

# My Cross- Cultural Experience

Ariana Dharambeer

---

# Introduction

My family is Hindu, and my parents are from Guyana. Throughout my life, we have been learning about my cultural and religious customs which has become a part of my character. However, this is not the only thing that has changed who I am. Although my family has grown up in Guyana, they came over here to give my brother and I more experiences as well as a better life. Being raised in a western society has challenged many of the views I grew up with such as the idea of taking care of my parents and loving my family simply because they are my family. It has also introduced new ideas that I can relate due to similarities in culture. America is a mix of different stories which in turn, has helped me form my own.

---



# Travels Within and Outside of the US

- Vegas
- Bahamas
- Canada
- Florida
- Virginia
- Maryland
- Pennsylvania

They are all different as they offer a different perspective on what people's lives are like. Although we usually stick to the tourist areas you get to experience the cultures through the food and the way you are treated. Vegas and Florida were the more expensive places we've visited, and things tend to be out of the way in places such as Pennsylvania. Virginia and Maryland are quieter compared to the other places. Overall, they all offer unique experiences.



# Culture and Traditions

Fasting when there are religious works to be done, whether it is for a certain amount of time or a few days. Specific rules, no animal or certain animal products. (Don't consume flesh of anything that has been killed.)

My family celebrates American holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas and Halloween. Hindus don't celebrate Christmas but the reason my family has is because our grandparents started the tradition. Fourth of July, we have adopted when my parents came over here.

Part of the culture is that we are supposed to pray every day. My family beds are placed so our heads face east (same with the altar.) Flowers for prayer can be used as an offering and you clasp it in your hands during prayer. Incense used a way to cleanse spaces and make them sacred.

---



# Religious Practices

- Diwali – Festival of Lights. The meaning behind it that I have always heard was that you make a pathway using diyas as a way to let light into your home which banishes evil presences. It is the triumph of good over evil. Before we light the diyas we fast and clean ourselves properly. We light the hallways and the driveway with them as a sort of “pathway” and after we finish praying, we make aarti as a blessing over ourselves and parents. Aarti is when we place the diya in a tari and move the plate clockwise, my family does it three times.
  - Holi (Pagwa) - Festival of Color. It is seen as a way to welcome spring. You wear white or old clothes and throw colored powder on friends and family.
  - Rakhi – A way to celebrate the bond between a brother and sister whether they are related or not. It's used as a way to pray for the brother's health, prosperity and overall well-being. You can choose whether you make the Rakhi or not, but it is meant as a way to protect. Red in general is often tied around the wrist to symbolize those things.
-



