of ancient culture. The following are the important features which aid the future generations in understanding the western world's adoption of Indian culture:

1. The diversity and the proportion of Indian population.
2. The depth of culture.
3. The dependence of future in the interaction amongst different nations.

The very term "India" implies a unity which exists more as a tentative political form than as a human and socio-cultural reality. As the ages pass by, India has become a renowned vibrant society with an increasing influence and internal dynamic, directly and indirectly. But on the dark side, the Western world views it as a country of inertness and poverty, a combination of

exotic and tragic. Apart from its significance in the size of the landmass, the diverse country has a flaw of adopting the path of domestic and foreign policies. India which has managed to secure a position between Western and Communist oriented states globally, is often tested of its non-alignment participation in international politics. For decades, its leadership and economic policies have also broken new grounds. Any proud nationality could say that India was the first large-scale test of modern mixed economy along with a combination of both private and public ownership of economic enterprises.

## **CHANGING TRENDS IN INDIAN CULTURE**

Globalisation has a predominant role to play worldwide. It has left back its footprints at every sphere of life. Not only in India, but the interchange of world views and ideas has resulted in a major transformation of the lifestyle and living standard of people globally. Indian culture is no bar to this transformation process. Our deep rooted traditions and customs have loosened up their hold with the emergence of globalisation. India has a rich cultural background and pride of its culture is famous throughout the world. Globalisation has not only inculcated the westernisation in India, but conversely the Indian culture has also spread its impact globally. Culture and traditions of any geographic region hold a special significance with respect to its uniqueness and that is the differentiating factor for a population within a geographic boundary from the other. This is the rich essence of the Indian culture that has attracted many foreigners to stay back in India and mingle into its eternal fragrance. When one analyse this rich culture with the globalisation point of view, it can find many punch holes of westernisation and mixing of other traits and cultures into our beautifully woven blanket.

In the beginning of the late 20th century, nation-states began opening their borders in efforts to be more globally competitive in international markets. Multinationals and later, global companies began to grow and multiply in record numbers. Due to the generalisation of free trade, the market economy of the twentieth century has progressively spread at remarkable proportions around the world. And hence, the recent shift from the international economy to a world economy that supersedes nations, including their regulations. This shift has been labeled globalisation with the latter's extended and evolving history yet to be traced to its origin. Globalisation is one of the most discussed concepts across the disciplines but still remains elusive and confounded. In this respect, the debate taking place in the literature on globalisation is two-pronged as the definition of the meaning of globalisation is still not consensual and its impacts on local cultures are yet to be circumvented.

In addition to an openness of diverse economic, political, cultural and social flows in both information and trade and its market-related dimension, globalisation also has political features through the so-called notion of global governance. In fact, the involvement of various states and governments in promoting the internationalisation of their companies contributes to globalisation, particularly through multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund.

Finally, globalisation is a natural and inevitable process as no country in the world can avoid or ignore it and failing to embrace it will lead to marginalisation. It is noteworthy to mention that globalisation does not concern countries at the same level. World nations are not integrated to the same extent in international exchanges. Thus, the concept of world village

characterised by the same values and concerns does not hold true. In fact, globalisation has not eliminated immense disparities in the ways of life or standards of living between rich and poor nations.

The common factor within all these diversities is the Indian mind-set of welcoming, greeting, celebrating in a united way with immense affection and togetherness. This is the rich essence. Unprecedented interaction and mobility have dented local cultures. Large scale immigration and a transnational workforce - the product of globalisation- is dispersing cultures across the world, leading to a unified world culture. India is no exception. There was a time when Indians used to greet each other with "Namaste" or something similar in regional dialects. But now it's "Hi" and "Hello" among a large section of the population. The joint family system of India, which has been appreciated worldwide, is breaking up, paving the way for nuclear families everywhere. Most people now like an independent life, a by-product of globalisation. There are old-age homes and senior communities everywhere, in the major cities at least.

English is already the primary language in India because it connects everybody. Yet each state in the country has a separate first language, and it can sometimes become very difficult without English. But are the local languages dying out? Hardly! The internet is actually preserving them. Take for instance the efforts to preserve Bengali and the works of Rabindranath Tagore. The Gitanjali project is an online archive of all the songs, stories, books and poems of Tagore. The internet is not just preserving this, it's actually taking Tagore's work to the world and making it more popular.

Thankfully, Indian festivals haven't changed a lot as yet, though some influences can be

found. Many festivals have gone global though, as a lot of Dussehra, Diwali, and Ganesh Chaturthi are celebrated abroad by the diaspora. Many locals attend these festivals as well, and get to learn about Indian religious events. But here's a change within the country that's quite a surprise. We are celebrating many more international events now such as Friendship Day, Christmas, and even Father's Day and Mother's Day. These events hardly had any relevance in Indian society even a couple of decades back. India is changing and integrating with the world. Many Indian traditions, festivals, performing arts and ways of life are centuries old, and while these run the risk of taking a backseat in an increasing global space, the internet is also playing a big part in preserving traditions which may otherwise have been forgotten.

Discounting the dark ages from about 1300 AD till our independence, in general India has maintained a very open and receptive attitude towards scientific discovery and new technologies. In spite of the distorted European view that Indians are totally oblivious to facts and figures, immune to scientific development and that they look upon the world as an illusion, it has been the primary aim of ancient as well as modern India to explore, to find out more about the world we live in. Though there are references to kings 100 ft tall and oceans of milk and honey, there is not a single Indian who actually believes in the physical existence of these things. Whereas it took more than a century for Europeans to believe that the earth is not the centre of the universe, such an observation was made by Aryabhatta more than a thousand years before Copernicus.

The earliest traces of human existence in India, so far discovered, go back to the period between 400,000 and 200,000 BC.



This is suggested by the large number of primitive stone tools found in the Soan Valley and South India. From 8000 BC, the Mesolithic age began and continued upto 4000 BC in India. During this time, sharp and pointed tools were used for killing fast-moving animals. The beginning of plant cultivation also appeared. So technology had already made an appearance on the Indian scene. Indus Valley and Harappan Culture Around the beginning of the third millennium BC, a culture appeared to the south east of Baluchistan, which evolved into what is now known as the Indus Valley or Harappan civilisation. The cities were far more advanced than their counterparts in prehistoric Egypt, Mesopotamia or anywhere else in Western Asia. This civilisation had developed technologies like the plough and melting of metals like copper and bronze. Technology played an important part in their lives.

