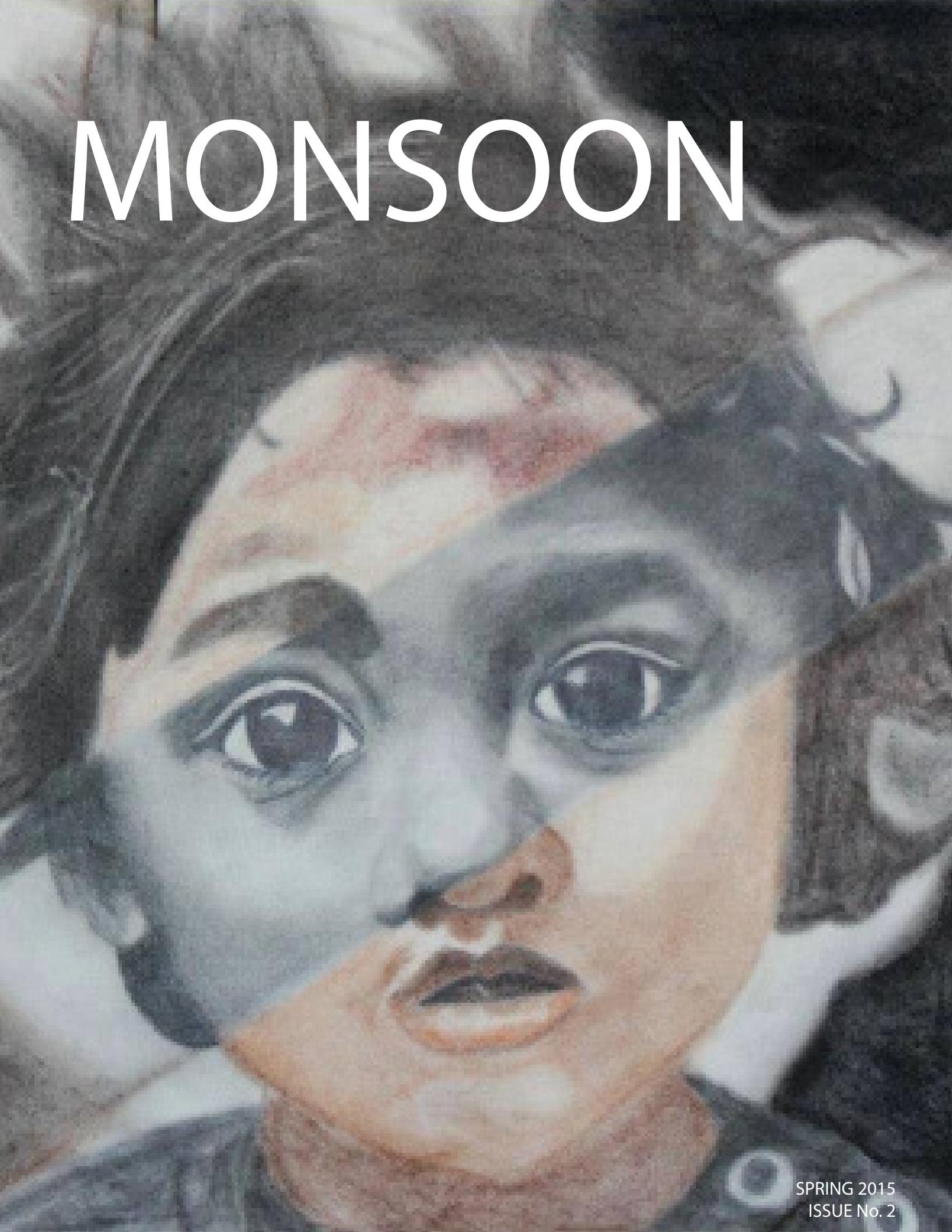


MONSOON



SPRING 2015
ISSUE No. 2

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Anisha Padma

Parth Shah

WEBSITE & PRINT DESIGNER

Sara Khan

WRITERS

Chiraayu Gosrani

Mariya Husain

Debanjali Kundu

Alekhya Mallavarapu

Dinesh McCoy

Sharath Rama

Nikhil Umesh

Naintara Viswanath

PUBLICITY DIRECTORS

Ranjitha Ananthan

Iti Madan

Sanjana Murthy

COVER ARTIST

Khushbu Gosai

COVER DESIGNER

Hamza Butler

CONTRIBUTORS

Aisha Anwar

Jalynn Harris

Layla Quran

Sagar Shukla

**SPONSORS**

CAROLINA ASIA CENTER WITH THE SUPPORT
OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
STUDENT LEARNING CIRCLES GRANT FROM
CENTER FOR GLOBAL INITIATIVES

YFUND FROM CAMPUS Y

UNC SANGAM

STUDENT CONGRESS

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

The issue you are holding in your hands is Monsoon's second print edition. It comes at the culmination of an unforgettable semester. We've experienced tragedy on February 10th, advocated for the renaming of Saunders, and enjoyed several performances at Memorial Hall.

As a student-run publication, we aim to focus on issues relevant to the diverse South Asian community at UNC. We hope to start dialogue on topics such as "the model minority myth," anti-black racism, cultural appropriation, and assimilation into western culture.

With great pride, we are delighted to say that Monsoon has started to shape campus discourse by engaging with issues like the lawsuit facing UNC Admissions, the Student Body Election debates, the Islamophobia Teach-in Series, and Holi Moli.

We are so proud of our writers, photographers, and designers who made this issue possible. We hope you enjoy the latest installment of Monsoon as curated by the brilliant individuals from UNC's premier platform for South Asian affairs.

Anisha Padma
Parth Shah





the reclaiming issue
Spring 15 | No. 2

identity politics

5 WE ARE NOT YOUR MODEL MINORITY

6 SEARCHING FOR A HOMELAND

7 KOLKATA ON MY SKIN

8 NOT ALL VEGETARIANS ARE CREATED EQUAL

9 DESIS OF THE GOP- AN IDENTITY CRISIS

11 JE SUIS CHARLIE?

keeping it local

12 A DAY WITH WAJAHAT ALI

13 "PASSION IN PRACTICE"

