



Sunita (Raje) Vemuganti was born in Hyderabad, India and raised in Khanapur, Adilabad. She returned to Hyderabad to attend Osmania University where she graduated with an M.S. in Genetics in 1975. Following graduate school, Sunita married Gangadhar Vemuganti and moved to the United States. Sunita and Gangadhar first lived in Utah, moving to Kansas and Nebraska before settling in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1981. It was here in Iowa where Sunita and Gangadhar raised their two children, Siddhartha “Sid” Vemuganti (wife Hareesha) and Soumya (Vemuganti) Dunworth (husband William). Sunita worked at the University of Iowa in the Department of Genetics as a laboratory research scientist and completed work toward an M.S. in Nutrition and Food Science at Kansas State University.

Sunita was very active in the Indian community. She organized and participated in many Indian cultural, spiritual, and educational activities. The Indian community was small when she first arrived in Iowa. She helped to form the Friends of India Association in Cedar Rapids (FOICR) and served as the Vice President (2000) and President (2002; https://youtu.be/_ID2TNy24pc; <https://youtu.be/KfiedZH6Qvw>). She published her famous “Rapid Recipes” in the FOICR newsletter and started the Darshan society, a group that met to read and discuss Indian spiritual philosophy. Sunita also supported the Hindu Temple Association of Cedar Rapids, Iowa where she served as the Public Relations Chair (2012).

Sunita had a strong connection with children and understood the importance of helping Indian children stay connected with their culture and traditions. She choreographed performances for children during the annual Diwali celebration. She encouraged her daughter Soumya to learn Bharatanatyam and supported Soumya when she completed her Arangetram in 1996. Sunita was the founding FOICR Youth Committee Chair and was named the first FOICR [Person of the Year](https://youtu.be/zUWdM5C-UVI) (<https://youtu.be/zUWdM5C-UVI>) for starting the Balvikaas children’s program. Sunita even conducted virtual Balvikaas classes with her grandchildren, Liam, Bodhan, and Neesh Dunworth, and Vyan and Reya Vemuganti. Her grandchildren truly enjoyed her light-hearted and playful approach to learning.

Sunita peacefully went to heaven on July 9, 2022, in Atlanta, Georgia, surrounded by family. Sunita was full of love for family and friends. If you met her once, you became her friend. She was a strong presence in our lives, had a fierce personality, and always made sure that her voice was heard. She taught her children and grandchildren to do the same. They were the light of her life.

Below is a shloka (Sanskrit verse) that she strongly believed and taught to her grandchildren.

ॐ सह नावतु |
सह नौ भुनक्तु |
सह वीर्यं करवावहै |
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om! May God protect us both together.

May God nourish us both together;

May we work conjointly with great energy.

May our study be vigorous and effective,

and may we not mutually dispute (or may we not hate any);

Om! Let there be peace in me! Let there be peace in my environment! Let there be peace in the forces that act on me!

