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Asian Indian Immigrant Women in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area: Work, Home, and the Construction of the Self

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Ashidhara Das

Committee in charge:

Professor Suzanne Brenner, Chair
Professor Frederick Bailey
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Professor Tanya Luhrmann

2006

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University of California, San Diego

2006

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Asian Indian Immigrant Women in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area: Work, Home, and the Construction of the Self

by

Ashidhara Das

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2006

Professor Suzanne Brenner, Chair

My dissertation research focuses on the construction of self and identity by Indian immigrant professional and semi-professional women who live and work in the San Francisco Bay Area. I have made an ethnographic study of the manner in which economic mobility and professional achievement remake gender, race, and class relations. The major issues are: What are the selves and identities of professional Indian women? How is continuity of selves and identities accomplished when individuals constantly shuttle between starkly different ethnoscapes of American workplace, Indian immigrant home, and transnational ideoscapes of ethnic belonging and cross-border ties? Indian immigrants in the San Francisco Bay Area have often been defined as a model minority. Indian immigrant women who have achieved entry into the current post-industrial service-related and technology -based economy in the Bay Area value the capital accumulation, status transformation, socio-economic autonomy, and renegotiation of

familial gender relations that are made possible by their employment. However, this quintessential American success story conceals the psychic costs of uneasy Americanization, social misrecognition, long drawn out gender battles, and incessant cross-cultural journeys of selves and identities. Americanization increases with the length of residence in the United States and duration of participation in the American labor force. However, despite their concerted attempts at being "American", my subjects continue to be viewed as "Indians", that is, as representatives of a foreign and exotic culture. Essentialization, whether positive or pejorative, causes psychological dissonance. My respondents are called upon to "speak for" Indian culture precisely when they are drifting away from old Indian habits and adopting new American ways. Nostalgia for the "homeland", as well as, "misrecognition" as "Indian" (rather than "Indian *American*") leads to a partial abandonment of the path to assimilation, and hence, it results in the reproduction of an Indian diasporic identity that is activated as and when needed. Thus, the Indian immigrant home becomes a principal site for the recomposition of Indian culture, and transnational ties to the "home-country" are strengthened. Code-switching back and forth between the performances of their dual American and Indian identities, my subjects have formulated a unique response to the contradictions in the expectations of American society and workplace on one hand, and the Indian immigrant home and community on the other.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

DESI DREAMS: INDIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN BUILDING LIVES ACROSS WORLDS

My dissertation research focuses on the construction of self and identity by Indian professional and semi-professional women who are resident in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area. I want to examine how professional achievement and economic mobility remake gender, race, and class relations for actual ethnographic subjects. Arguably, anthropologists today must be cognizant of sweeping changes in global populations in the current era of late capitalism. Traditionally a study of the "other" in the colonial and capitalist periphery, anthropology must now adjust to the entrance of the "other" in unprecedented numbers into the Western core metropolis. There is a burgeoning population of Asian Indians in California,[1] especially in the San Francisco Bay Area.[2] There are a substantial number of working women in this population,[3] and there are many highly qualified[4] professionals[5] among them, especially in the Silicon

[1] There are 314,819 *Asian Indians* in California, they constitute 0.93% of the population of the state.
[2] There are 143,022 *Asian Indians* in the San Francisco Bay Area, they constitute 2.l % of the total population of all nine counties of the Area. Notably, Asian Indians make up as much as 3.9% of the total population of the Santa Clara County.
[3] In my estimation, there are about 16,922 *working women* in this community. There are a total of 66,773 women in this community, that is, approximately 46.68%of the total Asian Indian population in the San Francisco Bay Area is female (5on page 44). There are 37,605 women above the age of 15. (5on page 44) Assuming that the national average (from national statistics about Indian American women) 45% of them work, this results in an approximate total of 16,922 Asian Indian women in the workforce in the Bay Area.
[4] There are approximately 31,527 Indian immigrant woman in the Bay Area who have a *degree equivalent to, or higher than, a bachelor's degree*. The percentage of female Asian Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area (from 5on page 44) is equal to 45.99%.

Valley. My study of their negotiation of ethnic difference and monocultural compliance contributes to contemporary debates about gender, work, and migration. While field studies of working-class immigrant women have proliferated in recent years, there is a relative absence of empirical research on professional immigrant women who enjoy a measure of socio-economic autonomy. It is my conviction that my study will be of use to researchers of immigrant relations and employment. My findings will be especially helpful in understanding immigrant dilemmas concerning assimilation, reclamation of ethnic identities, cultural autonomy and minority agency-hood. In my research, I discuss the following issues: What are the identities and selves of professional Indian women? How is there continuity of selves and identities when individuals constantly shuttle between starkly different ethnoscapes of American workplace, Indian immigrant home, and transnational ideoscapes of belonging? How do Bay Area *desi* women build lives across worlds?[6] I must mention here that my findings are specific to the professional class of Indians in the Bay Area, and not generalizable to all Indian immigrants.

From Table 2, the total number of Asian Indians (male and female) holding Bachelor's degrees or higher is equal to 68,552. Therefore, the number of females holding Bachelor's degrees or higher is equal to 31,527.

[5] In my estimation, Indian *professional working women* number more than 12,000 in the San Francisco Bay Area. From Table 2 shown on page 45, there are 37,605 women above the age of 15 surveyed in the 9 counties of the San Francisco Bay Area. According to a national survey, 34% of Asian Indian females indicated that they were in professional/managerial occupations. This would equate to 12, 785 professional Indian working women in the Bay Area (William Darity *et al* "Dressing for Success: Explaining Differences in Economic Performance Among Racial and Ethnographic Groups in the U.S.A." unpublished manuscript, 1994, quoted in Kamala Visweswaran 1997).

[6] *Desi* is a term used by immigrants from the Indian subcontinent to refer to themselves; it is inclusive of all *diaspora* from the Indian subcontinent, whatever their gender, religion, caste, age, or class might be.

Undoubtedly the level of *assimilation or accommodation vis-à-vis* mainstream American society increases with length of residence and employment-history in the United States, but parallel to that there is an increasing emphasis on Indian *diasporic identity* among those who have long residence experience and employment history. It has been argued in this dissertation that the following model explains how these *conflicting* trends develop in the selves and identities of Asian Indian women in white collar professions in the Silicon Valley and in other parts of the Bay Area.

In the *first stage* of identity formation, in the first couple of years in the U.S.A., my subjects dealt with the shock of arrival in America. Due to the pervasiveness of Western culture in ex-colonial neo-liberal India, my subjects had imagined that they were sufficiently familiar with the Western lifestyle to negotiate the intricacies of daily life and culture in America. My informants are post-colonial late capitalist subjects, continuing their forefathers' tradition of emulating the colonizing race, educating themselves in the ways of Westerners, and if possible, immigrating to the West. Seduced by the neo-liberal siren song of American global capitalism, they came to the United States to pursue the American dream of educational opportunity, technological innovation, and economic prosperity. Yet, when they got off the plane from India, they found that their ignorance of local linguistic accents, currency, cuisine, clothing fashions, traffic regulations, and modes of behavior, are sufficiently alienating in the United States to cause difficulty in functioning in American society, and specifically, in the American workplace. My belief is that in the first 0-2 year's duration of residence and work experience in the United States, due to the shock of acculturation and Americanization, my informants experienced a climactic psychological change similar to an identity crisis. Despite the

continuity of inner ethnic identity, they thought that many if not most old social habits, skills, behaviors and values are irrelevant in the new situation. The resultant quest to rapidly adopt locally accepted customs, moral standards and skills causes much internal turmoil.

In the *second stage*, my subjects became increasingly familiar with the American way of life. After a couple of years of residence and employment in the United States, Indian immigrant women became adept at "being American". In this phase, my informants were as comfortable with American linguistic nuances, behavioral codes, cuisine, apparel, and leisure time activities as they were with Indian counterparts. This made it easier for them to participate fully in the Americans workplace, and also in non-work situations. In this stage, the women completely identified with the host population.

Indian immigrant women who have achieved entry into the current post-industrial service-related and technology-based economy in the Bay Area are proud of their professional accomplishments and economic productivity. I found that my informants are eager to participate in the labor force because their salaries are essential for personal economic empowerment and familial upward mobility. Their professional success represents the hopes and aspirations of an entire family that wants to move from post-colonial global capitalist marginalization to the wealth and technological prowess of the financial and scientific metropolis. Employment assists in fulfilling visa requirements. It implies freedom from home-bound duties, lessening of feminine subalternity, and breaking out of restrictive patriarchal conventions. Employment enables a partial renegotiation of gender relations and a move towards democratization of the Indian

immigrant family structure.[7] It facilitates connective female autonomy, that is, the ability to maintain ties with, and even assist the woman's natal family. As far as housework and childcare are concerned, my subjects were not very successful in bringing about a more equitable redistribution of the second shift, but they were able to use their salaries to hire domestic help. My respondents related their enjoyment of consumerist freedom, the corollary of paid employment. Aggressive consumerism was their path to class mobility. These women and their families have achieved a version of the American dream, it is because of them, and others like them, that Indian immigrants in the San Francisco Bay Area have become something of a model minority.[8] However, employment in professional or white collar positions does not automatically guarantee good wages and advancement opportunities for these women. While some of my interviewees have reached mid-management positions, many others are stagnating in low grade technical or service positions.

Workplace interaction increases opportunities for assimilation. Indian immigrants train themselves in American ways in order to "fit in" with their co-workers and supervisors. As the immigrant enters the second stage, the positive psychological effects of joining the American workforce begin to be felt: first, that Asian Indian working women have more opportunity to acculturate into the mainstream of American culture,

---

[7] Despite opportunities for forcible establishment of equitable gender relations, first generation Asian immigrant women are reluctant to attempt to assert equality with their men. They fear forsaking traditional values and practices for fear of losing their husbands, who are materially, emotionally, and culturally essential for the upbringing of their children. The family is the seat of the womens' ethnic identity; they do not want to lose it.

[8] 41.22% of housing units occupied by Indians in the Bay Area are owner occupied. $73,181 is the median Asian Indian household income. 47.93 of Asian Indians resident in the Bay Area have a degree that is equivalent to, or higher than a Bachelor's degree.

and, second, independent identity formation of Indian immigrant career-women is aided by the emphasis on male-female equality in the workplace (this emphasis may be superficial, but even the rhetoric of workplace gender equity makes a positive psychological impact).

But as we will see, this quintessential American success story conceals the psychic costs of uneasy Americanization, social misrecognition, gender battles, and incessant transnational journeys of the selves and identities. The dominant ethnicities sometimes help, but more often divert or resist cultural change in America. Hence my subjects were forced to disguise their "difference" if they wished to claim a right to "equality" in everyday America, especially at the workplace. As some scholars have said, by practicing selective inclusion, the dominant majorities include ethnic minorities in spaces where there is an economic need for them, but not in social contexts.

In the *third stage*, immigrants resident in the U.S.A. for more than a decade, having had prolonged interaction with "mainstream" Americans, appear to be skeptical of effective assimilation. Those of my subjects who were in this phase said that irrespective of age, occupation, financial status, or general abilities, individuals of Asian Indian origin, are primarily viewed by "mainstream" Americans as culturally inassimilable immigrants, or at best, as "model minorities".[9] A substantial proportion of them earn middle-class salaries and own well-kept homes (Table 2 on page 45), but the majority of my subjects in the third stage felt that they had not been able to circumvent cultural essentialization in the United States. Americanization increases with the length of residence in the United States and duration of participation in the American labor force. My subjects reported

[9] Most of my informants came to America in their adolescence or in their early twenties.

that despite concerted attempts at being "American", they continued to be viewed as "Indians", that is, as representatives of a foreign and exotic culture. Essentialization, whether positive or pejorative, causes psychological dissonance. My respondents were discomfitured because they were called upon to "speak for" Indian culture precisely when they had begun to drift away from old Indian habits and started to adopt new American ways

Due to my subjects' conviction that "Americans" saw them mainly as "Indian immigrants", they embraced the role of ethnic representatives of India. As some scholars have said, minorities often become what the dominant majority perceives them to be. Increased exposure to non-Indians in the work place hastens the realization that Asian Indian immigrants are unlikely to be completely accepted as "one of us" by Americans. Immigrant writers who prescribe assimilation as the proper destination of immigrants overlook the fact that for ethnic minorities in the United States, assimilation into the mainstream is possible only as a minority.[10] Of course, there are other reasons too for the attachment to "Indianness": nostalgia is one of the most important reasons for the return to Indian culture. Indianness is a long held identity, and it is also is a way to make a connection to older and younger generations.

Indian ethnicity provides a convenient hook on which to hang one's identity. A return to India ethnicity bolsters self and identity, and this is not perceived to contradict the formation of an American identity. Indians in the U.S. feel that a strategic (though partial) re-activation of Indian ethnicity will help them to rise in the race/class hierarchy

[10] Such a minority identity is problematic for it precludes representing the majority, and also, it has to be reconciled with the workplace requirement of 'Americanness'. Also, minorities are sometimes marginalized.

in the U.S. and also allow them to stay within the model minority position. I suspect that the re-production of Indian ethnicity abroad also has a secret agenda: the reprehensible aim of trying to "show" the supposed "superiority" of Indian spirituality, moral standards, and historical heritage. Some scholars have noted that non-white ethnic groups use the discourse of moral superiority to transform negative ascription into positive affirmation. Also, I fear that Indians in the United States are shamefully racially chauvinistic themselves; I wonder whether Indians in the U.S. accentuate their ethnicity to distinguish themselves from other racial and ethnic minorities such as Hispanics and blacks. I believe that all the factors mentioned above account for the reassertion of Indian ethnic identity in the U.S.

Scholars have observed that the home is the conflation of the self. The Indian immigrant home becomes a principal site of the recomposition of Indian culture. Since Indian women are usually viewed as repositories and transmitters of "traditional" ethnic culture, the female performance of Indian culture at home is greatly appreciated by Indian immigrant men and by the Indian immigrant community as a whole. The tendency to be Indian at home and as "American" as possible in the work context asserts itself. The conflicting demands of the roles of career-oriented woman in the American workforce on one hand, and that of the traditional Indian housewife on the other, create considerable dissonance in the psyche of Asian Indian immigrant women. Also, I fear that Indian-ness at home means, among other things, a return to the inequitable patriarchal relations that characterize the traditional Indian family. This inequity at home is difficult to accept for Indian immigrant women who aspire to be treated as well as men in their place of work.

The performance of recursive Indian identity also leads to the strengthening of transnational ties to the "home-country" and cross-border loyalties. The recent proliferation of flows of ideas, people, goods, images and technology in today's post-national political world has facilitated the activation and maintenance of a diasporic identity. Nostalgia combined with "misrecognition" as "Indian" (rather than "Indian *American*") leads to a partial abandonment of the path to assimilation, and hence, it results in the reproduction of a diasporic Indian identity that can be activated whenever needed. While my interviewees want to hold on to their lives in the United States, they also desire a "home away from home". They plan to retain their diasporic residence and employment, but they also indulge in transnational imaginings of a partial but triumphant return to their "homeland" where they will feel "at home" and also gain the financial advantage that an income in dollars brings. Immigration is no longer a one way process but the creation of dual lives across national borders.[11] America represents economic riches and individual liberty, and India represents the emotional comfort of living in one's own "homeland". My interviewees desired both, but they were chasing goals that are worlds apart.

Indian immigrant working women in the San Francisco Bay Area avail of burgeoning Indian diasporic cultural resources here by hiring local fellow-immigrant producers and teachers of Indian culture. This enables such women to fulfill their

[11] In a survey conducted in the Silicon Valley by Anna Lee Saxenian, 45% of Indian respondents said that they will return home permanently, whereas 32% said it was unlikely. Those who wanted to return cited 'culture and lifestyle', 'desire to contribute to economic development of India', and 'professional opportunities in India' as their primary reasons for desiring to go back (Anna Lee Saxenian 2002:Chapter 4:32-35).

perceived obligation to enculturate their offspring in Indian ways of behaving even while they are away at work.

In the midst of these developments, my subjects continued to sustain dual contesting identities. Constantly code-switching back and forth between the performance of their American and Indian identities, they formulated a unique response to the contradictions in the expectations in the American workplace on one hand, and the Indian immigrant home on the other.

Comparative analysis searches for variance in experience across different groups. While my study mainly focuses on Indian working women in the U.S., I also interviewed settled non-working U.S.-resident Indian women in the Bay Area, and professional and semi-professional women resident in India. My purpose was to find out the difference, or lack thereof, made by participation in the American workplace on one hand, and residence in India on the other.

Being largely confined to the home, non-working expatriate Indian women are effectively insulated from American society. Hence, their level of Americanization is low. Surprisingly, such women exhibit very little identification with the culture and values of present-day India. The majority of these subjects lived in a time warp. They still function according to the culture of the India they had emigrated from, the India of two or three decades ago. I believe that the inner psyche of these women becomes very defensive about their constant efforts to Indianize their offspring, and their lack of income. Their external self is reflective of the tightly knit community in the midst of which they have found shelter, that of fellow Indian immigrant wives who are not employed.

While Indian American women who work outside the home in paid employment are relatively frank about the importance of the female income for familial economic success, working women resident in the country of origin are not so frank. Being aware of Indian patriarchal ambivalence about working women, employed women in India claimed that their incomes are useful but inessential. Yet I observed that women's financial contributions are vital for attaining "basic comforts" considered necessary by the newly globalized Indian middle-class that stayed on in the homeland. I found a surprising global uniformity in motivations across the thousands of geographic miles that separate working women in India from their immigrant counterparts resident in the United States. Both groups were motivated by the desire for upward economic mobility, status accumulation, expectational conformity, and agency. On another note, my interviewees in India faced as much, if not more of gender discrimination as those subjects who live in America. Another characteristic I observed among my interviewees in India is that the women I spoke to there have the support of the extended family and paid domestic help. Thus, in comparison to immigrant working mothers in U.S.A., upper class working women in India have fewer problems with housework and childcare despite their daytime absences from home.

I believe a brief overview of the chapters in this dissertation may be useful. In this chapter, the first, I will review the theoretical foundations of my work. I will also provide a historical and statistical background of Asian Indians in the United States; and I will discuss the methods I used to conduct fieldwork within the Indian immigrant community in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area. In the second chapter, I will write about female immigrant construction of the self and identities in the American workplace. Hence, I

will discuss motivations for paid employment among Indian immigrant professional working women in the Bay Area, and I will also uncover how ethnicity, race, and gender impinge on social interactions and career advancement in the American labor force. Lastly, in order to study how immigration changes the formation of the self and identities, I will compare the work-experiences of Indian immigrant professional working women in the Bay Area to those of their occupational and class counterparts in the sending community in the Indian homeland. In the third chapter, I will comment on the making of the self and identities by Indian immigrant professional working women in the context of the Indian immigrant home and community in the Bay Area. I will examine the feminine role in ethnic cultural deployment, inter-gender distribution of housework and childcare duties, women's access to household resources, women's personal freedom, and female empowerment and agency among my respondents. In order to study the effect of employment on self and identity formulation, I will compare Indian immigrant working women to Indian immigrant non-working women. For comparative purposes, I will also give an account of my observations on the home life and community presence of those Indian professional women who have not left their native land. In the fourth chapter, I will write about the re-activation of an ethnic identity and the development of a transnational self by my subjects. I will present my own three-phased model of the socio-psychological construction of self by Indian immigrant professional working women. I will also discuss my understanding of the self and identities of those Indian diasporic women who are not employed. In the fifth chapter, the last in this dissertation, I will summarize my conclusions.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this section, I will briefly discuss the theoretical concepts I have used in my study of the selves and identities of Indian professional and semi-professional working women in the San Francisco Bay Area.

(a) Transnationalism, Globalization, and Diaspora Theories

Arjun Appadurai suggests that due to current constant flows of ideas, people, goods, images, and technologies, stable structures such as nation-states are now threatened. Floating diaspora, mobile images and technologies, and cross-border transnational politics disturb the organized form of the nation and the international system. Hence the nation-state is no longer the arbiter of modern globality. The authority of the nation-state is challenged by recent high-volume traffic of people, goods, media, ideas, scientific techniques, and political loyalties across international borders. The motion of ideologies, techniques, messages, populations, and objects, is not spatially uniform, because they are at disjuncture with each other. While some regions may experience the entrance of advanced technological know-how, alien media images, new liberalizing ideologies, low-level employment positions, and over-priced multinational goods, other areas may be transformed by a deluge of job-hungry inassimilable immigrants from distant homelands, and the import of cheap foreign products of inferior quality. This lack of uniformity causes inequity and suffering in various parts of the world. The imagination emancipates whereas day-to-day struggles result in oppression. It creates a postnational political world. Diasporic public spheres flourish in the interstices between nations. Electronic mass media eliminates the necessity for face to face interaction. It does away with the need to read and write, or even to understand the

language, linking performers and audiences across borders. Electronic personal media initiate long distance discussions between complete strangers. They continue conversations between intimates separated by thousands of miles. Imagination aided by new technology has given rise to an international civil society, to mobile global forms of civic life in which nations are but individual transit points (Appadurai 1996).

Deterritorialization transports laboring people from the third world into wealthy nations where they are likely to occupy lower-class positions. This dislocation of place, political attachment, and class position produces intensified attachment to the culture left behind in the country of origin. Appadurai mentions the Islamic religion, which functions outside national boundaries and goals due to the dedicated activities of overseas believers. He also writes of how the cultural reproduction of Hinduism by Indian immigrants abroad has been tied to Hindu fundamentalism at home. The persistence of multicultural debates in Europe and the United States is “testimony to the incapacity of states to prevent their minority populations from linking themselves to wider constituencies of religious or ethnic affiliation”. Thus, we cannot assume any longer that all or most “viable public spheres” are national. Instead of national public spheres, we now have a postnational order of diasporic public spheres. “Diasporic public spheres, diverse among them selves, are the crucibles of a postnational political order. The engines of their discourse are mass media (both interactive and expressive) and the movements of refugees, activists, students, and laborers” (Appadurai 1996:23).

In general Appadurai’s formulations are useful, but as Aihwa Ong has pointed out, they are open to criticism on account of his failure to locate imagination as a social process within national politico-economic structures that control the flows of people,

ideas, technology, goods, images, and finances. In addition, Appadurai's formulations do not consider class stratifications in the global economy. He gives the impression that global capitalism is liberating for all, when the fact is that it mainly benefits the global elite who are substantially regulated by the state that has fashioned a new relationship to capital mobility and to manipulations by flexible citizens and non-citizens (Ong 1999).

Despite the lacunae in his theories, Appadurai's conceptions are useful, for they move the reader out of earlier unilinear theories of immigration where the immigrant is only imagined to move from arrival to assimilation to nationhood. Appadurai's theory of transnationalism is useful in its multilinear and multitemporal formulation. In fact we can understand how progressive Appadurai's theory is if we examine some older influential American theories of immigration. Writing just before the new wave of immigrants entered the U.S. in the 1960s, Glazer and Moynihan wrote of different immigrant groups in their popular book *Beyond the Melting Pot*. They identified "Catholics", "Jews", "white Protestants" and "Negroes" as those who principally comprise the American people. This formulation seems quite out of date in current times, but the rest of the theories of Glazer and Moynihan have aged better. They claimed that race and religion constitute two salient paradigms in the organization of the American population. Rejecting the notion that America is a melting pot in which incoming immigrants assimilate completely, Glazer and Moynihan held that plural ethnicities had survived American conditions, and that they would continue to do so. [12] Milton Gordon's

[12] But it was also held to be true that after two or three generations in America, ethnic people are sufficiently transformed to let go of their language, customs or loyalty to the notion of origin. Rather than a remnant of pre-immigration memories, the new ethnic

influential *Assimilation in American Life* was published just a year after Glazer and Moynihan's work. Gordon, too, perceived race and religion to be the two main organizing principles of the diverse sub-cultures and sub-societies in America.[13]

Many social trends that had just begun to evolve when Glazer, Moynihan and Gordon had formulated their theories gathered momentum after the publication of their works. Their theories were products of their time. In the mid 1960s, the black civil rights movement demanded racial integration. In the late 1960s came the black power wave, black pride and black ethnic unity that were ambivalent about whether racial desegregation was to be preferred to racial separation (accompanied by ethnic vitality) at the cost of ethnic dissolution. Led by the black example, native Indians, Chicanos and white groups also initiated a resurgence and reclamation of their ethnic identities. Group

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pluralism in America is a product of the interplay between group heritage and the American environment.

[13] He outlined a seven-stage assimilation process. First came cultural assimilation (i.e. adoption of the cultural patterns, customs and language of America) by immigrants. The next stage is structural assimilation, or social entry into cliques, clubs and other institutions of the host community. Cultural assimilation did not necessarily lead to structural assimilation, but all the later stages consisting of marital, identificational, attitude receptional, behavior and curricular assimilation succeed each other automatically. Gordon argued that the majority of ethnic groups in the U.S. had experienced cultural assimilation or acculturation. They had done away with distinctive languages, customs and distinguishing cultural habits, but they had not yet become structurally assimilated, let alone undergone any of the latter five stages of assimilation.

interests such as native Indian tribal autonomy, or black community control over schools that had a majority of black students, motivated many ethnic revivalist movements.

From the 1960s onward, and especially in the 1990s, millions of new immigrants from Asia and Latin America settled in the U.S. They have actively worked for linguistic, cultural and religious perpetuation of their own ethnic groups.

All these developments in pluralist America bring us to an important question: How far should a nation allow pluralism to develop? The American nation is premised on the ethics of democratic individualism and liberal pluralism. With the exception of the prevention of discrimination, liberal pluralism does not envisage the state as a direct controller of race and ethnic relations. It is committed to providing equal opportunity for all individuals, but it does not concern itself with the structural position or cultural uniqueness of ethnic groups. The state advocates tolerance for the protection of cultural distinctiveness, but it assumes a willingness to assimilate enough to identify with the national democratic goal of maintaining national unity and the coexistence of different ethnic groups.

When ethnic and racial corporations obtain legal, political and economic powers such that they restrict the educational, occupational, associational, residential, franchise, and linguistic rights and facilities of individuals on the basis of whether or not they are part of the ethnic group, then democratic universalism and identification with national values, ideas and institutions are threatened. [14] Cultural and racialist separatism allows

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[14] Such ethnic and racial corporations include bilingual, religious, or denominational private schools and colleges such as the Bay-Area-based Chinese Challenge School, tribal reservations such as Native Indian ones, ethnic associations such as the Federation of Indians in America, and linguistic lobbies such as Hispanic groups that advocate

ethnic minorities to participate in their distinctive culture to the fullest extent possible, but it prevents them from obtaining structural assimilation, thus ultimately cutting them off from civic and political assimilation.

Appadurai writes of this phenomenon. He explains that because of its pluralistic outlook, and because of its pride in being a land of immigrants, the United States of America continues to be the chosen destination for thousands of immigrants. The challenge is to balance multiculturalism with national unity. Most Americans have hyphenated identities, and their ethnic identities are threatening to overwhelm their American identity. The notion of the nation grows transnationally, but the legitimacy of the nation-state is under attack within its own territorial region (Appadurai 1996).

Appadurai stresses that diasporic peoples become more loyal to their nation of origin after having left its often unpleasant realities, hence there are now many transnations in the United States. These transnations are thoroughly diasporic, but they are founded on the ideology of putative origin from a common place or nation. In agreement with Appadurai, Khandelwal shows in her research on Indians in the New York metropolitan area that Indian culture is transplanted in the United States. The belief is that it is so strong that it will easily take root in new soil. Of course, it is slightly transformed in the long haul across thousands of miles. Also, just as Indian culture is divided by region, religion, and class, here too culture is diversified even within the community by the same three factions mentioned above. The effort to maintain

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increased funding of E.S.L. (English as a Second Language) classes in American public schools.

transnational ties have caused Indian immigrants to become more Indian here than they were in India (Khandelwal 2002).

Sandhya Shukla is also in general agreement with Appadurai. She admits that there are actual substantial transnational flows of finances, social relations, and political ideologies. But she suggests that the centrality of the diasporic sensibility lies in how Indian migrants have constructed India as a means to negotiate life in the multicultural United States. Rather than nationalist passion for former homelands, it is in the creation of a symbolic India that Indian immigrants can constitute a post-colonial national identity, and also a space in first-world United States. Hence in the diasporic formation of Indian-ness, it is more of an imaginary site for group identity in urban and suburban areas of settlement, than an actual territorial state. In today's globalized condition, Indian-ness provides a discourse for migrant articulation about race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism (Shukla 2003).

The American legend is that it is a land of immigrants. America is proud to be a pluralistic and democratic nation of immigrants, but no nation, not even the United States of America, can contain such a variety of transnations. "In today's postnational, diasporic world, America is being invited to weld these two doctrines together, to confront the needs of pluralism *and* of immigration, to construct a society *around* diasporic diversity" (Appadurai 1996:172-173).

Appadurai and his adherents present a convincing scenario of transnational "virtual neighborhoods" in which ethnoscapes are formed by modern technological mediascapes aiding imaginations that flow across national borders. But I wonder whether such an account of global diasporic imagined communities trivializes the permanence of

immigrants in their new home. As Lisa Lowe and others have shown, the critical flaw in transnational theory is that it places too great an emphasis on cross border links, and neglects the permanence of immigrant homes in the country of settlement. Whether or not they imagine that they will return home in the end, almost all immigrants end up living their entire lives in the adopted country. Theories of transnationalism fail to account for this reality of cross border lives (Espiritu 2003).

Theories of transnationalism also fail to give due importance to race and ethnicity that disrupt and realign everyday life. After all, issues of race and racism cannot be wished away by globally linked diasporic imaginations. Howard Winant of the racial formation approach has formulated that race identity, and indeed, race itself, is not stable, it is constantly politically constructed. Racial formation occurs at the intersection of representation with structures/ institutions. These intersections are articulations of the meaning of race. Winant points out that it is impossible to “transcend” race, and that is the way it should be, for race is a marker of a long history of both established systems of truth and epochal struggles for freedom, human rights, and solidarity. The legacy of post World War II anti-racial movements brought a vision of racial justice. Many racial reforms were carried out, but the effects of colonial rule, apartheid, and segregation have not been overcome (Winant 2004).

In addition to the issues raised above, I have a few more questions about transnational identity in particular. The first is: Transnational or diasporic identity is meant to further status claims for immigrants, but does it indeed succeed in this attempt? After all, even if the ethnic community showers praise on those who excel in ethnic cultural performance, what about the host society?

The second question is: Doesn't the emphasis on the transnational recreation of Indian sensibilities in the diaspora replicate inequitable gender and caste discrimination in the country of settlement? It has been widely recognized that unjust gender relations are indeed reproduced in America in the attempt to bring about ethnic resurgence here (George 2005, Espiritu 2003, Dasgupta 1998, Agarwal 1991). In her analysis of Filipino immigrants, Espiritu has shown that since immigrant communities perceive that the dominant ethnic group views them as different and hence non-normative, the immigrant community attempts to claim moral superiority over the dominant community by becoming hyper-vigilant in forbidding its women from indulging in what it believes to be transgressions of female virtue. This process reinforces patriarchy within the overseas community (Espiritu 2003).

My third question is: How authentic is the ethnic culture produced and performed in the diaspora? Of course, we need to be careful in our use of the concept of authenticity, since all cultures are always under production and formation. Some scholars have justifiably asked: Why can't Indian immigrants in America have their own culture, even if it is different from that of both their homeland and their adopted country? While that is a valid objection to the insistence on authenticity, we cannot ignore Shamita Dasgupta's observation that contradictions and intricacies that emerge in a lived culture, as in the Indian homeland, are obliterated deliberately in the U.S., in the name of "unity, coherence, and formal presentation to the dominant mainstream."(Dasgupta 1998:5) Many scholars have shown that transnational practitioners of their native culture are outdated (Mazumdar 1995). Also they cross-identify and code-switch too often to do any justice to either the culture of the homeland or the host settlement. Luhrmann has pointed

out that an authentic self is difficult to achieve especially in post-colonial subjects since such individuals are steeped in a history of cross-identification and rejection (Luhrmann 1996). The same is even more applicable for post-colonial immigrants who leave their own homeland for more prosperous nations.

Vijay Prashad has provided a response to the issues I have discussed above. He explains that it is due to racist rejection by the host society, that *desis* accept the only space sanctioned by U.S. society, a hyper-Indian orientalist ethnic space. Seen as superior in spiritual matters, but inferior in practical matters to "Americans" (usual code for white folks), Indian immigrants attempt to find at least an intermediary place in the race hierarchy. They obtain a position which is seen to be inferior to whites but superior to blacks. Hence, in order to maintain at least this marginal position of superiority, Indian immigrants embrace the model-minority image and in many instances, they even resort to shameful anti-black racist chauvinism. Prashad urges Indians in the U.S. to reject this racial contract, and renegotiate solidarity with all oppressed races in America (Prashad 2000). Indian ethnic identity is resurrected in the U.S. due to social rejection and the desire to get a leg up in multi-racial America, but in the end, it transforms into transnational and diasporic identity which attempts to escape the compulsions of color lines in the United States by imagining a global Indian or global South Asian mobile community resident across borders.

Ong has resolved some related questions in her interesting study of transnational elite Chinese investors and traders. Like the scholars quoted above, Ong finds that the ethnoracial moral order of the host community lessens the transnational's ability to transform economic capital into social advantage, and also that gender relations in

transnational families are regulated by family regimes that usually validate male mobility, and idealize female localization. Cultural norms favor global mobility for peripatetic Chinese males, enabling them to accumulate capital and power, but it disciplines women and children, forcing them to live restricted and stationary lives. As far as authenticity of identity is concerned, Ong points out that among transnational individuals, personal identity seldom coincides with state-imposed identity. The global economy of the current late capitalist period has motivated many Chinese to invest outside and immigrate to economically gainful and politically secure "safe haven" destinations outside the home nation. Despite obtaining citizenship in far away nations, such voluntarily displaced persons retain their personal Chinese identity. Thus, the Chinese transnational adroitly navigates regimes of family, state, and capital, all the while being true to his ethnic transnational practices and imaginings. But Ong cautions us that these manipulations only articulate the tension between the state and global capital, they do not herald the end of the nation-state or a "clash of civilizations" (Ong 1999).

(b) Immigration Theories

In his ground breaking study *Strangers from a Different Shore,* Ronald Takaki says that like European immigrants, Asian immigrants came to the U.S. for a "fresh start". A third generation Asian American, Takaki focuses on the "long hours of labor and racial discrimination" the Asian Americans endured in the U.S. Takaki concludes that: "they [Asian immigrants] did not permit exterior demands to determine wholly the direction and quality of their lives. Energies pent up in the old countries were unleashed, and they found themselves pursuing urges and doing things they had thought beyond their capabilities" (Takaki 1989:18). They wanted to become part of the American dream. But

Takaki also complains of the perpetual lack of acceptance of Asian Americans by other Americans even though the former have lived in the U.S. for many generations.

In a study conducted some years ago among Indian immigrants resident in the United Kingdom, Rashmi Desai found a similar lack of acceptance of Indian immigrants in the social life of the English majority. Desai showed that this resulted in a reluctance to assimilate on the part of Indians in the United Kingdom. In his survey completed in the 1960s, Rashmi Desai examined both blue and white-collar workers in U.K. He found that in both groups, there was a sense that immigrants were left out of English social networks, and if they were integrated, they were allowed only an inferior status. Hence there was an overwhelming tendency among his informants to confine their social interaction to other Indian immigrants. In Desai's time, immigration was encouraged by the presence of sponsors, and fellow villagers or relatives formed the foundation of the immigrant community due to their initial economic stability. This allowed junior relatives or village kin to act as a source of extra income for their families in India, and a supplementary source of labor in the U.K. This pattern of immigration resulted in an extremely close-knit Indian community, for there were large groups of immigrants who were related by blood or marriage, very often from the same village in India. The immigrants were largely male (wives and children were left behind in India) (Desai 1963).

While residential, leisure, and companionship needs were met by the internal social circuit of these immigrants, work or economic function (the primary objective of the passage to the U.K.) was only obtainable externally. Thus the immigrant had to venture into the host society in order to earn a living. Desai writes that work-related interaction with members of the host society led to "single stranded relationships." For

example, Indian immigrants met their English co-workers in the factory every day, but the initial relationship was not found to grow further.

Indian immigrants were “integrated” into the English workforce and were a part of British labor unions, but they did not assimilate into society at large since their interactions at the external interface were confined largely to professional and labor associated functions. The immigrant group as a whole could therefore be considered as largely “accommodating,” rather than “assimilating.”

Desai wrote that integration related to “assimilation” is one in which immigrants come to share the attitudes, values and behaviors of the host society with which they identify themselves, while in the process of “accommodation” immigrants typically accept the relationships available to them and act with some degree of conformity, but do not share the bulk of attitudes and values which are part of the host society. Assimilation participation extends far beyond the work situation to where social behavior is based on acculturation to the host society, whereas accommodation participation is restricted to the work environment. Desai found that Indian immigrants largely accommodated toward their environment and tried to avoid assimilation

Desai’s study has been useful to me not only for its theoretical insights, but also because it has provided me with a historical point of comparison. Are present-day Indian immigrants in the U.S. different from Desai’s informants? My comparison with Desai’s data from the middle of the previous century in the United Kingdom shows that the current pattern of immigration in America is different. Desai’s subjects were mostly brought to the United Kingdom by senior relatives and older village kin who needed a second income or some assistance in running a business in the United Kingdom.

However, this type of migration is the exception, rather than the rule in present-day America.[15] Thus, unlike Desai's mostly male laborers and clerks who had been sponsored by village kin or relatives, the Asian Indian population in the United States is largely composed of highly educated and qualified men and women who have been invited to study or work in universities, corporations and other institutions such as hospitals. They have in turn, been concurrently accompanied by their nuclear families.[16]

Both knowledge-worker and laborer Indian American immigrants of today resemble Desai's Indians in one significant respect: social self-segregation. This is a common feature of both categories of Indians currently resident in the U.S. as well as those in the U.K. of the sixties. Despite differences in patterns of immigration between

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[15] The Luce Bill, brought into effect in 1965, allows the entry of only those Indian immigrants who have secured admission in an American university, or who have been offered employment by an American corporation. The spouse and children of such immigrants are allowed to accompany them on adjunct visas making them ineligible for employment until such time that a permanent resident status ("green-card") is obtained. Such residents have the option of becoming U.S. citizens through the process of naturalization after a period of 5 years. An Indian immigrant can help his siblings or parents to migrate to the U.S. only after obtaining citizenship through naturalization.

[16] There is, however, a significant population of Indian immigrant blue-collar workers in the U.S. whose lives are probably more similar to Desai's immigrants in the U.K. than to those of the Indian American professional white-collar workers and their families. These groups comprise the labor-class remnants of the pre-1965 first wave of Indian immigrants who were semi-skilled and generally less qualified than the post-1965 Luce Bill wave of selected professional immigrants. The families and the progeny of the first wave created their own niche in agriculture in central California, and in blue collar professions such as cab driving; some have opened food franchise operations or gas stations, some work in the industrial belt of northern New Jersey. They in turn, through due process of becoming naturalized U.S. citizens, sponsored their relatives and next of kin, who mostly enter blue-collar professions like them. There is also an unknown number of Indians living illegally in the U.S., all in labor and service occupations. The mode of entry into the U.S., the economic networks, and the social lives of Indian blue-collar immigrants are more similar to those of Desai's informants, than the lives of Indian white-collar, that is, knowledge-worker immigrants to the U.S.

Desai's subjects and present day Indian immigrants in America, the two groups have similar social habits. Like Desai's people, first generation Indians in the U.S. continue to socialize almost exclusively with co-ethnics (preferably from the same region/linguistic group in India, and the same economic status). Pockets of high density Indian populations in different parts of America make regular face-to-face meetings between Indians convenient. Also, Indian immigrants support co-ethnic economic ventures by patronizing Indian grocery stores, video and D.V.D. renting shops, restaurants, dance and music instructors, Hindu priests, and by pooling money to open new business ventures such as computer software "start-up" companies. These are new forms of Desai's people's entrepreneurial activities within the internal Indian immigrant economy.

Desai concluded that while his informants had accommodated to English life, they had not assimilated to it. The same is true of first generation Indian immigrants who have recently arrived or have been resident in the U.S. for a decade or less. These immigrants' social circulation is confined to their own ethnic/linguistic unit. As a whole, the group tolerates discomfortingly unfamiliar social practices by the host society, since it has no option but to do so. It hopes that its own unique ethnic behaviors will be tolerated by the host community. Superficial changes are made in dress, diet, and financial habits in order to conform to some minimum requirements of the host society. Despite this, in general, neither the group nor individual U.S. resident Indian immigrants identify socially or culturally with the host citizenry. Hence assimilation is minimal.

However, I found that somewhat *unlike* Desai's subjects, after several decades of living in America, my interviewees experienced gradual internal Americanization. Their self-identity and sensibilities became more and more American. In the end, they bore

little resemblance to the family and friends they had left behind in India. But this stage is also, contrarily, characterized by a concerted effort to maintain "Indianness" in limited aspects of life, such as religious rituals, food and dress on special occasions such as weddings, births, and funerals. There is also an effort to provide Indian cultural training to the children. Self-segregation of Indian ethnics continues in this stage too.

Desai explained that a lack of social welcome by the host society had discouraged Indian immigrants in U.K. from venturing into the English mainstream. My informants, all white-collar workers in the Bay Area, told me that the Americans they came in contact with were polite, they were seldom cold or hostile. But native-born Americans seldom welcomed immigrant outsiders into their social cliques.[17] My subjects preferred to interact with fellow Indians because they felt more "comfortable" with them. Naturally, this tendency to stay within the Indian community prevented immigrants from identifying with the American mainstream. Equally importantly, many of my interviewees said that they preferred to think of themselves as part of a global Indian diaspora, "comfortable in any cosmopolitan city of the world", rather than envisage themselves as "minorities" in the American nation.

Kitano and Daniels express the immigrant dilemma aptly in the following passage:

> Who wants to become an American? The apparently simple question turns out to be difficult and complicated, since it involves different "Americas". If becoming an American means full acceptance and the chance for equal participation in the mainstream, most immigrants would answer with a resounding YES. If becoming American means giving up ones cultural heritage in order to participate in the mainstream, the affirmative response of some immigrants might have a lowered intensity. If it means

> discrimination and a second-class role, then some immigrants would not wish to become Americans. (Harry H.L. Kitano and Roger Daniels 1988: 4)

(c) Theories of Gender, Work, and Immigration

Immigrant women experience adjustment problems in a far greater degree than their male counterparts. Sangeeta Gupta explains:

> I believe that gender role expectations from South Asian cultures along with the mainstream Western culture form the foundations of their various struggles. Thus, expectations affect various generations of women in different ways. While first generation parents want their children to adopt some aspects of western culture such as education or occupation (what we may call structural assimilation), they also expect their offspring to shed this 'foreign' influence at will under other circumstances (especially related to issues surrounding dating and marriage). Thus parents do not want their children to completely submerge themselves in this mainstream culture by adopting all western social patterns of behavior, referred to as cultural assimilation. These conflicting expectations put tremendous pressure on the second and subsequent generations to be 'American' outside the home and 'South Asian' inside the home. This pressure is especially felt by young women who (like most women around the world), are considered the bearers of tradition and are thus expected by their community ties to preserve 'the culture' and pass it on to the next generation. But what exactly are they passing on? Is it the South Asian Culture that is dear to their parents, or are they blending their South Asian Heritage with mainstream American Culture? (Gupta 1999:12)

Espiritu has explained that female wage employment reconfigures patriarchal relations in immigrant families. Racialization diminishes male employability in the country of settlement. Female immigrants also experience racism, and also sexism and sexual harassment, but this has not stopped them from obtaining and retaining employment. As far as professional women are concerned, just like women in other occupational positions, they are burdened by full-time workloads as well as housework and childcare. Hence they have had to confront their husbands about sharing household labor. Some professionals such as nurses, obstetrical/gynecologist physicians, and

nightshift technical support crew, need significant assistance from their husbands in childcare. It is often the husbands who drop the children at school in the morning and put the kids to bed at night. Increased male participation in traditionally female tasks has dealt a blow to male privilege, but women's attempts to bring about more equitable family relations are hemmed in by their need for a double income and their desire for a strong and intact family. There is an over reliance on the family and the ethnic community since these are their main resources in their struggle against racial subordination in the dominant society (Espiritu 1999).

As Sheba Mariam George points out, who arrives first is very important within immigrant families. Family members who are primary immigrants sponsor the immigration of other family members to the U.S. They are typically the first ones in their families to become conversant with the ways of the host society. Their spouse and children depend on them considerably during the settlement process. This helps them in structuring gender relations to their advantage at home and in the ethnic community. If they continue to be the primary breadwinner, then they retain their advantage over other family members. George has written about professional immigrant Indian (Keralite) nurses, who migrated before their husbands and have higher economic status than their husbands. Hence they enjoy comfortable gender relations at home and in their community. This study is helpful to me since it validates my own strong belief that post-immigration gender configurations depend greatly on the order of arrival and the pay-packet of male and female members of the immigrant household (George 2005).

In fact other scholars such as Lamphere also state that the more women earn in comparison to their men, the more empowered they are at home (Lamphere 1993).

Hondagneu-Sotelo explains that due to spatial mobility, post-immigration women have greater authority in the family than before coming to America, and those who used natal networks to get to America enjoy more equitable gender relations than those who were sponsored by their husband (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). In any case, I think that rather than a straightforward economic reductionist view, we should adopt a more nuanced approach in which not just income, but also family solidarity and ethnic pride must be taken into account when we analyze the re-structuring of gender relations within the post-immigration family.

In her ethnographically rich study of Indians in New York City, Madhulika Khandelwal writes that Indian immigrants view female full-time employment as a new gender role. She affirms that professional Indian women feel that their income in the U.S. gives them a new authority within the household and an exhilarating freedom from economic dependence on their husband. Indian immigrant men in the United States are reported to be apprehensive about losing ground to women in the internal power struggle within the household. Indian immigrant women and men share concerns about issues of racism and the glass ceiling. But the women have gender specific complaints about the lack of support from female relatives or domestic servants, a resource that is commonly available in India. Also, many college-educated women expressed anger over having been rejected by mainstream sources of employment; hence, they had been forced to find employment in ethnic niches or in the Indian underground economy. Khandelwal's work is significant to me for it validates many of my own findings about work related attitudes, and diasporic gender articulations (Khandelwal 2002).

(d) Psychological Theories

Symbolic interactionism has allowed me to analyze my informants from both a social as well as a psychological perspective. The ideas that initiated this school of thought were formulated by intellectual pioneers such as William James, Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead.

Mead achieved a transformative breakthrough by developing a theory of self and mind that clearly explained how a phase of inner consciousness gives rise to a phase of outer initiation of action. Human beings select particular features of their universe and jointly assign symbols to them in order to communicate shared meanings. This collective reconstruction of the universe enables the organization of diverse individual perspectives into a single group perspective. Thus, individuals are able to respond to each other in the manner they expect others to respond to them. Also, individuals find it possible to perform actions that will motivate others to respond in accordance with their expectations. Individual action is a result of both creative impulse as well as reflective consideration. In Mead's formulation, "I" refers to the initial impulsive phase of attitude and action. "Me" is the secondary phase: it is a result of reflection over the expected reactions of others to the individual initial phase of action. Continual interplay between "I" and "Me" indicates an unending cycle of action and evaluation. The "Me" is led by the "generalized other" or the internalization of the rules and roles of the social order.

Almost half a century after Mead, Erving Goffman made a seminal contribution to symbolic interactionism by urging sociology students to study the "interaction order". The "interaction order" is what transpires in surroundings in which one or more

individuals are physically in one another's response presence.[18] Goffman makes a strong case for the study of all big or small socially situated actions in order to understand the forms of social life they derive from, such as relationships, informal groups, age categories, gender, ethnic minorities, and social class. The "interaction order" refers to social exchanges that are relatively circumscribed in space and most certainly in time -- it is all about interaction in the here and now. Also, it is about social life that is promissory and evidential, that is, others can form conjectures about an individual's intent, status and relationships from his appearance, manner, and actions. Moreover, the "interaction order" functions according to social conventions, or ground rules.

While symbolic interactionism has been useful to me for understanding individual adoption and shedding of different identities in different social situations, the work of Erik Erikson has helped me to account for the inner continuity of personality that endures through changes in social situations and life cycle stages. Erikson held that identity is the result of interaction between the inner psychic structure on one hand, and internalization of social norms on the other. Ego identity or individual personality is based on a combination of different group identities such as social heritage and geographical locations.

There are eight stages in the individual life cycle, each stage being marked by biological, social and psychological milestones peculiar to the specific stage. Though

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[18] Face to face social interactions are of five types:
1. Ambulatory, that is, persons move past each other without making contact.
2. Interactions involving some contact between individuals.
3. Interactions entailing individuals coming together in small physical gatherings of agreed upon participants in a consciously shared undertaking.
4. Platform performances for an audience or a group of spectators.
5. Celebrative social get-togethers, gatherings in which a particular event is celebrated.

personality is marked by inner continuity, and is constant irrespective of changes in life stages, the individual is likely to experience a climactic psychological change, called an identity crisis, during adolescence. Difficult circumstances, such as sudden and stark changes in the social and physical environment, might also trigger an identity crisis later in life. Despite such crisis events, in general, on account of being located deep in the psychic structure of the individual, identity is the constant and continuous sameness of being.

Some of my informants described their adjustment to their new life in America in terms reminiscent of an "identity crisis" such as that described by Erikson. Due to climactic psychological changes caused by immigration-related repositioning of function and status, there are significant shifts in personality. Sameness of being is difficult to maintain upon immigration to a new social, linguistic, political, technological, and national environment. Accustomed to being upper caste, upper middle class members of the Indian religious and socio-economic mainstream, many of my informants wondered if their new identity in America was bound to be that of a subordinate minority. They expressed a certain ambivalence about being counted as an American minority. Philip Gleason has shown that since the 1930s, the American use of the word "minority" has associated it with victimization. In fact, victimhood has continued to remain a crucial factor in the definition of the minority. The Civil Rights revolution seized upon the word minority to describe those who had been victimized by American society on account of their race and who were now determined to fight for equality. Minority became a semi-legal term when desegregation took place and affirmative action came into force. Only those groups that were officially designated as minorities benefited from affirmative

action. In general, race and ethnicity, and not distinctive non-racial characteristics (such as religion or culture) are the criteria for entitlement to affirmative action. Hence, American minorities that are recipients of affirmative action are mostly people of color such as African Americans, Native American Indians, Asians and Hispanics.[19]

My belief is that in the first 0-2 years duration of residence and work experience in the U.S., my informants undergo an identity crisis. The ego identity of individual personality is based on group identity and social heritage. The group and social environment changes radically when new immigrants first enter a new country. They become especially conscious of this change when they interact with local people at work. Due to the shock of acculturation and Americanization, which pull against the durability of the ethnic and national consciousness, my informants all experienced a climactic psychological change. Despite the continuity of inner identity, a perception exists that

[19]Asian Indians had been categorized as Caucasians by the U.S. government until 1980. In the 1970's Asian Indians petitioned to switch their census designation from the category of White/Caucasian to that of Asian/Pacific Islander. This move was motivated by the desire to be in the category to which they logically belonged, but more so, by the hope of qualifying for affirmative action programs on account of their 'minority' status. In 1980, Asian Indians were included in the Asian/Pacific Islander group in the Census. Despite their choice to be legally recognized as an American 'minority', Asian Indians are ambivalent about their inclusion among other 'minorities', for they perceive other minorities such as African Americans and Hispanics as a 'backward' underclass in America. Though I find it difficult to understand such prejudice, I fear that many Indians in America are reluctant to be lumped together with disadvantaged minority groups; it seemed to me that my informants preferred to project a diasporic/transnational identity rather than accept a 'backward' minority identity. They wanted to project their ethnicity as a positive social heritage, to be seen as part of a global population of prosperous, highly qualified non-resident Indians who deserve a place in the American middle class. In fact, now that many affirmative action measures are no longer legally enforced, Indians see little value in being classified among underprivileged 'minorities'. Some Indians in the United States aspire to follow the Jewish model; they want to gain prominence through educational, financial and political success and eventually influence U.S. government policies proactively just as Jewish Americans have done.

many if not most old social habits, skills, behavior and values are irrelevant in the new situation. The resultant venture to rapidly adopt locally accepted customs, moral standards and skills causes enormous internal strife that lessens only upon successful adjustment to the new environment.

ASIAN INDIANS IN THE UNITED STATES : A HISTORICAL AND STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

Immigration in the current post-modern age is a legacy of imperialism in the colonial era (Espiritu 2003; Kearney 1998; Lowe 1996; Bonacich and Cheng 1984). India was colonized by England, hence Indians hankered to live in England, the imperial center. But of course, now that America is more powerful than England, they want to immigrate to America. Also, in comparison to the United Kingdom, there is more funding for graduate and post-doctoral studies and research in the United States of America. The current proliferation of immigration is also a result of the present internationalization of labor in the neo-liberal neo-colonial global economy of today. Benefiting from the international division of labor, American corporate leaders make use of technically trained manipulable workers from India and other third world countries to bring down production costs and thus halt the decline of profit margins in the late-capitalist age.

