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# EMBRACING MY CULTURE(S)

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*Embracing both the culture your parents were raised in and the culture you are surrounded by is more beneficial than choosing one*



**WOULD YOU RATHER** celebrate Christmas or Diwali?

If someone asked fourth-grade me this question, I would've chosen Christmas in a heartbeat. It seemed like the obvious choice — I wanted to be like all the other kids in my grade who were opening presents from Santa instead of celebrating Diwali and honoring a mythological king's victory over evil by lighting traditional firecrackers in my driveway.

But my parents had other ideas. During the months of October and November, they brought me to every Diwali party they were invited to — sometimes up to four a year — and introduced me to kids whose parents were from India, too.

My link to Indian culture was not limited to Diwali. Throughout the year, I also attended Holi and Ashtami gatherings and my friends' four-hour Arangetrams — dance performances narrating stories with graceful hand movements and facial expressions. I despised my outfits for these events — scratchy and brightly colored clothing, long skirts and tight blouses that made me feel uncomfortable and out of place.

Only when prompted did I tell my closest friends that I celebrate Indian holidays. Unlike

other kids who openly discussed their Advent calendars and Christmas dinners, I never enjoyed gossiping about red and orange diyas and evening pujas. Even if I tried to explain Diwali traditions, how could my friends really understand without experiencing the traditions themselves?

These get-togethers gave me the opportunity to make friends with Indian kids my age. I felt more comfortable discussing Indian food, dances and languages with my new friends and was beginning to appreciate the uniqueness of Indian culture that I lacked in my predominately-Christian school. But the classroom was a completely different world where I was the only Indian student in my grade, and the "holiday party" was really just a Christmas party.

And yes, I do celebrate Christmas too. I may not go to Christmas Day Mass, but I've taken photos with Santa at Crown Center, decorated the Christmas tree in my house and ran down the stairs to open presents on Christmas morning.

I thought I celebrated Christmas like the other kids in my grade. The only thing that made me feel out of place was the number of

people who relentlessly asked if I celebrated it. The pitiful looks I received made me defensive.

Obviously I celebrate it. Why wouldn't I?

I got offended every time someone assumed I didn't celebrate their holiday just because I'm Indian — I enjoyed decorating gingerbread houses using store-bought frosting just as much as the next person. I felt inclined to do exactly what my peers were doing and felt awkward if they knew I celebrated holidays that they didn't.

And I haven't been the only one who's struggled to find a balance between two cultures. Over a quarter of children under 18 in the United States live with at least one foreign-born parent, according to census.gov. And though having a foreign-born parent doesn't necessarily mean you're struggling to balance two cultures, it does mean you're still influenced by both that parent's culture and the culture you're raised in.

Now, after being exposed to other kids with multiple cultures in high school, I realize that it's OK to celebrate both Indian holidays and American ones. We don't have to pick between two cultures like fourth-grade me wanted to

do. You don't have to choose between your roots and your peers — it's OK to be a mix of both.

You can celebrate your school friends' holidays while still honoring your heritage and culture. Wishing my grandparents in India "Happy Diwali" helps us stay in touch. But that doesn't mean I can't enjoy homemade mashed potatoes at Friendsgiving dinners and exchange Secret Santa gifts with my friends here in the U.S. because I don't have to pick between celebrating American holidays and Indian ones.

And biculturalism isn't limited to celebrating holidays. Visiting family, eating my grandmother's authentic Indian food, and playing cricket with my cousins in India are aspects of Indian culture that I'm able to experience from their perspective as a local. These experiences from India combined with growing up in the U.S. is the reason I can belong to both cultures.

Throughout elementary school, being different was my worst fear. But now I realize that by accepting two cultures, I get the best of both worlds. I'm able to enjoy a Krispy Kreme donut while also munching on a homemade samosa.

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## A BICULTURAL VIEW *Students share their experience growing up in bicultural families*



**AUTUMN SUN**  
JUNIOR

Being part of two cultures, your views are more diverse, you're more accepting of different ideas and I think you honestly are more adventurous just because you are trying new things all the time with both cultures.



**ANOHITA PAUL**  
SENIOR

I grew up with two languages in my house, so I had people that I would speak Bengali with and then people that I would speak English with and I think I got a lot more socially aware from a young age just because you speak different languages with different people and different groups of people.



**TRACY FAN**  
JUNIOR

Surrounding food culture, I really like Chinese food. But when I came to the U.S, I hadn't really tasted that much pizza, hamburgers and Thanksgiving turkeys and stuff like that. But I found I really actually enjoy eating that food. So I guess [with both cultures] I get to taste more of the delicious food in this world.