

THE LOTUS

A Quarterly Publication of the Federation of India Community Associations (FICA)



April - June, 2021

Since 1967

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Please email us at:
Lotus.ficacleveland@gmail.com

Sonia Aggarwal - NE Ohioan and Clean Energy Advocate in the White House

CHERYL D'MELLO



Northeast Ohio is proud to have Sonia Aggarwal, one of its community members, as the Senior Adviser to the President for Climate Policy and Innovation, working in the White House.

Sonia, who grew up in Northeast Ohio, has worked in the clean energy field for 15 years. She attended Laurel School and then Hawken School from where she graduated. After obtaining a BS in Astronomy and Physics at Haverford College in Pennsylvania, she spent about a year working and conducting research at the world's largest optical telescope site in Chile, in the Atacama Desert. On her return, she lived in California, and obtained an MS in Civil & Environmental Engineering, from Stanford University, focused on atmosphere and energy. Since 2006, she has been working in the field of climate change, developing America's Power Plan, and assisting in the move towards a clean energy economy.

Before taking up this new position, Sonia was the Vice President and a Cofounder of Energy Innovation: Policy & Technology Inc. a clean energy think tank, whose mission is 'to accelerate clean energy by supporting the policies that most effectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions.' She led the firm's programs. Earlier, she managed global research at ClimateWorks Foundation, authoring several research papers and contributing to the McKinsey carbon

abatement cost curves. She has won several awards, including the 2019 Advocacy Award from C3E (U.S. Clean Energy Education and Empowerment Initiative).

Sonia is the daughter of Prof. Raj and Karen Aggarwal. Prof. Raj retired as Dean and Sullivan Chair of International Business & Finance from the University of Akron and currently serves on the Board of Directors of several profit and nonprofit companies in Northeast Ohio. Her mother, Karen, is an artist and an art therapist.

Both Prof. Aggarwal and Karen, his wife of 45 years, are very happy and proud of their daughter, Sonia.

"She has always been interested in the environment," Prof. Raj said. "She used to frequently visit the parks in Northeast Ohio, and used to work at rescuing animals."

The Aggarwal family has lived for some time in Japan, Dublin and Sweden. They have made several trips to India, and Sonia has travelled and worked in India for a while as well. Sonia and her family are now in the process of moving to Washington, D.C.

The Aggarwal and Blackburn families have made endowments in North East Ohio to support global perspectives in education and to encourage greater intercultural understanding.

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The second wave of Covid-19 has crashed into India with an astonishing ferocity. The Head of WHO described the situation as, "beyond heartbreaking". WE ALL KNOW THIS!

The Indian diaspora has rallied to support India in times of natural or man-made calamities, be it the Gujarat earthquake, or other events.

We appeal to all the members of the community to extend a helping hand to our Motherland in her hour of desperate need.

The FICA Executive committee has created a new fund called "India Covid-19 Relief Fund" for this specific purpose and seeded it with FICA's own USD 5,000.00

Please make your Tax-Deductible contributions payable to FICA with "India Covid-19 Relief Fund" in the memo. These funds will be sent to India initially on May 15th and then on the 15th of every two months.

Wouldn't you contribute generously?

There are two ways to contribute:

1) Donate via PayPal or Credit Card, please use the link provided on our website: www.ficacleveland.org and click on DONATE NOW button.

2) Donating using a check, please make the check made payable to FICA and mail to:
FICA
PO Box 39474
Solon, OH 44139

Best regards;

Sudarshan Sathe
Chairman
FICA Board of Trustees

Ritu Mahna
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FICA Executive Committee





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Helping Hands

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Editors Note

SANGITA BAFNA



As the USA is beginning to open up and see some sense of normalcy, our motherland India is under seige..... Global cases of COVID virus are surging, with India accounting for more than 40% of the cases. With the second wave of COVID, India is under attack with about 400,000 new cases a day, making it the worst hit country in the world. India, a leading maker of vaccines (exporting more than 60 million shots), is now facing shortage of vaccines, and oxygen tanks; hospitals are swamped and cremation

grounds are burning thousands of bodies every day. Sickness and death are exploding across the country. All of us are seeing our families and friends being infected, with many dying.

Like never before, India is in dire need of our help today. The world is responding to India's distress call. Many countries, large companies and Indian nationals living outside of India are pledging their help. Here in NE Ohio, FICA has also created a "India Covid-19 Relief Fund" for those that wish to donate to help India during its catastrophe. May we all keep our mother country, India, in our prayers.

