



Not only is learning a second language good for your brain, it is also a great way to expand your communication skills. This is especially true for Indian Sign Language (ISL), which is one of the most commonly used languages as we have 18 million people in the [deaf] community. In today's world, the advantages of learning sign language are identical to those of learning a foreign language. Bilingualism—whether it is spoken or signed—is beneficial to the brain as it improves cognition and reasoning as well as memory, focus, creativity, etc.

GEETA BHATIA SHARMA (31), freelance Indian Sign Language Interpreter and social entrepreneur



My parents are deaf and so am I, and we use sign language to communicate with each other. It is so important for hearing people to learn sign language as it has many benefits... You might have a deaf brother, sister, even

parents who are deaf. In the future, you might have a deaf child or you may have hearing loss due to old-age or an accident. In such a scenario, you can use sign language to communicate.

SHALINI (22), student at the Indian Sign Language Research And Training Centre



I am a hearing adult but my brother-in-law is deaf. In order to communicate easily with him, it was important for me to learn sign language. In fact, I can also step in as an interpreter whenever required so that he feels like he is a part of the family and feels included. Sign language learning is important because it creates a conducive environment to promote inclusivity.

ABHISHEK TYAGI (27), student at the Indian Sign Language Research And Training Centre



EXPRESS ILLUSTRATION

Sign up to bring change

On International Day of Sign Languages, members of and allies to the deaf community emphasise why it is crucial to learn sign language

SIMI KURIAKOSE

At a time when the world experienced a surge in COVID-19, amid a slew of news articles were a few that highlighted how the pandemic inordinately affected persons with disabilities. During the pandemic, when important information—including additions and changes in COVID guidelines—were relayed effectively and with ease to non-disabled communities, deaf people remained at a disadvantage due to lack of sign language interpreters at press events and even on media channels. On International Day of Sign Languages, we speak to deaf individuals, children and parents of deaf people, and sign language interpreters on why it is crucial for persons without disabilities to know and learn sign language. This can build a more inclusive society and bridge the communication gap between deaf people and non-disabled individuals.



I am a CODA (child of deaf adults) and I have been using sign language to communicate with my parents from when I was a child. According to me, sign language is extremely important for every individual to learn so that there is no communication gap between us and people from the deaf community, and we can both understand and make the other comprehend what we are thinking or want to express.

MONIKA SINGH (23), student at the Indian Sign Language Research And Training Centre



With the pandemic, deaf signers have expressed frustration with regards to communication challenges be it with local shopkeepers, doctors, etc. Due to mandated mask-wearing, it has become difficult for the deaf community to become more inclusive with non-signers. What would make a difference is if non-signers take the initiative to learn ISL; it will cause a ripple effect on creating an inclusive community. Just showing a bit more effort to learn the signs from a native deaf signer would create a bigger impact than you can even think of.

DR. ALIM CHANDANI (44), consultant for Hear A Million Project, an initiative by Enable India



Earlier, when my son [who is deaf] would try and talk to me, I would not be able to understand what he would try to communicate with me. Now that I am learning sign language, I find it extremely easy to convey my thoughts to him and can even understand what he is trying to express. Communication with him has only become better because of me knowing sign language.

ANITA (31), student at the Indian Sign Language Research And Training Centre



Before human beings learnt language, we were already communicating through natural gestures. So, sign language is innate to us. As hearing people, we don't focus on the person or message. But sign language is unique, it makes us think differently. Also, since sign language is a visual language, I feel it is more inclusive. As a hearing community, we can learn things like eye contact, understanding body language, and emotions from the deaf community and through sign language.

SAURAV ROY (33), Sign Language Interpreter, Association of Sign Language Interpreters

GAGA OVER GARBA

After a hiatus of two years, the Gujarati community in the city is all geared up to celebrate Navratri with raas-garba

ANJANI CHADHA

"I felt very empty," comments East Delhi-resident Shweta Mehta (23), as she recalls the Navratri celebrations in the city last year. Until two years ago, Mehta, her family and friends would congregate to enjoy non-stop rounds of Garba and Dandiya—Gujarati folk dances. However, the pandemic changed the pace of celebrations. "My family would play devotional songs on YouTube and sit together, but there was absolutely nothing else," she adds, as she talks about how she missed dressing up, meeting friends, and dancing.

