



Remarkable Journey Discussion Guide (Segments by Topic/Theme and Corresponding Discussion Questions)

The *Remarkable Journey* documentary is available for free K-12 use at <https://vimeo.com/237623028>;
password: **remarkable**

Cultural Differences | 0:00 – 3:25

- What cultural differences are noted between North Carolina and India in this segment? Given these differences, what do you imagine it would have been like for these Asian Indians to take such a “leap of faith” on immigrating to North Carolina?
- What mistake did Christopher Columbus make?
- Steve Rao notes, “The story of my father – the story of other immigrants – is the American story.” What do you think he means?

3:25 – 7:17 History of Influence from India

- What are the various ways India has impacted the West throughout history, even very early on? “For thousands of years, spices, gold, and precious stones, spiritual and political wisdom, stories and fables, science, medicine, and mathematics, traveled westward from the ancient civilization of the Indus Valley.”
- What is **Sanskrit** and why was it so important to the rest of the world?
 - Discuss with students how modern European languages actually have their roots in Sanskrit, which is one of the oldest written languages on Earth. “...through translations of Sanskrit, Tamil, and other Indian writings, Western scholars discovered that India's influence - in Asia and beyond to the west - had been widespread, and spanned millennia.”
- Why did many generations of artists, intellectuals, scientists, and civic leaders visit India? What are some examples of the ways such visitors were influenced by India’s music, art, spiritualism & philosophies? (i.e., Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was greatly influenced by **Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent resistance** to injustice.)
- Who was Mahatma Gandhi and what influence did he have throughout the world?
- Why do we sometimes fail to realize (or give credit to) the numerous ways this country has actually been influenced (for the better) by India?
- The film opened with a passage from Mark Twain’s 1897 *Following the Equator*: “India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition.” What message is Mark Twain conveying, and how does some of the information shared in this segment relate to this passage?
- What types of people were emigrating to America from India and why were they interested in coming to this country?

- “Indian immigration to the United States had begun early in the 20th century, but the 1960's saw a new wave of talented and ambitious Indians – many educated in medicine, technology, and the sciences, leaving behind severe unemployment at home, for the opportunity to pursue their careers elsewhere.”
- What risks were immigrants such as Fasih, Pravin and Arvind, as well as their entire families, taking by coming to the United States? (i.e., Arvind’s father mortgaged the family’s house) Why do you think they were willing to take such large gambles on the promise of America?
- What was the **Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965** and how did it “open the doors” for Asian India migration?
- What types of skills did Indian professionals offer that were needed throughout North Carolina? (i.e., engineers, scientists, doctors & medical research, textile engineers, etc.)

Cultural Challenges | 7:18 – 11:35

- Naiter Chopra arrived in the US in the 1970s, when the effects of Jim Crow were still evident throughout North Carolina and many schools were still segregated. In what way does he, and other Asian Indian educators, make a positive impact on North Carolina education during this time?
- Does it surprise you to hear that Johnston County, NC had a billboard that said “The KKK Welcomes You to Johnston County?” How do you think this sign impacted the community (black, white and immigrants, including Asian Indians)?
 - The billboard promoting the KKK stood on U.S. 70 near Smithfield. It was constructed in 1967 and remained for all who drove by for 10 years, until it was dismantled in March 26, 1977.)
- In what ways does Tejpal Dhillon feel the impact of prejudice and racism?
- According to Usha (the teaching artist) and Santosh (the accountant), why were North Carolinians initially uncomfortable around Indians? Why do you think humans often times fear what looks or seems different to them?
 - Discuss some of the physical aspects of Indian culture that may be unfamiliar or misunderstood, such as the [bindi](#), [sari](#), and [turban](#).)
- Despite not always feeling welcomed, in what ways did Indian immigrants persevere and contribute to North Carolina?
 - Discuss former Governor Pat McCrory’s statement: “These immigrants came with talent that our country desperately needed. The way the future power plants were built in the Carolinas – the nuclear and fossil power plants - were mainly designed by the incredible engineering talent coming from India to Charlotte and the Carolinas.”
- Consider renowned chemist Mansukh Wani, who serves as just one example of the incredible contributions by immigrants to North Carolina and America. If he had allowed the unwelcoming attitudes many Indians encountered to force him to return to India, how would our country have suffered without him?
- In what ways and why does the perception of Asian Indians begin to change? What does Ajantha Subramanian mean when she says “this was not the old South – this was the **New South**”? Do you think this holds true today in regards to how immigrants are viewed? Explain.