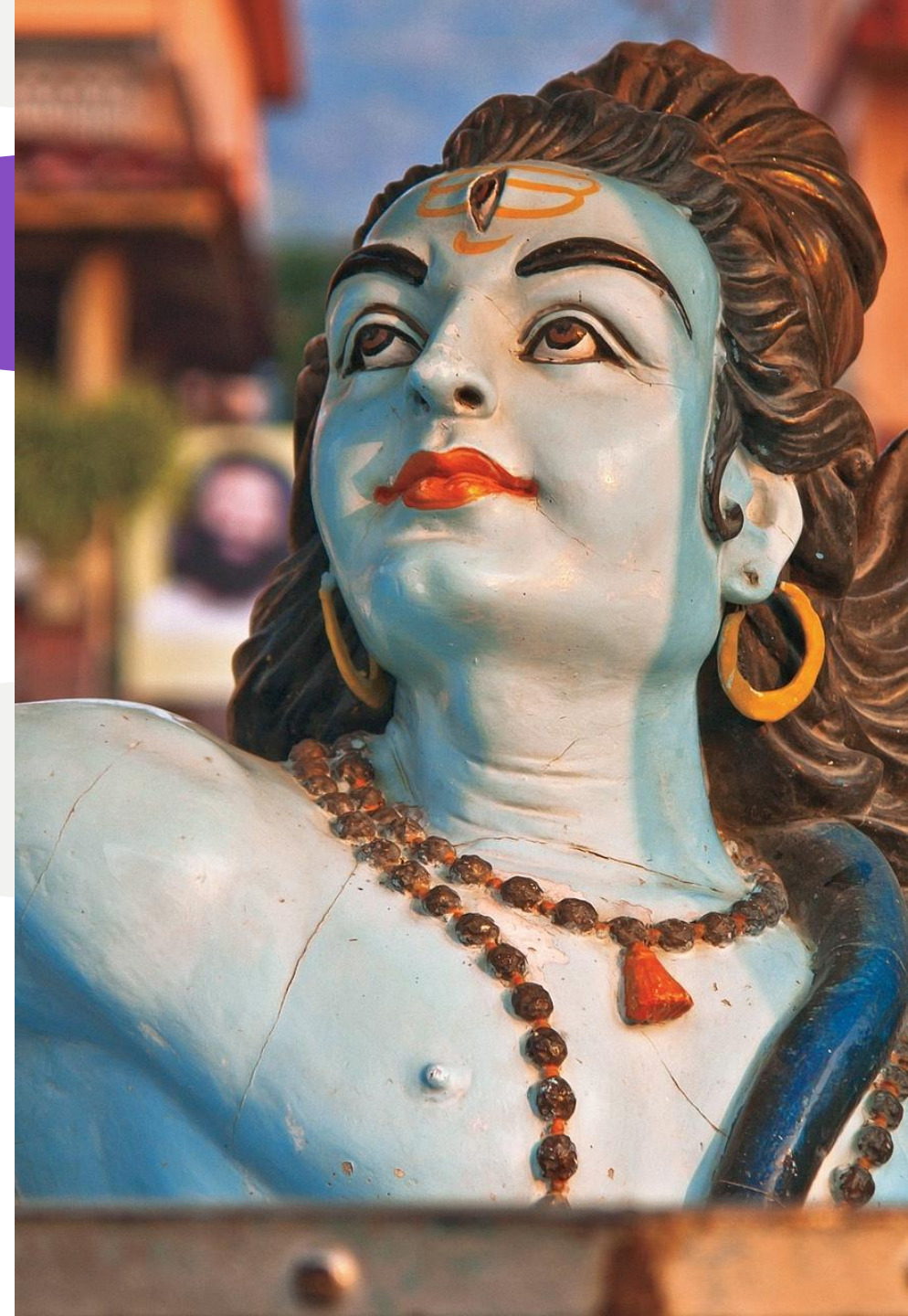
# Religious Practices Cont.

- Maha Shivaratri
- Navaratri

These are both fasting days and are used to worship and honor the gods. They are both celebrated at different times in the year and follow the same fasting rules which are no eating meat or certain animal products. (Ransohoff and Ransohoff)

Maha Shivaratri honors the Shiva and Navaratri honors the Goddesses Durga (the goddess of valor,) Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth) and Saraswati (the goddess of knowledge.)

---





# Cultural Symbols

- Henna - It can be considered an everyday thing, but it is also used for special occasions such as weddings or birthdays. During weddings it can be seen as a symbol for health and prosperity.
- Bindi - A bindi is a small rounded sign, made with a kumkum, between the eyebrows on the forehead of a Hindu woman. It is called something different for men and it is also placed on the forehead during a visit to a temple. Unmarried girls will wear a black bindi and married women will wear a red/maroon bindi. It is also seen as the third eye.
- Om - It is a symbol of god and is believed to be the sound heard at the time of the creation of the universe. All of the major mantras start with aum/om.
- Namaste Hand Sign - This hand sign is used during prayer, and it is also used as a greeting.

*(Hinduism: A Supplemental Resource for Grade 12 World of Religions: A Canadian Perspective Practices, Ri Tuals, Symbols, and Special Days/Celebrations)*







# Cultural Norms

- Calling people by certain titles. Usually if a neighbor is well known you can call them uncle, auntie, grandma depending on how old they are. I have never called my brother by his first name because it is seen as somewhat disrespectful, so I was always raised to call him “brother.” My younger brother’s do not call me by my first name and instead settle on a nickname. Titles also vary depending on whose side of the family you are referring to. “Mocie” is another way of saying aunt and it used on the maternal side, but “Auntie” is used on the paternal side.
- Taking care of parents as they get older. It is also a sign of respect and as a way of paying them back for the things they have done for you when you were younger.
- Cover your shoulders & knees in places of worship. Holy sites are a place of worship, and they should be treated as such. It is a sign of modesty and a way to not distract others.
- Lead with your right hand. There are many reasons that people lead with their right hand, but I know my mother insists on leading with the right hand because she considers leading with the left hand to be bad. My brother used to write with his left hand, but she forced him to start writing with his right hand.
- When praying you have to level with an altar and cannot be above it.

