



RAISING A
CULTURALLY
AWARE CHILD

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by Anjum Nayyar

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rowing up I remember my mom speaking to me in Hindi on a daily basis, both before and after school. Words like *kela* (banana) and *dood* (milk) became staples of my morning lingo. Other phrases like “Jaldhi kar,” and “late ho jayenge” meaning “hurry up” and “we’re going to be late” quickly became ingrained in my mind. I knew the meaning of these phrases and used them myself. And so I was exposed to my parents’ native language, learning how to speak it as a child. My mom also played Bollywood movie tracks on our 8-track player at dinnertime as another effort to expose us not only to the language, but also to the music and sounds of the culture.

As an adult, and a mother myself, I’ve lost touch with Hindi and can’t speak it all. My children bear the consequences, as they do not understand the language as well. If I decide to play them a Bollywood track, they turn to the television remote. As a mom, I’m constantly on the lookout for ways to help put culture back into my family life.

Sometimes you just need a few tools to help do the talking – or even a few good apps! Here’s my list of Top 5 Ways to keep your child plugged into a little culture and language in their daily routine.

1. GET A FUN EDUCATIONAL APP

For many of us moms who have been to India, the monuments alone are filled with history, but having to explain that history or culture to young kids travelling with you isn't easy. Tamarind Tots is not only a great app to travel with but can also be used to teach history and culture at home. Creators Aarti Khanna and Shameeli Sinha launched the Discover Indian Monuments feature as part of Tamarind Tots, and the app has been on countless "What's Hot" app lists around the world. Kids can "connect the dots" to construct some of India's monuments. Once they complete the activity, kids see a real-life, high-resolution picture of the monument. The Map of India game lets kids label each of the states on an iPad, giving them a great introduction to India's geography. There's also a great "Let's explore" section, which educates kids on a variety of topics, such as how the Sundial at the Sun Temple works, how much gold is in the Golden Temple, and many more! It's a real opportunity for South Asian parents to share their memories about India and for parents and teachers to do collaborative activities with kids. So why not get online and dig deeper into India's rich heritage?

2. USE THE KITCHEN

Why not let the food prep do the talking? Gnaana.com is a multicultural website which prides itself on educating kids growing up in a diverse world. On the site parents can purchase a wide range of educational tools and toys for their children. From alphabet blocks to books and puzzles, the options for educating your child about their heritage are endless! With Chota Chef, you can take kids on a sensorial tour of India, dine with Maha Rava Dosa of Mysore, practice fractions with Mini Moon Momos from Sikkim and march with Gandhi through the salt mines of Gujarat for some home-cooked kutchidi. It's a great way to introduce the basics of Indian cooking to your little one while having fun. Chota Chef comes packaged in a beautiful tin box, the collection features 20 recipes (one from almost every state or region of India) with step-by-step pictorial illustrations that make it easy for early readers to follow. Each recipe is double-sided (one side for the adult, and one side for the child) on a thick, oversized board and laminated for easy clean-up. The kit also comes with a Map Card highlighting the route of travel, as well as a Parents' Guide containing safety tips and a handy pantry list.

3. TAKE CULTURE TO SCHOOL

Remember getting notes in your lunchbox? What about flashcards? Make lunch fun and educational with Hindi flashcards also available on Gnaana.com. Astronomers in ancient India deemed each day of the week to be governed by a particular celestial body – the Sun (Surya or Ravi) and the Moon (Chandra or Soma) and 5 planets: Mars (Mangal), Mercury (Budh), Jupiter (Brihaspati, the Guru of the Devas), Venus (Shukra) and Saturn (Shani). Together with Rahu and Ketu, these celestial bodies are collectively named the navagrahas. Kids will learn that each day has its own personality and colour - Mars (red) is a troublemaker, Jupiter (yellow) is wise and pious and Saturn (blue/black) is strict and stern. The front has the day of the week in Hindi and the back of each gives a brief description. Your children learn the days of the week in Hindi, and can be a great topic for Show and Tell.

4. USE YOUR BEDTIME ROUTINE

Do you remember your favourite lullaby growing up? I do. It was, "lala lala lohri." I went to bed with Hindi lullabies as a kid and most of the time I learned a few words in the process. Today I actually sing some to my own kids from memory. My son Liam will actually correct me on my pronunciation when I'm tired. He'll say, "Mom it's not choo-ja, it's sooo-ja." Many of these old Hindi lullabies are available on YouTube to play for your little one. Because I don't speak Hindi, the lullabies I learned can help expand your vocabulary and help you expose your child to songs and new words.

5. USE A KEEPSAKE FOR CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

You can make a keepsake scrapbook with kids of all ages to remind them of what things like Diwali, Eid and other occasions are all about. Cut out prayer words and letters and let kids find pictures of various family celebrations like Diwali from year to year to add to their book. When it comes to teaching your children about Diwali, The Diwali Story – a book available on Gnaana.com is a fantastic resource. It even pro-

vides The Diwali story of Lord Rama's return to Ayodhya and has interactive flaps and folds. The story of Diwali is condensed simply on embellished paper, with plenty of space to record personal notes or store keepsakes from family celebrations. The handmade book is an heirloom your family will treasure for years to come.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anjum Nayyar, a Toronto native, has extensive experience in the television world as a News Anchor and Reporter. She began her career in Chicago, as a Masters Journalism student at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, specializing in broadcast journalism and at the city's suburban regional cable channel's one-hour program. She went to CBS in Washington, D.C. on Capitol Hill during the Clinton presidency, where she was the Washington Correspondent for WISC-News 3 in Madison, Wisconsin and for WMJI-FM in Cleveland, Ohio.

Returning to Canada, at MTN/A-Channel Winnipeg, she covered the province's pivotal election and health issues faced by the aboriginal communities. She joined the daily news team at the New VR/A-channel in Barrie, returned to Toronto to become a reporter/back up anchor at OMNI NEWS and reporting, writing and producing a health segment for the South Asian News program.

Nayyar has won several awards including the runner-up Journalism Award for Excellence in Women's Health Reporting from the Society of Gynecologists of Canada for her story on "Breast Cancer Misconceptions in the South Asian Community," as well as Best News Story 2004 from Toronto EMS for her story on its multilingual emergency services. She is now Editorial Director and CEO for masalamommas.com.

Items in this article can be found at the iTunes Store, Gnaana.com and MasalaMommamas.com.