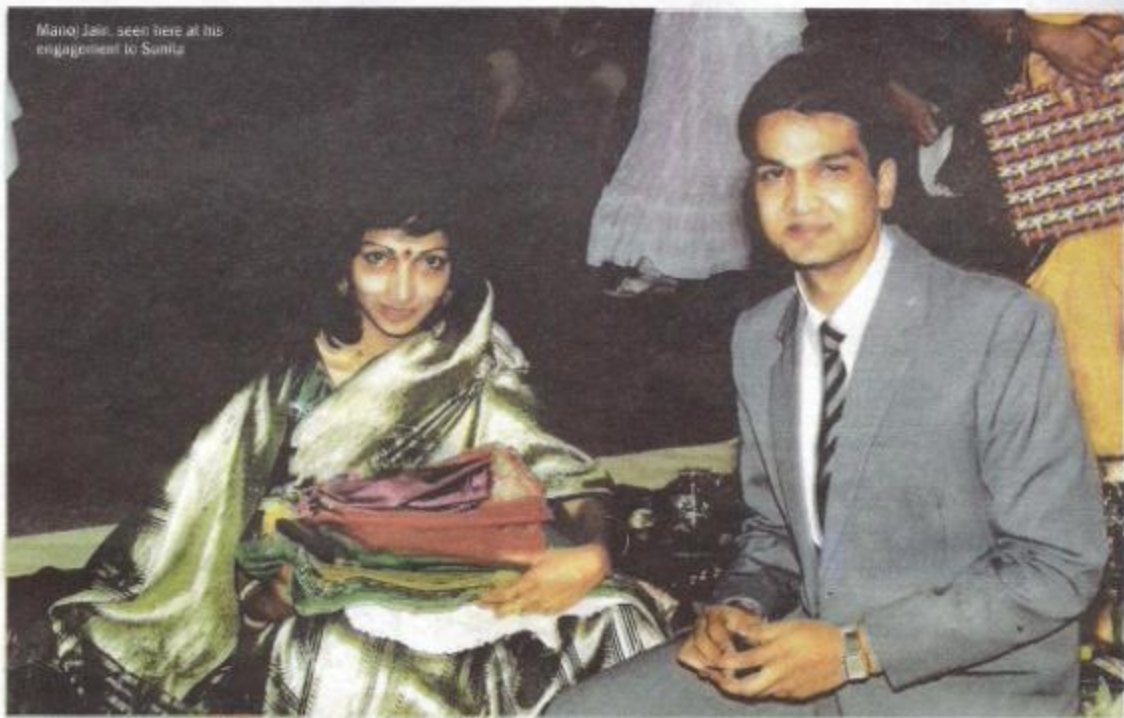




In America, there is a greater appreciation of self-reliance and critical thinking, Manoj Jain tells Arthur J Pais



Manoj Jain, seen here at his engagement to Sunita

Manoj Jain is an infectious disease physician, a writer, and a national leader in healthcare quality improvement. He writes regularly on medicine, spirituality and health care for *The Washington Post*, and the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis. His work has also appeared in *The New York Times*. He received his engineering, doctorate, and public health degrees from Boston University. He has served as a consultant to the World Bank on HIV, and has been interviewed by CNN International and National Public Radio for his views on his topics of expertise.

Dr Jain is assistant clinical professor at the University of Tennessee School of Medicine in Memphis, Tennessee. He is also on the faculty at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement and is on the leadership team for the Healthy Memphis Common Table Community Partners Council and for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grant. He is also the leader of an annual conference in Memphis devoted to the ideals and work of Mahatma Gandhi.

You have lived in America since the age of 10. How has the family journey been like for you in the last three decades — first as a son and then as a father?

My wife Sunita — who came to America when she was about 10 — and I have instilled in our children the value of an extended family. I lived with my grandparents in Indore when my father left India for Canada, and brought my

‘We chose from the heritage we inherited in India and the best of America’

in studies from their grandparents. The children also learn about Indian culture and values from them. My wife is also a physician, and, like me, she too makes time for community work.

I have been seeing in recent years an increase in the number of Americans who value joint family values. I have even seen people in the 50s who are taking care and living with their parent or parents, who could be in their 80s. I tell this to my children all the time. When I went to college in Boston, I could have lived on campus, but I preferred to be with my family.

What tools do you use to instill Indian culture in your children?

We discuss the Jain faith with them, and they are aware of the resources available to learn more about Jainism through organizations like JAINA [Jain Association of North America]. They also learn from books on Indian pe-

Gham. We use these films to discuss the various problems and challenges involved in maintaining family relationships.

For six years my family has been involved in the Annual Nonviolence Conference in Memphis. I founded this event at an institution started by Arun Gandhi, a grandson of the Mahatma. For many years, he ran the M K Gandhi Institute at Christian Brothers University. Over 400 people, including religious leaders, civil right and human right advocates, students and academics, attend the event.

A few years ago, Sapna presented a paper at the event. She went to schools to talk about Gandhi's ideas of nonviolence and service.

