

## INDIA New England

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A different kind of love: She's Hindu, he's Jewish

*... But each appreciates the other's strong views on religion*

By JULIE MASIS

BOSTON — Jason Jay, 30, who is Jewish and Italian, and Alaka Ray, 28, a Bengali Hindu, married two years ago in Calcutta. While Jay is working on a Ph.D. thesis at MIT on sustainable business practices, Ray recently graduated from medical school and is in residence at the Massachusetts General Hospital. Almost always finishing each other's sentences, they spoke with an INDIA New England reporter on a recent Sunday morning at a restaurant in Cambridge.



Jason Jay, an Italian Jew, smiles at his wife, Alaka Ray, a Bengali Hindu. Photo by JULIE MASIS

### How did you meet?

Jay: We met through a mutual friend at a party. A friend in college was having a party, that was five years ago.

Ray: And he had been to India before and I remember he was talking about India and I went to talk to him and I was impressed with how knowledgeable he was about India.

Jay: I grew up in Colorado in Boulder. My parents came from an interfaith marriage as well because my dad was Jewish and my mom was Christian, but they raised me as a Jew. I had a Bar Mitzvah. I started to learn more about eastern religion in college — that's why I wanted to go to India.

### Was it love at first sight?

Jay: Pretty close.

Ray: He said to me at the end of the evening, "Wouldn't it be funny if we got married tomorrow?"

Jay: It started because she was the most beautiful woman at the party. We sat down on this couch and talked for like four hours, and I had no idea of what was going on at the party.

Ray: I felt like I could talk to you forever. So cheesy. It's true.

### You were sober when you said that?

Jay: I was pretty sober when I came to the party, I spotted her immediately and I started looking for someone who knew her [who could introduce me]. We definitely didn't have time to do much drinking that night.

### Did your parents have concerns about you marrying someone from such a different background?

Ray: I think it was a concern for us, not just for our parents, that's probably why it took us two years to make a decision to get married. [We] wanted to get a sense of how we would fit into each other's families. But I think for our families, the most important thing was to first meet them -- to see that this person is respectful toward their culture, and loving toward their child. For my parents, meeting him is all it took.

### When did you introduce him to your parents?

Ray: It was probably a year and a half, because they came to Boston from Michigan. Once they had lunch with him, they kept wanting to spend the whole weekend with him. We're lucky, they really hit it off.

My parents are immigrants from India. I was born here, but I went back for most of my schooling until college — in Calcutta.

### **Why?**

Ray: My parents have always wanted to live in India. I was very close with my family, and I still consider Calcutta my home. I chose to come back here for undergrad and med school. To go to Harvard was a great opportunity.

### **Didn't your parents expect you to marry someone who is Indian?**

Ray: I knew they had that expectation. I always imagined marrying someone Bengali, but I don't think I had factored in — how do I describe it? To me, Jason has all the qualities I could want in a husband, except for the racial background. He has a very deep faith in God, a close relationship with his family, intellectual curiosity, he believes in higher education. And now he is almost fluent in Bengali — which is absurd! He worked on that from day one because he knew what's important to my family.

### **Did your parents expect you to have an arranged marriage?**

Ray: My parents married for love, so that was never the expectation. They married for love, they were not in the same caste. I think that's a testament to my family about being very open-minded.

### **How did you decide to get married in Calcutta?**

Jay: It was not negotiable. She always imagined a big wedding in India. We did two ceremonies. The big wedding was four days; we had 35 people come from Europe and America. There were 600 to 700 people involved. After we got back, we did a Jewish ceremony here for members of my family who could not come to India.

### **Which members of your family were able to come to India for the wedding?**

Jay: My parents came; one brother came; the other brother got sick and couldn't come. And a ton of friends.

### **Was it their first time in India?**

Ray: Almost all of them, it was their first time to India. They were so amazing though. Everyone wore Indian clothes and they participated in every ritual.

Jay: Recently, my parents went to Jordan and Egypt and they sent back postcards saying how much they miss India. It was like, "This is great, but not as good as India."

### **Have you decided how you're going to raise your children?**

Ray: It's important for me that they know how to behave appropriately and understand the significance [of each religion]. We're not choosing one or the other.

Jay: For both of us, religion and faith in God is really important. In some sense, the more the better.

Ray: I also think in the world right now, it's really important to have an understanding of more than one religion.

Jay: We had so much fun starting from the first conversation figuring out the similarities [between Hinduism and Judaism].

Ray: We break a clay pot with our feet [during the wedding ceremony]; in Judaism, they break a wine glass.

Jay: The thing is both Hinduism and Judaism are religions that grew out of nomadic tribes. For us, it just felt like God was smiling on us.

Ray: God's blessing.

**How did you decide to keep your last name, and not to take your husband's?**

Ray: I really wanted to keep my father's name; it's because I'm the only child. The second reason is that it rhymes. It's really funny. I don't mind being called Mrs. Jay, but I'm Dr. Ray. It's a professional name.