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# SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH



Celebrated from July 18<sup>th</sup> to August 17th, South Asian Heritage Month (SAHM) highlights the culture, history, and societal attributes of South Asian traditions to today's global culture. South Asia includes the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka; Afghanistan and the Maldives are often considered part of South Asia as well. The month-long observance allows for individuals to gain a better understanding of South Asian heritage while hopefully participating in or attending local events related to the topic. This year's official theme for SAHM is "roots to routes: exploring the rich journey of growth, and the evolving connections we make through generations".

## THE INDUS CIVILIZATION:

The Indus Civilization, also known as the Harappan civilization, was one of the world's earliest urban cultures, existing around 2600 to 1900 BCE in what is now modern-day Pakistan and northwest India. Centered along the Indus River, the civilization is remembered for its cities, developed drainage systems, and crop cultivation. This community laid the foundation for modern-day urban planning, early trade, and agricultural methods still seen today. Although much of its history is still a mystery, its written language known as 'Indus script' is said to be one of the first known languages and form of record-keeping. Based on archeological research, the people seem to have primarily consisted of artists, farmers, and vendors. There is said to be no true evidence of a defense army, very few palaces, and no temples or places of worship.

## A TRAILBLAZING PEACEMAKER:

Mahatma Gandhi was a key figure in India's struggle for independence from British rule, known for his way of thinking, nonviolent resistance, also known as the satyagraha concept. He believed that social and political change could be accomplished through peaceful and civil protest. Gandhi led many

**1965 IMMIGRATION ACT:**  
Before the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, South Asians faced immense difficulties when immigrating to the United States due to restrictions that heavily favored European countries. As a result, only a small percentage of South Asians were allowed to enter the country, and those who did often faced societal and/or legal discrimination. The 1965 Act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson at the foot of the Statue of Liberty, stimulated a more equitable immigration policy. Since the act was passed

## BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM:

Standing on 185 acres of land and made of 1.4 million cubic feet of marble, the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir is the world's second largest Hindu temple. Luckily for us, this fascinating structure is located right here in the state of New Jersey and was built with the help of the local community over a span of 12 years. New Jersey is statistically proven to be the state with the highest South Asian population, with the community making up approximately 5% of the state's population, many of whom identify with the Hindu faith. The architecture and craftsmanship throughout the Temple mirror the dedication and efforts implemented by those

involved in its creation. In addition to its spiritual and cultural enrichment, the Temple serves as a symbol of unity and peace, attracting and educating visitors from all diverse walks of life.

## 'LITTLE INDIA':

In areas like Edison and Jersey City, vibrant communities referred to as 'Little India' are popular for their cultural atmosphere and rich south Asian cuisine. Areas of specific cultural or religious groups can be referred to as Ethnic Enclaves. This reference can be defined as geographic locations where a distinct group

Gandhi led several major campaigns in India, encouraging millions to fight for freedom. His emphasis on peace, advocacy, and self-discipline inspired not only those of Indian heritage but also civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. Gandhi's peaceful approach shifted global perspectives on resistance and justice, and his story continues to impact conversations on peace, civil rights, and humanity.

, especially between the 1960s and 1980s, hundreds of thousands of South Asian individuals migrated to the U.S. This led to the growth of vibrant South Asian communities across the U.S. and representation in various professional fields. The Act unintentionally reshaped the U.S. demographic, allowing for increased cultural diversity and shared community.

maintains a strong presence through its cultural identity, language, and social network within a larger society. These neighborhoods are highly involved in immigration support, providing entry-level jobs, and creating a sense of "home away from home". Supporting communities like 'Little India' contributes immensely to the local economy, helps increase the longevity of their small businesses, and keeps cultural traditions alive.

### KNOW THEIR ORIGIN:

Since the implementation of society, fruits and vegetables have been imported and exported all across the globe. Click a link below to learn more about a specific produce item or spice that would typically be imported from South Asia:

Cinnamon (Sri Lanka and India)

Cucumber (India)

Durian (Indonesia and Malaysia)

Jackfruit (India)

Lemongrass (India and Sri Lanka)

Oranges (China, Indonesia, Malaysia)

Lemons (India)

Black Pepper (India)

Starfruit (Tropical Southeast Asia)

Eggplants (India)

Turmeric (India and Indonesia)

Taro Root (India and Malaysia)

### BEAUTY IN THE DETAILS:

Beeralu Lacemaking is one of the first forms of making lace by hand. Often involving unique designs and patterns, this hobby is rooted in Sri Lankan tradition but was introduced during 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese rule. Its name is derived from the Portuguese word "bilro" meaning bobbin while "renda" is a Portuguese word for lace. The art of Beeralu is an endangered tradition, one kept alive by its home of origin but is on the verge of being forgotten elsewhere. The technique requires immense patience, steady handedness, and knowledge of pattern-making that is typically passed down through generational knowledge. In today's society, the craft of Beeralu lacemaking is protected by cultural organizations as a way of preserving the history and storytelling of each piece that has been made. With the intricate patterns and shapes, this specific form of lacemaking may have been influence for modern-day interpretations of handwoven details and textiles.

### -WE ALL DESERVE KINDNESS-

Like many minority communities, South Asian Americans have often experienced discrimination and misunderstandings. These experiences can stem from societal misconceptions, stereotypes, differences in cultural or religious ideals, and much more. It is important to recognize these ongoing issues while uplifting and educating others on the contributions of south Asian communities throughout history. Promoting things like open conversation and mutual understanding can go a long way when creating safe spaces that allow all individuals to feel welcome and heard. In a society that only continues to grow in diversity, learning to be open-minded can allow us to build a better sense of community that promotes compassion and a shared sense of humanity.

#STOPAAPIHATE