**Generosity has no Religion
Helping feed the hungry and needy through the Salvation Army**

BY MALA GARG

The Indian community is known for its generosity and empathy – and a recent example is living proof of that.

Dr. Jaya Shah and Mr. Ramesh Shah recently sponsored an entire day of "produce distribution" at the Salvation Army, Cleveland, for families severely impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic.

The Salvation Army Cleveland West Park, located at 1245 Lorain Ave Cleveland, OH 44111, has regular "Produce Give Aways" for the needy. In partnership with The Greater Cleveland Food Bank, a large variety of produce items are made available at no cost to deserving area residents.

With the onset of Covid 19, many families are going without food and basic necessities. As part of the "produce giveaway" the Salvation Army provides fresh produce to feed a family for upto 3 weeks.

We are getting anywhere from 400 – 500 families for each food drive, says Major Ernesto Portillo, who heads up the West Park Corps of the Salvation Army. We have seen a



dramatic increase in the need for food. The lines of cars on our produce giveaway days can be miles long! If it were not for these food giveaways, many families would go hungry.

Mala Garg (who is on the Board of the Salvation Army) requested Dr Jaya & Ramesh Shah to get involved in the program. "Love to do it; it is an honor & great joy for us" said the Shah's. 'You are opening up the opportunity to open our hearts to help the needy and unprivileged in Cleveland, especially those impacted by loss of earnings due to Covid 19'. The Shah's volunteered for the produce giveaway at West park facility and also fully funded the drive!

Each family package of produce costs about \$25.00, and the generosity of the Shah family helped provide food to about 400 families on April 16th, 2021.

If you would like to know more about sponsoring a portion or all of a produce giveaway or volunteering your time with the Salvation Army, please contact Mala Garg at gargmala@gmail.com, or at 216 533 5769.



Dr. Jaya Shah and Mr. Ramesh Shah, with Mala and Sanjay Garg and Major Ernesto Portillo from the Salvation Army, at the Produce giveaway



The Shah's helping pack some of the vegetables in the giveaway boxes!



Produce packages contain fresh vegetables, fruits, bread, pasta etc. Each package can feed a family of 4 for upto 3 weeks.



Dr. Jaya Shah and Mr. Ramesh Shah loading produce packages in cars

FICA Sister Organizations

- Association of Asian Indian Women of NEO
www.aaiwo.org | Lynette Sequeira
- American Federation of Muslims of Indian Origin
www.afmi.org | Dr. Razia Ahmed
- Association of Indian Physicians of Northern Ohio (AIPNO)
www.aipno.org | Rupesh Raina
- American Society of Engineers of Indian

Origin (ASEI)
www.asei-usa.org | 440-734-1830

Bengali Cultural Society
www.bcscl.org | Soumitra Ghosh

Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation
Sreedhar Nair

Gujarati Samaj of Grtr. Cleveland
www.clevelandgujaratisamaj.org | Nilesh Patel

Guru Gobind Singh Sikh Society
www.clevelandgurudwara.org

Guru Nanak Foundation
www.gurunanakfoundationrichfield.com

India-Ohio Chamber of Commerce
www.indiaohiochamber.com | Radhika Reddy

Indian Christian Association, Michael Sreshta

Jain Society of Greater Cleveland
www.jsgc.org | Jitu Shah

Kasturi Kannada Society
www.kasturikannadasangha.org | Meena and Humchad, President

Kerala Association of Ohio
www.kaoh.org | JayaKumar

NEO Marathi Mandal (NEOMM)
www.neomm.org | Shekhar Ganore

Marwari Association | Sushila Mohanka

Orissa Society of America | Birendra Jena, (330) 544-1725 | birendrajena@hotmail.com

Punjabi Cultural Society
www.guidestar.org | Burjinder S Dhanoa

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NEO Tamil Sangam (NEOTS)
www.neo-ts.org | Jayabalan Sankarasubramanian

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Helping Hands A project of FICA

By MALA GARG

Helping Hands is a volunteer based community service organization, now under the umbrella of FICA, that has expanded its Mission in the recent past.

Started over 12+ years ago by Dr's Gita Gidwani & Jaya Shah, and Mrs. Mona Alag, Helping Hands has been active in helping members of the Indian community in NEO with various needs – including help for new immigrant families, help for visitors from India coming in for medical procedures, and helping women and families in need of support and care. Over the years, hundreds of families have been supported using the network of volunteers across the Greater Cleveland area.

