

The Ties That Bind  
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## Between Fathers and Sons



Joseph Anthony Foronda as Boo-Seng (far right), Erik Kaiko as Jimmy (center), and Dawen Wang as Isaac (far left) in Silk Road Rising's 2008 Midwest Premiere production of Julia Cho's *Durango*.

In Julia Cho's *Durango*, the Lee boys seemed to be the "perfect" Korean American sons. But when their widowed father took them on a road trip to Durango, Colorado, tempers flared and secrets broke open.

Join us as we revisit a production that brilliantly explored the complexities of intergenerational relationships involving an immigrant

father and his American-born sons. Check out the curated footage below.





Our latest offering of Polycultural Institute's soon-to-be-launched online publication, *The Polyculturalist*, features Shipra Parikh, a licensed clinical social worker and Assistant Instructional Professor at The University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration (SSA).

Stay tuned for expanded interview transcripts when *The Polyculturalist* officially debuts on Substack.

## **In Conversation with Shipra Parikh**

*This interview was conducted on September 16, 2022, by Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala, Polycultural Institute's Advisory Council Coordinator.*

**Tasneem: How do polyculturalism and social work align?**

**Shipra:** Polyculturalism is a viewpoint that is about fluidity and helping intersect layers onto each other rather than dichotomous viewpoints that are often created from the outside. Social work, for me, is that, too.



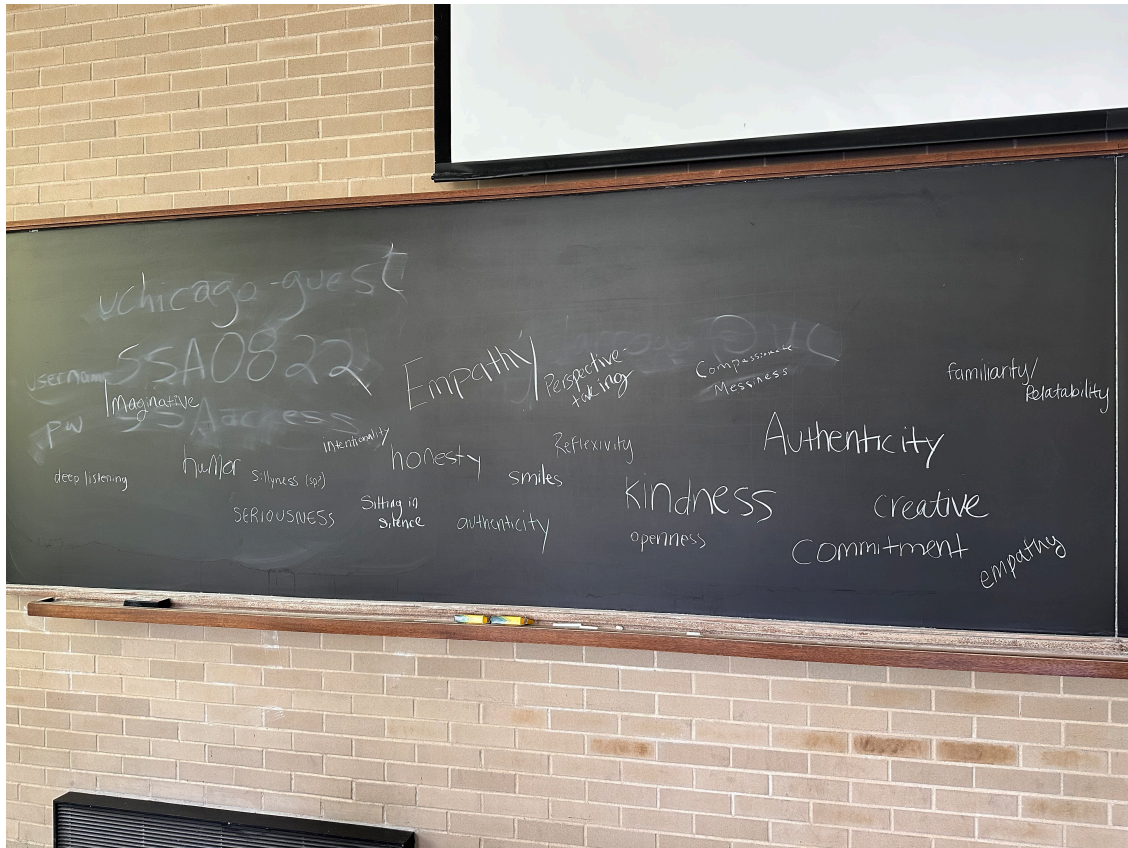
There's lots of ways in which social work has been defined, but I think more radical or community-based definitions tend to say it's not so much one specific thing. It's not therapy. It's not one definition or one outlook, but it's these layers of, "What does support need to look like for people? What are community resources that can be accessed more fluidly?" So, when I think of both, I think of the need to be creative and fluid, and inclusive.



