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**Middle School: 2nd place
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Challenges for Young Indian Americans

(*Note that this essay is written with traditional parents kept in mind.)

As any Indian parent has experienced, or will experience, it is not easy to raise children to acquire traditional Desi values or customs when they are growing in a European-type environment. More specifically, Indian parents may have difficulty getting their children to attain the ideal human interactivity, individuality, and spirituality customs and beliefs that Indian parents have in mind. Many young Indian Americans are different people on the inside, with different insights and ethics which they feel they can not project in front of their parents. This is due to the cultural challenges they face from being brought up in a way unfitting to their setting in America. Their fear of being berated or disowned truly changes the dynamic of their situations into a predicament. Thus, they face these cultural challenges.

Human interactivity is very general in the way it includes all types of social interactions like how elders, family, friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, etc. are treated. Indian culture follows caste, which Oxford Dictionary defines as "each of the hereditary classes of Hindu society, distinguished by relative degrees of ritual purity or pollution and of social status", whereas American culture is based on equality, as "all men are created equal" according to the opening statement in the United States Declaration of Independence. Many young Indian Americans with traditional parents are taught to live by the rules of caste and judge people in accordance with their socioeconomic statuses, but in school and other places outside of home children are taught about the importance of not judging people by outer appearances, or by materialistic things. Growing in a world where they are taught in school about the American Revolution for fairness and equality, where children experience various interracial situations, where 'inferiors' are treated the same as equals, and where children meet people of all different economic, educational, and prestigious backgrounds, yet as they grow up in America they see no morbidly unspeakable difference between people with differences, thus agreeing with their parents' opinions of how to associate with different types of people changes. They reject what may seem like a universally accepted thought in India.

because to them, who are growing up in America, it is not. This opinion contradicts that of their parents, and for fear of hurting their parents and fear of ultimately being hurt themselves it usually remains "bottled up". If the young Indian American decides to open up and make these thoughts known, the family and the young Indian may suffer from their parents "cracking down" on them. Also because Americans are such high advocates for equality, American children treat their elders much differently than how Indian children normally do. Elders are considered like nobles, they are the wise and they always hands down, know what's best. Also many Indians think. Americans treat elders like family members with respect undoubtedly, but nothing like how Indian children treat their parents. Many young Americans can "talk-back" to their parents without suffering from a consequence, many young Indians would learn soon after the first time that they "talked-back" to never do it, ever, again. Elders are never argued with in Indian culture because they are always correct. That is not so with Americans. They believe they should stand up for their beliefs and have freedom to speak up when they should want to. Naturally, when young Indians pick up these behaviors from the surroundings they are in it can propose a problem back at home. Now, the young Indian does not know what the right thing to do is and what the wrong thing to do is. They know that their society is like this for them because they do not live in India, but everyone in the world seems to agree with what they think, (including that they attend American schools, only watch American programs on television, watch American movies and most Bollywood programs they see are modern and culturally assimilated with the United States), rather than what their parents think. Seldom do many teens broaden their minds to all the cultures of the world and try to experience it all and live as the person they want to be. They either live like people who they grew up around, or like people who they came from. Young Indian Americans are beginning to define themselves for who they want to be, and finding out who they are due to these cultural challenges. Human interactivity for young Indian Americans is a huge challenge. From dating to how to treat different people, many Indian parents are culture shocked, and many young Indian Americans face a challenge.

Expressing one's individuality can also be a challenge for young Indian Americans. Traditional Indian parents always expect a perfect child with the best education and marriage. Learning in a western culture many young Indians may disobey their parents, begin to date to find a spouse, rather than getting an arranged marriage. An individual may want to date to get to know someone that matches them instead of getting to know someone after agreeing to a marriage based on status. Depending on the individual they may choose to share or not share this with their parents. Usually, young Indian Americans do not know what to do and just leave it up to fate. But as they grow up they face many hardships in trying to keep themselves happy and not disappoint their parents. Take gays for an example. Gays are frowned upon in traditional societies but modern society has had a change of heart and many people fight for their treatment as equals too. They feel caged, unable to open up, and express themselves for who they are. They must deny it, and often they suffer from unhappy marriages. If they were to open up they would likely be disowned and shame would be

brought upon them. Even many parents of children with special attention deny that their child has a disability and force their children to behave like the average person when it is not possible for them. They need parents who can understand them, and help them live their life as the individual that they actually are. But they struggle every instant of their life because of their übertraditional, away of saying super traditional, parents. And the thing that most young Indian Americans face an individuality challenge with is education. Typical Indian parents all want their children to become doctors or engineers. Of course not every child is capable of becoming one, yet every Indian parent thinks that their son or daughter is going to the best there is. And obviously every child does not want that. If a young Indian child were not an academic and more of an artistic type, they would be considered a "lesser" person, with lower status. If a young Indian American were to approach their traditional parents and say, "Jabam ai baraho, mai eka rock star banana chahta ho (When I grow up, I want to be a rock star)", their parents would not have a kind reaction. The young Indian American would be accused of being impractical, and throwing their life away. They would be told that art is nothing and they should press on their studies more. Young Indian Americans suffer from these challenges as well because they are not able to express individuality due to their own cultural differences.

Maybe the last major cultural challenge for young Indian Americans but surely not the least important is about spirituality. Traditional Indians are normally Hindus. Now I should explain Hinduism some to where my point can be clearly conveyed. Hinduism is the world's oldest religion and a way of life. It's a very deep polytheistic religion that focuses on inner power and spirituality. Hindus believe that when people die they come back to earth as another being, reincarnated as a particular being depending on how good of a being you were in your previous life. And they believe that this cycle, *samsara*, can only end when a soul has achieved spiritual perfection, or *nirvana* when a person reaches a zero level on consciousness. To do so, one must seriously meditate, be at peace with oneself, and often these people are very devout. So to resume my point, many young Indian Americans are raised Hindu. But still they are living in an atheistic society, dominated by Christianity. Many, and probably most, of their friends are Christians. Every Christmas, every Easter, every Sunday morning when they see their friends going to church they are exposed to the glory of their Christian religion. Not growing up in a Hindu society, it is easy for them to lose sight of what their true religion is. They once again can face a challenge of whether or not to confide in their parents. There is a very tricky situation because if one were to trouble their peaceful parents with this dilemma those parents who could be very close to achieving *nirvana* could be disturbed and thus not capable of achieving it afterward. The young Indian American could suffer from their parents' frustration as they take it out on the child for making them continue going through *samsara*. And even if the parents do not keep the *samsara* factor in mind, they could bash the child for various reasons like disobeying their Gods, disobeying them, or for bringing shame upon the family. When parents do not help the child and keep their child's needs and feelings in mind causing their child to fear them, why should they confide their parents? The young Indian

Americans face a cultural challenge of their spirituality shaking what defines their character and values

To disclose what many young Indian Americans have been challenged with, I end with saying that young Indian American still feel the pressures of these challenges and they battle them daily. To any parents I ask that you open your hearts to your children because they will love you more than you can imagine if you just let them open up to you, without fearing facing judgment from you. And to any young Indian Americans, if you face any of my above listed challenges then I ask you to hang in there and to not completely ignore your heritage. As Indians you are a strong people so you should do as your mother nation has all these years and not forget the ideals which give you strength, like Jawaharlal Nehru said, "At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her success and her failures. Through good and ill fortune alike she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her strength."