Helping Hands has now expanded its mission to include providing specific help for **physically and mentally abused women from the South Asian continent**. This need has emerged as a growing one, as we see more families migrating into Cleveland and existing families requiring personalized and confidential assistance of this nature.

Over the last few years the Helping Hands team has taken on several clients in distress and helped them get back on their feet and gain physical and financial independence. We work with local volunteer organizations (i.e. The Rape Crisis Center) to refer our clients to available help in the community. Volunteer training sessions are conducted to equip our volunteers with the needed tools to become effective first responders.

Helping Hands has **recently also started a program to support "seniors 50 and over"** and to help build a vibrant community of and for seniors from South Asia. The services for seniors are geared towards promoting health and independence for the elderly in our community.

Services can include (but not limited to) 1) access to information about available city services, 2) Access to home help or arranging meals, 3) Delivering groceries, 4) Helping with access to doctors, 5) Visits/social connections as needed for mental and physical well-being.

An important part of helping to create a community of seniors is a new webinar series called **Aangan**. As part of Aangan we will be holding monthly Zoom sessions on topics of interest and relevance to seniors.

Our first webinar was held on April 18th, with our featured speaker – Dr. Adi Mehta, a renowned Endocrinologist/Diabetologist from Cleveland Clinic. Over 100 attendees joined our first event and the reviews have been outstanding.

Our next zoom event will be held on **Sunday May 16th** at 3pm. The featured speaker is Dr. Susan Rehm, Vice Chair, Department of Infectious Disease, Cleveland Clinic. Dr. Rehm will be speaking to a very important and timely topic – **Covid 19 - Myth vs. Reality**.

If you are interested in joining our Aangan webinar series – please join our WhatsApp group at <https://chat.whatsapp.com/IpKmncaj22D5RgpPTMIxEo>, or call (440) 349 2513 and leave your name and cell phone number.

If you are interested in volunteering for Helping Hands, becoming part of Aangan, or donating to help us expand and grow our services, please contact any of our Board members.

For more information on Helping Hands please feel free to contact:

Board: Mona Alag: 440 796-5524, Mala Garg: 216 533-5769, Gita Gidwani: 440 646-9163, Sumita Kedia: 216 390-0107, Hemant Kanodia: 440 503-9345, Poonam Punwani: 440 349-2513, Jaya Shah: 216 650-7886, Nipa Turakhia: 440 668-0378

Members at Large: Guniya Bafna: 216 832-4646, Swati Sathe: 440 796-5950

Helping Hands Mission

- Helping Hands supports **South Asian women**, their children and families, trying to break the cycle of domestic and sexual violence
- Helping Hands assists the **elderly in the South Asian community**
- We also provide referral assistance for medical and non-medical needs for **visitors or new immigrants from South Asia**
- **All Helping Hands services are free and confidential**

Sonia Aggarwal - NE Ohioan and Clean Energy Advocate in the White House

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The first is an annual lecture/forum at the City Club of Cleveland on international perspectives on the education of impoverished girls and women in honor of Nathu R. Aggarwal and Roy G. Blackburn. The second is an international visiting scholars program in the Read Center for Global and Intercultural Education in Kent State University's College of Education, Health, and Human Services in honor of Pushpa V. Aggarwal and Minta L. Blackburn. The third is for an annual forum lecture for the Cleveland Council of World Affairs on India every alternate year and international business the other years. Besides, they have also made a gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art's South Asian Gallery, named the Karen Blackburn Aggarwal Gallery.

We wish Sonia all the best in her future endeavors of moving the country forward towards low carbon electricity sources that will cut power sector emissions by 2035.

Photo Credit: Energy Innovation: Policy & Technology LLC



Practice the 20-20-20 Rule

*Eyes feeling tired? Been staring at a screen for too long?
Here's your reminder to give the 20-20-20 rule a try!
Every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away from your screen,
for at least 20 seconds.*

A short and simple rule that can make a big difference!



Viswa Hindi Diwas - Celebration by NE Ohio chapter of IHA

On Sunday January 10th 2021

The Northeast Ohio chapter, International Hindi Association (IHA) of Cleveland organized Vishwa Hindi Diwas (International Hindi Day) on Jan 10, 2021 from 3:00-5:00 pm virtually on Zoom and Facebook live. It was attended by approximately 200 people from USA, India and UK. The participants and audience were from different cities and states of USA like San Jose, San Francisco, San Diego in California, Colorado, Arizona, D.C, Wisconsin, Virginia, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Indianapolis, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Massachusetts. The main objective was to promote Hindi and Hindustani culture in the younger generation by using different genres of Hindi language via a variety of mediums like singing, poetry, dance, ghazal, bhajan and Muhawara competition.

