

I. Arriving at Stanford

ESHAN INAMDAR Interview

WELCOMED: Tell us where you're from and what home life looked like in your family growing up.

Eshan Inamdar: I was born in Milwaukee, and my family later moved before settling in the Dallas area. Religion was present in my family, though not in exactly the same way for everyone. My dad was the most religious. My mom was also religious, though with somewhat less intensity, and my grandparents played a significant role in shaping the religious atmosphere that I found so beautiful and comforting.

Much of my childhood experience of Hinduism is tied to our family's practice and to my dad's commitment. We went to the Swaminarayan temple every weekend, and it was not close. It was a real drive, thirty to forty minutes, and once we arrived, we would stay there for a couple of hours. There are details I remember because they were so consistent and comforting: walking in, taking off our shoes, my dad receiving laddu prasadam after donating money and giving it to me, and then sitting in a large, auditorium-like space.

It was always very peaceful and quiet. We would hear mantras and hymns, the same ones repeated each visit, so the repetition itself became part of the experience. I loved moving through the space, circling the statues, and receiving prasad, the blessed food offered by the temple, in the cafeteria afterward.

One of the details that stays with me is how the temple changed the emotional atmosphere in my family. My brother and I fought constantly as kids. We were always arguing. But we never fought at the temple. The place had a way of making everything quieter, slowing everyone down, and creating a kind of peace that is hard to replicate elsewhere. When I look back, that is one of the reasons I still associate Hindu practice with steadiness and calm.

My relationship to Hinduism is both cultural and personal, especially through mantras. My grandmother, my dad's mother, is one of the most religious people in my close family, and she taught me the mantras I know. I remember her prompting me in the mornings and telling me to say them, and the mantras became something I carried with me as a tool. When I am stressed, I say mantras to myself because of the tranquil effect they have on my body and mind.

Stanford also made me notice how many people are culturally Hindu rather than strictly observant, and that resonated with me. You see many students who are tied to the tradition through family, holidays, community, and cultural belonging, even if their daily observance looks different from that of their parents. For me, that feels accurate: my father's religiosity shaped the rhythm of my childhood, and I am grateful for those temple experiences. I live that identity now more through culture, memory, and practice than through formal observance, but I know that can change, and I remain open to more explicitly religious experiences.

One especially memorable experience was Diwali at Stanford. It surprised me how many people were there. It was massive. I did not realize how large the gathering was until I saw the line for prasad stretching so far. I was already aware of the Hindu community here, since I had gotten to know many

other Hindu students, but seeing that many people gathered together, especially people wearing kurtas, our traditional clothing, was beautiful. I had not thought I would need to bring one, but after attending the festival, I regretted leaving my kurta at home. I was impressed by how many people had thought to bring theirs.

WELCOMED: And what would you say to a Hindu frosh?

Eshan Inamdar: There is definitely an opportunity to join Hindu organizations, and you get out of them what you put into them. There are many tight-knit communities. In fact, the first friend group I found here was primarily Indian. The Hindu community is very close-knit, and it is easy to find people within it. There is also a wide range of faith commitments and levels of engagement.