Home Away From Home

Dhruv Malladi

Note: Special thanks to Professor Gavin Whitelaw of Harvard University, who was able to review parts of my ethnography, give me feedback, and help me come up with a title.

Introduction:

My traditional Indian parents always wanted me to be a lawyer or a doctor. But it was when I took AP European History that I realized I was looking at life with such a narrow perspective. I started to ask myself questions, questions that I couldn't answer. Why am I studying history? How did we get here? What makes humans, humans? Eventually, I stumbled upon anthropology, and it opened my eyes to human experiences, cultures, and histories, which often go unnoticed in society, or at least to me. And it is now that I realize that anthropology taught me to appreciate the significance of cultural and linguistic contexts, something that many others, myself included, think, or may not even realize, subconsciously. To truly understand, that is the underlying principle of anthropology, is to understand the simply worded yet complex question that will never have an answer—what defines us? As we know, anthropology is split into 4 fields: cultural anthropology, biological anthropology, linguistic anthropology, and archeology. But many anthropologists, researchers, and scholars also contribute a "5th" subsection to anthropology, known as applied anthropology. Applied anthropology is the practical implications of anthropology on modern society to enact change. From the perspective of an emerging college student interested in studying anthropology, I feel like this "field" is not talked about enough. Thousands of ethnographies have been published, people have lived in rainforests for years, followed indigenous peoples, followed animals, and collected artifacts. But what use is this study if we are not applying it to change society? Ethnography is a form of research, but it is still our job to inherently apply it. Through this ethnography, which also intertwines personal insight and history, I hope to better understand a topic that I can research in the future, which is the "applied" aspect aforementioned. Specifically, by studying language and culture, I hope to immerse myself in a new perspective, one that will help me when it comes to researching specific types of anthropology in the future.

My family history is another reason as to why I am writing. In the winter of 1990, both of my Indian parents immigrated to the United States, to study technology and pharmacy respectively. They were uncertain but hopeful as to what was to come next. They worked very hard to establish themselves and support for me. As a second child and one of the first in my family to become an American citizen, I was enrolled in the daily life of an American: going to school, unquestioningly singing the pledge of allegiance, and animatedly watching the Super Bowl. America is nationalistic, to say the least, and my parents felt a need for me to fulfill that duty of patriotism as the son of immigrants. The term "Americanization", or to "Americanize" is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as

"to become or make something typical of the U.S. or U.S. culture", something I endured.[1] My parents' efforts to Americanize me were only exasperated through close encounters with racism and discrimination when they lived in the South. The late professor Ellwood Griscom of the University of Texas states how Americanization is necessary for both the "native born and the immigrant" (Griscom 10). There are consequences to Americanization, however, as my parents and even I would eventually come to understand. Over time, due to the American culture, tradition, and assimilation efforts, my entire family became more and more distant from our Indian culture. While my parents had always known Telugu, their native language, it was uncharted territory for me. As you will read more about later, many children of immigrants know the language of their parents to some degree, or have learned to some extent nevertheless. Not being familiar with the Telugu language at all made it increasingly challenging to do things important to myself and my family.

Frustratingly, I could never communicate with those in India who are my closest family. My parents were the first of their families to immigrate to America, and as a result, they in a sense left many of their families behind in hopes of finding "The American Dream" one of the first of For example, communication between my grandfather and grandmother was nearly impossible. As a result, in early 2015, my parents enrolled me in a Telugu school, the basis of this ethnography, in hopes of being able to better connect with my family.

ManaBadi (school in Telugu) is quite similar to a traditional Sunday school in the United States, however focuses on the learning of the Telugu culture and language through a book curriculum developed by Silichonadhra University in India. It is a shame that I did not start documenting experiences until this year, as over the past eight years, I have learned a lot culturally through the Telugu language. Attending Manabadi has been an enlightening experience, offering a unique blend of language instruction and cultural immersion. The curriculum, as you will learn more later, is a blend of culture and the language itself, which is why I may use the two interchangeably during this writing.

The structure of Manabadi classes speaks to different age groups and proficiency levels. For example, they have BalaBadi(a young school in Telugu), designed for kids around 5-10 years old. So, young children start with basic vocabulary and simple conversational skills and then move on to more advanced classes if they pass final exams. There are 6 "levels" total, and each level takes the whole year. I would say it is pretty similar to a

[1] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/americanize

traditional school in the United States, but different because it fosters an unrivaled sense of community. For example, the teachers at Manabadi are all volunteers and gain nothing other than connecting more with their culture and teaching the younger generation. The class I participated in was Prabhasam, which is the highest and last level of ManaBadi. Thus, most of the students in the class were very knowledgeable about the Telugu culture and language.