The Master of Ceremony of the program were Mrs. Rashmi Chopra and Mrs. Sunita Dwivedi. The program started with traditional Sarasvati Vandana by Radha and Shiv Kantomvar. Then, Kairav and Medha Malpani, 4 years old twins, sang "Vande Mataram" and pleasantly surprised the audience with their clear Hindi dictum.

The IHA-Northeast Ohio Chapter, President Dr. Shobha Khandelwal welcomed everyone and urged them to speak and write Hindi language at home and promote its use in USA. Mrs. Sushila Mohanka, Board of Trustees of IHA and managing editor of Vishwa shared her vision of relevance of Vishwa Hindi Diwas in current time and its objective. Her long-cherished dream of celebrating Vishwa Hindi Diwas by IHA came true. IHA National President, Mr. Ajay Chadda announced a historical and landmark achievement of IHA - the launching of a Hindi learning application program from January 10, 2021 on the IHA website. The learning application uses a short quiz to assess student's Hindi level in order to group them for differentiated learning.

Mrs. Shivani Matanhelia, a prolific vocalist in classic Hindustani music, performed a classical Hindi song - "Mangal geet", written by our Ohio's own Mahakavi Gulab ji Khandelwal. Mrs. Bimal Sharan, first president of IHA Cleveland and a prolific writer and Dr. Astha Naval, a well-known writer and poetess from Delhi both recited poems. Mrs. Swasti Pandey, a popular writer and singer from Bihar sang a Bhojpuri folk song and Dr. Tej Pareek, a writer and a professor at Case Western School sang an Urdu ghazal and read "Hindi Sankalp patra". The pledge letter asked the audience to promote Hindi language by reading, writing, via literary contribution to "Vishwa" - a quarterly Hindi magazine published by IHA; and/or on social media platforms. There was a group song about Hindi language sung by Mr. Anant Mathur, Mrs. Richa Mathur and their team.

