

RUNNERS-UP

Two super moms

Monika Jain and Sunitha Das created the kids magazine Kahani

Monika Jain and Sunitha Das want to help your kids. The two moms want your children to be better informed, learn more about South Asian culture, improve their reading skills and discover their inner confidence. That's why they have been producing Kahani, a children's magazine for South Asian Americans that began in 2004.

Meet Monika Jain

A longtime print and television journalist and a mother of two, Jain put her job and life skills to use as editor of Kahani because she couldn't find any publications that her kids could relate to, she said.

The only books and magazines available either told the stories of white American kids (think Nancy Drew) or were imports from India that told of life in that country. Jain felt her kids needed stories about people just like them — children with a South Asian background but whose home is the United States.

And she's one to know these stories. Jain was born in Delhi, but grew up in Japan from age 2, so she too "didn't have any South Asian literature — none what-so-ever" to read.

That's why four years ago, she created

Kahani, a glossy and colorful magazine full of photos, trivia, interviews and stories about South Asian American youth.

The formula has worked — the magazine has won Parents' Choice Approved Awards for 2007 and 2008, putting it alongside other winners such as Sports Illustrated Kids and AppleSeeds.

Though Kahani is still a labor of love for its makers, Jain is adamant about providing a high-quality and well-written publication that does not rely on advertising dollars.

"Our kids get so many ads thrown at them from so many sources and we feel this is one place that we really don't need that," she said.

Jain lives with her family in Newton, Mass, and holds a master's in broadcast journalism from Northwestern University and a degree in print journalism from the University of Southern California.

Meet Sunitha Das

Das, also a mother of two, joined Kahani about two years ago after accidentally meeting Jain in a grocery store aisle. She was already a subscriber of the children's magazine, she said, when she found out that Jain was the brains behind it.

"We stopped all the traffic in that aisle, talking for like 45 minutes," said Das of the encounter.

Coincidentally, at the time Kahani's business manager was returning to India and Jain invited Das aboard.

Das shares much of the same enthusiasm about producing Kahani as Jain, but perhaps a bit more unabashedly ("We're not as big as we should be given the quality of the magazine," said Das during an interview.)

And that enthusiasm has even rubbed off on her husband, she said.

"My husband went through a phase in

which he walked up to all his South Asian colleagues, reached into their pockets and said, 'Fork over 20 bucks. You've got to subscribe to this magazine,'" she said.

Still, she agrees that the publication should avoid advertising and stay true to its mission of providing a quality magazine for South Asian American children.

And she said her experience of finding material that her kids could relate to was similar to Jain's. Except in her case, she first tried giving her kids literature from India.

"I was always reading either religious stories or stories of maharajas and elephants and cobras, which made no sense to my son. We go back to India every year and he doesn't see elephants and maharajas in India today. But those were the only books that I could find here to read."

Besides working on Kahani, Das also is a partner with her husband at a marketing consulting firm and a gallery instructor at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. But she says she's most proud of her work helping to set up early intervention centers for children with mental handicaps in Mumbai.

Das, who lives in Massachusetts with her family, holds a master's in business administration from Boston University, a degree in information systems from Purdue University and a degree in psychology she earned while in India.

— Adam Smith



Sunitha Das, left, and Monika Jain, right, each hold framed Parents' Choice Approved awards that Kahani won in 2007 and 2008, ranking it along side competitors such as Sports Illustrated Kids magazine.

Best wishes
to all of the
INDIA New England
nominees for
2008 Woman of the Year

from the
Peabody Essex Museum

Now on view
Gateway Bombay

P | E | M
Peabody Essex Museum
Salem, MA | 978-745-9500 | pem.org

Best Wishes to the
INDIA New England
Woman of the Year Finalists
&
Congratulations to the
2008 Woman of the Year

RAJ SHARMA
Senior Vice President, Investments

THE SHARMA GROUP
Private Wealth Advisors

MERRILL LYNCH
One Federal Street
Boston, MA 02110
(617) 946-8030 • (800) 926-5579
Raj_Sharma@ml.com