3 MONSOON'S FIRST VISUAL ARTS COMPETITION

western iterations of south asia

14 DENOUNCING MY BINDI, ACCEPTING THEIRS

15 LANGUAGE ALONE IS NOT TRANSCENDENT

17 YOUR YOGA IS OPPRESSIVE

19 WHEN DOES FASHION CROSS THE LINE?

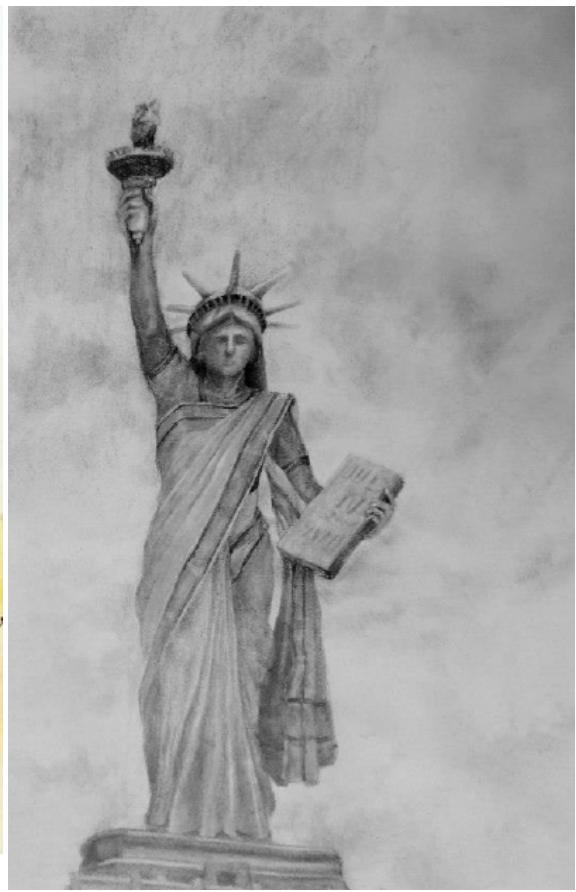
guest spotlight

20 THE "DOCTOR COMPLEX"

21 EXPERIENCING ANTI-BLACKNESS IN INDIA



ANTHONY GOMES



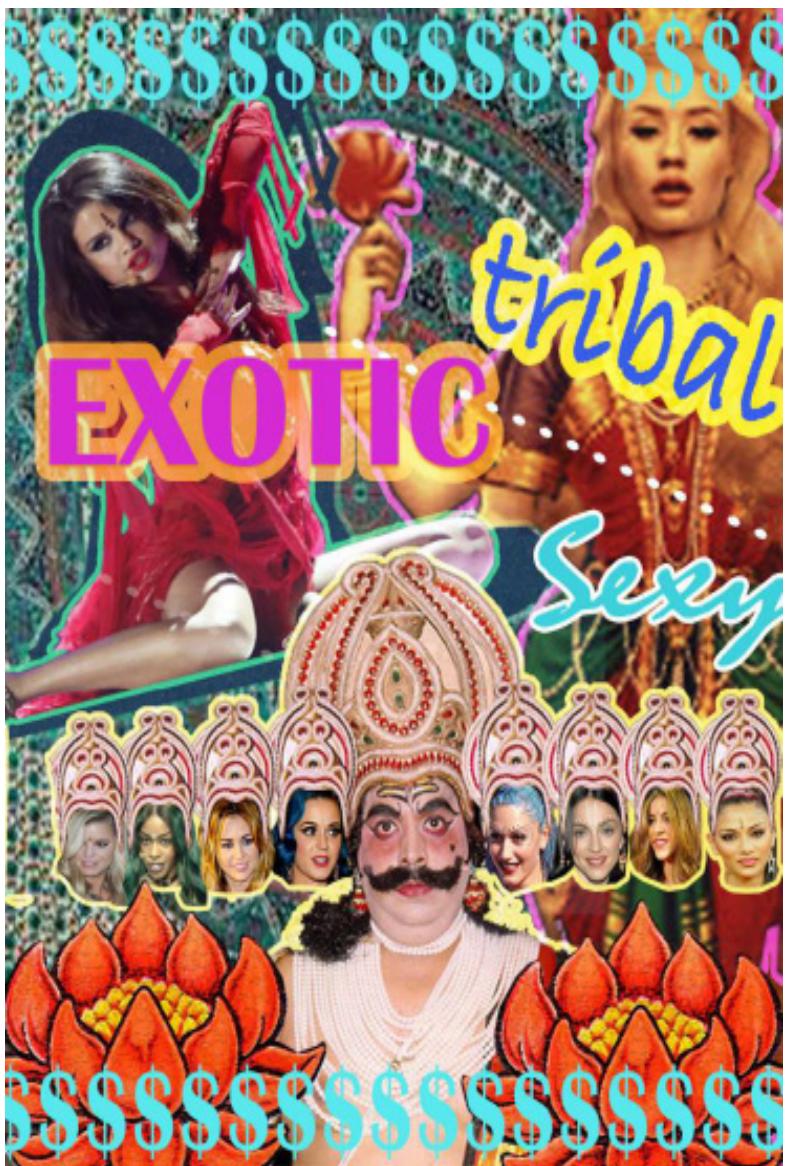
SMRITHI VALSARAJ



SYEDA SHAHEEN KHADRI

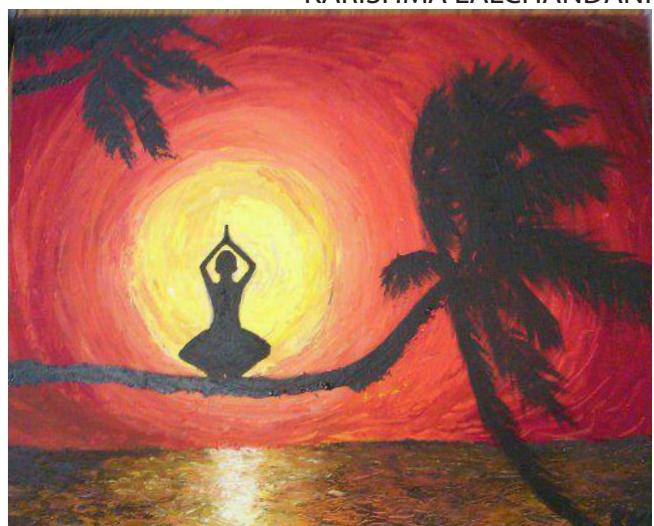
Monsoon's First Visual Arts Competition

In the spring of 2015, UNC Monsoon hosted a visual arts competition with the theme of cultural appropriation of South Asia by the West. Artists from the region challenged the representations of South Asia by mainstream media. The students discussed their interpretations on the commodification of their identities, in hopes to enlightening people on social media of the negative impacts such imagery perpetuates.



SARA ALI KHAN

KARISHMA LALCHANDANI



KHUSHBU GOSAI



KHUSHBU GOSAI



WE ARE NOT YOUR MODEL MINORITY

NIKHIL UMESH & ANISHA PADMA

On Monday, Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. filed a federal lawsuit against UNC and Harvard University. It alleges these institutions violated affirmative action guidelines set by the Supreme Court's 2013 ruling on Fisher vs. Texas, and seeks the implementation of race-neutral alternatives in college admissions.

When questioned in an interview with Colorlines as to why his website prominently featured Asian faces, Edward Blum, the executive director of the conservative Project on Fair Representation, denied he was rousing Asians to buy into his scheme or pitting people of color against one another.

It is not Asians filing this suit. Rather, it's a white man trying to use Asians as a tool to gain support for his anti-affirmative action crusade.

This narrative portrays Asian Americans as the "model minority" and paints an overly pos-

"WERE YOU DENIED ADMISSION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA? IT MAY BE BECAUSE YOU'RE THE WRONG RACE," READS THE WEBSITE.

itive (and manipulative) caricature of Asian immigrants as doctors, businesspeople, academics and politicians to prove that America is a land of equal opportunity and a color-blind meritocracy. Belief in the myth pits Asians against other people of color,



"How does it feel to be a solution?" Addressed to all Asians, but increasingly with special reference to South Asians, this question asks us brown folk how we can live with ourselves as we are pledged and sometimes, in an act of bad faith pledge ourselves, as a weapon against black folk.
-Vijay Prashad

where we contrast "our success" with "their failure." As a result, any lack of success among people of color is ascribed to lack of effort, rather than being grounded in historical and ongoing inequities.

The model minority myth, perpetuated by this lawsuit, is among the latest weapons being deployed against Black and Latina/o students.

The group behind the lawsuit suffers from historical amnesia — when have race-neutral admission policies ever existed at our so-called "Southern Part of Heaven?" Until recently, people who were deemed the "wrong race" were outright barred from attending UNC. Until the first Black men matriculated in 1951 after a heated battle in federal court, only white students were allowed to apply and enroll at UNC.

Even today, legacy-based admissions and standardized tests whose results correlate closely with income are race-based measures that disproportionately benefit white students. Our scapegoating of black students in the aftermath of the Wainstein report and the allegations of this lawsuit are nestled within a history that excludes and exploits people of color. And this University continues to do so. We tell athletes that they must be grateful that they have a shot at a UNC degree. We call their college education a salary for the entertainment and millions of dollars that athletes provide to the university and its fandom. We are comfortable throwing around the term HBCU — historically black college or university. But let's be historically accurate for a moment. Let's call the University of North Carolina what it is — an HWCU, historically white college and university.

Photo Credit: Iti Madan

Originally Published in The Daily Tar Heel
on 11/20/2014

SEARCHING FOR A HOMELAND

CHIRAAJU GOSRANI

I always hesitate when someone asks where I'm from. I'm expected to say India, but that response has never rolled off my tongue the right way.

I have no homeland.



Photo Courtesy of Chiraaju Gosrani

My lineage traces a century back to some farming village in Gujarat, India. But India is a distant, foreign land to me. The stories I grew up hearing were about life not in India, but in Kenya and England. These are the stories of my parents, and their parents, and their parents before them. All of us, wanderers.

My great-grandparents immigrated to Nairobi from India in the 1920s, seeking out an opportunity to provide skilled labor and entrepreneurship to a rapidly growing Kenya under British rule. They owned a general store, selling appliances and home goods. And they weren't alone. A large number of South Asians made the trip across the Indian Ocean to Kenya, launching the community of more than 100,000 living in East Africa today. Piyush Gosrani — my dad — was born in Nairobi in 1955. He's always told me stories about growing up as a school boy in Kenya. "All of the students at my school were Indian," he said. "Whites associated with whites, Indians with Indians, Africans with Africans. Having black friends was not socially accepted."

Despite these social divisions, East African culture played a huge role in my parents' life. My mom and Nani would switch from Gujarati to Swahili whenever they gossip about me. Even I blend the two languages, using words like "sufuria" for pots and "ndizi" for banana. Kenyan flavors fuse with Gujarati dishes on our dinner table. Eating mogo (fried cassava) or matoki (raw banana) curry is a tasty remind-

er of how divergent my culture is from even other Gujaratis. My dad left Kenya for London in 1974, accompanied by his older brother. His stories about the first few years in London have always painted a chilling picture of oppression and isolation. "When we first arrived, brown immigrants were treated like second-class citizens," he recalled. "We were egged on the streets and people would chant racial slurs at us. The police would just watch."

