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U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Patrick Dionne

NPS Faculty Member Completes Her Long Journey to U.S. Citizenship

By MC3 Patrick Dionne

According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, approximately 600,000 – 800,000 people, originating from all over the world, become naturalized U.S. citizens each year. On March 31, NPS Department of National Security Affairs Assistant Professor Naazneen Barma became one of those citizens after 25 years of residency.

“I was born and raised in Hong Kong, and it was such a vibrant and multicultural place with so many people with interesting stories to tell,” said Barma. “My family is ethnically Indian and my mother grew up in India, but my father’s family has lived in Hong Kong for five generations, so we had a lot of strong family roots there, and it really felt like home to me.”

Barma moved to the U.S. in 1992 to attend Stanford University at the age of 17. She went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in international relations and economics at Stanford, and her doctorate in political science from the University of California, Berkeley.

“For me, moving to the United States so young was a big culture shock, because before that, I had never really lived away from my family,” said Barma. “Hong Kong is a more conservative society, so it was a big change coming to California where everyone is so open and it was a challenge to get use to that, but I loved it. I fell in love with the personality and come-as-you-are mentality of the people here. That’s why I stayed.”

After completing her doctoral studies, Barma worked as a Public Sector Specialist at the World

Bank until she joined the faculty of NPS in October of 2010, where her personal experience as an immigrant helps provide unique insights in the classroom.

“I actually instruct students on East-Asian political economies, and I still very much care about the region and think about it a great deal,” said Barma. “Hong Kong is a very rich and successful place, and growing up, I often thought about why Hong Kong was so rich but India so poor. Having that experience and growing up in the region helps give my students, many of whom will go on to operate there, a more personal, contextual view of the region.”

Through working at NPS, Barma was able to finally be placed on immigrant status and receive a green card to begin the naturalization process. She says that without the support of NPS she would never have been able to become a citizen and credits her colleagues with providing her the tools of acquiring citizenship in a practical way.

“Being someone who teaches military officers, who are dedicated to public service to this country, made becoming a citizen so much more rewarding to me,” said Barma. “I very much enjoy working at NPS and find interacting with the students incredibly engaging. I also really value not only my colleagues, but the ability to do research that is not just scholarly but also relevant to policy and contemporary issues.”

Barma officially became a U.S. citizen in a ceremony took place at Cesar Chavez library in Salinas, Ca. and took place on Cesar Chavez day, a formal holiday observed in the states of Arizona, California, Michigan, New Mexico, Utah and Wisconsin to honor the legacy of Cesar Chavez, a Mexican-American labor and civil rights leader who was the cofounder of the National Farm Workers Association. Barma says that the historical significance of the holiday helped make the ceremony “feel even more significant.”

“When I finally took the oath, it was such a powerful moment that I was overjoyed to the point where I could feel it physically,” said Barma. “Becoming a citizen, while having my two young children, my partner, and the rest of my family at the ceremony, was incredibly meaningful to me.

“All my life, being engaged in the political fabric of my community has been really important to me,” she continued. “As a political scientist, it has always been something I understood intellectually, but now I get to truly participate in it for the first time.” (U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Patrick Dionne)

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