

## SAADA launches First Days Project

Based in Philadelphia, the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) is the only independent nonprofit organization in the nation working to document the rich histories of South Asians in the United States and ensuring that this community's stories are protected and preserved for future generations.

In 1959, 18-year-old Tariq Abbas departed from Lahore and arrived in New York City, en route to Dallas where he was admitted through the American Field Service foreign exchange program. Texas, he soon realized, wasn't exactly the America he imagined: "I only knew of New York ... I had no idea, no concept of what to expect or what I was going." In 1973, Mamata Misra left Mumbai for Maryland with her husband of six weeks, and came to her own conclusions about the country she had just adopted: "I realized that for days and months I would be meeting only strangers talking strange and it was up to me to make friends out of strangers and create familiarity out of the unfamiliar." These two snapshots form a part of the "First Days Project," a new initiative by the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) to collect and share stories from South Asians about their first day in the U.S. An ambitious and interactive online exhibition, the First Days Project creates a platform for community members to upload and share the story of their first day in the U.S.

As Abbas and Misra's stories illustrate, the first day in a new country can be full of both excitement and anxiety, a sense of loss and gain, and a mixture of other emotions. It was with that in mind that SAADA Executive Director Samip Mallick began to imagine the First Days Project. "As the South Asian American community is starting to see its second and third generation in the U.S., it is

imperative to begin to document these stories and provide a way for generations to connect with each other," Mallick explains, "Through interviewing my parents about their first days I learned something new about their experiences, hopes and dreams when first arriving in this country."

With the First Days Project, SAADA continues its longstanding effort to showcase stories that reflect the diversity of the South Asian diaspora. According to the 2010 census, there are more than 3.4 million Americans of South Asian heritage, a growth in 81 percent between 2000 and 2010. In other words, 1 in every 100 Americans traces their heritage to South Asia, which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives. Yet there is also a critical danger in narratives of South Asian Americans being lost, particularly the ones left out of history books and not featured in the media. Stories like Tariq Abbas and Mamata Misra's underscore just how diverse and complex the lives of South Asians in the U.S. have been. The First Days Project reveals the intimate details of arrival that are often lost in the grand sweep of history.

"Often, members of our community don't feel as though they have a story to tell or that their story matters," Mallick mentions. "The First Days Project demonstrates how individual stories come together to tell a community's history. Each and every story adds to that tapestry."

First Day stories will be accepted through August 31, 2013 and can be submitted as video or audio (up to 3 minutes) or text (up to 300 words). It can be one's own story or an interview of a family member or a friend. No story is too big or too small. People can browse stories, learn more and submit stories at <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/firstdays>

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