**Tasneem:** In your experience, how can cultural interchange strengthen pedagogy and enhance classroom learning?

**Shipra:** Again, pedagogy feels very top-down. There are people who think about the content driving their pedagogy: What is it that you are teaching, and how does it need to be taught? And I think that can be true, but I also think about what is it you're teaching, and to whom? What environment are you doing the teaching in? All of those things together feel like the same tenets of cultural interchange: contextualizing everything, appreciating who is in the room, and being aware of how it is that they're going to receive this information. It's not so much me going through a set of slides in a static way, over and over again, but more so that I have this content that I am comfortable with, except every time I teach it to a different group of people, we

approach it differently. Different things sit with them. Different questions arise. And it keeps changing. Teaching the same or similar content during different presidencies, during different times of the year people receive it differently.



A classroom community building exercise, Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, at The University of Chicago.

**Tasneem:** Organizational hierarchies can be found in many societies throughout the world. Because of your experience with and knowledge of South Asian culture, I'd like to ask specifically about the Hindu caste system. Though contemporary discussions talk of moving beyond the caste system, many communities continue to adhere to it within India and, to a lesser extent, in the diaspora. How can polyculturalism challenge and dismantle such social hierarchies as the Hindu caste system?

**Shipra:** I was raised with Hindu practices, which themselves are rooted in Brahminism, but being from a lower caste family, having a mindset around justice and human rights also felt present. Do I think that abolishing Hinduism specifically is a solution? I don't know. Any

organized religion has the same potential power to be a vehicle of oppression, depending on who's interpreting it. I think a lot of times it's seeing beyond what is normalized in any dominant culture to hold a critical awareness that should cross borders. If you didn't have empathy or structural commitment to justice as an upper caste person in India for caste-oppressed people there, you will emigrate with those same ideas and possibly recreate and reinforce those same hierarchies in a new place. There's a direct connection to strategies that could be used in different places around disrupting systems of hierarchy and oppression. While hierarchies and divisions can be used for positive nuancing of identity, they are also used to further divide us and to reinforce the same kinds of oppressions we brought with us from our home countries.

I think staying uncomfortable is necessary. Not getting comfortable that any of us are really doing the work fully, because there's always more to be done. It makes you more open to critiquing and assessing things you experience and acting on those values.