After reading the work of classic anthropologists, such as Clifford Geertz and Don Kulick, I have grown to understand that there is no one way to write an ethnography. However, each ethnography always has a purpose. When I was researching the origins of the Telugu language and the Telugu culture as a whole, I began to realize how underrepresented and undocumented the Telugu language and culture were. Despite not taking classes every year due to the pandemic, I have gained wisdom in the Telugu language and can now speak it fluently. This linguistic proficiency has opened new avenues for me to explore my cultural roots and engage more meaningfully with my family in India. As a now new graduate of Manabadi, receiving commendation from an Indian university itself, I can share my experiences with a positive outlook and hopefully portray this writing as accurately as possible.

Through this ethnography, I hope to highlight the change of the Telugu language, through various manners including qualitative descriptions as well as interviews, surveys, and discussions, via my involvement with Manabadi and the Telugu community. The ultimate purpose of this ethnography is to help me better understand this topic. Far too often, there is writing that is never utilized to better understand society. I want to use this ethnography as an opportunity to not only let others understand an important aspect of Telugu, but also a significant portion of the United States, and to more broadly understand the dynamics of unique peoples whose lives have been shaped by America’s melting pot.

The approach for this ethnography includes participant observation, in-depth interviews, and the collection of personal narratives. Participant observation will involve attending and documenting Manabadi classes and events, capturing interactions, teaching methods, and cultural expressions that define the school's environment. In-depth interviews with students, parents, and teachers will provide insights into their personal experiences, motivations for attending Manabadi, and the impact of the school on their cultural identity. The period of this ethnography specifically takes place from December 2023 to June 2024, but I have known the community, traditions, and practices of Manabadi for many years, providing a rich contextual background for my study. This extended engagement with the Telugu community has equipped me with a deep understanding of

its dynamics, challenges, and triumphs, which I aim to capture in this ethnographic account. In italics is my own personal analysis of my ethnographic account, which goes beyond just my observations in the ethnography. These are mainly for you to understand the connection between what I observe and the anthropology of culture and language.

If you wish to learn more about Manabadi, you can visit https://manabadi.siliconandhra.org/, their website. I have been a student and heavily involved in only the Buffalo Grove Manabadi center, and there are countless more centers within the United States. More than 500 people are a part of the center, but I only closely observed and talked with about 50 of them, some of them students and some of them a mix of teachers, both adult volunteers and student volunteers.

Picnic Preparation:

The ManaBadi picnic itself had been planned for several weeks. The following observations were made around a month before the picnic, which will be described later. However, it is important to understand the process behind the event because it includes equally as many cultural elements as the picnic itself.

A few clouds surround the sun but do not cover it. The blistering sun illuminates further. Sheer heat causes one of the adult volunteers to stop and take a drink from their plastic Dasani water bottle, which is already about a quarter empty. As he finishes the bottle, he looks for a recycling bin but finds none and tosses it into a garbage bin swarming with wandering wasps. The group of adult volunteers moves closer to the forest preserve and the area where they plan to have the picnic. It is not a traditional picnic with a blanket on the grass; but rather a large gathering and party, for everyone in the Telugu community to attend. As they enter the Old School Forest Preserve in Libertyville, they realize the event shelter is farther away than expected. One adult takes off his old Green Bay Packers hat, rubs his hand through his thinning hair, tightens the string of his hat, and promptly puts it back on. The cacophony of cicadas grows louder with each step towards the forest preserve. A cicada lands on the back of one volunteer's blue collared shirt, and the volunteer is quick to point it out. The cicadas are truly numerous, and amidst a plethora of cicadas in Illinois, it is hard to avoid them, especially in the middle of nature. Over 50 lie on the walking trail, and as they walk, the crunching of cicadas is brief yet long, their bodies being quite literally crushed underfoot. But despite cicadas being annoying to me, many of the volunteers felt a sense of appreciation for the cicadas, and empathized as they stepped over them.