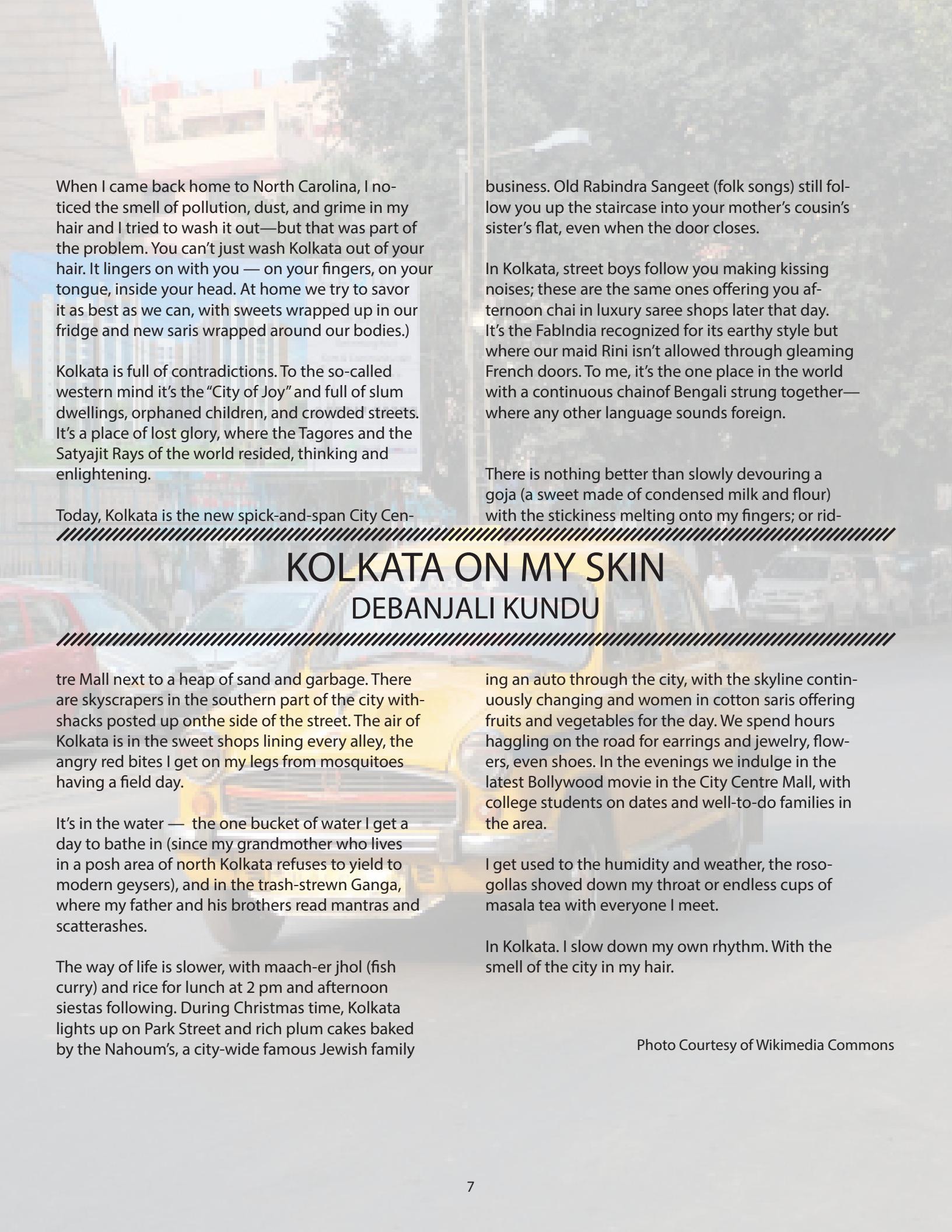
My parents met in England and lived there until we moved to America in 1998, four years after I was born. After 24 years, my parents wanted a fresh start—away from the congestion of a bustling city and the elitism of British society. They wanted a new home, a new space to begin a new chapter of their life as parents.

I grew up in white, suburban Fuquay Varina, North Carolina, surrounded by tobacco fields and southern charm. I had white friends, played soccer and baseball, and ate Lunchables and Fruit Roll-Ups at school. I thought I was just like every other quintessential American kid until I was six years old. I was in kindergarten, spending recess in the playground with my classmates. Four of my friends were up on the jungle gym. When I tried to climb up and join them, one of them shouted down at me, "You can't come up, you're brown." I cried to my mom, seeking comfort from her. She didn't know what to say. But her face spoke to me in clear terms, "Welcome to the real America."

From that point onward, I began to assimilate into whiteness. I abandoned garba for piano, taekwondo, and soccer. I went to the movies instead of the mandir. Today, I am still living a dual existence between white and brown.

"...and its time we stand and say.
That I'm proud to be an American..."

And there I stood, indifferently waving the American flag alongside 50 or so other immigrants who had just received their certificate of citizenship. Last year, I became an American and lost a part of my identity in the process. The roots to England and Kenya that had grounded me to a place and time were now painted over with red, white and blue. I flip through my U.S. passport book, page after page of empty space. Missing are my history and the stories of my family. My origins have been erased. I toss the passport aside. This is my story, the story of a nomad who is still wandering in between borders and places. I'm from India, Kenya, England, America, and everywhere. My homeland is neither here nor there.



When I came back home to North Carolina, I noticed the smell of pollution, dust, and grime in my hair and I tried to wash it out—but that was part of the problem. You can't just wash Kolkata out of your hair. It lingers on with you — on your fingers, on your tongue, inside your head. At home we try to savor it as best as we can, with sweets wrapped up in our fridge and new saris wrapped around our bodies.)

Kolkata is full of contradictions. To the so-called western mind it's the "City of Joy" and full of slum dwellings, orphaned children, and crowded streets. It's a place of lost glory, where the Tagores and the Satyajit Rays of the world resided, thinking and enlightening.

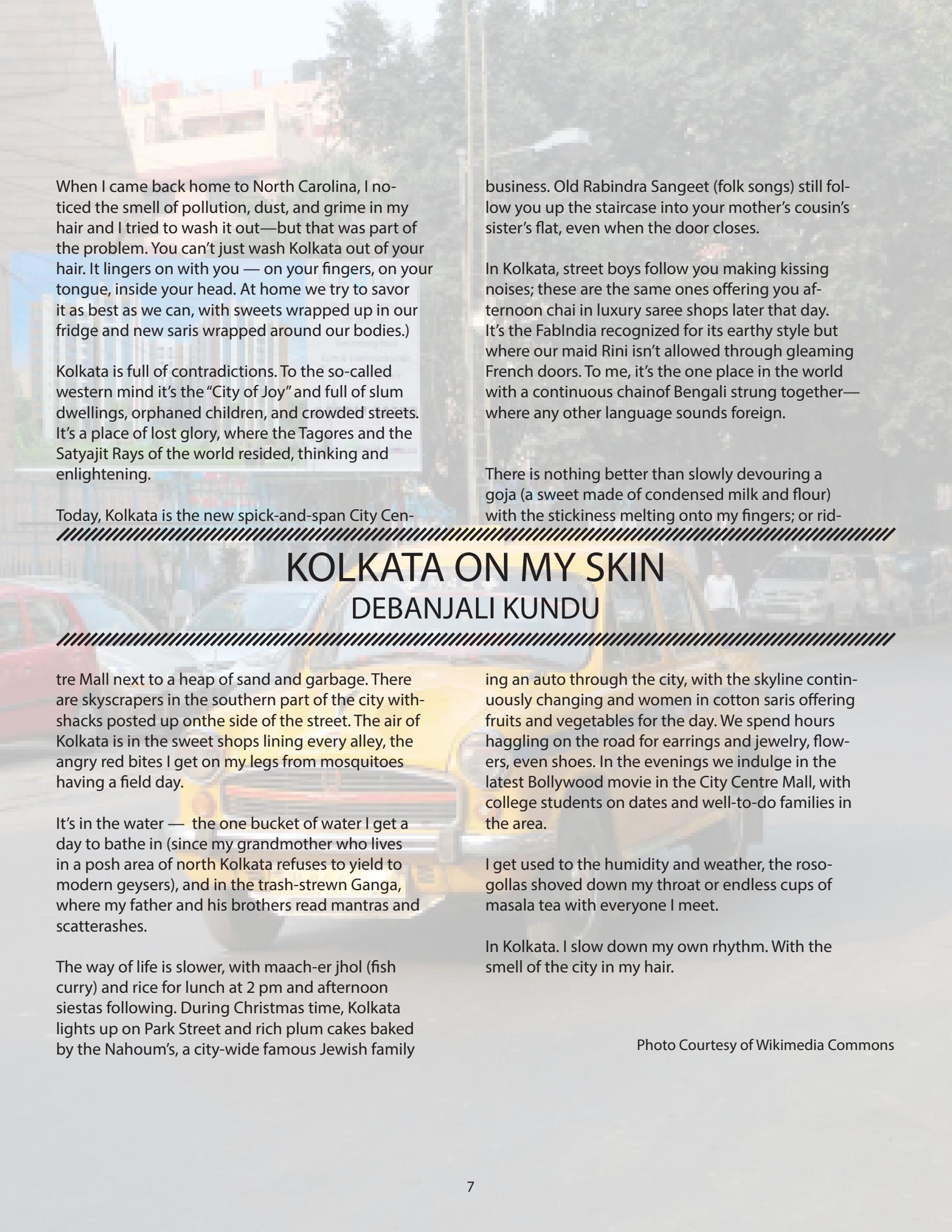
Today, Kolkata is the new spick-and-span City Cen-

business. Old Rabindra Sangeet (folk songs) still follow you up the staircase into your mother's cousin's sister's flat, even when the door closes.

