

International Students Feature: India

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This week, four international students from India volunteered to be interviewed about the differences between their home country and the United States. Akshata Kerur, a second year graduate student studying computer science, is from a state in southwest India called Karnataka. Greshma Naresh, a second year graduate student studying information technology and management (ITM), is from Andhra Pradesh, a state on India's southeastern coast. Shreya Jha, a fourth year undergraduate student studying psychology and architecture, is from West Bengal, a state in eastern India near Bangladesh's border. Raja Patel, a third year undergraduate student studying aerospace engineering, is from Gujarat, India's westernmost state.

One thing that these students noticed was different from home was the absence of widespread celebration for major holidays. According to Naresh, there is a festival or celebration "almost every month. Every festival, there's a set of things we do; it's so much fun." Of these festivals, the most notable were Dussehra and Diwali. Naresh explained that for each festival, "every state has their specific dance form," such as Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh and Garba in Gujarat. "Each hand movement represents something, has a meaning. Everybody has specific steps that they do together." According to Kerur, during

Diwali, it is common to bake desserts or sweets and share them with your community. "Whatever special ingredient you make that day," Kerur said, "you give it to the neighbors." Kerur said that one common dessert made was payasam, which was "sort of like pudding." Jha mentioned a dish called halwa, which Kerur described as "kind of mushy like oatmeal a little bit," yet Jha added that it "looks like oatmeal, but doesn't taste like it." Patel said he missed ghughra, which consisted of a crispy crust and a sweet stuffing. When Patel pulled up a picture on his cell phone, Kerur was surprised because she recognized the dish but had a different name for it: karjikai. According to Kerur, this can happen very frequently due to the fact that within even a single state, there are multiple languages used. Kerur explained that there was a common saying in India that "every six miles you go, you see a different culture."

These students noticed that the way Americans address people is different from what they were used to. Back in India, Kerur said, it was expected of you to call adults "ma'am" or "sir," yet that was much less common here. Kerur participated in TEDxDIT in the past, and when meeting with the founder Amy Lee Segami, she recalled how strange she found it that Segami insisted "don't call me ma'am, call me by my first name." People had trouble calling her by her first name. They were so uncomfortable," Kerur explained that she even addressed her brother with a word for "brother," and didn't use his name. When

she goes to a friend's place, even when they're not related to her, it is polite to call the friend's parents "uncle" and "aunt."

One of the things Jha missed the most was the weather. "I don't dislike the winter," she said, "but I just miss the monsoon season. Because it's just like, the sky is perfect. The sky is a perfect shade of grey. It's always drizzling." Kerur remembered that in India, if the temperature was in the 60s, "people will bring their blankets and shawls and will start freaking out." Even if it was in the 70s, she went on, people would still think it was cold. "70s here is like celebration," Naresh said, to which Kerur added, "barbecue season!"

In terms of academics, Kerur said that "internships are not as it is here." Kerur received her undergraduate degree in India and thought that "everybody does an internship here. But in India, if you don't do an internship, it's still okay." Kerur also thought that schooling here was more interactive than it was in India. In her words, in India, the professor "comes in, teaches, give you an assignment, and leaves." Here, she explained, you have office hours and can talk with the professor one on one. School in India is also "not as flexible as it is here," Kerur said. She explained that once you chose a major in India, you had a set schedule of classes you needed to take with no decisions left to the student. Additionally, Naresh mentioned, "here, you have more options about what you want to study." Jha said that "here, you can mix and match majors. There is more control over

where I want to go and what I want to do. It feels as if I have control over my life." Patel thought that the way in which students and professors interacted was very different. Patel was used to having to stand up to answer the professor's questions. In addition, he said, "when you go to the class, you ask permission to go into the class. 'Sir, may I come in?'" Patel also explained that food was not allowed in classrooms back where he was from. Naresh agreed with Patel, describing how people in India would quickly eat when the professor's back was turned when they were hungry.

When asked what he missed most about his home, Patel immediately answered the food. "Particularly my region, the food would be spicy," he said, "you don't get spicy food here." Kerur said she missed the street food in India. "In India, food's all about street food, you all sit together in a group. Any hangout would start with eating, then probably a movie." Kerur also remarked upon the fact that all the food in America, it seemed, had cheese in it. Naresh agreed with her. "I like cheese," Naresh said, "but in anything? No." In addition, Naresh thought that it was more difficult for vegetarians here, that the diet lacks the variety of options that India has. Jha thought that "over here, people usually have pizza all the time. I like pizza, but there's just too much of it. After a certain period of time, it just gets irritating."

Next week, look for an International Students Feature on Poland!

UNICEF caps off month of events and fundraising for Bangladesh

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Illinois Tech's chapter of United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has dedicated the month of October to trick-or-treat (TOT). UNICEF actually gives a little twist to the definition of TOT. Instead of candies, volunteers from this organization collected money, an idea that originated from UNICEF 70 years and now. The orange trick-or-treat boxes, placed on various locations in campus, also harmonized with the Halloween spirit.

Erica Cusmariov, the co-chair of education committee, explained about how Bangladesh necessitated aid. She highlighted

how Bangladesh has the worst records for human and child trafficking. For the entire month of October, volunteers tabled on the MTCC bridge and informed hawks about this recurring issue.

At the end of September, Whitney Cross from UNICEF Chicago headquarters held a special talk with our volunteers. She emphasized how human trafficking is an unacceptable form of modern-day slavery that violates human rights as stipulated in the United Nations (UN) human rights charter. It is highly upsetting how Bangladeshi are objectified, forced into bonded labor, and exploited sexually by fraudulent coercions. Padlocked and prison-barred, children are transited from the frontier of Bangladesh to brothels.

UNICEF aims to protect these children's rights by establishing protective mechanisms against abuse exploitation and violence. Money collected from this event will be a contribution that hawks made together to cripple human and child trafficking.

Quick facts about Bangladesh:

Officially known as the People's Republic of Bangladesh, it has a population density of almost 3000 people per mile. People from Bangladesh are commonly referred to as Bangladeshi. A striking fact about this country is that it was the only one in history that fought for its mother language: Bengali/Bangla.

Bangladesh had the same fate as India. After separating from the British regime, India and Bangladesh became distinct nations. Owing to this separation, Bangladesh has a

rich cultural background. All festivals of all religions are celebrated with great enthusiasm and joy.

As a developing nation, with per capita income of just about \$1300 per year, Bangladesh has a feeble economy and standard of living. From 1996 to 2008, an annual growth rate of 5-6% was registered. However, over 90% of Bangladeshi live in absolute poverty today.

Geographically speaking, Bangladesh is located in one of the most disaster-prone areas of the world. In the wake of frequent cyclones and floods, thousands were killed and eventually the economic growth was impeded for decades.



Photos by Divya Soopal