Let's take a deeper look at this point because it is quite interesting and most likely is related to Indian culture. Their views on caring for animals are most likely due to Indian views on nature as sacred and as gifts from various gods in Hindu mythology. If we take a look at cows, they are known as mythical Hindi animals. Many of the volunteers were vegetarian, and did not eat meat, especially beef. They treat them with a level of respect because they appreciate their work and are grateful, particularly for the milk they give to them and for the ecosystem which they shape, one example helping make lands more fertile in farmlands where many Indians, especially the first-generation immigrant volunteers who I am walking with. Another example of animals that Indian's heavily value are Peacocks. I use this example because it is very easy to understand and common. In fact, Peacocks are India's national bird. But the feather of the Peacock, each

unique and rainbow-like, represent the aesthetic view of nature that Indians cherish. They value color and not just the material value of animals, but also their manifestations.

As they reach the event shelter, a volunteer quickly checks his phone to confirm what is right in front of him. They collectively sigh in relief, knowing they have finally reached the shelter they were desperately looking for. The shelter is larger than they had expected; it is more than just a shed for cover from the sun. Grass stretches past the shed for about 60 yards, and trees enclose the area from another adjacent shelter. An old hand-press water fountain is behind the shadow of a tree, full of cobwebs. The cacophony of cicadas hasn't died down but has only grown louder. Seven cicadas crawl up a nearby tree, and several lie on the wooden-carved tables near the outskirts of the grass. One volunteer asks in English if this is adequate for the picnic:

Volunteer A: "Shelter A bagundhi, kada?"

The direct translation is essentially, "Shelter A is good, right?".

Several respond "ounu". One volunteer's voice spikes in particular.

The direct translation is essentially, "Sure", or "Yes".

Volunteer B: "Chala boundi actualga, ikkada chala space undhi"

The direct translation is essentially, "Very good actually, here there is a lot of space".

While there had been dialogue before this moment, this was one of the few I wrote down that brought attention to me and caught my I. As you can see, Telugu dialoge is quite different than traditional English dialogue. There is usually a need to repeat what others have said before, and then confirm his/her's thoughts. In other words, the dialouge of the parent volunteers was definitely a bit more on the formal end, despite joking about cicadas earlier. This is a testament to the fact that in Indian culture, all adults are respected, particulary elders(which we will see later). This sense of formality has carried over to America, despite informality that plays such a heavy role in American society. We will touch more on ways adults spend time together is different due to cultural components.

Picture of Old School Forest Preserve, Shelter A, Lake County Forest Preserves

As they walk back past the words “Shelter A,” the adults are quite satisfied and reserve the shelter online. One volunteer’s phone slips from his large hand and drops onto the concrete trail, the white gravel distinctively marking the phone directly on the three-circled camera and partially cracking the surface. As they curse over the symphony of the cicadas, another puts their phone to their face only to notice that their iPhone is too hot. Finally, one successfully pulls their phone out with Face ID. More than satisfied with the area, they reserve Shelter A from 10 AM - 6 PM for a month later, indicative of the planning and longevity of the event. The others stopped to grab a drink of water- the one with Dasani settled with water falling from one of the other volunteer’s bottles. Constantly swatting cicadas in the air, the exhaustion started to settle within the adult volunteers: they began to talk less, walk slower, and care less about the cicadas swarming around them.

As I started to drip sweat, I noticed that I had drank more water than any of the other volunteers, and that I was sweating the most. Now, you may be wondering how this has

anything to do with cultural elements or heritage, but I thought there may be an aspect of biological anthrioplogy linked to this. I wondered if it was because, in India, there are extreme temperatures, even prolonged periods of droughts and extreme heat. Maybe some of the volunteers had still been accustomed to that, despite living in the cold climate of Illinois for several years. The work of Richard Wrangham, a renowned biological anthropologist who studies the impacts of fire on society, particularly intrigued me. While this is a far less extensive time period, I thought it may have something to do with evolutionary biology and living factors. It was here I decided to interview one of the adult volunteers on the walk back to exit out of the forest preserve. I greeted him in Telugu in an informal manner but with respect. The following are the questions I made that I was planning to ask some, or at least one, of the adult volunteers during the time of their picnic planning. Just as a frame of reference, the same questions were used in all of the interviews I performed during the picnic planning period, partially because I wanted to get the most quality data I could without extrapolation.

Me: Miru enduku sahayam cestunaru?

The direct translation is essentially, "Why are you choosing to help?"