In Kolkata, street boys follow you making kissing noises; these are the same ones offering you afternoon chai in luxury saree shops later that day. It's the FabIndia recognized for its earthy style but where our maid Rini isn't allowed through gleaming French doors. To me, it's the one place in the world with a continuous chain of Bengali strung together—where any other language sounds foreign.

There is nothing better than slowly devouring a goja (a sweet made of condensed milk and flour) with the stickiness melting onto my fingers; or rid-

KOLKATA ON MY SKIN DEBANJALI KUNDU



tre Mall next to a heap of sand and garbage. There are skyscrapers in the southern part of the city with shacks posted up on the side of the street. The air of Kolkata is in the sweet shops lining every alley, the angry red bites I get on my legs from mosquitoes having a field day.

It's in the water — the one bucket of water I get a day to bathe in (since my grandmother who lives in a posh area of north Kolkata refuses to yield to modern geysers), and in the trash-strewn Ganga, where my father and his brothers read mantras and scatterashes.

The way of life is slower, with maach-er jhol (fish curry) and rice for lunch at 2 pm and afternoon siestas following. During Christmas time, Kolkata lights up on Park Street and rich plum cakes baked by the Nahoum's, a city-wide famous Jewish family

ing an auto through the city, with the skyline continuously changing and women in cotton saris offering fruits and vegetables for the day. We spend hours haggling on the road for earrings and jewelry, flowers, even shoes. In the evenings we indulge in the latest Bollywood movie in the City Centre Mall, with college students on dates and well-to-do families in the area.

I get used to the humidity and weather, the rosogollas shoved down my throat or endless cups of masala tea with everyone I meet.

In Kolkata. I slow down my own rhythm. With the smell of the city in my hair.

Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

There's a story we tell in my family whenever we want to embarrass my mom.

See, my father immigrated to a small suburb of Seattle in 1991 a few months after my older sister was born. Less than a year later, my mom and sister left India to join him. I came into the picture not too long after.

For the three years we lived on the west coast, my dad worked and my mom stayed home to take care of my sister and me. Every evening when my dad would come home, he would ask my mom what she did with my sister and me that day.

My mom would take us to the library, to the park. But a couple times a week, my mom would say she took us to the aquarium.

"Where is this aquarium you keep taking the kids to?" my dad asked. "The one in the supermarket," she replied. As a lifelong vegetarian, my mom didn't know that the lobsters and crabs kept in tanks at the back of the grocery store were meant for eating.

Needless to say, the world my parents grew up in is very different from the one that I live in.

Like my mother, I am a born and bred vegetarian. I accidentally tried chicken on an airplane once – and I'll admit, it was good – but aside from that, meat has never been a part of my diet. To a certain extent, I've felt like an outsider because of it. "You don't know what you're missing," is something I've been told throughout my life.

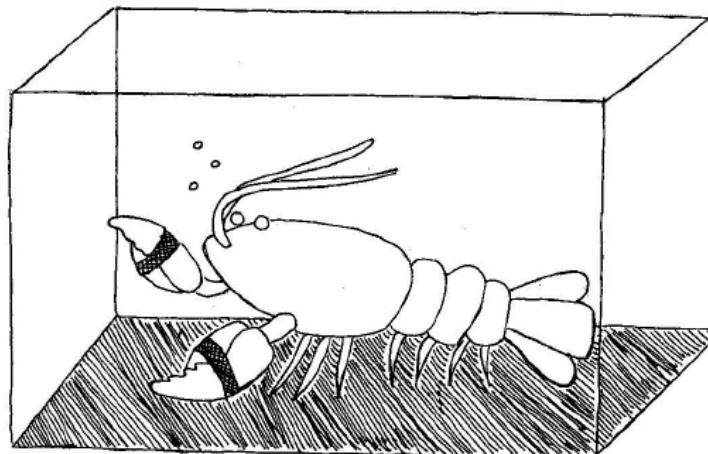
I've had people ask me the ridiculous question of what I would do to survive if I was stranded on an island with just a cow. Growing up in the United States, I've had to constantly defend my decision to uphold a vegetarian diet. Though it's not uncommon, vegetarians definitely make up a minority of Americans. And there's a certain

stigma that comes with being a vegetarian: it's associated with tree huggers and hippies, with animal rights activists and health nuts. I met a lot of vegetarians when I came to college. But I never felt a sense of community with them. Some of them are only vegetarian when it's convenient – they'll eat meat if they can't find a vegetarian option or if they can't resist the smell of barbecue. Others are extremely vocal about their commitment to their diet, taking pride in counting how many months it's been since their last chicken nugget.

I can't relate with those experiences. But I find a community of vegetarians like myself with whom I

every page without having to resort to ordering a boring black bean burger. Throughout the country, foods are labeled with either a green or red dot, the former identifying if the food is meatless. The green dots would blind me of all the privileges I have as an American. During my summer vacations in India, I would constantly remind my cousins how lucky they are to live in a color coded world with endless vegetarian options. Though I don't think it's begrudgingly difficult to be a vegetarian in the United States, it's no where near as easy as it is to be one in India.

People often ask me if I feel forced by my family to be a vegetarian or



Artwork by Parth Shah

NOT ALL VEGETARIANS ARE CREATED EQUAL PARTH SHAH

visit family in Ahmedabad. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, India has the lowest consumption of meat than anywhere else in the world. Being vegetarian is the norm.

That means menus at most restaurants are overflowing in vegetarian options. I get to peruse through

if I'll ever give in and assimilate. But for me, being a vegetarian isn't a lifestyle choice. It's who I have always been. It's how I uphold the tradition of my ancestors who have abstained from eating meat for generations. Changing my diet means abandoning the only way of life I know.



DESIS IN THE GOP- IDENTITY CRISIS? SHARATH RAMA

The Republican Party has a diversity problem. In recent years, it has struggled to make itself appealing to the ethnic minorities who make up an ever increasing share of the American population. However, two Indian-American governors, Bobby Jindal of Louisiana and Nikki Haley of South Carolina, have managed to achieve positions of great power in the GOP. As members of an immigrant community that is overwhelmingly liberal and Democratic, Jindal and Haley have diverged sharply in how they reconcile their cultural heritage with their partisan affiliation.

Jindal, the son of an engineer and an IT specialist, grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. As a child, Jindal traded in his given name Piyush for Bobby, inspired by a character on *The Brady Bunch*. He went to Brown University, where he accepted the Catholic faith, interned for a conservative

congressman and won Rhodes scholarship to study health policy at Oxford.

After working in health policy for a few years, Jindal ran for governor of Louisiana, narrowly losing his 2003 attempt to a Democratic challenger. He bounced back the next year to win a seat in Congress. In 2007, Jindal emerged victorious in a second run for governor, and in 2011, he was re-elected in a landslide with 65 percent of the vote.

Jindal's election marks the first time in history that someone of South Asian descent became elected governor of a U.S. state. But you couldn't tell from Jindal's comments. He's not a fan of hyphenated identities. "My dad

and mum told me and my brother when we were growing up that we came to America to be Americans, not Indian-Americans, but simply Americans," Jindal said in a speech at a British think tank. Jindal's positions on certain policy issues don't fall in line with those of most desis. He is an ardent proponent of cutting down on the size of government, even though a 2013 Pew survey showed that Indian Americans favor more government services over less by nine points. Jindal has staked out conservative positions on same-sex marriage and abortion; the Pew study found that Indian Americans hold liberal opinions on those issues.

Jindal has staked out conservative

As members of an immigrant community that is overwhelmingly liberal and Democratic, Jindal and Haley have diverged sharply in how they reconcile their cultural heritage with their partisan affiliation.

positions on same-sex marriage and abortion; the Pew study found that Indian Americans hold liberal opinions on those issue.

Source: Pew Research Center, "The Rise of Asian Americans" (2013).