Interactions between globalisation and culture hold considerable implications for both societies and organisations. In this respect, economic globalisation may exert an influence in reinforcing the ideology of individualism worldwide. As globalisation promotes the flow of cultural practices and norms along with cross-border exchanges of products and goods, both societies and organisations need to understand cultural implications of these flows in hopes for better interaction with other cultures and more efficient management of international organisations. In addition, while resorting to standardised practices across cultures, organisations need to adapt these practices in light of local cultural specificities.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude with, there are different aspects of the Indian culture. Each aspect is practiced by people but not everyone believes in the different aspects. As one can see it is a very traditional

culture, everyone has their opinion towards it, positive and negative. Therefore the Indian Culture is a very unique culture and has various practices. Although the youth do not believe in the traditional aspects, the culture will vary with time and will not be traditional anymore because of the modern world. All in all the aspects are frequently practiced but tomorrow's generation are going to change it. Indian culture is incredibly complex and resembles a chaos of mind-boggling proportions. But beneath this seeming chaos is a scientific foundation that is thousands of years old. The caste system in India, as it appears today, looks unnecessary, unfair and uncalled for. Why should we discriminate between people on the basis of profession or birth? But this was not always the case. Ancient sages look at why the caste system was setup in the first place and explores whether abolishing the caste system would solve any of the problems associated with it nowadays. It has been a long-standing complaint that Indian youth are highly influenced by American and European cultures.



# CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS

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“ Anjana Ramkumar

Anjana Ramkumar was born in Cuddalore, Tamilnadu and moved to Singapore with her family at the age of 4. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from the National University of Singapore and served as a Foreign Service Officer in Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs upon graduation. Anjana subsequently obtained her Master's degree in Geography from the National University of Singapore in 2019 and is currently pursuing her PhD in Development Sociology at Cornell University. She is a trained Carnatic Violinist and a passionate home cook.

I was four years-old when we first came to Singapore from Chennai on a sultry morning in October 1997. As a child, I was oblivious to what it meant to cross the Bay of Bengal on a one-way ticket. In the years to come, I have wondered several times how my parents must have felt during that journey, where they left behind the familiar to embrace the foreign. The journey that set in motion their transition from being Indians to becoming members of the Indian Diaspora. This essay is partly a story of that four-year-old. It is also partly an account of the historical and contemporary profile of the Indian Diaspora in Singapore. In situating my personal experiences within the larger processes that have shaped the Indian Diaspora in Singapore, I attempt to paint a portrait that highlights the rich, complex and dynamic experience of what it means to be an Indian in Singapore. In the years that followed my arrival in the city-state, I completed my education in Singapore's public school system, attained a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies and subsequently went on to serve in Singapore's civil service as a Foreign Service Officer. The positions and perspectives that I present in this essay have been crafted by this very personal journey of mine. It is, but one, among many accounts out there on what it means to be Indian in Singapore.

## **Retrospect: Across the Bay of Bengal**

*“The history of the BAy of BengAl AS A connected region points, Above All, to the limitAtions of the ArtificiAl distinctions between economic, politicAl, culturAl, And environmentAl history— And of those between South AsiAn And SoutheASt AsiAn history.” - Sunil Amrith*

In his 2013 book “Across the Bay of Bengal”, Sunil Amrith examines the history of migration across the Indian Ocean and weaves a narrative that traces centuries of social, cultural, economic and political interaction between the regions we now know as South Asia and Southeast Asia. Crossed by troops, traders, slaves and workers, the Bay of Bengal has borne witness to the movements of several thousands who hailed from across India, with records dating back several centuries. A small, thriving port-town at the tip of the Malayan peninsula, the island that would later become known as Singapore, received more than its fair share of migrants from India. When the island was officially declared a sovereign state in 1965, Indians constituted a significant number – A group that was as diverse from its Malay and Chinese counterparts as it was within itself. Traders from Gujarat, policing and military troops from Punjab, money-lenders from Chettinaad, and their fellow Tamil labourers were some of the prominent communities that constituted this group, with religious affiliations that spanned across Hinduism, Islam, and to a lesser extent Christianity.

In modern Singapore however, they found themselves bestowed with a new, broad identity of "Indian" - One among the four official categories of racial identity used by the state to profile citizens in its multicultural society.<sup>1</sup> Within this institutional arrangement, Indians became key players in Singapore's nation-building and they gained legitimacy in their claims to calling Singapore "home".

### **Cultural Imprints: Indians in Singapore**

This legitimacy is expressed in several mechanisms that govern the cultural lives of Indians in Singapore. It is expressed in bureaucracy as seen in the designation of Deepavali as an official public holiday in the state. It is also expressed materially, as seen in the temples scattered across the island, with their gopuras adding a splash of colour to the city's urban landscape. Multiculturalism is a key component of National Education, with students learning about the cultures of all three ethnic groups right from Kindergarten. Perhaps most importantly, the principle of multiculturalism is also adhered to in crafting the country's linguistic identity. While most Singaporeans are fluent in English, the state also designates Mandarin, Malay and Tamil as official languages, to represent the nation's linguistic diversity. A bilingual educational policy ensures that students learn their mother-tongue as their second language across the K-12 system. This institutionalisation of multiculturalism in Singapore played a significant role in allowing me to embrace my cultural roots. Mother-tongue lessons not only allowed a mastery of the Tamil language, it also allowed the fostering of a community within Indian students in public schools and subsequently presented an avenue to engage with cultural activities. My secondary and post-secondary education was enhanced by these opportunities as I honed my skills as a Tamil Debater and as a violinist in the Indian Orchestra.

Social theorists have proposed two opposing modes through which integration takes place in multicultural societies – The Melting Pot and The Salad Bowl. The former adheres to an approach of assimilation where minority cultures are expected to adopt the dominant culture while the latter adheres to an approach that allows minorities to retain their cultural identities in congruence with a shared culture that runs across the entire society. Members of the Indian Diaspora in the western world often find themselves part of a melting pot – where being "Indian" at many times runs contrary to being part of their larger cultural environment. What I value the most as a Singaporean-Indian, is the space that I have in positioning myself between the halves of the term. A space where the two are not mutually exclusive. A space in which I can embrace my Indian identity without hesitance of becoming any less Singaporean.

And yet, there are times when I find myself confronted with exclusionary experiences that problematise my cultural identity. Experiences that stem from belonging to a community that constitutes migrants from different eras and a community that is diverse along ethnic and linguistic lines.

### **Being Indian: Negotiating National and Cultural Identities**

*"Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; At other times, that we fall between two stools"*

- SalmAn Rushdie

*The majority of Indians in Singapore migrated to the island during colonial times. Having lain roots in the country, it is this wave of Indian migrants who were involved in the decades of nation-building following Singapore's independence. In the 1990s, Singapore opened its shores to skilled migrants from India.*

It was in this second wave of migration that my family moved to Singapore. Subtle tensions between the first and second wave of migrants are not uncommon, constituting sentiments that the latter are appropriating jobs and resources which in turn deprive the former of the same. Over their decades of national integration in Singapore, the former have also developed a distinct Singapore-Indian identity and cultural practices. Dressing and speaking like an "India-Indian", a term associated with the more recent migrants, has led me to experience several instances of exclusions. The questions "Are you from India or Singapore" has been posed to me countless times, both by Indians as well as Singaporeans belonging to different ethnicities. The question has always, and continues, to stump me. I am a Singaporean by citizenship. Yet, the entries in my passport and national identity cards reflect my place of birth (India), as a way of differentiating naturalized and natural citizens.