The few thousand Asian Indian immigrants who came to the U.S. in the 1900s were mostly laborers: farmers, railroad workers, and lumbermen. They were mostly from the Northern Indian state of Punjab. They lived under harsh and crowded conditions in cheap rooms in towns and makeshift shacks in the farm fields. The hostile native-born workers they encountered in America, and the restrictive anti-Asian immigration laws prevalent in America at that time made their lives doubly miserable. They were forced to

leave their women and children behind. In contrast, those Asian immigrants who came after the reformed immigration act of 1965 were young, college-educated, urban, middle-class students or professionally qualified men and women who were able to bring their spouse and children, if any, with them. Unlike the earlier wave of Indian immigrants, all of them were not from Punjab; they were from various different regions of India, of varied linguistic and religious backgrounds.

Currently there are 1.7 million Asian Indians in the United States (2000 Census). They reside mainly in the urban areas of the nation. Their numbers are highest in the states of California, New York and New Jersey. There are 30,000 Indians in California according to the 2000 census. Some are Indian citizens (residing in the U.S. as international students,[20] H-1B visa holders, green card holders) and others among them are U.S. citizens. The H-1B program has enabled hundreds of thousands of Indian professionals to live and work in the United States. Indian computer professionals, including tens of thousands of "techies" in the Silicon Valley, benefited greatly from the dot.com boom of 1997 to 2000. When the dot.coms went on the decline in 2001 Indian professionals found it difficult to hold on to their privileged position in the job market. In the Bay Area, large numbers of computer and other professionals were laid off at work. This had a devastating impact on the Indian community. Out of work, and consequently, out of visa status, many Indians on H-1B visas were forced to choose between going back home with their meager savings, or staying on in the U.S. illegally. Now, in 2006, the

[20] There are 80,466 Indians studying in the U.S. currently. India exports more students to the U.S. than any other nation. 18,653 student visas were issued by the U.S. embassy in India in 2005.

American economy is looking up again and Bay Area high tech industries are making good profit margins. Hence the Indian community in the Bay Area is doing well once more.

(a) The Early Sojourners

The U.S. census of 1900 reported 2050 people from India: they were mostly Punjabi laborers and Parsi or Gujarati merchants. Swami Vivekananda, the Bengali monk and social reformer, addressed the World Parliament in Chicago in 1893; his speech made him an instant celebrity at the conference. The inflow of Asian Indians into Canada and the United States increased dramatically in the beginning of the next century. As Indians were British subjects, it was difficult for Canada to refuse entry to them. Most of the new Indian sojourners or immigrants were Sikhs from Punjab.

In 1906, approximately six hundred Indians were allowed to enter the U.S. from Vancouver (Jensen 1988:132). Most of them found employment at lumber mills and in the railroad. This influx resulted in the anti-Indian Bellingham riots that took place in Washington State in 1907. Few Indians stayed on after the riots. Some returned to Canada. Others traveled South by rail to California. There they joined railway construction crews or took to farming. In 1908, Canada closed all its ports to Indians, resulting in hundreds of Indians not being allowed to disembark from the ships they had traveled in. Now that Canadian ports were closed, Indians turned to American ports such as San Francisco. 1,710 Indians were allowed to enter the U.S. that year, and a few hundred were refused entry in the usual process of elimination (Jensen 1988:132).

By 1917, the United States had legalized its policy of refusing entry to Indians. A new bill passed in that year banned all immigration of individuals from a “barred zone”, a geographical area that included India, Siam, Indo-China, parts of Siberia, Afghanistan, Arabia, and most of the islands of the Malay Archipelago (Sangeeta Gupta 1999:17). At the same time, day-to-day life within the U.S. was becoming increasingly difficult for all Asians. Until 1913, all aliens had the same property rights as American citizens; this included even those aliens who were not eligible for citizenship. But the land law of 1913 restricted the right to own property to only those eligible for citizenship (Leonard 1997).

Citizenship was a vexed issue for Indian immigrants. The first American Congress of 1770 deemed only “white” persons eligible for citizenship. Despite the above mentioned restrictions, at least 70 Indians were naturalized to U.S. citizenship from 1909 to 1922. Claiming to be of Aryan descent, Indians argued that they belonged to the racial category of “Caucasian”, and hence they should be classified as “whites”. In 1923, Bhagat Singh Thind was refused citizenship by the U.S. Supreme Court; the Court said that “according to the common man, white was not synonymous with Caucasian, but had a considerably narrower definition. Indians could not be included in this narrower definition.” (Jensen 1988:258). Since Indians in America were no longer eligible for citizenship, the land law and the anti-miscegenation law became applicable to them. They were henceforth forbidden to own land or marry Americans. Stung by these various difficulties, Indians began to leave the U.S. In-migration came to a complete standstill.

On the eve of the First World War, a number of Indian students and farmers in the United States attempted to organize Indian nationalist activities here. Most of the students

who arrived in the U.S. were, or became, staunch advocates of Indian independence from British rule. For example, Taraknath Das, a student at Berkeley from 1907 to 1911, worked towards establishing an Indian nationalist association in America. Har Dayal taught at Stanford from 1911 to 1912. At Stanford, he advocated political freedom for India. With the financial support of Sikh farmers and local Indian students, he launched a weekly Urdu paper called "Ghadar" (revolt) in 1913. After Har Dayal's departure, the new Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu editors of the "Ghadar" urged Indians in the United States to return to their motherland and fight for her freedom from British imperialism. In 1914, of the ten thousand or so Indians in the U.S., as many as two thousand responded to this cry for freedom. They took all their savings and boarded ships bound for India, hoping to organize a revolt once they landed there.

(b) The Second World War Era

In 1946, the Cellar-Luce Bill established an in-migration quota of a hundred Indians per year. Moreover, those Indian nationals currently residing in the United States were conferred the right to apply for citizenship. In addition to the quota, wives and children of Indians currently living in the U.S. were also to be allowed entry as soon as possible. After many decades of waiting, Indians in the United States were finally re-united with their families.[21] India became independent the very next year. In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act allowed immigrants from Asia to apply for citizenship. The Californian Alien Land Laws were repealed a couple of years later.

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[21] Karen Leonard has shown us that due to the absence of their Indian wives, many Sikhs in Central California- married Mexican women. The descendants of such Punjabi Mexican American families are still present in the Central Valley, especially in Yuba City.

(c) Immigration Reform of the 1960s

The Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965 was a landmark in the immigration history of the United States. The national origin system was put an end to. Highly qualified professionals were favored in the new system. At the time the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act was passed, Asian immigrants constituted only 0.05 % of the U.S. population; however, according to the 2000 census, Asian immigrants currently make up as much as 3.6% of the American population.

Taking advantage of the new immigration regulations, hundreds of thousands of Indian professionals immigrated to the U.S. in the seventies, eighties, and nineties. The post ‘65 wave of immigrants from India mostly consisted of highly educated and skilled professionals. They came on H-1B visas which enabled them to reside and work in the United States for six years. After six years, they could apply for a green card. Once they obtained the green card, they became eligible to apply for citizenship after five years. Many other Indians entered the United States as students; they had F1 visas that allowed them to study in the United States for a total of six years. Unlike the earlier Indian immigrants, the new Indian immigrants were able to bring their wives and children with them. While the majority of the early immigrants were from the state of Punjab, post ‘65 Indian immigrants were from various different regions of India. Being professionals, they preferred the job opportunities available in urban areas. They rarely settled in rural regions. Preferring to pursue the American middle class dream of buying a house in the urban areas or in the suburbs nearing big cities, post ‘65 Indian immigrants did not usually settle in ethnic enclaves.

(d) The Dot Busters

But there was a backlash: in 1987 there were a number of public acts of violence on Indian immigrants in New Jersey. In Jersey City, Bharat Kanubhai Patel's home was broken into, and he was beaten up by a gang that called itself the "Dotbusters". The "dot" is the *bindi*, or round vermilion mark worn by Indian women on their forehead. The "Dotbusters" published a statement in the Jersey Journal saying that they will go to "any extreme to get Indians out of Jersey City". Soon after, Navroze Mody, a young man of Indian (Parsi) origin was beaten up by white and Hispanic youth in Hoboken, New Jersey. A few days later, Mody died due to the injuries sustained in the incident.

Table 1: Total number of Asian-Indians in the U.S.

Year	Total number of Indians
1980	361,531
1990	815,447
2000	1,678,785

Source; Manju Sheth 1997:32 and INS data.

While middle-class, well-educated, urbanized professionals constituted the bulk of Indian immigrants who came to the U.S. in the late sixties and in the seventies, less-educated, less-qualified relatives (parents and siblings) of the post-65 Indian immigrants began arriving in the U.S. in the eighties. Their visas were approved under the family reunification preference categories. For example, 65 percent of Indian immigrants who arrived in the U.S. before 1980 had a Bachelors' degree or a higher degree, but only 53 percent of Indian immigrants who came to the U.S. between 1980 and 1990 had obtained education of equal standing (Gupta 1999:15). Unable to find professional employment, most of these new-comers set up small businesses such as motels, grocery stores, and restaurants in the U.S.

The nineties witnessed an upsurge of skilled computer professionals emigrating from India; American firms hired them to solve Y2K problems and to work on other current projects. By the late nineties, more than a hundred thousand overseas workers arrived annually in the United States. The 2000 census counted approximately 400,000 H-1B visa holders in the United States. The peak of the dot.com boom, that is, between

October 1999 and February 2000, Indians received fully 43% of H-1B visas issued by the Immigration and Naturalization Services Agency (INS Documents). The Bay Area has been a magnet for H-1B visa holders, many of whom are Indian. In 2000, the Bay Area accounted for as much as 12% of nationwide applications to obtain H-1B visa holders. This is a large percentage, especially when we keep in mind that the population of this area constitutes only 2% of the total population of the United States. At 19.89% and 12.23% respectively, California and New York were the two states which accounted for the highest percentages of applications for H-1B visas.

Shambhu Rao, executive director of the Indo-American Community Services Center saw the enormous increase in Indian immigrants in the Bay Area first-hand. Rao's Santa Clara center provided services such as counseling, *yoga*, and personal computer education classes. In an interview in 2001, he explained that the clientele coming to his center for classes has increased dramatically in the last few years. Even the influx of older persons had increased, "We used to have 25 to 30 senior citizens that would come in the daytime, now we are getting 100 a day". The swelling immigrant populace was made up of not only primary immigrants and their wives and children, but also the siblings and parents of primary immigrants.[22] As for primary immigrants, Rao estimated that about 30,000 Indian H-1B visa holders alone came into the Bay Area for high-technology jobs in the late nineties. Rao said, "There weren't enough qualified people in the United States. That's why they want and got people from India and China, and

[22] Once the primary immigrant is naturalized into citizenship, his or her spouse, siblings and parents can obtain green cards through a process of family reunification.

Indians have a slight advantage because many of them can speak English." (*San Francisco Chronicle* May 16th, 2001).

Table 2: **A cross-section of the Asian Indian Community among 8* Counties of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area**

ASIAN INDIAN POPULATION IN THE SAN FRANCISCO-OAKLAND BAY AREA
(Data obtained from *factfinder.census.gov* (2000 Census))

Population, Occupied Housing Units, Median Household Income and # Females > 15 years

SF Bay Area County	Total Population (All Races)	Total Asian Indian	Female Asian Indian	Female (>15 yrs) Asian Indian (married)	Total Housing Units Asian Indian	Owner Occupied Housing Units Asian Indian	Median Household Income ($) Asian Indian
Alameda	1,443,741	42,842	20,129	11,483	13,159	6,113	80,674
Contra Costa	948,816	11,683	5,544	2,909	3,573	2,106	73,301
Marin	247,289	1,330	608	368	459	188	64,792
San Mateo	707,161	10,535	4,782	2,899	3,783	1,335	83,621
San Francisco	776,733	5,524	3,045	813	2,329	557	72,018
Santa Clara	1,682,585	66,741	29,635	17,992	22,543	8,376	93,374
Solano	394,542	2,869	1,343	699	739	511	56,713
Sonoma	458,614	1,498	687	442	455	205	60,962
TOTAL	**6,659,481**	**143,022**	**65,773**	**37,605**	**47,040**	**19,391**	

*Data for Napa County not available, since # of Asian Indians<100

Table 3: Education Level of Asian Indians in 8* counties of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area

San Francisco Bay Area County	Education: Bachelor's Degree or Higher (Asian Indians-Male and Female)
Alameda	18,831
Contra Costa	4,297
Marin	723
San Mateo	5,588
San Francisco	2,326
Santa Clara	35,658
Solano	676
Sonoma	453
TOTAL	**68,552**

* Napa County not included since # Asian Indians<100)

(e) The Dot.Com Bust

The import of computer professionals from India has lessened considerably since the crash of the dot.com industry, and the general cooling down of the American economy in 2001. H-1B quotas that had been lifted during the dot.com boom to 195,000, were again lowered to 115,000 after the failure of a huge number of high tech companies. Many Asian Indian high tech workers whose Silicon Valley positions were terminated due to closure of their company or outsourcing to India were forced to return to India

with their families.[23] A few others became consultants to U.S. firms, but they had no fixed income or position. Some others who had been given pink slips set up home based enterprises in which they took high tech contracts from American firms, and had the work done in India for a low price.

(f) Conclusion of Statistical Overview

The 2000 census report shows that 1,678,785 Asian Indians currently reside in the U.S. Together, they constitute 0.6% of the total population of the U.S. Their number has increased by 105.9% since the last census was taken. The 1.68 million Indians in the U.S. are the third largest Asian group, both Chinese (12.4 million) and Filipinos (1.85 million) outnumber Indians in the Asian American group (Census Documents *www.census.gov*).[24] Nationwide, Asian Indians constitute 16.7 percent of the Asian American population. At 11.9 million , as a whole, Asian Americans constitute 3.6% of the total population of the United States.

Though currently relatively small, having grown by 48.3% since 1990, the Asian American population in America is the fastest growing racial category in the U.S. (Hispanics are more in number, but their rate of growth is smaller) (Census Documents *www.census.gov*).

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[23] A survey conducted among transnational technical workers in the Silicon Valley showed that 73% of Indian respondents knew between one and ten returnees to India, and 4% knew ten or more (Anna Lee Saxenian 2002:Chapter 4: 23).

[24] 1.68 million individuals identified themselves as “only Asian Indian” in the 2000 U.S. census, and 0.2 million said they were Asian Indian in combination with at least one more race. Hence a total of 1.9 million people reported Asian Indian alone or in combination with at least one other race or group (Table 4, Appendix III Census Documents *www.census.gov*).

California, New York, and New Jersey are three states with relatively large Asian Indian populations. There are 314,819 Asian Indians in California, they constitute 0.93% of the state's total population of 33,871,648. Indians currently make up 8.51% of the total Asian American population 3,697,513 of California (Census Documents *www.census.gov*).

According to the census of 2000, California is the most racially diverse state in the nation. This means that there is no particular racial or ethnic category that make up more than half of the population of California. There are 4.2 million Asian Americans in California. The 2000 census counted 3,697,513 Asian Americans in the state of California. As shown in Table 5 (Appendix III), they constitute 10.9% of the total population of California, 33,871,648 people.[25]

(g) Political Activity by Asian Indians

In 1957, Dalip Singh Saund became the first (and so far, only) Indian American to be elected to the United States Congress. Saund completed a Ph.D. in Mathematics from University of California, Berkeley in 1924. Later, he moved to Imperial Valley in central California to take up lettuce farming on land leased from his American friend. Founder of the Indian Association of America, Saund subsequently lobbied for citizenship and land

[25] Till only a few decades ago, whites constituted the bulk of the state's population. For example, as recently as 1970, whites accounted for 80% of the population; today only 47% of the population consists of non-Hispanic whites; if we include Hispanic whites, then we can say that 60% of the Californian people is made up of whites (Census Documents *www.census.gov*). The racial break up of the state's population in 2000 is shown in Table 6 (Appendix III).As we can see from the Tables above, fully 53.3% of the state's population is made up of races traditionally seen as "minorities". But Californian youth are even more diverse that the adults in the state. So-called "minorities" constitute as much as 65.2% of the state's children. Non Hispanic whites make up 46.7% of the state's total population, and only they constitute only 34.8% of the state's children (Census Documents *www.census.gov*).

ownership rights for Indian Americans. The Luce-Cellar bill of 1946 allowed Indian immigrants to become citizens, and hence, to own land in their own name. Having become a U.S. citizen in 1949, Saund was subsequently elected to the position of a U.S. judge, and in 1957, he was elected to the Congress of the United States of America by the 29th Congressional district of Imperial Valley.[26]

A study of ethnicity and civic involvement conducted by Karthick Ramakrishnan and Mark Baldassare of the Public Policy Institute of California in San Francisco found that California's Latino, black and Asian citizens are not only less likely to vote than whites, they also participate at a lower rate in nearly every other kind of political and civic activity.[27] If the trend continues, representation at various levels of government will not reflect the state's current diverse population (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004). In an interview to a local newspaper, Karthick Ramakrishnan, one of the co-authors of the study said, "It means elected officials will be listening to an increasingly selective portion

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[26] In more recent decades too, a few Indian Americans have ventured into organized American politics. Kumar Barve is in the State Assembly of Maryland, and Satveer Chaudhary is a state senator in Minnesota. Both are democrats. Democrat Upendra Chivukula has been elected to the New Jersey State Assembly. Also, Swati Dandekar is the Iowa State Representative. Nimi McConigley was Wyoming State Legislator. Piyush Bobby Jindal was assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services in the Bush Administration and he is now a Congressional Representative for Louisiana after a narrowly unsuccessful earlier run for governor.

[27] Ramakrishnan and Baldassare surveyed more than 5,000 Californians on their participation in civic activities. They found that non-Hispanic whites, who make up 46.7% of the state's population according to the 2000 census, were twice as likely as Latinos, blacks and Asians to sign petitions, write to elected officials, contribute money to political candidates and issues, attend rallies, or volunteer for a political party. The study's authors indicate that non-whites are not averse to civic activity, but often find themselves out of the political loop. The study also identifies immigrants as a potentially powerful political force (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004).

of the population, and that and increasingly small part of the population will dictate policy. It could spell trouble down the road in terms of greater political polarization. It could generate a sense of disenfranchisement among non-whites." (*San Francisco Chronicle*, April 22, 2004).

(h) From Lumberman to Software Engineer : More Continuity than Change in the Economic Structural Position of the Indian Immigrant

In the early 1900s, India exported mostly working class immigrants to the U.S.A. and Canada. Punjabi peasants came to North America to work as lumbermen, railroad construction workers, and farm hands. Though American legislation put a stop to all Asian migration in the intervening decades, by the mid-sixties, U.S.A. again opened its doors to migration from India and other Asian countries. But this time, all immigration quotas were reserved for professionally qualified workers and students. Only technically certified professionals such as doctors, engineers, and academicians were allowed to immigrate to the U.S. The post sixties immigration policy of the United States did not make any allowance for blue-collar immigration from Asia. Of course, illegal migration of unskilled laborers has continued unabatedly in the last few decades; despite starting their journey from thousands of miles away, some illegal immigrants from India do make it to the U.S. Illegal entry is the principle channel of immigration of working class men and women from India. Also, some Indians who end up working in blue-collar occupations in the U.S. obtain entry to the nation by acquiring green cards through their professionally qualified siblings, spouses, or adult children who have entered the U.S. on the strength of their technical skills and have since become U.S. citizens. In spite of the two sources of Indian working class migration mentioned above, the majority of Indian

immigrants are highly skilled and educated individuals. The occupational character of the bulk of the post-sixties immigrants from India is white-collar rather than blue-collar.

Amitava Kumar writes: “The terms of exchange called international migration require scrutiny and even stringent critique. Because to begin with, often the commodities are people, and they are part of an unequal and unjust exchange.” (Amitava Kumar 2000:223) I believe that in spite of the change in occupational category of the majority of Indian immigrants from laborers to doctors, engineers, academicians, and graduate students, what Kumar calls the “terms of exchange” have not changed to any significant degree. In the 1900s, Punjabi laborers immigrated to North America because there was no work for them in India. They could stay on in the U.S. and Canada because they agreed to work for longer hours, under worse conditions and for lower pay than native-born American lumbermen, railroad construction crew, and fruit pickers. There are striking similarities in the current situation of professionally skilled Indian immigrants. Indian engineers, doctors, and Ph.D. degree-holders immigrate to the U.S. because they cannot find suitable work in India. Rampant corruption and nepotism choke the few existing avenues of employment there. A weak economy fails to provide enough jobs for the millions of technically qualified graduates churned out by the Indian educational system every year. Hence, migration out of India is a natural choice for ambitious Indian youth. Once they reach American shores, Indian professionals manage to stay on in the U.S. because they are prepared to work longer hours, under worse conditions, and for lesser remuneration than native-born American professionals with similar qualifications. I have found that H-1B visa holders are not choosy about their terms of employment, they will take any terms offered to them by their American employers, for they know that they

cannot stay on in the U.S. unless an American firm employs them. If his or her employment in the U.S. is terminated, then the H-1B worker must leave the U.S. in less than thirty days. I have noticed that Indian immigrant professionals not only work longer hours, and for less compensation and benefits than their American counterparts, they also accept employment positions that native-born Americans with comparable skills are unwilling to consider. I have observed that most Indian software engineers work round the clock on complicated projects that must be completed at short notice; innumerable Indian immigrant doctors work in rural areas and inner cities under dangerous conditions; countless Indian immigrant Ph.D. degree holders teach in tiny community colleges and farm land universities. These are certainly not the best jobs in their fields. Indian immigrants are certainly not lacking in ability, so why accept such poor positions?

Is Amitava Kumar correct in labeling the terms of employment of Indian professionals in the U.S. “unjust” or “unequal”? I would not use these words to describe the situation, for I cannot ignore the realities of third world origins and first world comforts.[28] Even though they often accept positions and pay-packets rejected by their American counterparts, Indian immigrants must perceive their current situation in the U.S. to be better than what it would have been had they not left India. Otherwise, why would they stay on in the U.S.A.? Demand and supply, relative standards of luxury and hardship, and the will to do better than one’s compatriots drive professional Indian immigrants of the post-sixties era just as much as they motivated the Punjabi laborer immigrants of the early 1900s.

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[28] Of course, economic sense is not the same as economic justice, and I do see that one must not sacrifice the ideal of economic equality.

FIELDWORK IN THE SAN FRANCISCO-OAKLAND-SAN JOSE AREA

Due to the combination of the economic boom of the late 1990s and the burgeoning of the High-Technology sector in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area, large numbers of satellite cities grew in the East and South Bay. Technology has acted as a magnet to draw qualified personnel from various parts of the world, particularly South Asia.[29] There was an increase in the H-1B visa program. In 2000, the Congress increased the inflow of qualified Indian computer and other professionals into the Silicon Valley. The number of H-1B visas issued to those from India jumped from 2,697 in 1990 to 15,228 in 1995 to 55,047 in 2000, according to figures from the State Department. After the dot.com bust, the visa quota was brought down to 115,000 again by the Congress. Nevertheless, the so-called Silicon Valley houses the highest concentration of Indians, and Asians in general, within the Bay Area.

Some successes within the Indian immigrant population are well known, such as Vinod Khosla, co-founder of Sun Microsystems, and Sabeer Bhatia, who founded Hotmail and sold it to Microsoft for $400 million.[30] In the Silicon Valley, Indian venture capitalists such as Kanwal Rekhi are widely revered by the local Indian community for mentoring numerous successful startup founders.

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[29] The ethnic breakup of various counties is shown in Table 7 (Appendix III).

[30] The number of Indian American New Economy millionaires is in the thousands. In 2001, three Indian-Americans made it to the Forbes list of 400 Richest Americans. Ranked 236 was Vinod Khosla. As general partner of Kleiner, Perkins, Caulfield and Bryers, in the nineties, Khosla helped finance a series of Silicon Valley startups. His total worth is 1000 million dollars. Sanjiv Sidhu, co founder and chairman of i2 Technologies, manufacturer of supply-chain management software, was also ranked 236. He is also worth 1000 million dollars.

Most Indian families live in Fremont (East Bay) and Cupertino (South Bay). The burgeoning Indian population in the Bay Area (according to the 2000 census, 143,022 Indians live in the Bay Area), patronized a growing number of flourishing Indian stores and services here. For example, Naaz 8 Cinema, a small South Asian movie theater, moved out of its cramped premises in Fremont. It moved into a brand new multiplex movie theater where eight different new movies from Bollywood are simultaneously shown daily on eight separate screens. Business is booming; on opening nights, the long queue in front of the ticket counter snakes right into the parking lot. There is a similar Indian movie multiplex in Santa Clara, IMC 6. Also, innumerable Indian stores in the Bay Area cater to Indian expatriates. These shops sell Indian groceries, magazines, saris, *salwar kameejes*, Hindu *puja* equipment, and music cassettes and CDs. Some stores specialize in selling Indian gold and diamond jewelry. They also rent out Indian movie videos and DVDs for a few dollars. Almost every single neighborhood in this region has its own Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi restaurant.

The Indians in the Bay Area have also built a community center in Milpitas. Indian music, dance, and *yoga* classes are held in it. The famous Ali Akbar School of Indian Music is also in the Bay Area, and there are innumerable lesser known performers and instructors of the Indian arts in the area. There are numerous music, dance, theater, and movie stars who fly in from India and organize shows and lecture-demonstrations in the Bay Area regularly. At least a dozen shows of different Indian cultural genres are held in the Bay Area every week.

There are Sikh temples [*Gurdwaras*] and Sikh academies in El Sobrante, San Francisco, Fremont, San Jose, Sunnyvale, Palo Alto, Fairfield, and Tracy. The Stockton

Gurudwara has been in operation since 1946. There are Indian-Christian Churches in San Jose (four in that city), Santa Clara, San Carlos, Fremont, and Livermore. The one in Livermore is Syrian Christian. The Indian Muslim community in the Bay Area favors their own mosques in San Francisco City, San Jose, Santa Clara, Fremont, Oakland, Hayward, Fairfield, and Vallejo. There is a Jain temple and cultural center in San Jose. There is a big Hindu temple in Livermore in the East Bay Area. It boasts traditional South Indian temple architecture. There are also very active temples in Sunnyvale, Fremont, San Jose, and Concord where most Indians live. But from the outside, these temples look like the warehouses they were before.[31] There is also a Vedanta Society and an ISKCON center in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Every major Indian regional community, such as the Tamil, Telelgu, Kannada, Malyali, Bengali, and Maharashtrian group, has its own association in the Bay Area. These associations organize regional festivals such as Pongal, Onam, Durga Puja, Navrathri, and Ganesh Chaturthi. Diwali, the festival of lights, is celebrated in most parts of India. In the Bay Area, it is the occasion for numerous annual open-air fairs with booths selling traditional Indian food and merchandise. There is also live music and dance from the different states of India. A fireworks' display set to Indian music is put up in Paramount's Great America Park in Santa Clara. Indian regional associations and the various Hindu temples in the Bay Area also organize their own Diwali celebrations.

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[31] On July 21st. 2001, Hindus from all the fourteen Hindu temples in the Bay Area came together for a "Hindu Sangam", a two day long celebration of Hinduism in which the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh chief K.S. Sudarshan spoke, and *bhajan* singer Anup Jalota performed to a packed house. Khanderao Kand, head of the Bay Area chapter of the Hindu Swayam Sevak Sangh, pronounced the event to be a great success. However, many progressive sections of the Indian community were worried by such a blatant display of political clout in a purely religious institution.

METHODOLOGY AND PERCEPTIONS

I have studied identity issues, immigrant experience, participation in the American workforce, and presence in the Indian immigrant family of professional Indian women in the San Francisco Bay Area. I have conducted sixty interviews altogether. Of these, forty interviews were of professional Indian immigrant working women in the San Francisco Bay Area. Ten were of non-working Indian immigrant women in the San Francisco Bay Area. And the rest were of professional working women resident in India. All the women I interviewed were in professional or semi-professional white-collar occupations at the time of being interviewed. All the women I interviewed were in professional or semi-professional white-collar occupations at the time of being interviewed.

In India, my sample of interviewees grew naturally as each ethnographic subject introduced me to other subjects. In America, I conducted fieldwork by immersing myself in the Indian immigrant community in the Bay Area. I made contact with professional women at informal get-togethers or parties in Indian immigrant homes. Sometimes a friend would introduce me to her working-women friends, at other times I would myself seek out professional career women I had heard of from Indian friends. I conducted semi-structured interviews with these women at their home or place of work, or at my own home. The interviews followed the flow of conversation, but I also had a set of questions. I made sure all the questions were covered at some point in each of the interviews. The interviews were conducted in English, Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali. Sometimes, we spoke in English but used Indian slang that is comprehensible only to middle class or elite English

educated Indians. There were some coded words too, that repeatedly came up, such as "American" which was code for "Caucasian". I also interacted with many of the women I interviewed at social settings outside of the interviews. This helped me to get to know them better. I have used pseudonyms when referring to my subjects and their locations. The Indian community in the Bay Area is not small, but it is close-knit, and that is why I feel it would be wise to protect the actual identities of my interviewees. In fact, before interviewing, I always reassured my subjects that I would disguise their actual identities.

I enjoyed the discussions with all the women I met. Most of them were fun to talk to; they were intelligent and thoughtful, often insightful. I found them confident, self-assertive, and outgoing. I admired their high paying, cutting-edge-technology jobs in academia, medicine, or software engineering. I enjoyed the weekend get-togethers (mostly held on Saturdays) in which they would invite anywhere between five to fifty-five friends (the friends were almost always also Indian). They were accomplished hostesses, swishing about in their elegant chiffon or silk *saris* and *salwar-kameejes*, cooking up great quantities of Indian delicacies with practiced ease, or ordering in the food from an Indian restaurant or catering agency. Their homes were spacious, well maintained, neat and clean. Their children were attractive and friendly, trooping up to the bedrooms to chat together or play computer games with each other. But after dinner was over, and the leftovers had been stored away in Tupperware containers, and the soiled dishes had been loaded in the dishwasher, they would slip away to change into a casual dress or jeans and T-shirt. Then they would make *elaichi chai* for the guests who had not yet departed, and let slip that they had had to attend a particularly long technical meeting

on Friday afternoon, leaving them little time to prepare for the party. A project report was due on Monday morning, they would probably have to spend Sunday at the office.

It occurred to me that these women had dual identities, one for home and the Indian immigrant community, and another for work and their American co-workers. I suppose all of us are more "businesslike" and "professional" at work than outside of work. We go to work in our clean and freshly ironed formal or semi-formal clothes, we attempt to be on our best behavior with our colleagues, and we do our best to be punctual, responsible, and say intelligent things at work related meetings. Home is a place for leisure, relaxation, informality, and a release of tension. In any case, I believe that the contrast between the projection of the English-speaking, Western attired, aggressive career-oriented professional-woman persona with that of the Bengali, or Hindi, or Tamil, or Gujarati speaking sari-clad demure Indian immigrant wife and mother persona is quite remarkable. The clash between the performance of Western /American cultural practices, and that of Asian/Indian cultural practices is stark

As I interviewed and observed the professional Indian immigrant women I came across, I found that the contrast cannot be presented in such a simple way, for the situation is complicated by various factors such as tenure of residence in the U.S., occupation, duration of employment, class position before immigrating to the U.S., marital situation, and age and number of children.

In general, my research has been guided by the principle that the collection and analysis of ethnographic data is the principle foundation of the formulation of theories of lasting value. I do not claim to have penetrated the innermost workings of the psyche of my informants, I do not claim to have found out the ultimate truth about their lives. I

embarked on a journey of self-exploration with them. Many of them said they really enjoyed talking to me as they got to talk all about themselves and the issues in their lives. Each encounter was different in tone. While some women were eager to air their concerns, worries, and anxieties about their lives, others wanted to present their lives as complete, fulfilled, and balanced. I suppose each was speaking her own truth. She was conveying something to me even in her exaggerations, or even in her evasions and silences. I am grateful to the women I interviewed for laying out their lives in front of me for me to poke, prod, and examine. In the following chapters I will attempt to summarize some of my findings.

I am a member of the immigrant community, I know my work will be read by some members of this community, and while I was writing up the data I had collected, I was aware that some Indian Americans will regard my work as airing dirty laundry in public. I do not want to strengthen existing stereotypes. Yet, I must represent my findings impartially. On some occasions it has been hard to create a distance between myself and my subjects, especially as we are so similar. This has been one of the ongoing challenges of my dissertation, but I believe it is good ethnographic training for me. I suppose all researchers identify with “their people” at some point, and they must make a conscious effort to separate their own identities from that of their subjects.

At the same time, I found that my university colleagues sometimes raised issues that I found hard to discuss since they did not have the cultural conditioning that I did. Once I was asked about patriarchal tyranny in Asian America; after all, hadn’t all feminists, both white and brown, always insisted that patriarchal abuse was rampant in the Indian community? I found it difficult to counter this perception, but it is not entirely

correct: Yes, I had found that patriarchal authority was seldom directly questioned among Asian Indians in the United States, but I had also discovered many instances where it was indirectly subverted. Also, many Indian American women I had spoken to indicated that their priority was to hold the immigrant family together in the face of cultural oppression by the dominant society. They accomplished this by bolstering the self-perception of their men rather than attempting to change age old gender habits for the sake of female rights. Again, I was asked at the academy: Don't Indian diasporic parents deprive their children of the opportunity to adopt normative "American" behavior patterns, don't they force outdated restrictive ethnic cultural strictures on Indian American youth? I found it hard to explain the emotional over-reliance on biological links, especially on offspring, that I had found among first generation Indian immigrants. Also, the parental response to the charge of being racially inferior was to assert their own ethnic moral superiority and thus, to attempt to invert normative exclusion by whites. This does not justify overbearing parental conduct, but it does explain it to some extent. The fact is that I stand on both sides of the ethnographic researcher-subject fence, and my job of translator is sometimes hard to perform since I am invested in both sides.

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo explains that gender and immigration scholarship must research how gender permeates a variety of day-to-day practices and political and economic institutional structures (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999). Rather than focusing only on women's experiences, women's empowerment, and everyday female relationships, we must study how gender is a crucial ingredient of immigration. Gender permeates and organizes a variety of practices, institutions, and identities that are incorporated in immigration. In my own research, I have studied how gender is a crucial element in the

composition of labor force, transnationalism, moral conceptualizations, and ethnic identity. It is not possible to do justice to the full gamut of female experiences without studying male experiences, hence my research is as much about Indian immigrant men as it is about Indian immigrant women in the Bay Area.

CHAPTER TWO: IN SEARCH OF SUCCESS -- INDIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN AT THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE

INTRODUCTION

I am interested in work related attitudes of Indian immigrant women in the San Francisco Bay Area workforce. In general, Indian immigrant women in the Bay Area flourish in niche occupations such as tech worker, research scientist, educator, and physician. They are proud of the work they do, and they say their long journey to their present position has been worth every step. But due to various factors such as difficulty in translating Indian qualifications to the American employment market, stereotyping of Asians as technical (not managerial) workers, exclusion by social (ethnoracial) cliques at work, unwillingness to relocate, reluctance to work overtime, and immigrant family pressures, they find it hard to progress to higher management. Though they were white collar/pink collar employees, my subjects faced much of the same problems that docile genderized and racialized working class female immigrants did. They complained to me of being paid low wages and of having to increase productivity through long days or speedups. Techies reported not being paid extra for the extra time they put in after regular work hours to meet project deadlines. Lab bench scientists told me about occupational hazards such as having to handle toxic chemicals during experiments. My subjects prided themselves on their flexibility at work, but it seemed more like servility to me. Despite these problems, many Indian immigrant women have achieved brilliant careers in the Bay Area. When Indian women step out of the home to bring in a salary they add to their own

agency, prestige, buying power, and their worth to their family. Work is one of their most important means of expression, and through it they search for success.

I have interviewed extensively with Indian immigrant professionally and semi-professionally employed women in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area. For comparative reasons, I have also conducted interviews with women in the professional labor force in India. Some issues I will consider in this chapter are motivations for work, social interaction at the workplace, racism, sexism, and advancement at work. Many Indians in the Bay Area work in the computer industry in the Silicon Valley. Hence, there are more computer engineers and high technology workers in my sample of employed Indian immigrant women than there would have been had I done my fieldwork in some other part of the U.S. The same holds for biotechnology scientists, of which there are many in the Bay Area. In addition, Indian immigrant female physicians, dentists, research scientists, university professors, and schoolteachers are well represented in my sample. My principal focus is on professional women. But I am also interested in a comparison of work related experiences of professional women with those of non-professional and service women. Hence I will also write about the conversations I have had with Indian immigrant women in non-professional occupations such as child-care, book keeping, retail sales, and catering.

When South Asian women work outside the home in America they step into a domain shaped by a variety of forces. There has been an unabated increase in American

women's employment in this century.[32] The U.S. 2000 census reported that at present, 58.9% of American women over the age of sixteen are employed. Currently, fully 45% of Asian Indian women in the United States work outside the home in paid employment (U.S. 2000 Census Bureau Documents). From my knowledge of the Indian immigrant community in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area, I would think that the percentage of Asian Indian women employed outside the home in paid employment here is the same as the national average, simply because so many female workers from India have been employed in the Silicon Valley and in local biotech firms. Nationally, the overwhelming majority of first-generation Indian immigrant women are educated at least up to high school. Many are college educated and proficient in English. A growing number of new female immigrants from India are qualified professionals in their own right, mostly computer programmers, research scientists, doctors, dentists, or teachers. The percentage of professionally qualified Indian immigrants is higher in the Bay Area than in other parts of the United States. However, there is a significant number of Indian immigrant women in semi-professional, service, or blue-collar positions; they work as children's day-care center employees, baby-sitters, administrative assistants, secretaries, receptionists, caterers, cooks, shop clerks, hotel employees, cleaning women, tailors, and factory workers. Many work in family-owned stores, gas stations, and motels.

[32] In 1890, only 19% of American women were in the labor force (either employed or looking for employment). The corresponding number was 30% in 1950, 35% in 1960, 42% in 1970, 51% in 1980, and 56% in 1987 (England 1992: 6).

COMMITTMENT TO A PROFESSIONAL CAREER

When I told immigrant Indian working women that I was doing research on their sense of self, identity etc., they would usually say, “Oh! You want to know my motivation for working”. Usually, on their own, they would immediately tell me *why* they worked. Hence, in most cases, the first thing my respondent told me was her motivation for working as hard as she did on her career goals. Niharika, a software engineer who had immigrated from Bangalore, explained why her career was such an important part of her life, “I don’t want to give up my job because I have been working ever since I graduated from engineering college at the age of twenty-one…. I kind of co-relate independence with having a job because I have worked ever since I graduated… And I really enjoy working. That’s one more reason.” Niharika had been directly recruited from India to work in a computer software company in the U.S. She was in her fifth year of married life when I had this conversation with her. She had a baby, a boy, within a year of this conversation. She could return to work when her baby was just three months old because her own parents, and later, her husband’s parents, came from India to look after the baby.

Smita was recruited from Singapore, where she was working at that time, to come to the U.S. to work in the high tech sector. She had left behind a husband and a year-old-son to come to Singapore. Her husband and son stayed on with her parents-in-law in Delhi when she came away. While in Singapore, Smita accepted the assignment in the United States. She was initially on a B1 visa here, but soon her U.S. employers promoted her so that she obtained the coveted H-1B visa. Then she sponsored the immigration of her husband and little boy to the U.S.A. She says, “I found it claustrophobic to live with

my in-laws. So I ventured out. You do what you have to do. Akhilesh is very good with the kids. Sometimes it was hard, especially when I had to leave my year old son and come to Singapore. Now too I have to travel a lot on my current job. Then it is hard on Akhilesh. But on the whole my employers have always liked my work and initiative, so they always helped me."

Rani was a post doctoral research fellow in a university in Northern California when I first interviewed her. She had come to the U.S. approximately fifteen years ago as an international student at an Ivy League University. Having finished her Ph.D. in Biochemistry, she married a fellow Indian international student she had become good friends with at the university. She said, "I find research exciting and interesting. I like what I do." She emphasized the considerable time and effort she had invested in her career, the eight years it took her to complete her Ph.D., the hard work she put in to obtain her post-doctoral fellowship, "It seemed that there was always a pre-determined path to follow." Having just had her first child at the time of being first interviewed, Rani was on maternity leave. She seemed reluctant to leave her baby at a day-care center and go back to work, yet she was habituated to her job, "I can imagine myself not working, I enjoy staying at home. But I am not sure how I would react to the situation of not working after an extended period of time, whether I would be really bored, whether I would not enjoy being home." She is against the idea of staying at home so long that it becomes impossible to resume one's career. She says "There is a period of time when the children require attention from parents at home, but once they start going to school, it might get very necessary for me to have a job. I don't even think that I will last at home for that long." She feels the pull of both home and career, "There is a true conflict that I

haven't been able to resolve. Huge investment of time in my career. I don't know how it would affect me personally if I stayed at home and disconnected from work. I don't know how it would work."

As it happened, Rani's supervisor allowed Rani to take nine months off to take care of the baby. Rani happened to become pregnant again soon after she resumed work at the lab. The second pregnancy was not a planned pregnancy. Rani left her job when her second child was born. She used the term "*shaap ey bor*" when she talked of her second pregnancy. "*Shaap ey bor*" is an Indian term that means, "From a curse to a boon". Because they did not have the energy to juggle two infants and two careers at the same time, Rani and her husband decided that it was best that Rani should resign from her job and stay at home for a year or two. That decision could be considered a "*shaap*", a curse, for Rani resented giving up her coveted position at the lab. But the second child was certainly a "*bor*" or blessing, or boon. In the Indian cultural context Rani and her husband are considered very lucky, for they now have had two children. The second child was a boy. Traditionally, male children are considered a blessing, and female children are thought to be a misfortune.[33] Besides, there were many advantages of the children being so close in age. As Rani said, "Right now, it is very tiring to have two infants on my hands, but at least I can get it over with at one shot. Once their toddler years are over then it won't be so tiring for me any longer. We will be free and clear while our friends will have to start from scratch as they start having their second babies." When her second child was two- years-old, Rani began to look for work again. A part-time position would

[33] These sexist attitudes still prevail in some sections of the immigrant community, and they are certainly present in the sending community 'back home' in India, especially in the older generation there.

have been ideal, but she realized that it would be hard to obtain a part-time job that would sustain her interest. So she began to look for a full time position, but not one that would require her to work after the usual working hours. Her father appears to be proud that his daughter is the mother of two healthy children, but he often tells Rani about the progress made by Shobha, the daughter of a colleague. Shobha happened to be Rani's classmate and academic rival in school. Like Rani, Shobha had also come to the U.S. to do a Ph.D. in Biochemistry. Rani's father often remarks that Shobha has returned to the city in which she was raised. She and her husband have both secured associate professorships in the university in which Rani's father teaches. Shobha and her husband have no children. Shobha's story appears to be a constant reminder to Rani's father of the uninterrupted and brilliantly successful career Rani could have had had she not chosen to have children. Rani says of her father, "He never expected less from me because I was a girl. He raised me like a son." Rani returned to work when her second son was about three-years-old; she said he was old enough to be left in a nanny's charge without any worries.

Smita came to the U.S. on an H-1B visa sponsored by her employer, and Rani came on a F1 visa sponsored by her university. Both were primary immigrants, but the next two women I will discuss came to the U.S. as dependents of their husbands. Both had arranged marriages. Aparajita came on an F2 visa, for her husband was a graduate student at the time she came. Meera came on an H2 visa, for her husband had obtained a position in a computer software producing company in the Silicon Valley. Though they came as dependants, both Aparajita and Meera seem to be as determined as Niharika and Rani to focus on their respective careers. Aparajita is a Human Resources Manager. She explains her motivation for pursuing a career in the following words,

> I like to work. I like to pursue a career. Right since I was in high school, I had a great desire to have my own earnings. When I earn, I feel that I am doing something, that I have a life of my own. I don't get that feeling when I stay at home. Everything is fine, but it is as if there is a need to achieve a goal. Otherwise I have a goal-less life. Besides, there is also the thrill of having one's own earnings. I was never good at studies, but I am more motivated at work. I much prefer working to studying. I am much more sincere and hard-working at work. If someone says you have to work twenty-four hours a day, even then I don't mind, because I enjoy it.

Aparajita made it clear that she is not ready to compromise her career for her husband's sake, "It is not that I don't love my husband but my career is important. It's not that I have a very big job or anything like that. But I still need to do something. Being at home all day, cooking, or going out somewhere with my husband, I can't do only that. However much my husband earns, however lavishly we live, I still have to work."

Aparajita came to the U.S. on an F2 visa. She got an H2 visa when her husband Sumon got a job. One cannot be employed with an H2 visa. At the time I first interviewed Aparajita she was trying to convince her employer to sponsor an H-1B visa for her. She was certain that if she failed to get an H-1B visa, then she would not sit at home and wait for her husband to obtain his green card. She was determined to go away to India to seek a position in the advertising firm she had worked in for five years before she married Sumon. She knew that all her Indian friends and family would criticize her for living apart from Sumon for such a long period, but she did not care, " The choice is between either listening to what others have to say about you (*loke ki bolbe*, what will people say?) Or my career. I prefer my career. There will always be a few people who will say things against you. So it doesn't matter." As it happened, Aparajita did not succeed in obtaining an H-1B visa from her employer; she had to wait a year for Sumon

to get his green card. Aparajita spent all of this year in India with her parents. She seemed to find married life in America unbearable unless she had something to do besides cooking, cleaning, shopping, and socializing with fellow Indian immigrants. She returned to the U.S. as soon as Sumon got his green card. She now works in the Human Resources department of a computer software start-up company. She says that though her new job is extremely demanding, she loves it.

Like Aparajita, Meera also accepted an arranged marriage in India; she too is extremely ambitious about her own career. She says,

> Work is very important to me, because to sit at home like that, it doesn't suit me. Doing something is important. It's not that earning a lot of money is what matters. Basically I would like to earn some amount of money….. I would like to go out of the house first, and then of course, earn some money. That is the second purpose. To keep myself occupied is important. Right now, since I don't have any kids, I was definitely getting bored at home. And on top of that, my first thing is, I like to have an identity of my own, apart from being a housewife. I would like to go out and meet people outside really in a work environment, which is different from a college environment. You need to prove yourself.

Meera's story interested me because she said that she had wanted to come to the U.S. even before her husband got a job offer in the U.S. Meera had applied to various graduate schools in the U.S. Meanwhile, Tapas's parents proposed that Meera and Tapas, a software engineer in Kolkata, should marry. Meera's widowed mother arranged Meera's marriage to Tapas before any of the American universities could get back to Meera. Coincidentally, Tapas was recruited to his present position in the Silicon Valley shortly after his marriage. This was an unexpected but very welcome development. Within a few months of her marriage, Meera came to the U.S. with Tapas. In Meera's own words, "I got married in '94. Since '95 I have been in the U.S. Though I didn't want

to come here that way, but it was too sudden." Once in the U.S., Meera abandoned her plan to do a Ph.D. in Biochemistry. Instead, she decided to study for a certificate in computer software writing, she said, "After I came her, the first thing I wanted to do was start working, doing something short and immediately start working. " Within a year and a half she had obtained certification in software writing and landed an internship in an Indian computer start-up company. She now works as software tester in Star Microsystems.

Shupriya is in her early forties. She too came to the U.S. on an H4 visa, that is, as a dependent of her H-1B-visa-holding husband. Having completed her M.B.A. soon after she came to the U.S., Shupriya has been working as an information systems auditor for a decade. She has held numerous challenging positions of great responsibility. She had to travel a lot in her previous position. Having been widowed three years ago, she now has to be there for her children more than before. She has now taken a new position that does not require any traveling. Notwithstanding her "traditional" arranged marriage and the fact that she would not have come to the U.S. at all had her husband not been accepted to a graduate program at the University of California, Shupriya too is very committed to her career in the U.S. She says, "I think if I didn't work I would go crazy, for my own sanity. And I always like the introduction to people outside. I like the job that I do. Now of course, being a single parent, it's also I cannot afford to not work. I guess all these years when I was married, money was not important, it was a nice thing to have, but now it's important to me because I need to survive for my children."

MOTIVATIONS FOR WORK

(a) Economic Motivation

One of my informants said, "*Ghar se nikli hoon, to paise kama ke laungi*" [Now that I have stepped out of my home, I will bring in some money], and most of my other subjects echoed her sentiments in different words. In my view, the desire to earn money is the principal motivation for Indian immigrant women going to work. In general, all women in present-day America are more active in the work force than in previous generations. Paula England argues that the increase in the percentage of working women in the U.S.A. in recent decades is not only due to the growth in the number of single women in the U.S., but also due to unprecedented growth in the service sector, a portion of the economy that traditionally employs women. This is true for the Indian community in the U.S. in that many Indian immigrant women find work in service jobs such as retail sales, financial and accounting operations, medical assistance, computer technical support, contract research, childcare, real estate sales, school teaching, and food catering.

Moreover, England also states that recurrent recessions and recoveries in the American labor market in the last two decades have caused great fluctuations in the earning capacity of the American male. This has resulted in a perceived need for wives to have a regular income. The wife's income is thought to be imperative for the well being of the family. The wife's earnings are supposed to act as a buffer against possible unemployment or underemployment of the husband. This is certainly true in the Indian community in the Bay Area. Umesh says, " Nutan's [his wife's] income is essential. We have to pay the house mortgage, car payments, etc. You know how volatile the

telecommunications industry is right now. Hundreds of people have already been laid off in the company I work for. You never know, you can't take the risk of living on a single income." Charulata says, "I would love to take a break from my corporate job to complete my studies, but I can't give up my job in this volatile job market. You know how many people have been laid off from Delphi [where her husband is employed]. We can't depend on his income alone." As Valerie Oppenheimer (1982) and others have found, those wives who are subjected to economic pressures are more likely to participate in economic activity and make a contribution to their families' economic security than others. Lacking job security and financial support from the extended family, professional Indian couples have a precarious existence in the new country, hence two income are imperative.

England mentions another factor that is responsible for an increase in the number of working women: nowadays women usually work for quite a few years before childbirth. The family gets used to their income; hence it is difficult for them to give up their jobs during pregnancy and child rearing. Until a couple of decades ago, women would drop out of the work force in their child-bearing and child-rearing years, but currently, in order to maintain a stable family income, women remain in the labor force through child-rearing. The trend of women working for a number of years before childbirth, and remaining in the workforce through child-rearing is definitely true of the Indian immigrant community in the Bay Area. In fact, *desis* here come up with uniquely Indian methods of childcare while the wife/new mother goes back to work. Having the new baby's grandparents come over for six months at a time to care for the child is common among Indian immigrant families [the maximum stay allowed by the U.S.

visitor visa is six months for a single trip]. Not only does the typical Indian professional woman go back to being employed within a couple of months of childbirth, as the child grows up, she makes sure to stay at work even when the children are on vacation from daycare and school. Here too, the Indian extended family and Indian immigrant community is of great assistance. Grandparents are called over to spend the long summer vacation in the U.S., so that the children do not have to spend the summer in expensive summer camps while their parents are at work. Sending children to India to spend the summer with their grandparents is also common. Also, Indian immigrant housewives who are not employed make some money by taking care of their working friends' children during school holidays and vacations. Indian meals, Indian language immersion, and diligent homework supervision are provided in such settings.

When Mythili got married, her father-in-law said, "Devi Lakshmi [the goddess of wealth] has now entered our home". Indian women are traditionally referred to as the home's Lakshmi, and that is the role Indian working women try to act out. Yen le Espiritu has written that Asian American women work to support their families, to add to the economic well being of the family. This is especially necessary when many Asian men cannot find satisfactory employment in the U.S. Espiritu has written, " Due to the [Asian] men's lack of opportunities, women of color have had to engage in paid labor to make up the income discrepancies……This book will show that most Asian American women, like other women of color, do not separate paid work and housework. Their work outside the home is an extension of their domestic responsibilities, as all family members – the women, men, and children – pool their resources to ensure economic subsistence or to propel the family up the economic ladder" (Espiritu 1997:10). Espiritu has written

about both male-led immigration and female-led immigration. Filipino sailors and stewards in the American Navy are an example of the first, and Filipino nurses in America are an example of the second. Filipino Navy wives work to provide a secondary income: “Owing to their husbands’ limited incomes, many Filipino Navy wives have had to engage in paid labor to supplement the family income. Even when the husbands preferred that their wives stayed home, they understood the value of an added income” (Espiritu 2003:136). Espiritu writes about female-led movement to America, “The Philippines is the largest supplier of health professionals to the United States, sending nearly twenty-five thousand nurses to this country between 1966 and 1985, and another ten thousand between 1989 and 1991. …. The dynamics of the U.S. economy, in this case the shortage of medical personnel, gives many women an increased access to paid work, whereas male peers do not fare well” (Espiritu 2003 149-151). Indian women follow the Filipino work-migration pattern to some extent. While some immigrant wives provide supplementary incomes, many Indian women come to the U.S. in female-first migration patterns as international students in U.S. universities and guest workers in the software industry. A substantial number of nurses from Southern India (Kerela) have come to the U.S. as primary immigrants (George 2005).

