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### Indian To Indian American

India, a country of more than 19,500 languages/dialects but with less influence of English language, is where I come from. My family and friends influenced me by following common culture and language in India. I was an ordinary girl who could only speak the local languages like Hindi and Gujarati. Before two years ago, I moved to the United States of America, which had a totally different culture, language and people compared to India. In the past couple of years, I have had many weird experiences after moving to the USA as a non- English speaker. I had a really interesting and mysterious journey during the transition of becoming an English speaker.

After moving to America, me and my family had to face many difficulties because of our illiteracy of English. There were many events of miscommunication that have created blunders. During that time, even visiting a grocery store without any drama felt as if we'd achieved a goal. In India we use the word 'brinjal' for 'eggplant', so when we asked a grocery worker for brinjal; he didn't understand and moved along with us throughout the store. America is home to people speaking many different languages which makes it diverse and colorful. But, sometimes the different accents used by these people makes it harder for us to understand their English. Along with being a different language speaking country, the USA also has a different culture than mine. As I come from a Hindu household, I'm not aware of other religion's customs and creeds.

Before moving to America, I just knew about festivals like Holi, Diwali and Navratri. Here, I got to know about festivals like Thanksgiving, Halloween, Labor Day, etc. Because of my lack of knowledge about the meaning of festivals, once I wished one of my classmates who is a Christian, 'Happy GoodFriday'. She thought I was trying to hurt her feelings and make fun of her religion. She tried to ignore me for the next few days. When she explained the reason to me, I experienced the culture-shock for the first time. That was the first time that I realized that holidays are not necessarily a joyous occasion.

There were many other culture shocks that I experienced whether it be: clothes, people, styling, lifestyle, hair, food or relationships. In India, like any other South Asian country, people tend to wear long, full body covered clothes while here people usually wear short clothes. Apart from clothes, the thing about relationships is quite different. In India, people don't publicly talk about their relationships until they are ready to marry in a year while here the people are very liberal. Though the people having different identities shouldn't be scary, I really got scared on my first day of school after watching a crowd of people who looked totally indifferent to me. After spending the first 3 hours at school, I felt homesick until I saw an Indian face. Despite all the linguistic and cultural barriers, the humans and human resources made my transition from one country to another effortless.

The Asians and Indians who were present in the USA were very helpful for me and my family when we moved here. Our relatives and family friends who have been living here for years, used to come with us to the hospitals, school, public offices or any other places where we needed them as translators. One of my uncles came with me to my first IGP meeting where he suggested that I should take a Spanish class which turned out to be very helpful because in my

Spanish class, I had a classmate who was from India; who guided me and made sure that I could comfortably fit in that class. Dr. Walker, my physics teacher, was from the Philippines. She was very friendly with me and guided me during my transition. She also helped me with recommendations for scholarships and college admissions. Other teachers also tried to help me a lot. For instance, the first class I had after landing here was a US History HN class. The instructor was a cheerful young guy. On my first day, when I asked him about the books; he gave me information about it for like 7-10 minutes in his strong American accent. Though I was unable to understand some of the parts he said, I acted about it by nodding my head and filling the gaps of the conversation with my 'YA, YAs..'.

Practice makes a man perfect, as it is said. In the past two years, I have used many different resources to learn English. At school, I was given ESOL classes where I was taught English from its basics. In that class, I was made familiar with many different people from varied cultures. The night before my first day of high school in the USA, I dreamt that I'm in my English class crying as my English teacher just scolded me because of my ignorance of English. But, I'm glad that was just a dream and my English teachers for both the years of high school were very helpful and kind. They suggested that I read books of my interest to improve my English and were very liberal with my assignments and work. My aunt suggested that I watch American shows and movies. So, I started watching the show *AP Bio* which was quite helpful as it was a school based show. I got to learn about many cultures of American schools like pep rally, superlatives, student council, etc which I didn't get to see in high school because of covid. During the summer break, I started my first job as a cashier at a restaurant where I listened to my colleagues' & customers' English and tried to copy some of their phrases.

That was the first place from where I learned how to answer the phone in English. I also got to know some of the slang words used in South Carolina through my co-workers like gotta, wanna, y'all, etc. I used to practice my Spanish with the Mexican coworkers that used to work there.

Gestures are a wonderful way of conveying emotions and feelings. Whenever I travel by bus on some unknown route, the driver and the people around me are more than ready to help me whenever I need it. Gestures have not only been helpful but have also sometimes made my day. Once, while working I came across a deaf and dumb customer. With some hardships, I was able to serve the customer by doing Q&A on a writing pad. At the end of the notepad, he drew a flower and wrote 'Have a Blessed Day', which made my day. Not just random people, the neighbors up here are also very friendly and always greet us with a smile even though we don't know their names. Before some time, me and my family were quarantined. When our neighbors got to know about it, they brought us some groceries and put it outside our door with a 'Get Well Soon Card'. This gave me a very warm feeling that though our ethnicity, religion, race, etc are different, we all are part of the same society. In the USA, while walking on the streets or anywhere else, people bade hello even to strangers and ask about their farewell. In a world full of different languages and dialects, a single smile can convey the toughest of emotion. The people of this country are very accepting. I've learned many things from the culture and tolerating nature of Americans. Here, nobody is bothered about or makes fun of how someone looks, dresses or styles themselves. Most of the people dress-up for themselves, not for showing off. Recently, while going to my Math class at 12pm, I saw a person jogging on the street. If this was the scenario in India then the people passing by would stare and laugh at that person for exercising so late but here, nobody was bothered about that and even some of the passers by

were encouraging him by saying 'Keep it up!' & 'Good Job'. This quality of the people of America has transformed my identity from a nosy person to a clear minded person.

Although the world is divided by many languages and dialects, the language of love always unites it. The friendly behavior and kindness of humans make it possible for everyone to settle in any part of the world. After living here for two years, Columbia feels like home. I'm frequently asked the question about my identity and from where do I belong. At the beginning of this journey of two years, I used to tell people that I'm from India. But now I've reached the point that when someone asks me where I'm from; I answer them with pride that I'm from Columbia, South Carolina!