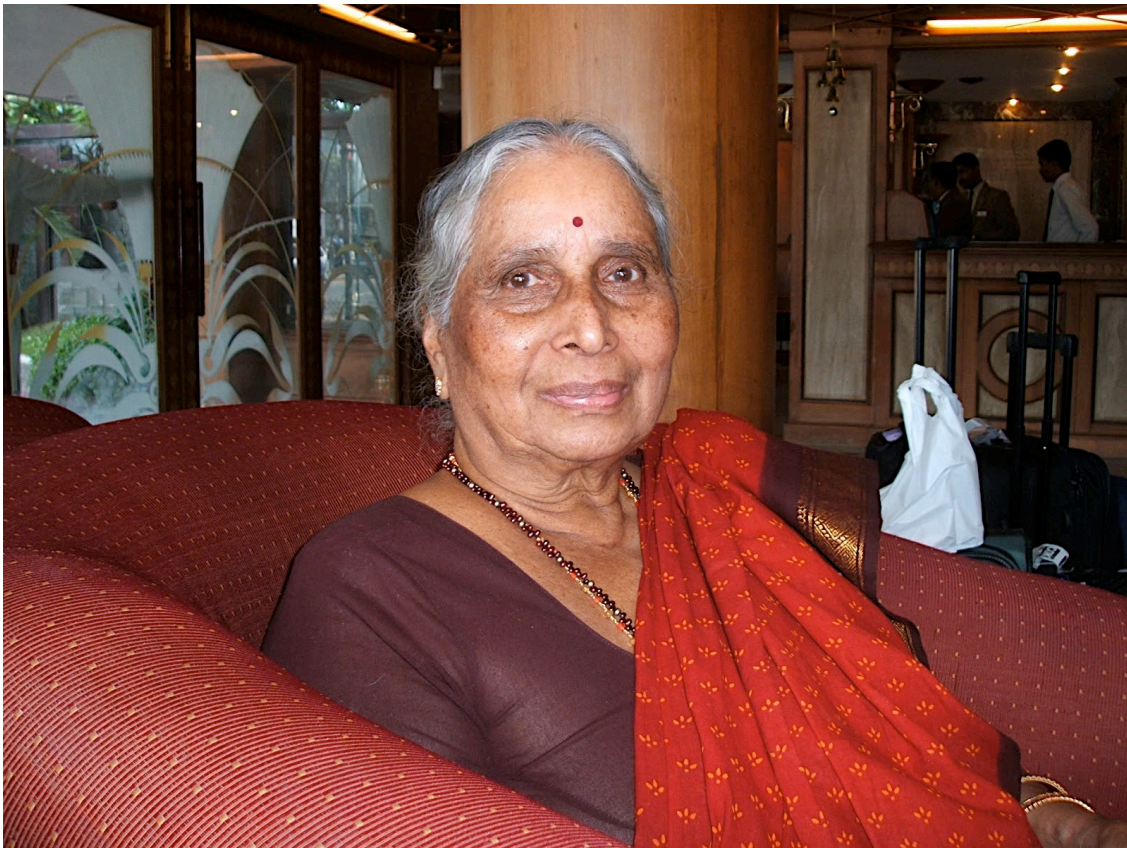
Sign indicating the entrance to the School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India.

**Tasneem: Please tell us a story of a time when someone surprised you because they supported you or demonstrated compassion towards you even though you expected otherwise.**

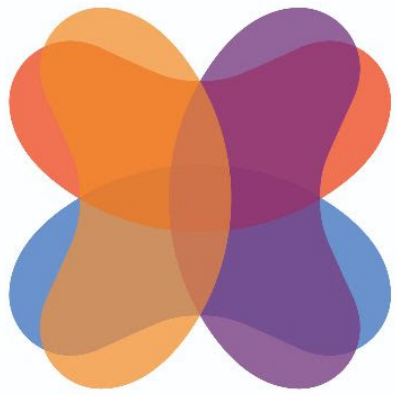
**Shipra:** I'll share a story about my grandmother. She was somebody who didn't have a lot of formal education, and there were many ways in which she had internalized not being that special. I remember one summer, I was in India visiting her, which I would do very frequently. We were talking one evening, and I said something about a friend of hers, who was a distant uncle for us. I said, "Oh, he's crazy." I was probably 14 or 15. I had meant it in the way that he was quirky and eccentric. But her face got really serious, and she said, "You should

never call an older person crazy.” And I thought she was gonna really scold me, which I was ready for. I said, “Why?” She said, “Well, when we get old, we don’t always have control over the things we say and do. What if that were me, acting ‘crazy?’”

I was really overcome. Instead of getting yelled at, I was getting an explanation that was rooted in her vulnerability and her empathy. And I feel like that was such a social work response. And I asked her, “Do you feel that way?” She said, “Sometimes. Sometimes, I think my American granddaughter thinks I’m crazy.” I was crying and laughing; I still get emotional. It was a very poignant moment for somebody who had no formal training about how to show empathy to people and how to live in a respectful way.



Shipra's grandmother and source of her earliest feminist education, Sharada Maroli.



# Polycultural Institute

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