

By Amanda Dass

Assistant Manager, Operations Department

Heritage is something very important to most of us – where we come from and who our ancestors are. I am Amanda Dass and I am happy to share with you about my very interracial family background for the Singapore Heritage Festival at ACM 2020.

I am very fortunate to have been born into the best of both worlds, as I like to call it, the worlds of the Indians and the Chinese. My father is of Indian heritage and my mum of Chinese. As a product of this interracial union, I am known to most locally as a Chindian. Growing up Chindian was really interesting, and it made me feel like a global citizen because I did not exactly look like one specific race. I for sure did not look Chinese but maybe a bit Indian. I was always asked if I was Malay or Eurasian due to my skin colour and features.



Amanda, at around age 1

Being Chindian gave me exposure to multiple languages and dialects. Having brown skin, most people assumed I could speak Malay. But I studied Chinese in school, and my mum's dialect is Hakka, hence growing up we learned that dialect as well. She was amazing with other dialects too, which benefitted me and my siblings. Sadly, my father did not speak much Tamil, as he studied Malay in school, so I ended up not learning or knowing the Tamil language. The one common language we spoke at home was English, which I guess is easiest for interracial households here in Singapore. The knowledge of languages we garnered through our growing up years has benefitted us in many ways.

Each year, it felt like my family and I celebrated all the different festivals here in Singapore. My family celebrates Chinese New Year with a reunion dinner and CNY visiting to my mum's side of the family; and Christmas (as both my parents are Catholics) with a party on Christmas Eve, where both sides of our family gather at our house and party till late (the only day I got to stay up till real late when I was younger!). I have very fond memories of all these celebrations, and till today these gatherings are still upkept!

Besides the two major festivals we celebrated at home, within the family we have relatives married to Muslims and Hindus, hence we get invited to their Hari Raya and Deepavali celebrations too! For us, it's really an all-year-round celebration, with feasting on the different kinds of cultural foods, and we absolutely love it! We're like one big rojak family!



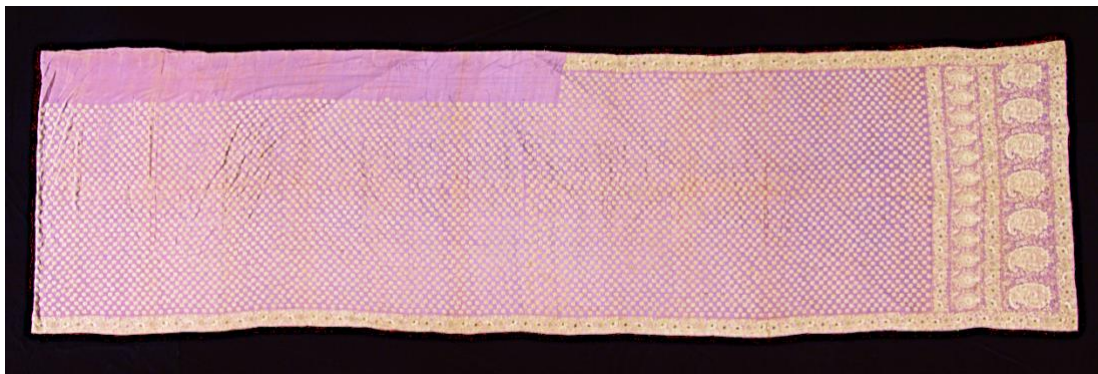
Family celebration

Food – We ate a variety of food growing up interracial, which I am thankful for. Dad being Indian had more of an Indian palate, hence Mum had to learn how to cook all the curries and sambals from my late grandmother. And yes, we all learnt how to eat with our hands from a young age, including my mum. We were also cooked Chinese food like soups and stir fries by mum occasionally. We ate mostly at home, and back then dining out was only made available for my family on Dad's payday, when we would have a nice meal of Zhi Char.

Being interracial, it was always funny when we dined out, as people would look at us, probably curious to see how we turned out being half Indian and Chinese, and perhaps what we ate as a family. Till today this still happens to me when I dine out with my entire family. I've told my siblings that when the whole family goes out now, especially with our partners and children, we look like a United Colours of Benetton ad!

I choose this *garo* (sari made from Chinese embroidered silk) because of the South Asian and East Asian connections, which reflect the union of my heritage. Also, growing up, my paternal grandmother had a nice collection of saris she wore wherever she went. It was her staple outfit. I was always fascinated by the textiles, prints, embroidery, and vibrant colours of the saris

she wore. How she would have a matching colour blouse to go with each sari. She had amassed quite a collection. I would always watch how she tied them with such ease from all the years of wearing them. These days you can get ready-made, beautiful saris and wear them easily.



Garó. China, late 19th or early 20th century. Embroidered silk. ACM, 2009-01458

The *garó* is a traditional Parsi sari usually decorated with Chinese embroidery. Parsi traders in Canton (now Guangzhou) admired these embroideries and brought them back to India. As China trade helped make the Parsis rich, the display of foreign goods became a symbol of status.