

“From India to America: Keeping the Indian Culture Alive: My Mother’s Story”

By Renita Sebastin

A year spent alone without her husband. A year with her first baby...My mother didn't have it very easy that year because she was in India with me waiting for her time to go to America and join her husband to reunite the family. She made sure to pack her wedding saree carefully into her hand luggage for fear that if she put it into a cargo suitcase, it could have gotten lost; so that she could keep it with her in my family's new home. It wasn't just a relic for her, it held more memories and wealth than any of her other possessions; it was the link from her parents to me and her own grandchildren in the future.

My mother's parents, sister, and in-laws went to a store in Tamil Nadu that was one of two to make silk sarees that are then sent out to clothing companies all over the state. My mom said that she was left at the house along with some other family members, as per our cultural tradition. The saree (called a paduvai in Tamil) was a maroonish-red with a golden thread design called a jaraihai.

The wedding saree holds more than just memories for my mom; although it is her treasure and does bring back all the moments from her wedding and all the other events from her life in India, it also serves the purpose to connect her traditions from her motherland to her life in America. She used to wear it on New Year's Day to church and occasionally on her wedding anniversary which was a tradition that was followed in her hometown. Just seeing her saree reminds her of the traditions in India and lets her stay close to the Indian culture.

In the future, her wedding saree will be used to make a swing for her grandchildren and for the baby to sleep on. The saree is folded and laced through a small hook on the ceiling, and I used to sleep in a swing like this as an infant. Even if it can't be used as a swing, the baby is still laid to sleep on the saree, and it forms a connection between a grandmother and her grandchild.

The time for my mom's wedding saree to serve as a passage from one generation to the next won't be here for some time, but until then, my mother uses it to remind her of her home in India and her wedding that brought her to the United States. It brings back memories of the past and thoughts about her future, but it will always serve as a form of happiness for my mother.

The culture that my mother has brought with her from India has also played a big part in my life. I'm not just Indian, I'm American too, and this reflects who I am. For my 18th birthday, I wore a saree for the first time to show that I'm a part of both cultures. With my family from India and my friends from America, I blew the candles and knew that I'll always have the best of both cultures.