

[Home, Sweet, Home](#)

Category : [March/April 2000](#)

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IN MY OPINION

Home, Sweet, Home

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I was born in San Jose, California, and so was my brother, Niyantha, who is two years younger than me. My parents were quite settled there, with many friends and a great home. But when I was six, my parents decided to move out of the US and come to live in Singapore. Partly it was because Dad got a job there, and partly because my parents realized that it was much better for me and my brother to be raised in a place which was close to India and had India's culture. To this day I've been grateful to my parents for making this decision. We also got lots of advice from people who told my parents how foolhardy it was to leave the "dream country" when they had so much going for them. But then there were a few who supported their decision. Most of these were old friends who had lived their lives in the States and realized how it had done nothing for the happiness or values of their families.

Mom and Niyantha liked Singapore, but somehow I didn't feel at home there. One thing led to another and Dad got a job in Chennai, where we moved permanently. Now, nearly four years later, I'm as happy as I can ever be. Dad has a good job

that he really likes, and I get to see him every day. Mom is ecstatic at being able to see all her friends and spend time with Grandpa and Grandma. Niyantha and I are in one of the most important schools in the city and we're doing really well. Most of all, I feel really at home here, as if I've finally found out who I am and where I belong. But I was not fully able to appreciate my life until I went for a two month vacation.

In 1999 Dad had to stay in New Jersey for a couple of months as part of his work. So we family tagged along. We saw New York, Niagara Falls, Disney World... It was great! But everything was different in America. I didn't exactly approve of the surroundings, right from the TV shows to the neighborhoods to the way our old friends looked. Ever since we got back after our vacation, I've been comparing the life I saw there to the life I lead now. If I'd continued living there, I'd most probably be insecure, constantly worried about the image I project and having totally the wrong ideas put into my head. And I've thought about how I really am today. I'm a very confident, popular kid at my school. I have a lot of interests and I do very well academically. I get a lot of respect for my brains and my talent. Nobody expects me to be a certain way. I'm always accepted for what I am. I have a lot of really good friends who never pressure me into doing anything. I live in a nice neighborhood in the loveliest home. My parents and I get along very well and, as for Niyantha, we make an almost ideal pair. I will always be thankful to God, who created this chain of events in my life which gives me the opportunity to appreciate everything I have.

Unfortunately though, there are still a lot of kids who live outside India and are a little confused about their roots. To

them, I'd like to say a few words. During the time I've lived in India, I've found so many wondrous facts and so many fantastic things about this great country that it fills me with pride to say that I'm an Indian. Don't ever, ever think low of your motherland. If you would just study India's history and learn about our very rich heritage, you'll find yourself being thankful you belong to such a beautiful land. Always be faithful to God and to our Hindu religion. Try to find out answers to your questions about ceremonies and rituals like puja, upanayanam, etc. Encourage your parents to tell you more about your culture and heritage. Learn more about the religious, biological, ecological and humane Hindu teachings, plus points about vegetarianism. And most of all, never allow anyone to have the wrong idea about India. Always remember that Indian values make sense. If you don't understand something about it, ask around till you get the answer.