Haley has been much more open to discussing her heritage and how it has affected her life. Born Nirmata Randhawa, Haley grew up in Bamberg, a small town in South Carolina whose 3,000 residents were about evenly divided black and white. Haley sought the Republican nomination for governor of South Carolina in the midst of the conservative wave of 2010. She was forced to confront her ethnicity head-on early in the race. Before the primary elections, fellow Republican state legislator Jake Knotts called her a "raghead" on a political talk show, a jab at her Sikh upbringing. That was hardly the first time Haley had faced a dig at her ethnicity in a contest. She has frequently discussed the beauty pageant she participated in as a kid. "They pulled my parents aside and said they had a white queen and they had a black

queen and they didn't want to upset either side by putting us in that category," Haley recounted to



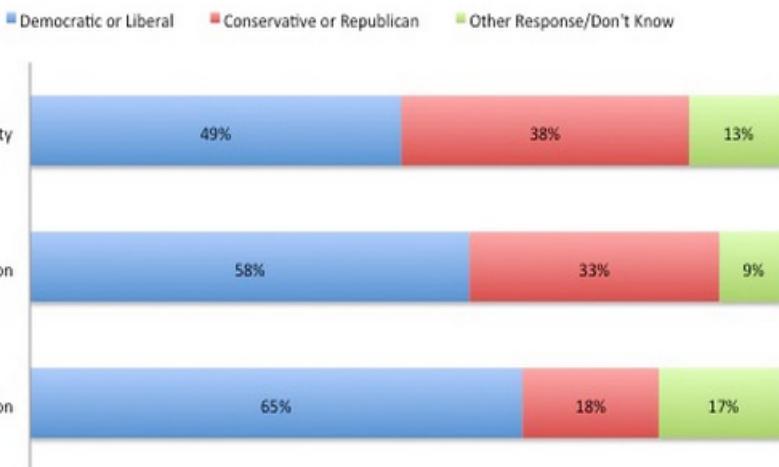
USA Today. The organizers gave her a beach ball and sent her off without a chance to compete. Haley didn't have to settle for a consolation prize in the governor's race. Despite the racial attacks, Haley ended up winning the GOP primary by almost 30 points and later won the general election, too. In the years since, she has shown a surprisingly keen interest in her South Asian heritage. In 2014, she attended the new Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at Madison

Square Garden in New York City, arranging a personal meeting with him. That same year, Haley visited Harmandir Sahib, the holiest site of the Sikh religion.

Haley doesn't share Jindal's hard stance against hyphenated identities. In an interview with The New York Times' Shivani Vora, Haley said of her background, "It's such a natural part of me, and I see it as who I am and what defines me. The cultural side of it has stayed very close to me." She also said that her children, though raised Christian, visit a gurdwara with their grandparents.

Despite their similar political stances, Jindal and Haley have taken wildly different approaches to addressing their heritage. Both have been held up as the standard-bearers of diversity in the Republican Party and strong contenders for higher office. Some political scientists have suggested Haley's ethnic background makes her an ideal choice for vice president by balancing the top of the GOP ballot. Jindal's stances may come under particular scrutiny because he is widely believed to harbor aspirations for the presidency himself. With the possibility that Jindal might have to move further to the right to stay competitive in the crowded Republican primaries, Jindal's choice of how he addresses his identity over the next few months will attract interest.

Indian American Political Attitudes



Data derived from Pew Research Center

Photos Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons and Twitter

JE SUIS CHARLIE?

NAINTARA VISWANATH



Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

On the eve of the New Year, I hoped for a more understanding, peaceful, and less hateful world. A week into 2015, the office of Charlie Hebdo, a satirical magazine headquartered in Paris, France, was attacked. Twelve killed and the hunt for the two gunmen was ongoing. France and the rest of Western Europe was on high alert. But what was it about this attack that made the world pay attention?

The gunmen allegedly yelled "Allahu Akbar" while running away from the scene of the crime.

This was referred to as a terrorist attack and worldwide support for the victims was pouring in. A social media slogan – "Je Suis Charlie" – which translates to 'I am Charlie' was buzzing. But there was a certain part of the world that held its tongue. There were certain communities that did not

outwardly condemn these attacks.

Crowds in South Asia greeted the news of the attacks "with relative indifference, or even outright support for the attackers". While the deaths of the twelve victims of the Paris attacks were shocking, numerous innocent people are dying every day in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, regardless of the circumstances of their demise (mostly because of civil wars and regional unrest) death is a common phenomenon experienced by many people in South Asia.

But let's peel through another layer and look at the beliefs of people who hail from South Asia. Islam is the second most practiced religion in South Asia, with Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Maldives comprising a majority Muslim population. Many argue that Charlie Heb-

do and their cartoons were not about free speech. Even liberal Muslims from South Asia believe the cartoons targeted Islam and discussed important aspects of the religion in an insensitive and derogatory manner. Professor Karl Kalenthaler believes that South Asian Muslims empathize with the attacks in France, however "they remain largely quiet in public; they know that in countries where the public space is so influenced by Islamists, saying "Je suis Charlie" is an invitation for trouble." Islamist extremist groups present a real threat in South Asia and they seem to be the ones most affected by the 'freedom' exercised by satirical magazines such as Charlie Hebdo.

As a staunch believer in freedom of speech and expression, I wholeheartedly condemn the attacks in Paris. However, a majority of South Asians, including myself, do not necessarily agree with the "Je suis Charlie" slogan. While I believe in freedom of speech, am I disrespectful of other identities, religions, beliefs, and values? No. While I mourn for the families of the victims in Paris, am I confused and frustrated that the daily attacks in parts of South Asia and Africa does not receive as much media coverage? Yes. While I am not Muslim, do I support the biased views of Western media while discussing 'terrorist' attacks? No.

Why am I identifying with a prejudiced media and a systemic bias that Western lives and beliefs hold more importance in the world?

Am I really Charlie?

A DAY WITH WAJAHAT ALI

ANISHA PADMA

Wajahat Ali is a man of many talents. He's currently the host of Al Jazeera's social media and citizen journalism show The Stream. He is also a playwright, journalist and lawyer. What isn't listed in these accomplishments are keen negotiating skills with disgruntled restaurant owners, accurate mimicry of several Middle-Eastern accents and an enviable digestive system.

These hidden skills make him worthy of the distinctive title of the Uncle.

For all of my non-South Asian friends, an uncle is an endearing term that Desis use to describe men who are wise and usually silly.

Wajahat Ali is the kind of uncle who can get you out of sticky situations, like when you insult a restaurant unknowingly in front of the owner (by the way, I'm really sorry. I love your food!) It won't take long for Uncle Waj to come to the rescue and defend your honor. He'll say to the owner, "Hey there. I've heard great things about your restaurant. In fact, we're going to stop by tomorrow!"

He's the kind of uncle who wants to be hip like the kids. He'll ask, "Where do all the Desis and Muslims go to eat?" To which I delightfully respond, "Hummus Cafe!" After he gulps both his chicken shawarma and hot Moroc-

can tea, we share excitement over our roots in Hyderabad, India and the deliciousness of Hyderabadi biryani and haleem. He must have some amazing digestive system to balance his appetite for delicious-dare-I-say-unhealthy Desi food and maintain his appearance to keep his on-screen job.

And finally, he's the kind of uncle that can give you free advice about activism in college. He'll recall his experience serving as the Publicity Relations Director for University of California-Berkeley's Muslim Students Association



when the September 11th attacks occurred. He and the other MSA members were thrust into the spotlight. They were the reluctant ambassadors of the entire Muslim community and every word they uttered was harshly scrutinized. He'll look at how the UNC MSA dealt with the tragedies of February 10th and remark at how fortu-

nate the organization was to have the support of prominent Muslim leaders in the community. He'll encourage us to take advantage of the intellectual capital at UNC and Duke making an impact in South Asian and Islamic Studies.

After Wajahat Ali's talk at UNC, my friend Zak, said, "For the first thirty minutes, I felt like I was watching stand-up comedy!" Hmm, maybe Ali should have replaced Jon Stewart. He used stereotypes in such a clever manner that we didn't realize we were being educated! Trevor Noah, take some lessons and learn. Ali seamlessly weaved in so many pop culture references. Whether it's discussing white hipsters wearing kafiyas or Zayn Malik promoting the Muslim agenda, Wajahat Ali used relevant examples to keep the easily distracted college students in the room captivated.

Though, Wajahat Ali, there's one thing I need to correct you on. It's not Tay-Swift, it's T-Swift.

From keeping a group of 200 people engaged on a Friday evening to discussing Islamophobia without a sense of hopelessness, Wajahat Ali is capable of near-herculean tasks. Although the rest of the world will regard him as a charismatic TV anchor and a hard-hitting journalist, I know him for what he truly is. An uncle.