Observed in the honour of Goddess Durga, Navratri—it is one of the most revered Hindu festivals—is celebrated differently by different communities. Despite varied rituals, the spirit of merrymaking remains common. While the pandemic-induced lockdown limited the festivities to our homes, this year, festivities are expected to be grand. Delhiites across communities are planning to take the celebrations a notch higher, and the Gujarati community is no different, as they intend to make the most of the upcoming occasion.

A joyous celebration

"For Gujaratis, Navratri is all about Garba," laughs Anjali Vora, a resident of Karol Bagh who also serves as the vice president of Gujrati Club New Delhi. Being a keen participant in Garba since childhood, Vora believes that every aspect of the festival revolves around the tradition and culture of dancing together. "You dress up in outfits such as *chaniya choli* to participate in Garba. By the time you are done—it is late in the night—you are very hungry, hence the food stalls and the snacks," she explains. Last year, Vora and her friends could only conduct a Zoom meet-up on Navratri. While they organised a dance competition virtually, the spirit was nowhere



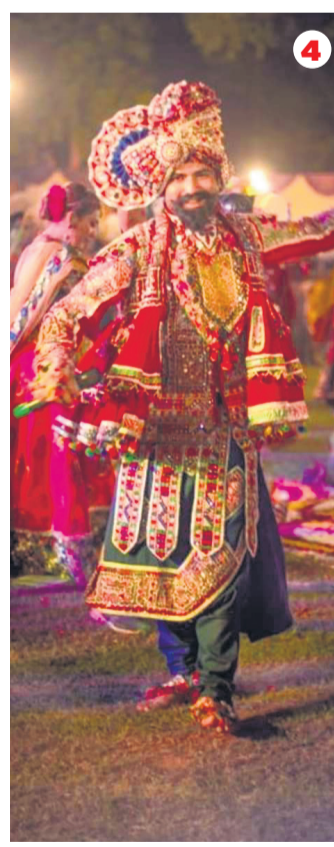
near to what they witnessed and experienced at the *pandals*. This year, Vora is looking forward to the festivities. In fact, the Gujrati Club will be organising their annual Navratri event in Sardar Patel Vidyalaya, Lodhi Estate. Similar events are slated to take place in various parts of the city such as Gujarati Samaj, Civil Lines; Gujarat Apartments, Pitampura, Gujarat Vihar in East Delhi, etc.

A common spirit of festivity

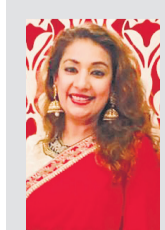
Garba is not just a big deal for the Gujarati community but also for non-Gujaratis in the city who head to the *pandals* to partake in the dance. "I have been going for Garba since 2015," shares Shubhi Garg (23), a Pitampura resident who usually heads to the annual Navratri event organised by Gujarat Apartments. "It is very lively and it is great to experience a new culture. After all these years, I have become an expert at Garba myself (laughs)," adds Garg. This excitement is also visible in the



(1, 2, 3 & 4) Photographs from various performances conducted by 'Garba in the City', a city-based venture that has Garba classes before Navratri; (5) a Garba event organised by Gujrati Club New Delhi



increasing number of enrollments that Greater Kailash-based dancer Richa Gupta has got this year for the month-long Garba workshop that she annually conducts through her organisation 'Garba In The City'. "Among the ones who have joined the classes this year, at least 90 per cent are non-Gujaratis. It is easy to get enrollments for something like Bollywood classes but not for a folk dance, so I am really surprised to see the response," concludes Gupta who would also be hosting an open-for-all Garba performance in Central Delhi next week.



A team from Ahmedabad joins us in Delhi to train people in Garba. The month-long workshop is an event wherein all the students participate—it is like a mini-Gujarat in Delhi.

RICHA GUPTA, founder, Garba In The City



In Delhi, there are different communities in various areas that organise Garba and Dandiya events during Navratri. There are proper Gujarati snacks, food, decorations present at the venue.

