

Dr. Mian A. Jan Fellowship

Digital Exhibition Guide

Created by Gianna Leonen
Chester County History Center

Table of Contents

01

Introduction

A brief description of the project and its objectives

02

Discussion Questions

Questions that correspond with interviewees' stories, designed to encourage discussion and reflection

03

Photo Gallery

Photos of families used in the project

04

Further Reading

Additional books, articles, videos, and more that relate to the project

01

Introduction

A brief description of the project and its objectives

Dr. Mian A. Jan Fellowship Digital Exhibit

This digital exhibit, developed using ArcGIS mapping system, was created with the intention of expanding on the rich South Asian and Southeast Asian migration history within Chester County. The exhibit was based on a series of oral history testimonies from five subjects: Esmeraldo Octavio, Chanda Octavio, Charisse Octavio, Pallavi Chavan, and Prutha Chavan. It consists of detailed summaries of their interviews, images of the families, a detailed map of some of their travels, and an analysis of common themes among the interviewees.

Objectives



Highlight Diverse Journeys

Explore the varied stories of South Asian and Southeast Asian immigrants, emphasizing personal experiences within the context of Chester County



Examine Cultural Identities

Highlight the multifaceted nature of South Asian and Southeast Asian culture, examining faith and holidays, cuisine, and family traditions



Reflect on Ongoing Challenges

Address ongoing challenges such as racial discrimination, social pressure, and establishing communities

02

Discussion Questions

Questions that correspond with interviewees' stories, designed to encourage discussion and reflection

Esmeraldo Octavio



Life as an OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker)

As an OFW, Esmeraldo worked in various countries, including Saudi Arabia. In his interview, he spoke about the cultural differences in Saudi, specifically how men and women were often separated. Have you ever visited a place that was culturally different from your hometown? How was it different and how did it shape your understanding of the place?

Example: In Mississippi, many shops and restaurants open later on Sundays because of the state's large devout Christian population. This shapes my understanding of the state because it demonstrates how integrated religion is with daily living.

Esmeraldo Octavio



Representation

Esmer talked about the importance of Asian representation in Chester County. Representation is often discussed in the context of media, such as movies, TV shows, and books. Why do you think representation is so important? Do you feel like your identity is represented in your favorite TV shows or movies?

Example: Disney released its live-action remake of The Little Mermaid in 2023, starring Halle Bailey as Ariel. After its premiere, hundreds of videos circulated through social media show the excitement of young Black girls as they saw someone who looked like them portraying a beloved Disney princess.

Chanda Octavio

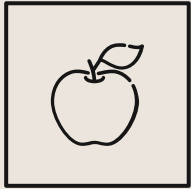


Overcoming Obstacles

Chanda spoke quite a bit about persistence, whether it was persistence working through poverty or persistence to succeed as a woman in a predominantly male field. How have you or someone you know worked to persist against all odds?

Example: Despite facing extreme violence and discrimination, Malala Yousafzai has become a symbol of bravery and resilience for her advocacy for female education. Against all odds, she continues to be an empowering figure who stands for human rights.

Pallavi Chavan



The Deeper Meaning of Food

What is a particular dish that is important to your identity? Pallavi discussed how when a woman is pregnant in India, her peers will often support her by taking turns making meals for her. How is food used as a way to express feelings or connect to others?

Example: In her memoir Crying in H Mart, musician and author Michelle Zauner described how the process of making and eating Korean dishes gave her and her mother a stronger connection and, when her mother was diagnosed with cancer, acted as somewhat of a healing experience.

Charisse Octavio

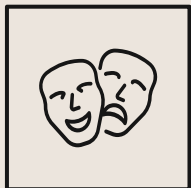


Identity

Charisse described her internal struggle with her identity, feeling conflicted about whether to identify herself as Asian-American or Asian. Have you ever felt conflicted about your identity?

Example: When you are filling out a demographics survey, you are typically instructed to select one race or a selection that merely says "two or more races." This does not always accurately reflect the true diversity of one's identity.

Chanda and Charisse Octavio



Finding Your Community

Both Chanda and Charisse talked about their love for dance and how it helped them build a community with others who shared their passion. How have your passions helped you build relationships with others?

Example: In school, students often bond with others who share the same interests as them, whether on a sports team, in the school play, or in another after-school club. Not only do these students spend more time together participating in these activities, but they also share similar interests and passions.

Prutha Chavan



Westernization and White-Washing

In her interview, Prutha talked about how some South Asian cultural practices are “white-washed” or “westernized” in the U.S. Why is it important to honor the origins of cultural practices?