Espiritu discusses another reason why a double income is preferred by the immigrant family: remittances to the family back home: “The rise of global capitalism, and especially the continuing global marginalization of “postcolonial” states such as Philippines, has moved the family into a new transnational arena; the survival of the family and its members increasingly depends on family labor that straddles national borders…..A significant economic manifestation of their transnational familial relations

is the remittance flows to relatives and friends in the Philippines" (Espiritu 2003 89-90). Indians are in a similar position. They regularly remit large amounts of money from the U.S. to their folks in India.[34] Since considerable amounts of cash flow away to India, the immigrant family needs to expand its income in the U.S. Hence the need for a double income.

(b) Visa Status

All first generation Indian immigrants who have entered the country legally and are working with the proper visas, begin their work-life in the United States on an H-1B visa. This is an extremely precarious existence. If an H-1B visa holder's employment is terminated, then he must leave the country within a couple of months. In such cases, even if the individual succeeds in finding new employment within that short period, his new employers must obtain a new H-1B visa for him. This is virtually impossible in most cases because the H-1B visa quota is usually filled as soon as the year commences. Hence the only option is to give up all hopes of residing in the United States and head back to India. To avoid such a scenario, married H-1B holders attempts to obtain double employment and two H-1B visas so that even if the husband loses his own position and H-1B status, he can stay on in the U.S. on the strength of his wife's visa until the new H-1B quota is opened in the next year. The hope is that he will have found work by that time, and his new employers will process a new H-1B for him.

(c) Status Accumulation

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[34] India has higher remittances than any other nation. In 2006, the amount was estimated to be U.S. $32 billion, that is, 5% of the India's GDP. There are more (legal) Non-Resident Indians in the U.S. than in any other nation, hence a large portion of the remittances are likely to originate from the U.S. (Kelleher 2006).

Indian immigrant working women support their men in their attempts at status accumulation. In fact, I strongly believe that most of my informants brought in wealth from the market to the home mainly because they saw that they needed it to not only feed, clothe, and house their families, but also to provide their households with the means to produce the cultural capital necessary for improved status. Writing about *batik* workers and traders in Java, Suzanne Brenner identifies women as the main producers and conservers of wealth in that community. Also, women play a key role in "domesticating" it, that is, in taming money's antisocial desire to break down social boundaries in the marketplace. Javanese women "civilize" money by investing it in the material and social welfare of their families. They convert it into status, prestige, and cultural value in order to improve their families' position in the hierarchies of Javanese society (Brenner 1998). Similarly, Indian immigrant women earn with a view to not only providing a minimum standard of living for their families, but also to assisting their families in climbing to a better position in the class hierarchy.

Indian immigrants in the United States are pressured by their co-ethnics to acquire the status symbols of the American middle class. Indians are not political immigrants, they are economic immigrants, and they are determined to "make it" in the American middle class. The Indian community in the U.S. wants to be seen as a model minority. Wealth, expressed as ostentatious consumerism, is a tool in the struggle to gain acceptance by the so-called American mainstream.

Richard Harvey Brown explains that "consumerism – the popular ideology of late capitalism – is produced and disseminated in the form of commodified culture." (Brown 2003:203). "Advertising creates docile workers who are also desirous consumers

dreaming of vacation travel, electronic gadgets, high-powered rifles, and other instruments of identity " (Brown 2003:203). Both in the immigrant community in the U.S., and in India, my subjects were clearly driven by the desire to own "stuff": electronic kitchen appliances, clothes, jewelry, furniture, cars, real estate, vacations not only within India but also in Paris, Spain, and Italy. Rather than work and kin roles, consumption is the master manipulator of personal style, body, identity, taste, and opinion. In the global capitalist era, people produce themselves through consumption. Of course, rampant consumerism in the U.S., even among first generation Indians was no surprise, but the extent of desire for high-end consumer products among my Indian middle-class informants was a shock to me. Is consumerism liberating? Is it an advance over patriarchy and feudal gender subjectivities? I think, in some sense, it is a progressive force, because consumerism delivers some amount of autonomy. The physical comfort and psychological self-confidence of my subjects is higher than that of their mothers because they dare to step out of the home in order to earn enough to buy that Cuisinart Food Processor they saw the advertisement for. They own means of personal transportation, and they have bank accounts in their own names. Their conjugal families own more investments and property than their parents did at their age. It can be argued that hand-in -hand with capitalism and consumerism comes gender equity and familial democracy, which actually enable the hardworking to climb up the class ladder and determine the course of their own lives. It might be preferable to be governed by global corporate bosses and consumerist desires than suffer enslavement to feudal landlords, patriarchal family elders, and the urge to produce maximum offspring to till the crop fields.

Let my informants speak in their own voices. One of my interviewees, Rajmani, an immigrant semi-professional working woman, was heckling her daughter, encouraging her to study hard, build a great career for herself, and buy a bigger house than her own. The daughter asked why she must try so hard. The mother retorted: “Do you want to be a beggar?” This family has two incomes, they own a house in a good neighborhood, and they are far from penury. Why did the woman ask her daughter “Do you want to be a beggar?” Was it because she wanted to make sure that her daughter tried as hard as she had done to gain a toehold in the American middle-class? Did she think her daughter’s status vis-à-vis her future husband and in-laws, or her siblings, or her classmates and cousins, would be that of a “beggar” if she did not earn any income? Did she believe that anyone who did not own a house was a “beggar”? Why do Indian immigrant professional and semi-professional women in the Bay Area work so hard? Is it because they think that they will be “beggars” in relation to their family and American classmates/colleagues and neighbors if they are unemployed or underemployed? I think that is very likely.

Besides status acquired through economic success, status is also achieved through educational and occupational success. Indian immigrants come to the U.S. to acquire educational and occupational prestige. U.S. universities are renowned all over the world, and U.S. corporations are much envied sites of employment. Indian immigrants are overjoyed when they can obtain education in a U.S. university, and work in a U.S. corporation. Niharika said, “I had always dreamt of studying in an American university, and working in a U.S. firm. Both of these dreams have come true in my life.” Despite apprehension about hitting the so-called “glass ceiling”, my subjects reported that employment produced feelings of professional self-worth and skilled effectiveness.

(d) The Expectation to Make Use of One's Education and Training

Since Indian immigrant women are highly educated, there is an expectation that they should work outside the home in paid positions. Ortiz found that seventy-one percent of Indian immigrant women in the U.S. are educated through high school, and thirty-five percent have graduated from college. Hence while fifty-three percent of them are in the labor force, fully thirty-three percent of Indian immigrant women in America are in professional occupations (Ortiz 1994).[35]

Steir also found the high level of education among Indian women in the U.S. remarkable. They have 14.5 years of schooling on the average. This makes it more likely that they will seek and secure employment. A woman's decision to enter the labor force is affected not only by economic factors, but also by family context. Some women work because their families need their economic contribution, others work in response to expected productivity in the labor market (Steir 1991).

Women who have been devoted to excelling in their studies and career all their lives find that their career remains an important component of their self-image, an essential bolster for self-esteem, even after marriage and motherhood. This pushes them out of their home into the labor market. Products of modern middle-class and elite Indian

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[35] Indians immigrants are often professionals, both men and women. The 2000 Census shows that 33 percent of male Indian immigrants in the U.S. are in professional occupations (U.S. Census Documents Bureau). An analysis of data from the 1980 census by Xenos, Barringer, and Levin showed that the ratio of female to male income earners among South Asians in the United States was 45 percent (Xenos, Barringer, and Levin 1985:82). In an older survey conducted in 1977-78 in the New York Metropolitan Area, Leonhard-Spark and Saran found that 40 percent of the married female Asian Indian immigrant respondents worked full time, 10 percent worked occasionally, and 7 percent worked part time (Leonhard-Spark and Saran 1980:153).

nuclear families of the sixties and seventies, families in which two children are the norm, and where the parents put most of their energies into training their sons and daughters to become brilliant doctors, engineers, or scientists, these women cannot imagine a life exclusively devoted to cooking, cleaning, and child rearing, a life constrained to the space within the four walls of their house. They have been trained to work in professional employment outside the home, and they feel their lives are balanced and complete only if they have a successful career. Their mothers may have been educated only so that they could obtain a good match, but they had been educated so that they could build careers for themselves. Most middle-class families in India favor sons over daughters, but in many families, especially those families where there are no sons (and there are many such families, for in this class, few couples have more than two, or at the most, three children), daughters become the bearers of their parents' ambitions.

Marriage does not drastically reduce their drive to work. In keeping with their demographic propensity for marriage, seventy-one percent of Indian women in the U.S. are married, yet fifty-three percent of them are employed (Ortiz 1994). Marital status plays a key role in deciding employment status. Married women are less likely to work than single women.[36] Most of the Indian women who immigrated to the U.S. in the sixties and the seventies came as wives of male primary immigrants. In the last two decades, Indian wives have continued to come in large numbers, but they come with professional and technical qualifications that can be easily transferred to the U.S. job market, hence they easily find employment here. Also, in the last two decades, quite a few unmarried

[36] A 1998 Census report found that 50 percent of separated, divorced, and widowed women with infants were working full-time, compared with 39 percent of those who were married and 24 percent of those who never married (U.S. Census Bureau Documents).

Indian women have come as international students to American universities and stayed on and found work here. A few other single Indian women have been directly recruited from India to work in the American computer software industry or in postdoctoral research in American universities. Some of the women married men they met here after they came to the U.S. as primary immigrants, but they continue to work after marriage.

(e) The Desire for Agency within the Immigrant Family

Many Indian immigrant women I have spoken to said that they work so that they have a say within their immigrant family. Agency is an important motivation for work. Asian American women work because they want to contribute to the family income, but another important motivation is that work brings empowerment, the power to make decisions concerning one's own life. Income brings more say within the family. Many of my interviewees said they could not imagine giving up their jobs, since failure to bring in an income would diminish their authority within the family. Rajmani says, "I work hard all day. I do whatever I want to, I don't have to ask my husband's or my parents' permission for anything, though of course, I always discuss with them. I work hard so that my family can live a good life. That is why my daughter says, "Mommy, You're the boss in this family!"

In a related but separate issue, my interviewees said that they are happy to have an income of their own so that they can spend money to strengthen the ties to their natal families and friends without being questioned by their husbands. Smita used her salary to sponsor her brother's education, and to pay for her parents' visits to the United States. This is revolutionary in the Indian context for it transforms the daughter's role from "burden" to "producer". Traditionally the wife's relatives are expected to only provide

services and gifts, but in the new equation, they are allowed to be at the receiving end of gifts and services from their wage-earning daughter even after her marriage. Pramiti also said that one of the chief motivations for work is that she can use her own earnings to aid her family financially without her husband taunting her for doing so, thus issuing a challenge to the traditional male-oriented status quo Writing about Keralite nurses, Sheba Mariam George has elucidated the principle of *connective autonomy*. According to this theory, while the nurses gain social and economic mobility and independence through paid employment, they enjoy these advantages mainly within natal family relationships and female friendship obligations. In giving equal, if not more, importance to their natal families and personal friends even after marriage, they democratize the traditionally patriarchally chauvinistic norms of the typical Keralite family, and question assumed rights of husbands and husbands' families over wives (George 2005).

(f) Conclusion of this Section

I found economic motivations to be the primary cause for employment in my subject group. The ambition for upward class mobility drove the majority of my interviewees; they wanted to be a part of the American dream, part of the American middle class. Also, proliferating consumerism compelled my subjects to increase their cash flows and credit allowances. The significant educational qualifications of my subject group did not automatically ensure employment, but they were of great assistance in the job search. Concerns about visa status drove many of my interviewees to work. It is

important to mention that employment brought increased agency to women, and therefore once they obtained employment, none of the women I spoke to wanted to give it up.[37]

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AT THE WORKPLACE: CULTURE, ETHNICITY, RACE, AND GENDER

Some occupations require more social interaction with colleagues and clients than others do. For example, a physician, a university professor, or a financial consultant has to constantly interact with patients, students, and clients respectively. On the other hand, a computer software engineer or research scientist spends most of her time in solitary occupations such as writing code and conducting experiments respectively.

Dr. Urmila Bannerjee is a physician who has lived in the U.S. for more than two decades. She says that she is very comfortable in her interactions with her patients, she does not feel that she is disadvantaged by her color or ethnicity, she explains that she does not attempt to "project herself" differently at work, she does not try to put on an American accent for the benefit of her patients.

Megha is an assistant professor at a Northern Californian University. She usually teaches two courses every semester. Naturally, a major portion of her time is spent in interaction with her students. She says,

> I present myself to my students as a teacher. And then, when it is relevant, I'll say, well from my experience of India, I'll introduce my experience of India, or I'll …say something about America that makes it clear that I am an outsider. Or sometimes, when talking about America, I would say

[37] As I will describe later in this chapter, these are global trends, for I was surprised to find the same motivations for women's work across the globe, in the professional and white-collar middle-class in India.

> something like “But this is a problem *we* have to face,” in the sense I am saying we as an American. So I do both, and I’m not entirely sure that it is conscious.

Also, while teaching classes on American society, Megha often ends up criticizing America. She worries about this, saying, “Sometimes I wonder, because I am so left, and so when I say things, sometimes I wonder if they think, “Why is she so critical? Then why is she here?” That kind of thing.” But Megha teaches at an extremely liberal campus. No student has ever directly confronted her with such remarks.

Shupriya has been an information technology manager at Stanford University the last two years. Before that, she worked for five years as an auditing and information systems consultant at Schourers. Her work is such that it involves constant interaction with the people whose auditing and information systems she is in charge of: “In my job, it’s mainly to go out and meet people and see what their systems do, try to find out about their systems, their applications, in a very short time, and come to some sort of a conclusion, and maybe help them to do their work better.” She says that she is very comfortable interacting with all the non-Indians she encounters on the job,

> When I had a consulting job, it was mostly, especially back East was probably 95 percent non-Indians. But in the Valley of course it is different. I meet all kinds of people, mostly men, few women, of all nationalities. Here of course, I meet more Indians. I used to go to different companies when I was consulting at Schourers, and there are a lot of Indians in this Valley, so it is mixed…. And when I am working I really don’t care who it is on the other side. If I have to give some bad news, whether it is Indian or American, man or woman, it doesn’t really bother me.

In fact one of the principle reasons she likes her job is the opportunity it gives her to meet different sorts of people, she looks forward to the “introduction to people outside”. Shupriya described herself as “blunt”, “aggressive”, “assertive”, “more

assertive than a lot of American women", and "confident". She was quite vehement that she does *not* "project a different image at work and at home."

Aparajita is a human resources manager at a start-up computer software company in the Silicon Valley. She used to work in a similar position in a Bay Area departmental store for a couple of years before she joined her present employer. She is in her mid thirties; she has been in the U.S. for only five years. Her job is all about managing people. She admits that she finds her work rather challenging,

> I don't think people who work with technology…. interact with people as much as I do. My job is to work with people. Sometimes, due to the cultural gap, I do face some problems. I don't know if I say something how will they react to it etc. I may have a reason for saying something, but they might take it in the wrong way. They are justified because I am from a different culture, I talk different, I think differently to a certain extent. All humans think, to certain extent, similar, but there are certain things that are decided by culture.

Though her previous place of work was a huge departmental store with innumerable branches in the West Coast, she now works in a relatively small company that is owned and run by Indian immigrants. She is mainly in charge of hiring people who know JAVA, a computer language. There are plenty of Indians in her new place of work. There are many new immigrants from all over the world among her new hires; many of the people she has recently hired happen to be Indian.

So far, in this section I have discussed Indian women whose jobs involve close encounters with colleagues or clients at the workplace: physicians, university professors, and human relations managers. A major portion of their working time is spent in interaction with colleagues and clients. On the other hand, computer software writers and

research scientists barely have to interact with their co-workers. Most of their time is spent in solitary work in front of the computer, in the library, or on the lab-bench. Since my study is about Indian professional women in the SF-Oakland Bay Area, more than half of the women I observed and interviewed were computer programmer and testers in the Silicon Valley.

Meera, a software tester at Star Microsystems, spends her entire day testing various applications of software on her computer. She described a typical day in the following way,

> There are two people testing software. I get a piece of work, my friend gets a piece of work. She is a white American. First of all, I finish the work that has been assigned to me. I finish before lunch. After lunch, I try to learn more about the application I am testing so that I then get a broader view of it… I need to know the application very well even before I can think of supporting the system. This is for my own benefit. I don't take lunch breaks, whatever I take from home, I eat while I am working at my desk.

Meera rarely leaves her desk; she doesn't even venture to the office cafeteria on most days. There are very few Indians in her office, she said about her colleagues, "Here, not now itself, I wouldn't say that they are very great friends. But I feel very comfortable with them. And I feel they too are very comfortable." Meera says she has trouble relating to American women because they are too "independent". Meera engages in a daily attempt to blend in with her workmates. For example, she never wears Indian clothes to work because she doesn't want to stand out from her colleagues.

Nila, a postdoctoral researcher in a social science department in a university in Northern California, spends most of her days working alone in her office at the university. She does not teach. She interacts with other people at the department only during

departmental meetings. Sometime she fixes up a lunch date or coffee break with some of her colleagues. She is glad that she has a reason to get out of her house, an office to work in, library facilities, a chance of getting her research published, but she doesn't have much else at work.

Navneet is a computer software developer. She too spends most of her day on her own; in her words, "There is not much interaction with others at work". She interacts with her colleagues only at weekly meetings. Though she works in isolation in her current job, face to face interaction was even less in her previous position. In her earlier job, she was sent by her own company to install some software in a different company; there was almost zero face to face interaction with employees of that company, she says "I was totally isolated".

Rani, a post-doctoral researcher in a science department in a university in the Bay Area also mentioned that the greater portion of her day was spent in solitary work on the lab bench or in front of her computer. There was no necessity to engage in any sort of social interaction with her colleagues. Some of her colleagues formed friendships with each other, but she was rarely involved in any such personal interaction, "I never really socialized with my colleagues [it was] only on a professional and just a very semi-social basis. I never had any deep social contact with my American colleagues."

Romila is a post-doctoral researcher in the genetic engineering department of another well-known university in the Bay Area. She is single; this is her first stint outside India. She spends the whole day at the lab, returning home as late as 2:00 a.m. on most nights. But she rarely has much social interaction with her colleagues, she speaks to them only to the extent of her professional needs. Her supervisor was going to send her back to

India once her contract was over, but she managed to get a grant from NIH. Now she has to work in two separate labs to do the work she has gotten funds for. Some essential equipment is in the second lab, but she can access that lab only after the regular researchers of that lab have finished their day's work, that is, only after 6:00 p.m. She says that she is glad that there is no need for social contact with her colleagues because she can't understand them. For one thing, she seldom sees the humor in their jokes, she says, "I laugh, but inside I am thinking, "So what was the point of that joke?""

In this section, I first discussed Indian immigrant women whose work requires them to interact a lot with colleagues and/or clients on the job. Then, I discussed women whose jobs require only minimal contact with colleagues or clients. But in both cases, the women were in a workplace where the overwhelming majority of employees were not Indian immigrants. However, there are some workplaces where Indian immigrants work mostly with co-ethnics. Shveta runs a small Indian store with her husband. Almost all the customers at her shop are from the Indian subcontinent. A few customers are Indian ethnics who have migrated from Fiji, South Africa, Singapore, and other areas outside India where there are large Indian diaspora. She says about her customers, all co-ethnics, "Most of them are well-to-do, but they are very tight-fisted". Mrs. Khan runs a catering business; she cooks Indian food for large Indian gatherings. Naturally, most of her clientele is Indian. She says she loves to chat with her customers, that is one of the main pleasures of her work.

Aparajita is a Human Resources Manager at a small Indian startup company that produces computer software. She says she likes working with other Indians. Niharika now works in Mallory-Powers, but earlier, she used to work in Neofone. Her division of

Neofone had started as an overseas branch in India. The division had been brought to the Bay Area *en mass* after having successfully functioned in Bangalore for a few years. Naturally, most of Niharika's co-workers were Indian like herself. She said that she enjoyed chatting with Indian co-workers, many became close friends. Even though she now works in a different company, she still meets up with some of her old friends from Neofone for lunch. Bur Niharika also felt that, "Indian managers here [in the U.S.] suck. They drive you nuts. They put too much of pressure on you." In fact she prefers American managers because, "They have a great sense of humor, and they really make everything very interesting. They always take work much less seriously than we do, it is not the end [the all and end all] of their lives".

Meera now works in an American company, Star Microsystems. But earlier she had worked in an Indian startup company that specialized in web development. In that company, almost all of her co-workers were Indian. Meera had formed a close friendship with another Indian girl there, but that girl turned out to be unworthy of being trusted with confidences, "I was very close to an Indian girl there but she was also trying to do some backbiting kind of stuff. Actually she was not backbiting about me, but she knew some things about the company which she should have told me. I just came to know about two days before I left that job. I was really starting to trust her and maybe if I had stayed on longer I would have told her some things. Thank goodness I did not do that". Meera says, "It's much better working in an American environment because they can appreciate your work. If they are happy with your work, they really express it. If they find any opportunity, they are happy to recommend you. They have a lot of work ethics,

and there is no backbiting, no bitching about anybody. They tell you up front. And if you don't know something, if you tell them, they will give you time. Much better, no doubt."

When Indian women come to the U.S., they realize that the formal gender relations required of "decent" women and men in India are considered strange in America. Indian women learn to be friendly in their behavior with men in America since that is the expectation. To show how different America is from "back home", Niharika says this about gender relations in the Indian workspace:

> When I was a hardware engineer in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, I was the only female engineer there; until I told them that I was an engineer, most people took it for granted that I was the receptionist. Anyway, I had to dress very formally so that people there would respect me and take me seriously. I only wore saris, never *salwar kameez*, and, of course, I could not dream of going to work in casual or Western clothes. I had to be very careful that I was not too friendly with my male colleagues, because otherwise they would think I was "cheap" or "forward", and take advantage of me. Once I got married, I discovered one of my mother-in-laws' relatives worked in my office. Then I was especially careful, because I knew that regular reports about my behavior in office were given to my in-laws! But in the U.S. things are so different. Everyone is so friendly.[38]

How do their male co-ethnic colleagues perceive professional Indian immigrant women? Amitrajit, an Indian computer engineer, says that he has met a lot of first-generation immigrant professional Indian women in graduate school and at work. In his opinion, they are diffident and stand-offish. He says that they act coy when they are interacting with male Indian colleagues, but they interact more freely with American men. I believe that this might be true. Perhaps Indian immigrant women do behave differently

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[38] In general, Indians are extremely class-conscious, and class barriers often hinder social interaction in the Indian workplace. I have observed that upper-class women like Niharika are often expected to behave in a reserved and superior manner in order to maintain their class advantage.

with Indian and American men. I believe that they hold on to Indian standards of "decent" behavior and "*achi ladki*"[good girl]-like "feminine" reserve in their contact with Indian men. In India, a woman who talks too freely to men is called "*chalu*" or "fast", that is, of questionable moral character. Hence Indian women hesitate to appear to be too friendly with Indian men. But Indian cultural standards are irrelevant during social contact with American men. In fact, here it is considered rude to be "cold" and "distant", even in casual social exchanges; hence Indian women are friendlier while interacting with American men.

In America, the usual servile feudal behavior of the Indian worker in the presence of his boss is also considered out of place. Hence Indian workers, both men and women, learn to be professional in their behavior with seniors as well as juniors in the American workplace. Niharika says, "In India I was so scared of my boss. Here I have a very friendly boss. He really appreciates when I do good work!"

JOB RETENTION AND ADVANCEMENT: MOTIVATION, GENDER, AND RACE

How keen are Indian immigrant professional working women to get ahead at work? From my conversations with professional Indian immigrant women in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area, I would say that they are definitely very eager to advance to senior positions in their place of work. They are meticulous workers, and many of them are involved in constant re-training so that they can improve their value in the job market. For example, in her present job, Meera studies the applications of the software she tests in much greater detail than is required by her supervisor. She does this because

she wants to be qualified to fill a position with greater responsibility than her present one, "Whatever free time I get, I try to technically upgrade myself in that time. I try to find out what new software is out in the market, I read software magazines, or I go to job fairs to find out what the hot thing is." Niharika is also doing certificate courses from the University of California Berkeley Extension Center to improve her technical skills. These are two examples of my subjects who are extremely motivated to excel at work, they are determined to get ahead. But was their ambition sufficient to lift them from the ranks of technical workers to managerial executives?

Uma, a Customer Programs Manager at Delphi Technology, did not think so. She said that in general, Indian women get plenty of opportunities to advance themselves from technical positions to managerial positions in the Bay Area high-technology sector, but they themselves fail to take advantage of these opportunities,

> Definitely there are more Indian women in technical roles than in management. Indian women are often offered management roles, but just as often, they opt not to become managers, mostly in order to take care of their babies, or due to pressure from their husbands. Indian women are scarcely to be seen in management positions, not because of the lack of opportunity, but by their own choice. Of course, I am talking of middle level management, I guess upper level management positions are not offered to Indian women.

I believe that the issue is not merely of the *desire* to advance at work; the issue is also of whether Indian immigrant women are *allowed to* get ahead in the American workplace. In general, in spite of the increase in female labor force participation, the sex gap in wages remains, and sex segregation of occupations continues to be a prominent reality of the American labor market. Even though they expend the same (if not more)

effort, and get the same (if not better) results, women are paid less than men for the same jobs.

Proleterization of technical positions is a fact of life in the Silicon Valley. Data entry and data processing jobs have already moved offshore, and other computer based areas such as software design, computer graphics, data based research, animated video production services, and computer aided design (CAD) is performed mostly by H-1B visa status foreign immigrants who are often paid lower wages than those demanded by equally-proficient native-born American techies. Also, electronic surveillance of workers has made it possible for managers to closely observe their charges without face-to-face contact. Given the current devaluation of technical and service positions in the San Francisco Bay Area, we are forced to ask ourselves a very pertinent question: Are women workers worse off than their male counterparts?

My subjects did discuss gender barriers to advancement at work. Aparajita mentioned problems with gender in her supervisory work at LM, a big department store: “I have faced gender discrimination in LM here, and in the homeland [*deshe*: India] too. Because some men have problems accepting a woman as a supervisor. A boy at LM openly told me “You know, I am a man, so it is very difficult for me to accept your supervisory powers”. I have seen that there are many [men] who have a problem accepting us. This is so in both nations, even in India I faced problems.”

Navneet had had problems due to her gender. She had strong suspicions that her supervisor had refused to place her in a new job opening in the firm because of her

gender, “He saw me only as a female”. The supervisor was concerned that she might become pregnant and neglect her work.

Mandakini claims to have detected a difference in attitude to women between an American owned and run company and an Asian immigrant owned and run firm; both firms are in the Bay Area. She said,

> In the totally American company, it did not matter whether you were a man or a woman. Equal amount of output was expected from both. A Chinese immigrant based in the Bay Area owns the company I currently work in, and most of the employees are also Chinese immigrants. Here they don’t force me to stay over time, only when there are deadlines do I need to stay over seven thirty in the evening. This company is more considerate to women. The people here realize that women have duties at home. My work hours are only 9.15 am to 7.15 p.m. I did not get a bonus in the last annual evaluation, my husband believes I should have got one. At the end of my first year in this company, they did not tell me my status report, they did not raise my salary, my salary is definitely less than that of my male counterparts in the company. But I don’t mind too much. I am not very ambitious. It is enough for me that I am working. I feel I should be able to spend a reasonable amount of time at home.

Moving on to a separate type of gender discrimination, sex segregation of jobs continues to be a prominent reality of the American labor force. Most women work in occupations in which most employees are female; and most men work in occupations which are filled mostly by men. Approximately 60% of men or women would have to change occupations in order to integrate all occupations in the American labor force (England 1992:12). Assembly line workers in the electronic industry, clerks in retail stores, secretaries, schoolteachers, nurses, and librarians are mostly women (England 1992:14). “Integration” would mean a situation in which the ratio of men to women in the occupations would be the same as the ratio of men to women in the labor force as a whole

(slightly over 40% in 1980). I mostly interviewed female Indian immigrant computer industry professionals, academicians, physicians and research scientists. They had escaped occupational gender segregation; that is, they were not in occupations traditionally filled in only or mostly by women. But I also interviewed many Indian immigrant women who were employed in children's pre-schools and day-care institutions. Like computer software writing, pre-school teaching is also a very popular occupation among Indian immigrant women. Pre-school teachers are almost all women, and perhaps that is the reason why they are paid so little as a group. Ayesha, in charge of two-year-olds in a South Bay private school says, " I work full-time, yet my pay is so low, it barely covers the subsidized school fees of my two daughters who are studying in the same school I teach in." Rajmani, also in-charge of two-year-olds in a pre-school run by a church says, "I have been working in the same place for more than six years now, yet I still earn peanuts, it is so frustrating! " Indian immigrant pre-school teachers did not report getting paid less than their American counterparts, *all* pre-school teachers are paid very little.

As we can see from the examples quoted above, gender acts as a barrier to career advancement for many Asian Indian immigrant working women. What about race? Let us examine what my respondents had to say about their experiences concerning their race. Initially Aparajita said she had never faced any problems with race relations, but later she admitted that she was daunted by the absence of racial and ethnic minorities in her department. Aparajita said,

> I have never any discrimination, even when I was studying, even when I used to work before, even here, nowhere have I faced any discrimination.

> A place like LM [a department store chain] where there are so many problems, there they accepted me very well. I left with very good relations. Even now, if I visit them they hug me. I don't think my supervisors or those I supervised discriminated against me because of my race or color or accent. But in LM, because I was promoted very fast, people didn't like that. That is why they weren't accepting my supervisory authority at first. But that's a different reason, not related with race.

Later in the interview, Aparajita returned to the issue of her race and the effect it has on her position at work,

> I achieved a lot at work in India…Here the challenge is greater --- white skinned people --- J's management is totally dominated by whites --- there is no other race. I am an Indian and there is one more black. I have taken classes in management, everyone was white. There are more non-whites in technical fields. There are problems of demand and supply in the technical field. And I am not at a management level where one needs a major degree. You will find a lot of people like this in San Francisco, so I don't know how they selected me. Moreover, my color is different. If I had been born in this country, my speech would have been like them. So it is a great challenge to do something here. If I can rise here, then I will know that I have achieved something against all odds.

Meera is a software tester, an entry level position; she says, "[As a non-white], when you are really getting very high level then at some point of time maybe you will not be allowed to rise any higher. But I am nowhere near that. When it comes to being the vice president of research of the company, definitely they have biased opinion; very few people have gone that far. Mostly what happens is that you are always stuck in the middle in some company and then you will give up your job and start on your own. Very few non-white people have really gone to the top. I think that is very sad."

Some of my interviewees did mention low levels of social exclusion at work. For example, Rani, is a post-doctoral fellow in a science department in a university in the Bay

Area. Having gone to graduate school in the United States, she has been in the U.S. since the late eighties. Rani says that her "for presentation to Americans self" at work is professionally accepted without any hesitation, but the social situation is not that clear. Rani feels that socially, there is a certain disjunction between what is demanded of her and what she is ready to deliver, mostly because her "Indian self" instructs her to behave in a certain manner that is not designed to attract to her co-workers. She says,

> The only difference between me and other Americans is that I never really, I interact with my colleagues only on a professional and just a very semi-social basis. I never had a deep social contact with my American colleagues …… At work I have not faced any outright discrimination. Obviously there has been some cultural discrimination because I have not been eager to do some social things that other white Americans have wanted to do.

But Rani is grateful for being in academia. Here people are open-minded and culturally enlightened,

> I did not feel any outright discrimination at any point. I think being in an academic environment was why I didn't face any discrimination. Because there was more enlightenment. Two reasons: one is there is a lot of diversity, two is that there is a much more enlightened outlook toward discrimination in the academic environment. I am sure there are [cases of] overt discrimination things, but I haven't faced any.

Almost none of Indian immigrant professional women I spoke to in the Bay Area had experienced any racism, what they had experienced was social unease. And this is only natural, for all of us naturally gravitate to social others who are as much like us as is possible. In the absence of "others" who are "like them" (of similar ethnic and cultural heritage), Indian immigrant professional women naturally find themselves without social "sisters" (or brothers/ playmates?) in their workplace, and consequently, with fewer social mentors or followers than "mainstream" Americans. While this is a rather

uncomfortable truth, as one of my subjects, Nila, said to me, it is a rather minor nuisance in the larger scale of things.

In fact, many of my interviewees emphasized that in their personal experience, they had never ever been held back because of their race or gender. This may be because they work in fields and companies that are relatively open to non-whites. Shalini, a Director of Product Development and Financial Applications at Delphi Technology said that she had been "lucky" in that she had never experienced her race or gender as barriers to her rise to middle management,

> I have had a very positive experience in my work throughout. It had been truly merit-based. I have been able to rise through the ranks to my present position of Director. My ethnicity and gender have not been a bottleneck for me. I have always had very understanding managers. I've never had a woman manager. My present manager, a white male is also very understanding. Over the last two years, my quick rise at work has also coincided with motherhood. I owe it to an extremely supportive husband and an extremely understanding manager. I too have made personal compromises. For example, I was back at work within eight weeks of childbirth; I did not take the usual maternity leave of three or four months… I don't think there is anything unique in my personality that has enabled me to achieve such success, I have been lucky, lucky to have the right kind of person as my manager. When I went for business trips, my husband took time off from work to be with my son.

Urmila, an Indian immigrant physician reported that far from facing any discrimination at work because of her ethnicity, it has been somewhat of an advantage because, at least in the Bay Area, Indian physicians are well reputed. She said, "I think Indian doctors are kind of respected by Americans almost because they usually tend to be very good, and my ethnicity has therefore never really been an issue."

Namita herself a Development Manager at Delphi Technology, said that far from being discriminated against, Indians are preferred for technical positions in the computer industry in the Silicon Valley because of their well-known information-technology skills,

> In fact Indians get higher preference than others. They are looked upon as hard working, and their quality of work is very high. Some people say that Indians don't mix with others socially, that they don't know how to behave, how to present themselves. You asked about Indian women advancing to high positions in the industry; well, definitely, if I look around, I find that women are rising to high positions, but Indian women … Of course, there are some departments such as sales and marketing where there are no foreign people – Indians are much more technical. I think Indians do very well if they realize their limitations and stick to technical stuff.

Many of my interviewees were stereotypical female workers: polite, obedient, well-dressed, and often young and attractive. Some of them said that their glamour gave them an edge over mostly unsophisticated Indian male colleagues. Niharika reported certain benefits of being a woman, "Sometimes you are given special consideration because you are female…. Because you tend to draw attention to yourself, because you are female…. Majority is male…. For example people will listen to you when you talk. A male colleague might be saying the same thing and they might not pay so much attention to him".

In general Indian immigrant women may face problems of incorporation due to lack of social inclusion at work, but despite such structural difficulties, they derive immense satisfaction from the contributions they make to their workplace, and the professional appreciation they receive there.

In this section we saw that some Indian immigrant professional working women do face gender discrimination in the United States. But having undergone similar instances of male chauvinism in India, they are habituated to it. Most of my respondents were in gender-integrated professions, but those women who were in gender-segregated occupations such as pre-school teaching had to accept low wages and minimal benefits. None of my respondents reported racial discrimination at work. In fact some said that workers of Indian ethnicity are at a professional advantage in niche occupations such as software writing, technical support, and medicine. Many of my subjects did mention lack of social inclusiveness at work. Failure to penetrate social cliques at work might hinder career development to some extent, but my subjects were not really bothered by it since they derived professional satisfaction from their work, and they had their own ethnic social spheres outside of work.

WHO SUFFERS WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN?

Indian immigrant workers are disadvantaged by their dependency on the H-1B visa. Many Asian immigrant workers lack a green card or citizenship, all they have is the H-1B work permit visa that allows employment in the United States for three years. It can be renewed only once for three more years, after which they must obtain a green card or leave the United States. Such workers also lack economic resources and social-support networks to sustain them for even a short time in case of termination of employment. In fact, their very disadvantage has given an advantage to racialized immigrant workers in that American employers are eager to hire docile, technically-trained, English-speaking Indian workers who don’t demand high wages. This has led to the creation of so-called

ghettoes of Indian tech workers in certain American companies in the Bay Area. But when company profits become slim and the corporation is forced to let go of some of its employees, then lowly Indian techies are as likely as native-born Americans to be handed out pink slips. In fact, the social isolation of Indian workers in American firms might increase their likelihood to become sacrificial lambs during downsizing and outsourcing. In any case, for many H-1B Indian immigrant workers, termination of employment means leaving the United States for good, and the end of their immigration ambitions.

(a) Fallout of the Failure of the Dot.Com Industry and the Economic Slowdown on Asian Indian Immigrants in the San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose Area

In the sixties, seventies, and eighties, many Indian immigrants came to the United States as international students and as employees of American corporations and universities. However, in the nineties, a new wave of information systems engineers arrived from India. Their numbers escalated as the decade went by. In the nineties, approximately one hundred and fifteen thousand immigrant high tech workers poured into the United States every year, most of them from India and China. Why was there such a demand for foreign-trained, high-tech workers? American tech companies said that they still faced an immense shortage of qualified workers in the U.S., they claimed they could do with a few more from outside the nation, and H-1B workers themselves said they were in demand because they were very good at their job. However, I wonder whether the fact that H-1B workers are docile, hard-working, and undemanding employees had anything to do with it. Such workers know they are at the mercy of their employers until they obtain a green card. H-1B workers cannot stay on in the United States if their employment is terminated. Another important issue is: Do H-1B employees

demand financial compensation and benefits equivalent to those paid to local workers, or do they make do with slightly smaller pay-packets and lesser benefits than their native-born colleagues? These questions are extremely relevant to the great influx of H-1B workers in the late nineties.

One reality is widely acknowledged: H-1B workers directly employed at their worksite are more secure than H-1B contractual workers. Contractual workers are temporary employees of staffing agencies that import foreign workers, mostly computer programmers from India, and then contract them to work for high technology and other firms in the Silicon Valley.[39] Staffing agencies or "body shops" flourished in the high tech boom of the late nineties. These staffing agencies charged high hourly rates for the workers services; $100 per hour was the going rate before the dot.com crash. High hourly rates enabled staffing agencies to recoup the costs of importing the workers; import costs were usually a couple of thousand dollars per worker. The workers were paid only a fraction of what the agency charged for their services since the agency pocketed a large portion of the money. Many Indians in the Bay Area ran "body shops" before the high technology industry crashed.

In the fall of 1998, Kishan was flown in from India by an Indian-owned staffing agency or "body shop". Having been recruited after a long-distance phone interview, Kishan arrived from Delhi to work on a proposed three-month-long project for a firm that had hired his staffing agency. He did not even have an H-1B visa (one can stay in the U.S. for six years if one has an H-1B visa); he came to the U.S. on a B1 visa (one can

[39] Contractual workers were often given B1 visas that disallowed them from staying on in the United States for more than a year.

stay in the U.S. for only six months on a B-1 visa). His Indian “body shopper” boss received him at the airport, and installed him in a two-bedroom apartment in Fremont along with three other software programmers from different parts of India. The next day, Kishan’s Indian boss’s wife brought Indian groceries such as rice, lentils, and pickle to the apartment. The following weekend, she and her daughter took them on a tour of San Francisco; her husband was away recruiting more software programmers from India. Kishan settled down to working twelve to fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. He did not have a car, so he took the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transportation) to the San Francisco firm to which he had been contracted. Whatever little shopping he did was by foot or by public transport. He bought chocolates, perfumes, and colognes for his parents, and a car stereo player and some software for himself. He tried to save money to help his parents buy a new car in India. His project took longer than the anticipated three months. Even though he had other commitments lined up for him back in India, he was not allowed to leave until he had completed his project. When the work was finally completed, Kishan was glad to collect his payment and return to India.

Kishan told me that he felt hemmed in by the constraining conditions of his employment, but in actuality, he was far luckier that some other temporary or contractual workers brought in from India by other staffing agencies. Staffing services routinely imported more workers than they had projects in hand for. In some cases, benched contractual workers were not paid any salary at all, they are given a meager allowance to tide them over until the agency found a suitable project for them. “Body shops” kept their workers under their control by threatening to ship them back to their home country if they complained. The Department of Labor has recorded cases where “body shops” charged

workers a fee of $10,000 to $25,000 for leaving before their contract was up. Investigations by the Labor Department in the later half of the nineties revealed more than two million dollars owed in back wages to H-1B visa holders (*San Francisco Chronicle*, October 5, 2000). However, as they were under the constant threat of deportation if their employers withdrew their sponsorship, most H-1B workers failed to report such abuses by their employers. [40]

Priya Asrani, a computer programmer whose Bay Area staffing agency failed to find a placement for her said, "I was flown in from Bombay in 1998 on an H-1B visa, I expected to start work at once. But the agency has not been able to link me up with any firm. It has already been six months. I am tired of doing nothing at home. My husband works for the same staffing agency that hired me. Thank God they could place him with a project here in the Bay Area. As long as one of us brings in a salary we are fine!" Towards the end of 1999, the staffing agency managed to procure work for both Priya and her husband Gautam in Atlanta, Georgia, so they moved there.

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[40] Dipen Joshi was an exception to the rule: most employees did not notify the authorities about the unjust hiring practices of staffing agencies; but Joshi fought and won a case against Compubahn, the staffing agency that brought him from India and then left him without any work or salary. Compubahn brought Dipen Joshi to the U.S. in March 1998. Compubahn failed to place Joshi with any firm for the first six months. Then in October 1998, another staffing agency placed him with Oracle. Nine months later, in June 1999, Joshi left Compubahn and joined Oracle. Compubahn claimed that Joshi owed the company $77,085 in damages for leaving before his eighteen-month contract was over. Joshi sued Compubahn for "alleged fraud, misrepresentation, and violation of a state statute against unfair competition". Joshi won the suit; San Mateo County Judge Phrasel Shelton ruled that Compubahn cannot enforce those clauses in Joshi's employment contract that prevented Joshi from joining Oracle. Joshi owed no money to Compubahn, rather, the latter was ordered to pay Joshi compensation for the trouble it caused him (*India Abroad*, April 18, 2001: 46).

As we see above, even at the peak of the high tech boom, not all of Indian immigrant techies who poured into the Silicon Valley in the late nineties were in a secure, permanent, or well-compensated position. Nevertheless, they contributed to the expanding Indian techie population in the Bay Area.

U.S. employers lobbied for more and more H-1B workers in the boom time. Notwithstanding the high-volume inflow of H-1B workers into America, tech companies threatened to relocate their research and development facilities overseas unless the Congress increased the quota of H-1B visas, President Clinton also supported the lifting of H-1B quotas. Given the factors described above, it was almost inevitable that in October 2000, both the Senate and the House overwhelmingly approved a bill that nearly doubled the number of temporary visas for skilled high tech workers. The bill raised the annual quota of H-1B visas for workers holding bachelor's degrees from 115,000 to 195,000 for the duration of the next three years.[41] The immigration legislation of 2000 mainly benefited prospective entrants from India and China, the principal suppliers of H-1B workers.

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[41] In addition, through this legislation, the visa backlog of the year 2000 was eliminated; it was not to be part of the visa cap of 2001. According to another provision in the new bill, those persons who have been offered employment by an institution of higher education, a university, an affiliated non profit research institution, or a government research organization, as well as individuals who have recently received a master's or higher degree from a U.S. university or college, were exempted from the visa quota. Moreover, the H-1B status was extended beyond the usual six year limit for applicants for permanent residency, by at least one year. The new bill allowed employees to change jobs once their paper work was filed. A clause that was especially useful for Indian and Chinese applicants was one that removed per country visa caps on individuals seeking permanent employment based visas if additional visas were available in other employment based areas.

Just as the Silicon Valley was the epicenter of the digital boom of the nineties, the Silicon Valley was also the epicenter of the dot.com crash of 2001. Nationwide, some 300,000 high tech jobs were terminated in 2001 alone; many, if not most, of these jobs were located in the Silicon Valley (*India Currents,* October 1, 2001:36). Since more than half of the Indians in the Bay Area were computer techies, Indians here were hit hard by the calamitous failure of dot.coms and massive personnel cutbacks at high technology companies.

The Silicon Valley is acknowledged to be the point of origin of the high technology wave that fed the New Economy in the late nineties. From 1998 to 2000, internet companies and dot.coms rose swiftly to exceptional stock values and unparalleled investor confidence. But by 2001, out of investor favor, and still unable to make profits, dot.coms quickly fell in value, and dozens of them were forced to shut down. The Silicon Valley economic meltdown happened in the space of a single year.

By May 2001, nine of the top-twenty companies in the San Francisco Bay Area had collectively laid off 40,000 employees.[42] 2001 was undoubtedly the year of layoffs.

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[42] Motorola Inc., the manufacturer of mobile phones, had the distinction of being the company to lay off the greatest number of employees in the U.S. in 2001. In all, 42,900 Motorola employees were given pink slips in 2001. In the same year, the Bay Area suffered other heavy job losses: 17,000 at JDS Uniphase Corp. of San Jose, 15,000 at Hewlett-Packard Corp. of Palo Alto, 9,275 at Selectron Corp. of Milpitas, 8,000 at Agilent Technologies Inc. of Palo Alto, 7,200 at Sanmina Corp. of San Jose, 6,000 at 3Com Corp. of Santa Clara, and 5,800 at Charles Schwab Corp. of San Francisco As this list indicates, companies whose core was digital were worst hit. The massive lay-offs were a cyclical reaction to unusually high hiring rates in the previous year. Jeetil Patel, Deutsche Banc senior analyst explained, “Everyone, internet company and others, staffed up for a big demand curve out there, which has pretty much fizzled. Now they are having to go through the tough time of cutting back on expenses and head counts”. Having hired more people than they need, tech companies were being forced to fire employees in

Since the beginning of 2001, the American unemployment rate had been rising steadily; the jobless were numerous in California, and within the state, the situation was most worrisome in the Bay Area. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in November, the U.S. unemployment rate rose to 5.7 %. In the same month, the California jobless rate rose to a high of 6.0 %. San Francisco had of 6.1 % out of work, and Santa Clara County, had 6.6 % jobless. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, December 15, 2001:B1).

As a result of the economic slowdown of 2001, the demand for H-1B workers was reduced dramatically. In 2000, the largest employers across the nation planned to make 1.6 million new hires in positions that required technical skills, but by 2001, there was a demand for only 900,000 new technically qualified workers; demand for information technology professionals had dropped by 44% in the past year. (*India Abroad*, April 13, 2001:36). In keeping with the trends reported above, in 2001, U.S. employers slowed down their rate of application for H-1B visas. In fact, to the great dismay of all parties concerned, the Congress 2000 legislation that lifted the H-1B quota from 115,000 to 195,000 preceded the high technology sector meltdown by less than a year.[43]

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droves. Still, they had more employees than they did a year or two ago (*San Francisco Chronicle*, May 7, 2001: D21, *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 27, 2001: B1).

[43] There were many reasons why the H-1B visa cap was not reached in March 2001 even though it had already been reached in March 2000. The slowdown in the high tech industry was one of the principal factors. But there were other contributing factors too. Most important was the new legislation passed by Congress in 2000, raising the H-1B quota from 115,000 to 195,000, making available 80,000 more H-1B visas available that year. Also, when the Congress raised the 2001 cap, it also decided to exempt from either year's quota the 45,000 visas approved between March 2000 (when the cap was reached) and October 2000 (when the new visas became available) (*San Francisco Chronicle*, March 30, 2001:D2).

It is very probable that the first employment sector to feel the impact of the unraveling of the high tech industry was that comprised of staffing agencies, also know as “job shops” or “body shops”. “Body shops” or information technology consultancy firms sponsored foreign software engineers from India, China, Israel, etc., and then hired them out to companies in the U.S. By mid 2001, most consultancy firms had dropped their hourly rates for H-1B or B1 visa holders with web related skills by 25% to 50% (*India Abroad*, April 13, 2001:36). By March 2001, Somnath Ghosh, president of Specsoft, a staffing firm with offices in San Jose and Bangalore, was forced to reduce the hourly rate charged for tech professionals from $100 an hour to $75 per hour. Earlier, he used to bring in at least ten new consultants from India every month, but in March he stopped all new hiring.

Recruiting firms also suffered due to the economic downturn in the high tech sector. In the heyday of the technological industry, head hunters were kept busy recruiting tech professionals for large corporations and start-ups in a hiring frenzy, but by 2001, firing rather than hiring became the norm. Aishwarya, a computer engineer at I.B.M. brooded in 2001, “Last year, not a single month passed when some job recruiter or the other did not call me up with a job offer. But this year I haven’t received a single call from a head hunter!”

As 2001 wound to its end, the number of new H-1B visa workers coming into the high technology sector had slowed down to a trickle, but what of the thousands of the H-1B visa holders who came into the country in the high tide of the Silicon Valley digital boom? Like many others during the high-technology industry slump, thousands of Indian H-1B workers received employment termination notices. Murali Krishna Devakaronda of

the Immigration Support Network (I.S.N.) says, “I know plenty of H-1B people who are getting laid off left and right, just like American citizens” (*San Francisco Chronicle,* March 21, 2001). H-1B visa holders cannot stay on in the U.S. once they are laid off. I.N.S. policy is not very clear on how long an H-1B visa holder can stay on in the U.S. after termination of employment.[44] Despite the calamitous consequences of employment termination for H-1B workers, employers did not hesitate to hand out pink slips to them. In fact, when corporations had to cut costs, they began to let go of more and more employees in the U.S.A., and both immigrant as well as native-born workers lost their jobs. Smita says, “They gave me the pink slip after many months of cost-cutting. In fact our department was reduced to half its size. Most of my colleagues got pink slips too. By the time they finished downsizing, only the manager’s special cronies were left.”

Many corporations opened offices overseas where the same work they did in America could be done at a fraction of the cost involved here. Other companies outsourced positions to other flagships located in India. In fact, in some instances, employees located in America were told to train their predecessors who were going to do the same work from offices located in India. The exit of jobs to India led to a backlash against Indians in general, including resentment against those Indians who had worked in American corporations for a many years.

2001 was a traumatic year for not only native-born Americans in the computer industry but also for Indians employed in American corporations here. Shyam lost his job

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[44] Different immigration lawyers interpret I.N.S. policy differently; from what they say, it seems that H-1B workers have anything from zero to thirty days to find a new job, change their visa type, or leave the country. Some H-1B employees who lost their jobs returned to their home countries, others stayed on under the threat of deportation.

at a software contracting company in the beginning of 2001. Desperate to stay on in the U.S.A., he began to work part time as a waiter in an Indian restaurant. He says" Life is tough". But H-1B workers who have received a pink slip find it difficult to obtain new employment, for it takes six months to process a new H-1B visa, and most employers are not willing to wait that long for a new employee to start work. Since the tech crash of 2001, most advertisements for jobs state that the employer is not ready to sponsor visa processing. Once an H-1B worker is "out of status", it is very difficult for him to find work in the U.S. legally.

Suranjan, a biologist, knows this too well. Having had his H-1B position at Stanford terminated a couple of years ago, Suranjan has been "out of status" for a few years now. Because of his aberrant legal status in the U.S., no employer here will hire him. Desperate for work, Suranjan is planning to immigrate to Canada or Europe. He says, "I will certainly not return to Midnapore" [the small Indian town he grew up in]. He exclaims "I don't even want to return to India, it is so frustrating to look for a good job there."[45]

Insecurity, fear, and alarm marked the Indian community in the Bay Area in 2001. The tech crash of 2001 and the overall economic slump in different employment sectors hit them hard. H-1B visa holders were extremely insecure. Charulata and her husband Tribhuvan are both H-1B visa holders, both work in Delphi Technology. When their

[45] The Indian job market in the information technology industry has rapidly expanded in the last few years due to the recent boom in that sector. But the employment situation has not improved in any other occupational field in India, including biological research, Suranjan's field of specialization.

friend Sumon, also an employee at Delphi got laid off, Charulata and Tribhuvan were very shaken. Charulata's alarm was palpable. She said;

> Sumon got laid off just ten days after his parents arrived. My own parents were visiting us when we got Sumon's news. It really scared my parents. Every evening, when Tribhuvan and I returned from work, they would ask, "I hope you still have your job?" I told them that this is the way it is here now-a-days. You may have a very good job one day, and the next day you may be out on the street, out of job, and forced to return to India for good even if you don't want to!

