

Indian Culture in Cincinnati for the Adoptive Family

Updated October, 2003

Cincinnati has a large Indian community, and the Hindu Temple is the center of activity. There are regional organizations that meet independently, but the Temple is the umbrella organization that offers both secular and religious activities from all of India's diverse regions.

Our adopted daughter, Molly, had been with us for a couple years before I made a call to the Hindu Temple. It was my first step towards putting Molly in touch with her Indian heritage. Little did I realize the delight and enrichment this gesture would bring to our entire family.

Through research and networking with new found Indian friends, I have acquired a familiarity with the Indian community that I want share with other adoptive families. This paper will provide you with an overview of Indian culture in Cincinnati, that will hopefully give you the confidence to reach out to it as we did.

Our Journey

Our first Temple activity was a celebration honoring the God, Ganesh. We drove down Klatter Road, through an older subdivision. The road narrowed, giving the impression that it would peter out at a private drive. Suddenly, the grand gates of the Temple appeared, inviting us down the tree lined, paved lane beyond. Soon we caught our first glimpse of the Temple, rising behind the gently rolling lawn.

A parade with music and traditional dancing led the participants to the Temple, where wide steps invited everyone to enter. In a gesture of reverence, all shoes were taken off.

The holy inner sanctum of the Temple is a large open room with a raised platform spanning the far end of the room. Stately statues of Hindu Gods line the platform, with a beautiful, cast glass "Om" (Hindi for "Hindu") in the center. Rugs were unrolled to soften the floor, upon which everyone sat. Sitting postures varied, but no one stretched their legs out in front of them, since pointing the bottom's of one's feet towards the Gods is a sign of disrespect. The rhythmic cadence of the Priest's voice and the incense enveloped us, touching our spirits with the sanctity of this place.

Months later, the Holi, "the Festival of Color", a celebration of spring, would entertain us. Dancers of every age performed dances from Indian movies. The music was alive and vibrant, making it hard to sit still in one's seat. Everyone had fun.

Mid festival, Molly decided that she wanted to participate the following year. Inquiring as to who organized this affair, I was told “Oh, the mothers choreograph the dances, teach the children and prepare their costumes.” And so began my search for an Indian mom with a daughter Molly’s age, who would guide Molly through the process. In so doing, I satisfied Molly’s request, which was a wonderful success the following year, and made a delightful new friend as well.

Although self conscience at first, we now feel comfortable and welcome at the Temple. Many Temple activities are marked on our calendar months in advance.

While we love the cultural enrichment the Indian community offers us, more importantly they provide something for Molly that we, her adoptive family, cannot. Someone once said “It’s hard to know who you are if you don’t know where you’re from.” Adoptive parents can offer an abundance of love and stability, but only the Indian community can tell my Molly “where she comes from”.

I would love to hear from other adoptive families. Feel free to offer additional information that can be added to this list, or corrections. You can contact me at the email address: name7500@yahoo.com.

Cindy

Cultural Information

The Hindu Temple of Cincinnati

The Temple has a newsletter that lists its many activities, although you really need an Indian friend to explain what's what. The Temple can be reached at 528-3714.

Directions to the temple are: from I-275 take Route 32 west. Drive about ¼ mile, turn right onto old 74. Turn left at the first stop sign, onto Summerside Rd. Go about a mile, turn right onto Klatter Rd. The road keeps getting smaller until it looks like it's a driveway, then it opens up and the gates to the temple are before you.

Special Events at the Hindu Temple

Holi, Festival of Color

Mid March

The Holi, a celebration of spring, is celebrated at the Temple with children and adults alike performing dances to music from Indian movies. Some performances are contemporary, some traditional, all exquisite. After a brief Puja (religious service) an Indian dinner is served, although pizza was offered as well at the 2002 event.

If you want your child to participate, start making calls in December or January. Since many of the participants have been dancing extensively for years, you need to find a group that dances on your child's level, and can accommodate an additional child.

For historical background on the holiday, check out the website:
<http://www.indiaexpress.com/faith/festivals/holi.html>.

Mela

First Saturday after Labor Day every year

This festival, held in the Temple parking lot, celebrates the different regions of India with a show of Indian fashion, a "Taste of India", tours of the temple, and a dance exhibition. Other activities include game booths, horseback rides, clothing for sale, etc.