Volunteer C: Manam ManaBadi community ki service chesthunnam… mariyu it's a good way to bring everyone together, kada?

The direct translation is essentially, "We as the Manabadi community do service, and it's a good way to bring everyone together, right?"

Me: Kani, indulo miku emi undi?

The direct translation is essentially, "But, what's in it for you?"

Volunteer C: One, nenu sanghamki ayyanu. Second, nenu intlo unnatlu naku anpistudani nenu bhavistunanu. Adi chalal boundi.

The direct translation is essentially, "One, I became a community. Second, I feel like I'm at home. This is really good"

Me: *Meeru enduku Telugu mariyu English kalipi matladutunnaru?*

The direct translation is essentially, "Why are you speaking a mixture of Telugu and English?"

Volunteer C: *Ikka Illinois lo undadam valla, manam English ekuva matladutham. Mariyu mana samskruti ni patukodaniki Telugu ni kuda vadutamu. Rendu languages kalipi matladadam anukoolam anipistundi. Actual ga, I forgot certain words in Telugu, so I use English to fill in those gaps as well.*

The direct translation is essentially, "Living here in Illinois, we speak more English. But to preserve our culture, we also use Telugu. Speaking a mix of both languages feels convenient. Actually, I forgot certain words in Telugu, so I use English to fill in those gaps as well"

Continuing on the theme of the intersectionality between English and Telugu, this is another instance of the same matter. While I did not write every interaction of speaking, this is another example of how English and Telugu are generally used together, at least in this particular group of individuals, the adult volunteers. Moreover, it opens up the avenue towards linguistics, but more specifically how culture has impacted language. This will be talked about more in a later chapter. Generally, when the adults spoke in this conversation, which I could only document some of, there was a mix of English and Telugu, not necessarily in separate sentences, but together. When we look at Telugu movies in another chapter, this will also be important to note.

Shortly after, on the same day, the adults collectively went to one of the volunteer's houses near the forest preserve. It had been the plan before they even went to the forest preserve. Since the Levittown era in the 1950s, many suburban houses seemed to look the same. But before one even entered the house, one could tell an Indian lived there. A toran illuminates the grayish house and distinguishes it from the rest of the ordinary townhomes in the alley. The toran boasted its colorful marigolds, each alternating in color between yellow and orange. Little ornate bells embellish the toran further, dangling from the petals of each orange flower. A sharp gust of wind rings the bells wildly as they enter the home, even though the sun is still blisteringly hot. The house is east-facing like many other Indian homes. As they ring the doorbell, an elderly women opens the door in her greenish-gold draped sari, welcoming her new guests. Each rug in the house, at least on the entrance floor, had been vacuumed, evident by the vacuum streaks along the fur of the rug. The house smells of the aroma of chai tea, and in the background, the muffled noises of table tennis paddles making contact with a plastic ball can be heard, likely from their children. They seat themselves at the large dining table as the wife brings over the chai tea, even though none of the volunteers asked for it. The dining table is plain, with nothing on it other than a volunteer's work computer and eight antique chairs enclosing it. She offers me one as well, and I accept, not wanting to come off as disrespectful. We

thank the elderly woman, now learning its the homeowners mother, and the volunteers begin working on logistics for the event.

A couple of things to note here are important because I think it gives some insight into the Telugu culture, but probably the Indian culture in America in general. First, a toran is a traditional Indian door decoration, that usually has some sort of flowers, design, or ornate decoration attached to it. In most Indian families that I have noticed, including my own house, we have one. The toran itself is more than just a decoration- it's a part of the Indian culture and tradition. Since Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth, the Toran serves to attract her, but more importantly bring good fortune and aura to those who enter the house. It is a very auspicious tradition in India, which has carried over to the United States with Indian Americans.