In his fictionalized account of the Silicon Valley, Kunzru describes his Indian H-1B hero's reaction to employment termination in the following passage,

> "No, you don't understand. I need this job. This job is all I have. [Arjun Mehta]"
> "We have looked at the options." [Jennifer Johanssen, Deputy Director of Personnel, Virugenix]
> "Please, if I lose this job I'll have to go back. And I can't go back. Don't you see? I can't go back." [A.M.]
> "I am aware of your visa situation, Mr. Mehta, but as I understand it you're still technically employed by Databodies. In reality, Virugenix has no obligations to you. It is only because we believe that all our employees, even those on freelance consultancy contracts, should benefit from harmonious termination experiences that my presence here was mandated at all." [J.J.] (Kunzru 2003:92)

Besides H-1B visa holders, innumerable green card holders and U.S. citizens of Indian origin also lost their jobs in the dot-com bust. They did not face the threat of deportation, but they struggled to pay rent, house mortgages, health insurance, car payments and other living costs for themselves and their families. Kasturi, a sales administrator who has a green card, says, "You know we are going through a rough time. My husband lost the job he has had the last ten years. Now it is difficult for him to start looking for work again. You know when something goes wrong, it is the woman who bears the brunt. Things are very difficult at home right now". Ruchir, a green card holder,

worked as a manager at Webvan; when the company closed down, he was left with a negligible severance package and valueless Webvan stocks. Rupa, also a green card holder, lost her software programming job in the latter half of 2001, just after she and her husband Ravikumar had bought a new house. Mortgage payments had to be kept up, plus their daughter's full-time pre-school and day-care fee payments were an exorbitant monthly financial burden. Rupa began to look for new employment as soon as she received her pink slip. Meanwhile, Ravikumar, a Pharm. D., took up a second part-time job as a pharmaceutical salesperson in the local Longs store. This was in addition to his full-time research scientist position at a bio-pharmaceutical drug research company. Jaya, an office manager, lost her job when the start-up software manufacturing company she worked for closed down. Naturally, her and her husband's plans for selling their town home to buy a larger single family home were indefinitely shelved.

Layoffs take a toll on not just the individual whose employment has been terminated, they affect the whole family. Sumon's parents were visiting from India when he lost his job at Delphi Technology. Fortunately, Sumon and his wife Aparajita had obtained their green card a year before. Aparajita had been working for a year before Sumon lost his job. Her job as a Human Resources manager paid enough to take care of the bills. Sumon and Aparajita made a point of taking Sumon's parents sightseeing to a different Bay Area tourist spot each weekend. They called friends over to their home so that Sumon's parents could meet up with Sumon's friends. In short, Sumon and Aparajita tried to behave as normally as possible under the circumstances. Nevertheless, it was difficult for Sumon's parents to accept the situation. Sumon's mother who had spent her entire life in a small town in the rural hinterland of Eastern India, said, "I never knew my

son was so good at housework. He finishes all the kitchen-work before I can make it to the kitchen. Of course, when Aparajita is at home then she does most of the kitchen-work". But Aparajita was not at home much. She returned at seven in the evening on most weekdays, and she even had to work on Saturdays. Sunday was her only full day at home.

Even those who have not been directly affected by layoffs, felt insecure due to the experiences of their friends. Arunima, a green card holder, says, "My husband's group has not had to lay off too many people, but it is bad enough that he had to let a few people go. Just now, a friend of ours told us that he has been laid off. These are such bad times, one doesn't feel like celebrating any occasion". Kalyani, a U.S. citizen, says, "So many of our friends have lost their jobs. It is very scary. Even on the day of my daughter's birthday party, one of our friends called in to say that they were not coming as the husband had just been laid off. They did not feel like socializing for now."

The deflation of the U.S. high-tech industry had even affected the Indian marriage market! U.S. settled Indian high-tech professionals were once considered prime marriage material by Indian parents looking for grooms for their daughters; dowries for techie-grooms went up to tens of thousand of dollars. But in 2001, Indian American professionals seeking wives found that due to the downturn of the U.S. high-tech industry, the average dowry offered to them had come down considerably. Marriage bureaus reported that while formerly there used to be dozens of prospective partners for a single Indian American high-tech professional, now there were only a handful. It has been found that Indian parents currently aim to find techie husbands settled in India or doctor grooms for their daughters.

The corporate culture in the Bay Area had changed drastically in the space of a single year. Earlier, tech professionals were compensated for the average of sixteen hours of work put in each day with corporate sponsored meals catered at the work site virtually every single working day. In 2001, the work hours remained the same, but no food was catered to the office any longer. Bonuses like corporate sponsored trips to Hawaii and extravagant Christmas parties became a thing of the past. The 2000-2001 recession even drove down house prices and rental property rates in the Bay Area for the first time in a decade.

PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN INDIA

In order to examine the origins of Indian immigrant professional working women in America, I have studied their sending community. Thus, researching the other end of the globe, I have conducted focused interviews with a number of professional working women in India. I have discussed their work, identity, and self. The women I had these question-and-answer-sessions with included physicians, academicians, high-school teachers, filmmakers, and research scholars. I will discuss my findings among Indian white-collar working women in the following section because I want to compare and contrast their attitudes to work and their experiences in the Indian workplace to the motivations and work-experiences of Indian immigrant professional women in the American labor force.

(a) Ambivalence about Women's Employment in India

Writing about urban middle or upper class well educated Indian women who have white collar jobs, Lebra, Paulson, and Everett (1984)) comment on their prominence in Indian society. They note that participation of women in the workforce is much higher in rural areas than in urban areas. But in spite of the pervasiveness of gainful female employment in the rural masses and among the urban poor, it is "women in urban white-collar jobs, professions, and administration" who have "high visibility". Lebra, Paulson, and Everett show that "new employment opportunities in these [white-collar jobs, science-based and technology-oriented professions, and administration] have absorbed women from the middle and upper classes who are educationally qualified" (1984:288). Such women are in a position to demand certain minimum rights for themselves: "They are--- those in the professions and administration at least --- highly educated or trained and aware of their options. They are highly paid and have better access to a whole range of child-care and health services, since most of them live in urban areas besides. They are more likely to live in extended families and to have the freedom which education, training, and economic means provide to consider other options" (1984: 295). The authors also note that such upper class women have the support of the extended family and paid domestic help. Thus, unlike working mothers in U.S.A., upper-class working women in India have few problems with housework and childcare despite their absence from home.

Interestingly, Lebra, Paulson, and Everett conclude that in spite of the prominence and the successful careers of highly educated upper class women, and in spite of the

indispensability of female income in most Indian families, the core of the Indian woman's identity lies in her familial roles: "The family is the social context within which all Indian women live and work and have their identity" (1984:293). Lebra, Paulson, and Everett believe that in India, there is no ideology supporting women working outside the home in paid employment:

> For Hindu and Muslim women alike, retirement of women from production is a sign of status. Gainful employment outside the home is not a condition that has any textual support for women in the Hindu tradition. A woman at the bottom end of the social and economic spectrum works because if she does not, neither she nor her family eats. At the upper echelons of society, on the other hand, women work primarily because of the personal satisfaction they find in their work (Lebra, Paulson, and Everett 1984:289).

In a personal interview with me, Madhu Kishwar, an activist who has founded a feminist organization called '*Manushi*' surprised me by abiding with the conservative Indian ideal described by Lebra, Paulson, and Everett and advocating that women should either live in a joint family so that their children are well cared for by their grandparents or aunts while their mothers are at work, or they should give up the idea of employment outside the home. Kishwar's view is an interesting variation of Lebra, Paulson, and Everett's notion that the Indian public believes that whenever possible, Indian wives and mothers must devote their lives to care of their conjugal and extended family from within the home. Thus the ideal Indian woman is not a career woman.

The ambivalence of the Indonesian public to "*karier* women", as described by Suzanne Brenner below, is very similar to the Indian attitude to professional working women,

> The career woman has been into a larger-than-life symbol of the positive and negative aspects of modernization. *Wanita karier* ambiguously

> signifies a woman who is admired for her ability to participate in the modern economy, but who is at the same time fundamentally suspect for her presumed selfishness and lack of attention to her family. According to popular portrayals, she may become overly engrossed with her work, causing her to neglect her family's needs……Depictions of career women often stress the dangers and fears that they and their families face. Such concerns are never aimed at men. (Brenner 1998: 242-243).

How do we explain the ideological rejection of gainful employment for Indian family women? After all, Indian women have worked outside the home for centuries. Since time immemorial, female work in India has not been confined to house-keeping and child-rearing, but has included agriculture and household production in cottage industries. I believe that the separation of female work/career vs. female role in home/family is a relatively modern phenomenon.

Writing about Indonesia, Brenner provides a few answers to the mystery of why women's employment currently causes anxiety in nations in which women have customarily worked outside the home in economically productive activities for many centuries. She explains that "the idea of the "career woman" becomes a problem at precisely the moment when such a category is *recognized* and opposed to another imported category, that of "housewife" (Brenner 1998:243). Thus, following Brenner, I believe that in India too, the idealization of women devoting all their energies to home-making and mothering to the *exclusion* of all other activities is a modern idea whose logical counterpart is the rejection of career-building as a goal for women to strive for. Here, I must mention that, not unlike my subjects in the United States, all the women I interviewed in India were proud of the careers they had formed for themselves, and personally, they saw no contradiction between family work and career work. In fact though they underplayed the importance of their own incomes to their families, they did

convey that they worked to help their families prosper. Saraswati, a high school teacher says, “My husband and I pool our income, it is never separated. Pooling our income works best for us; for example, my husband and I were able to pay for our son’s expensive computer classes only because we pool our incomes.”

Whatever the ideal of Indian womanhood may be, the fact is that many Indian women *do* work outside the home in gainful employment. The 1991 Indian government-conducted census found that 35.9 percent of Indian women between the ages of 15 and 59 are workers (Table 24 pp.114-115).[46] The percentage of working women is higher in the rural sector than in the urban sector. As much as 43.6 percent or rural women in the 15 to 59 age group work (Table 27 pp.136-137).[47] Though small in number, Indian women working in the organized sector, especially urban teachers, secretaries, nurses, government clerks, doctors, journalists, and politicians are very prominent. Occupational segregation by gender is a prominent feature of the Indian labor force. Just like in the United States, the majority of Indian schoolteachers and nurses are female.

(b) Motivations for Work among Professional Women in India

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[46] If we ignore age-group classification then we find that 22.3 percent of all Indian women are workers (Table 24 pp.114-115).

[47] 26.7 percent of all-age rural Indian women are engaged in economically productive work (Table 24 pp.114-115). In the urban sector, 14.5 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 59 work (Table 24 pp.114-115). 9.2 percent of all-age urban Indian women are in remunerative work (Table 24 pp.114-115). Due to poor industrialization, the distribution of all workers, both male and female, is mainly in agriculture. 80.9 percent of all female main workers are in agricultural, hunting, forestry, and the fishing sector (Table 27 pp.136-137). The next significant category for female workers is the service sector. 8.3 percent of all Indian female main workers are in the service sector (Table 26 pp.130-131). Fully 40.4 percent of women in the urban areas are service workers (Table 26 pp.130-131).

The women I spoke to always said that they work to “keep themselves occupied”. But this is not the whole truth, because from the women’s own testimony it was clear that their incomes are actually very necessary to maintain their own, and their families’ appetite for the consumption of multinational goods that are now available in the recently liberalized Indian market. The women themselves admitted that a double income is necessary to cope with India’s high rate of inflation. The new Indian middle class has been globalized due to the liberalization of the Indian market and also because of multinational corporate job openings in India. The availability of brand name consumer products in India has opened the floodgates to spending on credit. What were earlier thought of as luxuries, are now considered necessities, and only double income families are successful in the relentless race to obtain an international standard of life within Indian borders.

In her book on Malaysian factory women, Aihwa Ong writes that the woman’s income is said to be “useful but inessential” in Malaysia. Malaysian factory supervisors say that the typically young women who come to work in the factories usually use their wages on casual purchases. They might contribute to the family income, but they are not the breadwinners. Yet, the fact is that their salaries make the difference between familial economic survival or ruin (Ong 1987). There is a similar hypocrisy prevalent in India. Female contributions to the household income are usually de-emphasized in Indian families (Standing 1984). However, the truth is that in today’s consumer-goods-crazy India they make the difference between a balanced checkbook and bankruptcy.

Besides the doublespeak about financial motivations, all the women I interviewed said that they worked because they wanted to establish an independent identity of their

own, one that is separate from daughter, wife, or mother. They wanted respect from their family and from society in general. They wanted to make use of the education they had worked so hard to acquire. Many of the younger women mentioned that their own mothers were working women themselves. The daughters of working women saw their own mothers as role models. Many of the younger women also said that they could not imagine themselves living a life spent entirely at home, for then, in Renita's words, life would be "a blank". Many of the women talked of how being employed boosted their status at home and outside. Aarti, a post doctoral research scholar said, "My income gives me importance. Now that a fat amount of money is coming in, my in-laws and husband give me more importance". She is proud to be a working woman, "an officer, not a clerk" at that, because, "We working women are going like men to office meetings, making decisions, we get to see the world". Aarti emphasized that she was proud she was an officer, not a clerk, "When I reach my office, I feel I am an officer, all the clerks are my subordinates." Thus the work motivations of the majority of my India-resident respondents were based on a desire for independent identity formation, respect within the family, and status in the outside world. These attitudes do not fit in with the conservative dominant ideology that women should devote themselves above all to the home and family; yet these feelings cannot be ignored, for they are prevalent among Indian professional working women.

Thus, except for visa status anxiety, the motivations for work among professional Indian working women resident in the homeland, and those resident in America were very similar. But, unlike their U.S. resident sisters, my respondents in India were extremely reluctant to admit the necessity of the female income for maintaining a

"middle-class" lifestyle. There is a discrepancy between the economic necessity for a second, usually female, income to keep up with the Joneses, or rather, with the Kumars, and lip-service to the apparent ideal of a woman's career being something she engages in "to keep herself occupied". This discrepancy can be attributed to dominant gender ideologies which emphasize the woman's place being at home in the service of her family, and not in gainful employment outside the home.

(c) Gender Discrimination in the Workplace

The women who discussed their experiences in the Indian workplace with me were all in professional or semi-professional occupations. Most of the women reported that they did face some overt gender discrimination in the workplace. But they were thankful that, at least, due to their professional status, they were protected from rape, sexual molestation, and other types of sexual harassment directed against working women of the laboring class, or even against women in lower-rung white collar occupations such as that of a secretary, or personal assistant. Renita, a post-doctoral fellow says, "At this level there isn't much gender discrimination, especially in a big city like Delhi. In any case, the academic world is broad-minded, so there is little discrimination, … but the bureaucratic atmosphere and gender biases at work do push women back." Aarti, a research officer in a semi-governmental research institute says, "In India, even if a woman is a professional or even if she holds a high-level white-collar job, she still faces some discrimination. Discrimination persists if a man heads the organization; there is less of it if a woman is the head of the institution. One reads of incidents such as a personal assistant being raped or molested by her male boss, it is not that easy to do such things to higher level white-collar employees, but discrimination still

exists. For example, women are told that they are not suitable to become the head of the department, the excuse is that they will not be able to manage the department." Bipasana, a physician says, "Professionally, I never felt any gender discrimination, I topped the M.B.B.S. class in my university … At the officer level, professional women in India do not face any problem. At this level, those who are having extra-marital affairs are doing it of their own choice; they are not coerced into it. But sexual harassment does exist at the lower level." Beena, a physician who teaches in a Medical College, complained that she was not selected in a hospital job when she was pregnant with her second child because the selection panel doubted her ability to perform adequately in her job while pregnant. "That was a blatant act of discrimination," she commented.

Professional working women in India appear to face more gender discrimination than their cohorts who have immigrated to the United States because anti-discrimination legislation is not as stringently enforced in India as it is in the United States.

(d) Social Interaction at Work

Many of the women I spoke to described an active social life at the workplace. This was one of the attractions of working. Bipasana, a physician said, "I have made friends with some office colleagues whose outlook is similar to mine. They are from all different parts of India. We chat during working hours. We also chat on the phone after work hours, problem solving is made easier if we discuss our problems with each other. Sometimes a group of us goes off to see a cinema."[48] Saraswati, a high school teacher says, "I have my own friends from work. We get off work at the same time. We all go

[48] But she complains that "Though I grew up in a different part of India, I now live and work in Delhi, so there is no cultural continuity between the workplace and my home. Regional differences in culture set up differences at the mental level."

from work to have lunch together at a restaurant, or we go to the Delhi *Haat* or the Surajkund *Mela*".

In general, I found deeper social interaction with colleagues among the interviewees living in India than among the subjects resident in the United States. This may be because Indians who have left their homeland have a harder time penetrating social cliques in America both at work and outside, than those who stayed behind in India.[49]

(e) Conservatism at Work / Standards of Female "Decency"

Discussing general societal attitudes to the career-woman (*wanita karier*) in Indonesia, Brenner argues that there is a common fear that "her independence might lead her into adulterous affairs that could destroy her marriage and family" (Brenner 1998:242-243). Due to a similar public hysteria in India about female morality at the workplace, I found that my subjects were extremely cautious about interaction with male colleagues after work. Aparna Mahajan, a sixty-year-old member of the Rajya Sabha (National Senate) says that she doesn't socialize with her colleagues outside of work hours mainly because she lives on her own in Delhi, "I don't socialize with my work people usually. Here in the Rajya Sabha [National Senate], it would have been nice to socialize, but my husband doesn't live in Delhi, so he can't attend any of my parties. So I don't ask people to my home. In Delhi, I am a single woman for all intents and purposes, and the respect people have for me would get tarnished if I did invite my colleagues to

[49] On the other hand, it might also have to do with the fact that working women in the U.S. do not have access to as much after-hours care for their children as middle-class Indian women do. Socializing is difficult when there is no housekeeper or relative to watch the kids.

my home." My finding was that all of my respondents from India mentioned friendships with other females at work. They may have had social connections with male colleagues too, but they did not mention these.[50] On the other hand, my U.S.A. resident subjects were not coy about talking about inter-gender friendships at work.

(f) Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to point out that I have included my observations about the attitudes and experiences of professional working women in India mainly because they are the sending community for my subjects in the United States. I wanted to show what sort of a milieu my America-resident respondents emerged from, and the continuities and changes in their motivations and work habits upon their participation in the American labor force.

Firstly, I found that there is a certain ambivalence about career women in India: the dominant ideology dictates that women should devote themselves to their families, but due to the recent liberalization of the economy, only double income couples are able to keep up with present rates of inflation and consumption, families with a single income find it hard to break even. Therefore Indian women cannot adhere to the dominant ideal of confinement at home; there is an economic necessity for them to seek employment. In any case, Indian professional women want to work because they desire the independent

[50] I believe that the avoidance of inter-gender social interactions at work, or the refusal to admit to such socializing, may be caused not only by an Indian orthodox disapproval of inter-gender mingling outside of familial relations, but also by class differences between men and women in the workplace. In many cases, women workers are from families of a higher class, and hence avoid social contact with male colleagues who have emerged from an inferior socio-economic background. On the other hand, female Indian immigrants in the U.S. are eager to socialize with American male colleagues to prove that they are not "backward".

identity formation, elevated economic status, personal freedom, sense of achievement, and familial respect that gainful employment outside the home makes possible. Thus, except for visa status anxiety, the motivations for work among professional Indian working women resident in the homeland, and those resident in America were very similar. Secondly, I saw that as far as the ideological conditions in the workplace are concerned, professional working women in India appear to face more gender discrimination than their cohorts who have immigrated to the United States because anti-discrimination legislation is not as stringently enforced in India as it is in the United States. Thirdly, I found deeper social interaction with colleagues among the interviewees living in India than among subjects resident in the United States. This may be because Indians who have left their homeland have a harder time penetrating social cliques in America both at work and outside, than those who stayed behind in India. Lastly, I discovered that my interviewees in India shied away from discussing friendships or even casual social interactions with male colleagues. In fact they gave the impression that they avoided all socialization with workmates of the opposite sex. But my U.S.A. resident subjects were not coy about talking about inter-gender friendships at work.

PARTICIPATION IN THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE AND SELF / IDENTITY FORMATION

What do Asian Indian women get out of working in the United States? Their salary enables the women to support themselves and their families. Separation from their folks in India, racial prejudice, and lack of ease in the new American environment are tolerated in order to achieve a higher standard of living than would have been possible in

India. However expensive they may be, access to consumer goods, home ownership and a good education for the children are of paramount importance to Indian immigrants. The women's economic contributions help their families to reach the above mentioned goals. This enhances the prestige of the women within the family, resulting in an increase in decision-making power and a positive self-image. Working outside the home in paid employment has other advantages: firstly, it allows Asian Indian women to become acculturated into the mainstream of American society. Thus, the woman are more comfortable (than before acculturation) in their adopted home-nation. Secondly, even though they are not as vocal in this regard as they might have been, over the years, the emphasis on equality between the sexes in American culture inspires the women to demand equality at home, weakening the age-old hold of patriarchal values on the women. This is a positive step in the direction of independent identity formation. In the end, successful work outside the home may soothe the sting of psychological dissonance (discussed in the next paragraph) even if the dissonance remains.

What are the costs of participation in the American workforce? My subjects stressed that they worked in professional environments, in high tech positions, and in highly-respected occupations. But I suspect that in many cases their testimony hid the harsh reality of low wages and stagnant advancement. More importantly, no longer protected from racial and ethnic prejudice by the four walls of their home, Asian Indian women realize that they are unlikely to be accepted as "one of us" by Americans. The greatest challenge to identity is that though Indian immigrants identify with the white American majority, as Homi Bhabha has pointed out, Americans "misrecognize" them as "others", that is, ethnic difference is what is noticed the most. Most so-called mainstream

Americans do not acknowledge the “Americanness” of Indian immigrants as much as the latter would like. Instead, Asian Indian women are seen primarily as ethnic representatives of India. This pushes them to reassert their Indian identity with exaggerated firmness in private (at home with friends and family).

Minorities often become what the majority community perceives them as. When Indian immigrant women interact with Americans at work (and also in general American society) they realize that they are perceived primarily as “ethnic representatives of India”, and they then undergo an impulse to emphasize that part of their persona. Yet, fear of being penalized for being different at work necessitates efforts at continuing to act “American” at work. Hence the only space for enacting what they now believe is the most important part of their identity: “Indian immigrant”, is the home. Hence, ironically, the show of being “Indian” takes place in a site removed from where the impetus for acting “Indian” arises: the American workplace. Who is the audience? The women themselves, for they now believe that the most important component of their personality is their “Indianness”. In addition, there is pressure from within the immigrant community on women for them to behave in a more “Indian” (ethnicized, traditional, and subservient) fashion. This pressure also forces immigrant women to be more “Indian”, especially at home and in community events, than they would have otherwise been. The decision to be traditional at home moves Asian Indian woman back to their traditional (subordinate) role within the patriarchal Indian family. The traditional self-sacrificing family-centered female self is built up. This trend contradicts and co-exists with the impulse for gender equity forwarded by female employment and Western, specifically

American, feminism imported from American general society and the American workplace.

Despite exaggerated Indianness at home, Asian Indian working women are scared of being punished for being different; hence they try to follow the American model as closely as possible at work. Sometimes, they are called upon to "represent" their ethnicity at work too, that is, when they are asked specific questions about India and Indians. Of course, at such times, Indian immigrant working women flaunt their ethnicity at work too. But such occasions are exceptional. On the whole, Indian immigrant working women are "American" in the workplace and "Indian" at home.

This produces a conflicted self. It creates dissonance within the self. It chips away at the women's sense of being integrated consistent people, which, for now, following Steele, I will assume to be a psychological need. How do the women deal with this blow to their sense of self? Claude Steele's theories about the self help us to understand this scenario.

Steele theorizes that all complete models of the self include a "self-system" which images the self as "being competent, good, stable, integrated, capable of choice and control, and so forth" (Steele 1988:289). Steele's subjects were found to often maintain belief in self-adequacy by "affirming central, valued, aspects of the self" (Steele 1988:289), and not necessarily by "resisting self-threatening circumstances" (Steele 1988:287).

As I have said before, I believe that Indian immigrant working women experience psychological dissonance due to the conflicting demands of the roles of worker in the American professional milieu on one hand, and preserver and representative of Indian

heritage, culture, and ethnicity, on the other. Using Steele's theories, I think that the women resolve the threat to the self caused by this dissonance with the help of self-affirming thoughts about material well being in the new-country. The active practice in their immigrant homes of the women's perception of "Indian culture" in the form of Indian food, clothes, home-décor, music, dance, theatre, movies, literature, religion, and language, also helps in self-affirmation. Training their children in Indian culture is also a source of self-affirmation for the immigrant working women. These are the mechanisms used to maintain what Steele calls "adaptive and moral adequacy" so that the women can feel that they have global self-integrity. Paradoxically, affirming the separate self can help to soothe the individual even if that affirmation heightens the original contradiction.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have discussed various factors such as race, gender, and general social interaction in the work lives of immigrant Indian women in the Bay Area labor force. I have also discussed employment retention, advancement, and termination. I have compared work-related experiences of Indian immigrant women who work outside the home in paid employment with their counterparts who stayed on in India. I found that while my subjects did complain of isolated incidents of gender bias in the American workplace, they acknowledged that it was less prevalent than it was in India. This was corroborated by my own data collection in India. While none of my subjects admitted to suffering any incidents of overt racism at work, they did mention that they were left out of social cliques at work, hence it was more difficult for them to advance to management

positions than it was for native-born Americans. I discovered that race was hard to talk about, since many of my informants found it humiliating to admit to a racialized existence in the U.S. Another notable finding was that Indian American women who work outside the home in paid employment are relatively frank about the importance of the female income for familial economic success. On the other hand, aware of patriarchal Indian criticism of working women, employed women in India claim that their incomes are useful but inessential. Yet I observed that women's financial contribution is vital for attaining "basic comforts" considered necessary by the newly globalized Indian middle-class that stayed on in the homeland. I found a surprising global uniformity in motivations across the thousands of geographic miles that separate working women in India from their immigrant counterparts resident in the United States. Both groups were motivated by the desire for upward economic mobility, status accumulation, expectational conformity, and agency. Immigrant working women were differentiated only by their anxiety about visa status; naturally this was not a concern shared by the Indian working women resident in India. I found that psychological dissonance is caused by contradictions between the "American" role played at work, and the "Indian" persona adopted at home. In the next chapter, I will discuss how my subjects resolved this threat to the self.

CHAPTER THREE : THE INDIAN IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONAL WORKING WOMAN AT HOME AND IN THE INDIAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will look at the home life and the community presence of Indian immigrant working women in the San Francisco Bay Area, and I will also make comparisons with non-working women in the same region, as well as with working-women resident in India. The object of my research is to compare the self-construction of immigrant Indian working women in the home and community with that of immigrant non-working Indian women and working non-immigrant Indian women.

CULTURE

(a) The Indian Immigrant Home and Community: Women as the Bearers of Remixed Indian Cultural Heritage

Examining the concept of "home" in transnational global literature in English, Rosemary George theorizes that the home is a place of exclusion as well as inclusion, conflict as well as care, and a welcome refuge as well as a dreaded prison from which one needs to escape. Home is also conflated with the self (George 1996). How is the Indian immigrant home in the United States different from other homes? Significantly, it is the site of perpetual cultural confrontation, of daily acceptance as well as exclusion of American culture. The Indian diasporic home is where American culture is learnt, and it is also where efforts at re-building some form of Indian culture take place.

Diasporic Indians are as American as is necessary to succeed in their public life, and with time, innumerable Americanisms creep into their private lives as well, but yet, they are eager to reformulate their native cultural heritage, and they have the freedom and the resources to make the effort to do that in the United States. Due to the mass migration of an unprecedented number of people across the globe in recent times, and due to the current proliferation of diasporic or transnational electronic and print mass media, transnationals can now establish a presence in diasporic public spheres where they can initiate and continue conversations with individuals resident in separate nation states, even different continents. Hence, they can now imagine and maintain a mainly diasporic identity. Minority populations identify with post-national constituencies of religious or ethnic affiliation, rather confine their selfhood to narrow national boundaries.

Arjun Appadurai has explained that because of its pluralistic beliefs, and because of its pride in being a land of immigrants, the United States of America continues to be the chosen destination for thousands of immigrants. Countries from all over the world export their citizens to the United States. They arrive here as workers, refugees, tourists, or students. Once they are here they form delocalized transnations whose *raison d'etre* is putative origin from a particular geographical location, but these transnations are completely diasporic in nature (Appadurai 1996).

At what expense has the Indian diasporic community achieved cultural reproduction? My research among female professional Indian immigrants in the Bay Area has shown that the Indian community in the United States has been able to deploy Indian culture in the U.S. only by sacrificing female individuation and autonomy.

I found that the actions of women I interviewed were stringently reviewed and restricted by the community. Indian immigrant women were idealized by their family and community and expected to be culturally and morally perfect. Tribhuvan, the husband of one of my interviewees, complained, " My *desi* [Indian] colleagues and friends disapprove of my wife Charulata living in Austin while she completes her Ph.D. work. "Can't she do some studies locally in the Bay Area?" they ask." The immigrant community enforces the ideal that an Indian woman's place is by her husband's side. Paulomi, another subject in my study says, "My husband comes back from Indian get-togethers and parties and worries about the comments his friends have made about the difficulties of bringing up Indian girls in the United States. As a result, he is very strict with our daughter Moni. He has told me to make sure that she should never go on dates, she should not even go to the local mall with her girlfriends, and of course, now that she is a teenager, sleepovers are out of the question!" In fact, the community's attempts to recreate monolithic "traditional" and "authentic" culture has compelled its women to perpetuate anachronistic behavioral restraints. These norms are anachronistic by not only American standards, but also by current behavioral standards in India. Indian immigrant families try to rigidly adhere to the values prevalent in India at the time of their departure, and the women are expected to lead this effort.

Yen Le Espiritu has shown that communities which are economically or politically suppressed can claim superiority in only one sphere, that of female morality. Hence women are constructed as more faithful wives, more dedicated mothers, and more loving daughters than their white counterparts. Ethnic women are idealized as virtuous

paragons of sexual restraint and family centered re-presenters of traditional culture (Espiritu 2003).

Shamita Dasgupta argues that the trend of seeing women as emblems of a nation's cultural survival is a direct descendant of the medieval Indian tradition of depositing family honor, "*izzat*", in its female members. Indian diasporic women are expected to safeguard the family's *izzat* by rigidly controlling their own as well as their daughter's desires and actions. Mothers are directed to confine their daughters within the culturally prescribed boundaries of acceptable behavior and thought. The community monitors the behavior of first generation as well as second generation Indian American immigrant women. Female community members who transgress culturally imposed barriers to Westernization are marked as traitors to the culture community. Similarly, lesbians, social reformers, and critics of community culture are treated like pariahs (Dasgupta 1998:6).

My question is, are the women invariably *forced* to act Indian, or do they sometimes feel the urge to do so on their own? I think both. Dasgupta says women are compelled by their community to Indianize their daughters, but I believe that they have seldom to be forced to do so, because they themselves feel the desire to acculturate their daughters in the same traditions they experienced themselves as children. I believe that Indian immigrant mothers are somewhat guilty of double standards. They demand modern "American" liberation in their own lives, but they want to control their daughters by confining them to "Indian" norms of female "*lajja*" (shame).

Sucheta Mazumdar emphasizes that in the Indian diasporic community, women are regarded as the repositories and transmitters of Indian culture. For example, at formal

social events, Indian women wear "traditional" clothing, but Indian immigrant men invariably wear Western business style suits. Even at non-Indian gatherings, *Bhartiya* (Indian) women give a touch of exotic diversity by wearing *saris* or *salwar kameezes*, but Indian men prefer formal Western attire. "Women are forever the bearers of culture, the preservers of heritage; they must after all look the part." (Mazumdar 1996: 467).

My interviews and participant observation confirmed that my subjects held on to Indian culture in their clothes, food choices, and religio-cultural practices more than their male counterparts did. Such a genderized division of cultural labor can be seen in the Indian homeland as well. The women wear *saris*, *salwar kameejes*, or *kurtis* in *desi* parties. More often than not, the men wear shirt and trouser ensembles on such occasions. Many of my subjects ate only vegetarian food, even while their husband and children ate eggs, fish, chicken, and lamb. The women cooked Indian food for parties and for daily consumption at home, the men did not cook very often. Female immigrants performed *puja* more often than their male counterparts. They regularly fasted on religious occasions, but the men rarely did so. While both men and women were involved in cultural productions of music and dance, more women than men participated in such shows.

In agreement with my findings, Meera Srinivas notes that it is the women in the Indian immigrant community who uphold Indian traditions. They are the ones who make time for Indian music classes, *puja*, ethnic clothes, and native language studies (Srinivas 2000). Srinivas argues persuasively that Indian diasporic men are culturally inactive in comparison to the women. They appreciate the cultural practices of the women but they themselves do not engage in cultural regeneration. Making a bit of a sweeping

generalization, Srinivas contents that Indian immigrant men in the United States are emotionally repressed, hardworking, lonely workaholics whose only success in America are their big houses and new cars that they flaunt to visiting relatives and fellow immigrant friends. They only know a few religious rituals that they follow blindly, but other than that, Indian men are not grounded in Indian culture. Though extremely negative in her depiction of Indian immigrant males, Srinivas presents a rather convincing thesis. But she fails to analyze whether Indian immigrant women undertake cultural reproduction in the U.S. willingly, or whether they are pressured into doing so by their family and community.[51]

Transmission of cultural beliefs and practices to the new generation is important to immigrant parents. Transmission is not possible in the new country unless a reformulation/reformation/renewal of ethnic culture is undertaken in the new location. Thus, following cultural formulas learnt in the homeland, new cultural institutions, spaces, and occasions are created in the country of settlement in order to revive the languages, cultural practices, culinary recipes, apparel fashions, and religious rites of the old country. Who performs most of the work of cultural reformulation? Indian immigrant women do the greater portion of the labor of cultural recreation in the country of settlement. My subjects affirmed that since women spend more time with the children than men do, whether they like it or not, the former are assigned the role of transmitters of Indian cultural traditions to the next generation. Sangeeta, a part time pre-school teacher, says, “My husband is hardly at home. He has his regular job and he has also taken up some teaching assignments in a local university. I don’t even get to see him on Saturdays,

[51] I will deal with this issue in greater detail in a later sub-section.

besides the usual work-week he usually works Saturdays too, so I spend all my time with my son, and I have taught him to read and write Tamil, I have also taught him many songs in our language" Vijaylakshmi, a non-working wife and mother says, "My husband Vikram returns from work at 8.30 p.m. every night. So I have to keep my daughter busy single-handedly most of the evening. It is almost her bed-time by the time my husband returns home. I am trying to teach her Sanskrit *slokas.*" Most of the women complained bitterly of the long hours their husband spent at work, and how they spent most of their time alone with their children. Since these women spend the maximum time with their children, they are in charge of the children's cultural training. Rani says, "My husband travels a lot, but I make sure the children eat a North Indian dinner every night. My husband is North Indian, and he wants the children to eat *daal-roti*."[52] Chitra and Lakshmi both take their children to Hindu scripture classes at Chinmaya Mission every Sunday.[53] Urmila takes her daughter to dance and music classes at Swaranjali, a Bengali school (but not her son, he is taken to weekend basketball games by his father). Vijaylakshmi spends an hour doing *puja* every day, she says she wants to teach her daughter the importance of *puja* by demonstrating her own commitment to it. Her husband is passionate about safeguarding his family's Hindu traditions, but he has no time for *puja*, hence Vijaylakshmi is the preserver and transmitter of this ancient religion (but so far, the daughter has shown no interest in Hinduism). Immigrant families hope that the Indian "traditional" culture deployed (mostly by women) will be transmitted to

[52] Rani's efforts to follow her husband's desire to teach the children Northern Indian culture is commendable, because that is not her own provincial sub-culture. Rani is from Eastern India.

[53] Chinmaya Mission is an institute that trains children and adults in Vedic Hinduism.

the offspring, but “second generation girls rightly reject their moms who are still competing with each other over the tradition of making the best *paratha* or *khichdi,* [but they] have no alternative role models”(Srinivas 2001:49).

I agree with Meera Srinivas in that Indian immigrant women preserve Indian culture actively through their clothes, cooking, *puja*, cultural performances and training of children in Indian ways. Their men are rarely actively involved in cultural production. However, in my opinion, the men are important too in the effort to reformulate Indian culture in the U.S., for the men set the course. While it is the men’s will to be Indian at home, it is the women who carry out this policy. Tathagata says, “I think as an Indian immigrant father it is my duty to acquaint my children with Indian culture. If I will not introduce my children to Indian culture, then who else will do it? Their environment is totally American. So at home we introduce them to Indian culture. Once they grow up, it is their choice, they can choose whichever culture they want, Indian or American, but at least they will have the choice”. Tathagata has two daughters, one is seven years old and the other is one year old. At home, he and his wife speak in Bengali with each other and with the children. Their seven-year-old responds in Bengali. The one-year-old is of course too young to talk much. The elder daughter is sent to Swaranjali, a Bengali school, every Sunday. There she learns to read and write Bengali. The family usually eats Indian food at home (but the kids often clamor for pasta and meat sauce instead of *bhaat* and *daal).*

Ashesh says he wants his son to meet a Swamiji he respects immensely, “We are going to visit the Vivekananda Mission in Los Angeles during the Christmas break. We used to go there regularly when we lived in LA. We respect the Swamiji there very much.

We haven't seen him since we moved to the Bay Area. We want to pay our respects to the Swamiji, and we also want our son to meet with the Swamiji".

Similarly, Harishchandra insists that his wife Pramiti should wear saris at work and that his daughter Tripti should speak in Bengali at home. Ashutosh is equally vehement in his views. He says, "I have told Paulomi [his wife] "No Hindi films are to be watched in our home, only Bengali films"". Bankim says of his daughter Aalo, " When she speaks English at home, I get very irritated, *aamar gaa jole jaye* (my body burns with anger)". Arjun says, "Our daughter must be given an opportunity to acquaint herself with Indian culture". While he spends most of his weekends playing tennis, he does make time to take his daughter to Bharatnatyam classes. His wife Kalyani does *puja* and fasts for Santoshi Ma every Friday; she says, "I hope my *puja* makes an impression on our daughter, but to tell you the truth, despite my efforts, she has not really taken any interest in it". I suppose, even if they were left to themselves, the women would have come up with a similar India-centric family policy, but perhaps they would have been more lenient than their husbands. Arunima says, "My husband does not even approve of Hindi film culture for the kids, let alone American culture, but I am OK with Hindi film culture. He likes only Bengali, he teaches them Bengali script over the weekends".

(b) Cultural Authenticity

Women in the diasporic community have been given the charge of perpetuating so-called "traditional" Indian culture in the land of settlement, but I have doubts about the authenticity of the culture disseminated here. It must be said that because all cultures are continually evolving, all claims of cultural authenticity must be examined very carefully. And what is propagated in the name of Indian culture in the United States can hardly

claim to represent the diversity of Indian culture, or current transformations of lived culture in India. Indian food, language, and religion are essential cultural blocks that allow immigrants to get a taste of their native culture in the land of settlement, but I have often seen that what is transmitted in the name of Indian culture in the Indian American community is either sexually suggestive Bollywood song and dance routines or centuries old "classical" Indian music, dance, and theater. Espiritu says that native culture is essentialized in the United States as a simplified constant, and it does not account for the complexities of cultural change and indeterminacy in the nation of origin (Espiritu 2003). While ethnic culture perpetuated in the Indian immigrant home is often outdated and over-simplified, essentialization of culture for the sake of public displays of ethnic and cultural unity is the hallmark of the Indian American community. Shamita Dasgupta complains that the " powerful of the communities' leaders have endeavored to create counterfeit authenticity by denying culture's essential flux and inherent disparities" She accuses the diasporic Indian male bourgeoisie of manipulating religious, social, cultural, and informational institutions such as temples, mosques, newspapers, televisions, and cultural organizations in the community in order to suppress intra-community contradictions and present a united public image (Dasgupta 1998:5).

Sucheta Mazumdar is also extremely critical of the idealization of Indian culture by the South Asian immigrant bourgeoisie in North America. She is contemptuous of their attempts to essentialize constructions of the homeland's cultural heritage in order to bolster their own position within the community. The immigrant elite elect themselves to intra-community positions of power in which they decide who represents India in local parade slots for Indian culture, international fairs, and ethnic shows. Mazumdar insists

that the Indian American community displays an outdated, patriarchal, and middle-class version of their national heritage in order to preserve patriarchal authority and to discipline the rebellious generation born and raised in North America. So-called "preservation" of the "purity" of Indian culture lends authority to immigrant parents, self-appointed experts on authentic Indian culture. There is a strong desire to present a united and positive display of ethnic cultural heritage in order to project the community as a "model minority" that will be accepted by the mainstream. But in the process, democratic dissention and natural contradictions within Indian culture get swept under the rug (Mazumdar1996).

(c) Racial Chauvinism

One of my subjects, Shupriya, has correctly observed, "Most Indians wouldn't want their kids to marry anyone outside the community, but if it has to be, then white is better…..A lot of my friends' kids are of marriageable age…I find parents here are much more strict and unreasonable than parents back there [in India]. I really do. And it is amazing.….[This is] because they are so scared their kids will marry someone outside the community…it is just fear of the unknown….[They say] *Ora bhalo noy* [They are bad] generalizations [like that]". I too have noticed a tendency for racial exclusion in the Indian immigrant community in the Bay Area, especially a negative attitude towards blacks and Hispanics.

Mazumdar has correctly stated that most first generation Indian immigrants identify with the white middle-class in America, even though they are not always accepted by it. Primed by their colonial history of worship of the *gora log* (white man), Indian immigrant bourgeoisie easily mimic Anglo-European dominant culture, and hope

for upward mobility. Asian linkages are seldom explored. The state and other established powers in the U.S. also find it useful to accept the alliance of the Indian immigrant middle-class. Like other "model minority" communities, Indian Americans are given the task of disciplining blue-collar Blacks and Hispanics. As a "model minority", Indians in North America avoid any mention of domestic violence, child abuse, homosexuality, or the rising divorce rate within the community. They prefer to hold forth on superior Indian family values. Mazumdar writes that the South Asian middle class shares one common goal with the white middle-class: that of ensuring the cultural and political hegemony of the bourgeoisie. However, unlike the socially secure Euro-American middle class, it knows that its social conservatism and material success cannot ensure its place in the American middle-class. So members of the Indian American community re-invent themselves, Americanizing their accent, clothes, hair style and name in order to fit in. They walk a tightrope between Westernization and maintenance of so-called ethnic cultural "authenticity" (Mazumdar 1996).

(d) Indian Immigrant Parents and First Generation Indian American Children at Home and in the Community: A Clash of Cultures

Most of the Indian American children and youth I interacted with were eager to become fully Americanized. However, despite their offspring's lack of interest in Indian habits and traditions, Indian immigrant parents exert themselves to expose their children to Indian culture. "Indianization" of the "American Born Confused Desis" (ABCDs) may take the form of forcing the children to speak the Indian language and eat Indian food at home. Or it may include frequent vacations to India to visit the family back there. Or the

process of “Indianization” might consist of Indian dance, music, language, or religion lessons over the weekends.

Bacon has said, “Whatever a family has to say about being Indian grows out of the way its members lead their lives. Families do not seem very concerned with living up to ideas about Indian-ness. In the absence of this ideational aspect of adjustment, family life exists on the boundaries between Indian and American and consequently is free to exhibit wide variations and highly idiosyncratic patterns of interaction and adjustment” (Bacon 1996:249).I agree that each Indian immigrant family has its own individual method of balancing American assimilation with deployment of Indian culture. In fact families are much more flexible about cultural choices than communities as a whole. But I wonder how Bacon says that families do not care if they live up to ideas of Indianness, for in my experience, every family I observed was concerned about being Indian in at least a few of its spheres of functioning. Since it is impossible to be all-Indian while resident in America, families focused on particular areas of cultural enactment within the family.[54]

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, since the immigrant mother spends maximum time with the children, it is she who is burdened with the commitment to acculturate American born and raised children in Indian “traditions”. Shamita Dasgupta has shown that the Indian community forces Indian immigrant mothers to “Indianize” their children, especially their daughters. However, as I have mentioned in

[54] These areas often included restriction of daughters’ interaction with males (especially Black or Hispanic males), religious rituals at the family altar, consumption of Indian/vegetarian food, and female family members donning Indian clothes in Indian gatherings.

the first section of the chapter, I believe that community pressure is not the sole cause of "Indianization" of the second generation, in my opinion, the mother herself feels an urge to do so from deep within her own individual psyche.

As Manisha Roy explains, the young Indian immigrant wife enjoys breaking free from the fetters of the joint family and age-old Indian traditions. She is happy to be the undisputed mistresses of her home. But when the children become more and more Americanized in their adolescence then the mother insists that her daughter should not forget the food, language and traditions that are fixed in the mother's memories of her own Indian past (Roy 1998:104).

As described by Manisha Roy, disillusionment with American life hits first generation Indian immigrants mainly when their children grow up and show their preference for things American. Paulomi complains: "Dealing with teenagers growing up in America is so difficult. My daughter Moni has just entered high school. When Moni makes demands like being allowed to visit the mall with her friends, I say "No". She starts arguing with me. I don't know how to answer her questions, so I just quietly leave the room. Himesh is in grade eleven. When he wants to go to the prom or to late night parties with his friends, I try to discourage him. Sometimes, I try to do something that will distract him on those evenings I have forced him to spend at home rather than party with his friends. The whole family goes out for a meal together at a restaurant, or we rent a video, just anything to distract him". Paulomi's testimony shows us how accurate Manisha Roy's observations are: first generation Indian immigrants attempt to enforce their own out-dated and over-conservative cultural values and moral standards on their children. The children feel stifled by such outlandish constraints. This leads to a

breakdown in communication between parent and child, or elaborate attempts by the parent to appease the child.

Giving vent to her growing disenchantment with her life in America, Karuna, a mother of a twenty-five year old son married to a Anglo-European girl of his choice, expresses her disillusionment with her own position vis-a vis that of her American raised child: “Our generation of immigrants, that is, first generation immigrants, has had the worst deal of all. We had to listen to our elders, because, having been brought up in India, we were trained to do so, but our children, American born and raised as they are, don’t listen to us at all”.

Roy explains that when Americanized adolescent children cause more dissatisfaction than pride, and when the wife insists on him sharing housework, the male Indian immigrant wants to return to the joint family and enjoy the full attention of numerous doting female relatives, including his own mother (Roy 1998). Ashutosh, the father of two children in high school, says: “My children refuse to go to India on vacation. As a result, my wife Paulomi and I cannot vacation in India anymore. We really miss looking up our relatives and re-visiting our home-town.”

(e) Religious Zealots: Made in the United States

Mazumdar observes that some Indian immigrant community leaders eschew efforts to obtain the good favor of the mostly Euro-American powers- to-be in the U.S. Instead, they concentrate on re-creating a semblance of the religious and cultural framework that they left behind in the India embedded in their memories. They build temples, gurdwaras, and mosques in order to regain status lost due to dislocation from their native homeland. They are far more engaged with ethno-religious activism in the

United States than they had ever been in the Indian religious heartland. Mazumdar states that while white-collar Indian immigrants are know to be religious, the growing population of working-class Indian immigrants in the U.S. is also fiercely sectarian, supporting the religio-cultural glorification of so-called Indian "heritage" by those very community leaders who want to have nothing to do with blue-collar immigrants. Lacking professional qualifications for white-collar employment, they are forced to take working-class jobs they abhor. Regenerating their national identity allows them to claim moral and racial superiority to those at the bottom of the social hierarchy: blacks and Latinos (Mazumdar 1996).

(f)Lack of Inclusiveness at Home and in the Community

In general, the idea of a community implies inclusion of people with whom one has something in common, and exclusion of all outsiders. But in reality, relations between insiders might not be at all harmonious, and outsiders may not be as dissimilar as they are made out to be. The Indian community in the United States ostracizes all members who fail to comply with approved referent rules of behavior. Urmila says she is proud that Indians in the Bay Area are generally in professional occupations. She is a physician. She says that Indian doctors are generally respected here, they are known to be very competent, "And so far, we haven't personally felt racism, although we hear about problems, so that worries me a little, that as time goes on and more and more Indians move into the area, that it will become a problem……I think that because most Indians here are professionals, or like in little service industry, like shops. But it won't be quite as much as in U.K., because there the majority is menial, shops or whatever it is." She said that in the U.K., the first thing she noticed when she disembarked from the airplane was

the prevalence of Indian sweeper women at Heathrow Airport. Urmila expressed concern that many of the new Indian immigrants in the Bay Area were not professionals, they were unskilled laborers. Recently, she has come across many Indian cab drivers in San Francisco. Urmila is a bit worried about this trend; she would prefer that "Americans" (read Anglo-Europeans) in the Bay Area think of Indian immigrants as highly qualified professionals, not uneducated or semi-educated laborers.

Mindful of its professional upwardly mobile majority, the Indian community in the Bay Area is determined to project a middle-class image. It puts a lot of pressure on its members to acquire the financial trappings of the American middle class. Home ownership, buying new cars, expensive college education and lavish birthday, *annaprasan*, graduation, and wedding celebrations for the offspring are all required if one wants to escape criticism from fellow Indians in the Bay Area. This is especially true in this region because a lot of Indians have made millions of dollars in the high-tech industry. Charulata, a web designer who has not managed to buy a home yet says, "Those who have millions in the *desi* community, you know, a million dollar home, and a string of brand new expensive cars in their driveway, they have already written us off, they don't talk to us anymore". Her husband, a computer programmer, says, "I hate that everyone I interact with in the Indian community only talks of coding and programming, or buying a house or car. Not of politics or art or culture, or even of writing papers in journals. I am an exception in my company, I try to publish my research results in the appropriate scientific journals, I have twelve journal publications." Kalyani, a teacher, also says, "You know that we live in a rented house. My Bay Area resident sisters and so-called friends here are always asking me, "So when are you going to buy a house?" They

tell me of all their problems with their maids; now why tell me, what will I do knowing all that? The truth is, they just want to make me feel small because I can't afford to buy a house or hire a maid." Kalyani continues, "Have you heard of the million dollar house bought by Sriparna Bhavsar? Our common friend Vaijayanthi rang me up just now to inform me that she had just attended a party at Sriparna's new home, "Have you seen Sriparna's new house?" Vaijayanthi asked me. Well, I haven't seen it. Sriparna invited me to a housewarming party but I could not go because Arjun was unwell at that time. Anyway, Sriparna doesn't show off about her house, her friends are more eager to show off than she is herself!"

Indians in the Bay Area, especially first generation immigrants, are not only class conscious, they are also ethnically insular. They can afford to be ethnically exclusive because there are so many fellow-Indian immigrants and so many Indian resources here that they do not have to depend too heavily on non-Indian social contacts, cultural artifacts, and communitarian resources. This makes it difficult for Indians married to non-Indians to make friends within the Indian community. Aditi White is the young wife of a senior American professor in a university in San Francisco. She says, "We come across many Indians, but it is difficult to find people on the same wave-length. In fact, ever since I came here five years ago, only one Indian family has invited us to their home."

Organizations that highlight the dissensions that the community labors to deny, that is, groups working with battered women, gays and lesbians, and taxi drivers are often dismissed from community parades and other performances of community identity. Mazumdar explains that Indian diasporic leaders collude with the American state in preservation of the status quo, "Control of these little sanction slots for displaying

"heritage" and national cultures, marching in parades, and deciding who will be allowed to participate in the "international fairs", legitimizes the immigrant bourgeoisie's social and political standing among other immigrants in the community" (Mazumdar 1996:464).

Thus, due to intra-community peer pressure, the appearance of a homogenous community is maintained not only publicly, but also privately. In homes, families, and marriages, differences are actively repressed by a call for "cultural purity". As Shamita Dasgupta has written, being loyal to the traditional "culture" in private as well as public, "is an immigrant's ticket to belonging, our communities' acknowledgement of someone as Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, or Indian" (Dasgupta 1998: 5).

Despite Dasgupta's and Mazumdar's criticism of the Indo-American community, the novelist Chitra Divakaruni, who is also the founder of a South Asian women's help line called Maitri, praises the increasingly liberal mind-set of the Indian community in the Bay Area: "The attitude of the Indian community to the issue of domestic abuse and an organization like Maitri has really changed in the last ten years. Now Indians seem to realize that the problem of domestic abuse needs to be resolved and Maitri is here to help do that" (personal communication). I believe that American progressiveness has had a hand in changing inequitable gender relations among Indians here, but more importantly, the expanding feminist movement in mainland India has spurred immigrant Indians to correct excesses of gender discrimination within the community here. Indian feminism has influenced the younger generation of middle-class Indian women in the homeland to a great extent. When they immigrate to America, young women bring their homegrown feminist ideals with them, and in many cases, they join Maitri, Narika, and other Bay

Area organizations that assist victims of domestic abuse within the Indian overseas community.

