

INDIANS ABROAD

SAADA's First Days Project

In 1959, 18-year-old Tariq Abbas departed from Lahore and arrived in New York City, en route to Dallas where he had been placed through the American Field Service foreign exchange program. Texas, he soon realized, wasn't exactly the America he imagined: "I only knew of New York [...] I had no idea, no concept of what to expect or what I was going."

In 1973, Mamata Misra left Mumbai for Maryland with her husband of six weeks, and came to her own conclusions about the country she had just adopted: "I realized that for days and months I would be meeting only strangers talking strange and it was up to me to make friends out of strangers and create familiarity out of the unfamiliar."

These two snapshots form a part of the "First Days Project," a new initiative by the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) to collect and share stories from South Asians about their first day in the United States.

An ambitious and interactive online exhibition, the First Days Project creates a platform for community members to upload and share the story of their first day in the U.S.

As Abbas and Misra's stories illustrate, the first days in a new country can be full of both excitement and anxiety, a sense of loss and gain, and a mixture of other emotions. It was with that in mind that SAADA Executive Director

Samip Mallick began to imagine the First Days Project.

"As the South Asian American community is starting to see its second and third generation in the U.S., it is imperative to begin to document these stories and provide a way for generations to connect with each other," Mallick explains.

"Through interviewing my parents about their first days I learned something new about their experiences, hopes and dreams when first arriving in this country."

With the First Days Project, SAADA continues its longstanding effort to showcase stories that reflect the diversity of the South Asian diaspora. According to the 2010 census, there are more than 3.4 million Americans of South Asian heritage, a growth in 81% between 2000 and 2010. In other words, 1 in every 100 Americans traces their heritage to South Asia, which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives.

Yet there is also a critical danger in narratives of South Asian Americans being lost, particularly the ones left out of history books and not featured in the media. Stories like Tariq Abbas and Mamata Misra's underscore just how diverse and complex the lives of South Asians in the U.S. have been.

The First Days Project reveals the intimate details of arrival that are often lost in the grand sweep

of history. "Often, members of our community don't feel as though they have a story to tell or that their story matters," Mallick says. "The First Days Project demonstrates how individual stories come together to tell a community's history. Each and every story adds to that tapestry."

First Day stories will be accepted through August 31, 2013 and can be submitted as video or audio (up to 3 minutes) or text (up to 300 words).

Submit your own story or interview a family member or friend. No story is too big or too small. You can browse stories, learn more and submit your story at www.saadigitalarchive.org/firstdays

Based in Philadelphia, the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) is the only independent nonprofit organization in the nation working to document the rich histories of South Asians in the United States and ensuring that this community's stories are protected and preserved for future generations.

All materials and stories that SAADA collects are made freely accessible to the public through its website at www.saadigitalarchive.org

SAADA's First Days Project Website: www.saadigitalarchive.org/firstdays. Contact: Samip Mallick, Executive Director South Asian American Digital Archive, 1219 Vine Street, Studio G Philadelphia, PA 19107-1111

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ICC celebrates its 40th anniversary

India Culture Center Houston will mark its 40th anniversary this year and has planned to celebrate the occasion on Friday, August 23, at the Stafford Civic Center, with a musical night anchored by music director Jatin Pandit. Jatin, along with his brother Lalit, has scored music for over 100 films, including Khiladi, Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar, Khamoshi: The Musical, Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, Yes Boss, Jab Pyaar Kisise Hota Hai, Kuch Kuch Hota Hai, Mohabbatein and Fanaa. This is a ticketed event which includes dinner with the star musician.

On Sunday, August 25, ICC will hold its signature event, India's 67th Independence Day at the Stafford Center, 10505 Cash Road. Several Indian American organizations of Houston will be joining ICC in the dual celebrations this year. This event is free to the public and has a series of cultural programs throughout the day, including a Grand Parade. As part of India's Independence Day celebrations, ICC will be honoring individuals with Distinguished Community Service Award.

"Cigarette snatcher" dies in Dubai

DUBAI: An Indian cancer patient, who campaigned against smoking in unusual ways such as confronting strangers in public places and pleading with them to quit smoking, succumbed to lung cancer in a Dubai hospital. Abraham Samuel, 53, popularly known as 'cigarette snatcher' died on Sunday, July 28. Samuel is survived by his wife and two daughters aged 22 and 20.

He smoked two packets a day for 35 years and was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2010. It was then that he turned to approaching strangers in public places and pleading with them to quit smoking earning the title of "cigarette snatcher", the Gulf News report said.

Samuel's method of taking upon himself to "convert" smokers around him instead of indulging in self-pity had its effect on a lot of people who chose to stop smoking.

"When I see someone smoking, I simply walk up to them and ask them to give it up. People don't always like it, but I don't stop myself. Sometimes I even open my shirt and show them my radiation marks - so they understand the severity of my condition.

"I don't know how much time I have left in this world, but I will do as much as I can to tell people to give up smoking," Samuel had told a newspaper few months back. Several people apparently quit the smoking after listening about his woes, the report said.

Two weeks back Samuel was admitted to the hospital as he had refused to go to India for treatment. He worked in a stationery company, earning Rs 57,700 (3,500 dirhams) a month. His sponsor did not cancel his visa even though he was unable to work for months.



Rimple Mashruwala, CPA

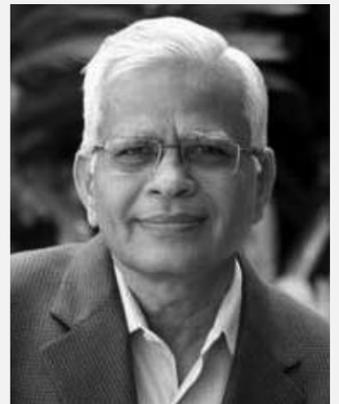
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