Welcome and Acceptance | 11:36 – 13:01

- With textiles providing a common thread between India and North Carolina, what do Harshad, Jay, and Mrs. Rao experience from North Carolinians?
 - To further explore Indian textiles, go to www.malkha.in.
- Mrs. Rao commented, “These are the folks who took me [into] their arms, they took me [into] their homes... they are my folks. Even I dressed different, even I talked different, but they never made me like I am a different person.” How does hearing this make you feel?
- How does this level of acceptance fit into your concept of America and the American Dream?

America’s Opportunity | 13:02 – 15:00

- Dr. Man Mohan Sawhney discusses how it was a “magical experience” to move from a **caste-oriented society** in India to a **class-oriented society** in the United States. What is the difference of these two forms of societies? What did America offer that India did not, and why do you think he characterized this as “magical?” (Discuss how in India it had not been easy to change careers. America offered a new kind of freedom and opportunity.)
- How do you think Subhash Gumber and his wife Kawaljit Pasricha feel about America and why? Why do you think they become emotional when discussing their immigration to the US?
- Subhash and Kawaljit are living examples of what it looks like to follow your dreams. He stated, “And here, you can change all your life and change is good, change is considered good.” Is following your dreams always easy? Explain. What might you be risking in doing so?
- Consider the quote by Jawaharial Nehru (the first Prime Minister of India and a central figure in Indian politics before and after independence), “Life is like a game of cards. The hand you are dealt is determinism; the way you play it is free will.” What message is he trying to convey? How does this message apply to many of the Asian Indian immigrants you’ve met in Remarkable Journey?

History of India & How it Propelled Immigration | 15:02 – 16:33

“The founding generation of NC’s Indian community had arrived from one of the world’s most ancient civilizations. Just as North America attracted British attention in the 17th century, so had India’s vast riches; and she became the “**Jewel in the Crown**,” Britain’s wealthiest colony. Three centuries of **colonization** provided an infrastructure that connected her many states. English became the official language of communication, eventually equipping educated Indians to be competitive in the international job market. But Britain had also exploited India’s resources and people, leaving much of the population in dire poverty. Powered by **Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence**, India finally achieved independence in 1947. It was also a difficult moment in her history, as new tension between **Muslim** and **Hindu** communities, fanned by the British, led to partition and the creation of **Islamic Pakistan**.”

- Why do you think Indian was nicknamed the “Jewel in the Crown?”
- What impact did colonization have on India?
- How did India’s 1947 achievement of independence impact daily life and work?
- Why did this propel many people to choose to start businesses in the US?

Investing in Self & Family through the Hospitality Industry | 16:33 -18:36

- What contributions have Indians made to the service and hospitality industry? In what ways did the hotel industry provide a sensible business option for Indian immigrants?
- What does the phrase “**attiti devo pava**” mean (“your guest is God incarnate”) and how might this philosophy result in successful hospitality businesses?
- Vinay noted, “...if you’re able to find an investment where you can get everybody involved, in the hopes of getting everybody successful, you go for it. And that’s what hotels ended up being - and continue to be for this community.” Do you think this philosophy of investment is the same as a typical American philosophy of investment? Why or why not?