(g) Language Usage at Home and in the Community

There are many home-based or temple/church/mosque-located private language schools in the Bay Area that teach the Indian regional languages. An important issue in reformulation of "traditional" Indian culture in diasporic Indian homes is the choice of language spoken at home. Different individuals in the first generation of Indo-American immigrants have different degrees of comfort with their Indian mother-tongue and with English. I found that the more comfortable the family members are in the Indian native language, and the less comfortable they are in English, the more of the Indian language is spoken at home. Ashutosh admits that even after so many years in the United States, he is more comfortable speaking Bengali than English. His English fails him occasionally: "Coming to this country, I have learnt English, but Bengali is my own language. I learnt only Bengali as a child. I grew up in Shobujdanga *gram* [Shobujdanga village]. When I got admission in IIT Kharagpur then I had to learn Hindi. My classmates at IIT used to laugh at my pathetic attempts to speak Hindi. Here I speak in English at work. But in times of crisis, Bengali still comes to my lips, not English. I was in court the other day, and for fully fifteen seconds my English failed me, and I found myself blurting out Bengali." He and his wife speak Bengali with each other at home, they also speak Bengali when conversing with their adolescent children, but the children always reply in English. Another native language speaker at home, Rani, says, "If the kids learn one Indian language I am happy, in my case it is Hindi. My husband Varun spends little time at home. Since I am at home all the time, it is my job to make sure the kids speak in

Hindi at home, even though Hindi is not my mother-tongue. I am not from the Northern part of India."

At the other end of the spectrum we have Dr. Urmila Bannerjee and Mrinalini, both of whom had a very Westernized upbringing in India. Dr Bannerjee explained, "Tushar and I rarely speak in Bengali. The children both spoke Bengali and understood really well when they were small, but once they started pre-school, they switched to English, and now they chatter away in English. Then we chatter in English to them. It's like a bad habit. It's because we feel very comfortable in English. It's basically like almost a first language for us. So it is a bit of a problem". Mrinalini says" I try to speak to my daughter in Malyalam, but since I am used to speaking in English, often English comes naturally to me, and I have to consciously force myself to speak in Malyalam so that she can pick up some Malyalam from me. My husband grew up outside Kerala, so he is not at all fluent in Malyalam, so he always speaks in English. So it is up to me to teach our daughter Malyalam, but I am not doing a very good job of it. In fact, ever since she began going to pre-school, she has switched to English and speaks little Malyalam at home." Of course, the longer the family spends in the U.S., the more English is spoken at home. But in some cases, home language becomes one of those sacrosanct areas of daily life in which desperate attempts are undertaken to deploy ethnic culture.

AGENCY

Agency and the exercise of individual will is a valid indicator of the quality of life. I will now examine the degree of agency among my subjects. Was income proportionate to agency?

Women's Empowerment at Home and in the Community: Indian Diasporic Cultural Deployment, Female Employment, and Agency

The degree of female empowerment is dissimilar in different communities, classes, and income brackets. I found that professional Indian working women enjoyed more rights and resources than non-working women in the Indian diasporic community I researched in the San Francisco Bay Area. However, non-working women reported that they believed that their agency and status in the household had improved upon migration out of India. I will deal with the issue of agency among Indian working women who have not left the homeland in a later section. There I will explain how I found that professional working women in India have more than adequate access to rights and resources, but non-working women in India are not endowed with comparable status in or outside the household.

Is the status of immigrant Indian women comparable to that of their men at home and within the ethnic community? Not al all, since ethnic traditions dictate against gender equity. In Meera Syal's novel, *Life Isn't All Haa Haa Hee Hee*, the heroine Tanya writes of her Punjabi immigrant mother settled in the United Kingdom: "Mum was heavier than the rest of the family's combined weight …. But she shriveled to the size of a pea around her husband"(Syal 2000:143).Syal insists that even though an earned income improves the status of women in the Indian immigrant home, this improvement is only to a certain extent. Syal is dismissive of most of her professional women friends in the Indian community. Most of them are married to Indian men and hence constrained in their behavior. Syal writes of them: "Ask most of my [Indian] girlfriends…I've seen enough to recognize it for what it is, our collective shameful secret, we meet the world head up,

head on, we meet our men and we bow down gratefully, cling to compromise like a lover who promises all will be well if we don't make trouble. We hear our mother's voices and heed them, to make up for all the other imagined transgressions in our lives" (Syal 2000:145-46).

Syal paints a rather dismal picture of the woman's position in the Indian immigrant home. Is this an accurate portrayal? I think that while Syal may have captured the tone of the majority of man-woman relationships in the Indian immigrant community, her value judgments give them a pathos and sense of backwardness that the women concerned would not have necessarily associated with their own lives. Syal's caricature of Indian womanhood is unintentionally reinforced by Parmatma Saran, an Indian immigrant author. Unlike Syal, Saran approves of what he characterizes as typical non-assertive behavior of Indian women, "Generally, Indian women are less assertive than their American counterparts and the majority feel that relations cannot be changed by being too assertive. They recognize that being too assertive and demanding is not the right approach to correct things" (Saran 1985: 97).

Shamita Das Dasgupta, a feminist Indian immigrant scholar, criticizes Saran for confining his description of the typical female Indian immigrant to the "proverbial good Indian woman". Referring to Saran's take on Indian women, she writes, "Despite such convenient categorizing, the realities of our life experiences do not allow simple caricatures. Our lives go beyond the images of the proverbial "good" daughter, the asexual, all enduring mother who walks three steps behind her men. Passive and insulated womanhood is not our reality" (Dasgupta 1998:3).

I think the reality of Indian women's lives in the United States lies somewhere in between the contrasting descriptions of them given above. I believe that Indian immigrant women in the U.S., whether professional, semi-professional, or working class, whether working, non-working or between jobs, whether single or married, whether with or without children, do tend to "cling" to their families, as Syal claims. In keeping with Saran's views, on the whole, they cannot be labeled "asserting" or "demanding". But of course, these are all relative terms, and it is difficult to put one's finger on exact behavioral patterns unless one discusses concrete examples.

I also believe that it is difficult, if not impossible, to disassociate a person from the paradigm which formed the basis of his or her upbringing. The nature of upbringing in the nation of origin, that is, India, is responsible for a large part of identity formation and self-perception of Indian immigrant women in the U.S. It is true that there are some gender-egalitarian myths and practices in traditional India. Also, in Indian history, there are some instances of women successfully defying gender barriers. Shamita Dasgupta writes in *A Patchwork Shawl*, "All cultures contain elements that disenfranchise women as well ones that empower them. It is for us to recognize by whose machinations and for whose benefit the former become reified as tradition and the latter exiled to obscurity. As activists we need to salvage those parts of our culture that uplift women as a group" (Dasgupta 1998:10). Dasgupta extols fellow immigrants to revive that strand of Indian mythology that idealizes the *virangana,* or female warrior. The *Shakti* tradition of the worship of goddess Durga/Devi/Kali propagates this formulation of courageous feminity.

Despite such masculine depictions of the *Bharatiya nari* (Indian woman), conservative India envisions rigidly defined and completely separate roles for men and

women: ideally, men are out in the world, producing earnings to sustain the family; women are confined to the home, bearing and rearing children and keeping the home fires burning. Female work is indispensable to the survival of the members of the household, yet it seems to be invisible, for all this work does not count in the narratives of the family or the women themselves, or even in the census enumeration of "working women". In rural and poor households, housework, done entirely by the women of the family, involves backbreaking labor: fetching water from wells and water reservoirs miles away, gathering firewood from distant jungles, collecting animal dung for fuel, cleaning and grinding food grains, vegetable cultivation in home gardens, cooking, cleaning, care of children and elderly. Male work, and in general, the male existence, is valued far more highly than female work or the female being. In spite of almost two centuries of esternization, modernization, liberalism, and efforts at women's education and empowerment, the reality is that Indian women are still regarded as inferior to their male counterparts by the majority of their countrymen (and countrywomen too).

Education, Westernization, and middle-class idealism have all acted to vastly improve the status of women in the highly-educated, elite, middle-class families from whence Indian professional female immigrants to the U.S. originate. But liberal idealism about male-female equality by one's parents, siblings, friends, and teachers cannot hide the chauvinist attitudes of the vast majority of the Indian nation. Also, while many progressive parents in India might want to bring up their daughters in a non-sexist manner, their own, more conservative, parents usually discourage such efforts. In general, sexism is ingrained in the Indian psyche; it is impossible for an Indian woman, however

progressive her immediate family or friends might be, to escape male chauvinism. Given these drawbacks, the successful careers of a select band of Indian women are remarkable. Indian women have been especially successful in the spheres of academics, medicine, computer software writing, law, and politics.

Since the mid-sixties, American immigration laws have favored professionally qualified persons. Hence those women who made it to the U.S. on their own in the last four decades, whether as international students or as overseas recruits employed by American corporations and universities, are all extremely qualified. Most primary male immigrants from India, at least those who came in legally, are technically or educationally skilled professionals. They are mostly middle-class. The majority of the women these men have married are also highly educated middle class individuals who value acquiring professional or semi-professional skills and aim for quality employment. Many of these women who came to the U.S. as wives have also built up successful careers for themselves here. While career-goals are important both for those professional Indian women who came to the U.S. on their own, and for those who came as wives, daughters, or sisters, they still are influenced by traditional Indian ideas. Thus in some corner of their mind they are likely to believe that so-called “ideal” Indian women are not only “career-oriented” but also “family-oriented”. Neither Indian middle-class idealism, nor American feminism can totally rid Indian woman of certain backward chauvinistic ideas such as these.

American feminists such as Sylvia Yanagisako, proclaim that gender differences that are portrayed as natural must be revealed to be what they really are: differences and inequalities constructed by culture (Yanagisako 1995). Our feminist liberal progressive

sensibilities inform us that Indian immigrant women in the U.S., even most of those who are educated and professionally or semi-professionally qualified working women, are backward in their thinking. Contrary to the ideas of Western feminism delineated so clearly by feminists such as Yanagisako, Indian immigrant women in the U.S., even most of those who are highly educated working women, seem to cling to the concept of essentialist gender differences, such as the ideal of the woman as nurturer, and the man as protector. They hesitate to dismiss such stereotypes as inequalities constructed by culture. In general, due to this discrepancy in opinion, Indian immigrant women seem conflicted about whether to put their lot with Western feminists, homegrown Indian feminists, or anti-feminist Indian traditionalists.

Childcare and housework are contentious issues which are greatly affected by ideas of ideal womanhood. Indian immigrant working women do not hesitate to avail themselves of the excellent childcare facilities in America. Indian immigrant women who are employed in America invariably put their children in professional childcare within six to twelve weeks of birth, that being the duration of the state-approved length of maternity leave. Rather than opting for culturally alien American daycare centers or expensive American nannies, many Indian immigrant couples, such as some among those I interviewed, put their children in South Asian home child care centers. Or they bring their parents and parents-in-law in turn, six month for each set of parents, so that the newborn child is cared for in a home environment by his co-ethnics or relatives in the first year of his life. I found that unlike Arlie Hochschild's resentful interviewees, Indian immigrant working wives do not make very serious attempts to pressure their husbands to increase

their share of housework and childcare. Instead, they employ domestic help and childcare providers to lighten the burden of the second shift (Hochschild 1989).

Due to blind faith in mothers being the best possible nurturers for their children, non-working Indian immigrant mothers reject the option of fathers performing anything more than minimal childcare. Paid childcare by a nanny, or institutional day-care for children is also kept down to a minimum. This was cheap and easily available in India, but it is prohibitively expensive in America. This preference for the mother spending most of her time in childcare alienates non-working Indian immigrant women from Western and Indian feminists.

Childcare and housework are not the only issues. Gender roles are fairly rigid in India; those husbands fail to excel in their career experience shame, and so do their wives. An Indian immigrant wife may earn enough to support her husband and children, but she feels humiliated on account of her husband's failure to shine in his career. Some of my subjects gave examples of how they had sacrificed their own career in order to boost their husband's career. Two of them had even given up promising jobs in order to relocate to areas where their husband had found good employment. This self-sacrificing attitude makes it hard for Indian immigrant women to engage in any meaningful dialogue with feminists.

Most Asian Indian women, even those who call themselves feminists, hesitate to make alliances with Western feminists. Indian American feminists such as C.T. Mohanty fault Western feminism for reducing all problems of inequity to a single denominator, that of gender. Mohanty claims that Western feminists are not sensitive to issues of race, class, and colonial domination. Sometimes Western feminists do concern themselves with

"third world women", meaning all women of, and originating from, third world nations, including third world women living in the developed world. But then Western feminists fail to recognize the heterogeneity of third world women. Mohanty claims that Western feminists universally stereotype all third world women as backward victims who must be rescued by the progressive and liberal women of the West (Mohanty 1991).

Yen Le Espiritu has also written of how difficult it is for Asian women to decide whom to align themselves with: female American feminists or male Asian American nationalists. She points out that racial domination of Asian Americans casts Asian men as feminine. At the same time, racial oppression also involves the portrayal of Asian men as hypersexual. Asian American women are sensitive to the emasculation of Asian American men, yet they resent their sexist attitudes. White supremist ideology renders Asian women both super feminine and masculine. In an effort to counter such skewed representations, Asian Americans have embraced masculine cultural nationalism, a position that fails to speak for Asian American women. "Though divergent, both the nationalist and feminist positions advance the dichotomous stance of men or women, gender or race or class, without recognizing the complex rationality of these categories of oppression." (Epiritu 1997:106-7).

I must point out, that on the whole, most Indian immigrant women are, in my opinion, conservative in their thinking; they are hesitant to join Western feminists, or feminists of any sort at all. I have observed that whether they are employed in service, entrepreneurial, or manufacturing positions, Indian immigrant working women seem to have one thing in common: they are determined to hold on to male/patriarchal superiority within the family, or at least, to the façade of it. This is so despite the fact that their

contribution to the family income renders them capable of breaking out of patriarchal oppression. For many years, Mrs. Singh earned while her husband did not, but she always said, “Your uncle knows more about all matters than I do. Why don’t you discuss what you want to talk about with him?” Invariably, they attribute their success to their husband. Shalini, an extremely successful technical manager at Delphi Technology says, “My success is due to luck, and of course my husband, he is like a rock of support. Of course, now he is trying to get his own company off the ground, so I can’t expect him to help with housework or childcare.” Uma, a technical worker at Delphi Technology also says, “In the last four years, I have had one promotion in every year, and I owe it all to support from my husband.”

This paradox that I observed, and that I have discussed above, has been described clearly in a few articles (A. K. Dhaliwal 1995, M. Williams 1989). But none of these articles succeed in *accounting* for this behavior. Yen Le Espiritu explains this phenomenon by pointing out that first generation Asian immigrant women are reluctant to question sexist subordination because they are fearful of losing their men. The income brought in by Asian women in the U.S. does not give them enough economic self-sufficiency to attempt to end patriarchal discrimination, and in fact, egalitarian equations have naturally emerged in some families. But in others, loss of male status both inside and outside the home have resulted in strained familial relations. Women fear forsaking traditional patriarchal values and practices for fear of losing their husbands, who provide economic support. Women still don’t earn enough to free themselves from men. Equally importantly, husbands are an essential part of a strong and intact family. Indeed, in this

hostile environment, the act of maintaining families is itself a form of resistance, “The family is the seat of their ethnic identity, they do not want to lose it” (Espiritu 1997:118).

This is an accurate description of the sentiments of first generation Indian immigrant working women in the United States. Saloni is a good example of this attitude, she says, “There came a time in my life when I had to make a choice, do I become the primary provider, or should Gautam be the main earner? I was in a tenure track position in a reasonably good university. Professionally, I was set for the next ten/fifteen years. But it was impossible for Gautam to find a tenure track position in that university. There were no other universities in that town. So we decided to move away, to go where Gautam found a suitable position, one that he was comfortable in. That was the decision I made when I was at the crossroads. To be very frank, I did not feel comfortable being the primary provider, I wanted my husband to assume that role.”

In some cases, female principal earnership can lead to violent arguments, and in certain extreme cases, to homicide. On March 4th, 1999, Krishna Prasad Agasthireddi of Terre Haute, Indiana, was arrested for allegedly strangling his wife Sumana Guvva. Agasthireddi was a twenty-nine year old radiologist who had been out of work since he had arrived in the country two years ago. He had come to the U.S. after his marriage to Sumana Guvva, a twenty-six year old American citizen. Agasthireddi had an Indian medical degree. Though he had passed the American certification exam for foreign medical graduates, he had failed to be accepted by any American hospital residency program. Hence, Sumana provided the living expenses for the couple. She worked in her uncle’s lab as a chemist. Her parents lived in Houston. The accused allegedly strangled his wife and left her body, dressed in bedclothes, lying in water in a field just outside the

city. Tread marks that were believed to be from his car were found nearby. The police were alerted to Guvva's disappearance by her uncle. Guvva failed to show up for work on the morning of March 4th. Her uncle went to her apartment and found that she was not there, but her purse and cell phone were in the apartment. Her husband was not to be found anywhere on the scene. Agasthireddi was arrested just as he was about to board a flight to Brownsville, Texas. The police suspect that Agasthireddi planned to flee to Mexico from Brownsville, a border town. Authorities theorize that the crime was committed after a domestic argument "based on the fact that the accused's wife was working and he was not" (*India Abroad,* May 4,1999: 38).

While family is of paramount importance, Indian immigrant women also cling to the ambition to build a successful career for themselves. They have in fact, come a long way from backward ideas that held them back from full participation in the workforce. Saloni says, "But now that we are here in San Francisco, and Gautam has found a tenure track position, I am building up my own career once again. I switched jobs recently, now I have a research position in a UC. I am happy with the work I am doing, and I am confident that once I manage to publish some more papers I will be able to look for even better positions within the Bay Area."

In a personal meeting, I met women's rights activist Chitra Divakaruni, President of Maitri, a South Asian women's help line. Divakaruni is critical of the position of women in the Indian immigrant community: "Many women who came to Maitri need to know simple things like opening a bank account or getting citizenship. Some of them had lived in America for decades but knew no life outside their homes". But I believe that all evaluations of a woman's empowerment are relative to the position she may have been in

had she not immigrated. The women I spoke to were happy with the freedoms they had won in their own lives. Not just inter-generational gains, but more gains in perception of what could have been if things had not gone the way they did, and what these women actually achieved in terms of control over their own lives.

Arunima, a stay-at-home mom says, “My husband and I both wanted that I should devote all my time to our children. I like it that way. But no way am I housebound. As you know I spend almost my entire day outside the home, carting my children back and forth between school, soccer, ballet, swimming, and karate lessons. I also do all the shopping; and I have friends far and wide in the Bay Area, sometimes I visit them in the afternoon, that is, before my husband returns from work. I am very driven. On a typical day, I spend more time on the road than at home.” Paulomi, an engineer, says: “I don’t want to work full time, I like to work from home because then I am not rushed and stressed out like other working women. After all, it is the woman who has to look after the home.” She works from home in her husband’s architectural firm. Kalyani, a part-time teacher says, “I like working part-time so that I can return home the same time as my daughter does. Neither my husband nor I like her to stay at after-school care. She may pick up bad habit there and make undesirable friends there. I take her to piano and Bharatnatyam classes in the afternoon. Also, the daughter of one of my colleagues tutors her in Math in the afternoons. In the evening, I supervise her home-work and cook dinner at the same time. I like the present arrangement, and so does my husband Arjun, I am not particular about the car I drive, my husband has given a Volvo for me to drive and that is OK with me. I am glad we live in a reasonably big house that we are paying up for,

because after all, home-ownership is essential". Chitrangada says "I found full-time work in a reputable financial firm within a few months of my arriving in the U.S. as Manas' bride. I like my work, and it provides an excuse for me to avoid having to visit my parents-in-law too often. They live in New Jersey. I am resisting my mother-in-law's advice that Manas and I should have a child. I think the present situation is just fine, and I want to keep it that way." Pramiti says, "I work in my husband's lab. I wish I could have found work somewhere else, but this was the only job that worked out for me. Earlier I could not drive the car on the highway, so I had to take a ride from my husband, or I had to rely on public transport. Now I have learnt to negotiate freeway driving, so I have great freedom, I go wherever I want to on my own. Also, my job is a convenient excuse for me to avoid having to spend months at a stretch with my parents-in-law who live in Boston. I think things have worked out just fine for me".

All the women quoted above report a certain basic satisfaction with the life they lead here in the United States. The comfort level with the way they have organized their lives seems to be uniform whether the women are unemployed, employed part-time, or employed full-time. I believe that the reason why most of the Indian immigrant women I spoke to reported that they were happy with the way things had turned out in their lives is that most of them have made gains in individuation and personal freedom because of their immigration to the U.S. To U.S. born women, the lives of first generation immigrant Indian women may seem restricted and bound by patriarchal traditions, but the women themselves realize that they have gained significant freedoms simply by virtue of the fact that they have settled in the United States. Such freedoms are both big and small. They

include the freedom from day-to-day interference from meddlesome neighbors and from elders in the marital and natal families, the replacement of traditional patriarchal spousal relations by a more "companionate" model,[55] the ability to drive a car and go to many places on one's own, earning salaries that allow one to buy consumer items and vacation packages that were out of one's reach in India, earning degrees from world-renowned U.S. universities, working with the best facilities modern technology can offer, and mixing with people of cultures one had only read about or heard about before migrating out of India. These may seem to be modest gains to some, but they are considerable in the eyes of the women who experience them.

Most of the husbands of my interviewees have supported their wife's education and wish to be employed. The husband's reasons for doing so ranged from to the desire to increase the wife's earning potential (and hence the family income), to idealism about setting up equitable gender relations in their own lives, to sentimental attachment to the wife. But there seem to be limits to the husband's flexibility. For example, both Varun and Rani finished graduate school at the same time. After dating each other in graduate school, the two of them got married as soon as they obtained their Ph.D. degrees. Varun "encouraged" Rani to take up a job in San Francisco and move into an apartment there. Varun set up home in Europe where he had accepted a post-doctoral position. But in spite of the "freedom" he "allowed" her, he says, "You must know how far you can allow your

[55] Though male chauvinistic pressures from conservative forces within the overseas Indian community, and the reification of a 'traditional' Indian identity due to perceived rejection by so-called mainstream Americans, do cause backward, patriarchal behaviors, there is substantial post-migrational progression towards a more equitable reconfiguration of gender relations.

spouse to act contrary to your comfort level. If you allow her to go too far, then you will not be able to handle it. So let her know what you are comfortable with and what you are not comfortable with." Rani, ended up resigning from her much coveted position of post doctoral researcher in a reputable university when Varun and Rani had two children in quick succession. Both Varun and Rani said that they felt that two full time jobs and two full-time day-care schedules for two infant children were too hectic. Rani's radical decision to give up her job may have had something to do with Varun's frequent reiteration of the statement, "If the kitchen is taken care of then the whole household is taken care of." It is ironical that Varun and Rani had initially moved into the Bay area only because Rani had accepted a job here. Then an Indian college friend of Varun's roped him into a start-up company the former had recently founded in Silicon Valley. Ratnam, a friend of Rani's from her graduate student days says, " Rani has changed so much, she used to be so focused on her career, so independent, now her whole life revolves around those two noisy kids of hers."

Paulomi's husband sponsored her education at Berkeley soon after he married her in an arranged match-up set up by his parents. Paulomi, raised in a village in Eastern India says, "My husband is idealistic. He always supported my education. I could not have done my Bachelor's in Engineering at Berkeley unless he had supported me." But Paulomi also says, "Ashutosh is very strict at home. He is very rigid about how to raise the children. I feel one has to let go a little bit, or the children feel stifled. But he hardly listens to me. He always says to me and the children, "Go, do your own work!" As if work is the be all and end all in life!" Harishchandra, a second-generation Indian

immigrant married to a girl raised in a small town in Eastern India "permitted" his wife to work while he completed his medical residency. Now he has procured a job for her in his lab. But he said to my husband, "My wife will complain to your wife. I will do my best to discourage that, our personal stuff should stay personal." My informants' testimonies give credence to Vijay Prashad's analysis, " The *desi* takes cultural refuge in the "home", a place in which the *desi* might feel sovereign, superior, and dignified…..The *desi* woman emerges within this logic as the repository of tradition, and as long as she is able to reproduce "India" in the home, she too is encouraged to go out and work and enhance the capital sums of the family fund" (Prashad 2000:105).

Despite the above described limits to their husband's flexibility regarding the wife's role at home and at work, the majority of the Indian immigrant professional and semi-professional women that I interviewed experienced some amount of empowerment in their personal and marital lives. Unlike their counterparts in India, they did not have to directly deal with their extended families or intrusive neighbors on a daily basis. This freed up a lot of time. The women devoted this time to pursue their own interests. Though the immigrant community often attempted to restrict the women's so-called "Americanized" individuation, and though the women themselves wanted to return to an Indian (and hence gender-specific subservient) identity, the fact is that great physical distance from their in-laws served to enhance the women's personal decision-making powers. In addition, professional achievement so far from their homeland, in the heart of the Western metropolis, gave these women a sense of achievement and confidence that

emboldened them to stand up to oppressive forces. However, I must clarify that my respondents did not always choose the path of resistance.

Most of the working women I spoke to had access to household resources such as a joint bank account and the family car. They were able to decide their own career track. They had a say about whether or not to start a family, when to have children, and how many. They bought consumer items for their own personal use without too many restrictions, their input was of considerable influence in making family decisions concerning purchases of consumer goods for the household. The women I spoke to also had substantial say in deciding what to do in their leisure time, the timing and destination of out-of-town vacations, whom to socialize with, and what to wear on what occasion. They yielded significant clout in ascertaining what school their children would study in, what after-school activities the children would engage in, and whom to hire to help with housework and childcare. Also, though housework and childcare primarily remain the woman's responsibility, the husbands of working Indian immigrant women do help with a few household chores. Moreover, limited vacation time combined with a well-developed earning ability make it convenient for working women from India to replace time spent in the company of parents and parents-in-law back in India with lavish gift-giving.

Having written about infinitesimal progress for all Indian immigrant women, and limited but significant empowerment for most working Indian immigrant women, let me now talk of giant leaps in self sufficiency and leadership that a few working Indian women have achieved in their professional as well as personal lives. Among the Indian professional and semi-professional Indian immigrant women I interviewed in the Bay

Area, there were a few who had mustered up the courage to *reinvent* the traditional Indian male-female equation. In such cases, Dasgupta's claim on behalf of Indian American immigrant women that "Passive or insulated womanhood is not our reality" (Dasgupta 1998:3) rings true. In fact, six of my subjects, Smita, Megha, Urmila, Rani, Mrs. Singh, and Niharika, were primary immigrants. They continue to work, but only two of them are primary breadwinners anymore. They certainly have progressive views on gender relations, and their families are clearly more concerned about their opinions than the families of my other informants. As Sheba Mariam George points out, many professional Indian women such as nurses are primary immigrants to the U.S.[56] They sponsor their families to the U.S., and help them establish themselves here. They continue to be the primary breadwinners. Naturally, they are able to establish equitable gender relations at home and leverage authority within their community (George 2005).

Having left her two year old son under the care of her husband and parents-in-law in Delhi, Smita came to the U.S. on a B1 visa. After arriving in the U.S., she managed to get an H-1B visa for herself within six months. Then she brought her husband and child to the U.S. as her dependents. While her earning power and visa sponsoring ability was welcomed by her husband, it created some confusion in him and in the extended family. Smita challenged gender norms in her family and society by demonstrating that a wife and a daughter is not a burden, underlining the value of all women. In fact Smita not only brought her husband to the U.S., she also paid for his education so that he was able to set up a computer-software related start-up venture

[56] President Bush signed a law in May 2005 providing for an extra 50,000 visas for registered nurses, physical therapists, and their families.

enterprise. After ten years in the U.S., she is still the primary provider in her family. She has also been able to pay for her younger brother's education in management, and she pays for her parents' annual visits to the United States. Thus she has contested assumed rights of husbands over wives by putting forward her own selfless desire to help not only her conjugal, but also her natal family.

Megha is the main provider in her household. She came to the United States as an international student. Having completed her graduate studies, she is now an associate professor. Her husband is a consultant at a university, but Megha's earning power and enormous visibility (by virtue of her high-profile university position) in the Indian community can be seen as a disruptive force that challenges the Indian norm of the woman being the "home-maker". Megha explains that her husband does the greater portion of housework, and he is progressive enough to take his "unmanly" domestic duties in his stride. Thus Megha and her husband are proud of the growing democratization of the moral framework of their family.

Urmila came to study medicine in the United States. She is now a physician and owns two private clinics. As a management consultant, her husband earns a substantial salary, but her own income is enormous. Urmila has developed deep friendships with her Indian immigrant patients and most of them have become family friends. Thus, her identity as a physician is so prominent in her and her husband's social life that in many social circles, her husband's main identity is that of "Urmila's husband". Thus, Urmila exercises the autonomy she has gained from successful participation in the labor force by establishing and maintaining social connections with patients/friends. Like Smita does with her natal family, Urmila strengthens ties to her patients-cum-friends, and hence, like

Smita, she also demonstrates the principle of connective autonomy, or a "self fundamentally understood only within relationships and obligations" (George 2005:76).

What is remarkable in the lives of these women is the ability they have exhibited to break out of the traditional Indian mould of a wife whose career and ambitions are always secondary to those of her husband's. They have shown the courage to carry the burden of being the primary provider for not just themselves, but also for their families. And their husbands have shown the open-mindedness to allow their wives to grow their wings and take up whatever challenges they want to take on.

There are a few Indian immigrant women in the Bay Area who have made quite a name for themselves in their respective professions and also gotten a lot of local media attention for their achievements. Being more prominent than their husbands in the public eye, these women have obtained a level of empowerment that most Indian immigrant women can only dream about. However, it is also true that when we talk to them, these women repeatedly emphasize their efforts to balance their family lives with their professional careers.

As one drives up and down the freeways of the Silicon Valley, one often comes across billboards advertising a company called support.com. Ketaki Basu, a first generation Indian immigrant woman, is the CEO, Chairman, and President of support.com, an automated technical support company based in Redwood City in the San Francisco Bay Area. The company provides electronic support for technical problems. Support.com has 150 different customers in all, mostly blue chip corporate institutions. The company was formed in 1998 by Basu and a few of her former associates at Hewlett-Packard. Basu spent twenty years working at Hewlett-Packard. She started there as a

Research and Development scientist. Running a series of large groups in the latter part of her career at Hewlett-Packard, in her last four assignments she was part of the senior management at H-P. Initially founded with a handful of former H-P employees, support.com now has 200 employees. The company went public in 2000. It has already obtained four patents in "self-healing" automated support technology. Ketaki Basu has received many awards as the CEO of one of the fastest growing companies in the Silicon Valley. She was awarded the *Top 25 Women in the Web Award* in February 2000. The next year, she was one of the recipients of the *Women of Achievement Award* sponsored by the Women's Fund, an organization based in Northern California (*support.com* website). How does Basu want to be remembered by history? This is how she wants to be remembered:

> As one who had a good balance between family and work and community. I certainly want support.com to be remembered by history. I am not vain enough to think I will be remembered by history. I want to make support.com long term sustainable….In five years I want to start a school for young girls to make them more confident (*International Channel* of the San Francisco Bay Area, August 25, 2001).

Basu emphasizes that the road to her successful career has not been without stresses and strains, especially on the family front,

> Usually I am not at home when my daughter returns from school. If she finds me at home when she returns from school then she is surprised and asks me if everything is OK or not! Sometimes, I fly back from an out-of-town business trip just when my husband is departing for a business trip of his own. My husband hands over the baby to me as soon as I arrive at the airport gate, and then, immediately afterwards, he leaves for his own flight. There is no security, what if my flight is late, what if he has to change the timing of his flight? (*International Channel* of the San Francisco Bay Area, August 25, 2001).

Thus we find that though Basu has made giant strides of progress in female empowerment – she has opened a technology based company of her own and made a success of it – all the same, her family commitments do not seem to have diminished to a very significant degree. In fact she is often straining to make both work and home function smoothly at the same time. Nevertheless, she finds time for community building voluntary work: a decade ago, she co-founded Maitri, a San Francisco Bay Area help line for South Asian women suffering from domestic abuse. She currently gives her active support to a few charitable organizations based in India.

Hailed as an "an emerging literary celebrity" by *Time* magazine a few years ago, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has quite a dedicated fan following. One often hears her interviews on National Public Radio, or reads announcements of her book readings at bookstores in California, and also in other parts of the U.S. Having arrived in the United States at the age of nineteen, Divakaruni completed a Masters in English Literature at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and a Ph.D. in English Literature at University of California at Berkeley in the eighties. Divakaruni taught at Foothill College in the San Francisco Bay Area for twenty years, and she has now retired. She devotes all her time to writing, her family, and voluntary work for Maitri, a South Asian women's help line that Divakaruni co-founded a decade ago with a few like-minded friends. She has been President of Maitri since 1991. A well-known poet as well as an acclaimed fiction author, Divakaruni's poetry has been published in over thirty anthologies, and she has published seven books of fiction. She was awarded the Santa Clara Arts Council 1994 Award for Fiction and the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation 1994 Award for Poetry. She won the 1996 American Book Award, the Bay Area Reviewers and PEN Oakland Awards for

Fiction for her book of short stories *Arranged Marriage*. After having published two novels: The *Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart*, Divakaruni recently published *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives*, a new book of short stories. In 2001, she was one of those who were given the Women of Achievement Award sponsored by the Women's Fund of Northern California.

Divakaruni's popularity is not confined to the Indian community, she has a mainstream following. She told me, "I've always been received with a positive attitude by the mainstream American community. My writings have been very well received. In my readings usually half the audience is Indian, the other half is American". Does her public persona give her any advantage in her home life? That is not something she is ready to discuss, but she does emphasize to me that, home and work are equally important for her, "For me, my career and family are equally important, I want to give time to both of them, it is an ongoing process". Divakaruni is a traditional Hindu woman in many ways: even though she used to eat meat and fish before, she is currently a vegetarian on principle. Most devout Hindus are vegetarian. She takes her two young sons to Hindu scripture class every Sunday at the local Chinmaya Mission where she also teaches Hindu scripture recitation. When we had dinner at her home, she and her mother cooked, while her husband chatted with the guests and played with the children.

Yet, in many ways, she does not fit the picture of the traditionalist Indian immigrant woman. She devotes a lot of her time to running Maitri, the South Asian women's help line that she has founded. The evening we spent at her home, after feeding her guests dinner, she settled into a meeting with a Bay Area technical whiz kid, a young male second generation Indian immigrant who wanted to donate some of his time and

technical skills to Maitri. Traditional Indian women eschew working in organizations fighting for women's rights, for they claim that such organizations are subversive to the goals of the Indian community in the U.S.; they say feminist organizations should not be supported for they question, even betray, "Indian values". Conservative sections of the Indian community in the U.S.A. complain that feminists give all Indian Americans a bad name by giving undue publicity to isolated cases of domestic abuse by Indian Americans. Hence, Divakaruni can be said to be "subversive", she is certainly not a "traditional" preserver of the status quo. Also, Divakaruni's writings about inequitable male-female relations among Indians confound the conventional Indian immigrant tendency to cover up all problems in the community. She explained to me, "I've always been received with a positive attitude by the mainstream American community…. I've received more criticism from Indians. This is mainly because I sometimes write about sensitive topics. Traditional people in the Indian community do not like this, they want to project Indians as a model minority. But I think that if there is a problem we should work towards solving it".

MARRIAGE, ROMANCE, AND SEXUALITY

Romantic Love in the Indian Immigrant Family and Community

When a newly married Indian immigrant couple leaves India to come to the U.S, it leaves behind all of its family. In India, the first few years of married life are usually very difficult for the Indian bride, for she must learn the ways of her husband's household under the exacting tutelage of her mother-in-law and other female elders in the family. But if her marriage is to a N.R.I. (Non Resident Indian), then she comes away with her

husband to the U.S. Away from the intrusive gaze of other members of the joint family, the newly married Indian immigrant couple enjoys an initial period of uninterrupted marital bliss.

Many of the women I spoke to mentioned that though they feel guilty about leaving behind their aging parents and parents-in-law in India, they enjoy the freedom from daily responsibilities to them, they enjoy spending time with their husband and children rather than visiting relatives every weekend, they enjoy the option to make big and small decisions on their own rather than constantly having to answer to elders in the extended family. Smita says, “My husband and I met each other in a computer software training course. We became friends and, later, when my parents tried to arrange my marriage to some other man, I discussed it with Akhilesh, and we decided to get married. My parents are very fond of Akhilesh. After our marriage, we moved in with his parents. I was working at H.C.L. at that time. My mother-in-law managed the kitchen, I knew no cooking. On weekends we visited Akhilesh’s relatives, or they came over, specially his married sister and her children. After a point, I began to ask myself whether this was the life I wanted. Maybe if I had not lived in a joint family then I would not have accepted the job offer in Singapore. Of course, now I and my husband and children are settled in the U.S. There is such freedom here, we can do whatever we want to on the weekends, we are not tied down to visiting relatives or being visited by them. I feel guilty about not being there for my parents-in-law, they visit every year, and so do we visit them as often as possible, but I still feel guilty.”

Meera says, “One gets used to such freedom here. Small things. In India one always has to keep one’s room or one’s home tidy, for one never knows which relative or

neighbor might drop in at what time. But here no one, not even one's closest friend will drop in without calling you up and making sure that it is convenient to you. And of course, here a husband and wife just have to consult each other before coming to a decision. There one has to take the advice of twenty people, all motivated by love and concern for you, your parents and elders, before coming to any decision. Since I have spent a few years living so freely in the U.S., now-a-days when I visit India, I find the constant interference from family very annoying, I am amazed at how short-tempered I have become."

As with all other nuclear family units, the advent of children allows less time for romantic interaction between the husband and wife. Swati says, "Ramesh and I don't need any birth control, our two children are our birth-control, the two of them keep us so busy, we have no time for each other!" Indian immigrant couples like Swati and Ramesh feel they have an especially hard time bringing up kids in the U.S. This is because they are acutely aware that had they been in India, not only would nannies (called *ayahs* in India) have been eminently affordable, but also, it is very likely that the couple would have received help from their own parents. In the typical Indian joint family, childcare is usually shared between grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, and domestic servants. Even nuclear families in India get regular help with childcare from the children's grandparents if the latter happen to live in the same city. Though many Indian immigrant couples bring in their parents to the U.S. to help out with the care of newborn babies, most grandparents leave after six months, the maximum period allocated by the visitor visa. Thus, though the presence of children creates new bonds between the Indian immigrant husband and wife, preoccupation with children is a deterrent for romantic time spent together.

Replacement of “couple-time” by “family-time” was a common trend among the Indian families I studied in the San Francisco Bay Area. This is especially true because first generation Indian immigrants are rarely comfortable hiring middle-school or high-school teenagers as babysitters for their children. Besides, they usually don’t know their predominantly non-Indian neighbors well enough to seek out baby-sitters from amongst the neighborhood teenagers. Moreover, first generation Indian immigrant parents rarely encourage their U.S. born and raised teenagers to earn money through baby-sitting. Indian parents believe that their children, even teenagers, should devote all of their time to studying, or sports, or music and dance lessons; they should not try to start earning money at such a young age. Thus it is difficult for first generation Indian immigrant parents to procure baby-sitters from amongst the teenage offspring of their Indian friends. First generation immigrant parents may leave their children at a daycare so that the parents can go to work, but they will rarely leave their children with a baby-sitter to enjoy an evening in each other’s company. All social activities in the Indian immigrant community include children. Indian immigrant children are taken by their parents to lunch and dinner parties that span at least four or five hours, they accompany their parents to Indian music concerts and dance performances that extend for many hours, restaurant meals are family events, and Indian-American offspring go to see not just children’s movies but also all sorts of other Indian movies with their parents.

Though the working woman’s achievements in the workplace strengthens her bond with her husband by enabling her to earn her husband’s respect, full-time work naturally reduces the time the woman can spend with her family, and consequently, with her husband. In fact, in most of the Indian immigrant families I interviewed and observed,

the woman leaves for work very early in the morning, often she is in her workplace by 7.00 am. Meanwhile, her husband drops the children to school or day-care and then heads to work himself. The wife often leaves work as early as 4.00 pm; she picks up the children from school or day-care, brings them home, feeds them, and supervises their bath-time. Then the wife cooks dinner, oversees the children's home-work, and packs the lunch-boxes for the next day. The husband often comes home from work as late as 8.00 p.m. or 8.30 p.m. The family has dinner together, and it is time for the children to go to bed. The majority of the Indian immigrant working women I spoke to described slight variations of the above as their typical daily routine. We can see that in a typical weekday, barely an hour is spent by the whole family together, and the couple hardly gets to spend more than an hour or two exclusively in each other's company.

Perceived neglect due to work priorities sometimes leads to the building up of marital resentment. This may result in the wife focusing all the free time available to her on her children; rather than spending quality time with her husband, she plays with her child. Feeling rejected by his wife, the husband may do the unthinkable: he may initiate a search for sexual amusement on his own. Indian immigrant men in the U.S. have access to pornographic movies on cable T.V. and at the local video store. The World Wide Web and electronic chat rooms are other possible sources of pornographic material. The *San Francisco Chronicle* carries daily advertisements for sex oriented shows in local nightclubs.

Written in the first person, the following extract from Chitra Divakaruni's short story *Affair* describes an Indian immigrant's woman's disapproval of her husband Prakash's choice of explicitly sexual cable T.V. channels:

> I'm not much of a T.V. person … I can't seem to relate to the regular American shows, the ones Prakash watches ….. The couple on the screen right now weren't wearing designer clothes, though. In fact, they weren't wearing anything at all, and when I got over the shock I realized that I'd turned on the cable channel which Prakash had ordered last month and which he watched, in spite of the fact that I pointedly left the room whenever he turned it on (or maybe because of it), almost every night. My face hot, I switched off the T.V. Really, the things they'll show on the air nowadays, I said to myself indignantly as I got up to leave. (Divakaruni 1995: 242)

It appears that a few Indian sexually starved immigrant Indian men even resort to feudal sexual relations on their visits to their home-towns in India; one such man, Lakireddi Bali Reddy, a real estate millionaire based in Berkeley, attempted to import his under-age lovers into the U.S. on fraudulent visas. But he could not escape the law. In March 2001, Reddy, 63, admitted before a U.S. District Judge to one count of conspiracy to commit immigration fraud, two counts of transporting a minor for illegal sex, and one count of submitting a false tax return in 1998 and lying about having a foreign bank account in India. He was sentenced to eight years in prison and ordered to pay two million dollars in restitution to the three victims, and also to the parents of a fourth victim who died of carbon monoxide poisoning in a Reddy owned apartment in Berkeley (*San Francisco Chronicle*, November 4, 2001: A1 and *India Currents*, August 2001: 22).[57]

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[57] Lakireddi Bali Reddy owns 1,100 apartments units, and his Berkeley property holdings are estimated to be worth about fifty million dollars. He also owns three restaurants in the Bay Area. Before he was arrested, Reddy was regarded as an icon of success in the Indian American community. He was widely admired not only for his vast wealth and business success, but also for his philanthropic undertakings in the U.S. and in Velvadam, his native village in Andhra Pradesh, India. He contributed freely to charities in the U.S., and he founded schools and hospitals back in his village in India. Though regarded as a 'savior' or 'godfather' by his employees and the townspeople of Velvadam, in reality, Reddy was not all that he pretended to be. He used his position to sexually exploit poor, destitute young women in his village.Born into low-caste economically-deprived families

In the short story *Affair*, Divakaruni has dealt with another issue that directly impinges on the Indian immigrant marriage: in *Affair*, Abha, the narrator, displays the typical Indian immigrant woman's confusion about whether a happily married Indian woman should spend her time and money on looking good, or on other less frivolous pursuits. Here, Abha, the narrator, converses with her girlfriend Meena, who takes great pains with her appearance:

> "Really, Abha!" Meena had shaken her head like there was no hope for me. "*All* women need to look good. Don't you want Prakash's heartbeat to speed up when he looks at you?"
> The thought of it made me laugh out loud. Really, sometimes Meena's ideas were so adolescent. I remembered my mother, who'd spent most of her life in the simple red-bordered cotton saris most Bengali mothers wore, dabbing at her plump face with its *palloo* as she hurried from kitchen to nursery to dining room. I doubted that she'd *ever* made my father's heartbeat speed up (though of course he loved her) – at least not in the last thirty years that I'd known them. "You're starting to sound like an American, Meena. Indian marriages aren't based on such superficial things." (Divakaruni, 1995, 235-36)

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that lived on the brink of starvation, many young girls in Velvadam considered themselves exceedingly fortunate to be employed in the Reddy estate in the village. They were initially employed for cleaning, gardening, and other menial jobs. Once they established their home in the Reddy household, the girls were forced to engage in sexual intercourse with Reddy during his visits to Velvadam. In the late nineties, Reddy arranged for a few of these girls to be brought to the U.S. They posed as daughters or wives of other Indian nationals whom the Reddy family sponsored as employees of their businesses in the Bay Area. Once the girls arrived in the U.S., Reddy put them up in some of the apartments owned by him, and sexual relations were resumed. He also put them to work as laborers in his construction business and cooks and cleaners in his restaurants in the Bay Area. The Reddy case came to the notice of the local authorities when one of the victims, Chanti Prattipati, 17, died of carbon monoxide poisoning in a Berkeley apartment owned by Reddy. Chanti's fifteen-year-old sister and a third room-mate survived the fumes. When they were questioned by the police, the girls admitted that they had been smuggled into the United States by Reddy, and that he had sexual relations with all the three girls. Soon after, Reddy was arrested, tried, and convicted in court (*San Francisco Chronicle*, April 11, 2001: A1 and *India Currents*, August 2001: 22).

As is evident from the passage quoted above, the traditional Indian norm, as well as ideal, is that a married woman, and especially a mother, devotes all her time to household and childcare duties; she should not waste time on “dressing up”. In conservative Indian circles, the prevailing consciousness dictates that all men and women must cease to “dress up” when they enter middle age or when their children enter their adolescence. This signifies the end of the Indian middle-aged mother’s sexual identity. In this stage of their life-cycle, the women aim to derive power not from their beauty, but from their senior status, and their supervisory authority over their children and other junior family members. Though middle-class Indian men wear Western clothes far more often than Indian clothes, when they dress in Indian attire, traditionally, older men wear white and light pastel colors. Older Indian women hardly ever diet or exercise for the sake of beauty or physical fitness, consequently it is difficult for them to maintain their figures; they are required to wear light colors; white saris with colored borders are favored by the matriarch even while her unmarried daughters and newly-married daughters-in-law wear a riot of brightly colored attractive fabrics with gold-or-silver-thread embroidery. The American emphasis on youth and on looking good stresses an ideal that is contrary to the Indian emphasis on middle-aged synonymity with drab clothes: the American sartorial ideal holds that everyone, irrespective of their age, should make the effort to look good. Self care is emphasized, and beauty is showcased, because sexuality continues to be a source of marital and personal power even after the reproductive stage is over. Indian American immigrant women, and men too, are caught between these two contrary ideals.

I have observed that most Indian immigrants to the U.S. do make concessions to the American emphasis on always looking at least presentable, if not attractive. Most middle-class Indian immigrants try to take care of their bodies, many exercise and work out regularly; they dye their hair when it turns white, and they buy what they hope are current American fashions in departmental store sales. When they visit India, Non-Resident Indians buy suitcase-fulls of "youngish", that is, colorful, richly patterned, and "revealing", *salwar kameejes*, s*aris*, and *sari*-blouses. The "Americanization" of the immigrant's viewpoint is evident from Kalyani's comment; she is an immigrant Indian long settled in the Bay Area; she said: "In India, once the offspring reach marriageable age, their mothers begin to dress in drab clothes. Women over thirty-five stop wearing bright colors. They stick to boring light pastel colors. They don't "dress up" anymore. I wonder why they purposely make themselves look ugly!" However, speaking from the opposite viewpoint, while on a visit to the Bay Area, a visitor from India wryly observed: "America is the place of *chirobosonto* (everlasting spring). Even older women in the Indian immigrant community in the U.S. dress so gaudily, they wear such brightly colored saris!"

But in spite of their efforts to look young and fashionable, deep-seated insecurities exist among many Indian immigrant women who are concerned about their attractiveness, particularly in the American milieu. Gautam, another male Indian immigrant in the Bay Area announces "All Indian women have such awful figures!" Not just appearance, behavior is also a source of confusion and insecurity: I believe that a lot of first generation Indian immigrant women are confused about how they should behave, should they be "good Indian women" or "liberated and progressive Americans"? I think

that Indian men in America are not too sure about what they find attractive in a woman, "Indian modesty" or "Westernized glamour". Amitrajit says, "Indian women are so coy, they act stand-offish for no apparent reason. American women are so much more frank, friendly, and upfront!" At dinner parties in their home, Arjun regularly plies his female Indian guests with wine, Bloody Maries, and whisky , but his own wife Kalyani rarely drinks any type of alcohol. Anju says, "At the workplace, my white friends go out socializing, they often stay at bars till late at night; I go with them, but I feel guilty, I am sure some of my Indian friends would disapprove if they found out." Pramiti says, "My husband (a second generation Indian American) does not allow me to wear anything but a *sari*, even when I go to work at the university lab, I have to wear a *sari*." Meera, a recent immigrant, says, "I always a wear a *sari* at my husband's Christmas party, I don't think it is *decent* to wear anything but a *sari* at such formal events, not even a *salwar kameej*."

The high divorce rate in America (almost fifty percent of all American marriages end in divorce) makes divorce an ever present threat. Meera recognizes that her own attitude to divorce is different from that of American women when she says, "I don't like American culture. They are a bit too independent. The women. They really don't care about anything. They don't give. I don't know how much they give. But they don't feel like Indian women do about their husbands, the way they take it even if they break up, they take it too easily. I suppose it is nothing great, but I don't feel I will ever do things like that." Ankita says, "So many of my Indian friends are divorced! The divorce rate in the Indian community has gone up in the last ten years. Why? Because the extended family is not here, family elders are not here to advise the married couple. After all, even if they live in a nuclear family, married couples in India are constantly in touch with their

parents, who prevent them from making major mistakes in their relationships. Here there is no family, friends advise to a certain extent, but not beyond that, they want to "give space". Under pressure from their family elders, in India, couples may try to hold on to a marriage in spite of marital discord, but here there is no such pressure. And here they are more likely to have problems than in India, because there is such pressure to constantly perform one's level best at the work place here. If both husband and wife are working, then both are under constant stress due to workplace tensions. Plus, both have to put in extremely long hours at work. If the husband and wife hardly spend any time with each other, and if what little time that is spent together is spent in arguing, then why continue with the marriage?"

DOMESTIC CRISIS

When Things Go Wrong at Home

Towards the end of the eighties, Chitra Divakaruni and Ketaki Basu founded Maitri to help abused and battered women in the South Asian community in the San Francisco Bay Area. Divakaruni explains that she came across many South Asian immigrant women who suffered doubly because not only were they abused in their immigrant home, but they also had no one to turn to since they were unfamiliar with the American system. Also, they thought they would "shame" their family or "betray" the Indian community if they confided in "outsiders", that is non-Indians. Many even lacked a driving license and a bank account of their own. Many women in such situations lost all hope of help, and were driven to attempt suicide. Divakaruni explains that she was prompted to set up a

support structure for Indian immigrant abused women when one of her long time friends tried to kill herself due to domestic abuse.

Divakaruni says that it is not only Indian working class women who come to Maitri for help from abusive relationships, numerous professional and semi-professional Indian women are also abused by their husbands and turn to Maitri for support. She said to me, “By a process of self selection, those Indian professional women who are in the U.S. are very committed to their careers. How else would they have made to the U.S? Yes, these women have very successful careers here. But domestic abuse is prevalent even among successful career women. A woman may be very successful in her work, but she might be abused at home. I have come across cases in which doctors, doctors’ wives, women who had very successful careers in India but now cannot work because they are on H4 visas, are abused at home”. They fear that their immigration status in the U.S. will lapse if they separate from their husband, the primary immigrant in most cases, so they hesitate to ask for help. Also, the stigma attached to a divorced woman in the Indian immigrant community often prevents even economically self-reliant women from walking out of a destructive marriage.

Sonia Pelia, current President of Maitri says that awareness about wife-beating has increased within the Indian immigrant community in recent years, “I have seen domestic violence become an issue that is no longer denied and kept behind closed doors, but an issue that must be frequently brought to the forefront.” Financial contributions to Matri have increased in recent years, and its annual budget has increased from $1,500 a decade ago, to its current figure of $200,000. It operates a twenty-four-hour volunteer-

staffed help line and answers at least 120 calls per month. Nalini Shekhar, a spokeswoman for Maitri says, “Maitri has helped hundreds of women fight abuse, regain dignity and self-esteem, and find jobs.”

But it appears that there are limits to the progressiveness of Bay Area Indian immigrants: despite Maitri’s expansion and rising acceptance in the Indian community over the last decade, there are some issues that Maitri has had to tackle against the will of Indians in the Bay Area. For example, Maitri has helped to raise awareness against Laki Balireddy, the rich Berkeley landlord who is serving time for sexually molesting minor girls he brought to the U.S. from his village in India. Maitri has succeeded in obtaining refugee status for eight of the girls brought by Reddy. The organization has given them counseling and gotten them entrance into suitable educational courses in the U.S. Shekhar elucidates, “Initially a number of people in our community were upset with us for taking a stand against Reddy saying that we shouldn’t expose our problems to the world. Our response was that if something is wrong in our community, we should be the first ones to speak about it and seek to set it right instead of letting outsiders do something about it” (*India Today*, November 5, 2001: 40).