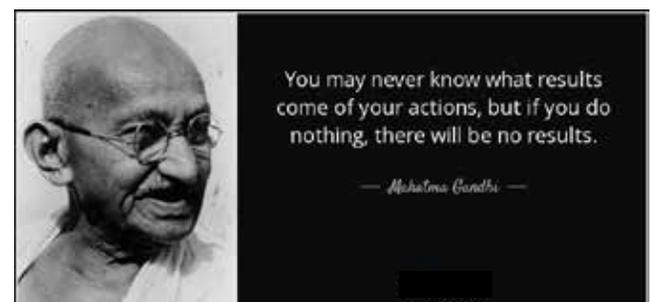
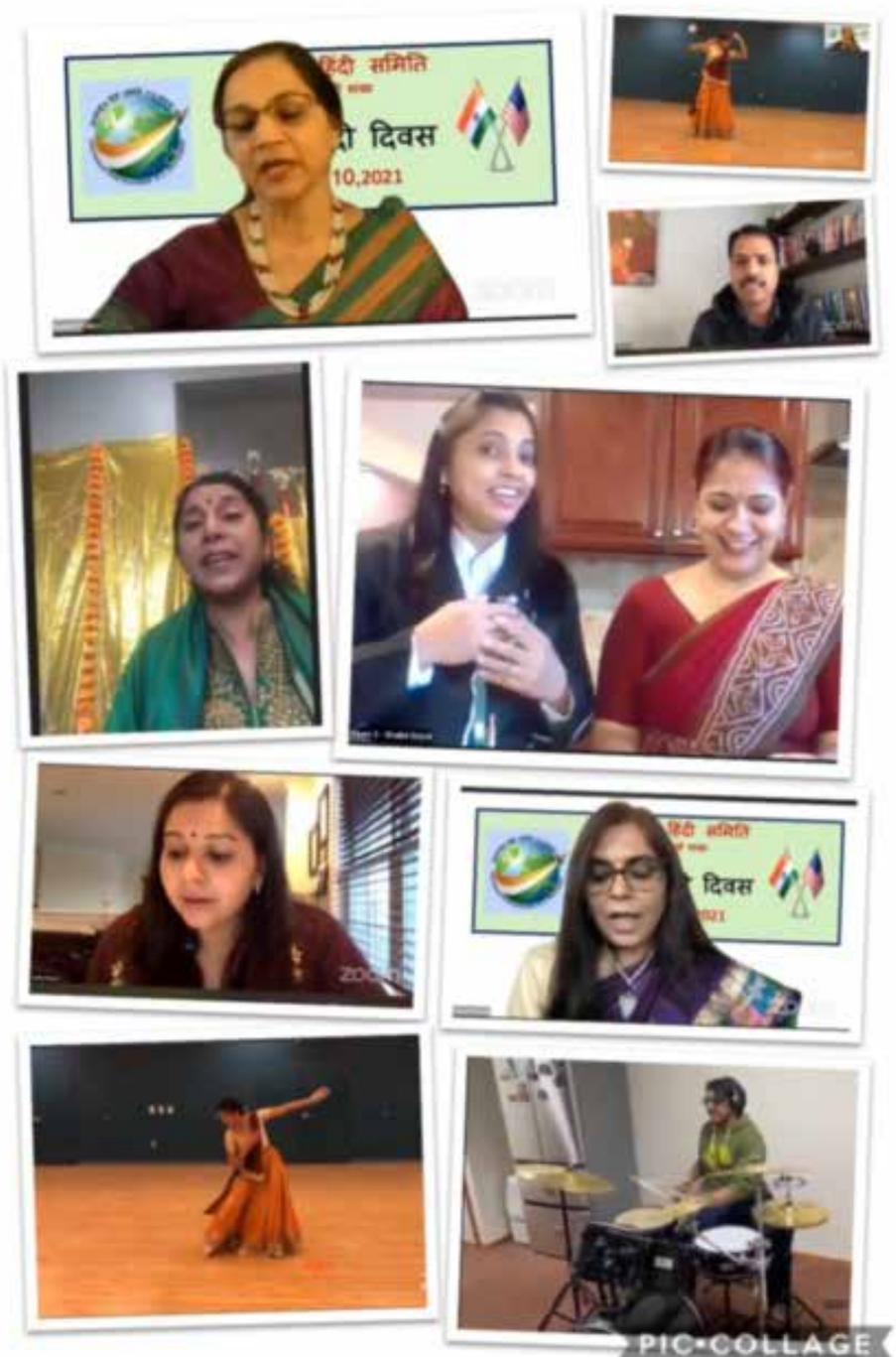
Young students from schools and college performed various items. A graceful, classical Kathak dance on the song "Mohe chedo na" by Ishita Mathur, and energizing performance on acoustic and electronic drums by Surya Pandit, both Canton residents, were well received by the audience. Mehak Sebharwal, a seven year old girl from Solon, astonished the audience by reciting her grandfather's poem. Her grandfather is Mr. Ashok Lav, a renowned poet and writer from India. All performances enchanted the audience.

The highlight of the evening was usage of idioms and phrases in conversation and the information shared about the Federal program of Seal of Biliteracy. There was an informational and educational video about Ohio Department of Education's Seal of Biliteracy program that includes Hindi language. This seal recognizes graduating high school seniors who can demonstrate the proficiency in any language other than English. This was well presented in the form of a conversational play by Prabhav Taneja, Anshi Tolani, Radha Pareek and Nikunj Khandelwal with the guidance of Mrs. Vandana Bhardwaj. At present, there are 39 US states who give the seal of biliteracy to their Seniors. The interested parents and children were requested to contact Mrs. Kiran Khaitan, Mrs. Vandana Bhardwaj, Dr. Tasneem Lokhandwala and Mrs. Rashmi Chopra

The most appreciated and popular item was "Muhawaroan Mein Samvad", a competition played among 4 teams with 4 participants each (Vibha Jhalani and team, Nupur Khandelwal and team, Shalini Goyal and team and Veda Mathur and team); who showed their skill in usage of Hindi idioms and phrases with humorous interactive dialogue in short entertaining acts. This idea was conceptualized by Mrs. Alka Khandelwal and well executed by her team comprising Mrs. Renu Chadda, Dr. Tasneem Lokhandwala, Mrs. Richa Mathur and Mrs. Maneesha Jain. Audience also participated by Poll to pick the best team for maximum and relevant usage of idioms, most interesting and entertaining act and appropriate use of props in their play.

The program ended with a vote of thanks by IHA, NE Ohio vice president, Mrs. Sheila Lahoti.

