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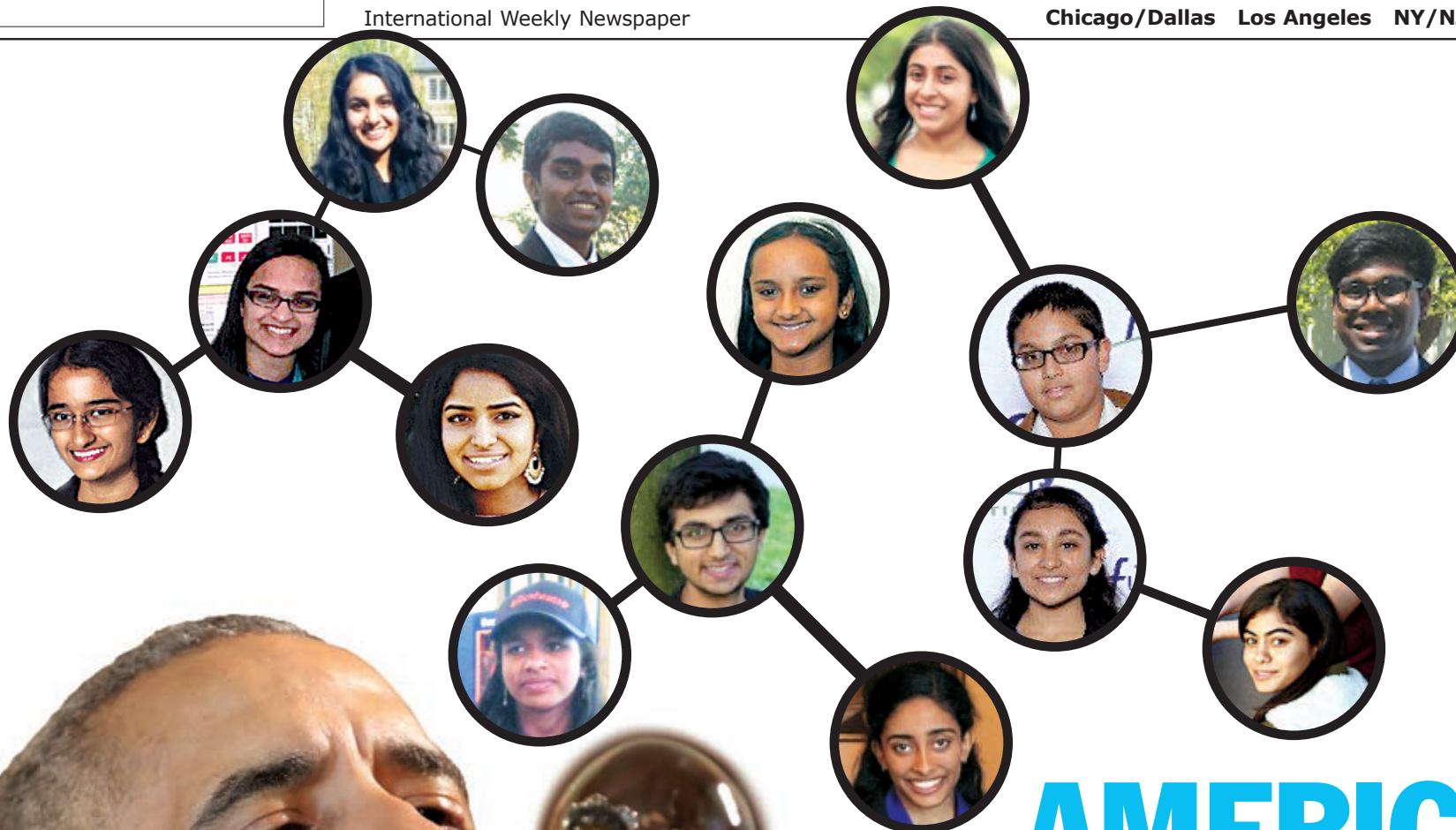
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AMERICA'S NEXT INNOVATORS

- Desi kids dominate White House Science Fair
- Sona Dadhania wins new science scholarship

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The Science Ambassador

Sona Dadhania has been awarded the inaugural Science Ambassador Scholarship. **Aziz Haniffa** reports.

Sona Dadhania, 19, a freshman at the University of Pennsylvania, has been awarded the '2016 Science Ambassador Scholarship' from over 1,000 applicants from across the country and the full-ride award includes full tuition to study Materials Science and Engineering.

The scholarship was created by Cards Against Humanity after the success of their 'Science Pack,' a \$10 expansion pack available for purchase on *CardsAgainstHumanity.com*, which funds the scholarship trust and has raised over \$850,000 so far.

