



# Retail Business Services

**AAPI Heritage Month: Meet Radhika Iyer**

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*Retail Business Services – the services company of Ahold Delhaize USA – is celebrating Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month by shining a light on some of our great associates with Asian or Pacific Islander heritage. This week, meet Radhika Iyer, Systems Analyst for Retail Business Services, who grew up in one of the most diverse places on earth.*

Radhika Iyer knows the meaning of diversity. She was born and raised in Mumbai, India, which is one of the most culturally diverse cities in one of the most diverse countries in the world.

While India is home to hundreds of distinct cultures and languages and has no official language, Hindi is commonly used and helps unite the country.

"There are so many hundreds of languages people speak across India's states," Radhika said. "While most people do speak Hindi, if I move from one state to another, I could not speak the native language. It's amazing. And if I moved from one state to another, the food would be different. There is always a mix of cultures.

"We used to live in a building with 75 apartments, and each one had a different culture," she added. "So, growing up, you never had to ask, 'What are we doing today?' Because every day used to be a holiday or a ball."

Each afternoon, Radhika continued, she would go to the ground floor to play with other children in her building. During those afternoons playing, chatting and making friends with people from numerous different backgrounds, heritages and cultures, Radhika also learned how to speak many different languages. In addition to Hindi and her own native language, Tamil, Radhika learned six other languages – most of them belonging to specific cultural groups within India. And they've stuck with her through the years.

"I'm still conversational in most of them," she said.

As a child, Radhika was bold and brave in trying new things. She kept her hair short and was a tomboy growing up – and she wasn't afraid to break the rules.

For example, at 14 – four years younger than the legal driving age – she hopped in her family car and drove to higher ground to save it from floodwaters.

"In Mumbai, flooding is a constant problem. Before a storm, you have to take your car and park it somewhere, then walk back home. Otherwise, when it floods, your car is going to be ruined," she said.

The story goes like this: It was torrentially downpouring one day, with rain sheeting down so hard her father couldn't make the walk home from work to move the car.

"So I told my brother, 'Ok, it's up to us, we need to save our car.' I was in the driver's seat holding the steering wheel, and my legs wouldn't reach the peddles because we were that short. We couldn't drive the car," she said, laughing at the memory.

The two siblings tinkered with the seat, trying to adjust the height so Radhika could reach the peddles. Eventually, they found a solution.

"So we got it going and moved the car, parked it and walked home," she said.

It's a fond memory for her breaking the rules to do what was right for her family.

Radhika lived in India until she was 26, when she earned her undergraduate degree and master's degree from local Indian universities. After college, she met her husband, Kartik – a Michigan native – through a matchmaking site. In 2009, Radhika moved to the U.S. and the couple got married. She said the transition was difficult.

"I was used to spending time after work with family and friends, so I didn't know what to do during my evenings anymore," she shared. "My first six months here were really challenging."

But there were good things, as well.

"I moved to the U.S. in December, so everything was lit up for Christmas and New Year's," she recalled. "I'm a Hindu, so we didn't celebrate Christmas back home. It was really amazing to experience."

Following her history with cars as a young teenager, Radhika developed a love for driving. When she moved to the U.S., she said was eager to get out and explore.

"But my husband said, 'You're not driving here on an international license because it's completely different.' So I said, 'Let me see,' and I looked at the car. The first thing I noticed was that the steering wheel was not in the right place," she chuckled. "Because in India cars are right-handed."

After some practice, she earned a U.S. driver's license and is now comfortable on the road.

Radhika started a job with Food Lion in 2016 before transitioning to Retail Business Services in 2018. Now, she and her husband live in Concord, N.C., with their 10-year-old son, Rudresh, and their husky, Jasper. And, while she misses her family and friends in India, Radhika visits as often as she can – or they will visit her. But she still misses her mom's cooking – especially a dish with vegetables covered in coconut gravy.

"I know the recipe, but my mom has to cook it because if I cook it, it's not as good," she said.

She's especially thankful that her parents have been able to stay with her in the U.S. as the pandemic rages in India, and she encourages everyone to pitch in and do what they can to help alleviate a global crisis.

"India is going through a challenging time right now and I plead everyone to do what it takes to help," Radhika said. "Thank you for all your support!"

*Keep an eye out for more associate features this month!*