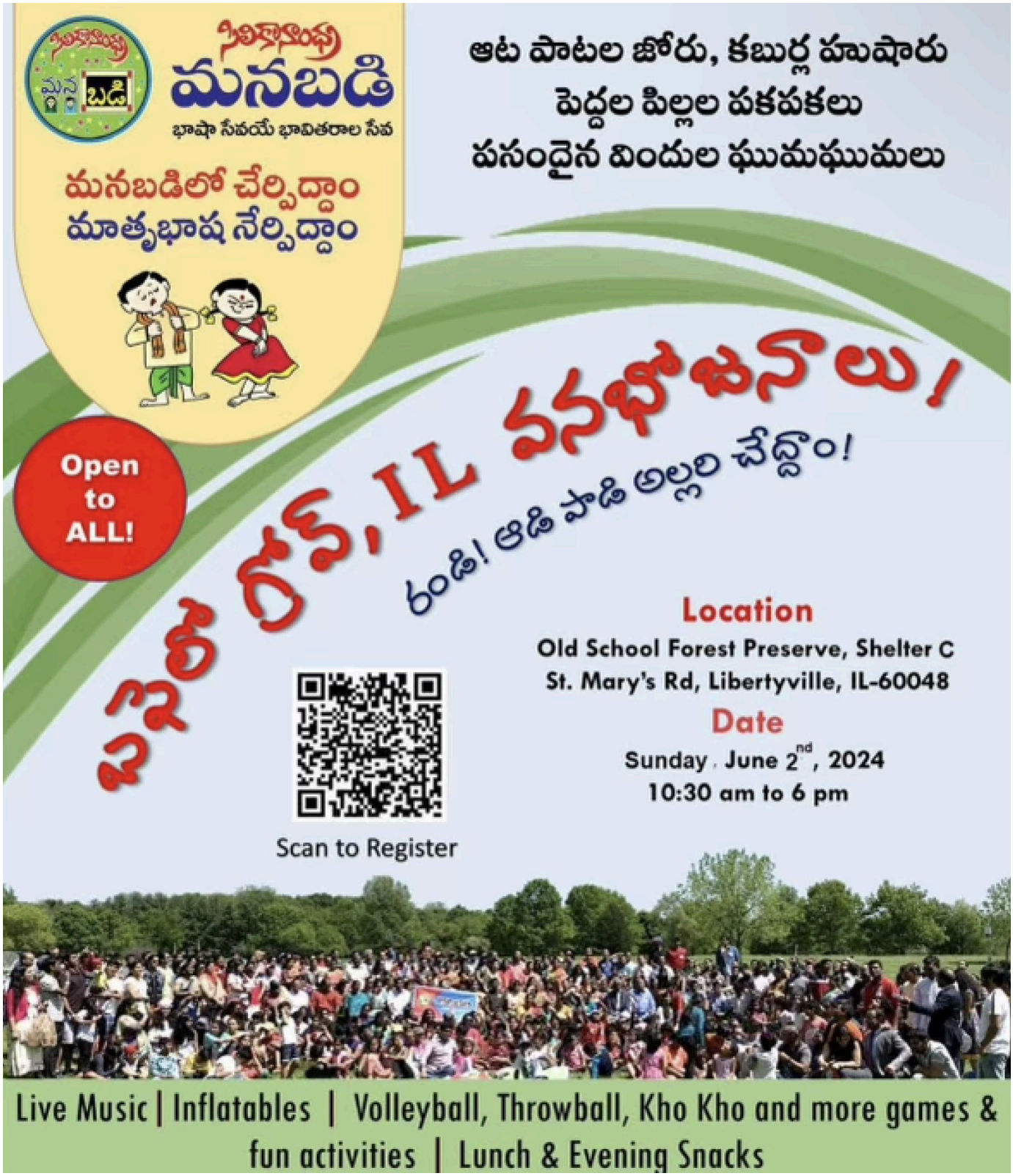
Second, a little detail that may be overlooked is that the front door of the house is east-facing. When I asked my father why we bought the specific house we live in, he explained how the east-facing front door was a deal breaker. I think this just goes to show how important Indian traditions and practices are, even as significant as not buying a house. Having the door east-facing is not only auspicious, but is a symbol of positive energy and aura in Indian culture. Thus, the volunteer's family, like many others, most likely had this Indian tradition in the back of their minds when they were buying their house.

Third, in the Indian culture, guests are incredibly important. It is a tradition to always treat guests with the utmost respect and greet them ornately. Based on the vacuum being recently used on the rug, it is pretty evident that the family wanted to prepare for the guests by cleaning the home. Additionally, the mother of the volunteer brought chai tea to me and the adult volunteers. Typically, chai is a common drink in India just because of the unique spices and herbs in it. So, many Indians drink it, and its commonness in India has made it a tradition in America as well, evident in the volunteer's home. It is also second nature to give guests drinks and food in many traditions, even if they never asked for it. As a result, the mother gave everyone chai as an act of hospitality and also because it is an integral part of the Indian culture. And, as previously mentioned, saris are an integral part of Indian culture, especially in the Telugu culture. These important symbols will be talked about in separate chapters later on in this book.