Jenn Bane, community director, Cards Against Humanity, said, 'We created this scholarship to raise visibility of women in

Applications opened last fall and students were asked to submit personal videos explaining a topic in science.

Bane said, 'We decided to accept video applications to give women a platform and an audience, so to speak. Production value wasn't a factor.'

Sona, she said, 'submitted a creative, interesting video explaining nanotechnology. She drew really funny illustrations to convey her points. Her video immediately stood out to the board of judges as one of the best.'

An advisory board of over 60 women, who hold higher degrees and work professionally in science, ultimately picked Sona as the winner.

Dr Veronica Berns, a board member, said,

Bane added, 'I can't wait to offer this opportunity again next year. With our scholarship fund, we're going to continue making public spaces for women to share their love for science.'

The Voorhees, New Jersey-born and raised Sona found out about the scholarship from a "random Web site," she told *India Abroad*, decided to apply just "to see what would happen."

"I wasn't even expecting to be a finalist, let alone win and so I was pleasantly surprised on hearing I was a finalist," she said. "And then when I heard I had won the scholarship, I was just blown away. I was totally shocked and surprised when I heard that I

Sona, who is a member of Penn Raas, a South Asian cultural dance team at the university and its artistic director, said her responsibilities as the scholarship winner would entail "that I act like a sort of science ambassador — like an outreach person to kind of inspire young kids to pursue a career in the STEM field."

"As part of this, I am going to be making instructional videos every semester on different topics on science for people who may not be very familiar with these subjects," she elaborated. "I'll also be running a blog and locally in the Philadelphia area, I'll be doing some speaking events."

She added, "I am just thrilled that I'll be able to share my love of science with others and I can't wait to get going on this project. I hope to be a mentor because when I was younger, I was so fortunate that there were many people who reached out to me about science and inspired me with their passion and helped to push me along this path. So, getting this scholarship and getting this role as a science ambassador, I know I can contribute to make a difference in the lives of some kids and advocate the same love and passion for science in them."

And she was understandably thrilled that the burden of tuition fees was now off her shoulders. "They will pay all my tuition and fees and yes, it's a lot of money and it's great that they will be paying for almost everything."

Sona's father Dr Mahendra 'Manu' Dadhania, a practicing allergist in South Jersey, told *India Abroad*, "This award truly fits Sona because of her passion, creativity, imagination, hard work, and sincerity in everything she does. She has always pushed the boundaries of her own success and this caps off her other successes. We wish that she will continue to excel in science and engineering and make the world a better place for everyone."

Her mother Dr Ketki Dadhania, clinical director of centralized admissions at the Division of Mental Health & Addiction services, New Jersey, and also an alumnus of the Baroda Medical College in Gujarat like her husband, said, "First, I just could not believe that Sona is the recipient because this is such a huge deal."

"Being a Science Ambassador is perfect for Sona, as she loves to teach, and is very passionate and creative in everything she does. She will certainly inspire many more girls to choose STEM as career path."

Dadhania, who is the youngest, has two siblings. Her brother, Ankur, a finance and international business major, from Drexel University who works for an independent alternative investment management firm.

Her sister, Anna, a Cornell University graduate with majors in chemistry, chemical biology and Biochemistry and a masters in forensic Science in forensic molecular biology who currently works for Orange County, California District Attorney's office as a DNA Analyst.

At Eastern Regional High School in Voorhees, Sona Dadhania excelled both in academics and extra-curricular activities. Among other honors, she was the Valedictorian for Class of 2015 and scored 2390 of 2400 in SAT exams. She is also an accomplished artist who has displayed her works at various art exhibitions. Between all this — and starting the Jaipur Foot project in her high school to raise funds for the Jaipur Foot initiative in India — Sona also finds the time to play tennis and pursue Bharata Natayam.



science. Several of us at Cards Against Humanity have backgrounds in science and technology, and under-representation of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields is a glaring problem we've seen ourselves. That's why we decided to both fund a woman's undergraduate education and carve out a public space for women in science to discuss what they're passionate about.'

'Sona was a great candidate from the very first round of judging. Her video explained difficult concepts in nanotechnology in a creative, visual way that made them simple to understand without feeling condescending. That's a very hard thing to do, and Sona made it look easy. I can tell she is a very talented young scientist, and I'm so happy that we will get to throw a spotlight on the work she is doing in the coming years.'

won. I wasn't expecting it at all and I really wasn't prepared for it.'

Sona believed the clincher may have been her video on nanotechnology "because nanotechnology as a whole is a topic a lot of people don't know about and I think taking that topic and explaining it in a way that anyone — who has no idea what nanotechnology is all about — can understand helped."