In most Indian homes, the extended family does its best to make the new bride feel welcome. One of the primary goal of seniors in the family is to maintain familial harmony and peace in the joint household. Thus, the Indian extended family usually serves to minimize outbreaks of marital violence and domestic abuse. Indian women who migrate to the U.S. to set up nuclear households here are deprived of this facility. Shamita Das Dasgupta has explained that traditionally, the South Asian woman has always been defined in terms of her relationship with the men in her family, she has never been an

individual in her own right, only a daughter, sister, wife, or mother; and these relationships have confined her personal growth, but they have also provided her with refuge, “Away from traditional structures of the extended family, which afford some protection, South Asian women in the United States are being victimized in unique ways” (Dasgupta 1998:8).

My observation is that the overwhelming majority of first generation immigrant families in the Bay Area live in intact nuclear families. However, in some first generation immigrant families, changes in family composition have taken place with the passage of time. College-going children, or children who have graduated from college and entered the workforce, that is second generation Indians, have moved out of the parental home to reside in college dorms or set up their own separate homes. In addition, having become U.S. citizens, some first generation immigrants have obtained green cards for their parents who have either moved in with them, or who spend three to six months every year with the immigrant family settled in the U.S. In spite of these exceptions, most Indian immigrant families are intact nuclear families. The women in these nuclear family units are cognizant of the fact that when things go wrong in a marriage, it is the extended family that provides the first line of defense against domestic abuse. This benefit is not available to those couples who immigrate to the U.S., since they leave their family behind in India. Meera says, “Here when things go wrong between husband and wife, no one gets to know, there is no one to advise them and guide them so that they try to patch up. There is no family here, and neighbors do not care.” Newly-arrived recently-married brides who live alone with their husbands are particularly vulnerable, for they are not

familiar with social services offered by various U.S. government agencies to save women from a cycle of violence in their homes.

On June 4th, 2001, Sai Maddi of Lake Haiwathe, New Jersey, was charged with aggravated assault of his wife. Prosecutors alleged that he had been biting and hitting his newly-married bride to punish her for "being bad". When Maddi's twenty-three-year-old wife was admitted to hospital in a seriously injured condition, doctors found as many as thirty bite marks all over her body, including some on her face. Ten of her vertebra were found to be fractured due to having been kicked or hit by a baseball bat several times by Maddi on the morning of June 4th. After Maddi left for work on June 4th, his battered wife called up 911 to ask for medical assistance. When the police arrived, they found that she could barely walk, and she had injuries all over her body. In the evening of June 4th, Maddi returned from work and heard that the police had been to his home. He went to the local police station at once, and referring to his wife, he said, "You have my property, and give it back to me." He was arrested for aggravated assault of his wife. Maddi's arranged marriage with the woman had taken place in February of 2001.Reportedly, she had been denied food for a week, and Maddi had beaten her up on June 4th after she had attempted to help herself to some food while her husband was asleep. On two earlier occasions, Maddi had allegedly heated up a spoon and burned her with it (*India Abroad*, June 15, 2001: 39).

My question is: why are there so many arguments, so many disagreements, so many incidents of domestic violence committed against women in the Indian immigrant home? I believe that away from the restrictive paradigms of the sexist Indian work culture and the gender-prejudiced Indian extended family, immigrant women attempt to

renegotiate new gender relations in the U.S. In fact, they are assisted by their male counterparts to some extent, but they are not allowed to go beyond a certain limit of change. Diasporic Indian women are encouraged by their men to go out of the home and bring in a salary, but not at the cost of any diminution of the reproduction of Indianness at home. Indians believe that Indian culture must be protected and cherished at home for it is their refuge from the mistreatment suffered in the racially chauvinistic outside world in the new country. But so-called "traditional" Indian culture propagated in immigrant homes sanctifies male-chauvinistic behaviors and the oppression of women. In fact, senior transnational women deploy "traditional" Indian culture to tame young America-raised women into submission to parental ideals of Indian female behavior. But, at the same time, senior women who discipline the young in the Indian diasporic home also wage a continuous battle to renegotiate more equitable gender relations for themselves.

In general, Indian immigrant women in the U.S. enjoy greater equality and freedom, especially if they work, than they would have had they remained in India, but this is not true in all cases. Due to a variety of reasons, in certain *desi* couples, female attempts to reconstruct gender articulations at home only result in a greater policing of gender boundaries by male immigrants in their family. This often leads to more arguments, and even to domestic violence. Despite the presence of a few progressive elements in the *desi* community, the community is mostly conservative, and it is scared to draw attention to the uglier elements of it idealization of the "family-oriented" *Bharatiya purush* [Indian man]. Hence, it often does nothing to help female victims of domestic abuse. Sometimes the U.S. media and courts also accept the so-called cultural defense argument for domestic abuse in the Indian immigrant home. Prashad has shown that "U.S.

orientalism" and "U.S. desi conservatism" often serve to justify domestic violence: "when one accepts that men are culturally authorized to dominate women, it is not far before even violence is sanctioned" (Prashad 2000:125).

Inter-gender relations are not the only problem in the new country. Another issue that affects both immigrant men and women is that there is no economic or social network to assist in time of critical disease, death, or bereavement. Mr. and Mrs. Khan immigrated to the U.S.A. to make a new life. But Mr. Khan suffered a brain stroke and became paralyzed within a year of immigration. Now the couple's two college-going daughters pay the family's bills by working full time and studying part time. Mrs. Khan runs a catering business. She says,

> "I must earn to pay our bills. Please buy my food. *Dollars mein kamana chate thei* (we wanted to earn dollars) so we came to this country. But we have suffered too much here. One has to work so hard to earn here. In this country, while one earns, everything is fine. But if something goes wrong, this is the worst place to be in. My husband suffered a brain stroke, and now he is paralyzed and can work no more. We used to own an Indian food business, but now that my husband is ill, all that is over. Now life is hell. We would have been better off if we had stayed on in India. *Vanha aadha roti khao, voh bhi theek hain* (even if we eat only half a bread there, it is OK). At least we had family and friends to look after us, to spend time with us when we were there. Here we spend the whole day confined to the apartment with no one to speak to. My small earning and the earnings of our three school-and-college-going daughters allow us to pay our bills."

COMPARISON OF THE HOME LIFE OF WORKING AND NON-WORKING INDIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN

(a) Degree of Empowerment

In my research in the Indian immigrant community in the San Francisco Bay Area, I found that as far as decision-making power at home is concerned, working women are at an advantage compared to non-working women. Indian immigrant working women are more empowered than stay-at-home housewives in the community. Women who work part-time are also more empowered than non-working women, but they have lesser leverage to get their way at home than women who work full-time. However, those women who have worked full-time for a long time and have temporarily given up full time careers to work part-time are an exception to this rule.

Non-working women in the Indian immigrant community seem to have lives rather similar to those of white American home-makers of a few decades ago, as described by Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan discussed the unsatisfactory stay-at-home lives of white middle-class American women of the early sixties. At that time, most middle-class white women were not employed. Friedan called for “a new life plan” for such women. She advocated that women escape from the “housewife trap” and attempt to construct a new, more purposeful self. Friedan insisted that the transition to a new self would not be difficult for (white) American women, ”Once she begins to see through the delusions of the feminine mystique --- and realizes that neither her husband nor her children, nor the things in her house, nor sex, nor being like all other women, can give her a self --- she often finds the solution much easier

than she had anticipated" (Friedan 1964:339). Friedan insisted that women have not only the right to love, children, and home, rights that "have defined femininity in the past," but also the right to "work towards a greater purpose that shapes the future" (Friedan 1964:338). She wrote that this would be possible only if women made a lifetime commitment to education. Those women who halted their education due to the demands of marriage and maternity must resume it as soon as possible. They must use this education in careers. Women must not shy away from competition with men in their careers. They must demand "maternity leave, or even maternity sabbatical, professionally run nurseries, and other changes in rules that may be necessary [so that] they will not have to sacrifice the right to honorable competition and contribution anymore than they will have to sacrifice marriage and motherhood" (Friedan 1964:375). In the last four decades American women have won themselves many, if not most, of the changes sought by Friedan. But as Hochschild has shown, this transformation in the role of women has created a double workload for working women.

(i) Housework and Childcare

Working women do a first shift at home, and then, when they come home, they perform what Arlie Hochschild calls the second shift. Hochschild points out that most families in contemporary America are double job families, and that most women in two-job families complete their day-job, "the first shift", only to return home to the "second shift", that is, housework and childcare. Currently, 58% of American women work (2000 Census). Despite the post-sixties myth of male-female equality at home, Hochschild found that only 20% of men in the two-job families she studied shared housework and childcare equally with their wives (Hochschild 1989:8). Due to various reasons such as

the ideological and legal gains of the women's liberation movement, the inflation related current inadequacy of a single wage per family, the recent decline of male blue-collar jobs, and the present proliferation of female service-sector jobs, more American women have now joined the labor-force that ever before. But there is a substantial wage gap between men and women. 46% of working women in America earned less than $10,000 a year at the time Hochschild did her study (Hochschild 1989:25), and the average American wife earned only one-third of her husband's earnings (Hochschild 1989:219).

Also, divorce is an ever-present possibility for married American women. The divorce rate is very high in America. Half of those who marry today are likely to divorce their spouse. In terms of personal finance, divorce hurts women more than men. It often pushes women into poverty. Quoting Lenora Weitzman, Hochschild states that "in the first year after divorce women experience a 73% loss in the standard of living, whereas men experience a 42% gain" (Hochschild 1989:249). Few men pay child-support. Only 20% of the fathers asked by the court to pay child support do so regularly. 15% pay irregularly. The rest do not pay any child support at all (Hochschild 1989: 249). Due to all these factors, despite their new commitments as full-time participants in the labor force, American women hesitate to press their husbands when the latter resist a renegotiation of the traditional (inequitable) understanding that the woman will perform almost all of the housework and childcare.

Hochschild found three types of ideologies of marital roles: traditional, transitional, and egalitarian. The traditional woman "wants to identify with her activities at home (as a wife, a mother, a neighborhood mom), wants her husband to base his at work and wants less power than he" (Hochschild 1989:15). The traditional man's views

are no different. The egalitarian woman wants to “identify with the same spheres her husband does, and to have an equal amount of power in the marriage” (Hochschild 1989:15). The egalitarian man wants the same. The transitional type of woman “wants to identify with her role at work as well as at home. Unlike the egalitarian, she believes her husband should base his identity more on work than he does. A typical transitional wants to identify both with the caring for home, and with helping her husband earn money, but wants her husband to focus on earning a living. A typical transitional man is all for his wife working, but expects her to take the main responsibility at home too” (Hochschild 1989:15-16). Hochschild found that most of the people she interviewed turned out to be transitional types. Most of the Asian Indian immigrant working women I interviewed are either “traditional” or “transitional”.

While Hochschild concentrates on marital happiness of “traditional”, “egalitarian”, and “transitional” types, I have examined the empowerment of the women I interviewed. I believe that the pattern of sharing work at home is a clear indicator of the woman's status at home. I found that women who work full time get a significant amount of help with household chores and childcare from their husbands. When the woman is the principle earner then the husband takes on equal household and childcare responsibilities as the wife. I found that working Indian immigrant women employ a significant amount of domestic help; Hispanic cleaning ladies and South Asian nannies and cooks were commonly employed by my employed subjects. The easy availability of South Asian services in the San Francisco Bay Area contributed to the trend of “outsourcing” childcare, housework, cooking, and Indian cultural training.

Megha is a tenure track associate professor in a San Francisco Bay Area university. Her husband Prakash is a consultant in a university business school. Megha says,

> The wonderful thing about Prakash having left home when he was young is that he was used to looking after himself and the house….At this point we fight about the cleanliness of the house certainly, but Prakash does sixty percent of the cooking, I do forty percent of the cooking, I do more of the cleaning. But mainly I do all the thinking about the cleaning. You know, it's time to do this, it's time to do that, it's time to change the sheets, it's time to do the bathroom, and either I do it myself or I fight with him till he gets up. My thing is if I say to "Do something," and you don't do it, then I just can't stand it. Then I do it myself. I haven't learnt if Prakash says "*Hanh, hanh* [yes, yes], I'll do the dishes," I haven't learnt that if I leave it for two hours, he'll do it two hours later. I feel like it has to be done now, he's not doing it now, I have to do it. But this is something I'm working on. We take equal responsibility for paying the bills…. And I'd say it is an unusual household in that Prakash does more than almost any other husband I know, because he did live alone, and he is someone with enough self-confidence and lack of ego hassle that, for example he doesn't have to entertain his colleagues, I have to entertain my colleagues, and he will do eighty percent of the cooking when we are entertaining other people, so in that sense I am very fortunate.

Smita has a similar equitable division of labor at home. She is the main earner in her household. She came to the U.S. on a B1 visa and then managed to obtain an H-1B visa. Her husband Akhilesh, and their first child Rohan, followed her to the U.S. as her dependents. Smita worked for many years as a highly paid independent contractor. She used to earn as much as $150/hour as an independent consultant because her expertise is in the much-in-demand field of Oracle software and electronic data interchange. Now she has a second child, and hence, she has chosen to tone down her work responsibilities by closing down her consultancy and working as a software engineer in a local high tech firm. She is currently a project manager in a start up company that recently got bought up

by a large multinational company. Her husband runs his own software engineer staffing agency. But his business is slow. Akhilesh spends a lot of time running the household and taking care of the children. At get-togethers at their house, I observed that Akhilesh does all of the cooking. He actively minds the children while Smita spends most of her time chatting with the guests. Smita has to spend at least one week out of town looking after client needs; she admits that Akhilesh has a tough time when she is away. She says, “I don’t know how single parents manage. For us, even one week per month is hard on Akhilesh. He has to take care of Rohan’s weekly soccer practice, Akshay’s speech classes twice a week, plus the usual chores like packing lunchboxes etc.”

When the husband himself is very busy with his career then professional Indian immigrant women do not hesitate to avail of hired help. Daycare for children is a must. Dr. Urmila Bannerjee, a physician, explains that she placed her son Pranab in daycare as soon as she had weaned him from the breast. She was a resident physician at San Francisco’s St. Mary Hospital at that time. “I placed him in daycare when he was almost three months old, it was a home daycare. A nice family. I mean I couldn’t have done it without them. I mean my husband has always been busy and stuff like that. It was a Polish family here in Palo Alto.” When her second child Sucheta was born, Dr. Bannerjee employed a nanny to take care of the baby. Christina the nanny still works full time for Dr. Bannerjee. Sucheta is now in elementary school, and Pranab is in middle school. Christina looks after the children after school, she also does the laundry, housecleaning, and helps with the cooking. Dr. Bannerjee explains, “I have taught Christina to cook a few Indian dishes, so she is helping out quite a bit with the cooking.”

I see the issue of husbands sharing housework and childcare primarily as an issue of *empowerment* or lack thereof of the women. This is certainly implied in Arlie Hochschild's popular work, *The Second Shift*. But her main focus is on how sharing work at home is vitally linked to marital harmony. Hochschild writes,

> The majority of men did not share the load at home. Some refused outright. Others refused more passively, often offering a loving shoulder to lean on, an understanding ear as their working wife faced the conflict they both saw as hers. But I came to realize that those husbands who helped very little at home were often indirectly just as deeply affected as their wives by the resentment their wives feel towards them, and through their need to steel themselves against that resentment (Hochschild 1989:7).

Even Holt, a warehouse furniture salesman described in Chapter Four, did very little housework, but he did play with his four-year-old son, Joey, in his free time. Juggling the demands of work with family at first seemed a problem for his wife. But Evan himself suffered enormously from the side effects of "her" problem. Hochschild writes, "His wife did the second shift, but she resented it keenly, and half-consciously expressed her frustration and rage by losing interest in sex and becoming overly absorbed with Joey. One way or another, most men I talked with do suffer severe repercussions of what I think is a transitional phase in American family life" (Hochschild 1989:7).

In keeping with Hochschild's findings, I too saw that Megha, Smita, and Dr. Bannerjee, the full-time principal-earner women I have written about above, are happy in their marriages, for their husbands actively share work at home. Also in keeping with Hochschild's theories, I found that many Indian immigrant stay-at-home wives, part-time working women, and full-time working women who are not principal earners are

discontented in their marriages because their husbands refuse to help with chores at home. Karabi, a pregnant housewife says,

> Sometimes I really don't feel like cooking, pregnancy has drained me of all my energy, and I also get awful back-pains. But my husband refuses to cook a single dish. So I spend about two hours every morning cooking. Now-a-days I don't feel like eating rice anymore, I feel like eating *chapatis* (Indian flat bread). So every evening I stand in the kitchen with my protruding stomach often colliding with the kitchen counter-top, rolling out *rotis* and baking them on the open hot stove. And my husband eats those *rotis*. Once he is done, then I make a few for myself. I really resent his refusal to help out in the kitchen even during my pregnancy.

Similarly, Lakshmi, a full-time senior research scientist in a private pharmaceutical company says,

> I am an Indian woman, my family will come first. Everyone assumes that among Indians the woman will be in charge or running the home and taking care of the family. My son says, he is only eight tears old, "I am glad I'm not a woman." I asked him why he felt like that. He said, "Because women have to work out side the home and at home too." I said to my son, "No, men also have to work outside and at home too. You are going to live in this country, you had better understand that men too need to do home things." My son said, "No, Daddy told me it was so." But I know that Ramesh could not have said any such thing. My son must have said what he did based on what he is seeing in the house. He must have come to the conclusion that Indian men don't have to work at home.

In the same way, Charulata, a full-time product manager at Delphi Technology, is unhappy with the unequal division of household chores in her home, but she blames herself for allowing her husband to get away with doing minimal household work,

> Training is a big thing. As women, we ourselves tend to give in to our men without a struggle. We say, "He has come home after working hard all day, so let me make the tea." We let go. Indian men who have been here a long time on their own, men who did everything on their own, they might be more helpful at home. But basically, the fault is usually the woman's. As women, we go on taking more and more demands without protesting. More and more responsibilities are thrust on us, and we do not object, "Please mail the letters, please fix the car, take it to the garage, do the bills, do the taxes," the responsibilities just keep increasing.

On the whole, though most of the women I spoke to were well aware that they did far more work at home than their husbands, they were resigned to it. This includes full-time working women. Most of the Indian immigrant women I spoke to did not allow their resentment and frustration with their husbands for refusing to help significantly with housework or childcare affect their marital satisfaction. In fact, they were grateful for the occasional help their husbands offered, especially with childcare. Jaya, a full-time medical insurance claims manager, says, "I just do all the chores. Standard stuff for Indian wives. He takes care of Gita on weekends, she is a high-maintenance kid! Household chores are not a big deal!" Shalini, Director of Product Development and Financial Applications at Delphi Technology, says,

> I still think the division of childcare and household work in our household is unequal. I do more. But my husband is the founding member of a new company he started this year. So I can't expect him to have time to do childcare or household chores. But it is not an issue. In an emergency he comes to my rescue, he is a bedrock of support. But of course I can't expect to come home to find a hot meal cooked by my husband!

It is interesting that both Lakshmi and Jaya mention that they are performing the "standard" or "expected" role of an "Indian" woman. It appears that they are aware that though they have built lives in a new country, they cannot escape the gender biases of their third-world, specifically Indian, origins. Haleh Afshar writes that in general, due to their greater social power than women, third-world men have been able to control female sexuality, enjoy the fruits of female labor both outside and inside the home, as well as women's capacity for nurturance, that is, of family, marriage, and the household. Afshar

points out that “the ideology of marital domesticity confines women to the role of dependent and inferior bearers of labor” (Afshar 1985: xiv). This view seems to be borne out by the attitudes of Lakshmi and Jaya, resigned as they are to their single-handed household work juggled along with full-time jobs.

Some women try to organize a formal system to make sure that there is an equitable division of labor at home. Shreya is a junior research scientist in a private firm. She and her husband share their home with her younger brother, a student in a local university. The three of them share the housework, marking the calendar to specify duties and days. She is happy with this arrangement, “But of course I do more of the cooking than the men in the family because neither of them are very good cooks!”

(ii) Access to Household Resources

Hillary Standing has written a chapter on how wage earnings affect the position of women in the Indian family. Standing is of the opinion that access to family resources is one of the prime indicators of status within the family. Wage earners have better negotiating power than non wage-earners as far as access to family resources are concerned. The resources that Standing refers to include education, health, common family property, real estate, cash, and savings. Standing suggests that we can estimate the impact of wage earning on women’s situation within the family by examining “women’s relations and access to family resources, defining resources as in a broad way to encompass education, health, different forms of property such as those accruing through inheritance or marriage settlement, cash incomes, savings and so on.” Standing writes that we should “try to determine whether any change occurs either in the amount or the terms of access when a woman enters wage employment” (Standing 1985: 233).

In the context of the Indian immigrant women I studied, a crucial family resource was access to the family car. Unlike their stay-at-home Indian immigrant female counterparts, most of the Indian immigrant working women I spoke to drove their own car. But there were exceptions. Ratika and Ashesh have a seven-year-old son. Though Ratika took two years off from work when her son was born, she has been working full time the last five years. She and her husband bought a single family home a few years ago, but they have not bought a second car. Ratika is eager to buy a second car for her own use, and to regain her driving skills, but her husband is in no hurry, "My husband drops me to work and picks me up, we do all the shopping together. He drives, I don't. I used to drive a little bit before my child was born. But now it's been so long since I've driven the car, that I have almost forgotten how to drive."

Education was another commonly mentioned resource that the women I spoke to longed for, and though many did not manage to convince their husbands to sponsor the education they wanted for themselves, a few others did succeed in this attempt. Vijaylakshmi, a house-wife, says:

> I have already taken a few computer classes. Now I want to take a few classes in JAVA (a computer language) so that I can enter the job-market as soon as possible. But I need Vikram to baby-sit Atula while I am at class, the classes are in the evening, one weekday evening per week. Since I don't have a technical background, I also need Vikram's help to explain certain technical concepts to me. I did some classes last year in computer languages. Since then, for one whole year Vikram has been stalling, refusing to allow me to enroll for classes. He says he is so overburdened with his work that he has no time to baby-sit Atula or help me with my assignments.

Lakshmi could not do a graduate program because she got married at the time she was to commence classes, but she is now doing an M.B.A. Chitrangada could not do an M.B.A. as her husband refused to pay for it. On the other hand, Meera, Shreya, Charulata, and Priya got educated with their husband's financial backing.

Cash and savings are also one of the family resources mentioned by Standing. I found, as I had expected to find, that gainful employment gives women the ability to spend money as they please. Pramiti says, "One of the principal reasons I work is so that if I want to buy something for my parents then I can do so without fearing that someone will question my right to do so. If my parents need money I will be able to send it from my salary. I feel good about that." Kalyani says, "Now that I earn, I can spend money on small items for myself and friends and family without constantly feeling guilty or anxious about what Arjun will say about my expenditures."

(iii) Paid Employment: Hard Won Ticket to Freedom

Those Indian immigrant women who have low-paying jobs have to struggle to obtain their husband's support for their decision to work outside the home in paid employment. Pramiti explains,

> We pay $4000 per month mortgage for our house. Most of my husband Harishchandra's earnings go in that. My thinking is that he can pay for the mortgage and I can pay for Tripti's preschool and day-care. Tripti would have to go to pre-school whether or not I work. So it will be good if my salary can cover that cost. Of course, if I work we will have to keep a baby-sitter for Aradhana but I think it is worth it in the long run….The baby-sitter for the new baby costs $1,200 per month, my elder child's preschool and day-care costs $800 per month. That only leaves $500 surplus income per month. Harishchandra says I might as well stay home. We have been through a lot of stress, the household has ceased to function smoothly since I went back to work after the new baby turned three

> months old. Harishchandra says the stress is not worth the paltry $500 my salary adds to the family income every month.

Once an Indian immigrant women enters the workforce, she finds that her job gives her some freedom to control her own life. Chitrangada's husband is a second-generation Indian immigrant, he grew up in New Jersey. Chitrangada says, "I keep avoiding visiting my parents-in-law in New Jersey on the pretext of not having enough leave from my job. In fact that is the main reason I am working!" Pramiti, who is in a similar situation, agrees, "My in-laws live in Boston. I too keep avoiding visiting them on the pretext of not having enough leave!" For some, freedom means finding an excuse to defy their marital family's directives, for others, freedom means obtaining an excuse to get out of the house. Paulomi says, "I am lucky my parents-in-law live in India. So I have no issues on that front. I work mainly for some freedom, just to get out of the house – I feel good when I get out of the house and get involved in a work related project – it liberates me from the four walls of my home."

Working women get a chance to make other friends than their husband's friends. Kalyani says, "I told Arjun I'm tired of trying to be your friends' wives' friend, they are too scheming and gossipy. Why should I not make friends with the white girls I work with? They are white girls. I live in this country, then why should I discriminate against the people of this country? If they are ready to accept me, then why can't I accept them? They are uncomplicated people, they like to enjoy life and have fun." Kalyani has often invited her co-workers to her home for dinner; from her accounts it seems that her husband actually likes to interact with them. They are white women of various ages, they always come on their own, without spouses, significant others, or children. Arjun and

Kalyani ply them with Indian food and beer, wine, or tequilas. They usually don't leave before midnight. One evening, Kalyani hired an Indian woman to come to her home and do *mehendi* artwork on the palms and feet of the colleagues she had invited to dinner. Another afternoon she held a yoga and meditation session for her colleagues, followed by lunch.

(iv) Full-Time and Part-Time Work, Transition from Working to Non-Working and Back Again

I also found that a transition from full-time work to part-time work increases the woman's responsibilities at home. Neelima, formerly a full-time post-doctoral research scientist at a U.C., is now a part-time instructor at a local State University. She says, "The division of housework has changed since I left my full-time job. Now that I am at home it is mostly I who cook. Housework, nobody does much, but I do more than Amitrajit. Childcare I do more. Amitrajit has some duties on weekends and nights. But I've never felt I cannot get a break from childcare, Amitrajit takes over whenever I request him to."

Rani had given up her post-doctoral position at a university in Northern California to spend three years at home with her two children, a daughter and a son, both of whom were very young. She retained the car she bought when she began her post-doctoral fellowship. She drove all around the Bay Area in her car, taking her two children to visit the home of friends, parks, amusement arcades etc. Rani retained her mobility throughout her stint at home. She took over all the household chores that formerly her husband used to share with her when the both of them were working. When Rani's elder child was almost three years old, and the younger one was almost two years old, she felt she was ready to start working full time again, but she is found it difficult to re-enter the

workforce in a position of her choice. Finally she obtained a post-doctoral research position in a U.C.

(b) Do Working Indian Immigrant Women raise their Children in the same way as Non-Working Indian Immigrant Women?

(i) Motivations of Indian Immigrant Non-Working Women

Indian immigrant non-working mothers claim that they opt to stay at home full time so that they can devote all their time and energy to raising their children in a proper manner. They say that since their children are being raised in an alien environment, it is the parents' duty, and especially the mother's responsibility, to teach Indian culture to the new generation of Indian Americans. These women claim that their continuous presence at home enables the exposure of their children to the glories of Indian food, music, clothes, movies, and friends. This group of interviewees was extremely critical of those mothers, and especially of those Indian immigrant mothers, who choose to work outside the home. Sandhya says,

> I made a conscious decision to spend all my time at home and to devote myself to the upbringing of my children. I taught them to appreciate Indian food, language, music, and literature. And in fact, one of my working friends, a doctor, would leave her son with me most summer-vacation-days. This child used to envy my own son Ribhu, because I was always free to spend time with him. He would tell his mother, "Why can't you stay with me the way Mausi (Aunt) stays with Ribhu?" My friend would talk about the money she earned etc. but her son was not convinced. She too had a guilt complex. Working mothers are their own worst critics. Do you know, in adolescence, this boy turned to drugs? Later he went back to the correct track, but just think how much he suffered!

But of course, Sandhya's testimony is based on incorrect assumptions. The fact of the matter is that children of working mothers learn almost as much of Indian culture as

those of stay-at-home Indian immigrant mothers. And studies have shown that children of working mothers do not have a higher likelihood of developing chemical addictions than those of non-working mothers. In fact, unlike the clinging offspring of full-time mothers, the children of working mothers are independent and self-reliant, both positive qualities.

Living in the San Francisco Bay Area makes it easier for Indian immigrant working mothers to arrange for Indian childcare. California is the land of immigrants. Twenty-six percent of Californians are immigrants. And the San Francisco Bay Area is very popular with immigrants. Twenty-eight percent of the population of San Francisco is foreign born. The whole of the San Francisco Bay Area is populated by a high percentage of immigrants. Indian immigrants cluster in certain areas such as Fremont and Cupertino. There are 143,022 Indian immigrants in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area. Priya Agarwal points out that as in most communities, Indian women are considered the repositories and bearers of Indian culture. Since Indian mothers are considered responsible for biological as well as cultural reproduction, they prefer Indian childcare as it provides both care of the body and a taste of Indian culture. Hence Indian women can undertake monetary production with an easy mind.

Aihwa Ong tells us that Chinese transnational immigrant families are ready to set up home, albeit a transitory home, in foreign lands for the sake of capital accumulation. Cultural capital is not given up, for the immigrant family keeps its roots in the nation of origin, and sets up ethnic cultural networks in the land of settlement. The ultimate ambition is to convert economic capital into prestige capital in the new land as well as in the old country (Ong 1999). Indian immigrants follow this model, and Indian immigrant

working women engage in economic production as well as cultural and biological reproduction to attain the goal of prestige accumulation for their family and ethnic group.

Due to an unprecedented influx of immigrants into the United States, and because of the acceleration of cross-border transnational discourse in mass print and electronic media we now live in a postnational world of diasporic public spheres where the state must construct a society around diasporic diversity (Appadurai 1996). Easily-accessed personal media such as letters, phone, home video, and electronic mail combine with the ease of long-distance travel in our current technologically advanced times; these foster intimate friendships between individuals separated by thousands of geographical miles (Hannerz 2002).

The ability to indulge in diasporic cultural activities to the fullest extent in America, and specifically in the San Francisco Bay Area, allow Indian immigrant wives who go to work to continue cultural reproduction through locally available Indian resources. These include Indian childcare centers, Indian caterers, Indian movies, and Indian T.V. shows beamed into their children's bedrooms, Indian groceries for their Indian nannies to cook up for the children, Indian prayers, dances, and songs taught by local Indian instructors, and frequent visits from their folks in India.

Thus, due to the easy availability of Indian cultural trainers within the Bay Area, Indian immigrant working wives and mothers have no trouble outsourcing the enculturation of their children to Indian nannies, music and dance teachers, and cooks. Hence they can continue economic production along with biological and cultural reproduction. Also, family from India can be flown in to the U.S. to provide further, and perhaps more authentic, Indianization and enculturation. The easy availability of Indian

mass and personal media facilitate the passing on of “traditional” Indian culture to second generation Indian Americans even in the work-time absence of employed Indian immigrant mothers from their homes.

(ii) Authenticity

My question is: how authentic is the culture passed on to the immigrant children? Sucheta Mazumdar insists that what is passed on is outdated, and even worse, usually a means used by the first generation to restrict the freedom of the second generation (Mazumdar 1996). Espiritu has also shown in her work among the Filipinos of San Diego that what passes for native ethnic culture is often deployed by the parental generation to limit the individuation of teenage and young-adult immigrant offspring (Espiritu 2003). I personally observed many instances in which elders in the Indian immigrant families I hung out with passed off what I knew to be outdated behavioral strictures as current, up-to-date, and authentic. For example, Pia told me that she wants her daughter Sheela to be “simple, like the girls growing up in India.” She said that she does not want Sheela to pay too much of attention to her own appearance, and hence she discourages her from removing the hair from her arms and legs. But high-school-going girls of Sheela’s age commonly use hair-removing lotions, shaving creams, or waxing paper in India for that very purpose. In fact that is the current norm in urban middle-class India.

(**iii) Comparison**

Most of the non-working Indian immigrant women I spoke to were insistent that because they were able to spend more time with their children, they succeeded in transmitting more Indian habits and values into their children, and hence they were able

to counteract the unsuitable influences of so-called “American” culture on their children. Pia, who came recently from India with her husband and two children says,

> We grew up with family: not just parents and brothers and sisters, but also cousins, grandparents, and other relatives, constantly around us. But our children who grow up here do not have that. So it is up to the parents to look after them. If I now left them at a day-care from 7.00am to 7.00pm, then that would not be good. You have to sacrifice something or the other, you have to choose: either money or your children. I am not saying that the children who grow up in day-care are failures, but their values are different from us parents. You cannot expect that if you keep them away from you all day long, they will grow up exactly the way you want them to grow up. For example, look at Sheela, she goes to the well-reputed Kennedy Junior High School. Sheela came second among all the students in grade six….. Yesterday was the award ceremony for Sheela. My husband and I were very happy last night because of Sheela’s achievement. For parents, children’s achievements are the greatest joy. We don’t want them to give us money when they grow up, we just want them to achieve …. My son Sid won a chess tournament last week, he is just six years old…All these achievements by the children are not possible unless parents encourage them regularly. Parents are responsible for their children’s success. My husband wants me to devote all my time to my children so that they get all the attention they need ….Sheela has never caused us any worry. The children who go to Kennedy School are from very well-to-do families, they only wear brand-name clothes and shoes. But Sheela makes no such demands. She wears whatever clothes I buy for her. Recently some kids in her school were discussing skin, they happened to say that Indians have hairy skin. So Sheela said, “There is nothing wrong with having hairy skin, who said that hairy skin is bad? Rather than bothering about these things, if you concentrated on your studies, then that would serve you well.” If someone says something bad about India or Indians, then my daughter doesn’t hesitate to tell them off.

All the Indian immigrant housewives I spoke to emphasized that spending maximum time with their children was “the best thing they could do for their kids.” Leela says, “My first child grew up in day-care. When my second was born, I told my husband that I want to stay at home with the new baby for a few years, and I have done that, now

she is two years old. You know, the more time you spend with your children the more attached you grow to them."

But working Indian immigrant women said that their children are no less emotionally attached to them than the children of non-working Indian immigrant mothers. It is a fact that due to the after-school hours spent in day-care, such children are less proficient in Indian languages than the children of stay-at-home Indian immigrant mothers, they are not very fond of Indian food, etc. But Indian immigrant working mothers said that this was quite OK with them. They asked: What is the point of fighting a losing battle to "Indianize" one's children when the kids are going to spend their entire lives in the U.S. anyway? What is the point of inculcating Indian habits in children who will not spend more than a few weeks each year in India? Dr. Bannerjee says,

> I think you can't expect the children here to know as much about Indian life as kids there. But since they are going to be just basically Americans, I think it is fine, whatever amount they know, so I am pretty comfortable with that. A lot of people are not comfortable, they tend to be more religious, they find it a problem to train their kids in their particular beliefs or their cultural values. But I don't know, for us it's been just fine. So let me say, it's kind of atypical. Those Indian women who come recently find it harder. There is such a huge community of immigrant kids here, second generation Indians, that it doesn't matter.

The Indian immigrant working women I spoke to were proud of the expensive private schools their salaries paid for their children to go to. Smita said,

> Kids' Junction is the best school in our city. My son started pre-school there, and now he is in fifth grade. He starts school at 8.30 am and comes home at 5.30 pm. Kids' Junction really taught him to function in a disciplined fashion. He thrives on structured schooling, and that is exactly what Kids' Junction enforces. Public schools might insist that children follow the rules, but here, in this private school, they make sure your child follows the rules in such a manner that he excels academically. Unlike most public schools that promote children irrespective of their capacity to

> learn, children here are not promoted to the next grade unless they have mastered the curriculum of the previous grade.

Similarly, Sriparna says,

> My daughter goes to Motivator Private School. It is expensive, but my salary makes it possible to pay the fees. It is worth every penny. I do not worry about what my daughter is learning or not learning while I am away at work the major portion of the day, because I know Motivator will do the job well. Did you know that they teach two or three grades ahead of public school counterparts, and even in after school day-care, they help with the child's home-work?

To conclude this section I would like to emphasize that Indian immigrant non-working women claimed that they were doing the best thing possible for their children by staying at home full-time and devoting all their energies to child-rearing. Indian diasporic women are burdened with something more than the common American phenomenon of the "Mommy Mystique". The Mommy Mystique is "an almost religious adherence to ideas about child-rearing, about marriage and sex-roles and society that supports the status-quo even as mothers denounce it, even as children complain about it, even as "the experts" warn that our way of doing things is stressing children to the core" (Warner 2005:32). Besides being weighed down by the Mommy Mystique, immigrant mothers also shoulder the responsibility of acculturating their children in their native culture despite their location an alien environment. Non-working transnational mothers claim to do both child care and cultural training better than their working counterparts, but my point is that this is not true. Indian immigrant working mothers have enough child-care and ethno-cultural resources in the Bay Area to outsource significant portions of both child rearing and enculturation to professional experts. This is the only way to stave off the perfect madness of the immigrant mother's attempts to handle everything by herself.

COMPARISON OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONAL WORKING WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES WITH PROFESSIONAL WORKING WOMEN RESIDENT IN INDIA

While Indian immigrant professional women in the San Francisco Bay Area renegotiate gender, class, and race relations at work and at home, at the other end of the globe are their counterparts who stayed behind in the sending community of middle-class highly-educated Indians. I will examine professional immigrant working women resident in India in the following section.

(a) Social Profile of Working Women in India

Shalini Talwar's study of working women in the Northern Indian cities of Jodhpur, Delhi, and Mumbai is a good source of details about the social background of professional and semi-professional working women in India. Talwar draws our attention to a section of young working women who are highly educated and have very prestigious jobs. Most of these women belong to the upper or middle castes (Talwar 1984:37). In fact, I believe that many of the immigrant professional Indian immigrant women that I have interviewed in the U.S. have emigrated from this category of young, upper-caste, highly educated women resident in India.[58]

(b) Issues of Empowerment at Home

[58] At the time Talwar conducted her study, many, if not most of the women in my own sample group were resident in India and they were in their formative years. Thus, Talwar's research sheds light on prevailing consciousness about female work/family presence in India when my interviewees were shaping their own views about these issues.

Writing about working women in India, Hillary Standing enters into the ongoing debate about whether women's entry into the waged labor force has had any effect on gender subordination within the family. Standing writes that the low female wage, and the common practice of the woman giving up her right to decide how her wages will be disposed off, make it impossible for women to cease their dependency on the family. Senior members of the family decide how the woman's wages will be used (Standing 1985).

In India, occupational segregation by gender is practiced not only by employers, who slot cheap and compliant non-unionized female labor into low-paying jobs, but also by the women's families. The families of the very poor are desperate for any job that the women may obtain, but even they prefer domestic service or gender-segregated factory or farm work for their women. Middle-class and even lower-middle-class Indian families confine single, and especially, married women, to selected occupational categories that are said to be "respectable" and "suitable" for the feminine physique and temperament. These job categories include teaching, medicine, and nursing. As in many other places, in India too, "female occupations" are usually thought to require less skill than "male occupations". Such positions entail adverse working conditions and low wages.

Standing also points out that due to familial pressures, most Indian women marry and have children by a young age, and, constrained by the obligation to take care of very small children, they are forced to work from their home, or work part-time for very low wages.

Standing states that in spite of all these negative factors, it is usually true that the "self-perception" of wage-earning Indian women is more positive than that of their non-wage-earning counterparts. Bringing in an income might not actually improve the female familial situation, but it gives them a positive self-image that helps them to successfully negotiate with other family members. Standing suggests that we can estimate the impact of wage earning on women's situation within the family by examining "women's relations and access to family resources, defining resources as in a broad way to encompass education, health, different forms of property such as those accruing through inheritance or marriage settlement, cash incomes, savings and so on." Standing writes that we should "try to determine whether any change occurs either in the amount or the terms of access when a woman enters wage employment" (Standing 1985:233). In the households that she examined, Standing found that as Indian women earn considerably less than Indian men, their access to coveted family resources is also less. For example, education for the girl child and for women is an "expendable option" (Standing 1985:239). Moreover, Indian women have virtually no access to family property such as land or real estate. They wear the jewelry gifted to them by their parents in dowry, but they rarely have the right to sell it, for it is considered a part of the family inheritance to be passed on to the next generation. Most families "played down the importance of women's earning to the family budget" (Standing 1985:239), but Standing discovered that women's earnings were nevertheless a significant and necessary part of the family income. It was found that most of the younger women kept a small portion of their income for their own transportation to work, clothes, and small incidental expenses, the rest of the salary was given to the family for household maintenance and savings. Older

women sometimes retained control of their salaries, but they used up most of it for household expenses or they saved it up for major family expenses such as a daughter's wedding or purchase of land or real estate to reside in after retirement.

Using some of Standing's parameters, I will now analyze the data that I myself collected in India.

(i) Control Over Income

The ten women I interviewed in India were living in nuclear families at the time of being interviewed. Some of the older women had lived in a joint family early on in their married life, or had had their parents or parents-in-law live with them for a year or two at a stretch, but they were all presently residing in nuclear family units. My sample reflects the preponderance of nuclear families in the current urban Indian middle class. This is especially true in a cosmopolitan city like Delhi. Young people from all over India are attracted to Delhi because of its job opportunities. Newly married immigrant couples from other regions of India are forced to set up nuclear family units in Delhi since their parents have remained in their hometowns.

The husband makes most of the financial decisions for the family in most Indian nuclear families, but he does so in consultation with his parents, siblings (even if the parents and/or siblings reside in a separate household), and wife. Some of the women I spoke to displayed substantial financial independence. For example, Nisha, a research fellow and instructor in a semi-governmental institute said that she and her husband maintained separate bank accounts, "My husband and I maintain different bank accounts for tax purposes, there are various technical advantages to doing so". On the other hand,

Nutan, a physician who worked in a government run medical clinic said, “I don’t bother about financial matters in our household. I ask my husband for how ever much money I need. Earlier my mother used to look after my money matters, now my husband does it”. Vinita, a single woman in the film-making industry lives with her parents. She puts aside a large portion of her monthly income for unforeseen expenditures in the future; such expenditures may include her own wedding (assuming that she will marry in the near future), or a vacation, or her aging father’s medical expenses. She said, “Ever since I have started earning, I haven’t had time to spend my money. I do spend money on gifts. The rest is put into my savings. I don’t party, I haven’t been on any expensive vacations, so I manage to save quite a bit.” As we can see, some of the women to whom I spoke controlled their finances on their own, but the majority set aside some money for incidental expenses and then presented the major portion of their salaries to their husband or parents so that the latter could decide how to use the bulk of it.

(ii) Segregated Occupations

In accordance with Standing’s findings, most of the women I interviewed were in the occupations that are supposed to be suitable for women. The majority of my interviewees had been affected by gendered occupational segregation. Saraswati was a high school teacher, Bipasana, Nutan and Renu were physicians, and Renita, Nisha, and Aarti were research fellows. The only exceptions were Vinita, a film-editor, Aparna, a politician, and Madhu, a women’s issues activist. Vinita and Aparna did mention that there were not too many women in their professions. They had to look out for some occupational hazards that were specific to women in their professions. Vinita, a film

editor, often has to come back home very late at night, “Sometimes I have to work till 3.00 o’clock in the morning, specially when I have to complete an editing project. I have to stay awake during the ride home to be sure that the taxi-driver is not taking me somewhere else. You have to be convincing and confident yourself so that no one will take advantage of you. It is difficult for my parents, but I have to have confidence in my abilities.” Thus most of the women I talked to were in gender specific occupations, and the ones who were not, had to observe special precautions to survive in their chosen professions.

(c) Marriage and Family

On a different note, Standing mentions that Indian women are forced into early marriage and motherhood by their families. This pushes them into marginal and part-time employment. Among the professional women I interviewed in Delhi, I found that the age of marriage and child bearing uniformly increased as one moved from the older generation to the younger generation. Women who were now in their fifties and sixties had entered marriage and child bearing in their twenties. But younger women were found to delay marriage and especially child birth, until they were well into their thirties. Vinita, now in her thirties, says, “My job is important to me because it has become an extension of myself. The job gives one a chance to assess oneself. Things which would have troubled one, such as not getting married, are no longer important because one is involved in one’s job. This is specially true in today’s times.” Aarti, who is also in her thirties, recalls how she refused to comply with her mother’s wish that she should get married right after she obtained her Master’s degree,

> I was a rank holder in my Master's degree class in Utkal University. After I finished that degree, my parents wanted me to settle down, that is, to marry. But I did the written test and the interview for admission to the Ph.D. program at Central University in Hyderabad. I topped the admission test and got a fellowship. My mother objected to my accepting the offer of admission at Central University. She didn't want me to leave, she wanted to get me married. She said that I have two younger sisters who had to be married off. How could they marry if I, being the eldest sister, refused to get married? But my father supported my decision to leave. He said, "You may lose everything in life, but your education will stay with you." So I was able to leave for Hyderabad and do an M.Phil. at Central University. I got married after my M.Phil to a boy I met at Central University.

Older women had entered marriage and parenthood in their twenties, but women who are currently entering the professional workforce put off marriage and motherhood until they were well into their thirties.

I also found that older women whose children were currently adolescents or young adults had depended on members of the extended family and maids for child care when their children were small. But younger mothers who currently had infants, pre-schoolers, and small children to take care of, did not take assistance from members of the extended family. Rather, they resorted to a combination of help from maids and children's crèches. Aparna, now in her sixties, recalled how she moved into a joint family upon her marriage, "There were thirty-four people in the family, there were two kitchens. I was unhappy because I had grown up in a nuclear family, it was difficult to adjust to life in a joint family." Aparna accepted a lecturer's job in a local girl's college. She would spend the morning and the greater part of the afternoon in the college. Two daughters and a son were born to her in quick succession, maids supervised by elders in the joint family took care of the children while Aparna was teaching. Nutan, a physician, is now in her

fifties; she explains, “When my first child was born I was working as a gynecologist in Kasturba Gandhi Hospital in New Delhi. My mother-in-law and my mother took turns residing with us so that there was always someone at home to look after the baby.” Renu, also a physician who is currently in her early fifties, says,

> When our first child was born, my mother-in-law stayed with me and my husband for two years to help us look after the baby. I finished my post-graduate degree in microbiology and joined Lady Harding Medical College as a senior Resident Doctor just when my first child was born. After two years, my mother-in-law returned to Assam. At that time, we got a good maid who stayed with us for ten years. This maid helped me with my second baby, and she also helped me to manage the household.

A trend is evident; women in their sixties, fifties, and forties had relied on family, whether joint or not, as well as on maids, to look after their small children. In contrast, some women who are currently in their fifties, and most who are now in their forties and thirties depended more on maid-servants and crèches than members of the extended family to look after their young children. Bipasana, a physician who is now in her fifties, had a male domestic servant look after her children while she was at work. He looked after the children right from their infancy,

> I was alone with my husband when my elder son was born. I thought of requesting my parents-in-law to stay with my husband and I for a few months when my first child was born, but then I thought better of it. Dasu was twenty or twenty five when he was sent by my in-laws to help me. He was male, so I wasn’t sure how he would be able to take care of my son, but one day I found that he had changed my son’s dirty nappy (diaper) on his own. Then I realized how capable he was of childcare duties. Dasu brought up both my sons!

Renita, a doctoral fellow, is in her forties; she has a maid to look after her children when they return from school. Nisha, a research officer who is in her thirties, explained,

> My two-and-a-half-year-old-son is at his play-school in the mornings from nine to twelve. The school bus drops him at a crèche at noon, he spends the rest of the day at the crèche, I collect him at 5.30 pm. The crèche is run by a retired couple who live in the same flat complex that we do. There are three more children at the crèche, two are younger, and one is older than my son. He didn't get traumatized or anything when we sent him to the crèche. In our institute we get three months of paid maternity leave, plus I took three months of unpaid leave. A maid came to help me with my son when I had to return to work. She was sent by my in-laws from our home-town. She was very dependable, she gave us no problem at all. She was solely in charge of my son from 8.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. She had no work except to look after the kid. But after a year or so, we found that the kid required the company of children of his own age. So we put him in a play-school when he was a year and a half old, he would spend the morning at the play-school, and the maid would pick him at 12.00 noon. When he turned two we put him in the crèche he is at presently, and we sent the maid back to her village. My son enjoys being at the crèche.

In this context, Madhu Kishwar's views are of some interest. Kishwar is the founder-editor of Manushi, a feminist journal that seeks to fight for justice for Indian women. Author of many articles in other academic as well as popular publications, and a frequent invitee to international conferences about Indian women, Kishwar is one of the most well-known women's activists in India. She told me,

> If you have children then both men and women must make sacrifices … These vulnerable creatures did not ask to be born – in this day and age you can avoid having kids – it really becomes an act of responsibility. Looking at kids who grow up with maids or in crèches, I feel it is a crime against these kids. Kids need nurturing by family, the joint family. Women are not acting realistically … Young women want nuclear families for personal freedom. But the three things, career, children, and nuclear family arrangement, are irreconcilable. The only way a demanding career can be adjusted with children is living in a joint family. In such situations, children don't even miss their mothers because they have emotional relationships with members of the joint family … Men cannot succeed in

> their careers if they make too many career-wise sacrifices for their children, and we must remember that women are attracted to men who are successful in their careers. In India, if a lot of women have been able to succeed in their careers and have kids without breaking down, it is mainly because of the joint family…. These are very viable relationships ….Children are happy, and the old people feel emotionally secure….. the only way I see women having successful careers and emotionally resilient kids is a willingness to work out living arrangements with extended family.

Kishwar is in her early forties, yet in the matter of child-rearing methods, her views are out of step with most liberal, progressive, and highly educated professional and semi-professional modern working women of her own generation who subscribe to her journal. Her opinions seem rather reactionary at first glance, especially since many feminists urge employers to provide crèches in the workplace so that working mothers can have a place to conveniently place their children while they themselves are at work. But perhaps, in unwittingly echoing the voices of so-called traditional or conservative women who form the vast majority of Indian women, she has at least managed to give representation to most working professional or semi-professional women who are more than fifty years old, the urban lower middle-class, as well as the rural masses.

In fact, I did find that the older women I interviewed were resigned to the sacrifices they had made in their career for the sake of their family. But it is interesting to note that younger women did not accept the need to make compromises in their career for the sake of their family; instead they focused on the importance of their work. Bipasana, who is in her fifties, said,

> If someone wants to be a real professional, then she should not get married. Once one has a family to look after, then you have to adjust. If I give birth then it is my responsibility to bring them up properly. Children of working mothers are insecure. Children of non-working mothers have a secure feeling. When my children were born, I reduced my work hours to

> a part-time schedule, I just work six hours a day. I could not give up my job entirely. One needs the double income. Ideally all mothers should be non-working and children should have full-time attention. Working mothers tend to bribe their children with consumer items, it leads to consumerism.

Nutan, another physician in her fifties says,

> When my first child was born then I could hold on to my position of gynecologist in Kasturba Gandhi Hospital because my mother-in-law and my mother took turns residing with us in Delhi. Hence there was always someone at home to look after the baby. But when my second child was born then nobody could come to help me. The hospital job was extremely interesting, but managing both the hospital job and home became too much. So I took a job in a government-run dispensary. There is no call-duty in my dispensary job, one is not called at all odd hours of day and night for emergencies. I have to sit at the dispensary only from morning to afternoon. I leave work at 4.30 p.m. I come home and spend time with the children. I can't leave everything to the servant, in the evening I do the cooking…..If anyone asks me to resign from service for the sake of my family then I will do so. I gave up my specialization in gynecology, I gave up performing operations, gynecological operations, all of which I had been trained for and did at Kasturba Gandhi Hospital from 1973 to 1981. I really liked the smell of the operation room, I loved my work at the hospital, but I gave it all up. You have to make a choice, family or work, this or that. I think I made the correct choice, I feel I have finally reached where I want to be, I am quite comfortable with this life.

Renu, also a physician in her fifties, explains how she gave up her plans to specialize in pediatrics because her husband was already in the same field, "My husband is a pediatrician. I too wanted to specialize in pediatrics. But at that time we did not know where we would settle. If both of us were going to be in the same field then it was going to be difficult, so I took up microbiology, which had originally been my third choice." Renu said,

> My parents-in-law live in Assam, and we got jobs in Delhi. So they were of no help in running my household. A girl has to choose between a career and family, can't have both. Maybe if I had lived in a joint family then it would have been possible to give more attention to my career. Now that I am a microbiologist, my work is not too laborious, mostly lab-work and teaching. I work only from nine to four. Then I am free to go home. If I had been a pediatrician as I had originally planned, then I would have had to work day and night. There are compensations in the choice I made.

Saraswati says, "A woman can work only if everyone in the family cooperates. I cook breakfast and lunch before leaving for work but it is my son who heats up breakfast, and my husband heats up the food in the afternoon." Aparna, an academician turned politician says,

> When my eldest child was one year old, I got admission in Oxford University. But my parents-in-law did not agree to my leaving for Oxford. My mother-in-law said, "When you married our son, you did not tell us that you wanted to go abroad for further studies." Many years later, when my daughter had grown up, I told her how I regretted not going to Oxford, and she said, "Ma, do you think your life would have turned out exactly the way it did in every other respect if you and gone to Oxford? I don't think so. You would have lost something if you had gone to Oxford." And my daughter was correct, perhaps it was for the best that I was not allowed to accept the offer of admission to Oxford University.

