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Chapter 1

Message to the reader

What is to follow is a collection of thoughts that I had while living in India over the course of 6 months as an adult for work not something that each of us have had the privilege to do due to many different circumstances. My time in India was primarily for the completion of some field work for my Masters thesis in Agricultural Development. This work is not a common field for an Indian-American/Canadian to get involved with for many reasons; however it was something that I am incredibly grateful for as it has shown me a completely different side of the world that we live in. As this experience will not translate to everyones experiences, I believe that sharing my experience may be worthwhile for others that find themselves in a similar boat in being caught between the east and the west as a young adult. To help put this entire writing in perspective I figure it would be good to get to know a little bit more about who I am and where I am coming from as an author of this text to see if I even slightly line up with a portion of your life. I grew up in Austin Texas throughout my childhood to a father of Punjabi descent and a mother of Bihari descent. Both of my parents however grew up in the Canada and the USA respectively and my grandparents on either side immigrated to the West in the 1960s in search of a better life compared against what was available in a newly independent South Asia. This makes me a 2nd or 3rd generation Indian-American (depending on how you define those terms). This means that for many Indians that are present in the USA, I am one generation further removed from south asia than you may be. This means that growing up I did not visit India to see my grandparents or aunts/uncles. I went to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Windsor, Ontario for these things. We did go to India once as a kid for 2 weeks to see family there but this trip was incredibly brief and being a kid you do not get to see

the Indian world in excess rather you get to see what is present in the homes of your family members with the main noticeable difference being language. Having grown up within this diasporic realm, I grew up with bits and pieces of the Indian world being represented in my daily life with other things not being represented as heavily. Things that I grew up with all the time that can be considered to be quite Indian were the easy things, like Indian food for dinner almost every day, but a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in my lunch box for school. We went to temple as a kid but then went less frequently as teenagers. Maintenance of Indian culture through Hinduism was present, but not nearly to the same extent as my peers whose parents had immigrated to the United States. I grew up speaking English at home and very rarely if ever ran into language issues with my grandparents as they all speak fluent English. As a second language I was taught Spanish in school and speak it currently and have had relationships(both friendships and romantic partners) where Spanish was our primary language. I only started learning Hindi after I had lived in Tanzania and was finding that it was useful to have a couple words here and there to interact with the Indian population. This brings me to the next point of interest. I grew up in the USA, but since then have lived in Canada, Tanzania, Denmark, and India. This has given me the benefit of getting to live in other contexts and see what it is like to be Indian across the world and how Western and Eastern societies function. My field of work to this point has been in Agricultural Development work to help address the issues of hunger that primarily plague communities of colour across the global south as these communities are going to pay the highest price for the effects of climate change while those of us in the global north get to skate by on our geographical location and different societal structures. As a child of the south Asian diaspora, I found that after joining different facebook groups and seeing that my life is still incredibly similar to that of other Indians across the globe, I started to wonder things like is it worth fighting the system all the time for a seat at the table especially when I may understand the problem. (Not all fields are like this, but the development field in agriculture is very much this way). This book/manifesto of sorts will not really dive into the concept of people of colour very much as this is not something I can do justice to and the amount of literature that is available for this is quite large. I am more focused on looking into the idea of whether or not it makes sense on a social side of things to have South Asians from abroad moving back towards south Asia to help increase the world from which we all come from. This will assume that you as a reader are well versed in the issues that exist as a person of colour in the west and will aim to answer the question of but what is it like over there? And what

about all the social issues that exist such as .. Hopefully this will help you to see the east in a different light and help you to know if you want to work towards improving that world with the skill set you have or if you want to stay in the west.

Chapter 2

Culture and Religion

Part of my last years of living in Denmark aside from trying to settle there was getting the experience of the old world. Having grown up in the new world, it is very easy to see in a performative aspect but also in many other ways as well. I am noting this as the cultural intensity found in the west is quite different from Europe to North America. In Europe, cultural identity is very strong while religion is not such a big deal. It seems as though there is a much bigger emphasis placed on things like food, family, and other cultural events that we might equate to the likeness of what thanksgiving or the 4th of July/Canada day means to us. I believe that within North America the presence of a strong cultural identity is far less. We have one, as would be expected of any place in the world, yet it is based more in the vein of individual importance of cultural heritage from whichever motherland we hail from. This is coupled alongside a much bigger influence of Religion in our lives. If you do not believe this, look at the prevalence of the Bible Belt in the south and try to find something similar to that outside of the Vatican in Europe. I can almost guarantee you will not find anything like this for individuals that belong to the millennial generation. I think that India is very much like Europe in this regard as cultural identity is quite strong and the layers go on for quite some depth. Having been raised in an "American" house, much of the cultural stuff has been lost within our world. This is not to say that we are substantially further away from India, but things like Darshan, puja and appropriate ways to act around elders are quite different in both places. Many of the cultural bits and pieces that are different from Indian society back home will be quite strange, but it is not something that is out of reach. Rather this is always something that is within reach of your capabilities and abilities - I managed and I spent

the greater portion of my adolescence rejecting Indian culture. Of course being in India will be far more intense than you may have expected but then again if you just allow yourself to realise that you have grown up with India Lite, it will become easier. How are you supposed to compare with these individuals who have known this their entire life!? It might be synonymous to someone from India coming to the West and being expected to be as good as navigating the western landscape as you are. We all have different qualities. Your whole life you have been straddling the East and West in a balancing act that can only be described as damn impressive. It is not an easy feat, and it is something that takes time, energy, and practice. Upon arriving in India you will quickly understand that you do not have to do anything, the culture of this place is far more regional and family specific. You just need to do the same things that you grandparents or parents had you do and all of a sudden you will be enough. Religion here while still massively important, will be slightly less of a reason for doing or not doing certain life activities. You can just live life here to whatever degree you feel is enough and it will be okay! You do not need to maintain the culture if you dont want to. After all culture is dynamic and there are another 1.3 billion individuals who are also working to maintain the culture the same way that it has been maintained for the last 1000 years. Suddenly you can stop being a person of colour in the west and just a person.

Chapter 3

Personal Freedom and Individualism vs Collectivism

Being in India with family, you will feel like you have had your wings clipped and you are unable to do what you have been conditioned to do since you were a child; be independent. From a young age growing up in the west we are not conditioned to be taken care of by others from a societal point of view. At home we are taught to respect elders, and take of what they want but society also encourages us to put our elders in a home. In the west we love our independence and as a result of growing up in this environment it becomes a part of us. Coming to India/Asia will inherently mean that you will have to give up a portion of this when with family. This is done to avoid drama which can be created quite quickly here in South Asia. Independence as well as many other western ideals are found in bits and pieces here yet the mindset of a westernized asian will never quite fit into the true asian world after having grown up outside of it as far as some basic things are concerned. These things primarily boil down to values that are impressed upon us from a young age by the society within which we grow up. I think that this independence aspect is what might drive the differences between these two societies. This can be seen with the idea of an arranged marriage. We all groan as we know that there is a difficulty in explaining the idea of an arranged marriage to non-indians and why indians abroad tend to be fine with this or even joke about it and why white westerners hate this ideal. While I could elaborate(and will) for this chapter I digress.