Submitted by:
Dr. Prakash Chand
Secretary, IHA Cleveland
Dr. Tasneem Lokhandwala
Team Member, IHA-Cleveland





Derek Chauvin found guilty in George Floyd's death; Empathy and Compassion is the only way to mend our communities

By SUJATA LAKHE



Police violence, excessive force, and a bias against Black Americans were on trial in a Minneapolis courtroom almost for a year. Mr. Chauvin, a former Minneapolis police officer, was found guilty of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. When George Floyd was killed by the police in Minneapolis in May 2020, the case drew comparisons to the death of Eric Garner six years earlier in New York. The two men uttered the same dying words to the police officers forcefully restraining them: "I can't breathe." However, about 20 minutes before the guilty verdict in Derek Chauvin's trial was announced on April 2021 in Minneapolis, a teenage girl in Columbus, Ohio, was shot

and killed by the police there.

Black Americans are 3.23 times more likely than white Americans to be killed by police, according to a study published by researchers from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. The researchers examined 5,494 police-related deaths in the U.S. between 2013 and 2017. Scholars and researchers have connected the toxic mix of armed police empowered with ability to stop/search/arrest/tase/shoot and racial bias to the days when enslaving black and non-whites was legal in our country. But today, the biggest question is how do we deal with this. Especially as South Asian American communities, what is our role in it, what could we do about this, and how should we talk to each other within the community with compassion and kindness.

Sahan Journal, which publishes news by and about Minnesota's immigrants and communities of color, has reported how minority communities reacted after George Floyd's death and after Chauvin's verdict. As the protest movement sparked by the police killing of George Floyd rippled throughout the world, it's also reverberating in Minnesota's Asian immigrant communities, including Tibetans in exile, Cambodian genocide survivors, and the country's largest Hmong population. Even though these communities have their own struggles for justice, they say Black Lives Matter is their cause as well. Community leaders host online workshops, creating videos, and facilitating intergenerational conversations about George Floyd and anti-Black racism, encouraging their communities to stand up for justice for Black lives. For some Asian Minnesotans, taking such an active role is an important part of defying the "model minority" myth that often pits Black and Asian Americans against each other. It's also about fighting a policing system that deports Asian immigrants and entrenched racism that led to an uptick in anti-Asian violence at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic and fetishizing of Asian women which lead to an attack on massage parlor in Texas.

I took part in a BLM rally organized by our community in the shadow Mahatma Gandhi statue in Cleveland's Cultural Gardens. There I had

an opportunity to have a safe space to talk with community members, especially younger generations, from high schoolers to fresh college graduates. I realized the younger generation of Americans of Indian origin already understand, especially those who have their formative years in this society and have gone through school systems in the U.S., understand the role systemic racism play in our day to day life. How it racially segregates power (voting, political office, gerrymandering), opportunity (early education, daycares, housing, hiring bias), and wealth (fresh food, health access) in greater Cleveland. They understand the myth of "model minority"; superficially it might sound nice, but when you scratch the surface, it perpetuates toxic hierarchy within minorities, thus never letting them unite and acquire power.

There is a well-documented history of discrimination against Indians, based on skin color and religion, who immigrated in 18 and 19 centuries with ban on land ownership, employment denial, and ultimately leading to exclusion from immigrating. At this time, Indian women were banned from immigrating by United States government because that would mean that Indians could "put down roots" in the US by marrying and starting a family. The citizenship of Indians who were already here was rescinded after Congress passed the "Immigration Regional Restriction Act" in 1917. This act drew a line around the areas in Asia from which Indians and Filipinos were banned from immigrating. Of course, there was a provision to allow Europeans born in this region to enter. This left the Indians already here country-less and unable to work and thrive. There was limited quota immigration opened to South-Asian Indians only in the year 1965. Even then, when you went for the visa, they would ask if you intend to immigrate permanently; a yes answer would be held against you. I would be really curious to know if they asked the same questions of European immigrants. The racial 'othering' goes back to the colonization of an innocent world by white European nations. Those who think—"slavery was so long ago and this immigration discrimination doesn't exist anymore" or "I am thankful for what this country has given me, I am tired of her complaining"—to consider the report from April 14, 2021, a group of students at a predominantly white high school in Aledo, Texas had assigned prices to students of color in a Snapchat group message called "Slave Trade."

Sahan Journal reports that, after Minneapolis police killed George Floyd, Sangay Taythi, whose parents fled from Tibet to India first before finding home in US, placed a Khatak, a Tibetan scarf offered during religious ceremonies, at the site of Floyd's death. He snapped a photo of the scene and uploaded it to social media. This photo, Taythi said, sparked an "uproar" of social media commentary. Taythi's generation of younger Tibetans were overwhelmingly supportive, but he faced a backlash from elders, especially for his involvement in BLM. But not discouraged Tibetan activists from Boston, California, and the United Kingdom began to put together a collective they called Tibetans for Black Lives. Together, they planned to lift Black voices and confront what they perceive as anti-Black attitudes in their community. They would do it, Taythi said, "Not by being a jerk, saying 'you guys suck, and you guys are racists,' but actually with some empathy and with compassion."