In retrospect, she saw her decision to turn down the offer of admission to Oxford University as the correct decision. I think this is typical of her generation.

But in some other ways, in spite of being a member of the sixty-plus generation, Aparna is as radical as the younger women I spoke to, as uncompromising as the women in their twenties and thirties. In this way, Aparna is a bit of an exception among the other older women I talked to. She said,

> I don't believe that it's a woman's duty to do equally well at work and at home. In the kitchen of the joint family, my responsibility was to cut the vegetables, I always said to my sisters-in-law, "By 10.00am you must tell me what vegetables to cut, otherwise I can't do it, because I have to go off to teach at college." It is not possible to do equally well in both work and family. I have done what I thought I should do. It has worked well for me. When my daughters were growing up, then I was living in a joint family. I taught at a girl's college, but I did nothing more than that for my career. My husband and I established a separate household round about the time when my youngest child, a son, was born. I had taught at the college for many years, but I started my university career when my son was small, when he was growing up. One evening, I was sitting in my verandah all by myself when a question occurred to me, "Is this it?" I have given all these years to Hume College, and what have I gotten out of it?" That is when I thought of doing a Ph.D. Prof. Sudarshan Sharma was my Ph.D. supervisor. I started my Ph.D. when my son was three years old. I would come back from work at 4.30 p.m. to feed my son. Then I would go off to the National Library and study there until 8.30p.m. I finished my Ph.D. in four years. It was not easy, but I believe that one should do what one wants to do. Of course, not at the cost of others.

Aarti, in her early thirties, is typical of the new generation of female professionals in India; they are unwilling to make compromises in their career for the sake of their family. Aarti says,

> Being employed is good. I think all women should work. There are all sorts of negative forces but women should make up their mind to get an education and to work. I have a Class One job, I am a Class One officer in the government of India. I have the highest education possible (a Ph.D. degree). Women are discriminated against, they suffer violence against them, it is a man's world. I have to be as good as men to survive in this man's world……Women who do not work are unhappy. Where as we who work are going out into the world like men, going to meetings, making decisions, we get to see the world.

In a similar vein, Vinita, a film editor in her late twenties, recognizes that many professional Indian women of the new generation tend to give low priority to getting married or starting a family; their main ambition is to get ahead at work. She says,

> My mother chose to take up a nine-to-five job when she was young. She gets up in the morning, she cooks, then she goes to work, then she comes back from work and cooks again. That is OK for her. To me too, my family is important, but progress in my job is equally, if not more, important. I don't want to end up in a dead-end job. The Indian social environment is changing. The new generation's, the children's, values are different from those of their parents. For me, the views of my marriage partner will also be a deciding factor. But one thing is clear to me: my career is important to me. Let me see to what extent I will go to promote my career. I don't want to forgo family altogether, but I don't want to make the choice my mother made, that is, accepting a dead-end job for the sake of being able to devote more time to the family. I think that modern Indian women of the new generation believe that they can do both work and family equally well. But it is also true that many more educated urban elite women are pursuing a career by foregoing marriage. I think this is a sort of Americanized individuality. Many such women find themselves without roots. May be we are earning thirty to forty thousand rupees a month, but we don't enjoy it because of the way we have been brought up. We have been raised to think that family is important. This leads to an emotional crisis ….. I don't want to feel emotionally rootless for the sake of my career, and yet peer pressure leads one to such a life ….. A lot of Indian middle-class women choose to work in jobs that are convenient for their kids, to others, the monetary aspect of their jobs is more important than the convenience of their children. To me, creativity is important, I want to use my training …. Some husbands give their career up a little bit for the sake of their marriage, but in the ultimate analysis, it is women who are considered responsible for the family, that is what was instilled in us, I am trying to fight against that.

If we examine the situation in India, we find that the women of today are less willing to make sacrifices in their career choices for the sake of setting up a family; thus their way of thinking is different from that of women who entered the workforce a few decades ago.

(iii) Access to Resources

Standing states that because of the discrepancy in their incomes, women have less access to resources than men. This might be true, but many of the women I interviewed

had considerable access to significant resources such as education. Many of the women I spoke to had completed their education *after* their marriage, and even after childbirth. Renita completed her Ph.D. ten years after her marriage. Nisha completed her Ph.D. eight months after her marriage. Aarti finished her Ph.D. five years after she got married. Aparna began a Ph.D. more than a decade after her marriage, and she completed it within four years. Renu completed a post graduate degree in Microbiology three years after her marriage. She completed her residency in medicine in the seventh year of her marriage. Saraswati started a bachelor's degree in education five years after her marriage, completing the degree in two years.

Standing correlates low female income with women's limited access to family resources in India. But many of the women I talked to had a great deal of access to important resources such as the family car. Nutan the physician, Nisha, the research fellow, and Madhu, the women's magazine editor, each had a car for their individual use. Renita, a post-doctoral research scholar shared the family car with her husband. Aparna, the Rajya Sabha member, had been provided a car for her own use by the government. Earlier, when her husband had been a high-ranking manager in a private company, his employer provided the family with a car and a chauffeur.

Another relevant point is that the women reported that they had some say in deciding how the family's leisure time and extra income is going to be spent. Renita said that all the family members, including the children, are allowed to state their preference about where to eat out, an activity the family indulges in very often. Renu said she loves to get away from Delhi to cooler regions during vacation time, and she frequently

vacations in a hill-station of her choice with her family in tow. But many of the women I spoke to did not have as much access to vacation-destination choices as their husbands. Almost all of them reported that they were able to spend significantly less time with their natal families than their husbands could spend with their own parents. Aarti says, “My parents-in-law visit my husband and me every year. My husband too visits his parents every two months or so. My mother is dead. My father has visited us once, and I try to visit him once a year.” While decision making is shared with the husband in almost all cases, Vinita and Madhu are single women living with their parents, hence in their cases, decisions are made in consultation with the parents.

(c) Self-Image

Standing discusses how Indian working women gain a positive self-image in spite of their contribution to the family income being constantly underplayed. I found that Standing’s estimation that working in paid employment improved the women’s self-perception was born out by my interviewees. Yet I also found that the women seemed to have internalized the attitude of playing down the importance of their own earnings in the family budget; almost all of the women I spoke to emphasized how their own salary was secondary to their husband’s salary. They repeated over and over again that the family could have lived on their husband’s income, so in that sense their own income was not strictly necessary to the family budget. Bipasana said, “I do not work for money, I work to maintain a professional career. I have become a [medical] doctor by my own choice, I want to use my professional skills….I have studied a lot so it is my duty to serve the people as a doctor.” Renita said,

> My work is important because you need a steady income, I make my contribution to family expenditures. Even the single income of my husband could have seen the family through, but with all my training and professional skills, it would be a pity to let it go waste. Also work gives me a personal identity, it satisfies me, I get the confidence to face the world. I think that if you are a confident person than you are a better mother, better wife, better social being.

Nisha said, “My work keeps me active and engaged, it gives me a lot of satisfaction. Plus of course, in an expensive city like Delhi, a second income is needed, naturally my income is secondary compared to my husband’s, but that is one of the considerations.” Nutan, a physician says, “Being a medical doctor, a professional, I can’t stay at home. If I leave my job I will feel blank. I love my job…. My identity is triple: Dr. Pranav Shah’s wife, Doctor Nutan Shah, and Arnav’s mother.” Renu, a physician who teaches microbiology in a medical college says, “I enjoy working. My nature is to get fully involved in work … Status wise I don’t think a teacher in a medical college has any less status than a practicing doctor, I like teaching.” Aparna, a college professor turned politician says,

> In 1986 I was made Pro-Vice-Chancellor of D. University. I was the first woman Pro-Vice-Chancellor in D. University. I had to work very hard, from 9.00am. to 11.00p.m. every day. But I very much enjoyed it. My post gave me a chance to help students. God chose to do this for the students through me. Even when I grow old I will be remembered by the students I helped. For example, my husband and I recently went to a painting exhibition by Suresh Mittal at the Delhi Arts College. There we happened to meet Suresh Mittal himself. He came up to me and said that when he had graduated from D. University, then I had helped him to obtain his exam results in time to meet the deadline for application for admission to Arts College. Suresh Mittal remembered that I had myself rung up the Controller of Examination and told him to do the needful. Suresh Mittal gifted a small painting to me that day to express his gratitude for what I had done for him so many years ago. You know, I was really able to help a

> lot of students, I fought for their causes, when I was Pro-Vice-Chancellor. That was the most fulfilling period in my work life.

Saraswati says, "I wanted to work. I felt I had put in a lot of effort into my education, so I must not waste my education….Women should work. Work keeps them above spending their time in idle gossip. If you work then your views broaden, you learn to interact with people. In my school, I interact with younger people, that keeps me young." Vinita says, "I make a fair amount of money, but that is not my main motivation, I work to satisfy my creative urges, to use my training." Thus all the women acknowledged the importance of work in creating and sustaining their self and identity.

AFFIRMATION OF THE SELF / IDENTITY AT HOME, IN THE FAMILY, AND IN THE COMMUNITY: INDIAN IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONAL WORKING WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

Claude M. Steele argues that all comprehensive models of the self contain a self-system that functions to "sustain phenomenal experience images of the self, past, present, and future as having adaptive and moral adequacy, as being competent, good, stable, integrated, capable of choice and control, and so forth" (Steele 1989:289). Steele's psychological theories are significant because they show that the goal of the self-system is to "maintain global conceptions of self-adequacy and not necessarily to resist self-threatening circumstances and events" (Steele 1989:287). Steele found that people eliminate the effects of specific self-threats by "affirming central, valued, aspects of the self" (Steele 1989:289). Thus, people have a great deal of flexibility in dealing with

threats to self-integrity. They can either adapt to the threat itself (by directly eliminating or diminishing the threat, diminishing the perception of threat, or by diminishing the perception that the threat endangers self-integrity). Or, they can also undergo "behavioral and cognitive changes not directed towards the threat, but towards the perception of global self-integrity. The pressure for self-affirming thoughts about one topic can be reduced by salient, self-affirming thoughts about another, even unrelated topic"(Steele1989:291). For example, in dissonance experiments, "Subjects eliminated the dissonance arising from public opposition to funding for the handicapped through self-affirming thoughts about beautiful concerts and painting" (Steele 1989:289).

The conflicting demands of the roles of the career-oriented woman in the American workforce on one hand, and that of the traditional Indian housewife on the other, create considerable dissonance in the psyche of the Asian Indian immigrant woman. There are numerous positive psychological effects of joining the American workforce. In comparison to the stay-at- home Indian immigrant wife and mother, the career-oriented Indian American woman has more opportunity to acculturate into the mainstream of American culture. This increases her level of comfort in the newly-adopted nation. For example, Kalyani has made many American friends since she has begun teaching in a private school. In fact, two of Kalyani's co-workers, both young, white, single women, coordinated a vacation in India with Kalyani's annual visit to India. While they were in Kolkata, the two American women stayed in a guest-house owned by a friend of Kalyani's, and they spent most of their day with Kalyani and her family. Now that the vacation is over, and Kalyani as well as her American friends are back in the U.S.A.,

Kalyani says she feels even more comfortable than before while interacting with her American friends/colleagues at work.

Another relevant point is that independent identity formation of Indian immigrant career women is aided by the emphasis on male-female equality in the workplace (this emphasis may be superficial, but nevertheless, even the rhetoric, if not the practice, of workplace gender equity makes a psychological impact). Shalini, a relatively high-ranking manager at Delphi Technology says, “I’ve never been discriminated against on account of my gender. Delphi is good about that.” Deepti echoes Shalini, “Delphi does not allow discrimination based on gender or race, so I have been very lucky about that.” Rani, a post-doctoral research scientist says, “In the university environment there is little scope for gender bias.”

As we see above, participation in the American workforce encourages progress in self and identity formation. But at the same time, increased exposure to non-Indians, that is to Americans of various types, hastens the realization that female Asian Indian immigrants are unlikely to be accepted as “one of the girls” by so-called “mainstream” Americans. Working with Americans on a daily basis, most Indian American women realize that in most situations, most Americans are likely to view Indian immigrants, especially first generation Indian immigrants, primarily as ethnic representatives of India. Shupriya says,

> I don’t think that Americans see me as an American. Maybe they all know that I have been here a long time … but when they come to my house they always want to have Indian food. So they obviously don’t see me as an American, and if I don’t give Indian food, then they ask me, “Why didn’t you make Indian food? We came here to have Indian food and you are giving us spaghetti!” That type of thing. So you know, they do see me as an Indian. There is no way in hell I can look or feel like an American,

> because I am not one. But I can understand all the jokes, and I am into it. So when they are talking to me they don't feel that way. But yet when they are relating to me … definitely they think of me as an Indian or an Asian.

This pushes the women to reassert their Indian identity with renewed vigor. As we see, Shupriya always cooks Indian food for her American colleagues and friends. Yet, the women fear that exaggerated displays of Indianness in the workplace will destroy what little chances they have of being accepted as "one of the girls" by their American colleagues. Meera says that there are almost no Indians at her workplace, so she cannot go in *salwar kameej* or *sari*, she always wears Western clothes to work. Also, a return to Indianness at home means a return to the inequitable patriarchal relations that characterize the traditional Indian family. This inequity at home is difficult to accept for Indian immigrant women who aspire to be treated as well as men in their place of work. Shalini, Lakshmi, and Jaya all agree that their doing almost all the housework and childcare is no surprise, because, unlike their fortunate American counterparts, they are *Indian* wives. These contradictory demands on the self create a conflicted, dissonance-ridden self. Many working Indian immigrant working women lose their sense of being integrated consistent people, which according to Steele, is a universal psychological need. This internal conflict and dissonance is a definite threat to the sense of self.

How do the women cope with this threat? As Steele's experimental subjects had done, Indian immigrant professional working women attempt to reduce the pressure of self-threatening thoughts about one topic, the impossibility of being accepted as an "American" by Americans, by conjuring up self-affirming thoughts about other topics, such as their financial security, their artistic achievements, and the achievements of their children. This psychological adaptation aids the perception of global self-integrity. One

common self-affirming thought seems to center around the material success and the gift-giving capacities of the women. Giving expensive gifts to [extended] family members in India is a major method of procuring prestige in the [extended] family. When Kalyani goes to India on her annual vacation, she loads her suitcases with U.S. made perfumes, colognes, soaps, shampoos, fine china, sweaters, shirts, purses, and wallets. She also buys a few small electronic items such as cameras and watches to give to friends and relatives in India. Lastly, since gold costs less in the U.S. than in India, she takes a few gold guineas to give to especially close relatives. Besides, the women frequently remind themselves that they have a much higher standard of living in the U.S. than their contemporaries in India (home and car ownership, and expensive education for the children). Kalyani says,

> In India, I wanted to distribute food among beggars at the big city temple. But none of my relatives approved of the idea. They are all employed in white-collar jobs, but they are so poor themselves that I suspect that they resented that I was going to spend so many dollars in charity for temple beggars. I guess they would have been happier if I gave the money to them instead of the temple beggars! There is so much poverty at all class levels in India, but then, that is why we left India. Why else did we set up home so far away from our birth-place!

There is yet another tactic for accomplishing global self-integrity. This tactic is the attempt to improve oneself by continuing training (at considerable financial expense) in hobbies (such as dance/music/sports/cooking etc.) that the women had trained in during their childhood in India. Indian women in America attend many cultural performances by visiting artists from India. They put up music/dance performances themselves and encourage their children to do the same. Shupriya learns Indian dance. Jaya and Meera sing, and Kalyani performs Indian dance in cultural shows organized by

the Bay Area Indian Association. Kalyani's and Mallika's daughters learns Indian dance. Urmila's daughter learns Bengali poetry recitation and Indian dance. Paulomi's daughter Moni learns Indian music.

Lastly, these women throw lavish parties in which they compete with each other to provide the best-cooked food and display the biggest and most beautifully decorated home. Kalyani throws parties for her close friends, all Indians, every Friday and Saturday night. On the days that she does not organize a get-together at her home, she attends a similar party at a friend's home. At her parties in her four-bedroom million-dollar home, she cooks at least ten different items of Indian food, and her husband plies his guests with wine and beer. The children play, watch T.V., or play video games in Kalyani's daughter's room.

A third form of self-affirmation is through one's children. Many Indian American mothers live vicariously through their children; they vie with each other to have their children win the highest academic, sports, and artistic honors. Also, they train their children in the same [or similar] cultural skills that they have, and expect the children to excel in them. Cultural programs held during religious festivals such as Diwali, or Indian shows organized during Indian National holidays such as Indian Independence Day, provide venues to show off the children's talents in music and dance. Kalyani's daughter is only ten-years-old but she is already a veteran of dance competitions in the Diwali Mela [Diwali Fair], performances in the Indian Independence Day Parade, and local shows organized by her dance teacher. Meanwhile, she also gets individual coaching to improve her math skills and she attends swimming and piano lessons.

The continuity achieved by the methods described above helps the women affirm their own identity. Such psychological mechanisms aid in the process of what Steele calls "adaptive and moral adequacy": it helps to make the women feel competent, good, stable, integrated, and capable of choice and control (Steele 1988:289). Paradoxically, affirming the separate self can help to soothe the individual even if that affirmation heightens the contradiction between the "American self" and the "Indian self".

CONCLUSION

I conclude this chapter by pointing out that my findings about the Indian immigrant home and community reflect Yen Le Espiritu's analysis of the general dynamics of Asian American gender relations:

> The existing data indicate that changes in relations between Asian American men and women have been slow and uneven. In some cases, greater equality between men and women is the result; in others, it is not…..Economic constraints (and opportunities) also structure gender relations within contemporary Asian America….. Men's dependence on the economic and social resources of women shifts some of the decision-making power to women. This shift has not occurred without friction. Men's loss of status in both public and private arenas has placed severe pressures on the traditional family, leading at times to resentment, spousal abuse, and divorce. For their part, Asian women's ability to restructure the traditional patriarchal system is often constrained by their social-structural location in the dominant society. In the best scenario, responding to the structural barriers in the larger society, both husbands and wives become more interdependent and equal as they are forced to rely on each other, and on the traditional family and immigrant community, for economic security and emotional support. On the other hand, to the extent that the traditional division of labor and male privilege exists, wage work adds to the women's overall workload. The existing research indicates that both of these tendencies exist, though the increased burdens for women are more obvious. (Espiritu 1997:84)

I have interviewed Indian working women in the Bay Area, non-working women here, and working women in India. Despite a steady process of Americanization with the passage of time, the Indian transnational community in the United States is extremely concerned about the transmission of Indian culture to the next generation. Women are usually held responsible for this process. Non-working Indian immigrant women personally acculturate their children, but working Indian immigrant mothers are no less active in exposing their children to Indian culture; they employ Indian domestic help and cultural teachers for their children. Despite the time spent away from home because of work commitments, Indian immigrant working women in the Bay Area create an Indian ambience at home by availing themselves of the services of immigrant Indian nannies, Indian cultural teachers, Indian clothes retailers, Indian food caterers, Indian grocers, and Indian media dispensers. These are readily available within the community here. Thus, Indian diasporic working mothers arrange for their children to learn Indian culture even while they are not physically present at home. On the other hand, Indian immigrant non-working women emphasize that their constant presence at home is necessary for the proper enculturation of their children in so-called “Indian traditions”. They are critical of women who have stepped out of domestic boundaries in order to contribute monetarily to the well being of the family. Indian immigrant parents as well as diasporic community leaders claim that their cultural productions are true-to-life replicas of home-country counterparts. Hence, I believe that when we discuss cultural deployment in transnational families/communities, we must focus on whether the culture that is passed on is authentic, updated, and reflective of the diversity of the lived culture in the nation of origin.

I found it interesting to note that the working women I interviewed in India were not overly concerned with cultural reproduction, for they were surrounded by co-ethnics who shared a common cultural heritage.

I found whether one is analyzing women in the home country or those in the diaspora, one rule holds true across the board: working outside the home in paid employment brings women appreciation for their contribution to the household income, and it gives them agency and access to household resources. Non-working transnational women rationalize their relative lack of ability to financially assist their family, and their lesser independence and access to household resources by stressing their success in the re-creation of Indian culture at home and in community gatherings.

The selves of immigrant working women are Americanized by their functioning in the American workplace (however, the multi-cultural workforce and the significant presence of Indians in the local population, and especially in the Silicon Valley, diminishes the mainstreaming effect of employment). Along with Americanization comes the realization that Indian immigrant women, especially first generation entrants, are likely to be viewed primarily as “Indians” by native born Americans. Hence there is a return to Indian culture in significant but isolated areas of self-construction.

CHAPTER FOUR : THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS , THE WORST OF DOUBLE IDENTITIES – CONSTRUCTION OF SELF BY ASIAN INDIAN PROFESSIONAL WORKING WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

I have studied identity issues, immigrant experience, participation in the American workforce, and presence in the Indian immigrant family of professional and semi-professional Indian working women in the San Francisco Bay Area. My subjects took a year or two to learn enough about the American way of life to function efficiently in the American cultural milieu. After that initial period of confusion, they seemed to open up to American cultural influences. Of course, even while Americanization takes place, a significant portion of the Indian expatriate core psyche continues to be Indian. The trend of unidirectional Americanization does not continue for more than a decade. Thus, though they may discard Indian cultural practices, ethnic objects, and "*desi*" modes of thought in favor of American equivalents in the first decade or so of their stay in the U.S., most of the long duration Indian immigrants I spoke to, made an eventual return to Indian ethnicity as an important marker of their self and identity in certain key issues. The majority of these respondents perceived a diasporic self and transnational identity as the only alternative to a racialized existence in the U.S.

Indian immigrants make all sorts of strategic adjustments to improve their position in the country of settlement. Whether they swear singular allegiance to the United States, jettisoning the language, food, clothes, and habits of their country of origin in order to "blend in", or whether they emphasize the deterritorialized plurality of their

global selves, they are all struggling to come to terms with the unfamiliar customs of the new country, and the cultural, social, and economic anxieties of being a racial and ethnic minority in their adopted country. As they themselves said, they want the best of both worlds: American material comforts and freedom, and Indian culture and community. In this chapter I will discuss whether my subjects succeeded in this endeavor or whether they ended up with the worst trouble of maintaining two or more opposite and contrasting identities: a constant sense of superficiality and rootlessness.

THE SELF-CONCEPTION OF ASIAN INDIAN PROFESSIONAL WORKING WOMEN IN THE BAY AREA

The concepts of self and identity enunciated by diasporic immigration theorists and psychological anthropologists guide my study of Asian Indian professional working women in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area. My main area of interest is the interplay between the Indian self/identity and the American self/identity. Both are influenced by an interaction between an inner core psyche and the surrounding social milieu. Professional Indian working women in the Bay Area can be assigned three separate categories, each with its own sense of self:

a) Recent entrants, that is, women with short work experience in the U.S. (residence and work experience of one to two years in the U.S.).

b) Medium duration working women (residence and work experience of two to ten years in the U.S.).

c) Long duration working women (residence and work experience of more than ten years in the U.S.).

The self and identity in these three categories will also be compared with that of Indian non-working women resident in the U.S. for more than two years.

(I) RECENT ENTRANTS: WOMEN WITH VERY SHORT WORK EXPERIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

(a)Yearning to Come to America

Imperialism, neo-colonialism, and economic expansion by the West have disrupted non-Western economies and social systems, and spurred unprecedented mass migration to the West (Bonacich and Cheng 1984, Ong, Bonacich and Cheng 1994). Post colonial identification with Western colonial powers, and American commodified global mass culture of the late capitalist era have served to familiarize Indians, especially educated middle and upper class Indians, with Western culture as a whole, and British and American culture in particular (Bhabha 1994, Hall 1991).

The Indian professional working women that I observed, interacted with, and interviewed in the San Francisco Bay Area, had been vastly affected by post-colonial and neo-colonial fascination with the West even before they had departed from Indian shores. They were the human legacy of British colonial history, and the ideological by-products of current American globalization of the economy and world culture. They did not know it, but they were already a part of international circuits of global immigration; the ground had been laid for their migration even before they had thought of studying or working overseas.

Nayana's grandfather studied in Britain; he was a senior officer in the British colonial administration in India. Nayana's father also did his graduate studies in U.K.

They were both "brown *Sahibs* [masters]". Highly educated post-colonial natives identified more with their former colonizers than with the masses in their own nation; that is why they would rather indulge in "mimicry of colonial masculinity and mimesis" than embrace new Indian nationalist culture (Bhabha 1994:168). The colonial natives in the imperial periphery identified with their British rulers to such an extent that when colonial rule ended, some of them followed the British to Britain, "The very moment when finally Britain convinced itself it had to decolonize, it had to get rid of them, we all came back home. As they hauled down the flag, we got on the banana boat and sailed right into London" (Hall 1991: 24). In any case, when Nayana's father returned to India after his education there, he brought a British accent and English tastes with him.

Nayana herself grew up in upper middle-class India. Like other elite Indians of her generation, she was raised on a post- colonial diet of "classic" British literature, as well as on American movies, music, cars, food, and clothing fashions. Her childhood home had been filled with old British memorabilia and new American imported goods.

Nayana was part of that generation of ex-colonial natives that was attracted not by post-colonial yearnings for "back home", that is, England, but by American global mass culture. Western, specifically American popular culture, seduces people over the world to set up home in the U.S. Images, visuals, and graphic arts beamed from the U.S. reconstitute popular life all over the world; American television, film, and mass advertising shape entertainment and leisure across linguistic frontiers. Satellite television is the prime example of mass communication that cannot be limited by national boundaries, but originates from and is controlled by advanced first world nations and cultures (Hall 1991). Global mass culture "remains centered in the West", it is powered

by Western technology, capital, and the stories and legends of Western societies. Secondly, global mass culture is a "homogeneous form of cultural representation, enormously absorptive of things, as it were, but the homogenization is never absolutely complete, and it does not work for completeness". It accepts that there will be differences "within the framework of what is essentially an American conception of the world" (Hall 1991: 28).

Gurcharan Das also writes of Indians learning American ways without leaving their own homeland,

> The communications revolution has brought the world into our homes and we have come to realize how far we have been left behind. ….change will take place because too many know too much – through television, cable, and increasingly the Internet. Millions talk to their relatives overseas. They may not be able to articulate economic policies, but they see clearly enough who has power and who has not (Das 2002: 346).

As in many developing nations, Indian youth like Nayana are lured by Western goods, capital, and media to migrate to the West so that they can acquire global symbols of success. Nayana came to study in the U.S. in the early '80s and she has stayed on here. She says: "When I graduated from school, the expectation was I would study in England, as my parents and grandfather had done, but I wanted to come to the U.S. So I did."

(b) The Shock of Arrival

Colonial memories, as well as the new American cultural global outreach, give the people in the margins an impression that they are familiar with Western culture. But of course, it is impossible to know the West until one actually lives in it. Though they are enamored with the West, all internal psychic development has taken place in an Indian social milieu. Hence, all role-playing has been restricted to Indian contexts. What G. H.

Mead called the inner "I", is Indian. It may be a post-colonial "I", it may be submerged in world-conquering American mass culture; nevertheless, it is an Indian "I". For example, inter-gender interaction is typically Indian, not Western. Without essentializing Indian and American social behavior, I will argue that in comparison to their American counterparts, Indian men and women avoid social interaction with each other while in the public gaze. Remarking on the difference between Indian and American female attitudes to men, Amitrajit (a male informant) said American women are "friendly" but Indian women are "stand-offish." I think this is because in the Indian workplace, men and women can socialize with each other only at the risk of triggering off rumors of the woman having "lost her decency". Vinita, a film editor resident in India, says, "My socializing with colleagues is while I am at work…Other than that, I try to avoid professional socializing. I do go to one or two parties, one has to mingle a little bit, but people often attach other meanings to innocent social mingling."

Jishnu (a male informant) grew up in Mumbai, a large cosmopolitan city. He went to a co-educational school. But in India he was seldom exposed to the semi-clothed female body.[59] This is obvious from his reactions in the following anecdote he related about his first year in the U.S. Jishnu says,

> In my first year in the U.S., when I was an undergraduate student, in our dorm the water pipe in the boys' restroom burst. So we boys had to use the girls' restroom for a few days. The girls would come out of the shower stalls and go to their rooms in their bath towels, right in front of us boys. Fresh from India, I was totally amazed by this behavior, [he makes the gesture of opening his eyes wide], I couldn't believe my eyes.

[59] Even female swimwear was very prudish in the India of Jishnu's time.

In general, once in the U.S, Indian men discover that they must avoid sexual "harassment" during close social interaction with women at work. There is seldom much censure of sexual harassment in India, even in the workplace. Indian men in America find out that they must take the open and friendly manner of American women in their stride. At the same time, they see that rules forbidding sexual harassment in the workplace are stringently enforced in the U.S.[60]

Once they arrive in the U.S., Indian women find out that they must not be "shy", they learn that in the U.S. women and men are expected to interact in a free and friendly manner. A woman who chats with her male colleagues will not be labeled a "loose character" in the U.S. In the U.S., Indian immigrant women may be expected to do things which are taboo for women in India. Charulata says, "Before I came to the West, I could not imagine myself drinking alcohol in a bar! But in American graduate school, my fellow-students often met in the bar. In fact one of the professors whom I assisted as a T.A. organized a few T.A. meeting in the university pub. So I learn to go to the pub. Initially, I used to drink only soda or fruit juice or soda there."

Let alone the nuances of inter-gender behavior, just day-to-day functioning in America may turn out to be a challenge for "Fresh-Off-the Boat" immigrants. Ankita says:

> When I arrived in the U.S., I knew very good "Indian convent-school English", but I had difficulty making myself understood because my accent was so different from the American accent. Also, I felt

[60] But lapses do occur. In 2003, the Indian Chief Executive Officer of the American branch of Infosys, an Indian software company, was removed from his post following charges of sexual harassment against him. His former secretary, an American woman, successfully sued him for sexual harassment at work.

> uncomfortable driving on the "wrong" side of the road. I had to figure out the values of dollars, dimes, cents and pennies, and someone had to explain how to work the coin-operated laundry machine before I could wash my own clothes!

Jishnu says: "I arrived in Boston airport tired and hungry after a grueling 18 hour flight from Bombay, and I could not even get a coke from the soda dispenser since I didn't know how to operate it! And all around me were the sounds of video game stations that I had never seen or heard before!"

Rani used to keep track of cricket scores when she was in India, but in the U.S. all her classmates talked of was American football and baseball. She says she could not relate to them.

Pramiti wears a *sari* to work. She dons her lab coat over her *sari*. She is a laboratory assistant in a university in San Francisco. She says: "People in the university rarely comment on my *sari*. Now I drive to work, but earlier I used to take the bus. Then my *sari* and my long hair attracted so much attention; so many men, blacks and Hispanics too, tried to act fresh with me. The movie Alladin was showing at that time. They said I looked like an Arabian princess!"

"Fresh-Of-the-Boat" Indians are the subject of much immigrant humor. A popular inside joke is about a "F.O.B." Indian vegetarian who is very hungry. He orders a cheese burger at McDonald expecting to find only cheese in it. He is outraged to find a meat

burger between the buns! This story is often told at Indian immigrant parties and get-togethers.[61]

In general, American global cultural and economic clout attract people from all over the world. They want to enjoy the good life here. But ironically, once they are here, visitors, sojourners and immigrants experience the shock of arrival. In comparison to India, social behavior and public/ private interactions are very different here. Role expectations are enormously different. This makes it difficult to hold on to old social and personal behaviors and ideas. In this process of change, the self/ identity is jolted, and a questioning of the old idea of self and identity is inevitable.

Ankita explains,

> In India, I was considered fair [of complexion], my height was about the Indian average height. I could speak good English, I wore fashionable locally-made clothes. But here, surrounded by pink complexions, and deodorized Americans, I suddenly felt very dark, short and bad smelling. My clothes, even the skirts, shirts and pants I had bought for myself in India, seemed strange, ill-fitting, and completely out of fashion in the U.S. At the bus stop white people stood as far from me as possible, and Hispanic women, mistaking me for one of them, often asked me the time or bus routes in Spanish. In shops, sales people, though trained to be polite, were reluctant to serve me. Whereas in India, the sales people would sense my upper/middle class status at once, and hasten help me, saying "*Namaste Madam, aap kya lenge*?" [Madame, how can I help your respected self?]. When I arrived in America, I felt like someone had cut off the ground beneath my feet!

Old ways do not make sense in the new context. The inner "I" continues to be Indian, the outer "Me" is also still Indian, but the individual realizes that her/his social behavior is inadequate in the new setting. Hence there is an attempt to change oneself.

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[61]McDonald recently opened a few branches in the major cities of India, but beef burgers are still not on the menu there. Only chicken, fish, and mutton burgers are sold in Indian McDonald outlets. The global is available locally, but with a local twist.

Indians undergo racinization when they come to the U.S. Their class position is lost upon exit from India and arrival in the United States. They are no longer middle or upper class English-speaking privileged youth, they are nothing but economically disadvantaged brown students or entry level workers when they arrive in the U.S. In fact, they are also repeatedly asked to prove the legality of their presence in the U.S. This is what Rosemary George has referred to as the fall from "expatriate aristocrat to immigrant nobody" (George 1997).

Women who have not lived in the U.S. for long, or have not been in the American workforce for long, are discomfited by demands to shuttle back and forth between their "want to fit in with Americans" role and their "I am an Indian" role. They are extremely confident of their technical knowledge in their field of expertise, but they are unsure about how to interact with Americans in social situations. They fear that due to a mutual unfamiliarity with each other's cultures, even casual conversation between most Indians and Americans is going to be awkward at best. There is little overlap between the cultural models Indians and Americans bring into any social interaction with each other.

For example, Niharika, a software engineer at Mallory-Powers has been in the U.S. for only three years. She is confident about work-related interactions with her colleagues, but she admits that she is at a loss about how to make small talk with her non-Indian "mainstream" American colleagues, "I think professionally they [Americans] perceive us like most Americans," and, "Professionally they [Americans] treat you absolutely as equals, there is nothing like "You come from India, you are different." There is no difference whatsoever professionally." But she feels that it is not easy to interact with most Americans at a social level,

> Personally, I'm not so sure how they would [pause] I mean I don't even know what kind of idea, most of them have, most of them are quite ignorant about other countries, right? So I don't think they know much about Indians and Indian women and all that. I was taking a course in University of California, Santa Cruz Extension College. So there I picked up one American, I mean I became friends with one American guy. He was very nice. He was very interested in India; so it is easy to talk to such people.

But most Americans are not so interested in India. Niharika repeated her litany of complaints about the difficulty of conversing with most of her American co-workers. She had observed that "People don't interact personally with each other at work" as far as she had seen, everyone has his or her own coterie of "friends who are different from work [friends]." Yet, sometimes she felt that "the things that make a difference" in office politics were seemingly insignificant things such as small talk after a meeting. And that was precisely what Niharika herself lacked,

> I mean, after a meeting you wouldn't really love to make small talk with your American peers. Like, what would you discuss, you don't know what they enjoy discussing, so at the most you can discuss a movie or some music. If they are Indian, you can discuss a lot of things. For example, you can discuss the situation in India….So I think having a rapport with a co-worker outside of professionalism, it's a little more difficult probably. If he is American and he doesn't know anything about India, he wouldn't know anything about your concerns, your hopes, your worries…..Here I guess half of them just know about India because there are so many Indians here. Don't know the difference between India and Pakistan and Bangladesh. So you can't really discuss India's war with Pakistan because an American won't even know what you are talking about. I mean, it makes work a little more boring.

Like Niharika, Shreya has also been in the U.S. for three years. Having completed a master's degree in biochemistry in an American university, Shreya is now a research scientist at a bio-pharmaceutical company in the Bay Area. She expresses her problem with transitions between her "self at work", and her "self at home", in this manner:

"Obviously I act differently at home and at work. At home I can kid around, but at work, even though I do that sometimes, I understand that in the office environment I have to act in a more mature manner. I am not hundred percent myself at work. At home I can say whatever I want to, but that is not possible at work." The difference in her "work self" and "home self" is more than the difference we all feel between the freedom of home and the challenge to keep up with work deadlines and behave in a manner acceptable to all our colleagues at work. This is apparent from Shreya's admission that she is not "hundred percent at work", meaning that she is not herself at work. She is herself only at home, and her home is permeated with Indian, specifically Bengali culture, not "American culture", "I like to read Bengali books in my free time. We rarely go to the movies. I don't feel like absorbing the culture of the U.S." Shreya insists that language is not a problem in her interaction with Americans, but she can't understand their humor. She eagerly waits to come home from work so that she can speak in Bengali with her husband, brother, and her friends.

Shreya points out that she had a good chance to make friends at school; at school one is thrown together quite a bit, working side by side in the lab on common projects etc. But there too, Shreya got the feeling that Americans are on a different wavelength: "At school, I couldn't relate to anyone." She thinks that one of the reasons she found it difficult to relate to anyone was that having gotten married at twenty-two, she was the only one in her class who was married.

Meera is a software tester at Star Microsystems. She has been in the U.S. for the last five years. Meera makes a conscious effort to mould her "for presentation to Americans self" such that it is acceptable to her "mainstream" American colleagues. She

explains that she never wears Indian clothes to her place of work because there are really very few Indians in her company. If there had been a few more of them then she would have considered wearing *salwar-kameej* once a week because, “There is nothing bad in it. They really appreciate it.” She also tries to follow an unwritten dress code that she has observed in her office: technical workers like her seldom go to work “decked up”, but Human Resources people and receptionists wear quite dressy clothes.

Having worked in a small Indian startup company initially, Meera was very happy to get a job at a well-known American company like Star Microsystems (this is not the actual name of her company; pseudonyms have been used throughout this dissertation in order to protect the identities of my interviewees). She said that she was learning a lot of new things at Star, and I believe that her “work self” was making corresponding changes in itself. She confided that she had hated the back-biting and exploitative attitude she had encountered at her previous, Indian-run company. The work environment at Star is much nicer; it is an “American environment”: people are generous with praise when she does good work, but on the other hand, they are also willing to speak to her directly if something is bothering them. Meera stated that personally, she has never faced any racial prejudice. But she has heard of the so-called “glass ceiling” for people of color trying to enter higher management.

Though Meera is quick to praise work-related habits of her American colleagues, she seems less sure when it comes to social matters. She does not have any non-Indian friends, she knows few Americans at a social level, and the only Americans she interacts with on a regular basis are her office co-workers. It did not seem to me that she is very friendly with anyone in particular at work. She brings her lunch with her every morning,

she always eats lunch at her own at her desk, seldom venturing into the company cafeteria. Meera had this to say in general about "American culture", "I don't like American culture. They are a bit too independent. The women." But at the same time, Meera expresses a great admiration for certain aspects of American culture, "There are a lot of things also to learn from them, from the Americans, like…their honesty, which is very lacking among Indians still. All Indians here are educated, but still they are dishonest. Americans are much more honest. There is no comparison."

Navneet, a systems analyst in E-Equip, a computer company in the Silicon Valley, tries hard to fit in with her non-Indian "mainstream" American co-workers. She always wears carefully selected Western outfits bought in annual clearance sales in up-market department stores. There are few Indians in her office, no one in her company wears Indian clothes. She dislikes the idea of "sticking up like a sore thumb," so she too wears Western clothes to work. But despite this effort to blend, for some reason or the other, she has not been able to make too many friends at work. She explains, "There is not much interaction…I was totally isolated in the last job." In her previous job she was the only person handling the project she had been assigned. She asked to be moved to another group. But she is not happy in this new group, and wonders what it is that is troubling her, "I am not sure whether there is racial discrimination, but it may turn out to be so." Most of the people in this group are Israelis. They talk to each other in their own language, ignoring her "unless there is something specific [to tell her] such as "there is a meeting today."" Navneet complains, "Day by day it is getting worse." The Israelis come together, have lunch together, and leave together, leaving Navneet out of everything socially. Navneet finds it "pretty uncomfortable."

It is interesting that the only incident of an Indian worker feeling "pretty uncomfortable" due to ethnic marginalization that I have recorded in my interviews was caused by the behavior of another immigrant group. It was not caused by the behavior of native-born "mainstream" Americans. I think this is illustrative of the relatively high standard of racial equity in the American workplace. I believe that native-born Americans, especially those in professionally-trained technical or academic occupations, seldom practice conscious or significant racism or ethnic discrimination. The incidence of racially-motivated action by native-born Americans is minimal in the American workplace, especially in occupations in which at least a graduate degree is required for employment.[62]

Going back to Navneet's story, Navneet has taken courses in computer science at Oregon State University and at San Jose University. She felt no discrimination there. But she did feel that other students were "hesitant to include" her in their group.

My thesis is that newly arrived immigrants imagine that their familiarity with Western culture has equipped them to deal with life in America, but once they arrive on U.S. shores, new immigrants from India are perplexed by their difficulties in socializing with native-born Americans or other ethnic groups resident in the United Sates.[63]

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[62] However, my subjects indicated that when the chips are down and pink slips are being handed out, racism rears its ugly head, and browns are often let go before Euro- Anglo Americans.

[63] But the longer Indian immigrants function in this situation, the better they become at dealing with it. They learn to 'be American' so as to successfully interact with 'mainstream' Americans, and they also learn to 'be Indian' when their American friends ask them about India.

(II) MIDDLE DURATION INDIAN WORKING WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

(a) Fitting in – The Americanization of the Self

Indians who have spent at least two years in the U.S. become familiar with the American accent, linguistic phrases, driving practices, gender-interaction expectations, hand gestures, body language, foods, apparel, workplace etiquette, recreational pursuits, holiday traditions, T.V. shows, sports, and a myriad other collectively-know entities that constitute what is commonly referred to as "American culture". This makes it easier for them to function in the U.S. Shupriya says: "After a year or two here, which were spent studying in graduate school, I learnt to function in America. Not just driving, and the accent etc., I now understand the jokes, and even the reference to American T.V. shows. I can talk to anybody here without any problem." Rani says "Coming from India, I was a big cricket fan, but I had no idea about American football or baseball. So it was often difficult to join sports-related conversations, especially at work. So I made a special effort to learn about those sports, and now I keep up with the games and scores, I can easily understand and join in such conversations!"[64]

Cultural adjustment occurs in men as well as women. Of course, those Indian women who work outside the home are given more opportunities to experience U.S. culture than those who spend most of their time in their homes. In the words of my informants, Indian working women "adjust to the U.S." much faster than Indian non-working women do. Asian Indian immigrant women who are employed outside the home

[64] In fact she organizes a Super Bowl party at her home every year and is an extremely vocal fan of the team from her *alma mater*.

find it easy to adjust to American culture since they have more money to spend on buying themselves the consumer commodities that signify middle-class membership in America. Rajmani buys new clothes and shoes for herself regularly at seasonal sales at departmental stores. She exclaims, "I *love* to shop – and I *need* new things, I have to look OK when I show up at work!"

Indian women know that in India, "decent" women are expected to uphold certain norms, such as maintaining a distance from all men they are not related to, and avoiding alcohol. But immigrant Indian women, especially those among them who interact with non-Indians through work, learn that in America, women are expected to act friendly with men, to make conversation, and they are expected to have at least one alcoholic drink in certain social situations. They learn to avoid being perceived as "shy" and "unsociable". Charulata says that she only drank fruit juice or soda when she first accompanied her American classmates to the university pub, "But after a few visits, my friends persuaded me to drink beer. Now I have a no problem having alcoholic drinks. I don't enjoy it, but I am not uncomfortable either."

Also, in some traditional corporations in the Indian homeland, even white-collar workers are expected to be feudally servile while interacting with their boss, but in the United States, mutual cordiality is the hallmark of worker-supervisor relations. Niharika says she was "scared" of her boss in India, but her American boss is "friendly".

(b) *Deshe* / *ei deshe*: The Contested Self in the New Country and in the Homeland

Adjustment to the U.S. is often accompanied by some amount of emotional withdrawal from "back home", that is, India. What seemed "normal" and "regular" in India no longer seems so, and what seemed "strange" in America now appears "OK". It

sometimes takes an outsider to see what is strange, and having become relative strangers to India, my subjects noticed many discomfiting trends in India. Almost all the women I spoke to constantly made comparisons of their experiences in India (*deshe*, in the homeland) and in the United States (*ei ideshe*, in this nation).[65] I had expected to find that most Indian immigrant women are uncomfortable in the United States. What I actually did find was that the comfort level depended on the duration of residence in the U.S. The longer the women spent in the U.S., the more comfortable they became here. Also, Indian immigrant working women are slightly more comfortable with native-born Americans than non-working Indian women. This is because women employed outside the home get more opportunities to mingle with non-Indians and become familiar with American culture than non-working female immigrants.

An unexpected finding was that many Indian immigrant women gradually begin to experience a pronounced lack of comfort in India. This discomfort surfaced during their visits to India. Time is again an important factor. The lack of comfort in India is directly related to the length of residence in the United Sates. Antara, a university professor, says, "In two years, I will have spent as long in California as I spent in India. India seems removed from me the longer I stay here. I've lived in California since 1981. I am not in touch with India anymore. For example: money. A hundred rupees now is nothing, where as it was our monthly stipend when I was there. In that sense, I am getting

[65] Rosemary George reminds us that, "What the hyphen in home-country make explicit are the ideological linkages deemed necessary for the subjects who are at home in a social and political space and even more acutely for those who are, because of geographical distance or political disenfranchisement, outside their "legitimate" space. Home-country and home resonate differently from different locations for different subjects and often even for the same subject at different locations" (George 1996:17).

further and further removed, and what I remember about India is very different from what it is now."

Rani, a research scientist, says, "We do watch Hindi movies once in a while, but I don't enjoy. I feel very disconnected from the current Indian movies, so the only Indian movies I enjoy are the older Hindi movies of fifteen-twenty years ago that I can identify with."

Megha, a university professor, is quite aware that she doesn't feel totally at home in India any more, but she also acknowledges that she does not feel completely at home in America. She says,

> I really have come to believe that at this point in my life I am just as comfortable in India as I am in America. That is, I've spent eighteen years of my adult life here…. Which means that I understand life here. I am interested in a wide range of things that interest Americans, a wide range of things that interest Indians, you know. And I am perfectly happy to be one or the other …… I have come into an identity which I think is…. transnational…I feel comfortable in both places [India and U.S.A.], but in both places I am slightly uncomfortable also. That's just who I am. I will forever be somebody who'll never be hundred percent comfortable anywhere.

Suchitra Pal similarly says that she knows she is never going to be fully comfortable either in India or the U.S. In India she is perceived as extremely Westernized because of her attire, she usually dresses in shirts and pants. A schoolteacher in a boarding school, and later, a graduate student in an American university, she put off marriage and motherhood until she was in her forties. Her single status confounded her relatives for long, they put it down to her being too Westernized and consequently, far too independent for her own good. Paradoxically, in the U.S., she feels an urge to be Indian. She feels more Indian in the U.S. than in India,

> The moment I am away from India, my Indianness surfaces. In India, everyone in my family saw me as someone who kept off the beaten track, someone who read life differently. Plus, I used to wear jeans and skirts there, which meant to my family that I was Westernized. But here I like to listen to Bengali songs, I see Hindi movies, I am very particular about eating Indian, that is, the Bengali foods I ate before I came here. I wear Indian clothes, I feel the urge to wear Indian. The emphasis is so that I don't leave my Indian identity ….. I am an Indian who wants to incorporate what is good in this society for my own good and for the good of my family. But I don't want to lose my Indian identity.

Aparajita, a Human Resources Manager explains that she loves to visit India, but she frequently finds herself chaffing against the lack of hygiene there, "A few things [that] I used to eat earlier such as *phuchka* [snacks sold by street-vendors], now I feel disgusted……the kitchen towel with which they wipe everything there, it is so dirty, it disgusts me. That is a little bit of a problem. Earlier I did not notice all these things, now I can't help noticing them a little bit. She notices the absence of good customer service there,

> Another example would be customer service. ……I am now acutely aware of the difference in customer service between India and the U.S. *Deshe* [in India], if you go to the post-office, in your whole life you will never see their teeth [never see the postal clerks smile]. If you want an inland letter for ten rupees, they will say, "Give the exact change." It is not so much that they want the exact change as it is the brusque manner in which they demand it. On such occasions, one thinks of the post-offices here. Here the very first thing they say is, "Hi! How can I help you?" Here they greet you, and second, they are much more cooperative. Now days, I pick up on all these things. Earlier, I too would have replied in the same brusque tone they used with me, "No, I don't have change." But now I can no longer speak in that manner. I have gotten used to the way they speak here. So I do face those problems there……So I am comfortable *deshe* [in India] but there are a few problems.

Also, on her recent visits to India, Aparajita has found the impractical dress code there quite irritating,

> There is no dress restriction at my home, but however hot and uncomfortable I feel, I can't go visiting other people's homes wearing shorts! Once one gets used to all these comforts….[But] these are just passing thoughts, things that occur to you once or twice. I would not say that they are major problems. There are no restrictions at home, but of course, I can't roam around in pants in Polash-Bedhiya [Polash-Bedhiya is a small town in the rural backwaters of Bengal], though I could do that in Baligunj or New Alipore [these are slightly Westernized, "modern" middle-class and upper middle-class neighborhoods in Kolkata]. Still, I do wear *salwar-kameejes*, not *saris*. This time it was awfully hot there. I didn't wear any *saris*, I wore *salwar-kameejes*. But still, if I visited someone and a load-shedding occurred, then the thought would cross my mind, "How comfortable I would be if I could change into my shorts now!" But of course, that is not possible [load-sheddings are state arranged power-outages that are meant to reduce the consumption of electric power resources by the public].

Though Niharika, a software engineer at M-P, is not too concerned about the practical issues Aparajita brings up, she mentions her social unease on her recent visits to India. Both her parents and her parents-in-law live in Kolkata. She was born and raised in that city. She explains, "Personally, if I go back to Kolkata, I am not sure where exactly I would fit in…Now you've seen something better. Not exactly better or worse, more like, how do I explain it? For example, when I used to live in Kolkata, there was obviously a lot of, not quite gossip, I mean you obviously pay a lot of attention to what people are thinking about you and whether you wore this or you wore that." In Kolkata, a conservative city, a female software engineer was an oddity,

> The place I worked in Kolkata was a semi-government concern, and people there were pretty old and conservative, and they really hadn't [pause], and this was like five years back, so women software engineers were fewer than now. So they were not really used to working with girls. So I think that made all the difference….[I was] more of an exhibit, and people don't really believe that you are an engineer. And there, it's like a different world.

Besides feeling anxious about what her place would be in the male dominated working world in Kolkata, Niharika also feels that her work vs. family priorities are no longer synchronous with those of her old friends in Kolkata, “Also what I find now-a-days when I go home…. I mean with my family I’m still the same, but with my friends, I don’t know, there is something sometimes. You feel like they’ve kind of become different. I mean you sort of feel that they’ve become more, “homely” I think is the right word. They are concerned about things which don’t concern you because you’ve never been in that situation.”

Niharika explained that most of her old friends in Kolkata are married, they live in joint families with their parents-in-law. Most of them are employed. Some of them have one or two children, “Still, what I think is, maybe I was always more ambitious than my friends, but they are ready to sacrifice their career. I mean, they don’t think twice about doing it. If they have a baby, probably they’ll leave a job. In these ways they are a little bit different. But I don’t know if they were always like that, or because I have changed.”

Niharika is quite certain that living in the United States has changed her personality in many ways,

> I think you gain a lot of confidence. At least it is an unfamiliar environment and you walk in with, you know, so-called “foreigner” [status]. And you get exposed to more new things, like, like you become much more independent. That is, I think if you leave home and go anywhere you become more independent. But here, since you do everything on your own, you are more, like, independent……For the same reason, I think you might become a little more aggressive than you were back in India. You know, in India you tend to accept things.

She explains that in Kolkata she believed that every woman should be the "center" of her home and family, but now she knows that was wrong. She feels she was being trained to live her life in certain manner, but now she knows that is not the only "correct" way to live her life, "For generations people have been feeding you things about women being the center of the family, of the home. Those things I think tend to matter less in this country. I mean, you know that they are important, but they are not important in the same way as was portrayed to you back in Kolkata."

Meera is a software tester at Star Microsystems. She and her husband want to return to India for good within a few years. Meera is concerned that now that she has become used to the comfort and independence of living in the United States, she will find it difficult to re-adjust to life in India,

> We plan to go back to India for good after about five years. But after five years, when I really have to go back, I don't know how much I will be accepting the thing. It's now in the mind that I will return, but how many compromises I will have to make at the actual time of return!……Compromises in everything. First of all, what sort of job will I get after returning to India? Forget my job, my husband's job is very important. And we are very keen to return to Kolkata. Now Kolkata has not developed that much in software yet. So we can stay in Kolkata only if the affordability we have here can be maintained there. Otherwise it is impossible to live in Kolkata. So we go there and build a house for ourselves. Or even if we can't build a house, I hope the company will give us a house. And then to maintain a car. The good lifestyle we have here, it is not quite possible in Kolkata. First thing, you have to get a salary like that. Then I will get a job. That will be no problem because I am very flexible in what I do. I can start in any position. That is no problem. But I don't know. If I have some experience, I cannot go back to where I started. Anyway, leave alone my job, my husband's job is the main thing.

