

What I bring to the table

by Anshika Kapur



Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. The American Dream. The Land of Opportunities. These were the phrases I learned as a kindergartner that had just immigrated to the United States less than two months ago. Twenty years later, despite the hardships my family and I have endured, I truly believe that we are living proof of the American dream. Twenty years ago, when my parents, sister, and I moved to Minnesota, my parents left a comfortable lifestyle in India because they saw promise in the quality of life and education system the States had to offer for their daughters. I remember stepping out of the plane at the Minnesota airport for the first time at the age of five and being awestruck by the moving stairs (aka the escalator). That escalator was my first memory of the United States. When I first moved to Minnesota in the summer of 2000, I did not see a difference between the life we had left back in India and the new life I was about to begin in this foreign land. The differences did not become apparent until I started going to daycare every day after kindergarten.

Every day, my mother would pack two meals for me—one for school and one for daycare. A recurrent meal used to be aloo-stuffed pooris, something that reminded me of my life back home in India. Every week at snack time during daycare, I would unfold the aluminum foil my mother wrapped the pooris in and hear the “Ew, that stinks” from all of the other kids. I was bullied for being Indian when I did not even understand the word bully. I remember wanting to fit in so badly with my peers, so every day, my mom would pack Indian food for me and every day, I would throw it away before my friends could even smell it. I would avoid the sun like the black plague in the effort to be lighter like my friends. I tried so hard to only speak in English, so that I could lose my Indian accent. I was ashamed to be an Indian until I was a sixteen-year-old college freshman.

When I saw the diverse cultures that come together at the University of Minnesota is when I started understanding that I don't have to disregard my Indian upbringing in

order to fit into the American culture. Instead, I strive to use my values and cultures to better myself and what I bring to the table and I am proud to be an Indian American.