The cinnamon in the chai is quite strong but is masked by the drink's heat. Surprisingly to me, they make registration for the picnic mandatory for all ManaBadi families to cover the event costs and attract most of the Telugu community. This picnic has been held for nearly a decade, always around summertime when the ManaBadi year ends, especially

right after final exams. As a result, it was relatively easy for the volunteers to plan at this point. To gain attention and traction for the event, they pulled up last year's flyer on the singular MacBook in front of them, tweaked the date, changed the location to Shelter A, and added a mixture of text in Telugu and English. As several volunteers on the right side of the table continue working on the flyer, they nearly simultaneously sip their chai, while the rest try to cup their hands around the minuscule cups, the handles useless. The chai remains surprisingly warm even after five minutes, and I start to worry about holding the tea for too long without burning my hands, which are so large they barely fit around the cup. Three main volunteers continue working on the flyer, pointing and touching areas of the flyer. However, the MacBook isn't touchscreen, somewhat infuriating them. One gets out of his chair, nearly knocking it over, to plug in the MagSafe charger. The flyer is a mix of Telugu and English, with the ManaBadi logo at the top left, an "Open to ALL!" text box underneath it, a picture of last year's event as the backdrop, and event details such as timing and location in English. A QR code is placed in the middle for registration. Others start to have a conversation with one another. Intriguingly, they discuss Indian politics, but I am unfamiliar with the names of the parties. Some of them get quite adamant about it, while others sit back in the conversation. Almost all of the conversation is in English, although I am not entirely sure of the reason. I decided to interject and join in on the conversation, hoping to learn more about what it was they were talking about.

Ironically enough, the volunteers have become more technologically savvy than before. No doubt, this applies to many adults, but I thought it was humorous to point out. But keep in mind the background of many of these adults—working class families in India, with little to no opportunities given to them, but they made the most out of it. When you look at the biggee picture, and see how far they have come, it truly is profound.


సిలికానాంధ్ర మనబడి
భాషా సేవయే భావితరాల సేవ
ఆట పాటల జోరు, కబుర్ల హుషారు
పెద్దల పిల్లల పకపకలు
పసందైన విందుల ఘుమఘుమలు
మనబడిలో చేర్పిద్దాం
మాతృభాష నేర్పిద్దాం
Open to ALL!
షికాగో దగ్గర, IL వనభోజనాలు!
రండి! ఆడి పాడి అల్లరి చేద్దాం!
Location
Old School Forest Preserve, Shelter C
St. Mary's Rd, Libertyville, IL-60048
Date
Sunday . June 2nd, 2024
10:30 am to 6 pm
Scan to Register
Live Music | Inflatables | Volleyball, Throwball, Kho Kho and more games & fun activities | Lunch & Evening Snacks

Above is a flyer of the ManaBadi picnic that the adults worked on. Published on FaceBook and emailed to all parents and students. However, this image was taken directly from FaceBook. Even the flyer, as you can see, is in a mix of English and written Telugu. The written Telugu part intrigues me because most the adult who was working on this flyer had a hard time writing in Telugu. Partly because of how hard it is to write on a computer, but also because the reality is that it has been so long since he had written in Telugu. While some volunteers are ManaBadi teachers that demonstrate to students in class how to write, some merely just stay around, helping here and there with getting packets, books, pencils, whiteboards, etc.

Me: What's happening with the Indian election?

Volunteer 4: The elections are coming up soon in India and they could determine a lot. Actually, we were just talking about how our parents in India all went out to vote just recently.

Me: Are Indian politics a big deal? I mean, in America it is.

Many start laughing, and another volunteer interjects to answer.

Volunteer 5: You have no idea. Politics changes everything in India, from classes to fame. The two main parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC), both have different views. You are familiar with the caste system, correct?

Me: Sort of. I know there are 4 castes, and a lot of your status is dependent on it.

Volunteer 5: Exactly. But the INC party is extreme and is threatening to uproot the entire thing. It's ridiculous. So we are all hoping for a BJP win.

