

Cultural globalisation: From India to US

By Swati Desai

Santa Monica is a city nestled along the beaches of Los Angeles area. It boasts of its beautiful blue Pacific Ocean, warm sunny weather, and a good mixture of wealth and tolerance for poverty. This is the place with palm tree lined crisp and long ocean front park in which you find trendy health conscious yuppies jogging, homeless people taking naps, and the spiritually-minded doing meditation on the grass. Santa Monica houses, on one hand, gorgeous hilltop homes, tall business buildings, and on the other hand, low cost substance abuse recovery centres funded by grants. The people in Santa Monica are known for their radical, new age, and individualist life styles that include political and cultural activism.

Why is Santa Monica relevant in our discussion of cultural globalisation? Santa Monica in particular, and Los Angeles in general, are known to originate trends in liberal political and social activism that travel to other more internal parts of the US. Examples of such trends are health consciousness, vegetarianism, and creating institutions caring for the have-nots. Description of a walk in the surroundings of Santa Monica can give a glimpse into how the cultural globalisation from India is reaching the US beyond the outsourcing and the technical success.

Start from the oceanfront palisades park to enter the street parallel to the beach called the Ocean Avenue. The walk along the avenue can lead you to shops full of Indian artifacts, the wooden carved elephants, beautiful old doors, embroidered fabric

and elegant antiques. You may want to take a turn to go to the promenade where you would find plenty of shops full of books about Indian mythology, gods, Vedanta philosophy, objects such as incense, aroma therapy oils, artificial jewelry, and god statues. Deepak Chopra's face will be smiling at you when you go to the best seller section of a book store. You will encounter plenty of people wearing T-shirts adorned with Sanskrit writings such as OM or a sentence

yoga teachers advertising their own Pranayama techniques. You will be amused to see a yoga centre around every corner and shops selling yoga mats and yoga clothes. You may even be a little disgusted to find a flier on your car for cash flow yoga for generating more material success in your life!

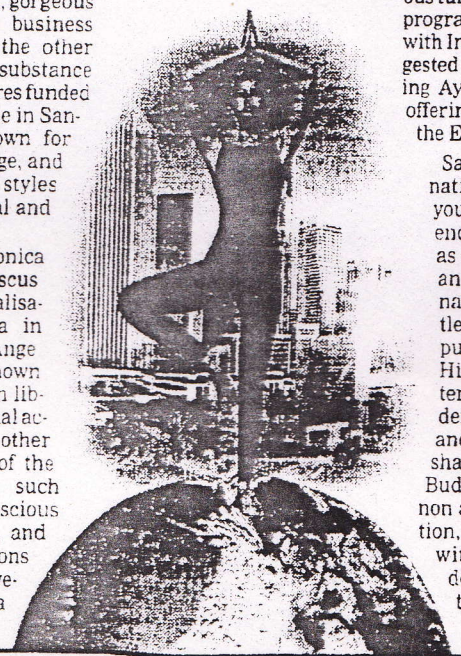
In the car if you switch on to the local Santa Monica radio station, you will hear world music with Vedic chants, Indian percussions, and melodious tunes. You may hear a food programme in which recipes with Indian spices may be suggested. Speciality shops selling Ayurveda medicines and offering health care tips from the East are plenty.

Santa Monica is an international place. As a result, you will find similar influences from other cultures as well, however the Indian philosophical and culinary influence is not subtle any more, neither is it purview of a cult like Hippie lifestyle. It has entered the mainstream. The definition of happiness and peace of mind is reshaped by the Hindu and Buddhist philosophies of non attachment, meditation, yoga, and oneness with the universe. Evidence is being found, in the brain-imaging studies as well, of effect of such lifestyles on health

and on evenness of mind.

Next time you visit the US, do not be surprised to hear people explaining their predicament as coming from their karma and that they got rid of the sinus trouble by using Pranayama breathing.

(The author, a psychotherapist in private practice in Los Angeles and a mental health consultant to South Asian agencies, is on a visit to ISB, Hyderabad)



Imaging: Saji Divakaran

from the *Geeta*.

If you go to a grocery store, you will be surprised to find not only Darjeeling tea but sesame chikkie and coconut ice cream. You will be equally surprised to see glossy magazines full of Advaita discourse, discussion on happiness and non attachment, Buddhist meditation techniques, advertisements for serious classes on *Bhagvatgeeta* or *Ashtavakra Samhita*, and