“The Do’s and Don’ts in India. How to Be on the Right Side of Indian Cultural Norms”

---



# Cultural Beliefs

- Cows are Sacred - Hindus believe that cows are providers and because of this they are seen as sacred. To harm a cow would be going against this belief.
- Reincarnation - It's the system of belief where if you do something bad, then you will have a bad life after you are reborn but if you do something good, you will have a good life.
- Caste system - This goes hand in hand with reincarnation sometimes but it's about how your family's status will affect you. Your societal rank is passed down and there isn't a way to get out of it.
- Cremation: It is the belief that cremation cuts ties between the soul and body and when you do this, the soul is released.



# Socialization

- West Indies culture mixes with our culture.
- South Asian culture mixes with us as well.
- Western Culture has started to introduce itself to the younger generation.

We share somewhat similar beliefs on the social side such as the way children are raised or the stance that we take on education. Boys and girls are raised very differently but this can also depend on the family. Education is not something that you should ever take for granted and you should always strive to do your best. However, western culture has started integrating itself with the younger generation which challenges and changes these types of ideas but it can also reinforce it.

---



# Impact of Gender and Sexuality Inequality

Gender inequality has kept me on a tighter leash than my brothers. My parents do not believe that I should be allowed to do certain things and while they are correct in their own way, it has effectively robbed me of an experience that I might have had if they treated me like my brothers.

It made it so that I did not have to do much because I am the only girl in the family but with that comes with not being able to do virtually anything. I wasn't allowed to call or hang out with any of my friends after school. When I got my phone, they made it clear that it was for calling and talking to them alone. It ruined a lot of chances that I had to make friends. I was also very sheltered, so it makes doing certain tasks difficult. I do have to pick up what my brother's did not do (school wise) and this has led to unrealistic expectations on their part which I do not follow or listen to.

Aside from this, I am also a part of the LGBTQ+ community even though they are not aware of this. This just makes a lot of things awkward on my part because I am bisexual and aromantic and they do not understand things like that. There's also the fact that I am somewhat gender non-conforming. They mainly have a problem with me looking gay or too masculine because my mother believes that femininity comes from long hair and traditional "girly" things such as painting your nails, wearing heels, dresses and skirts.

---

# Why Cross-Cultural Understanding is Important

Cross-Cultural understanding is important because it helps shape us as people.

Distinct groups of people offer different perspectives and not everything should be viewed from surface level. Although most things could have simple answers, there is more to a person than what they present to you during a first impression. Everyone has history and that can play a huge role in the way a community is formed. It is a sort of guide that acts as a baseline for many people as it gives us something to relate to which can help form connections between everyone. It makes us more comfortable and more open-minded.

---





# References

*Hinduism: A Supplemental Resource for Grade 12 World of Religions: A Canadian Perspective Practices, Ri Tuals, Symbols, and Special Days/Celebrations.* 2019, [https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/world\\_religions/hinduism/practices.pdf](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/world_religions/hinduism/practices.pdf) Accessed 30 Oct. 2022.

Ransohoff, Julia, and Sam Ransohoff. "Hindu Holidays | Sutter Health." [www.sutterhealth.org](http://www.sutterhealth.org), July 2019, [www.sutterhealth.org/health/preteens/relationships-social-skills/hindu-holidays](http://www.sutterhealth.org/health/preteens/relationships-social-skills/hindu-holidays). Accessed 30 Oct. 2022.

"The Do's and Don'ts in India. How to Be on the Right Side of Indian Cultural Norms." *Nomadic Expeditions*, 16 July 2020, [www.nomadicexpeditions.com/the-dos-and-donts-in-india-how-to-be-on-the-right-side-of-indian-cultural-norms/](http://www.nomadicexpeditions.com/the-dos-and-donts-in-india-how-to-be-on-the-right-side-of-indian-cultural-norms/). Accessed 31 Oct. 2022.

---