The rest of the volunteers then continued their discussion about the specifics of what was going on, still confusing to me even though I am very familiar with the American system of government. Most of it seemed similar, but some of it seemed very different. But what I did know was that the volunteers were biased, but were also very passionate about the election. Most of the volunteers are from Telangana, the Telugu state of India where most of the Telugu population live. Clearly, they wanted the BJP party to win. As a result, it was evident that Indian politics had a significant impact on the adults, even when they weren't in India.

An elderly man, most likely the father of the volunteer to whom the home belonged, walks slowly into the dining room, his steps short but deliberate. His white hair was neatly combed back, revealing a few strands of silver that glistened under the soft glow of the lighting. His white collar shirt sharply contrasts with the color and dullness of the dining room and his formality is seen through the collar shirt being fully buttoned up. The adult volunteers, all except the homeowner, immediately stand up to greet and honor him, each one introducing themselves and greeting him in Telugu. The volunteers each state their name and ask how he is doing in Telugu. As the man responds to each of the volunteers, he audibly struggles but sits down in the antique seat next to one of the volunteers, his wisdom seemingly having an impact on the entire room. He must have heard us talking about politics, because he then joins the conversation on Indian politics. As he continues the conversation, it is now entirely in Telugu, and his hot-headedness about the election is evident just through the spike of his eyebrows, even more so than the adult volunteers. Several minutes pass as I start to zone out, confused by the specifics. One comment by the elderly man particularly sticks out to me, as he shows his jagged phone to the volunteers. He shows a picture of the protests near his Indian house, infuriated by the situation. He explains in Telugu how he has already voted back in India before visiting his family here in America, and that the election could make or break a lot of land that he owns. Before he drinks a sip of the chai next to him, he shouts to the daughter-in-law and makes sure that there is no sugar in the drink. And as he finishes his sip of chai, its steam fogging up the glasses he had just now put on, he continues to explain a watch party he is going to. It was a local one in the neighborhood, but I actually recalled my own parents talking about it before I came to the planning.

First, in India, a strong emphasis is placed on the elderly, no matter one's relation to them. This is because they are seen as guardians of the younger generation, and people of tremendous wisdom that still have a lot to give back to the world. As a result, it is always customary, especially in Indian tradition, to formally greet the elderly and treat them with the most respect possible. Furthermore, it is common in India to always treat elders like extended family and kin, which, as you can see, has also carried its way to certain American households and groups like the adult volunteers I was observing.

Second, in America, a lot of our culture and actions are caused and influenced by politics. It was evident to me that in India, it has the same effect, and even though Indian Americans don't vote in India anymore, many are still very passionate about it. This is because in India, family, community, and inheritance are all things of great importance. As opposed to America where the "American Dream" is apparent, and people, or at least some, can go out into the world and create opportunity, opportunity in India is limited for

most in society. The caste system is what defines India, and makes it very difficult to move up towards success. But also, in India, there are serious problems: overpopulation, poverty, droughts, and problems that can singlehandedly change families. India's problems are why I think Indian politics are so largely talked about. America is already a developed country- but India still struggles and has made little progress for a long time. Thus, a lot of the adult volunteers and even the elderly men are very passionate about who wins the election. Also, the sense of community in India is strong. The Telangana people will stand by one another. When I talked to my parents, who grew up like many other Telugu families in Telanaga, they stated that not only did they know everyone in their community, but that they treated everyone like family. Thus, the culture of Indian politics still plays a role in the decisions and minds of many Indians, no matter where they currently reside.

Third, the grandma dresses up in a sari while the grandpa dresses up in a casual polo shirt. But why is this the case? When we think about why this is, it's isn't just because they willingly decided to dress up fashionably: its because of gender roles. In India, gender roles have long played an effect on clothing on the things we wear, stemming all the way back to patriarchal societies and once again, the caste system. These strict traditions in Indian society—where men are seen as those in "power" and in "control" of the households— are still somewhat evident in America. Albeit to a lesser extent, as the relationship between the two is definitely more informal as generations pass,