Example: Prutha discussed how yoga in particular has been westernized quite a bit. She said that while everyone should be free to practice yoga, it can lose its meaning when it's marketed as a new health fad rather than acknowledging the history behind it.

Charisse Octavio & Prutha Chavan



Familial Expectations

Both Charisse and Prutha discussed the pressure they felt being the oldest child of immigrant parents. Oldest children often face a particular kind of pressure to succeed. Do you think there are expectations associated with your birth order? Do you feel as though your birth order impacts your personality?

Example: Middle children are sometimes seen as being the outsider or rebel of their families, which although this can be seen as negative, may also suggest values of independence and self-certainty.

03

Image Gallery

Photos of families used in the project



The Octavio Family



The Octavio Family



The Octavio Family



The Octavio Family



The Octavio Family



The Octavio Family



The Octavio Family



The Chavan Family

04

Further Reading

Additional books, articles, videos, and more that relate to the project

Further Reading

- **Watch:** [The Namesake](#) | Based on Jhumpa Lahiri's novel of the same name, this 2006 film explores themes of identity, family, and cultural adaptation. It follows the life of Gogol Ganguli, the son of Indian immigrants living in the U.S., as he struggles to balance his Indian identity and Americanized upbringing. The film explores his relationships, the legacy of his name, and his eventual acceptance of his roots, creating a passionate depiction of the immigrant experience.
- **Listen:** ["Letter to My 13 Year Old Self"](#) by Laufey | Icelandic-Chinese musician Laufey writes a bittersweet ballad to her younger self, describing how she felt different from her peers.

"I'm so sorry that they pick you last

Try to say your foreign name and laugh

I know that you feel loud, so different from the crowd

Of big blue eyes, and long blonde hair, and boys that stare..."

Further Reading

- **Read:** [*Crying in H Mart*](#) by Michelle Zauner | *Crying in H Mart* by Michelle Zauner is a poignant memoir that explores grief, identity, and the author's Korean-American heritage. Zauner reflects on her complicated relationship with her mother, whose death from cancer catalyzes a journey of self-discovery through food and memories.. The book examines themes of love, family, and the healing power of culinary traditions.
- **Read:** [*South Asian American Experiences in Schools: Brown Voices from the Classroom*](#) by Punita Chhabra Rice | This book tells the stories of South Asian Americans in K-12 schools by examining their experiences, especially in the context of teacher cultural awareness and belief in "the model minority myth." Combining first-hand accounts and quantitative research, Rice highlights the diverse and complex experiences of South Asians in the classroom.
- **Read:** [*So You Want to Talk About Race*](#) by Ijeoma Oluo | This book offers an accessible, insightful examination of contemporary race relations in the U.S. Her chapter on the "Model Minority Myth" specifically challenges the idea of a monolithic Asian experience, acknowledging how South Asian and Southeast Asian perspectives differ from their East Asian counterparts. Oluo's work is a must-read for anyone in the education field especially, as it offers a powerful and passionate look into how race complexities impact future generations.

Further Reading

- **Read:** [“Minor Feelings and the Possibilities of Asian-American Identity”](#) by Jia Tolentino | In this *New Yorker* article Filipino-American writer Jia Tolentino shares her thoughts on Cathy Park Hong’s essay collection [Minor Feelings: An Asian-American Reckoning](#). Similar to Oluo’s book, she discusses how multifaceted Asian-American identities truly are, specifically referencing her experience as a Filipino-American
- **Read:** [“Olivia Rodrigo is the Pinoy Representation That Pop Needed & I Won’t Shut Up About It”](#) by Julianna Marie | In this essay, Julianna Marie discusses the importance of representation in popular culture, specifically talking about Filipino-American pop singer Olivia Rodrigo. She also talks about being mixed-race and coming to terms with her identity in various communities.

Further Reading

- **Organize:** [Stop AAPI Hate](#) | *Stop AAPI Hate* is a U.S.-based coalition that aims to end racism and discrimination against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). Their website is full of information from resource centers, campaigns, news articles, etc., all pertaining to their central goal to eliminate anti-AAPI violence and discrimination.
- **Play:** [Venba](#) | This narrative video game follows an immigrant Indian couple in Canada as they navigate their new environment. The game draws heavily from Tamil culture and South Indian culture and features many traditional Indian dishes that the player can learn to make. “Players will cook various dishes and restore lost recipes, hold branching conversations and explore in this story about family, love, loss and more.”

“Keep your
culture alive.”

- Prutha Chavan