Navaratri, Nine Days of Festival

Mid October

Festival in autumn that celebrates the harvest. The event covers two weekends as well as the week between. The evening folk dances are usually held at the Temple on weekday evenings and at a larger venue on Friday & Saturday nights. The weekend dances technically start at 8:00, but no one shows up before 9:00. Participation is high, making the atmosphere one of elated gaiety. A musical group from India's Bollywood, performs for each of the nine days.

Diwali (dee WAH lee), also called Deepawali, “Festival of Lights”

Can be in October or November

Diwali, or the “Festival of Lights”, is the Indian New Year. It is the biggest holiday of the year. In India, small oil lamps are lit and placed around the home and garden, sweets are exchanged and fireworks abound. Although the Temple has a prayer service and fireworks display, the most child pleasing event is organized by the Ankur Gujarati Sumaj group (see information on this group under “Regional Organizations”). An adult pleasing “Grand Diwali Celebration” is a dinner and concert, featuring top rate Indian musicians, held at UC’s Kresge Auditorium. Tickets are \$20 at the gate, \$15 if you buy them ahead of time at an Indian grocery.

For historical background on the holiday, check out the website:
<http://www.indiaexpress.com/faith/festivals/dhistory.html>.

Dinners at the Temple

The first Friday of the month, a prayer service is held at 7:00 with dinner served at 8:00. The cost is \$5 per person. Indian women volunteer to make the food, which then serves as a fund raiser for the Temple.

Taste of India

In early May, the Association for India’s Development hosts Taste of India at St. Georges Church in Clifton. Local Indian restaurants and shops set up booths to showcase their foods and goods. There is a minimal entry fee and the food is purchased per item. You can also buy Indian movies and music, clothes, cookbooks and accessories. There are fashion shows, dance performances and talks given. If you go, arrive early as it gets unpleasantly crowded later on. Information is available at: www.aidcinti.org

Indian Clothing

Authentic clothing and accessories can be purchased at local boutiques. Shah’s is located at 618 Old St. Rt. 74, just off Rt. 32; and Dipti Gada in Mason at 7511 Placid Lake Dr., #102.

Sheetal Patel runs a small boutique out of her home. Reach her at 936-9655 or sheetalindia@yahoo.com.

“Lily Sarees & Suits Boutique” comes to Cincinnati about once a month. The owner, from Indianapolis, sets up shop in a local hotel room and folks go there to shop. Clothes are displayed on every available surface with many more hung on movable racks. The bathroom serves as a fitting room. Dates in Cincinnati are announced in the temple newsletter, or you can call Lily at 317-823-6915.

Chicago has a great “Little India” section of town with many clothing stores. See the “Chicago” section for details.

Indian Grocer

Indian groceries are a source of authentic Indian foods, as well as movies to be rented, music tapes for purchase, and tickets for major events. If the employees don't speak English, you can always find a fellow shopper who can help you find what you want. When you check out, always include some of the ready to eat sweets sitting near the register.

There are two good groceries at the Sharonville exit on 275. Niva is a block north on the east side of the road, with Indian Grocers just south, on the west side of the road. Asian Market, 563-9922, is also in Sharonville. Deeps Groceries is in Clifton, at 365 Ludlow, 961-2699. India Grocers is in Roselawn on Reading Rd. Chiva Groceries can be reached at 874-1221. Jungle Jim's, on Rt. 4 in Fairfield, has a respectable selection of Indian foods, and offers Indian cooking classes as well.

One item you should definitely try is Patak's curry pastes (concentrates for sauces). They enable the total novice to make great Indian food with very little effort. There are easy recipes on the jars, or you can just sauté vegetables/meats, and serve with a sauce made of the paste mixed with plain yogurt. We really like the Biryani, Mild Curry Paste, and Kebab. The pastes also serve as an exotic marinade for grilled chicken.

Indian restaurants

There are many listed in the phone book, but some of our favorites are Mayura & Ambar India in Clifton, and Anand India in Sharonville. Anand India usually has a discount coupon in the Temple newsletter. A new one that has received good reviews is the Udipi Café in Roselawn. We hope to try it out soon.

