

Dear SIETAR Members and Supporters,

The theme of this month is Returning. Our editorial features a conversation between author Shobha Narayan whose book "Return to India" provides an insightful account of life in the US and what appeals (or what doesn't) to an Indian and the adaptation process. We thought it would be great to catch up with her and have her talk about her experiences post her move to India with Gauri Acharya, a colleague from the intercultural field who works with professionals and families relocating from one country to another. Check out the editorial for this conversation.

UPDATES

CONFERENCE: The Sietar Europa 2013 conference in Talin, Estonia promises to be a wonderful event in the month of September. For more details visit <http://sietareu.org/congress2013/welcome>. It is an unbeatable opportunity to connect with an international network of professionals.

LEARNING EVENT: the SIETAR Delhi Chapter was happy to set up a learning event with Isabelle Demangeat, long time supporter of SIETAR India. A very mixed group of interculturalists, corporates, trainers, consultants and people from hospitality took part in the event. Isabelle talked to us about how European countries differ in their cultural expectations and we discussed how that is similar or different to expectations in India. Especially intriguing for many of us was Isabelle's talk on how many different factors actually influence our communication with others: how direct/indirect we are, the context of the communication, the rank between the participants in the communication, how long the relationship is, how formal/informal and many other factors. It was another great event in Delhi!

EDITORIAL - Gauri - Shoba Chat

Gauri Acharya was Shoba Narayan's first friend when Shoba moved to Bangalore six years ago. Over many laughs and cups of coffee, the two discussed life upon returning to India. Both women lived for many years in the US; both have two kids; and both are married to men called Narayan!

What are the challenges of returning home?

Shoba: Being interrupted constantly, balancing the never-ending web of relatives and family events with things I need to do. Finding me-time.

Gauri: Inefficiencies have been my biggest issue: at home, outside, everywhere. I used to be impatient with inefficiencies even when growing up. Living abroad only amplified this feeling. Now when I am back, India has become worse; I have become more impatient and age has caught up with me.

Shoba: What about relationships?

Gauri: I am happy to be home: with my Mum, in-laws and extended family. That has actually helped because I do more here thanks to my mother's involvement in the house and my kids.

What are the joys of being in India?

Shoba: The comedy, the madness of it.

Gauri: Absolutely

Shoba: you have to laugh, otherwise you'll cry.

Gauri: That's why we meet, compare notes and laugh at the ridiculousness of it all.

Shoba: Seriously though, what are some joys of life here?

Gauri: Celebrations

Shoba: Colour, sensuality, the fragrance of flowers.

Gauri: And sometimes even the chaos. I don't know what I would do if I had to live in the suburbs of Oregon or California again. Because I did that—went back to live in California. I don't know if I could live in a quiet and isolating place like Menlo Park again, after living here, with the dog barking and the noises of traffic way past midnight.

Shoba: Family is family. No matter how close my friends were in America, it is more relaxed to be with family. You don't have to put on your game face here in India.

Shoba: What about values? Any conflicts?

Gauri: I don't think I compromised on my values while living in either place. As a person, I've been the same way in both places. In America, I didn't put on an accent; maybe I did not wear a salwar-kurta as often, but I was the same person. With the kids also, this new generation is so in tune with the West, that it pulls us in that direction anyway. We are straddling both worlds — not too Indian and not too Western.

Shoba: You are absolutely right. As you said, the kids are naturally Western but being with grandparents and elders grounds them.

Gauri: They learn small things. You need to touch feet; talk a certain way.

Gauri: Do you feel like you fit in here?

Shoba: Absolutely. I miss stuff from the States—small, specific things like good bagels, greasy pizza, well designed affordable T-shirts, hiking trails, stuff like that. But I feel more at home here.

Gauri: I miss things too. The clean spaces which I don't find here, so I clean up my neighborhood. I miss a more involved school, which I don't have, so I write more notes to the teacher. I miss Ann Taylor, so for that I make a trip to that perfect tailor who doesn't exist. And I go back to the US. I fit in here and I feel like I fit in there. I need both worlds.

Shoba: Would you return to the US?

Gauri: I guess I would now go where my kids go.

Shoba: Same here. I'd love to live in New York.

On that note, the two friends ended the discussion and went back to their coffee.



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