In addition to straddling two national identities, I also find myself negotiating with ethno-linguistic boundaries. Among Indians in Singapore, Tamils are the dominant linguistic group. Being Indian in Singapore is at times easily conflated with being Tamil in Singapore. With a large Tamil community brought in during the era of colonisation, sentiments of the Dravidian movement had a strong influence in the region. The ideas instilled by the movement continue to shape the way Tamil is taught as a mother-tongue in school, imbued with a strong sense of affinity towards the ethno-linguistic group. The exclusive status that Tamil has within the Indian community in Singapore was reflected in several moments during PM Modi's visit to the city-state in 2015. The official gift presented to Mr Modi was the framed front page of Tamil Murasu, the leading Tamil daily in Singapore, carrying the news of India's recognition of Singapore as a sovereign

state in 1965.

Singapore's Premiere then hosted Mr Modi to a dinner at Komala Vilas, one of Singapore's oldest South Indian restaurants, famed for its Idlys and Dosais.

The hegemony of Tamil within the Indian community in Singapore meant that to me, being Indian, was in many ways being Tamil. While this was a comfortable stance to adopt at home, I found myself perplexed about my identity once again when interacting with Indian communities beyond Singapore, where I found myself struggling to relate to a pan-Indian identity within which being Tamil is subjugate to the dominant cultural and linguistic markers of being Indian. This struggle is epitomized in a question posed to me by an Indian friend in Austria, where I now live. "Arre, how can you look Indian and not speak Hindi?" The question was one that was posed in zest. The notions of identity and belonging problematised by her question are nonetheless salient.

### **India in Singapore: Prospects**

Post 2005, Singapore saw another wave of migration, comprising two distinct groups. The first comprises of highly skilled workers who meet the growing demand in the Information Technology Sector. The second are short-term workers who supply labour for the construction industry. While the latter are predominantly Tamil, the former are distributed from across India. The demographics of the Indian population in Singapore is thus constantly evolving, across class, ethnic and linguistic divides. In tandem with the growing Indian community in Singapore, geopolitical relations between Singapore and India are also taking forefront in Singapore's foreign policy. In 2004, the Institute of South Asian Studies was established as an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore, in reflection of the growing

economic and political importance of South Asia as well as the key links between South Asia and Southeast Asia. In the decades to follow, it is clear that the historical relationship shared by the two regions across the Bay of Bengal will continue along economic, political and cultural lines.

As for me, I moved out of Singapore last year after 22 years and this shift has added new dimensions to my introspections of identity and belonging. While I do not expect to be bestowed with any magical clarity to my questions anytime soon, I look forward to new experiences and interactions that will enhance these

introspections. In August this year, I will be starting my PhD in Development Sociology at Cornell University. Faced with the task of creating a community for myself from scratch during my graduate education, perhaps it is wise to start thinking of my answer to the question that has always stumped me – “Are you from India”?



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# CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS

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**Advay Deb**

Advay Deb is a proud Indian born in Lomé, Togo. He is working on learning about the best of his Bengali and Keralite heritage. He has survived the challenge of learning about multiple languages, being comfortable with different kinds of cuisine and growing up in a dual religious household, where both his father's Hinduism and his Mother's Christianity are taken equally seriously. He spent most of his life in West Africa, and misses his friends and second family in Cameroon. He completed his high school at Repton School Dubai, and is now planning to study PPE (Politics, Philosophy, Economics) at the University of Western Australia. He has a younger sister, and two dogs – a beagle and poodle.

To give a snapshot of who I am as an individual, we need to go back a bit. On a cold Tuesday evening, 6 p.m. to be exact, a baby was born at a small local hospital in Lomé, Togo. That baby is me, and now I'm not so little having turned 18 just a few months ago. But before we can proceed any further, it's important to give a bit more context surrounding my early years – as those years were crucial in shaping me up as the individual I am today.

Shortly after my third birthday, my baba, or dad to everyone else, was transferred to Douala, Cameroon. A place of special significance to me, because that is where I was raised up. For all intents and purposes I have spent the majority of my time on this planet living on the African continent. Douala holds a lot of precious memories and precious people for me, some who are still with us, and others who have passed on to the ether. Sophie Auntie is one of those precious people who is no longer with us. She was my caretaker, my second mother. In all of my earliest memories, she is there. She was with me and my family every step of the way until we left for Dubai. She would make my meals just the way I liked it, tell me stories, sometimes sing us songs even though she was tone deaf, and I regret not being there with her in her final hours. I'm

not gonna lie, I wasn't exactly in a good position academically when news of her passing came to me and my family, but still...I regret not being there for her. Whatever phone calls we had prior to her passing could never substitute her actual presence, and if there's one thing I'll say is that I'm grateful to have had her in my life. She taught me and my little sister a lot of things, but her most important lesson was that nothing matters more than family. People come and go in your life all time, but family, whether they're blood related or not, that bond is eternal. And bigger family do we then are fellow Hindustani's?

My father is a Hindu from Calcutta and my mother is a Catholic Christian from Hyderabad, and even though my sister and I were raised in this dual religious household we were exposed to both religions with equal favor. Their belief was that my sister and I should have the freedom to choose where our Faith shall delve in, and their philosophy of being strict, but fair has carried through in nigh all of their actions. From an early age my parents and grandparents have immersed my sister and I in India's culture. From participating in religious festivals like Holi, Easter Sunday, or Durga Puja to reading the Bhagvad Gita and Amar Chatra Katha comics pertaining to our history, though slightly embellished.

However, I'll be frank in saying that I never really considered myself to be Indian until my 16th birthday. And Prime Minister Modi and the good work his administration has been doing so far has helped changed that perception. My physical exposure to India has and is still limited to visiting my grandparents during the summer holidays. For a very long time I saw India for what it was on the surface, and not what lay underneath. It's so easy to get caught up with all the corruption and pollution, and not see the beautiful cultural heritage that we're all connected to that was hidden under all this muck. The work Modi-ji has put into developing and reforming the image the world has of us let me catch a glimpse of what India once was and what it can be. And from the moment I caught sight of it, I have been enthralled.

Here's something to consider; Hinduism is the last polytheistic religion. Our counterparts the Greeks and Romans, cultures that once blazed brightly have now faded into obscurity, and yet we are still here.

Slowly, but surely we are working towards reclaiming our lost glory and I for one can't wait for Chandra Gupta Maurya's India to be reborn. To have our influence spread across the globe once more as center of knowledge and culture much in the way the US has over our modern world. For the first time in a long time, world leaders respect our Prime Minister – the US and Chinese president see him as their equal, and I'm confident that that attitude will eventually translate to Hindustan and her people.

India is the fifth largest economy in the world and referred to as the 'bright spot in the global economy', growing at 5.8% and that is a fact. India is the fourth most powerful military in the world, only below the US, China, and Russia and that is fact. India was the first nation in the world to put the Mangalyaan into orbit on its first try, and that's a fact. And India was able to achieve all this as a developed country, imagine what they'd be able to do as a developed country.