Creating Community in North Carolina Despite Great Diversity in India | 18:37 – 20:40

- Although Indians, as the narrator states, “came from the world's largest and most diverse democracy – a land of 29 states, each with their own unique languages, traditions, and religions,” what leads them to form a strong knit community of support and trust in North Carolina? How do the humorous anecdotes that Parul Shah and Garry Gobind Bhojwani share illustrate this?
 - “Although they came from the world's largest and most diverse democracy – a land of 29 states, each with their own unique languages, traditions, and religions -here in NC, these newcomers, fellow strangers in a strange land, relied on their shared roots to build their new communities.”
- Moni Sawhney notes, “The fathers of the Indian freedom movement, Gandhi, and Nehru, and Patel...the theme was that ‘we’re all Indians.’ I think without our knowing, we began to come closer to the dreams of the founding fathers of India. We did become ‘Indians.’” Why do you think this is the case?

The Four Major Faiths of India | 20:41 – 24:19

The wisdom and teachings of ancient India’s **Sages**, or **Rishis**, handed down through oral tradition, inspired and laid the foundations for early Indian civilization. Considered sacred revelations, these were called ‘**the Vedas**’- and contained knowledge of the sciences, healing practices, hymns, arts, stories, and the basic tenets of a **Hindu** philosophy of life. **Jainism**, guided by **Mahavira**, emphasizes total nonviolence, expressed in the word “**Ahimsa**.” **Mahatma Gandhi** was deeply influenced by Jain philosophy. **Prince Siddhartha Gautama** was a Hindu who became the **Buddha**, 2,500 years ago. He taught the way to “right” understanding in life, and the practices to help end suffering through detachment, compassion, and non-judgment. And **Sikhism** was founded by **Guru Nanak** in India in the 1500s. Many Sikh men maintain a strong visual identity as part of their faith practice (i.e., the **turban**.) Their sacred text includes teachings from many spiritual traditions of the world.

- While to Pall and Sawtanter Sandhu “the most beautiful angle about India is its diversity,” what is the “common thread” that weaves the entire population together?
What are the four major faiths of India and what do you know about each? (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, & Sikhism)
- Usha says that “**Hinduism** to us is **Sanatana Dharma**.” What does this mean?
 - “Basically it’s a nature religion where we are looking at peace and harmony, both within ourselves and also with the environment around us.” Go to <http://veda.wikidot.com/sanatana-dharma> for additional information.

- What does Moni mean in saying that Hinduism is not just a religion, but a lifestyle? What are some of the aspects of Hinduism mentioned in this clip? (“...the many images are symbols through which Hindus experience the concept of a unifying, universal spirit: **Brahman**. That one-ness is represented by the **bindi**, from the **Sanskrit** word “bindu” – a symbol that is seen as the source of all creation.”)
- Usha notes that “The ancient sages said ‘All paths to God are valid – and therefore all religions have to be honored. **Vasudhaiva kutumbakm**’...they looked at the ‘**whole world as one family**.’” What is your opinion of this concept, from the Sanskrit? Do you think this is a common world view, the “whole world as one family?” Explain.

Other Religions Welcomed in India | 24:20 – 25:19

- In addition to the four major faiths practiced in India, what religions from outside the Indian subcontinent are practiced there? (**Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam**)
- In this clip a quote from the [RigVeda](#) was shared: May all noble thoughts come from all corners of the Universe.” How is this concept illustrated in India’s diversity of religion?
- What examples do we see of not only a diversity of religion, but a tolerance of such diversity? Is this common in other parts of the world, even in America? Explain.
- Were you surprised to hear that India has the second largest Muslim population in the world? How does this change your conception of Islam?
- Afroz Taj says that “India is a garden of all kind of flowers, and they know how to live with each other.” What does he mean by this?

Indians Maintain Their Religious Practices & Build Faith Communities in North Carolina | 25:20 – 29:50