"PASSION IN PRACTICE"

AISHA ANWAR & LAYLA QURAN



"There are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground." – Rumi, 13th century Persian poet

From the musings of a poet to the pirouette of a ballerina to the notes on a violinist's music sheets, these embodiments of Islam render it an intricate and live form of art. In the fall of 2013 our exhibit featured Muslim students and scholars embodying Islam through the pursuit of their passions. Our present installment showcases the work of North Carolinians and how Islam drives their work in the community.



Through rain, little sleep and biting wind, we drove treading our own dotted line on the map of NC. From book stores and bakeries to eco-boxes and hospitals we sat down with the people who have helped build this community: writers, architects, chaplains, scientists, bakers, artists, politicians, and more. The perfect examples of our theme are Deah, Yusor and Razan whose contributions have been recognized globally. We would like to dedicate this exhibit to #OurThreeWinners. Visit passioninpractice.wordpress.com for more about our project.

Photo Credit: Anisha Padma



The red dot I wear on my forehead brings questions ranging from whether it's blood, or perhaps a tattoo, and what it says of my marital status. The red dot is called a bindi and my bindi is not blood, nor a tattoo, but rather a washable paint that I apply daily, and to me, means nothing of marriage.

The bindi is a form of tilak, a mark that has religious significance in Hinduism and is worn by both males and females. In South Asia, the bindi is worn most commonly by female followers of Hinduism. Some wear it as a symbol of marriage. Others adorn it to connect with their spirituality. For me, the bindi stands as a symbol of my religion and represents a point of spiritual balance and concentration.

Usually the bindi is worn between the eyebrows and is traditionally a red dot. The bindi can be applied as paint, powder or an adhesive sticker.

Over the years, the bindi has evolved as an element of fashion, with bindis coming in different colors, sizes and shapes. It's even made its way into western culture.

Celebrities like Selena Gomez, Iggy Azalea, and Katy Perry (just to name a few) have worn a bindi. Sometimes it's worn as a visual aid to represent South Asian culture and other times it's purely used to make a fashion statement.

The western use of the bindi has incited arguments over cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation is defined as taking elements of a minority group's culture and misrepresenting them. For me, the bindi is misrepresented in western culture, but that is certainly not the case for everyone. The bindi also has a strong decorative purpose for certain groups and there are people that question whether it is culturally appropriation if the bindi is purely a decoration.

fixed preconceptions that a bindi is bizarre. There is a message that I am not able to wear my bindi with meaning and it will only be accepted when non-South Asians don't understand it meaninglessly. I am not alone in this type of reception.

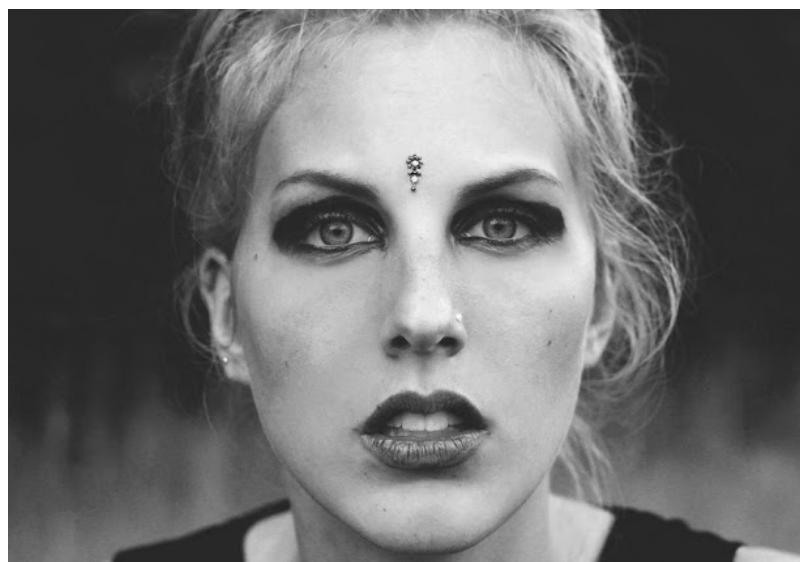
The bindi is representative of my culture and it is part of my identity. It does not mean that I am backward and certainly does not mean that I do not deserve someone's respect. I should not have to de-

nounce an aspect of my culture and assimilate to be worth someone's time, only to later find someone wearing it on television without facing the same scrutiny.

There needs to be a dissolution of stereotyping and making uninformed judgments on one's culture and personality based on appearance. My prob-

lem with the bindi is not that it is crossing borders, but that it is crossing borders through rejecting what it means for the very people whose culture it originates from.

I respect the use of forehead decorations on non-South Asians. I ask the same respect for bindis on South Asians.



While this discussion exists, I do not believe that it changes the underlying attitude and reception of the bindi in western culture.

But not everyone is treated the same when they put on a bindi.

When a white woman wears it, it is seen as an exotic decoration that enhances beauty. It does not need to be defined nor does it require justification. But when I wear it, I am met with dismissive looks. Sometimes, I find myself having to justify my bindi to people with

Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

DENOUNCING MY BINDI, ACCEPTING THEIRS

ALEKHYA MALLAVARAPU

“...I’ve been disheartened a bit by a number of people who seem to be studying Arabic for all the wrong reasons... for purposes that will likely make things worse rather than better.”

I wrote these words on July 17, 2014 in the midst of my summer of intensive Arabic language study at the Middlebury Arabic Language school in Oakland, California. I came to Middlebury excited about the program and its possibilities. As a complete beginner, I was immediately surrounded by an environment of almost complete Arabic, often merely gesturing vigorously to get my point across as students in their third or fourth years rattled off words I wouldn’t learn for years.

My motivations for studying Arabic are rooted in my interest in religious studies. After taking several courses in the Department of Religious Studies and having taken classes in Hindi-Urdu at UNC, I saw the potential to learn Arabic as a logical step towards potentially pursuing a graduate degree in religious studies. I thought that the program at Middlebury would likely cater to a similar group: scholars who hold a deep interest in the study of life in the Middle East with at least general understandings of the Orientalist discourses offered by popular media. It didn’t take long to realize that the reality was more complex and difficult than my naive expectation. While I was grateful to engage with teachers from an assortment of Arabic speaking countries daily, I was struck by the number of students learning Arabic for strictly militaristic purposes. Indeed, a plurality of students in the program seemed primed to either go into national security careers or already were part of the military. Perhaps more disturbing than this was the number of students who would share blatantly stereotypical and problematic opinions about Arab people and face no consequences of these actions.

Some of the statements I heard are truly mind-boggling and painful to recollect. From simplistic praise of drone strikes, despite the evidence that the strikes

have led to a disturbing number of civilian deaths, to the open discussion of how people “there” do not think of freedom like “us,” intolerance and troubling ideas about the nature of Arab and Muslim peoples did not dissipate with the simple engagement in language learning through the program.

I admit that the blatancy of statements like these were the exception rather than the rule. The majority of individuals in my program were indeed people with honest intentions either to connect with their own cultural heritage lost among the Arab diaspora or use language as a tool for teaching and scholarship aimed at dismantling stereotypes.

The dilemma, however, lies in the implications of empowering a small yet significant group of people with problematic aspirations with the tools of language. Given the exploitation of native-speakers already undertaken by the United States military, the idea of the military themselves being equipped with language skills begs the question of whether this practice can simply be seen as a tool for continued occupation. To be clear, this critique is not one of every individual with a connection to the work of the military. Rather, it is a critique of the influence of the military in our society, and how the military-industrial complex has become such a strong force in constant need of new recruits. With language scholarships

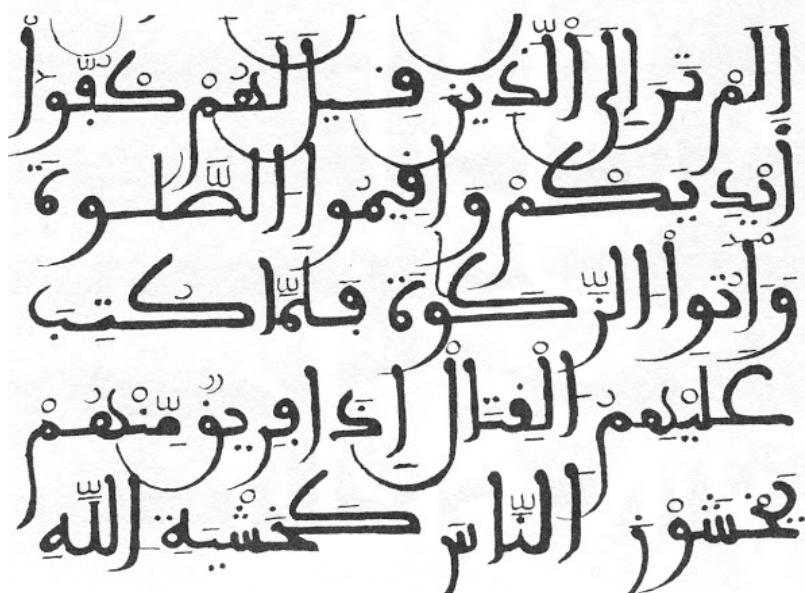


Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

in place like the Boren Scholarship that cater specifically to those interested in promoting “national security,” militarism pervades the language learning landscape and posits that these awards necessarily are contingent on the supremacy of the United States.