According to an article by Huffington Post, India is leading in the world in terms of reading habits, and personally I can confirm this. I spend on average daily reading about 530 pages, amongst listening to various podcasts on different topics ranging from

Tesla's newest Gigafactory to film critique, updates on the COVID-19 situation, and watching political interviews and streams. I spend nearly every second of my life consuming information, constantly seeking to broaden my knowledge of the world we inhabit in, and potentially use this knowledge to my advantage if need be. And this thirst for knowledge that I possess was cultivated by my parents, whose thirst for knowledge was cultivated by their parents and so on and so forth. Our culture is one that has always valued academia over all else, and our past accomplishments stand true to this statement. One need look no further than the number system that runs and operates our phones, laptops, and computers; all our devices run on binary code meaning ones and zeroes. And without Aryabhata coming up with the number zero none of this would've been possible.

The world perceives India as backward, filthy, and poor. And yet what is the nationality of the CEO's of some of the biggest companies in the world since ever? Look at who is the current CEO of Google, PepsiCo, Nokia, Microsoft, and Adobe Systems – they're all Indian. Satya Nadella is the CEO of a trillion dollar company for God's sake!

The world looks down on us. Just take a look at various articles printed by the New York Times, the Washington Post, and other similar publications in relations to how India has handled COVID-19. In comparison to most countries, India has handled the virus exceptionally well, and yet when you look at the various headlines it's framed in such way that implies 'how are these brown hillbillies not dying as much as more advanced, white people'.

One of the measures our Prime Minister has taken to combat COVID-19 is that he has put forth a program to boost our immunity, which consists of a mix of yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, and using ancient Ayurvedic home remedies made from ingredients, such as tulsi and neem leaves that are easily found in all Indian households. The remedies put forth by the government have been proven to strengthen the upper tract of the lungs. And yet pseudo intellectuals scoff at the notion of its effectiveness, people who are obsessed with scientism without actually having researched on the subject matter.

For example, us Indians have been using copper for thousands and years, and yet the Americans have only realized the sanitary effect of copper during their engagement in the gulf wars. Similarly, us Indians have using charcoal for thousands of years, and now brands like Colgate are implementing material into their toothpaste.

They make fun of our accents, the way we dress, and our habits, but none of that matters really. Chanakya once said, "Don't be ashamed of where you come from. Don't fret for with is past, nor be anxious about the future; wise men deal only with the present moment.". They can doubt as much as they want, but our achievements speak much louder than any of their words ever will. It is somewhat shameful that within our country we have self-loathers who don't share the same pride we have for our country. But then again the drowning man tends to drag down others.

To correct this self derisive attitude we need to teach our youth about Chanakya, Subash Chandra Bose, Chandra Gupta Maurya, the Mauryan Empire, the Gupta Empire, Aryabhata, the Vijayanagara Empire, Shivaji, and the Maharata Empire.

Why should we learn about any of the things I've listed? Let's take for example the Vijayanagara Empire.

"Founded in 1336 AD, Vijayanagara would soon grow to be one of the world's mightiest empires. At its peak, the Vijayanagara Empire covered a size that was larger than the Austrian empire. It was one of the richest empires of its time, which made foreign visitors wonder in awe, be it the architecture, the urban layouts or its immense wealth in diamonds and riches." (Ratnakar Sadasyula, City of Victory: The Rise and Fall of Vijayanagara)

How many Indians know this? That we were so prosperous that at one point of time, common citizens traded in gold and jewels on the street like it was nothing? Or that Chandra Gupta Maurya defeated Alexander the Great's strongest general, Seleucus, at the peak of their power. That Shivaji with a rag tag of guerrilla fighters was able to vanquish Aurangzeb, who ruled the Mughal Empire at its largest extent, with

its military at its most powerful. Aurangzeb was once so powerful that British Empire in 1686 had to formally apologize for the actions of East India Company. That Britain that would come to rule most of the Known World. And yet Shivaji and the Maharata Empire was able to completely decimate the Mughals and wrest control from them.

We need to teach people about our traditions. I'm not saying they're all perfect, and they shouldn't question, but we live in reality where people question our traditions and heritage without knowing a single thing about it. These were great people who revolutionized India, took it to new heights, and yet their voices have been purposefully drowned out by false heroes. This is why it is critical to treasure our culture and take it forward.

My goal in life is to revolutionize the medical by expanding research on stem cells and coming up with practical implementations of the research in the every day scene, and in the process doing so earn a fortune. I will use my wealth to help boost and revitalize the Indian economy; given jobs to the Indian people, rebuild and improve India's public infrastructure, provide energy to areas that have previously been dark zones, and create an environment that promotes education for all. That is my commitment to the future generations.



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# CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS



**Soumitra Gupta**

A seasoned Human Resource professional with an extensive and diverse career in the manufacturing and financial services industry across geographies in India and the Asia Pacific region. A Post-graduate in Economics from Kolkata University and in Human Resource Management from XLRI Jamshedpur, have worked in different multinational organizations gaining a deep appreciation of employee behavior in varied cultural contexts of different countries.

Professionally qualified Behavior Process worker and worked with different groups of people across sectors, organizations, and age-groups in Personal Growth Labs as a facilitator. Visiting faculty at the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad for their Executive Development Programs on Leadership as an Executive Coach. He is a Visiting faculty at the S.P Jain School of Global Management, Singapore & Dubai. Mr. Gupta is a Member of the Industry Advisory Board, Singapore for SP JAIN School of Global Management. Executive Coach.

Mr. Soumitra Gupta is Interested in sports, music, travel and observing cultural nuances and dynamics of intra and interpersonal behavior in different contexts. Passionate about developing people and building leadership capability & Committed to community support and contributing in whatever way possible.

He has Lived in India for the major portion across Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai and now living in Singapore since 2009.

Reflecting on what Culture imprints in retrospect and what the prospects it holds, in this time of an unprecedented global phenomenon as the pandemic, it is perhaps one of the most relevant discussions we can have today.

The word culture and its derivatives have many meanings and nuances but for purposes of this essay I am putting out a few to set context.

To quote " Culture is a word for the 'way of life' of groups of people, meaning the way they do things. Different groups may have different cultures. A culture is passed on to the next generation by learning..."

It is also defined as " An integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior." And / or "The outlook, attitudes, values, morals, goals, and customs shared by a society"

The word "culture" derives from a French term, which in turn derives from the Latin "colere," which means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivation and nurture."

What resonates with me from the above are way of life, behavior, beliefs, attitudes learning and tend to the earth. Its only when you deal with a crisis and that too of this magnitude that you want to look back and rediscover what are some of the anchors that now seem invaluable and precious. Also, how relevant will they be in the post crisis scenario.