- Although Indians often came together in temples to practice their varied religions, why do you think they also “yearned to replant their own [specific] faith traditions?”
- What challenges did Indian immigrants face in maintaining their diverse faiths in a predominantly Christian North Carolina? Why do you think people from different religions sometimes negatively judge those who practice other religions, even though the root of what they believe in (faith, love, family, etc.) can be similar?
- What is a [Gurudwara](#) and where was the first one built in North Carolina? What does Herjit’s family’s willingness to travel 100 miles to worship there tell you about the importance of religion and community in their **Sikh** faith?
- Why is having a [mosque](#) so important to Muslims?
- How do you think practitioners of Hindu felt when a [Hindu temple](#) was opened in 2009 in Cary, NC?
- According to Ajantha, why are the various religious spaces of Indian faiths – such as [temples](#), [mosques](#) and **Gurudwaras**, as well as Indian Orthodox and Catholic churches – an important aspect of the Asian Indian experience in North Carolina?
- Marisa Dsouza stated, “We incorporate our food, we incorporate the way we dress, and we incorporate some of the Indian festivals. We have a [Keralite](#) friend and we celebrate [Onam](#) with rosary and after the rosary all the non-Christian friends came to join in the celebration.” How does this one comment illustrate the great respect, tolerance and acceptance of all faiths and practices that Indians encompass? Similarly,

Remarkable Journey: Founding the Asian Indian Community in North Carolina

A Documentary & Education Film Project by [Video Dialog, Inc.](#) | Curricular materials by [Carolina K-12](#) at UNC-Chapel Hill

how does Parul's grandmother respond when he asks her why she has [Mahavir Bhagwan](#), some Hindu idols, and a small picture of Jesus?

Festivals | 29:51 – 30:57

- What role do festivals play in the Indian culture?
- What are some of the festivals mentioned? ([Diwali](#), [Navratri](#) – where they do [garba](#), traditional dancing) Based on the images you saw and what you heard, what do you think it would be like to attend one of these festivals?

Spiritual & Healing Practices - Yoga, Chanting, Meditation, & Ayurveda | 30:58 – 35:10

Indian self-healing knowledge also came from the [Vedas](#), further developed over thousands of years, and carefully transmitted by teachers to students through a meticulous code of memorization. Indian immigrants understood the need to bring this profound knowledge and health practice to their lives here. **Chanting** is a form of **meditation** created through sound vibrations that help to still the mind. Om is chanted in all four Indian faiths. "[Ayurveda](#)" - the ancient system of Indian medicine - means "the science of life". Today many of these time-tested healing practices, as well as healthful spices and herbs, are being adopted in mainstream Western medicine.

- In this clip we meet Swami, who established an [Ashram](#) in Yanceyville. How does he describe Yog ([yoga](#))? Why does he feel that the real practice of yoga has been lost?
- Why do many Indians practice **vegetarianism**?
- What type of philosophy and traditions surround Indian medicine and how do these compare to America's traditional view and practice around medicine and health?

Art | 35:11 – 37:25

- This segment starts with a Rudyard Kipling quote: "If history were taught, in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten." What message is he conveying? Do you agree and why or why not?
- What role does storytelling play in Indian culture? Do you feel a similar culture exists in America? Why or why not? (Many Western fables and stories actually share roots in ancient Indian stories.)
- In what various creative ways is the culture and spiritual/self-healing practices of India transmitted? (i.e., through music, and dance, puppetry, and painting)
- What message is Asha Agarwal conveying when she notes: "This is my way of telling my kids... and I have written on this the different tenets from our [Gita](#)....And it says whatever happened was good, whatever is happening is good, whatever will happen will also be good...This is something I want the kids to get ingrained in them...we're trying to keep them grounded and give them the same values that we got from our parents and our great-grandparents."
- What lesson does Sampada say can be gleaned from the Indian art form of [Rangoli](#)?
 - "My art has always given me a lot of peace, a lot of joy. And when I recreate that kind of art, that the tribals used to do, it somehow connects me to the roots of India. The one thing which strikes me as very original about Indian art, especially in the everyday, especially the [Rangoli](#), is that it is

a very temporary endeavor. It is here, gone tomorrow. And I think it conveys a very important aspect of life, which is 'nothing is for keeps' and 'you have to let go.' And the easiest way to learn that is by creating these beautiful designs that last only a day."