Although Indian food has a reputation for being hot, you actually determine how hot it will be by telling the waiter your preferences. Mild means that they go light on the hot chilies, but it still has lots of flavor. Yogurt dishes are often part of an Indian meal, because yogurt tempers the heat of spicy foods. We always get a creamy yogurt drink called a "Mango Lassi" with our meal, because it's good and it tempers the heat well.

One misconception about Indian food is that everything has curry in it. The word "curry" refers to a sauce, like we would say "gravy". Some curries are spiced with curry, but most are a combination of many other spices, without a trace of curry in them.

Books for Children

We have found an extensive collection of books on India at the public library's Symmes branch. "Shiva's Fire", by Suzanne Fisher Staples, has been available through the Scholastic Book Club at school.

Cooking Indian Food

Indian Groceries carry Patak's curry pastes (concentrates for sauces), which enable the total novice to make great Indian food with very little effort. There are easy recipes on the jars, or you can just sauté vegetables/meats, and serve with a sauce made of the paste mixed with plain yogurt. We really like the Biryani, Mild Curry Paste, and Kebab. The pastes also serve as an exotic marinade for grilled chicken.

Deeps Grocery offers Indian cooking classes once a month. For information call and ask for Cathy (wife of the owner), 961-2699. Jungle Jim's teaches Indian cooking classes every so often. Call to find out when one is scheduled.

Nita Mehta, a prolific Indian cookbook author, has many books available at the website: www.indiagreet.com. Her daughter and son in law, who just happen to live in Cincinnati, run the web site operation. They are very open to answering questions, which is good since Mrs. Mehta assumes that the reader has some familiarity with Indian cooking terminology. Have your questions answered at 474-3763 or email: corporate@indiagreet.com.

A variety of Indian recipes, organized by food type and by region, can be found on the website: <http://www.indiaexpress.com/cooking/>.

Regional Organizations

Kaveri, Association of Southern India

Family gathering at Fairfield High School, 3-4 functions a year, dinner and program. \$15 - \$20 per family per year.

Ankur Gujarati Samaj, Association of the State of Gujarat

Offers family oriented dinners, activities, holiday celebrations and educational programs at their facility in Blue Ash, 9502 Highland Ave. A newsletter lists all the activities throughout the year. A yearly membership costs \$35 For details, call president, Bharati Noticewala at 563-2007.

The public is welcome to join the monthly fund raising dinners, which are prepared by association members. The dinners are on a Friday at 7:30. There are usually activities for the children after dinner.

Information and upcoming events: <http://www.ankurcinci.org/>

Padma's School of Traditional Indian Dance

Padma Chebrolu offers traditional Indian dance lessons. Call to arrange lessons or to hear their schedule of public performances, 230-5991.

Indian Movies

Rent Indian movies from the Indian grocery stores. India produces more movies than Hollywood does each year. They are full of song and dance, and are long, usually three hours. Two great movies, appropriate for children, are suggested here. Both offer a wonderful view of traditional Indian homes, clothing and culture.

“Lagaan”, a “must see” film with English sub titles, was nominated for an Oscar, in the international film category. The fictional story is set in 1893, in a rural Indian village under the thumb of British occupation. This is a heart warming, inspirational film where good prevails over evil, without any of Hollywood’s offensive violence or foul language. Although Laagan is almost four hours long, the music and captivating story make it worth every minute.

“Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam” is a particularly touching film. Although Hindi is spoken, you can follow the movie well by reading the English description on the movie jacket and using a little intuition. There is one intense part when the main characters accept a ride from a couple in a jeep, but it is graphically tame by American standards.

“Bend it Like Beckham” is the story of an Indian family living in England. The youngest daughter is a soccer fanatic who hides her participation in the sport from her disapproving parents. The clash of cultures makes for many hilarious scenes. It is a heart warming, coming-of-age romance, rated PG 13 because of some bad language. Film critic, Roger Ebert recommended Beckham very highly. It is available at conventional movie rental venues. To further understand the family dynamics that inspired the movie check out this person’s website: http://courses.ed.asu.edu/margolis/spf301/virtual_classroom/eastindian.html

Indian Music

As you would expect, a wide selection of both traditional and contemporary Indian music is available at the Indian Grocery stores, but you’ll also find a decent selection at Joseph Beth Bookstore in Hyde Park. For traditional Indian music try Ravi Shankar, Ananda Shankar, and Anoushka Shankar. A lot of contemporary Indian music comes from the vast movie industry. Our favorites are from the movies Lagaan and Gadar. You should also try Falguni Pathak, a great contemporary singer.