One such anchor is our cultural heritage. A fundamental construct of that was the sense of belonging to the personal primary system and the sense of community. Many of the customs, values beliefs and behavior manifested around that socially and as human beings sharing was a part of life. Respecting physical distance and boundaries simultaneously existed with the need for transparency, co-habitation and access. Sounds paradoxical, but I can think of a situation when my parents and grandparents lived in undivided family systems in a home, everything got talked and discussed in the open and each members problems was everyone else's to bear; there was a sense of community

and shared spaces built around the hearth and dominant authoritarian role holders held it together. There was implicit acceptance and belief that whatever the decision, it was for the good of all. Despite all of this, boundary lines were not crossed, no public display of affection, doors were seldom shut in old traditional homes ...that was the way of life.

A lot of us, grew up with very clear understanding of negotiables & non negotiables, do's and don'ts and my values and morals were built around those as a part of my socialization and culturalization processes. That's what defined our culture. However, inevitable cop outs I could see were superstitions, biases, prejudices and stifled independent thinking. Different parts of my country evolved with different sets of norms, but patterns and commonalities were evident. Of the threads tying us all some were strong and some fragile, but we held on.

In retrospect, there were inhibitions and limitations to such a way of life and change was essential. I felt that need very strongly too. Creativity and spontaneity must have been challenged in that world of strong norms. As we progressed, free will, independence of thought and action, success became very important. Competitiveness, self-interest and greed came with it. Inhibitions made way for expression and we had to change. A song that keeps buzzing in my head is Dylan's "The Times they are a changing":

*"Come mothers and fathers Throughout the land  
And don't criticize What you can't understand  
Your sons and your daughters  
Are beyond your command  
Your old road is rapidly agin'  
Please get out of the new one  
If you can't lend your hand  
For the times they are a-changin'"*

I feel happy that we moved on but what concerns me is when I see patterns of behavior amid this current pandemic context. I see us having to force people to stay home and distance socially and to get humans to engage just within their own families is being difficult. I have been reading and hearing about abuse, domestic violence and helplines. You need to remind people by law and strictures to behave responsibly and be sensitive to the vulnerable and demonstrate self-restraint. Respecting boundaries seems like a problem. The stress and anxiety of dealing with the current reality is compounded with the nuclear family construct, lack of support mechanisms, geographic dispersion and physical lockdowns of borders. The core remains the same where concern and care for near and dear ones is there but the

helplessness of it all is probably making people wonder is this what we bargained for as we evolved.

Not for once am I saying that walking back is the option and that we should recreate earlier times. I do want us to ponder that, have we in our quest for progress and success forgotten the fundamentals of our culture of building and nurturing families and communities. What's the balance between individualism and collectivism?

Behavior, beliefs, goals, morals and attitudes have changed with time and those are integral to culture. Question that we are confronted with is what do we want to revive or even preserve?

Borrowing from common knowledge, in any path of growth and evolution there comes a point of inflexion which offers us the option to take a pause and think of the path ahead. Some key questions confronting us are: what is the emergent reality, what's the forecast based on data and evidence of past behavior, what will it take to not only survive but also thrive? I am an optimist and have great faith in the human ability to be positive and determined to take a few calls particularly from a culture point of view.

So, as we look ahead, it is important to make a brief reference to the present. What are some of the defining elements of our culture today? Irrespective of the generations co existing whom we label as baby boomers, Gen Y, millennials etc. the ways of living, beliefs and attitudes as elements of culture, can clearly be identified. Those seem to be elements of insularity, everything instant, virtual, distance, greed, questioning, social affirmation and competitiveness to name a few. Each of us add to shaping them and find ways to respond and work around in order to survive and thrive.

Here is what I visualize the future as and hope strongly that you take a pause to think about it as well. Let us preserve the construct of a community not by co-habitation in large family settings as that is not realistic and pragmatic, but by bridging gaps and bringing back people from their isolated distant and insular realities largely driven by self-interest.

We need to create common ground with a shared purpose of preserving the planet and its inhabitants. As an example, to do this, the earlier dominant authority figure of a primary system as the family has to make way for more expressive and authentic membership of all family and community members. Membership roles and accountabilities need redefining and manifest behaviors which emanate will shape the culture of the future. Societal leadership role models will be the influencers and will have to play an important role to shape destiny. They need to emerge from different contexts and over reliance on select sectors as government and industry needs to be managed.

A necessary corollary will be the need to put in perspective individual pursuit and ambition and redefine it. This does not mean you have to push it back because it is critical to drive and motivate the individual spirit of enterprise, creativity and innovation. It needs to be seen as an 'and' to social responsibility and not an 'either/ or'. Recognize that wealth and technology don't frame culture and they are means and not ends. We need to bring back the belief in real time human interaction and emphasize social inclusion and sensitivity in every possible way. I do recognize and am certain all of you do too, that when a crisis hits the planet the burden of fighting or bracing is shared by all and sadly so, more by the underprivileged and weaker sections of the society or the frontline resources who step out each day to deal with the challenge. This is happening right here and right now. I firmly acknowledge that technology enables and facilitates, and the future holds a lot of promise that we humans can leverage but our values and belief need to be rooted in our experiences of the human living process.

The need for personal instant gratification must be curbed and replaced with gratitude for nature and other humans around us. It is on this canvas that we as individuals thrive and splash our individual colors but time and again as humanity, we tend to forget the canvas and abuse it. If this pandemic is not a learning of that reality, I wonder what is? We do need to tend to the earth.

Another aspect that remains a debate in my mind is what I mentioned earlier as an element of our current way of living ...the concept of distance and its influence on culture. While in the emergent world we will continue to be separated physically and

have borders to deal with, but the question is how we will respond to it. Probably, it has to be seen with a renewed bifocal lens of the local and the global. While globality, despite forces to the contrary, will be an integral part of the future but societies must increase dependencies for sustenance on what is locally accessible as resources both natural and human. Local cultures will need to be acknowledged more with a view to success transfer knowledge rather than be subjected to power games of dominance of a few. By this, no way do I mean closing windows to the world as that will be extremely counter-productive and dysfunctional. Divergent cultures need to be allowed to proliferate across boundaries and that's what real inclusion is all about.

Yet another critical and integral player in the evolution of culture will be the commercial, corporate, industrial sector that energizes the economies and where individuals as you and I spend a significant portion of our lives as members redefining and shaping culture at the workplace. Working norms, reward mechanisms, wellness, diversity and inclusion, social responsibility et al will surely get restated as an outcome of the current experience. There will be a need to find ways to redistribute wealth across larger sections of society without getting caught in extreme positions of capitalism and socialism and that balancing act will be tough. A new norm is imminent and that too will define culture going forward.

While I hold a deep sense of pride in the past, there is a restlessness and energy about the future that beckons the need to evolve to the next stage of our culture and existence. I firmly believe that the prospect of the cultural imprint that we can build, and nurture will firmly be grounded in the reality of human existence and living processes. But it will be extremely unwise if we don't take the pause now. This current pandemic has forcefully created that speed breaker in the path that we were all hurtling down with good intent but with utter disdain for the environment and the planet we live in. Once more dear Nature has proven to be the wiser player harshly reminding us how we transgress all boundaries and go wrong. Some shifts in values, beliefs, behavior, attitudes and way of living must happen NOW if we want to commit ourselves to create a legacy and really ask ourselves that hard question .... What do we want to be remembered for ?

# CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS



**Arpita Das**

Arpita Das is a public policy professional, researcher, voracious reader, aspiring writer, an ardent traveller and a proud Indian. She grew up across India but remains rooted in Guwahati, Assam. She has a doctorate in Social Work and has worked in industry, Governments and not for profits across Asia Pacific. Arpita currently lives in Wellington, New Zealand where she works with the New Zealand Parliamentary Services.

I will look forward to hear from you about the anticipated date of publication and hope to receive a copy soon.

Migration is possibly as ancient as human civilisation. In fact, as a phenomena in no way is migration restricted to human beings. The animal world has been migrating for centuries before humans walked this earth. Even today, the tenacious Arctic Tern has no challenger. In its lifetime the little bird travels more than 2.4 million kilometres from its breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere to the south-pole every year. Yet, it is human migration that has remained a constant subject of intrigue to politicians, planners, policy makers, social services, scientists, artists, writers, businesses, non-profits and almost everyone in any profession. As we grapple with a pandemic of epic proportions in recent history, it is evident that the virus has most certainly taken advantage of rapid human migration. As the entire world talks about little else, it is a good opportunity to reminisce what else travels when people move from what begins as 'home' and remains much beyond an individual's lifetime. Culture is what we are born into. It seems simple enough to understand but culture has eluded a standard stock definition. Social scientists never seem to agree with each one trying to tweak the definition of culture. A very popular Indian saying sums up this conundrum really well.

It goes like this, '4 kos par paani badle, 8 kos par baani '(the quality of water changes almost every 12 kilometres and the language changes almost 24kms). For a land that has more languages than some continents can boast of, it seems apt that the Indian Council of Cultural Relations has provided an opportunity for all Indians and people of Indian origin to ponder on culture and its imprints.

## Imprint of culture

So where do we begin this journey of understanding Indian culture? What better place than Madhya Pradesh, the heart of India, where lie the Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka in the foothills of the Vindhya mountains. Within massive sandstone outcrops, above comparatively dense forest, are five clusters of natural rock shelters, displaying paintings that appear to date from the Mesolithic Period right through to the historical period. The cultural traditions of the inhabitants of the twenty-one villages adjacent to the site still bear a strong resemblance to those represented in the rock paintings<sup>1</sup>. These paintings can capture one's heart and mind in their simplicity, science, art and infinite wisdom. Refuting Western science, lions and tigers have been shown to coexist together along with other animals, an example of biodiversity. These paintings find a reflection in the immensely popular Warli art which has become a symbol of Adivasi culture and social movements. Bhimbetka shows to the world the fascinating interaction of the human and natural elements and is undoubtedly the finest testimonial of the earliest Indian cultural landscapes.

Yet another cultural imprint which has survived and transcended the geographical limits of India is the Namaste. The salutation with hands joined and the head bowed is the acknowledgement of the sacred in the human. Whether in reverence to the almighty or a mark of welcome or a respectful greeting, the Namaskaram has travelled and transformed into the Namaste in Nepal, the Wai in Thailand, the Sampeah in Cambodia. At the UN General Assembly where India's presence has grown manifold, one misses the Namaste of the late Sushma Swaraj as she delivered her eloquent speeches from a land of 1.3 billion, a mighty but humble India. The Air India Maharaja with his hands folded in Namaste regaled millions from his envious position at the Nariman Point location, a nostalgic memory many of us hold onto or a symbol of homecoming as we board a homeland bound aircraft. The lady with her head bowed and greeting with a Namaste has become a symbol of Atithi Devo Bhava (part of the Incredible India campaign). An age old tradition has made a resurgence in these pandemic times as world leaders greet each other with folded hands, forsaking the handshake. The Namaste has indeed adapted to changing times while keeping its essence of respect and humility.

The cultural imprint of India is probably the greatest in its exports of religion. Never used as a means of force, conquest or imperialism, Hinduism and Buddhism shaped the cultures of so many nation states today. Carried by early traders or later indentured labour, Hinduism travelled as far as the Pacific islands of Fiji, the Caribbean nations like Trinidad and Tobago and even Guyana in South America where populations still practice it as a religion. Hinduism as a culture and way of life is even more widespread. Hinduism has integrated and become a part of the local culture, so much so that it can no longer be viewed through the prism of religion. A living example of this is the epic Ramayana. In its various interpretations, it exists in predominantly Islamic Indonesia (Bali, Java and Sumatra) and Malaysia, Buddhist Thailand and Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Japan. The monarch of Thailand still trace their lineage to that of King Rama despite being devout Buddhists. In fact one has to see the Samudra Manthan in its glory at the Suvarnabhumi airport (Bangkok) or travel by Garuda Indonesia,

named after Vishnu's vehicle to truly understand how traditions stay behind in the local culture long after the divine has made way for other forms of faith. The revered Rewa (Narmada) flows in Fiji apart from its home in India, a reminder how culture travels wherever people go and leaves its imprints in grand or everyday ways.

Buddhism also travelled far and wide but in a different manner. From Lumbini to Sarnath, Sanchi and Bodhgaya, it travelled to Sri Lanka, Tibet, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Southeast Asia, China, Korea and Japan. In many of these countries, Buddhism continues to be the main religion practiced and its imprints are evident in society and polity. However, the cultural impacts of Buddhism have been hit hard in other places where the religion had flourished and become a way of life. Today, it is hard to imagine that the Gandhar school of Art once flourished in present day Peshawar with its Buddha sculptures resembling Greek Gods like Apollo attributed to the Greco Roman and Persian influences. Centuries of cultural symbiosis fell prey to fanaticism when the Bamiyan Buddhas, (a fine example of the Gandhar School and a passive observer of the ancient Silk Route) in Afghanistan were deliberately reduced to rubble. In a tragedy of global proportions, a myopic view of religion prevailed over a combination of ancient and the modern. India, with its deep appreciation of history, culture and a tradition of non-violence, was one of the very few nations who stepped in while the superpowers remained mere spectators. The Bamiyan Buddhas will forever serve as a reminder of what happens when an exclusive lens overshadows the inherently inclusive realm of culture.

### **Retrospect and prospect**

Modern day India is the largest democracy in the world. Yet the India we know of today along with the larger Indian subcontinent has been a civilizational state before the Common Era began and continues to retain an essence of age old traditions as it adapts to globalisation. It is commonplace even now to have customs of revering nature as divine while adapting to artificial intelligence with equal ease, often, in the same space.

When the Indian Space Research Organisation launches the futuristic Chandrayaan (the Moon Mission), it is preceded by a ceremony such as breaking a coconut, an ancient ritual for seeking the strength from an invisible super power. To a mere observer, this might seem primitive but for an Indian, it is so natural that one cannot really imagine otherwise. This adaptation and assimilation of every tradition that has come into this ancient land either by non-violence or by conquest has created its own place and been taken forward by practice.

