

Indian market aims to raise cultural awareness

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STAUNTON — Joel Singh is proud of his heritage. An American by birth, Singh's roots are Indian. His great-grandparents grew up in India, one from Punjab, another from Gujrat and another from Madras. Singh, 19, who is studying Hindi, is a sophomore at James Madison University. He's also the owner of Singh's Market on West Beverley Street.

"I want to expose the people of the area to our culture," said Singh, who practices Hinduism. "Everywhere else they've been exposed to India. It's nice to see people being exposed to it here."

Singh's mother, Maggie Singh, who grew up in Guyana, is helping run the store. She, too, wants to teach others in the Valley about her heritage.

"It's a fun-loving culture. We take pride in our food, our religion and practically every aspect of our culture," she said. "We want to show the flavor of India in this store."

Singh's Market opened last week with buckets of fresh vegetables, rows of powdered curry and cumin and packages of myrrh, Nag Champra and frankincense. They also have Indian sweets, jewelry, music and perfumes.

They encourage everyone to come into their store and learn about their culture. The store carries religious items: cards representing their gods, water from the Ganges and silver prayer cups.

"We are renting Bollywood movies, too," Maggie Singh said. "And soon we'll have Indian clothes. We're trying to get the feel of what's more in demand."

Staunton resident Rachna Patel's parents immigrated to England from India, and then moved to the U.S. when she and her sister were grown. Patel loves her heritage and wants to pass it on to her two children. But in order to buy them clothes or cook them food from her parents' native land, she must travel to Charlottesville or Northern Virginia — until now.

"It's hard to find a lot of spices and beans," said Patel. "It would be really convenient to have a store downtown."

Patel, who spent summers in India while growing up, enjoys many of the festivities, as well as the garments that she wears to the celebrations. She takes her young children, dressed in their Indian finest, to festivals in Charlottesville. But she must buy the clothes elsewhere.

"There is a large Indian population here," Maggie Singh said. "We're hoping to expand and grow with the community."

As the store grows, Joel Singh hopes to grow in knowledge. This spring, while on an internship, he will walk the path of his great-grandparents, speak their language and drink from the River Ganges. He will soak in the smells of fresh ginger and garlic, roam through the streets of Punjab and relish the orange, turquoise and shocking pink saris that many women wear.

"He's finally going to fulfill my dream," Maggie Singh said. "My grandparents were taken (to British Guiana) as slaves by the British. They were taken onto the boat under false pretense."

Her son will now visit the land that she has not seen — the land of their ancestors. The younger Singh plans to bring back to Staunton a renewed appreciation for his heritage.

"I've always wanted to go just to see my roots," he said. "I want to see where my great-grandparents came from."



Photos by Mike Tripp/The News Leader

Joel Singh of Singh's Market sprays down produce Feb. 5 while working at the downtown Staunton business at 132 W. Beverley St.

If You Go

Singh's Market is located at 132 W. Beverley St. and is closed Tuesdays. Call 245-0231 for hours.

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