RECIPE CORNER - Mexican Quinoa Casserole

Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 40 minutes
Total Time: 50 minutes
Yield: 4-6

INGREDIENTS

1 cup water
½ cup dry quinoa
3 cups sweet potato, diced
1 medium red bell pepper, diced
½ small yellow onion, diced
1 Tablespoon + 1 teaspoon McCormick Gluten-Free Taco Seasoning
One 14-oz can black soybeans or black beans, rinsed and drained
¼ cup sliced green onion



¼ cup cilantro, chopped
1½ cups prepared salsa (mild, medium or hot)
2 cups shredded Mexican cheese blend
2% Greek yogurt, avocado, extra green onion and cilantro (for topping)

INSTRUCTIONS

Bring the water and quinoa to boil in a saucepan. Reduce to a simmer, cover and cook for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and let the covered saucepan cool for 4-5 minutes. Remove the lid and fluff with a fork. Set aside.

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Grease a 9"x 13" dish and spread the sweet potato, bell pepper, and onion in the bottom. Sprinkle with 1 teaspoon of the taco seasoning.

In a bowl combine the beans, cooked quinoa, green onion, cilantro and 1 tablespoon of taco seasoning; mix well.

Place the bean and quinoa mixture over the veggies in the baking dish. Spread salsa on top of the quinoa mixture. Top with cheese.

Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 40 minutes. Removed cover and bake for another 20 minutes or until cheese has melted, the sweet potatoes are cooked and everything is hot throughout.

Serve immediately topped with greek yogurt, avocado slices, green onion and cilantro if desired.



Sindhu Heritage New Year Day: Connecting Hearts to Long Lost Ancient Roots

DR. R. RAY GEHANI



On Saturday April 10, 2021 the **Sindhu River Society** of Cleveland celebrated Sindhi New Year **Cheti Chand** in collaboration with the Sindhi Association of Columbus (SACO). Over 600 participants from around the world, reconnected with their 5,400 Year-old Sindhu Heritage, as old as the **Egyptian and Mesopotamian Civilization**, and LARGER in area than these two combined. A 2-hour program from 10:30 to 12:30, streamed online on Streamyard, Facebook, and YouTube, consisted of a riveting unprecedented global ensemble of Bhajan and Sufi songs by **Sindhi singer NARODHA Malini** joining live from Karachi

in Sindh province. Children's cultural performances in Sindhi too were also about Sindhi Culture and Heritage 1,000 years older than the Vedic, Greek, and Chinese Civilizations.

JHULELAL'S BIRTHDAY

The program, emceed by REETA BALWANI and HARESH ASNANI described the origin and significance of Cheti Chand festival. Celebrated on the 2nd day of the Chet month (a day after Gudi Padva), it commemorates the birth of Udero-Lal commonly known as JHULE-LAL. He was the savior of the Sindhi residents living on the banks of Sindhu River oppressed by a tyrant Muslim invader.

Professor RAMESH GEHANI was invited and requested to explain the long-lost heritage of Sindhu River Society.

VISION OF SINDHU RIVER SOCIETY

Dr. GEHANI, a long-term researcher of Sindhu Civilization, noted that the Sindhu River Society of Cleveland was launched in 2018 to unite about 3 dozen Sindhi families scattered in the Northeast Ohio (often not knowing one another). His Vision for the Sindhu River Society was to help the young Sindhis, including adults and elders, reconnect their hearts with their 5,400 year old rich roots often ignored and long forgotten by them and others.

ANCIENT SINDHU HERITAGE IN 5 PILLARS

Dr. GEHANI clustered the Ancient Sindhu River Civilization into 5 key Building Blocks.



He shared that the Sindhu River Civilization started in c.3,400 BC as one of the world's oldest civilization contemporary with the far more widely known Egyptian Civilization and the Mesopotamian Civilization where agriculture was started. This makes the start of Sindhu River Civilization approx.. 2,400 years OLDER THAN the Vedic Hindu Civilization that started

in c.700 BC on the banks of Ganga and Jamuna, (both preceding the Chinese and Greek Civilizations also by many centuries.) Furthermore, the Sindhu Civilization spanned 900 miles from **Harappa in Punjab to Mohen-jo-Daro in Sindh** and beyond, spreading 800 miles across the shores of the Arab Ocean to DHOLAVIRA in Gujarat in the East. This was geographically LARGER THAN the Egyptian and Mesopotamian Civilizations COMBINED.