For long, the visible aspects that are often referred to as 'Indian culture' – music, dance, food, literature, handicrafts, handlooms, languages, dress, art and architecture have been ambassadors of our heritage. British imperialism at its might sought to corrupt the very soul of this collective wealth by means of English education. The stereotypes of the great Indian snake charmer, ropewalking and the Maharaja were long used to ridicule this ancient land and are still evoked on the rare occasion. However, the Empire underestimated the quiet strength of composite culture. India adopted English as a language and many other facets of Western science and philosophy and merely adapted it to its already vast repertoire. As an independent nation, this cultural legacy became a powerful means of soft power and diplomacy.

The powerful philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family), taken from the Maha Upanishad is India's gift to the world. It resonates even more urgently today as the global community strives to walk the talk on solidarity and cooperation. India has rightfully reclaimed the centre stage with Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam when reinforced by the Prime Minister in the UN General Assembly speeches. The philosophy finds its relevance across a host of issues- climate change, sustainable development, poverty eradication, terrorism, human trafficking where action is needed across borders. Interestingly, Sustainable Development as we know today has its historical beginnings in Indira Gandhi's speech in 1972 at Stockholm that linked poverty, environment and lack of empowerment of the world's vast majority. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) draws heavily from this philosophy where the success of one nation is meaningless until all the member nations achieve their goals. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam has re-emerged as an action philosophy and a guiding force for the world.

Yoga has been a timeless Indian tradition that has focussed on the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of health. The practice of yoga as documented by Sage Patanjali,

has been a path to salvation by means of uniting the body, mind and the soul. Yoga is characterised by the adage of less is more; the body is one's equipment, regular practice and discipline impart perfection, and this coming together of the body and the mind leads to the purpose of being. Seen in its entirety, a Yogi engages in yog sadhana (practice) to surrender to the one truth and attain salvation. The International Day of Yoga, following its inception in the United Nations General Assembly in 2014, recognises India's contribution to global holistic wellbeing. Led by the Indian missions globally on June 21st every year, it is a movement that elicits participation of people across race, religion, language, sexual orientation and age. India's has led the world to a realisation that only peace within leads to peace all around. Challenging the onslaught of consumerism, the popularity of yoga demonstrates that unless mental wellbeing is achieved, no amount of riches can bring in happiness.

Much like the yogic tradition on constant improvement, the evolution of unique Indian global power is characterised by our relentless improvement in making the world a better place.

India's journey at the global stage initially as a leader of the Non Aligned movement to that of a prominent global player, our diplomacy has been marked by ahimsa (non-violence), non-aggression, peace, inclusion, a feeling of sadbhavna and above all humility. India's approach to COVID 19 has amply displayed all of these values. While India works relentlessly to contain COVID 19 at home, she offers assistance to every nation who needs it, be it the superpower United States of America or its closest neighbour.

#### Way forward

India had attracted scholars, pilgrims, traders, travellers, asylum seekers, conquerors and marauders since time immemorial. Much like Indian spices, our culture assimilates all to renew itself. As a people, as a culture and as a member of the global community, we continue to live much beyond our borders, adding the Indian flavour. The Indian diaspora, old and new, has contributed immensely to this cultural journey of India. The modern Indian state that will be 75 years in 2022, continues to draw global attention. The 70 year journey of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations has been instrumental in taking India to the world as also bringing the world to India. The anniversary seems an apt occasion to reflect at the path taken and rejoice at the possibilities ahead as an ancient India charts a new path to a global India.

# CULTURAL IMPRINT; RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS



**Dr. Ziya. A. Pathan**

Dr. Ziya. A. Pathan, completed his Ph.d in Sociology with the topic entitled "Muslim Elite: A Sociological Analysis" from Karnataka University, Dharwar in 2006 under the esteemed supervision of Prof. Dashrath R. Albal, Rani Chennamma University, Belgaum, Karnataka.

Presently, he is serving as an Associate Professor in Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Eswatini, Kingdom of Eswatini and liaising as an instructor in Dept. of Sociology and Social Work and as a major research advisor presenting new & innovative ideas for research, guiding inter-departmental research as a member of research ethics committee with his previous experience at Ambo University Department of Sociology, Ethiopian Civil Service University's College of Policy studies and at Wollega University, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Ethiopia.

Dr. Ziya has published 5 books and he is a recipient of several awards and always involved in various research activities by serving as a key note speaker and resource person in conference, seminars and workshops of national and international levels. He has published several research articles in international journals where the areas of his concentrations have relevance to higher education, marital conflict, household industries, disability, health, inequities, aging, tourism and sustainable development.

*"Every culture is valuable to that particular population largely for emotional and territorial reasons. But the significance of Indian culture is that it is a scientific process towards human liberation and well-being. No other culture has looked at a human being with as much depth and understanding as this culture has. No other culture has looked at it as a science and created methods to evolve a person into his ultimate nature. We know if you do certain things, this will happen to a human being. To put it very bluntly, I would say we have technologies as to how to manufacture an enlightened being"*

Sadhguru

## Introduction

Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. Culture is defined as a "shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding that are learned by socialization".

According to Christina De Rossi, "Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things,"

The word "culture" derives from a French term, which in turn derives from the Latin "colere," which means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivation and nurture. As per Rossi, "It shares its etymology with a number of other words related to actively fostering growth,"

## Sociological definition of Culture

Culture is one of the most important concepts within sociology because sociologists recognize that it plays a crucial role in our social lives. It is important for shaping social relationships, maintaining and challenging social order, determining how we make sense of the world and our place in it, and in shaping our everyday actions and experiences in society. It is composed of both non-material and material things.

Sociologists see the two sides of culture—the material and non-material—as intimately connected. Material culture emerges from and is shaped by the non-material aspects of culture. In other words, what we value, believe, and know (and what we do together in everyday life) influences the things that we make. But it is not a one-way relationship between material and non-material culture. Material culture can also influence the non-material aspects of culture. For example, a powerful documentary film (an aspect of material culture) might change people's attitudes and beliefs (i.e. non-material culture). This is why cultural products tend to follow patterns. What has come before in terms of music, film, television, and art, for example, influences the values, beliefs, and expectations of those who interact with them, which then, in turn, influence the creation of additional cultural products.

### **Importance of Culture and Cultural Relations**

Culture is important because it plays a significant role in the production of social order. The social order refers to the stability of society based on the collective agreement to rules and norms that allow us to cooperate, function as a society, and live together (ideally) in peace and harmony. For sociologists, there are both good and bad aspects of social order.

According to the theory of classical French sociologist Émile Durkheim, both material and non-material aspects of culture are valuable in that they hold society together. The values, beliefs, morals, communication, and practices that we share in common provide us with a shared sense of purpose and a valuable collective identity. Today, sociologists see this important social phenomenon happening not only in religious rituals and celebrations like (some) weddings and the Indian festival of Holi but also in secular ones—such as high school dances and widely-attended, televised sporting events (for example, the Super Bowl and March Madness).

