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Ashidhara Das. 2012. *Desi Dreams: Indian Immigrant Women Build Lives Across Two Worlds*. New Delhi: Primus Books. xviii + 162 pp. Tables, bibliography, index. ₹795 (hardback).

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The title indicates that the book will be about immigrant women from India and their dreams, and the reader does find some material in that regard. The book is gracefully written and is generally informative but scholars will be disappointed since the book is a hotchpotch of theory, statistical data and interview material. Information about the key informants is limited and the material presented from them is still more limited. The book poses some interesting questions and makes provocative generalisations as the author presents her own views as well as those of her subjects.

Das opens by presenting her hypotheses about the various identities and selves of professional Indian women. She argues for a three-stage model of identity formation: a first stage—two years of shock of acculturation upon arrival; a second stage of growing familiarity with the American way of life; and a third stage, for those residing at least a decade in the US, a phase of achievement of the American dream but also a reassertion of Indian ethnic identity. These, apparently, are her actual findings and they are repeated several times throughout the book and in the conclusion. The reasoning given for the third outcome, although never systematically evidenced by statements from her interviewees, seems to be twofold. Her informants believe that although they have become Americans, they are still pigeonholed by others as Indian; in other words, a full assimilation is not possible. Further, they resist categorisation as a racial minority group in the US and prefer to identify as diasporic or transnational Indians. It is often hard to distinguish the author's views from those of her informants because, as she says in the preface, she and they are so similar.

This appears to be a revised PhD dissertation and Das moves on in her first chapter to discuss the relevant theoretical literature on migration and diaspora, and summarise census data on Asian Indian immigrants in the US. She ends the first chapter with brief remarks about her fieldwork and methodology. She conducted 60 detailed interviews. She writes that 40 were with professional Indian immigrant working women in the San Francisco Bay Area, 10 with non-working Indian immigrant women in the same area and 10 with professional working women resident in India (defined as 'the sending community'). The next sentence states, however,

that all these women were ‘...in professional or semi-professional white-collar occupations at the time the interviews were carried out’ (p. 31). She had a set of prepared questions but we do not see them (an appendix?) and we never get an idea (a chart?) of the actual occupations, the religious affiliations, the regional origins of the women she interviewed. She uses pseudonyms, first names in most cases when citing or quoting her interviewees but we never get a full description or analysis of any one of them. From the names given, all were Hindu, save for perhaps one Sikh and one Muslim woman. Confusingly, she sometimes quotes from interviews with men, usually the husbands of the women.

Chapter 4, ‘The Construction of the Self’, comes closest to giving us a coherent picture of the interviewees, discussed as ‘Recent Entrants’, ‘Medium Duration’ and ‘Long Duration’. But we have no idea how many women fell into each category or how they might be characterised. Some of the voices here are memorable, as are some of the voices of the 10 non-working immigrant women and the 10 working women in India. On the whole, Das and/or her informants reported: no racist incidents at work in America but omission from social cliques; isolated incidents of gender bias in America but fewer than in India; frank admission in America that women’s incomes were important and increased women’s power in their homes, in contrast to Indian working women’s claims (‘aware of the criticisms of working women in patriarchal India’, p. 57) that their incomes were useful but inessential; and so on. The overall effect of the information reported from these interviews is impressionistic and no solid conclusions can be drawn. However, the changing identities of Indian immigrant women in the US, over time, are a fascinating topic and perhaps Das could have produced a clearer and more analytical representation of her findings.

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