

## TRACE YOUR FAMILY HISTORY: The family tree project

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### **Setting the context**

Family is the most important aspect of human life. It lays the foundation for a person's cultural heritage. When we connect to our family history we are taking a journey into our past and backgrounds. We are trying to understand where we come from, what has shaped us into the people that we are today. It is an attempt to understand ourselves better in order to understand the world around us better. We need to gain clarity about what are the cultural aspects that affect us and our behaviour. Do they lend us any prejudices or belief systems or stereotypes that shape our reality towards other people. It is in short an inward journey that we commit to when we explore our family history.

### **Why trace the family history?**

It helps us understand ourselves better, our values and beliefs that impact our behavior. At the same time when we see the world through the prism of our own beliefs, it can lead to projection. This means we expect the world to be the way we have learnt about it.

Recording the family history is an effective tool to preserve and retain oral histories of families, people and events. Details which maybe nowhere accounted for, can be tapped into and retained.

### **MIRROR IMAGE**

Those who work or live around people from other cultures understand the importance of learning about the differences surrounding them. What is often neglected, however, is the equal importance of knowing one's own culture, values and beliefs in order to relate more effectively across cultural lines.

Awareness of our own culture is important, because it can keep us from projecting our values onto others. By projecting, I mean the universal tendency to think other people are doing something for the same reasons we would. This can happen when we are unaware of the values that drive us and unable to distinguish them from those held by other cultures.

We are like a fish in a fish bowl. The fish swims inside the bowl surrounded by water and glass, but unaware of their presence. Most important, the fish does not realize these substances alter its view of the outside world. Our culture is like that water and glass. We see the world through a distorting screen created by our deeply held, often subconscious, values and beliefs.

### **Know Your Own Cultural Values**

The first step toward solving this problem is obvious: Learn as much about other cultures as you can. The second step is too often forgotten: Understand your own assumptions about body language, communication style or other cultural characteristics that impact your impression of the outside world. This may seem easy, but it is not. Our own culture is such a part of us that—like the water surrounding the fish—we are unaware of its existence. Some of us go so far as to think of our own

culture as human nature and, to make matters worse, as one to which all should conform.

## **PANKIL KALRA**

I am Pankil Kalra. I am studying in Indraprastha Institute of Information and Technology Delhi, [#IIITD](#). I am pursuing Computer Science in Engineering, [#CSE](#) and currently in the second year.

I worked for Reachout Foundation as a part of Community Work Credits in our college, for around 40 days in the summer of 2019. I, along with two others – Arjun Lakhera and Debraj Ghosh worked on [#TheIndiaProject: #Traceyourfamilyhistory](#). The project aimed to raise awareness about the negative generalizations we tend to make around race and ethnicity and create stereotypes that lead to prejudices and discrimination. This was done by encouraging people to research their own cultures and find out how their differences affect the way they view other people. People from different cultures- people who spoke different languages, people of varying age groups were interviewed. Questions that gave us insights into their lives, such as their music and food choices, significant events of their lives were asked. Their answers were analyzed to find out how their culture affected their life choices. This was also an effective way to record [#ORALHISTORY](#) of people.

### **Challenges and obstacles**

Convincing friends and colleagues to get data from their own families was difficult. The data gained from each family was limited as most people gave one line answers to quickly get the interview over with. Studying the data was difficult as well since we had to ignore our own differences and prejudices, and try to view the data from the perspective of the person giving the interview.

### **Lessons learned and insight**

After spending a decent amount of time at collecting data and studying it, I conclude that one's cultural heritage has a significant impact on his/her life.

Religion, food choices, languages spoken, songs listened majorly depends on one's own culture.

There were some things though which were independent of culture. Love for cricket was common and it ran across religions and languages across our country. Likewise everyone wants the society to remember them for moral values, deeds.

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Cultural impact on young people from Delhi seemed to be less than those in towns and villages of other parts of the nation. It would be safe to extend this observation to all the other major cities of India.

The first person that I talked to was my maternal grandfather – Mr. Suresh Chander Malik who is 81 years old.

### **Family History: Maliks**

Born in 1938 in Multan (present-day Pakistan), his family moved to Ambala shortly after due to the partition. Since he lost his father at a young age, he had to take up the responsibility of his family as he was the eldest son amongst the 7 children. His native

language is Punjabi but he can speak Hindi and English as well. He is very religious- a Hindu by birth.

Partition was the most significant event of his life. Not only his family but the whole Indian society was affected by the happenings around the border. He says he does not remember much about his childhood home. He did his schooling from Ambala and then he went on to study Mechanical Engineering from Thapar Engineering College.

His engineering job took him from Ambala in North to Karaikal in the South, then to Gujarat in the West, then to Assam in the East, then to Bombay where he finally settled. He got married in Delhi in the year 1964. He has a daughter and a son. His daughter (my mom) became a doctor whereas his son went on to become an engineer. He is happy as his children are living successful lives.

He has tried different cuisines but he prefers North Indian food. He loves to cook and makes amazing chicken curry. He used to play Badminton and Table Tennis. He has visited various cities and villages all around India and outside India, he has visited US, Bahrain, and Mauritius. He mostly wears trousers and shirt because they are comfortable.

He says he wants to be remembered for his good moral values. Throughout his life, he has faced irreversible changes and he has survived through all of them. He has fought sickness with a bold heart. He is proud of himself and we are proud of him.

P.S.

'Multan' is a city in Punjab, Pakistan. Located on the banks of the Chenab River, Multan is Pakistan's 7<sup>th</sup> largest city and is the major cultural and economic center of southern Punjab.

'Malik' is a surname meaning "king". Muslim and Hindu (mainly Panjab): status name from a title meaning 'lord', 'ruler', 'chief', from Arabic malik 'king'. In the subcontinent, this is often found as a title for the headman of a village.