DESIGNER *AKANKSHA DEO SHARMA* ON MOVING FROM NEW DELHI TO DENMARK

As told to Ditlev Fejerskov
Photography by Lasse Dearman

New Delhi-born Akanksha Deo Sharma moved to Scandinavia when she landed a job as a designer at IKEA. Today, she lives in Copenhagen with her Danish partner. Deo Sharma, who has been featured on Forbes India's 30 Under 30 list, is constantly navigating the cultural differences she experiences between her home country and Danish culture. The calmness, safety and the Danes' love for nature were all completely new to her. The same was true for the way we celebrate our birthdays. Occasionally, she misses the chaos of New Delhi.





New Delhi is a beautiful city, and it's my childhood home, but it's also rough, edgy and chaotic. Even as a local, it can be quite challenging. At times, I didn't feel that safe. But when I moved to Denmark, I felt incredibly safe. I could walk alone at night, cycle around town and not have to worry about anything – feeling free and relaxed.

One of the first things I noticed about the Danes was their beautiful relationship with nature. They're born with access to water: they swim like fish, and they embrace hiking. They want to get out of the city to be in nature. As someone born amidst so many people, cars and tall buildings, I'm a big city person, but I'm trying to learn from the Danes' connection to nature. It's a very alluring and calm way of living.

In Denmark, everyone is running around in their cool running gear – it's like a whole culture here – with communities of runners. It seems like people are really taking care of their bodies, and health is very effortlessly intertwined with everyday activities. I think that's so inspiring and something I've tried to embrace by taking up running myself.

The funniest thing I learned about Denmark is the fact that Danes put up Danish flags on birthdays. I think it's so cute and funny. I could never imagine that happening in India. But here, it's never looked at in a nationalistic way. It's simply: "Yeah, it's my birthday, so I put flags on the table." That's real Danish *hygge*.

I've found that people here are more reserved and less spontaneous than I'm used to. However, in Denmark, the process is more gradual when building relationships. In parts of India, we make friends easily, and I've often had friends over for dinner just hours after meeting. Here, it can be a bit more challenging to move into people's personal lives. But I think that's also the beauty of it. Danes tend to have fewer close friends, but those relationships are often long-standing and deep. I've focused on strengthening and deepening my friendships both from back home and in Denmark. Once you break the friendship barrier, I think people here are really warm and welcoming.

I was born in a country where the beauty lies in the paradox. There is chaos, contrast, sublimity, fun and opportunities all together. For me, it's a sign of human life. Denmark is a leading force in architecture, design and food at the moment while Copenhagen is the focal point of creativity; the people are free and can be whoever they want. But I see so many people who look quite alike. White and grey sneakers and overcoats – it's like a uniform. I'm used to seeing so many different styles, looks and people. So for me, it's really interesting to understand why people look more the same here.

In India, you are often encouraged to stand out from the crowd, to be a star, to be unique - as a means of survival and success. In contrast, Denmark seems to embody a socialist mindset, where everyone should have the same opportunities in life. This approach strives to maintain a sense of cohesion and balance, where no one is allowed to stand out or show off their qualities or wealth. I think it's a fascinating space to be in for a culture.

The Danes are very calm and tolerant people – except on the bike lanes. They're fast and efficient, so please be wary of walking onto the bike lanes by mistake. Most people use their bikes as an everyday means of transport, so they are experts at riding them, no matter if there's snow or rain.