

SING, SING A SONG

Heights woman's film traces folk songs' origins

By **JOHN DUNPHY**
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Listening to a folk song may just be the best way to gain insight about any culture.

Meera Jaffrey has made such a discovery as she delved into the mysteries of Chinese folk songs. She shares her stories tomorrow at the Jersey City Museum where her documentary film, "Fine Rain: Politics and Folk Songs in China," will be showing.

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MEERA JAFFREY

"I had an encounter on a train that was going from Shanghai to Beijing," said Jaffrey, who lives in the Heights section of Jersey City.

On this train, some 20 years ago, she met an elderly man. Having studied music and Chinese culture in college, Jaffrey asked if he knew any songs she could learn.

"He said he knew a really nice song, but that it was forbidden to be sung," Jaffrey recalled. It was then that he leaned over and whispered the song to her.

IF YOU GO . . .

WHAT: "Fine Rain: Politics and Folk Songs in China"

WHERE: The Jersey City Museum, 350 Montgomery St., Jersey City

WHEN: Tomorrow at 2 p.m.

DETAILS: The movie is free with museum admission of \$4. This will be a sneak preview for the community.

"I always wondered why it was forbidden, but life went on and I became a music teacher," said Jaffrey, who teaches at Learning Community Charter School.

Originally from India, she has lived in the Heights for the past 25 years. In 2004, she learned of a grant for charter school teachers to pursue a topic that would be of interest to them and that could potentially help other teachers. So this was her chance to finally answer her question about the old man's forbidden song.

After getting the grant, she began interviewing older people from China who were living in America. She asked them about the songs they grew up with and how it reflected society and the governing bodies of that period.

Though most of her interviews were from the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area, she also went to California to interview people there. A movie



JAMES DOUGLAS JOURNAL PHOTO

MEERA JAFFREY plays her guitar at the Learning Community Charter School in Jersey City on Wednesday. Jaffrey has completed a movie about Chinese culture and the influence folk songs have contributed to it.