

India Adds Spice to Globalization by Sandip Roy [NPR](#), March 2, 2006 · Transcript

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Morning Edition (NPR); 3/2/2006; Host: STEVE INSKEEP Time: 10:00-11:00 AM

STEVE INSKEEP, host:

Now, President Bush is spending his day meeting with the President and Prime Minister of India and attending a state dinner. If he had gotten to town just a few days earlier, and if he did not have to spend quite so much time with all those dignitaries, the President could well have crossed paths with commentator Sandip Roy, who was visiting family in India.

SANDIP ROY reporting:

I'm sure President Bush brought along gifts for his Indian and Pakistani hosts. I hope he had better luck picking them out than I did.

Gift shopping for India in the new globalized world is hard work. Before I visited my folks, I went to the brand new H&M clothing store in San Francisco and picked up a trendy little outfit for my niece. Thankfully I checked the label before I paid for it. It was made in India. I checked the next one: made in India, made in Bangladesh, made in India, made in Pakistan. Good grief. I can just imagine my mother's face if I flew for 28 hours, halfway around the world bearing gifts that were made in Pakistan. So I got some marmalade. I remembered as a kid in India you could never find really good tikkat(ph) marmalade or strawberry jam. We'd always have a hideous red glop known as mixed fruit jam.

My family accepted my jams with gentle smiles and polite thank you's. Next day, they took me to a brand new shopping mall in Calcutta. I saw row upon row of marmalade and strawberry jam, not to mention the sugary cereals I'd lugged back for my nephew and niece thinking all they got were plain corn flakes. I could have done 90% of my India gift shopping in India itself. Coming home is just not what it used to be.

Once upon a time the foreign returned had a certain cache; now we're a dime a dozen. People go weekend shopping in Bangkok and Singapore. The allure of expatriates is wearing thin. And newly confident, booming India doesn't chase foreign products like we used to when we were kids drinking Coca-Cola knock-offs and wearing jeans with fake Levi's labels. Indians not only have the real brands now, the brands have Indianized themselves. KFC sells paneer tikki wraps. Subway has chettinad chicken sandwiches. Why can't we get that in America?

India doesn't need to remake itself in the image of America anymore. It's becoming America Plus-Plus. If we have one American Idol here in the U.S., they have three versions running in India. India has opened itself up in ways I'd never imagined possible. Instead it's America that's starting to seem closed and insular now, worrying about outsourcing and job losses while India embraces the world.

Mr. President, if you want to really see where India is headed these days, forget those stuffy, staid dinners. Check out the little corner stores your motorcade whizzes by. In them, you'll see the new India: rows of brightly colored packets of potato chips. The brand is Frito Lay, but the flavors are bindas bale(ph) and must(ph) masala. In fact, why don't you bring some back to America. I did. They're really good with American sour cream and onion dip.

INSKEEP: Commentator Sandip Roy serves his chips and dip in San Francisco where he is host of Up Front on member station KALW.