SHWETA MEHTA, student



The concept of teaching Garba started about 15 years ago in Delhi. The idea was to keep the art form alive. The classes attract non-Gujaratis as well who enjoy being a part of the celebrations.

ANJALI VORA, vice president, Gujrati Club New Delhi

'I WAS SINGING IN A BAND WHERE KK WAS ON DRUMS'

Film score composer Julius Packiam talks about his musical upbringing, the process of creating background music and his friendship with director Kabir Khan

KARTIK BHARDWAJ

THERE were always songs wafting at Julius Packiam's house. The film score composer who gave the background music (BGM) for *Ek Tha Tiger*, *Tiger Zinda Hai*, *Baaghi*, *Baaghi 2*, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, *Sultan*, *Bharat*, *83*, and the recent Akshay Kumar-starrer *Cuttputli*, comes from a family of melophiles. "There were record players, cassette players, and radios all over the house. Different kinds of musical genres were continuously playing on all three devices. There was jazz, rock, Bollywood music, *ghazals*, etc.," he reminisces. "Like a person born in a library might develop an appetite for reading books, similarly—since I grew up around music—my ability to understand it enhanced," he adds.

After competitions and events at school, Julius was part of various rock bands in a college in Delhi. "It is ironic that in one of them, my senior Krishnakumar Kunmath (KK) was on the drums and I was the lead singer. He shifted to Mumbai before me but we interacted a lot later." Julius, however, later realised his talents will be best utilised in composing. "I sang in bands but mostly in English because my Hindi was not so great. When the pop music market in India started ex-



panding, most songs were in Hindi or Punjabi. Hence, I made a shift to composing from singing."

We ask him what goes behind composing background scores of films. "Months and months of work," he says. "Once the film is shot, the director provides us with a rough-edited version. The scenes mostly have some temporary background score, from predominantly Hollywood blockbusters. The director then asks us '*aisa kuch bana do*' (make something like this)"

But doesn't that influence the originality of a score? "It is a skill most BGM composers have, to get inspired by a melody and make your own," he replies.

The genre of a film determines how the mood of the music will be, states Julius. "Like in *Cuttputli*—a film about a serial killer—the music is more on the ominous side. It has to make the audience feel that they are being stalked by a murderer. They should be scared and on the edge of their seat throughout the film."

A lot of films Julius gave music to have been directed by Kabir Khan. The two shared the

same classes in college. "We immediately hit it off. After graduation, he went to Jamia Millia Islamia University for a course in Mass Communication. There, he had to make films for projects and I was his go-to BGM composer."

Julius feels that BGM composers are not getting enough representation. In India, when credits for music are given for a film, it is mostly for those who have composed the songs. BGM composers get named in the technical category. "In the West, it is different. There, a 'Music by' follows the name of the background music composer. The makers of the songs are credited separately along with their song names," explains Julius.

"In the 70s-80s, composers like RD Burman, Lakshmikant-Pyarelal, were composing the songs as well as the background score, so a common credit was fine. Later, when song composers got busy and background scorers came in, the work got separate and more defined. But we never bothered to change the nomenclature," he adds. "To ensure proper credit is given to BGM composers is my only grind. It is my hill to die

SHOWBIZ

Rasika Dugal is all set to headline upcoming dramedy 'Little Thomas'

Actor Rasika Dugal, who was recently seen in Netflix's *Delhi Crime 2*, is set to headline National Award-winning filmmaker Kaushal Oza's upcoming film, *Little Thomas*. This project will mark the second collaboration between Rasika and Kaushal after the short film, *The Miniaturist of Junagadh*. The film, which went on floors recently, will be shot in Mumbai and Goa. Talking about the project, Rasika said, "*Little Thomas* is a beautiful and lyrical story about a Goan family. I have known Kaushal since we were students at FTII. He has a quiet and unique style of storytelling, which I am naturally drawn to. Shooting times are always chaotic but I feel we are creating something special." Rasika's upcoming projects include *Mirzapur 3*, *Adhura*, *Spike*, *Lord Curzon Ki Haveli*, and *Fairy Folk*.

—Express Features