If you have access to the internet, go to the website www.live365.com. Under “Complete Genre List” click on “more”, then “international”. Try “Hindi Love/Sad Songs” on the first page and any of the stations with the word “Telugu” in the title. Our favorite is “4 indians - Telugu Music” on page 5, although they are all good. This web site is a real delight for anyone who loves music, with stations offering every kind of music imaginable, from every corner of the earth.

Henna Painting, Mehndi

Henna painting is the intricate, lacelike design work that is temporarily tattooed onto the hands and feet for special events. Henna leaves are ground with oil into a green paste that stains the skin as deeply as walnut hulls do. The paste is allowed to sit on the skin for at least a couple hours, and then is washed off to reveal a deep cinnamon colored pattern. The effect can also be created with “temporary tattoos”, like those found inside bubblegum wrappers, which transfers to the skin with water and a little pressure in less than minute.

The Northside library has offered classes on henna painting in the past. Materials for henna painting or the temporary tattoos can be purchased at Indian groceries or Jungle Jim’s.

Red Dot on the Forehead, A “Bindi”

The bindi is symbolic of the spiritual eye. Our regular eyes see that a friend is wearing a red shirt, but our spiritual eye sees that he is happy or sad. Beyond the obvious physical world is a much deeper, soulful world that we see with our spiritual eye. Honing this vision keeps us in touch with our inner spirit, makes us more sensitive to others, and makes for a richer, more meaningful life. Bindis come in both an adhesive backed, stick-on form, and as a container of red paint.

Advocating for Your Child Through Education

Whenever I was in my daughter’s first grade classroom, the other children would ask me questions about India. One day the teacher asked if I’d consider putting together an educational talk for the entire class. The following is a list of the activities I put together.

1. I set the mood by putting on Ravi Shankar music and burning incense. I was dressed in a salwar kameez.
2. I showed a large world map that had been mounted on foam core. I showed where India was. Then I had each child come up, I gave them a push pin with their name and one country in their heritage on it. (The teacher had sent home a flier requesting the information two weeks earlier.) The child then put their name tag on their country of origin. Only one child had Native American heritage. It became very apparent that although we call ourselves Americans, we all (almost all) came from somewhere else.
3. I showed a series of posters that I had made from pictures in books. Each poster featured a different topic such as schools, food, festivals, shopping, transportation, entertainment, etc.
4. I showed clothing and jewelry, and gave all the girls a bindi.
5. I served a variety of treats that I had both made and bought at the Indian grocery. I also offered pieces of nan (bread), which was surprisingly the favored item.
6. I left the kids with a picture of a traditional floor painting and sidewalk chalk to create their own during recess.

Indian Culture Out of Town

Chicago

If you're ever in Chicago, check out its "Little India" on Devon St, just north of downtown Chicago. It is a wonderful collection of fine restaurants, small cafes with great food for little money, and shops selling every sort of Indian apparel and jewelry imaginable. Be sure to try Hemma's Kitchen (the spelling might not be exactly right). It's favored by Indians (quite an endorsement) and the prices are very reasonable too. Be sure to haggle over the prices in the shops, or you'll pay too much.

Culture Camp in Colorado

Colorado Heritage camps, Inc. offers summer camps for internationally adopted children and their families. Their country specific camps focus on a different theme each summer, all designed to enrich adoptive families' understanding of their child's homeland. They can be reached at:

Pam Sweetser, (camp founder)
Colorado Heritage Camps, Inc.
2052 Elm St.
Denver, CO 80207

www.heritagecamps.org/
info@heritagecamps.org.

Spice Camp

I've heard that there is a culture camp near Pittsburgh, PA, but I haven't been able to reach anyone who can give me information. If you have any leads, let me know.

Internet Links for Indian Culture

www.indiaexpress.com/
www.indianmonumentsportal.com/monuments-by-region/monuments-north-east.html
<http://www.ankurcinci.org/>