

All Eyes On: Priya Kambli



Photography professor uses childhood culture for inspiration

BY SHAWN SHINNEMAN
Staff Reporter

Priya Kambli is living between two worlds.

In one world, she is a girl who never cared much for photographs, who grew up in India and who was excited to leave India at age 18. She is a daughter, a sister.

In the other, Kambli is an American and associate professor of art, photography and foundations. She is married to professor of art Aaron Fine, who works two offices down from hers in Ophelia Parrish Hall. She has a five-year-old son, Kavi. Kambli has released a book of photography and travels across the U.S. and the world showcasing her photos.

Mostly, though, she is a woman in the middle of two cultures, two worlds. She is Indian, but she is American. She never saw herself in a small town, but these days she couldn't picture leaving.

People often ask her, "Where are you from?"

She's not quite sure how to answer.

Kambli was born in Mumbai, India, where she spent her

childhood.

Kambli's father was an amateur photographer, and he would frequently dress up his two daughters as the subjects for his photos.

They would pose for long periods of time, trying to keep a smile on their faces and sometimes getting into fights simply because they were too close for too long. Some of those fights are captured vividly in the photographs.

When she was 18, Kambli left India for the University of Louisiana-Lafayette to study graphic design. At the time, she was not interested in photography.

"I was having a little bit of a crisis being a teenager in India," she said. "I think culturally, I wasn't a perfect match."

Soon, Kambli realized she'd rather take photos than arrange them on a page. Photography was fun for her, she said, as long as she was the one in charge.

She switched majors, earned an undergraduate degree from the University of Louisiana-Lafayette and a graduate degree from the University of Houston and went out into the work force. She thought surely she would be headed to a big city.

However, at age 25, a small, liberal arts school in Kirksville, Mo. hired Kambli.

Despite her original aversion, Kambli has grown to have a passion for photography.

"I got to watch how she improved," Fine said. "I think people think that artists get good at art because lightning strikes them and they're born a genius, and I'm sure that doesn't hurt. But the way she got better in the 10 years I've known her is just working really hard and really being her own worst critic."

Most of Kambli's work focuses on life as a migrant and on the cultural dichotomy she is living. She has pieced together some of her father's photographs with her own.

"[I am] trying to figure out a way to connect my past with my present, because those two lives for me feel like completely different planets at this point," she said.

Kambli entered and won a photo contest in which the winner gets his or her work published in book form. The result was "Color Falls Down," a 64-page softbound book containing 32 of Kambli's images, released Feb. 1.

It took Kambli three or four years to complete the work, she said. She still is continuing the project beyond the photographs that appeared in the book.

"It was interesting because I had worked towards getting this book to have enough images that the body of work feels whole, but I didn't feel that the body of work was complete yet," she said.

Kambli said she enjoys talking to other individuals who are interested in and excited about photography.

"She's very encouraging and she always gives good advice," said junior Janna Langholz, a student participating in an independent study for Kambli this semester.

Kambli has settled into this small town. She's grown to like it.

"I think I've sort of made peace since it's so easy having a child here and raising a child," she said. "We travel a lot. ... Every time I find a fabulous conference in a fabulous city, I make sure I get to go to it."

She's been back to India several times since coming to America. She still has family there. She wants to show her new family where she came from. And she's been drawn back as she's gotten older, "to sort of reconnect," she said.

But Kambli still struggles with the question she so often is forced to ponder. People hear the accent. They see Kambli's complexion. They always ask.

"Where are you from?"
"When I think of India, it's all these childhood memories, but when I go now I'm sort of at a loss what to do with myself, besides shop or visit family," she said. "I don't have anything. I feel like a tourist there, because I am. I don't have anything that feels like home."

"So in that regard, I think for me, home is here now, because my life is here."



Amey Vicars/Index, Bottom photo submitted by Priya Kambli

Professor of photography Priya Kambli lived in India before moving to America at age 18. Her new book features photography, like the one above, that explores her relationship with her family and cultures.

Coffee shop expands to create homey feel

BY BLAISE HART-SCHMIDT
Features Editor

A new local coffee shop is expanding and remodeling to offer a relaxing place to unwind, refuel and recharge.

On the northeast corner of the square sits Sweet Espressions, a new coffee shop and café owned by mother and daughter Sherry Stacey and Sarah Mitchell. Though still under construction, Sweet Espressions offers coffee drinks and light fare to customers looking for a break.

Mitchell and her mother — who owns Hidden Treasures, a resale shop less than a block away — are expanding the café's seating into the space currently occupied by The Vintage Book Shoppe next door. The bookstore, meanwhile, will move into Hidden Treasures, Mitchell said. Stacey and Mitchell are converting Vintage Book Shoppe's

basement into a study lounge for students, complete with a fireplace and board games. A small conference room in the back offers a place for groups to meet, and soon the café also will offer a coffee and spice shop and an area to watch the cooks prepare the food.

The café's history begins long before its actual opening this June. Mitchell worked as the manager for restaurant Upper East Side, which was located in the same space as the new café. When he closed the restaurant, owner Don Kangas, who also owned Manhattan Café and Bakery, decided to retire and close Upper East Side as well. Mitchell said she took advantage of that opportunity.

"We wanted to create a place that felt like home," she said. "Whether that is someone just having a bad day that wants to come here and settle down, have a cup of coffee, re-

lax, or a student who misses home can pretend they're going to Aunt Martha's house."

Mitchell said the café offers three varieties of wraps and soon will offer a fourth, as well as a homemade soup of the day. A vintage ice-cream maker sits on the corner outside the shop, complete with a miniature John Deere tractor engine and wooden barrel. Mitchell said she found the machine on Ebay from a seller in Georgia, and "drove down in a truck with bad brakes through the mountains in a tornado," to get it. The machine's loud, explosive gusts every other second attract curious visitors, she said.

Kirksville resident Sandy Lammers said it is the homemade ice cream that keeps her coming back.

"She makes it with good, fresh ingredients and real fruit," Lammers said. "Nothing's fake, no fake flavoring.

I think it's probably one of the healthiest ice creams you can eat, if ice cream can be healthy."

Owning a café is nothing new for Mitchell's mother, Stacey, who said Hidden Treasures used to include a café on its second floor about five or six years ago.

"It was well received by those who would find the stairs to go up there, but I had a lot of people who either didn't want to or couldn't," she said. "It really limited our productivity, and so having this opportunity brought back the café environment plus the opportunity to work with my daughter."

Despite the many other coffee shops in Kirksville, Mitchell said business has been good. Mitchell, a business owner and member of the Kirksville Downtown Improvement Committee which suggests plans for downtown



Blaise Hart-Schmidt/Index

Sarah Mitchell, co-owner of Sweet Espressions, bags up some homemade ice cream for a customer.

development, said she was excited to see a new expansion and didn't want a corner business to sit vacant.

"[The coffee shops] all

have a different flavor, and it improves commerce," she said. "It gives people another choice, and I don't think that's a bad thing."



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