

A Jain Milan True Story

Your first time at Jain Milan?

Maybe you've been there, done that, and think you know everything Jain Milan has to offer? Check out the following true story.

Editor's note: For the sake of anonymity, the interviewee has an alias name of Puja Jain. If you are interested in talking with Puja Jain or hearing more about her experience, please feel free to reach out to one of the Jain Milan coordinators and they will get you in touch with her during the convention.

Before the Convention

Q: What were your thoughts about marriage before the convention?

Puja: I knew my parents had an arranged marriage but I didn't think I would have one because I'm not living in India. I was born and raised in US. To be honest, I didn't think too much about it.

Q: So, did your parents approach you about having an arranged marriage?

Puja: Maybe a little, after I reached the age of 26, my parents asked me to put my extremely successful career aside and find a Jain bridegroom. They had me attend JAINA conventions and they put an advertisement out for me in the JAINA newsletter and they would randomly introduce me to some friend of theirs who had a Jain son around my age. It was always so awkward and uncomfortable.

Q: Why was it awkward and uncomfortable?

Puja: I was encouraged to do well in school and get a good job. Because of being brought up to be independent, I assumed my parents would be open to a Western approach to dating. So being introduced to someone simply because they share a religion felt very forced and I was often embarrassed about the whole situation. I didn't have the right attitude.

Q: What would you say is the right attitude?

Puja: I realize this sounds cliché but I think one must be open minded and know that others are feeling the same way.

Q: What were you looking for in an ideal partner before you met your husband?

Puja: Good question. While in my 20's, I was looking for someone with a similar life-style to mine. When meeting Jain guys, I would often focus on the type of friends they have, the type of music they listen to, what they like doing outside of work, very basic stuff. I was looking for a partner that could be my friend. This was my biggest mistake.

Q: Finding a friend in your partner sounds like a really good thing. Why would you say that's a mistake?

Puja: Because friendships generally revolve around interests and interests change depending on your available time, your environment, etc. What don't change are your values. So, finding a partner who shares similar values as you is a much more solid foundation to build on.

Q: How did you meet your husband at Jain Milan?

Puja: When I attended JAINA, there was another organization called JNF, Jain Networking Forum. My husband and I both attended that conference but we never actually met at the conference. Though there were many activities, ice-breakers, etc., people tend to stay in their own circles and we never crossed paths.

Q: So, the planned activities didn't work?

Puja: I think the planned activities are a good starter, a good environment. But if you really want to meet someone, then you have to step out of your comfort zone and actually talk to different people. Don't expect the activities to be enough.

Q: So how did you two meet?

Puja: The JNF organizers had given us a booklet of everyone's information. About three weeks after the JAINA convention, my husband happened to have a work conference in the city I was living in. He randomly reached out to me and introduced himself as a JNF participant and asked me if I wanted to meet him for dinner since he was in town.

Q: And it was that easy?

Puja: Well, to be honest, I didn't think much of it. In fact, I had pretty much written him off before we even met because this was yet another Jain boy that I was meeting and nothing came of the other ones so I felt like this was more of a courtesy meet up.

Q: But clearly it wasn't because you two- got married. What was different about this particular meet up compared to previous engagements with others?

Puja: During that first dinner, we were able to talk below the surface level (where do you work, and what do you like to do) and we got into our personal values. It was because our values matched that we clicked.

Q: What happened after your first date?

Puja: We were in long distance with a big time difference. But he called me the next day, and the next day, and the next day. I was actually a bit surprised but I was excited too. We both were fine being vulnerable.

Q: How did you make it work with such a big time difference?

Puja: I think we made it work because we wanted to make it work. After our first date, we met four times and we were married within 10 months.

Q: And you think that is all because you had common values?

Puja: Exactly!

Q: Great story, do you have any advice for participants who will be attending Jain Milan this year?

Puja: First, be open minded. I know the process sucks and it is totally awkward but only if you give it an honest effort, can something come from it. If you go in with a negative attitude, you should not even bother wasting your time. Second, get beneath the surface. - Think about it, you live until you are 80-90 years old. You make a life decision when you've only had a third of your life experienced. People often get caught up on how they are "now", in their mid-twenties or mid-thirties. But your values don't change. In order to find someone to click with, look for common values.

Thanks Puja, appreciate you spending some time with us.

Puja: My pleasure, thank you for letting me be part of it.