

[My Turn: With a Little Patience and Understanding](#)

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My Turn: With a Little Patience and Understanding

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Indian culture has often puzzled me. It is uniquely diverse in that it comprises many different religions and communities. And yet, at the very heart of this eclecticism is a prejudice that is quite paradoxical. You find this prejudice everywhere-between Muslims and Hindus, brahmins and non-brahmins, North Indians and South Indians, Catholics and Protestants. The list is endless. Having lived in India for twenty-six years, I grew up with this prejudice. My family hails from a Syrian Christian community. Though my parents always encouraged my brother and me to have an open mind about other religions and cultures, they always made one thing clear. When it came to marriage, it had to be within the Syrian Christian community. I accepted that decree for 25 years of my life. I kept away from dating, from relationships, from any event that could lead to a marriage outside the community...till it suddenly happened. I fell in love with a Hindu-a classmate from school days. Could I help it? Sudhir swept me off my feet and before we knew it, we were both determined to marry each other. Easier said than done! I was to be the first one in the history of my family to marry a non-Christian. My mother was nonplussed in the beginning. But romantic that she is, it didn't take much to persuade her. My father agonized over the idea. He wondered about what the Syrian Christian community would say. But he was too loving

to stand in the way of his daughter's happiness and finally consented. Sudhir comes from an even more orthodox Hindu community. Convincing his parents was a much more difficult task, especially since they were already looking out for a bride from within the community. They tried to dissuade him, but loved him too much to stand in the way of his happiness. If there was another factor that facilitated our marriage, it was astrology! When our parents learned about our decision to marry each other, they rushed to their family astrologers. They were amazed when our horoscopes matched! With that, things fell into place. I still remember the details of the wedding-my parents giving me away to be married, kanya dhanam, Sudhir and me exchanging garlands, his asking my brother for my hand in marriage, his tying a thali around my neck, the two of us walking around the fire. Sudhir's father managed to find a priest to conduct the ceremony between a Hindu and a Christian. I enjoyed every minute of it, and I could see that our loved ones were also happy. They trusted in Sudhir and me, and in our love for each other. Today, more than a year after our marriage, Sudhir and I live our quiet lives in California. He accompanies me to church every now and then. And I accompany him to the temple. I read the Bible and try to learn more about Hindu mythology. He reads none of the religious books, but is open to my beliefs. Of course, now and then questions pop up, "What about our children? What religion will they follow?" These are questions that our parents posed to us before our marriage, and we cannot ignore them. But then, as Sudhir and I tell each other: time alone can determine what our children will be. As long as they are healthy, we should be happy. And as long as they are morally strong, they should do well in life. I don't think we should ask for more. Susan Verghese, 29, born in Kerala, has an MA in English from the U. of Wisconsin and a Certificate of Journalism from the UCLA-extension. She is a freelance writer.