That is not to say there are not grave humanitarian causes for which language learning can be a tool for positive change around the world. Indeed, Martin Luther King Jr. and Angela Davis are part of a legacy of activists who connect the struggles of individuals

then move to challenge those who we see egre- giously using the tools of language acquisition for the pursuit of policies and goals with little regard for the lives of those whose communities they choose as targets. As we delve into the complexity of new

LANGUAGE ALONE IS NOT TRANSCENDENT

DINESH MCCOY

beyond the United States with those within it. Yet our approaches and motivations need to constantly be evaluated. Language learning does little to solve the complex challenges faced in the Middle East and beyond when the primary policy is still to send soldiers into wars often driven by misinformation and marked by rampant abuses of basic human rights. At best, these efforts are hindered by their disconnected paternalism. At worst, they are oppressive and destabilizing, justified by perverse systems of value which prioritize money and political influence over lives. For all language learners, especially those of us who are not connected by birth or location to the languages we seek to understand, we must ask ourselves why we choose to become involved in this effort to acquire something so fundamental about another peoples' culture.

Those of us who hope to use these skills as a tool for social good and the dismantling of oppressive attitudes must understand our responsibility to ensure that our goals are rooted in the real experiences of people living in cultural contexts we may never fully understand. With this first responsibility, we must

grammar structures and linguistic forms, we must embrace a level of empathy and understanding of privilege that situates our new knowledge within the power dynamics of today's society.

Language is power, yet, language alone is not a tool for peace or good. We must always be wary of our ability to use our newfound skills to cause pain. Too often we already see this as our universities and our nation continue to push the study of "critical languages," a euphemism for the languages (Arabic, Mandarin, Japanese, Urdu, Indonesian, Hindi, Korean, etc.) that have the most relevance to our national military as targets of US aggression or economic exploitation. For those of us serious about combatting these ugly politics of language and domination, we must seek to use our abilities to elevate the stories of marginalized peoples, challenging our own communities to hear these voices through our work. Only then will we impact the culture of white supremacy and militarism that has led to the racist status quo: the status quo that accepts violence on Muslims and brown people around the world as an acceptable cost of "freedom."



Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

YOUR YOGA IS OPPRESSIVE

NIKHIL UMESH

"Where were you on 9/11?"

The question is embedded in the national consciousness.

But more importantly, as I found out when I came to the United States as a 13-year-old, the question served as the moral justification that allowed classmates to joke about how I might single-handedly blow up our middle school. Terrorist. The word was tossed around with such ease.

I live in an America where my brown body is a stain, a mark of "other."

During my time at UNC, I have noticed that yoga is a popular pastime among white Chapel Hill residents and students. Yoga is historically and presently a spiritual and meditative practice, whose origins lay in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Yet the Western variant of this centuries-old religious tradition has been whitewashed into physical mastery of various contortions for their own sake.

The West has ravenously exotified, fetishized and butchered yoga. Like a pig ready to be picked, it has been hacked apart into a \$27 billion industry. Aside from \$100 Lululemon yoga pants, attempts have even been made to patent yoga positions and postures.

I am painfully aware that my Indian grandmother would stick out like a sore thumb at one of the many yoga studios dotting Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

We have a tendency to historicize and narrate colonialism as a neatly packaged and historically discernible era that ceased on Aug. 15, 1947, when India won independence. But colonization never truly stopped.

As someone from the Indian diaspora, I have seen that the project of Western imperialism that renders cultural practices free for the taking is connected to a logic that renders Muslim lives disposable. America conceals me when it's convenient but makes me hypervisible when deemed threatening.

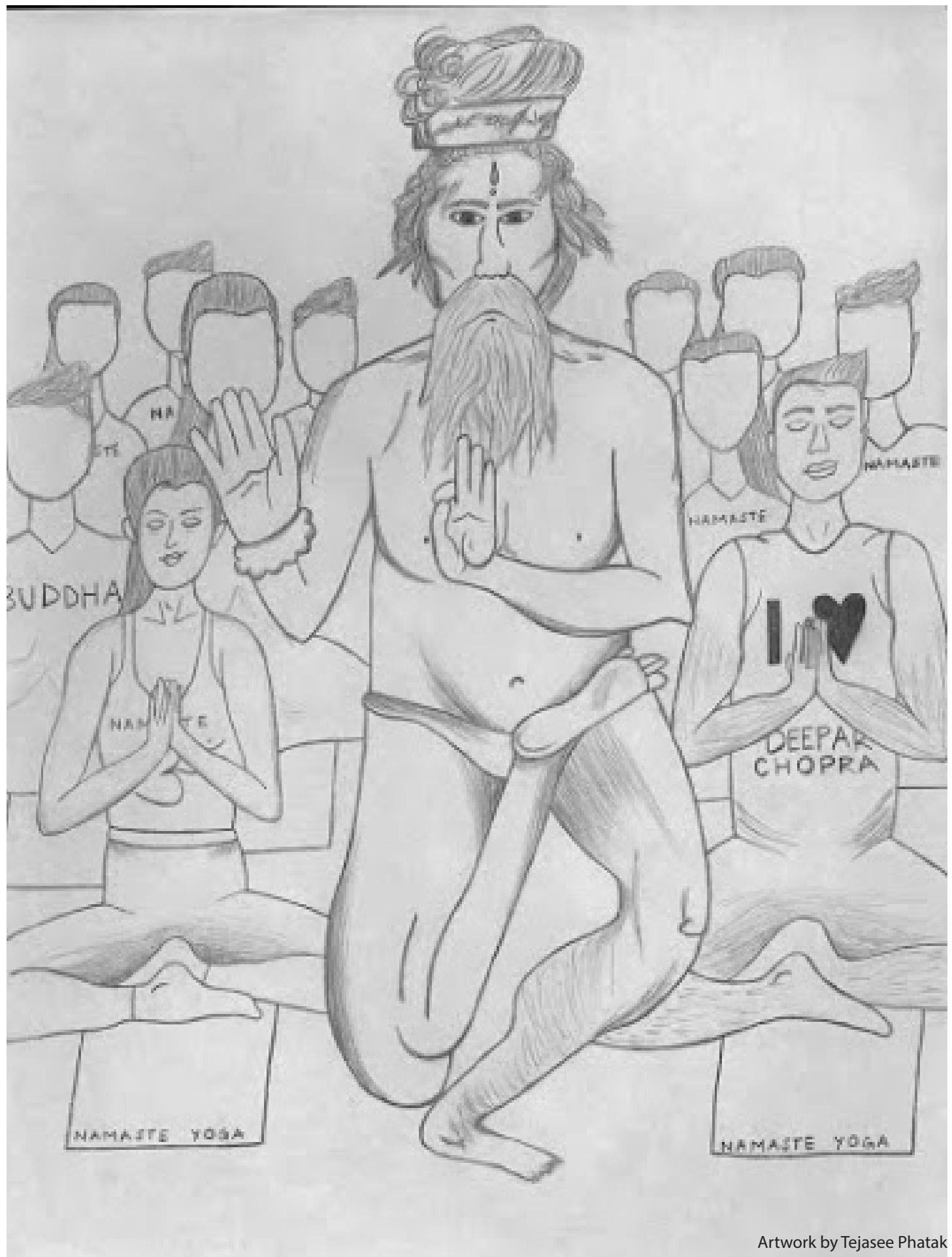
How is it that South Asian culture is valued where brown bodies are not? America's empire mindset is woven into public policy, policing, the military and everyday interactions — drone strikes in Pakistan, "The War on Terror," Sikh temple attacks and racial profiling.

**When will this society stop
seeing my body as disposable,
my labor as exploitable and
my culture free for the taking?
When will it stop colonizing?**

I am writing this to challenge the falsehood that America is a "melting pot of immigrants," a colorblind meritocracy and that yoga's widespread presence is a product of innocent cultural exchange. One-sided plundering of a culture is not "exchange."

Even if U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services gives me a long-awaited green card, I will be a perpetual "other" in this country. I'm not the only one.

This society asks all people of color to surrender claims to their bodies, experiences and traditions for use, distortion and violence by white America. Colonization didn't stop when India gained independence, when indigenous people in the Americas were incorporated into the state or when enslaved black people were granted "citizenship." When will this society stop seeing my body as disposable, my labor as exploitable and my culture free for the taking? When will it stop colonizing?



Artwork by Tejasee Phatak

WHEN DOES FASHION CROSS THE LINE?

