

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month 2022 | Prathyusha Chenji

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AAPI
Asian American and Pacific Islander
HERITAGE MONTH



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Q: To what Asian or Pacific Island country(s)/region are you connected?
A: India

Q: When you think of India, what feeling does it evoke?
A: My family is from Tirupati, which is a Hindu pilgrimage site in India. Thinking of that connection evokes a feeling of serenity and a feeling of being rooted to a rich, cultural and spiritual history.

Q: What are some of India's cultural traditions? Which of any of these does your family celebrate?
A: Hindu festivals are a big deal at my house. We celebrate or observe most holidays that fall on the Hindu lunisolar calendar (Panchanga), including, but not limited to: Sankranti, Ugadi, Ganesh Chaturthi, and Diwali.

Q: What is India known for?
A: India is a republic comprised of 28 states and 8 union territories. Much like the U.S., each state has its own government and operations. But uniquely, each state also has its own language and distinct culture. I'm connected to Andhra Pradesh, a region and one of two official states in India that is known for the Dravidian language, Telugu.

Q: Is there a particular food dish that reminds you of India?
A: For me, it's Avakaya. It's spiced and pickled green mangoes, often sold in jars or fresh. The extended making/fermenting/preserving process for avakaya is similar to Korean kimchi. It originates back to Andhra Pradesh and Telugu people always have some at home. Sometimes when I am sick, it is the only thing I have appetite for and eat it with everything.

Q: What is one major misconception about India?
A: Indian languages are vast and complex, so the misconception is thinking that most speak only one particular language. For example, I get asked if I speak Hindi a lot, which I do, but not necessarily because I'm of Indian descent. Again, since each state speaks a different language, one's native tongue depends on one's ancestry. My family speaks Telugu, though one also tends to develop fluency in languages of their diverse Indian neighbors, both on the mainland and in the diaspora. I think the count right now is that there are 22 official languages, 121 recognized languages and 270 mother tongues in India? And English is also a national language, as well as the primary language spoken by most people of Indian descent in the diaspora. But I can confirm there is no such thing as the Hindu language, that one is a religion.

Q: What major holiday is celebrated in India?
A: Diwali! My family throws down hard for this holiday - we're talking traditional food, sweets, decorations, presents, and fireworks. Lots of fireworks!

Q: Is there anything else about India that you would like to share?
A: I think the coolest thing about being Asian American is that it's an identity united by such vast, rich, and unique cultural and historical legacies. I love that we can celebrate diversity within the Asian community for AAPI Heritage Month!