HIGH TECHNOLOGY AND GLOBAL TRADE



In addition, the Sindhu Civilization was also technologically far MORE advanced than Egypt or Mesopotamia. It had specialized bronze craftsmen, well-laid North-south avenues and east-west streets (like in modern day Manhattan), urban planning, centralized sewers, and baked brick homes with private baths.

Professor Gehani also underscored that the new archeological discoveries have completely refuted the colonial notion that the highly prosperous and peace-loving Sindhu River Civilization was decimated by a fictitious alien

'Aryan' invasion from Central Asia. More recent archeological discoveries confirm that around 1,200 B.C., due to a drastic climate change (serial draughts, drying of the **Saraswati river**, and devastating flash floods), small groups of Sindhi residents started migrating southward to **Lothal, Dholavira, and Bhuj in Gujarat**, and westward towards Rajasthan, Punjab, and Haryana and the plains of Ganga and Jamuna. Sindhi worshippers of Shiva and water god Vayu helped establish the firm foundations of Vedic Hindu Civilization many centuries later.

RUSHED PARTITION REFUGEES

Long after defeating Alexander and many invaders, fast forward to the rushed partition of India in August 1947. After the British Labor Party sacked **Winston CHURCHILL**, a planned partition of India and Pakistan was proposed over a 15-Month period until June 1948. Instead, the new Viceroy of India **Lord MOUNTBATTEN** uber-rushed it into 1.5 months by August 15, 1947. Almost overnight, millions of Sindhi Hindus (along with Punjabi and Bengali Hindus) became refugees in India without a state of their own, leaving behind their lavish homes, lucrative businesses, and land holdings. They were forced to settle in makeshift camps in random unknown locations.

Dr. GEHANI shared that these Sindhi refugees worked hard to rebuild their families with dignity. Some who lived in luxuries were forced to sell handkerchiefs on the streets of Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Gradually some grew to be the diamond merchants in Zaveri Bazar, Honk Kong, and Yokohama. Others became builders of skyscrapers, and financiers in Bollywood film industry. Bombay builders **HIRANANDANIs** and **RAHEJAs** are billionaires. Sindhi creative entrepreneurs like **G.P. and Romesh SIPPY (Sholay)** and **Raju HIRANI (3 Idiots, Piku)**, and artists from **Sadhana, Babita, Asrani, Ranvir SINGH (Ramlila, Bajirao Mastani)**, and **Akshay KUMAR (Pad Man, Toilet)** have played prominent roles in raising the Bollywood film industry to new heights.



In the 1960s and 1970s, after the Civil Rights Movement led by **Dr. Martin Luther King following the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi**, a few hundred Sindhi Indians, started migrating almost empty handed to different parts of the United States for educational, entrepreneurial, or other purposes. A relatively larger number of Sindhis moved to New York – New Jersey – Pennsylvania – Washington D.C. area. Some eminent Americans of Sindhi origin include **Samir BHATIA**, the founder-innovator of

Hotmail, **Dr. Chandru GEHANI**, the current President of the American Dental Association, and **Billionaire Dr. Romesh WADHWANI** (picture included).

As Sindhi children grew in America, they joined colleges and got jobs. Many started marrying non-Sindhi Indians, Americans, and some have spouses of other national origins. As they tried to assimilate the American and Global cultures, many got farther and farther from their rich 5,400-year long heritage and roots.

Karachi-based singer Nirodha MALINI, entertained the large global virtual audiences on Facebook and You Tube with a dozen melodious Sindhi Bhajan and Sufi Songs. These included many traditional sufi and well-known popular Sindhi songs such as Dhama Dham Mast Kalandar, Ho Jamalo, and others. A dozen Sindhi kids from North-east Ohio and Columbus presented Sindhi songs and their favorite nursery rhymes. Overall, most members in the audience, requested and hoped that more such meaningful and well-planned events, connecting their hearts to their deep roots, would be organized soon.

For more information, please contact **Dr. Ramesh GEHANI** at rgehani@uakron.edu or gehaniray@gmail.com. Since the 1990s, he has served for many years as an executive officer and a member of the Board of Trustees for the Federation of Indian Community Associations (FICA) in the North East Ohio. He enjoys researching the ancient Sindhu River Civilization.

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