MARIYA HUSAIN

In 2012, Chanel debuted its pre-fall collection called "Paris-Bombay," an avant-garde line of clothing that featured modern trends from the world's fashion capital infused with the traditional tailoring and ornate fabrics native to India. The debut of this line has been lauded for having an ambience and décor almost more glamorous than the clothing itself. That's not to say that the clothing did not have a level of glamour as well. Karl Lagerfeld received much praise for taking risks in this collection by juxtaposing the structured tailoring and aesthetic of Paris fashion with the more flowing and colorful style of India.

While this line does convey Lagerfeld's unmitigated talent of constructing beautiful, show-stopping ensembles, it also raises some red flags.

Lagerfeld was quoted in reference to this line, "It's much more inspiring not to go places than to go." Lagerfeld's statement implies that going to India for inspiration or to receive an accurate grasp of Indian fashion was unnecessary, Karl Lagerfeld shows that this line was created based on what he perceived Indian fashion to be, not necessarily what it actually is. This is clearly evident throughout the line, with every female outfit being paired with a "tikka," a type of Indian forehead jewelry, and a side-styled head wrap for every male outfit. Some ensembles had little other than this to show for in regards to Indian influence.

Even the pieces with more obvious Indian influence and construction show a serious lack of judgment on Lagerfeld's part. This collection has been admired for evoking the atmosphere of "the last days of the Raj," referring to the British Raj, the period of British imperialism and colonialism in India. Lagerfeld chose at times to mix this British Raj influence with true Indian tailoring, such as the Lungi. The lungi, a

sarong-like garment, is typically worn on a daily basis in India by above average to low income Indians. It is somewhat dubious to mix the clothing of the oppressive class from the British Raj with the clothing of the oppressed. It also shows a lack of insight, knowledge, and understanding of the implications of using this time period as a representative of Indian fashion, a period of time in which much of India's culture and people were devalued and silenced by white colonialists. Indian fashion is much more than its period of influence by white people, but this does not necessarily translate in Lagerfeld's collection.

When does fashion cross the line? Clearly, Karl Lagerfeld had no consideration of the implications of his fashion line when creating it, but what if he had? What if he had indeed visited India for inspiration?

What if he had consulted Indian fashion designers to ensure authenticity and to make sure that no part of his line appropriated Indian culture or was offensive? Would this have made a difference? Is it acceptable at all for western fashion companies, such as Chanel, to use another country, such as India, as a fashion influence?

It would be naïve to say that these two entities should be mutually exclusive. Western fashion borrows tailoring techniques and ideas from Indian fashion just as much as Indian fashion borrows ideas and techniques from western fashion. However, there are instances where "borrowing" is less appropriate. Having a completely western-styled ensemble paired with a tikka crosses the line towards appropriation, but perhaps in the future western fashion companies may make more progressive, appropriate fashion choices, like draping a skirt to mimic the flow of a sari. Choices like this will show that western fashion highly respects and admires non-western countries' culture and fashion, which are very intertwined.

"We've had Paris-London, we've had Paris-Shanghai, so it felt like time to go off the circuit, to somewhere less expected," said Karl Lagerfeld, creative director of the fashion company Chanel.



Photo Credit: Terry Bowman

Either directly or indirectly, I've experienced it numerous times: my grandmother's expectation, my mother's excitement, and the subtle smile that arises in an aunt, uncle, or family friend. These moments all occurred when I told them my goal was to become a doctor. In my experience, the Indian community's obsession with their children becoming doctors is deeply pervasive. I have always been fascinated (and a bit annoyed) by this phenomenon and have a hypothesis as to why this may be the case. As members of the diaspora, my parents and grandparents grew up in a pre-1991 India with a scarcity of job security and a surplus of status-seekers; having prestige, wealth, and long-term security was coveted, which often came in the form of being doctors and engineers.

The departure from India, motivated by a desire for more opportunity, led my family to pack this mentality into check-in bags and tote it to America with a steadfast hope for the future. I have the greatest respect for my family and what they chose to bring with them, and am even more awed by what they left behind. It is because of these sacrifices, I believe, that the "doctor com-

plex" had become manifest in my educational trajectory. I felt that I owed it to my family to follow the path to medical school because of the mentality that brought them to America. When reflecting on the fact that my family members left the homeland in hopes of greater opportunity, I presupposed that

THE "DOCTOR COMPLEX" SAGAR SHUKLA

deviating from their conceptions of success would have been against their expectations, as the hope of immigrant families is that their children are able to achieve a higher level of prosperity than they ever could.

Through high school and college my friends struggled with why they felt obligated to pursue this path. We have seen this moment many times in popular culture, like in the movie, *Three Idiots*, where the protagonists deviate from the path their parents set out for them. Going back to the hypothesis, I believe that what my parents and my friends' parents really wanted for us was not necessarily becoming a doctor, but that we have the ability to sustain our families, build a name for our-

selves, and be happy, much like what they were looking for when they came to the U.S. A deviation from this path does not necessarily mean a rebellion against our parents; rather, it is realizing what our parents truly want for us.

I will never forget the car ride back to UNC at the start of my sophomore year. I told my mother that I was dropping my chemistry major, no longer pursuing pre-med aspirations. While my family never gave me any inclination, I had internalized the subtle pressures from family friends and the wider community that going to medical school would make me "successful." However, UNC exposed me to conceptions of success that were beyond what I would have imagined during my first year. Meeting people who wanted to challenge institutional

norms, advance art and culture, and ultimately find fulfillment through building a legacy inspired me to rethink what career choices I was making. I realized then that being able to define my own success was one of the most liberating moments of my collegiate career. Additionally, this is probably what my family hoped for when leaving India and coming to a land where they hoped there would exist greater opportunity and choices. The "doctor complex" for me ironically represented a self-imposed limitation of choices because of how family expectations manifested. In actuality, those expectations were for me to develop and follow my own convictions, because that is what my family was hoping to achieve all along.

In Ajmer we visited the town of Pushkar to take a look at the holy lake. It's a town that's pretty used to tourists so there were fewer 'you are out of place here so let's make you feel out of place' incidents than usual. But two notable ones being 1) when a tweenage boy biked by me singing Shakira's "it's time for Africa" (I wish I could tell you that isn't the first time that's happened) 2) when we were enjoying a lovely rooftop dinner/monkey watching time when a guy from below called out loudly "HEY, SOUTH AFRICA!" (especially peeved here bc I was on a roof like 4 stories up in the dark so how did he even thinking to harass me from so far away????) Let me sound this out better.

ca" and I say "Um, no, like North America" and then they just look very confused. So that is the deal with my skin. And don't let me get into the hair bit. I've caught a few "he" pronouns and have also been in conversations where, after I've managed to convince someone that there are black people in America, I get the "why is your hair so short" and I say, "I cut it all off" and they say, "No, long hair is good for girl" and then I make some joke about being Lupita in Twelve Years A Slave (because jokes about African slave girls go a long way) and life moves on. And I don't even want to go into the whole female thing. This male dominated culture (re: the way these men look at women like we are a tall glass of mango lassi) has leveled

they don't understand me. But we're working on it. I am gaining respect the more I use my little Hindi skills. I am understanding more as I ask questions, the more I open myself up to the challenge.

But romantic holy lake moments of aloneness come and then they go away, forever. Yesterday, I carved out almost a whole hour. There is this sweetly lit caged in shaft where we hang our clothes out to dry and I stared at the moon (positively my favorite part of the Earth's beautiful body) and ate a whole watermelon (please no comment here about the color of my skin; I've had enough). Alone. More excitingly, if you don't count lusty thoughts of the

EXPERIENCING ANTI-BLACKNESS IN INDIA

JALYNN HARRIS

My name is Jalynn
and I am young,
black, female, with
short hair.

And the more I interact with Indians—whether in Jaipur or Agra or Delhi—they don't know what to do with me. In a group of other white people, I stick out like a sore thumb—this is true in the States; this is true in India. In the land of contrasts, foreigners obviously attract a lot of attention. But sometimes black foreigners (ahem me) get actual gasps and points and random shouts of Hindi as she walks bye. Even in a group of other foreigners. Not only that, but people are usually very confused that I am not from South Africa.

Often (and I mean like twice a day), I am asked by an Indian "Which country?" and I say "America" and they say "No, South Afri-

up my feminism faster than any of my Pokemon sapphire Charizards from when I was 10 years old. And as this place comes closer to me, I am being forced to ask myself about my own values—individuality, female equality, diversity of background, etc... So many days I have been frustrated. Frustrated that I don't understand them just as much as

curvaceousness of the moon, I didn't have one thought. I just sat. And was.



Photo Credit: Sarah Miller



monsoon.web.unc.edu

FOLLOW us on Twitter and LIKE us on Facebook
@UNCMonsoon UNC Monsoon