When the elderly man leaves, a sense of informality returns to the room. One of the volunteers readjusts his posture and slouches back into the comfort of his chair. As the rest of the volunteers continue to chat and slowly but surely sip their cooling chai tea, the working adult volunteer, now finishing the flyer, seems to open a spreadsheet of some sort- to add a list of items they should bring to the picnic. He now asks everyone in the room what to bring, stumped and perplexed. As they start to name things, it becomes evident that a significant amount of planning and effort will be needed for the picnic. Much more than I thought was the case- to be honest, I do not know why they call it a picnic when it is going to be a large gathering. Perhaps because picnics are quite popular in India and Indian culture. As the adult volunteers shout items: games, food, commodities, and necessities; several unique Indian are mentioned as well. Cricket, badminton, carroms, spikeball, volleyball, bubbles, frisbee, soccer, football, chess, dancing, speakers, tables, Indian food, utensils, napkins, trash bags, water bottles, lemonade, wood for a fireplace, and more are brought up. As the adults continue to list items, many of them being repeats, my mind begins to drone out and focus on the battling of table tennis just downstairs, the children's screams starting to pierce through the wall.

The clock on the wall becomes not just the target of I, but of many of the adult volunteers, sensing their exhaustion and the desire to go back to their home and family. As the volunteers can no longer think of any more items, they start to say their goodbyes to each other. I notice that many of them say “sare”, meaning okay in Telugu, then say a typical English salutation, and then shake hands. They shake their heads from side to side, somewhat confusing me. As the adults all go back to put their chai teas away, they are stopped in their tracks by the wife, who does not allow them to put it away, but rather insists on her doing the deed. As the front door opens, the marigold and its bells sway side to side clinging on to the ledge above. The wind is sharp and a storm brews. At least 3 teslas and several hondas are parked in front of the house as the adult volunteers walk back to their respective cars, satisfied yet exhausted from the work they had done.

What is significant here is the items the adult volunteers think of that they bring to the picnic. Obviously, it is a picnic, but one that will be Indian-oriented considering it is run by ManaBadi and Indian volunteers. Some of the things are of cultural importance, and they are important to note. For example, Cricket is a very well-known sport across the world, but especially in India. In fact, India takes a lot of pride in Cricket. The National Indian Cricket Team is a significant part of the culture in India as that is the main sport they are very good at, similar to American Football or Basketball. So, not only the younger generation, but people of all ages participate and play cricket, whether at the professional level or just for recreation. By bringing it to cricket, they not only bring a common sport familiar to the entire Indian community but also better connect with a significant part of Indian culture which is cricket.

Another Indian item that was brought up was carroms, a common Indian board game that is played in many Indian households. It is more of a leisure sport meant to kill time, but is also quite competitive in India. In my, and many other American Indians, there are carroms in our households, and it is another integral part of Indian culture. Thus, bringing it to the picnic is another demonstration of the adult volunteers trying to better connect with the Indian culture at the picnic. The adult volunteers also said they would bring dancing to the picnic. Singing, dancing, and music are other significant parts of Indian culture. In fact, at a young age, many Indians are put into singing, dancing, or both. It provides a medium to not only connect with the Indian religion and traditions, but also allows for self-expression no matter who one is. There are specific types of Indian dances and singing, such as Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam, the two which many Indians study and learn throughout their childhood. These items and activities illustrate how material culture (objects, artifacts) and non-material culture (rituals, practices) intersect to form cultural identity and community cohesion. The picnic serves as a microcosm

where these cultural elements are consciously selected and shared, reinforcing a sense of belonging and continuity among the Indian diaspora in the United States. It also demonstrates how cultural practices adapt and evolve in new environments while maintaining core traditions that connect individuals to their origins and roots.

It's also interesting that there is a mix of American and Indian cultural items. Spikeball, an American game that has recently been popularized among teenagers, is one of the items they added to their list alongside Indian games such as cricket. On a larger scale, the assimilation of cultures, specifically immigrant cultures, can apply to nearly every immigrant. Referring to the idea of America as a "melting pot", it will interestingly allow for there to be a mix of Indian and American cultures at the picnic as well. One cannot necessarily quantify culture and if the picnic is more "culturally" American or Indian, but the bottom line is that a fair share of Indian and American culture is evident.

Note: These "Indian" items, such as cricket, carroms, saris, chai, and other symbols will be detailed in later chapters, before the picnic chapter.

Lastly, the amount of Teslas that the adult volunteers owned was quite numerous. Teslas are electric cars as opposed to gas cars, that are somewhat expensive but are becoming more affordable yearly to the general public. I think this is because of the Indian culture that cares deeply about financial well-being and environmental sustainability, especially coming from a country that suffers heavily from pollution and overpopulation. As a result, the Indian background of the adult volunteers is most likely a large reason for the reason why they have Teslas as their cars.