We also teach our children the importance of certain things in Indian cultures, for example greeting older people with the word *ji*, the meaning behind bowing the head, greeting people with folded hands, of touching the feet. We get students to do these things, and they also learn a lot from their



Above: Manoj Jain, right, with his brother a few months after arriving from India

Top right: Jain, second from left, with his family in Wellesley

Below: Clockwise from top left, Manoj Jain, father Vinay, grandfather Nandlal Soni, and son Rishab

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The most important thing all of us have learned from him is about simplifying life — reducing possessions and having a spiritual outlook. He goes for a walk every morning.... Still, at the age of 92. He has slowly reduced his possession and attachment to material goods. He has a spiritual outlook — a belief in the existence of a soul something beyond the body. He does not impose his beliefs on us as the oldest in the family — yet, over breakfast and dinner when we talk, he poses compelling arguments for us to improve our lives — through example.

What are some of the things you like in America?

We are able to pick and choose from the heritage we inherited in India and the best of America. In India, many of us do certain things because our parents do it. If they go to a temple, the children are expected to do so. We do not try to find out the meaning of rituals and religions. [In India] we are often afraid to ask questions, be it at home, in a classroom or at the work place.

In America, there is a greater appreciation of self-reliance and critical thinking. I have realized that one can do hundreds of things when a crisis appears, but it is that critical thinking that helps you through it.

Critical thinking is very important in our home. We discuss many things openly, say, vegetarianism to anything connected to the way of life. We tell the children that all our life we have been vegetarian, so have been our parents and grandparents. We tell them by being vegetarians we reduce violence in the world. We also tell them how the vegetarian diet is healthier.

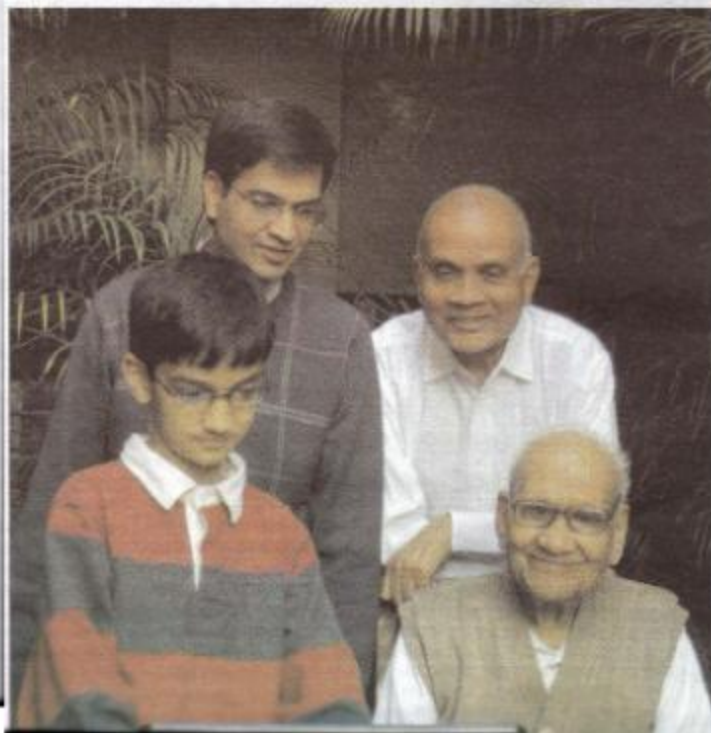
We encourage them to question us. Unless one has critical thinking attitudes, we do not see the big picture. For instance,

What are your thoughts about Indians parents in America?

I often come across parents who say, America has ruined our kids. But then when your kids were growing up, you let them slip. You did not ingrain cultural and moral values in them. Perhaps because you were too busy advancing your career and accumulating wealth. The most important wealth in your life ought to have been children.

Why did you pursue medicine?

I wanted to be a doctor who treats individuals and a doctor who treats populations (*an epidemiologist*) — a doctor who practices in a local area (as I do in Memphis) and a doctor who works to influence change across continents. Medicine is my life and mission.



I was in India for the past few days giving lectures on swine flu to doctors and health care workers. But I am a bit different from others who give similar lectures. (*Chuckles*). I make a quick introduction and involve others in a discussion. I find it the best way to disseminate information.

You believe prayers and spiritual practices benefit patients. How do you incorporate spiritual practices in your therapeutic recommendations, just as you recommend exercise and diet?

I believe that doing so requires understanding of a critical concept or two.

First, we need to distinguish between religion (an organized institution with social boundaries, rituals and membership) and spirituality (the sense of the sacred within us and our relationship with a greater force).

Spirituality may or may not be rooted in religion, but the core of all religions is spirituality. Once we can relate to the spiritual core of each patient, we do not have to agonize about finding the 'appropriate' prayer and 'politically correct' words for patients of different religions.

I think I could pray (using a generic prayer) or do a meditation exercise at a critical moment with my patient. If this is uncomfortable, or if there is not enough time, I could simply encourage the spiritual part of patients' lives.

This is what I did with my patient suffering from end-stage congestive heart failure. I touched his Bible and said, 'Many patients find this very helpful. I am glad you are using it.'

'Couldn't make it without it, Doc,' he replied with optimism.

Second, we doctors need to expand beyond medicine's traditional body-mind focus. Most of my patients see themselves as having a soul and a spirit, and if I, as a doctor and a scientist, wish to treat them in a holistic manner, I need to take this thinking into account.

I was reminded of this recently on morning rounds. I walked into a room, saying, 'Hello, Mr Jones.' My patient was sitting in a chair in the corner, head bowed, lips moving silently.

I realized that I had interrupted his prayer. I bowed my head to join him. He continued, 'Lord, I want to thank you for helping me heal and decreasing my pain . . . and now, Lord, I have to cut my prayers short this