



Volume 19
Issue 2
2025

Intake form

Tara Srinivas

Check one:

White

Black

American Indian

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Asian

Other

Per the American census, there are six options.
The boxes do not communicate
the intricacies, practices that accompany
the life implicit in checking them.

You enter, pills out, armed with cautious explanation.
I greet you, a soft nod and a smile.
How are you eating?
Eyes glued to the floor, toes shifting beneath thick cloth, imprisoned,
you place a glucose diary on the exam table before you
and take residence instead on the cold plastic chairs
lining the far reaches of the room.
The Western diet is uninviting, foreign, impossible.
I sit, tenderly—I am level with your eyeline.
The bright red *bindi* on your forehead is a welcomed familiarity.
With the deference known intimately to me and mine, I say to you:
“Thank you for your honesty.”
Hindi flows between us like nectar from the fruits
we could have shared in a different life.

I'm Asian—South Asian.
A mutt of three Indian regions, I grew up around quick-tongued
languages,
creamy curries and crispy banana-leaf dosas,
trips to the temple where aunties and uncles adorned themselves
with fabrics from the tailors
they once knew on their block.
My culture has sometimes been the subject of appropriative ad-
miration, passive denigration.
But Sundays in religious school stumbling through ancient texts,
the tales of the Ramayana,
ears ringing with the twelve-o'clock chime of the prayer bell,
bring me here.

A prick and blood oozes.
I take in quick whispers,
the warmth from your finger,
your brow is unfurrowed, your eyes kind,
your mouth gently upturned as though sharing with me
whisps of memory
from grandmother to granddaughter.

Check one:

Beyond the box,
an acknowledgement of the practices, culture, languages that
form the essence of our patients' lives—
can it mean the difference between treating and healing?

I practice in humble caution,
hands of a trainee,
yet experienced enough to witness
that the ultimate empath,
is not only she who knows others,
but she who knows herself.

About the Author

Tara Srinivas is a medical student at Johns Hopkins who enjoys exploring the in-
tersections of identity, culture, and healing through writing. Email: tsriniv4@jh.edu