Music and Dance | 37:27-41:14

- Based on what you saw and heard, how would you describe traditional Indian music and dance?
- How do Indians view music and singing? (i.e., Sajjan says, "Singing the hymn, that's called [kirtan](#). Singing and music is the voice of God.") In what ways have dance and music been central to Indian life? (i.e., Palghat notes, "The music is so integrally connected with the culture, and the spiritual aspect of it, the language aspect of it. It was not a choice. The music was all the time there for us to listen to.")
- Is this true for the culture you identify with as well? Explain.
- From what aspect of life did Indian classical music arise? (As in the growth of Western music, Indian classical music arose out of faith practice.)
- Why do you think Indian immigrants prioritize maintaining a connection to traditional song and dance?

Food | 41:15 – 43:06

- Have you ever traveled outside of the country, or been in a situation where you only had foods that were unfamiliar to you to choose from? What was this experience like for you? What do you imagine it is like to immigrate to a new country and not have access to all of the foods you have grown up with? (Discuss with students how we often overlook aspects such as this when considering the challenges and "culture shock" that immigrants face.)
- Have you ever had Indian food? How does it compare to traditional American Southern food?
- While the flavors might be different in many ways, what cultural similarities does Vimala (the owner of a [Chapel Hill café](#)) point out? Why is food so important to her? ("There are certain things that define the south that are now defining our restaurant: come as you are and be treated with hospitality and love and openness and open arms. I feel like everything I make is a memoir on a plate...and I just think if I cannot be in India, the memories will keep me alive, and this food is an expression of everything that I am.")

Indian Impact on Business & Government in North Carolina | 43:07 – 46:21

- The narrator notes that "Transplanted from India, these newcomers brought their memories, culture, and enterprise to the fertile soil of North Carolina." What examples of this have been provided throughout this film and in this segment?
- What specific industries in North Carolina have Indians made a large impact in? How did they specifically help to grow our state's biotech industry?
 - Josh Stein notes that "About a quarter of all doctors in North Carolina are of Indian descent, which is really amazing. A third of all hotels are owned by Indians. They're in IT, they're in biotech, so they really have deep roots in our economy."
- How does Chandon Kumar characterize America? ("Here, chances are a lot higher, and America is the land of opportunity.") How would you describe his work ethic? ("I worked 16-18 hours a day – and I'm still

doing it, I love it. It was hard when I came in the beginning - I didn't know the language, I didn't know the culture. It took me a lot to be where I am.")

- Why do you think members of the Indian community developed an interest in running for government offices? (Discuss Subahash's comment, "...we needed to contribute, we needed to be part of the democracy...")
- What similarities does Steve Rao say are common between Indian Americans and Americans? ("...the core values that I have as an Indian American are American values: hard work, determination, persistence, being judged by the content of your character.")

The Indian Focus on Serving Others - "Dharma" | 46:22 - 51:20

- This segment begins with a quote from Gandhi: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." What does this mean? What examples are shared in this segment of Indians following this philosophy? (i.e., Priya Sunil Kishnani becoming a doctor, not for the money to but make society a better place; Jayant Baliga with a dream of creating a technology to help mankind rather than a dream of getting rich; Dr Jindal's *People's Medical Clinic*; Rakesh and Dolly Agarwal's eye clinics; etc.)
- What is Dharma and what are some of the various ways that Indians live by this belief?
 - For Indians, the commitment to family, providing for community, and sustaining a spiritual society is ongoing through their belief in "[Dharma](#)." Usha describes Dharma as "duty, duty to oneself, to take care of your inner self, and create the peace and harmony within, so that you can express that in the world. To do something in the greatest good of all is Dharma."
- What does Vandana's father always asking "Whom did you help today" tell you about the Indian culture? How does this compare to the typical American culture?
- Why did Priya want to become a doctor? Why did Jayant want to work in technology?
- In what ways does Gandhi's spirit of service continue to influence Indians and their contributions to communities across NC today?

"Culture from Both Sides" – Indian AND American | 51:22 – 56:27

- Usha describes the experience of immigration as a "hero's journey." What does she mean? What examples can you cite from throughout the film that exemplify this?
- Does it surprise you to hear Sonny say that his experience growing up as a kid wearing a turban in North Carolina was "pretty great?" Why or why not?
- What does Christeena mean by the phrase "a culture from both sides?"