Famous Prussian social theorist and activist Karl Marx established the critical approach to culture in the social sciences. According to Marx, it is in the realm of non-material culture that a minority is able to maintain

unjust power over the majority. He reasoned that subscribing to mainstream values, norms, and beliefs keep people invested in unequal social systems that do not work in their best interests, but rather, benefit the powerful minority.

Both theorists were right about the role that culture plays in society, but neither was exclusively right. Culture can be a force for oppression and domination, but it can also be a force for creativity, resistance and liberation. It is a deeply important aspect of human social life and social organization. Without it, we would not have relationships or society.

### **Concise on India & Eswatini Culture**

India is home to over a billion people, accommodating incredible cultural diversity between languages, geographic regions, religious traditions and social stratifications. In recognition of this large demographic diversity, the following descriptions are not intended to represent every Indian person. However, there are common themes and principles that contribute to the values, attitudes, beliefs and norms of the dominant society. Generally speaking, Indians tend to have a strong sense of pride in the distinctiveness and diversity of their culture. For example, the country's agricultural expansions and technological advancements in infrastructure, science and engineering are sources of pride. Moreover, a considerable amount of pride stems from India's rich artistic cultural exports of music, fine arts, literature and spirituality.

Eswatini is home to around 1,087,200 individuals. The population is ethnically quite homogeneous with most of the residents being indigenous Swazi. A small Zulu and White population also exists in the country. Both English and siSwati are the official languages of the country. 90% of Eswatini's population adheres to Christianity of which around 40% practice a form of syncretic religion that blends Christianity and indigenous ancestral worship. 20% are Catholic Christians. The remaining Christians are affiliated to other Christian denominations.



## **Indo-Eswati Relations Leading To Cultural Exchange**

The Indian community (NRI/PIO) in Eswatini consists of around 1500 persons, including about 500 who have taken up Eswatini nationality. Most Indian nationals in Eswatini are engaged in business and there are a few Indian experts working for the Government departments, Indian doctors working in the hospitals and a few Professors teaching at the University of Eswatini.

Since the establishment of the new High Commission in Mbabane, interaction with the resident Indian community has seen healthy participation in get-togethers and celebration of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, Vishwa Hindi Divas, 550th Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, National Day flag hosting, evening reception and International Day of Yoga continues to be conducted in the country.

The relations between India and Swaziland are close, friendly and cordial. The Indian Mission in Maputo, which is concurrently accredited to Swaziland, maintains regular contacts with the Swazi authorities.

The Swazi King, Mswati III, met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on 28 October, 2015 during his first ever visit to India. Earlier he had met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during the India Africa Forum Summit II in Addis Ababa in May 2011.

While there have been an exchange of Ministerial visits, the bulk of visits have been from the Swazi side to India, especially to attend the annual CII-EXIM Bank Africa Conclaves and for other multilateral events. From the Indian side, MoS for Culture, tourism and civil aviation visited Swaziland on 13-14 July, 2015 as Special Envoy of PM to invite King Mswati III for the Third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS). Smt. Preneet Kaur, MOS for External Affairs had also visited Swaziland in May, 2011 to invite the Swazi King and Foreign Minister to attend the Second India- Africa Forum Summit the same month in Addis Ababa.

King Mswati III attended the third India Africa Forum Summit in Delhi from 26 October to 1 November, 2015, which was his first ever visit to India.

### **(a). Training and Scholarships for Cultural Exchange:**

India has been extending training under

the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships for UG/PG/Doctoral studies to Swazi nationals every year. For 2015-16, 20 slots under the ITEC and 12 slots under the ICCR have been provided to Swaziland. A celebratory event of the First International yoga Day was held in Swaziland on 21 June, 2015 coordinated by our Honorary Consul General, Ms. Mona Ashraff in which the Swazi Health Minister and Home Minister were present, along with about 70 other persons.

In the training year 2019-20, till date, 26 Emaswati have availed of ITEC training programme. Emaswati continue to avail of the ICCR and IAFS scholarship slots being provided for academic courses.

In 2018, apart from regular allotment of ITEC, ICCR and IAFS slots for training and scholarships for Eswatini nationals, Hon'ble Rashtrapatiiji during his visit, announced an increase of ITEC slots from 30 to 50 and also a customized accounting training for 50 Treasury officials at Institute of Government Accounts and Finance in India (INGAF). In fulfillment of these commitments, almost all ITEC slots were utilized and the training of 50 treasury officials was completed in 2018.

In July 2008, India-Eswatini signed a MoU on strengthening of bilateral co-operation in area of computer aided education of children at the elementary level in the Eswatini. Under this, the Hole-in-the-Wall (HiWEL), the implementing agency, established 3 Hole-in-Wall Learning Stations (HiWLS) at Cetjwayo Primary School and Bulandzeni Community Primary School in Hhohho Region and Mahlanga Primary School in Manzini Region.

### **(b). Cultural Cooperation**

For the first time, a group of 7 artisans from Eswatini took part in the Surajkund International Crafts Bazaar 2020 at Haryana from 1-16 February, 2020 besides 200 solar lamps have been provided by IIT Mumbai for school children in Eswatini for assembly and distribution to kids from all the four regions of Kingdom.

### **(c). Bilateral Consultations:**

In August, 2017, bilateral consultations between the two countries were held in Mbabane.

The Indian side was led by Dr. Neena Malhotra, JS-E & SA. First Foreign Office Consultations with Eswatini is scheduled to take place in May, 2020. The first meeting of the JWG for consultations on implementation of MoU on Health Cooperation signed in April 2018 was scheduled to take place in later part of February 2020 is on time lag due to the rise of CORONA Pandemic.

### Conclusion and Recommendation:

Culture is by no means subordinate to politics. It provides the operating context for politics through language, education, the arts and popular culture. Indeed, cultural icons such as Lady Gaga in the US, David Beckham in the UK, Youssou N'Dour in Senegal and Amitabh Bachchan in India, have frequently had a higher profile and debatably a greater influence, particularly over young people, than many international political figures.

Cultural policy is often marginal to the political process, outside of the mainstream of heavyweight economic and social policy debates, or is appended as a supplement to them, it is recommended to;

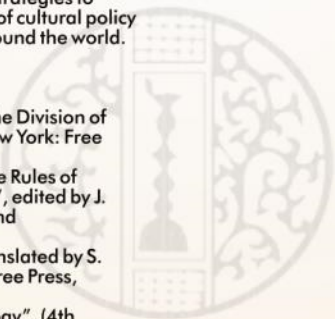
- Appraise the role of the culture ministry and review of marginal role of culture in government.
- Culture be placed centre stage in governing process and facing international challenges.
- Cultural ministries develop more active international strategies to increase the sharing of cultural policy and practice from around the world.

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