Meera believes that in India, she will miss many things that she takes for granted here, "What I like about U.S.A. is, first thing, their independence to drive a car on the road. I have driven a car in India too, but there I never drove in such a tension-free

manner. And of course, comfort is here. The standard of living. Not that we have a very high standard of living here. But still, I would say that there is a difference in [pause]. I traveled by car in India too, all that, but still the comfort level is much more here."

Meera believes that in some ways, she is happier here in the U. S. than in India. At least, here she can escape the interference of family members, she can avoid "the nuisance that relatives occasionally make of themselves." She says,

> I definitely think that after staying here for a few years I have developed a bad habit, I feel irritated if relatives interfere too much in my affairs. That is a very big point because it causes a lot of problems for a lot of people. Once you get into the habit of living on your own [pause], here no one [else] gets to know anything at all. *Deshe* [in India] you have to be very careful actually, for example, your home has to be tidy all the time. People might drop in at any time. They don't bother to ring you up to let you know that they are going to visit you. All that. Besides, here I don't have to carry out too many responsibilities to my *sasur-bari* [literally: father-in-law's house; means husband's family].....After having lived here so well [pause], as one gets older, it becomes very difficult to adjust [when one returns to India].

Shupriya, a systems auditor in the Bay Area, misses her parents and siblings in Delhi very much. In fact, when she lost her husband three years ago, she thought of moving back to Delhi for good. But ultimately she stayed on here because she came to the conclusion that there are some things here which will not be available to her in India. For example, she takes her own personal freedom to make choices in her career for granted in the U.S., but she will not have too much of it in India's conservative society. She says,

> I think I can live anywhere. I am not really wedded to any place. I've moved around so much. I can go and live in India too. It's not that just because I've lived here for eighteen years, I won't be able to live in India. I was very seriously thinking, at one point, of going back. Not for anything [else], but just to have some family support. But I decided, "O. K., let me see if I can do this on my own." The pro [of living in the United States] is

> that life is easier here in many ways. Easier, [pause]. I think it gives you a lot of freedom. Even if you have a liberal family or whatever, [pause]. Career choices. If I want to go back to school today, I can. Because I am older, that doesn't prevent me. I may want to become a curator in a museum, and go back and do art history, do a Masters. I don't think people are going to call me weird. I don't think you can do that in India. They are not going to allow you to do that. That's a bit weird. That's a big pro, the choices that you have here.

Gargi is sixty years old; she has lived in the United States for twenty-three years. Having taught at a Northern Californian university for almost two decades, she has now retired. Her current occupation is translation, she translates Gujarati literature into English. Gargi visited India regularly ever since she came to the U.S., and she still makes annual visits to India, "I am a product of the forties, I cannot imagine living away without touching base for some time. I just have to go and breathe that air, have those interactions. And, you know, my work also cannot be done with that length of time [away from India]. I start feeling restless after a year or so. I have to go back and breathe that air, live in that environment for a little while, re-charging my batteries, come back, and then live."

By now, Gargi is relatively free of any responsibilities in India. But in the past, she had to discharge all her duties to her old and ailing parents and parents-in-law. Besides, she also had to help her younger siblings and her husband's siblings in the two or three months she spent in India. She missed her son and her husband who always returned to the U.S. after only a week or two in India. The annual visits to India took their toll on Gargi's health and peace of mind. The burden of duty, and the pressure to complete all her tasks within the period of her vacation did not allow her to enjoy her visits to India, they were a big strain on her,

> Every year I went for three to four months to take care of them [her own parents and her husband's parents]. And that kind of put a lot of strain on

> my health also. Because I was trying to give so much in those three months. I was trying to compensate for the whole year's absence in those three months. When my father was sick, and then, my mother became ill, my parents-in-law were not well for many many years, they were ailing for many years. And I would go, my husband [pause], our son was small at that time. He was ten to twelve, between his age twelve to his age fifteen. And we could not all go. So my husband and I took turns to take care of them. And that was a big strain with a young child who needed constant care. In fact, a teenager needs as much care in this country as a small child. So that was a lot of strain.

Again,

> And also it caused more health problems [for us] because we were overdoing it. We were exerting every time we went home, every year for some two to three months. I'll be there for some two to three months, he'll be there for some two to three months, by taking turns like that. Well, I did it at a stretch, two to three months, which was a lot more for my husband [to be on his own here]. And my son missed me for some three months a year for some four to five years. So I was straining myself trying to compensate for my absence in their times of trouble, and that was a hardship.

Thus, according to Gargi's testimony, more often than not, her visits to *desh*, the homeland, that is, India, were with the sole objective of helping out her ailing parents and parents-in-law. And these visits were no pleasure, they were an "exertion", a "strain", a "hardship" that had to be endured for the sake of duty. Thus India remains "home" at some level of Gargi's consciousness, but it becomes a site of mostly negative and uncomfortable experiences.

On the other hand, *ei desh*, this country, is the location of new and liberating experiences for Gargi. Amitava Kumar writes of how immigrants from the Indian sub-continent are released from the grip of rigid traditions and fixed cultural habits when they settle in the new country, they can construct a new self here. Kumar stresses the freedom to be oneself in America, "In the diaspora, especially, culture and lives can, and often do,

find new undiscovered forms. So that immigrants balance the conceit of a preserved heritage against the unanticipated and fairly uncanny elaboration of new identities that are liberating" (Kumar 2000:229). The influence of the individualistic American culture allowed Gargi to decide to follow her own interests rather than be tied down to her former unfulfilling career. She made up her mind to break free of her old unsatisfying position as a part time instructor and to try to build a new and exciting one as a translator of literature. Though she hasn't made much money since she has resigned from her former position, Gargi has already made a name for herself in her second career; she has published two books, and in 1998, the government of India awarded her the Sahitya Akademy Award for her contributions to Indian literature.

Gargi is certain that she would not have been able to make the bold career switch that she made if she had stayed back in India. If she had lived in India she would have continued to try to be the person her family elders wanted her to be,

> The slow death and the distance from my extended family, because some of the members died, and also emotionally, I grew emotionally more distant as time passed, that enabled me to act more freely in many, many ways. For example, the switching off of a physics career, from professional physics to someone who just pursues literature for its own sake, does translation, it's not a paying job. It's just a labor of love. So if I were close to my family, if they, if I had lived in India, it would have been physically closer, and perhaps emotionally closer too. I don't think I would have been able to change so easily, because of the idea of not doing the same thing all your life, sort of investing in a career, and then pushing it away and moving on to something else is something very akin in the American way of thinking. So maybe, if I had never come here, I would have been more reluctant and more hesitant about switching disciplines. It would have been harder too in India, because one salary is not enough to keep a family. So I should say that the end result, I have been [through] a lot of agony in the earlier part of my life because of sheer physical distance from my extended family to which I was very close. And [in] this later part of my life, I have this sense of freedom, not only because my elders in the family have died, so they are no longer there to judge me, but

> also because the environment in this country thinks nothing of moving from one field to another, changing subjects, doing as one pleases, rather than following any particular expectations……I find myself totally free, you know, this American individualism in determining your life needs, you sort of make yourself, self-creation kind of thing, and not with anyone in mind, you could be doing it just for your own sake, which is very much a Western sense. It was certainly not bred in me in India.

After having spent more than two decades in this country, Gargi seems to have finally come into her own,

> I was not truly [a] self-determined individual until this late in my life, self-determined individual from my own view point, not from the view point of anyone outside. And suddenly, it seems to me it doesn't even matter if anyone outside knows what I am doing or not, because it is entirely my own life that I am managing……You know, when you are a product of India, as I am, you have this sense that your life is not just your own, your life is your parents', your parents-in-law's, your brothers' and sisters', you know, every body else's….I cannot say that I am free of that sense. You're never free from a sense that is bred in you, you have sort of been conditioned by so much. But there is this other thing that has started seeping in, that your life is only your business and nobody else's in the ultimate analysis.

Mayuri also mentions that she cannot bear to live in the U.S. for more than a year without "re-charging her batteries" by going on a month-long vacation to India. But in India, after a month or two, she longs to return to the U.S., for that is "home".

Kalyani says that she hopes that by visiting India frequently, her daughter will come to know India. Also, she loves to shop for *saris* and *salwar-kameejes* to be worn at Indian get-togethers in the U.S. But she dislikes staying in India for too long because her U.S. raised daughter frequently gets diarrhea and other tropical infections in India. Relatives feed her food bought from the market and cooked under unhygienic conditions. Also, the eight-year-old girl is sensitive, and the disease and poverty she sees in India upset her. On their last visit to India, Kalyani distributed small bags of rice to beggars at

the Kali temple. Her daughter was upset by the violence of the beggars fighting over the rice.

Navneet is a computer systems programmer at E Equip. She is in her late twenties. She has been married to Gurdeep for a little more than two years. She loves to visit India, in fact she would be happy to return to India for good. But her visits to India are not entirely enjoyable, she cannot spend her entire vacation with her mother and her grandparents at Chandigarh, Punjab. As the *bahu* (daughter-in-law) of her husband's family, she is expected to spend a considerable chunk of her time in India at her *sasural* (the home of her parents-in-law) in Patiala, a small town in Punjab. Navneet's mother is a professor in Punjab University. She is a very liberal and understanding woman. Navneet says," I talk very freely with my parents." But Navneet's mother-in-law is "conservative". She expects Navneet to say "*Han ji*" (Yes, Madam) to her all the time, she wants Navneet to behave in a meek and deferential manner with all her elders in her *sasural* [in-law's home]. Navneet feels her husband's family is "different" from her own family. Fortunately, Gurdeep is "different" from his own family, he is not as conservative as they are. Though Navneet's mother has visited them in the U.S., Gurdeep's parents have never done so, Navneet says they are "too old" to travel. In the U.S., Navneet doesn't have to worry about Gurdeep's family too much, but it is a different story during her visits to India. She avoids spending too much time at the *sasural*; she spent two days there after her wedding, and again, ten days during a recent visit to India. But she is made to feel guilty for not spending longer there, and this difficult part of her vacation prevents her from being entirely comfortable in India.

Shreya is a research scientist in a biopharmaceutical company in the Bay Area. She is in her mid twenties. She is married, and has been in the U.S. for three years. She mentions a number of different factors that make her uncomfortable in India ever since she migrated to the U.S.:

> I didn't realize that, like, living here [in the United States] [pause], until I returned *deshe* [to the homeland] for the first time, I used to always tell Gautam [her husband] that we will stay here only for a few years. As soon as we have saved some money, we will return to India. When I went back to India I realized that here we take a lot of things for granted that we will not get in India. Of course, I have lived for twenty two years in India, if I have been able to live there before, then I will be able to live there even after I return there. [But] I realized at that time [pause], first of all transport. It takes so long to go from one place to another in Kolkata. Even if you take a taxi, or go by car, whatever means you travel by. Here because of the highway system, we go thirty five miles in thirty minutes. We can visit our friends' homes whenever we want to, however far away they live. And maybe because this is California, we can go sight seeing over the weekend to some beautiful spot that is not too far away. And another thing, everything is so clean and hygienic here. These things stand out, you can't help noticing them.

Shreya points out that besides her living conditions, her work facilities are also much better in the U.S. than they were in India,

> One thing that I have realized is that I have learnt a lot after having come here, especially as far as my studies and my work are concerned. I learnt a lot in my first year. We may learn theory in our country, but we don't get a chance to learn much practical stuff. Here, I have had to learn instrumentation, basic stuff, the ABCs of instrumentation, from scratch. Maybe at that time I felt, "Oh no! Everything is new here!" But looking back, I am happy I could learn all that.

All the women I have quoted here, currently experience some sort of discomfort that they had not felt before in India. Before it was their home, most things there seemed natural and proper. And even if everything did not feel completely right, the women did not notice it, or think too much about it. But now that they have been exposed to new

culture here in the U.S.A., they notice things that seem wrong or out of place. This is because their sensibilities have changed. The change has been profound in some cases and subtle in others. While many of the women I talked to say that America is their home now, others feel that that they belong to both India and America; they have no single or true home anymore. A third group consists of women who still consider India their home. But none of them accept India unquestioningly the way they did before. In fact, while it is true that Indian immigrants use Indian standards to understand America, it is also true that while in *desh*, that is, in India, they use standards acquired in America to judge India. I believe that immigrant experience not only in America, but also in India, is the site for self-contention, for a contest between Indian and American sensibilities. The experiences and emotions of Indian immigrants in both countries is also the location of the process of the construction of the immigrant self, a self that is neither Indian nor American but betwix and between these two separate cultures.

Adjustment to the U.S. is achieved by subtle as well as radical changes in social behavior, role-playing, and presentation of self. As Goffman has argued, all social contact, whether public or private interaction, is a dramaturgical production in which the self is presented. Cooley and Mead have also emphasized the importance of role playing and social exchange communicated through symbolic interaction. The subjects of my research learned to modify the presentation of their selves in light of the fact that their audience was no longer Indian, it was now American. Dramaturgical changes in the histrionic production of self were accompanied by learning the symbolic meanings of words and actions unique to the U.S. Within a few years of arrival in the U.S., my interviewees became quite familiar with the shared symbolic systems of American

culture. Naturally, the degree to which they succeeded in mastering American culture depended on many variables, such as previous knowledge of Western culture, type of occupation, time spent in the American workplace, and so on. New "American" roles were adopted, and old "Indian" ones were often abandoned. New local role-models emerged. Of course, familiarity is not enough. Competence is also required. Most respondents reported that it took a few years to attain competence in the new roles. The internal psyche remained Indian, but the external "Me" is significantly American in this stage.

(c) Americanization

As expected, I found that those of my interviewees who had a) spent a few years in the U.S. and b) worked outside their home, were much more comfortable in America than newly arrived individuals. Those Indians who had resided in the U.S. for more than two years were more Americanized than those Indians who had just come to the U.S., or those who had spent a relatively short time here, and than those who did not engage in any work outside the home. As duration of residence in the U.S., and length of participation in the American labor force goes up, familiarity with the Indian environment also decreases. Working immigrant women may re-create an Indian home, but once they step out of the home, they are submerged in an American milieu. Since full-time working women spend the major portion of the day in the workplace; a diminution of Indian habits and modes of thought, and a heightened attraction towards American cultural practices and values is to be expected.

When Meera first came to the U.S., she wore only saris and *salwar kameezes*; now she wears skirts and blouses to work every day. She had learnt to drive in India but

she was rarely allowed to drive the family car in Kolkata; only her father and brother had that privilege. Now she drives her own car (her husband has a separate car). In Kolkata, she rarely ate non-Indian food, now she and her husband regularly cook what Meera calls "continental" food: soups and baked casseroles. She follows a book of American recipes that she picked up at the local mall. They also eat out at Chinese and Thai restaurants and American fast-food joints. In India, she and her friends saw many more Hindi than Hollywood movies, now Meera and her husband watch as many American films as Hindi ones. In Kolkata, Meera's husband never dreamt of helping with any household chores; in the U.S., Meera's husband does the laundry, takes out the trash, and vacuums the carpets.

(d) Economic and Familial Freedom

I also found that after a few years in the U.S., having learned the ropes of living and functioning in America, my subjects found it easier to enjoy the freedom of individual choice, unbridled consumerism, and economic ease of living that had attracted them to U.S. Having spent two years in the U.S., Kanchana says:

> I love the freedom here. I live with my husband, no one else to interfere, not even any neighbors to comment on our comings and goings; for our immediate neighbors, all Americans, don't interact with us, they don't say anything more than a "Hello" when we pass them. And I love to drive in my car. I came to the U.S. two years ago. My husband went to India, married me there, and brought me here. I have just commenced an M.B.A. in the University of California at Irvine. I have taken an apartment there, I will share it with another girl. I will drive to the Bay Area in weekends, so that I can spend the weekends with my husband. My husband is paying for everything. Can you imagine such an arrangement in India? His family would have squelched the whole thing at once, and so would mine!

Niharika says, “I love to drive around in my new car. My office is quite far from my home, but I don’t mind the commute with my favorite channel playing on the car radio.”

Meera says “I can easily buy things that would have been out of reach my in India, I would have had to wait for months together to buy them had I lived in India. I don’t buy stuff simply because I can afford to buy it here. But I know I can buy it, that makes a difference.”

(e) Remains of the Indian Self

Despite substantial Americanization during the mid-duration stage of the development of immigrant consciousness, a large percentage of day-to-day behavior and thought continues to be Indian. We observe from Meera’s example, despite her attraction to American cultural objects and consumer items, Meera has retained considerable Indianness in her food, clothes, recreational choices and so on. For example she and her husband do continue to cook and eat a lot of Indian food, she does wear Indian clothes at home, especially in the weekends, when she and her husband frequently get together with their friends, all of whom are Indian, for pot-luck lunches and dinners. Meera does *puja* every day, and she fasts on Tuesdays for Hanuman, the monkey god.[66] Her spiritual self continues to be Hindu.

(f) “Representative” of India

Into her third year of residence in the United States, Niharika is already learning what it is like to be seen as a “representative of India” by her non-Indian co-workers at

[66] Meera always adds “*ji*” to Hanuman; thus she says “Hanuman*ji*”, denoting her special respect for the god.

M-P, “I explain things to them….For example, when India made the nuclear bomb, I felt it was my duty to…that was something [about which] Americans were saying to me, “How do you feel about it?” So I felt I must defend India’s standpoint, and ….When you are talking to an American about issues in India, you are…then your so-called patriotism come the forefront. I’m sure I wouldn’t mind complaining about Jyoti Basu [the former Chief Minister of West Bengal] or Sonia Gandhi [the leader of the Congress Party] to an Indian, but I would definitely try to bring out the best in India in front of an American.”

I have shown that Niharika is uncomfortable with her role of “representative of India”, a role she often has to take on in her office by virtue of being the only Indian in the room. I believe her discomfort stems from the double-speak she has to resort to in order to show India in a good light. Whether or not she has given it much thought, she appears to be aware that her estimation in the eyes of Americans is intimately linked to their estimation of her homeland. She emphasizes positive aspects of India while presenting herself to an American audience, but in the company of Indians, her “Indian” self does not mind dwelling on the negative aspects of India, “It depends on what you are stressing on. I mean I wouldn’t complain about India’s roads to an American. I would just probably say “Yeah, they are horrible.” When you are discussing with an Indian who has been through the same roads, obviously you share your experiences….just try to put on the best. I mean, you do tell them of the problems, but you don’t complain about them, at least, I don’t.”

Kalyani has been called on to represent the spiritual side of India. Her American colleagues at work asked her about Yoga. So Kalyani invited them home one day. She played some tapes she had of Hindu Chants (*sloka* recitation), lit some incense sticks,

taught her friends a few Yoga *asanas* (postures/exercises) she had learnt as a little girl in school, and ended the evening with a home-cooked Indian meal. Kalyani says, “It was no problem for me, and my American friends from work had a nice evening, it was a different sort of an experience for them.”

(g) Code Switching and Role Changing

Another common issue I came across was difficulty in role-changing, that is, changing from “Indian American working woman” to “immigrant wife and mother”. Ankita says,

> The most difficult moment is when I come back from work to face my children, and my parents-in-law. My husband comes home from work much later. I feel like I have to shed not only my business suit and wear a *salwar kameez*, or an Indian tailored all-concealing housecoat, but I also have to shed my American attitude, the assertiveness that I pride myself upon in my office. What is the point of trying to change things? After all I am an Indian wife, so it is no surprise that I do all the housework while my husband watches T.V. or plays with the children. He does help me by occasionally taking out the trash. My mother-in-law dislikes my husband doing housework, so when she is with us I feel guilty about that too.

Here Ankita emphasizes her abrupt and painful abandonment, at the point of entry into her own home, of what she sees as assertive Americanness. This was a sentiment many of my interviewees expressed. Thus the women themselves seem to be somewhat aware that their assertive American workplace identity is at odds with the docile and submissive Indian identity deployed [and expected] in the Indian immigrant home.

How does Meera reconcile her new-found American tastes and behavioral habits, her nascent American identity, with the remnants of her Indian identity? It seems to me that Meera has considerable difficulty in switching between her Indian identity and her American identity. This was evident from her unease concerning junctures and meeting

points, the line of suture joining her Indian and American selves. For example, she spoke to me at length about her husband's office Christmas party. She said she felt strange in her colorful silk sari, and heavy gold jewelry, especially since she was surrounded by American women wearing dresses, mostly short black dresses, and subtle diamond jewelry. "But I still think I should wear a sari. After all it is a formal party. Actually I don't think even a *salwar kameez* would be decent."

(h) "Indian" in Private and "American" in Public – Mixing the Public and Private

The drive to fulfill behavioral expectations while in the American public gaze and to be accepted at the workplace is a powerful incentive for mimicking American standards of dress and deportment. Yet, in private moments, and within diasporic gatherings, middle-duration Asian Indians relax into old habits of clothing, speech, recreation, and consumption. The pattern seems to be the same for both men and women, but it is more prevalent in female immigrants. Even in India, women are the standard bearers of culture. For example, in India, middle and upper class women often wear *saris* and *salwar kameez* while in public. They usually wear the same to work. But men in the same class position wear *kurtas, churidars,* or *dhotis* more rarely. And they seldom wear Indian clothes to work. Also, women execute culture: they cook, decorate the home, and acculturate the children; hence it is the women who bear responsibilities that provide the opportunity for the deployment of ethnic culture. It follows that in the diaspora too, women perform Indian culture more often than men do. Wherever she is situated, the *Bharatiya nari* is always held responsible for upholding *Bharatiya parampara* .

While I generally found Indian immigrants to be Indian in private and American in public, there were instances where the roles were reversed. For example, on one hand,

we found Meera and her husband regularly experimenting with American food in the privacy of their home. On the other hand, we saw how Niharika was called upon to "speak" for India at her office during informal discussions about international nuclear policy. It is difficult to lead a life compartmentalized into "Indian-private" and "American-public". Hence significant areas of overlap begin developing in the middle stage of diasporic identity formation, a trend that is accelerated in the next stage.

(III) LONG DURATION INDIAN WORKING WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES: RECURSIVE PATTERN, RE-AFFIRMATION OF ETHNICITY – FINDING ONE'S PLACE

(a) Gradual Americanization in all Life-Areas with Time, Increased Skill in Code-Switching and Representation, Intensive Indianization on a Few Fronts

As time passes in the "new country" Indian immigrant women, especially working Indian immigrant women, become more and more American. As their familiarity with American culture increases due to day-to-day interaction with it, they internalize it. A significant portion of their "Indianness" and its accompanying ideology and behaviors fade away as their participation in Indian culture decreases.

But Indian immigrant women don't lose touch with their Indian self completely, for their sensibilities have been shaped in India, by Indian values and mores. That cannot be undone despite many immigrant decades out of India and many overlaying layers of American socialization. Besides, their friends are all fellow immigrants from India who help to preserve contact with their version of Indian values, fashions, food, religion, arts, and social customs. Most important of all, increased interaction with Americans

convinces them that they will always be perceived as “Indian” or “immigrant” by so-called mainstream Americans. Sometimes being seen primarily as an “Indian” is caused by positive essentialization, but even if such a gaze is motivated by friendly interest in India and Indians, essentialization nevertheless causes psychic dissonance. In fact, essentialization (sometimes positive, but more often pejorative) is a common experience of minority immigrants in the West (Espiritu 2003). I believe that after a while, diasporic Indians find that there is little point in trying to forsake their Indianness. Instead they decide they must master their role of representative of India, and become competent speakers for the Indian immigrant community here. Also, emotional attachment to India encourages nostalgia and an urge to train one’s children in Indian culture (Roy 1998). This results in a recursive pattern of Indianness.

We must not forget the discomfort with American culture expressed by Meera and Shreya, or Niharika’s lack of confidence in her ability to make small talk with American colleagues, or Rani’s and Navneet’s recognition of their lack of social connectedness with their American co-workers. Lack of comfort with the roles the Indian immigrant is expected to play is a hallmark of the first stage of self development. We can compare this with attitudes in the third stage. In this phase, the last phase, immigrants are very familiar with American culture. Of the women I interviewed, Megha, Urmila, and Shupriya displayed the characteristics of the third phase most prominently. Their behavior is marked by relative comfort in American society, and a certain confidence in their dealings, even non-professional social dealings, with “mainstream” Americans. I believe that the main factor that differentiates the two groups is length of residence in the United States, and tenure of employment here.

Megha explains her self in the following way,

> I had been in college [in the U.S.]…I think I learnt how to deal with people's ignorance of India, of the Third World. I learnt how to cope much better by the time I was in graduate school. I learnt pretty well….It depends, sometimes I ignore, sometimes I explain, sometimes I get irritated, you know. But usually, and this I am sure is because I came here so early, I usually don't feel like a foreigner….Yeah, I guess I develop a story. For example, my arranged marriage story. I say to people that we all arrange our own marriages, I mean those who have love marriages. The only difference between modern day arranged marriage (I don't mean olden days' arranged marriage) and our marriages is who does the arranging. So when people ask me about this, this is what I say, this is what I elaborate on. So I have, I guess, developed certain narratives about code words like arranged marriage and caste, and that sort of thing. [For] caste I give the race example. So yes, I have learnt how to express things in terms they understand.

Another factor that increases Megha's comfort in American society, and hence her self-conception and self-transitions, is that she has created an environment for herself in which she is culturally comfortable. The presentation of self to American audiences is relatively easy when the audience is predisposed to be sympathetic to people like Megha. She explains, "None of the people I am very close to are exactly mainstream. So in that sense, perhaps I have chosen to protect myself from the mainstream. Certainly, I've done that. The only mainstream people I encounter are my students with their multiple piercings in [their] lip and their ear. They're not exactly mainstream! I think, had I been working in Silicon Valley, I'd have a far more difficult time. And certainly, I've chosen my environment such that I'm somewhat protected."

Megha has many non-Indian friends,

> These are people who are academics in the humanities. And so, many of them have been to India, can make jokes about India, you know….We can't really be that close to people who are always going to exoticize us, to whom we remain some very distant strange person. You know. These are people who are all…Like my friend Rachel who is Jewish, her

> husband Michael actually did research in India, and she did research in Chile. So, in that sense, it's that kind of thing, um…..I have another friend, not a work friend, I met her outside. She is a very good friend. She is half-Japanese, half-Korean American. So I have friends like that also. And yes, she has never been to India, but we have something of those Old World sensibilities. You know, that we understand each other very well. And my closest friend probably is somebody who grew up here but is of Indian origin.

Megha used to live in the Midwest before she came to the university in which she now teaches. The move from to the Midwest was largely motivated by Megha's desire to create a comfortable environment for herself in the U.S.,

> I never want to live anywhere else. I think that, I love it. For all its political correctness, I find it a very open place. Both weather-wise and culturally, I love that there are so many Indians here, but you have the option. It's like when Prakash and I want to go out to have dinner, we say, what kind of food do we want? You know, that option-or when we want to listen to music, we can listen to Western music, or Latin American music, or African music, or Indian music. And those, I mean my sensibilities and tastes have become like that, very, very internationalized. So the Bay Area is just perfect for that.

Megha declares that she has reached a point of her life where she is comfortable in her personhood. Various different identities, radically contrasting roles, all of these come to the fore at different times, in different contexts. But Megha is not perturbed in the least by this juggling of roles and identities, in fact she revels in it. Sometimes the switch of identities is conscious, and at most times it is not, "So I do both [present herself both as an insider and an outsider to her American colleagues and students]. And I'm not entirely sure that it's very conscious, sometimes it is conscious, but I don't think it usually is." Inspite of the constant shuffling between identities, or maybe because of it, Megha feels that as far as her identity is concerned, she has come into her own in the last few years,

> Now I'm thirty-seven, I feel that in the last few years I have come into an identity, which I think is a truly, the trendy word I guess is transnational. But I actually believe that I am. I feel very comfortable in both places, but in both places I am slightly uncomfortable also. I will forever be somebody who'll never be hundred percent comfortable anywhere. My sister actually, she has a term for me, she calls me a hybrid rose, that I can grow anywhere, but there will be some little disease or some little problem.

Megha knows she has different selves, and she is comfortable with this knowledge. Though the transition between the "for presentation to Americans" self and the "for presentation to Indians self" and vice-versa is sometimes conscious, it is usually not conscious. Megha believes that rather than being a drawback, her lack of commitment to any single identity or cultural framework is her principle strength. She identifies her ability to survive anywhere, in any culture, to regain her well-being however many times she is uprooted and replanted, as the chief virtue of her self.

Urmila is a physician. Internal medicine is her field of specialization. Like Megha, Urmila too has been in the United States since undergraduate college. She was a premedical student at Wellesley College before she went to Medical School at the University of London. She and her husband moved to California after a short spell in the United Kingdom because they wanted to settle here. Having worked at King's Medical Group for many years, Urmila now runs two practices of her own; both are shared with one other physician. I don't suppose Urmila is exactly the same "self" in her clinic and at home. After all, even her dress is different, she wears shirts and pants to the clinic, but she wears *saris* or *salwar kameejes* in most Indian get-togethers. But rather than pointing out the different selves she presents to different audiences, Urmila prefers to emphasize the continuities in her selfhood:

> Because, you know, I've been out of India a long time…..and it's like, natural to me, that you know, I don't know. It's never been an issue basically. So I don't project myself differently. I don't try to develop an American accent like I know some people consciously do, or unconsciously. I just basically, I'm Indian, I'm a doctor. And I think Indian doctors are kind of respected by Americans almost because they usually tend to be very good. And it hasn't really been an issue. All this stuff is atypical a little because if I was in a big computer firm, having to talk to clients, I might project myself differently. I might actually go to a class and would get an American accent. That kind of stuff. But hasn't been an issue in my career. My patients – I always introduce myself as Dr. Bannerjee. Few of them I know as friends also, so they call me Urmi.

Urmila believes that she has a single cohesive identity, that of an Indian immigrant doctor, and everything she does, even her roles of wife, mother, sister, daughter, and friend, are subsumed in that one main identity. When I asked her to describe herself she said, "Immigrant, doctor, and I am quite comfortable being that. O.K. And I always stipulate that this is California and the Bay Area. And if I had ended up in Idaho or some place like that, middle of Iowa, middle of farmland, then it would be totally different." I believe what Urmila is trying to say here is that because she is in the Bay Area, in California, her work life allows her a certain amount of freedom. It allows her the freedom to be an "immigrant", hence she does not have to try to be "American". Her accent may be different, her name may be difficult for non-Indians to pronounce, but her patients and her fellow-physicians accept all that because a lot of immigrants in California bear similar characteristics. Their non-Americanisms are tolerated because they are very skilled in their respective professions. And Urmila's work life is truly marked by her immigrant status: many if not most of her patients are fellow immigrants, many of them are Indians who are personal friends of hers. Also, in one of her two clinics, her partner is another Indian immigrant physician.

The transmission of Indian culture is usually through its regional or parochial manifestations. That is the reason why most Indian immigrants in the U.S. are more involved in the activities of their regional culture organizations in the U.S., such as the American Telegu Association, the North American Bengali Association, or the Maharashtra Mandal Committee, than in pan-Indian organizations such as the Federation of Indians in America, or the Alliance of Indians in America. The closest circle of friends of most first-generation Indian immigrants invariably consists of other Indians who hale from the same region of India from which they themselves originate.

In the situation described above, the offspring of "mixed marriages" face a difficult cultural dilemma: should they follow the culture of their father's region or their mother's region? Urmila is the child of such a "mixed marriage", her father is Bengali and her mother is Sindhi (Bengal is in the Eastern corner of India, Sindh is on the Western border of India, just next to Pakistan). There is a large Sindhi community in Kolkata. Urmila's mother was born in a Sindhi merchant family that had settled in Kolkata many generations ago. Urmila's Bengali is rather rusty, as she said, and she considers English to be her "first language". Urmila is married to a Bengali, most of her friends are Bengali, and for a while she even sent her children to Bengali school, but she is not at all involved in Bengali culture of any sort. Moreover, Sindhis follow a brand of Hinduism that is very different from the Bengali Hindu *Shakto* and *Vaishnav* beliefs; they worship "*jhulen wale lal*" a regional saint. I suspect that Urmila's and her husband's attempts to introduce Indian culture to their children is complicated by Urmila's relative distance from Bengali culture, and their having to make decisions about which regional variation of Indian culture and of Hinduism they will advocate. Perhaps this is the reason

why Urmila's home life was less markedly Indian than that of any of the other women I studied. And of course, Urmila's many decades in the United States have worn away much of her Indian ideology and behavior. In Urmila's words,

> Neither of us is very religious. We do go to the Puja (Durga Puja, a Bengali religious festival). But not every time. Depending on what else we are doing over the weekend. All that. But that's not so important to us. As long as they know they are not Christian, they are Hindu, and that we should be tolerant, that, you know. We've been very open about the thing. We don't go to regular weekly [pause] to the temple or anything like that. Sometimes my son is asked, "How come you don't go to the temple?" I say we must go sometime. We are basically very relaxed about the whole thing.

Urmila said about Bengali school:

> They [her children] were going to Bangla class, and they have not been for several months because there was too much to do and too many things. It was kind of cutting into whatever else we were doing over the weekend, stuff like that. Time, it tends to get very busy in the weekends ….. I am more keen that they learn Bengali and so on than my husband is. To him that's not such a priority compared to my son's interest in basketball. So we should go to his basketball games and not miss his games because of Bangla. Or whatever their interests are – they should pursue. So I kind of go along with that. But I've been more keen that they learn the language, and I think Tushar is equally happy that they do, but in terms of priority, they are, I mean basically they are going to be here, unless they decide to go back to India. So we are basically settled down here.

Concerning their food habits, Urmila said, "They [the children] do have a preference for American food, pizza or sandwich….. My husband's main thing is there should be chicken curry. So the kids have some Indian food too, but they can't eat food that is too spicy. So quite often I do end up making something for them when they don't want to have Indian food. So that is the problem."

Urmila sees herself primarily as “immigrant doctor” and her family as an “immigrant family”, and she believes that that is how she and her family are perceived by most of the people she interacts with, including “mainstream” Americans:

> I don’t know about other areas of America. I’ve heard that it is very different in some areas in the Midwest. But here, being in California in the Bay Area, there are so many immigrants here, that basically, I think they see us as an immigrant family. So in that sense it is not such a big deal, and so cosmopolitan. And, so far, we haven’t personally felt racism.

Even the fact that almost all of the friends she interacts with in her free time are Indian does not suggest to Urmila any contradiction between her workday self and her home self, “I know in general Indians are not as well assimilated as they probably should be. Like I was saying, most of our close friends are Indian, but I don’t know. I guess we are like most other immigrant families, where your closest friends will be in your own group or whatever, country, whatever. And plus you have these other friends who are not quite as close, but you still have them.” Urmila mentions the Scottish family living in the house opposite hers as an example of her non-Indian friends; there are two small children in the family who regularly play with Urmila’s daughter. Urmila is also friends with the parents of her son’s friends. But again, “It’s never quite as close with them, although we are very comfortable with them. But if we are getting together on the spur of the moment on the weekend, it will usually be with Indian friends. But I think probably that is with any immigrant group over here….If you have a lot of friends you tend to become lazy and don’t make as much of an effort to make American friends. I think Tushar [Urmila’s husband] has more American friends because he plays golf with them and stuff. I tend not to make as much of an effort.”

About her children, Urmila says,

> I think my children are missing out a bit on Indian culture, Indian history, but you know, they learn a lot of it because we have Indian friends who keep going back and forth. We go back and forth. I think you can't expect the children to know as much about Indian life as kids there. But since they are going to be just basically Americans, I think it's fine, whatever amount they know. So I am pretty comfortable with that….There is such a huge community of immigrant-families' kids, all these kids, second-generation Indians [that] it doesn't matter.

These are pragmatic words from a woman who is speaking from the trenches, so to speak; she knows what she is talking about for she is actually in the midst of the process of raising children in the United States. Observe the contrast of Urmila's self-assured belief in the correctness of making sure her children are well-adjusted in the United States rather than "Indianized", with the over-anxious imaginings of Niharika, the software engineer at M-P who has been in the U.S. only three years and has not yet had any children,

> I feel that if you are here, the children suffer a lot. They are kind of neither here nor there. I and Sarang [husband] don't mind staying on here because I already have my roots and everything. But I think my children would suffer a lot because here children have a huge identity crisis. Most of them go around looking like Spanish [Hispanic] kids, shave their heads and that sort of thing. I guess they have to be with some majority. So I guess most of them look like Mexicans. I mean I don't want that to happen to my children.

As I have said before, I believe that in keeping with her long residence in the United States, and her long tenure of employment, Urmila had become less "Indian" than those Indian women who had recently arrived in the U.S., or those who were full-time home-makers. Contrast Urmila's lack of religious rituals with Meera's (the Star Microsystems software tester who has been in the U.S. for five years) daily *puja* (prayers), religious fasts on every Tuesday for the monkey god Hanuman, and her frequent visits to the local Hindu temple. Observe Urmila's pragmatic de-prioritization of teaching Indian

culture, represented by Bengali language classes, to her children, with the refusal of Arunima, a housewife who has been in the U.S. for five years, to respond to her children unless they speak to her in Bengali. While the “Indianness” of Urmila’s “home-self” has faded over time, her “work-day self” is not entirely engulfed by American culture. Approximately half of her patients are Indian immigrants. One of the two practices she has set up is partnered by another female Indian physician.

But in spite of Urmila’s projection of an integrated personality, that of an “immigrant doctor”, there is a major contradiction in her life. On one hand she says that Indians have not assimilated enough, they stick to friends within their own ethnic community. On the other hand, Urmila acknowledges that her children don’t get as much Indian culture as she would like in spite of Indian friends and frequent visits to India. Perhaps it is between these many prolonged progressions in many different directions that Urmila and her family have found a balance, a niche for themselves.

Shupriya came to the U.S. at the age of twenty-three. She has spent eighteen years in the United States. She is a systems auditor. Shupriya seems to have gained a certain amount of skill in juggling her “for presentation to so-called mainstream Americans” self with her “for presentation to Indians self”. She appears to have gotten used to being the natural representative of India by virtue of being the only Indian in the room.

She believes that non-Indians in America view her primarily as an Indian, not an American. When they speak to her, Americans realize that she has been here a long time, but they still see as a representative of India. For example, when they come to her house they always want to have Indian food. Shupriya feels that there is a certain amount of conscious role-playing in her persona. She is conscious of playing the role of “Indian

woman" in her interaction with Americans. Of course, this interaction is possible only because she has learnt enough of American culture to be comfortable with "mainstream" Americans. Shupriya is not surprised that she is assigned the role of "Indian woman", she is Indian, and she is a woman. She did grow up in India, she knows far more about India that all her non-Indian friends and acquaintances, "I'm definitely Indian. I've lived here for half my life, I came here when I was twenty-three, but I have twenty-three years of [Indian] culture ingrained into me". However, due to her Westernized upbringing, and her almost two-decade-long stay in the United States, she is very comfortable in the United States:

> I am equally at home with pretty much anyone. I don't have a problem dressing up in a *sari* because I don't think I look good in a strapless evening gown. I think when I was slimmer I could have gotten away with it. But I am very proud of my heritage. But at the same time, I think I am a very comfortable person. I am very confident of who I am. Therefore I don't think I suffer from any kind of complexes, which I find a lot of Indians here do. Inferiority or an extreme superiority [complex]. I suffer from neither, I think. So I guess I am just comfortable with myself. I don't get offended when people say, "Oh well, in India this happened and that happened." So what? You know. For example, I remember when there was this huge thing about female infanticide in India. It was on 20/20 or 60 Minutes, I forget. People were up in arms, why this? But that's the truth. You can say that they are not always showing the good things, but that is the media. But if you take the issue of female infanticide, it happens. Because my sister was in Bombay, and she was working against it. Because they had this amniocentesis, as soon as you had a female (fetus), they used to abort the baby, and these are educated people. And no, it didn't offend me at all that they were projecting that. Yeah, I felt bad, just as I would have felt bad if there was female infanticide here. Yeah, as an Indian, yeah, you feel a little bad, but it doesn't bother me. I never tried to say that this is not correct, or this is exaggerated. There are times when you have to explain stuff to people. A lot of people find it almost insulting when [non-Indian] people say "How do you guys know how to speak such good English?" I think it's a compliment that you are speaking a foreign language with such fluency.

(b) Prototypes

Jean Bacon writes, “Although family members clearly understand and use prototypes of “Indian” and “Americans”, their use of these prototypes is lucid and creative; they are not overly concerned with living out the symbolic prototypes that form the community’s shared understanding of what it means to be an Indian immigrant in America. (Bacon 1996:245).” Also, “Prototypes about India and America are most commonly used as a point of contrast between what is happening now or the ways people see themselves now, and the way things were before, or the way “other people” behave, thereby blunting an otherwise sharp distinction between Indian and American” (Bacon 1996:248).

I found that many of the professional Indian immigrant women to whom I spoke, did built up prototypes of Indian and American. Just as Bacon predicts, they would proceed to tell me how they were different from the prototypical Indian immigrant. This happened with almost all the women I interviewed and observed. Perhaps Shupriya was the most articulate about this issue. She said that she had a theory about the Indian immigrant community in the United States, “This is my theory: I think Indians as individuals are very confident of themselves, but as a group, I don’t think that they have a group identity…Americans as a group are very proud of their country…I think Indians as a whole lack that.” Shupriya also said that she had found Indians in America to characterize races in their stereotypical form, “Sometimes I find that Indians are also very color conscious: “Blacks are like this, Chinese are like that.” Shupriya has a prototype of what “typical” Indian Americans are like: ashamed of India and also racially chauvinistic, but she is careful to point out that she herself is different.

(c) Racialization of Indian Immigrants in America: "It would be nice to have more American [read white] friends; you know I can't bear blacks!"

The issue of race and the Indian immigrant self is marked by who we are not, rather than who we are. Luhrmann has said, "Identity politics are politics of difference, in which the central desperate question is how to negotiate confident uniqueness in a hostile world that threatens to obliterate you. Indeed if you search for identity in the classic psychoanalysis texts such as Fenichel's you will find no listing for it in the index" (Luhrmann 1996:199). Vijay Prashad helps us to understand how Indians in the United States are anxious to avoid being seen as black, for the blacks are at the bottom of the race hierarchy here. In fact the whole purpose of the emphasis on ethnic identity is to demarcate difference from blacks , "Desis seek out an "authentic culture" for complex reasons, among them the desire not to be seen as fundamentally inferior to those who see themselves as "white" and superior. To be on par with or at least not beneath these people, desis, like other subordinated peoples, revel in those among them who succeed in white terms. There is a sotto voce knowledge among nonwhites of their various forms of greatness" (Prashad 2000:157). He adds, "When we tell ourselves and others that we are great, do we mean to imply that there are some who are not so great? White supremacy judges certain people greater than others, and some are frequently denied the capacity to be great at all. This is the root of antiblackness, for it is "blacks" who are mainly denigrated" (Prashad 2000:158). But the question is, what sort of authenticity is allowed by white supremacists for Indians? It is of the spiritual kind, "To be given some value, to be seen as worthwhile, if only for one's ancient wisdom; to be seen as deeply spiritual and capable of wisdom about the ethereal world – this is the hallmark of the desi in the

eyes of white supremacy" (Prashad 2000:160). Prashad has said authenticity is valuable only for it demonstrates the "spiritual" and moral superiority of the Indian immigrant to inferior blacks. *Desi* assimilation is only through its "ancient heritage" ticket, and that too is valuable only because it is seen to establish more worth than that of historyless blacks. Indian acceptance in the U.S. is built on the backs of black rejection.

I believe that we must fight back against the "clash of civilizations" theory first proposed by Samuel Huntington, and subsequently elaborated by others who espouse the singularity of identity and the inevitability of conflict based on that identity. We are complex beings composed of many identities, we must recognize the plurality of our identities. Identity is affected by many factors such as citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, occupation, religious beliefs, and leisure time activities. It is our responsibility to ascertain what our relevant identities are, and make use of reasoning and choice to weigh the relative importance of these different identities. I found that my subjects attempted to resist imposed identities. They wanted to move beyond external attempts to incarcerate and miniaturize their selves by narrow divisions of ethno-racial characteristics, nation states, religious affiliations, or even civilizations. However, as Prashad has said, Indian immigrants are often essentialized as "spiritual" in the West, and my subjects had the same experience. Though some fight this essentialization, it must be acknowledged that there are many groups in the Indian-American community that build on this image of "spirituality" to climb on to the "model minority" bandwagon and claim moral superiority over other races, especially blacks.

(d) Brown Body

After a decade or more in the U.S., Indian professional working women become even better at maintaining an American identity than before. They are at ease in America. They adopt American food and dress habits. American media is usually the entertainment of their choice. They keep track of American sports, political events, and those who have been naturalized exercise their franchise.[67] Most long-resident Indian professionals are single or joint owners of some real estate and movable property in the U.S. While familiarity with America and Americanness increases with length of residence and employment here, Indians in America also come to realize that on account of being an ethnic minority, they occupy a subordinate place in the American race/class hierarchy. Espiritu calls this the principle of differential inclusion, "a process whereby a group of people is deemed integral to the nation, but integral only or precisely because of their designated subordinate standing" (Espiritu 2003:211). The awareness that minority immigrants in America cannot escape racialization is a constant challenge to the Indian immigrant's sense of self. Motivated work and the entrepreneurial spirit pay off with a place in the model minority, and with professional and financial success, but my interviewees admitted that they found it hard to penetrate middle-class, usually Caucasian, social cliques. Despite self-denial of racination, the American subalternity of brown people cannot be ignored. It is very evident in all walks of American life.

My respondents reported that in their experience, the social exclusion of brown people can be both subtle and crude. Navneet spoke of how she was excluded from the sought after, usually white, social cliques in college. Rani mentioned how she was left

[67] A few Indian women in the U.S. such as Swati Dandekar, State Representative in the Iowa House, have won elections in local and state political bodies in the U.S.

out of social get-togethers at work. Often her white colleagues would congregate in a bar, or at a sport event outside work hours, and Rani was seldom invited. Also, she herself opted out of many work-related parties because she had to return home to her family, and also, she had prior social commitments with Indian family friends. She said that she had found that unlike first generation minority immigrants like herself, second generation Indian Americans born and raised in America found it easier to penetrate social cliques. Seeta described a "typical" incident in which her daughter was not selected for the lead player's position in a school concert despite being the best piano player there, "They don't like Indian girls playing the lead part." Rupa spoke of how a homeless white man traveling with her by BART shouted, "Go back to the country you came from!" and threw some half-eaten food at her face. Niharika related an incident about an elderly white colleague at work. When she told him that her brother had obtained a graduate scholarship to a prestigious American university, he said something about "Students from other countries are taking over the American universities." She says, "I suppose he had children of his own who were having a hard time getting into good universities or getting scholarships. But why be rude about my brother?"

Professionally qualified Indians are usually from upper or middle class families in India. Born in the post-colonial era, they are unused to dealing with "foreigners", white or other. Yet, growing up in a nation undergoing a perpetual colonial "hangover", their sensibilities have been "Westernized" by images of "white Christmas" on greeting cards they had sent and received, daffodils they have read about in Wordsworth's poems, Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* investigators who sup on scones, clotted cream, and potted meat, the English countryside of *The Secret Garden*, the moors of *Wuthering Heights*, Sherlock

Holmes' London, and the songs of the Beatles. Hollywood stars such as Greta Garbo, Gregory Peck, and Marilyn Monroe have indelibly impressed themselves on their imagination. The images that drive their dreams and ambitions are set in a strange amalgam of Ivy Leagues colleges, Elvis Presley's Graceland, and Disneyland.

De-racinated by two centuries of colonial rule, the Indian bourgeoisie "brown *Sahibs* [masters]" helped to perpetuate colonial rule by acting as intermediaries between the brown masses and their white masters. As a consequence of their admiration for the British Raj, they began to identify with their colonial masters, and their moral values and day-to-day habits became quite Western. Though the women and children in this class continued to favor native Indian language, dress, and food, the men dressed in Western clothes, ate all sorts of Western food (except beef), and spoke, read, and wrote fluent English. Most significantly, their thought processes became quite Westernized. As the Indian poet Sunil Gangopadhyay has written, the colonial Indian bourgeoisie had rejected its native tongue and ethos to such an extent that it even dreamed in English!

Most professionally qualified and highly educated middle-class modern-day Indians are the descendants of the class of native Indian colonial bourgeoisie described above. Indian immigrants to the U.S. are also drawn from the progeny of colonial bourgeoisie. In India, their family connections, their fluency in the best colonial-Indian version of the Queen's English, their multiple educational qualifications, and their professional occupations assured them an elite status. They were unquestionably *"bhadrolok"*"(gentlemen) in India. But gentility does not ensure adequate employment. The high rate of unemployment and underemployment pushed them out of India, and their Westernized sensibilities and familiarity with the English language drew them to

England and America. Once in the U.S., Indian immigrants are racialized to brownness. Individuals who would have described themselves in India as “fair”, “wheat complexioned”, or “golden colored” (phrases that are commonly used in English language matrimonial advertisements in Indian newspapers), are forced to describe themselves as “brown” or a “racial minority” in the U.S. They stand out in the U.S. on account of their dark skin color. The new global economy is as racialized as earlier economic formations. As Winant has shown, both the North-South and East-West lines of division are drawn in accordance with racial differences, “The international division of labor, the flow of commodities and capital in trade, and the global movement of people are organized racially” (Winant 2003:xx). Asian Indians always suffer on account of their skin-color. Before immigration, Indians did not feel the heat of racism since there were many persons poorer and darker than themselves in the homeland. But here in the seat of capitalist power, they have a closer view of racism, for here there are few over whom they have the power to exclude.

Arjun says, “I love visiting India because there I can merge with the mainstream, I don’t look different from everyone else.” Of course, what he says is not strictly true. While it is true that his Indian appearance would probably put him in the Indian “mainstream”, Arjun does look different from a lot of people in India. He is very clearly a “*bhadrolok*” (gentleman), not a “*mazdoor*”(laborer). His well groomed appearance, his Western clothes, and his knowledge of English instantly set him apart from the working poor in India. In the U.S., Arjun’s (relatively) dark color, and his ignorance of American grooming habits and apparel fashions negate his attempts to look like he belongs to the American upper/middle class. Arjun’s professional educational qualifications, his real

estate holdings, his extensive financial savings cannot be guessed from his appearance. As far as his appearance is concerned, Arjun resembles his Hispanic gardener Jose, or his black mechanic Mike, more than he resembles anyone else among his other American acquaintances. This troubles him, for it subverts his aim of being recognized as a member of the (white dominated) American middle class.

Ananya Bhattacharya has written that while the Third World bourgeoisie was in a dominant position in its native land, upon migration to the U.S., it is forced into subordination to the local bourgeoisie. Preferring “ex-nomination”, that is, to remain un-named, it sees itself as universal (Bhattacharya 1992:19-46). But I found that “universality” is the prize only of whites, hence Indians in America must resign themselves to being seen not as universal standards, but primarily as “browns”. This is especially galling as almost all Indians came to the U.S. of their own volition; they were not forced to come here, they came here on their own to improve their economic situation.

Being seen as brown by the general populace leads to a process of self-recognition on the part of Indians in the U.S. One’s identity is now seen to be centered on a hitherto insignificant quality: the chromatic nature of one’s skin. The millions of Indians who live in India range in color and genetic heritage. It is true that many Indians are various shades of “brown” or “persons of color”, but it is doubtful that any of them would identify themselves as brown. Rather they would describe themselves on the basis of their caste, religion, education, income, occupation, or place of residence. (George 1997).

I asked all of my interviewees, “How do you see yourself in the larger scheme of things? If someone were to ask you out of the blue; “Who are you?”, then what would

you answer?" Though unused to thinking about such existential questions, most of my interviewees thought about it for a while, and most of the long duration immigrants came up with an answer that approximated to a statement of Indianness in the U.S. Megha said, "I am an Indian transnational residing in the U.S." Urmila said, "I am an Indian immigrant in the U.S." Neela said, "I am an Indian woman/wife/worker living in the U.S." Not one of my respondents mentioned being a "brown" or "minority" individual. Indian Americans want to push aside racial/color lines and majoritarian/minoritarian statuses in favor of ethnic identity. Hence, Indianness is chosen as the principal self-marker mainly because it rejects a subordinate racial position in the U.S. Indians in America avoid racialization. If race is to be discussed, then Indianness can be linked to an "Aryan heritage", which is deemed to be preferable to "brownness", or being a "racial minority". George questions Indian links to an "Aryan" heritage, but she notes that Indian Americans favor an imputed genetic and cultural connection to Aryanness. She writes: "What is refused by nearly all upper and middle class South Asians is not so much a specific racial identity, as the idea of being raced. The only identity that is acknowledged is the cultural and ethnic one of being no more and no less than "Indian-American"", and "when pressed, the commonly offered affiliation approaching a racial category that is seen as acceptable is "Aryan"" (George1997:31).

George identifies two main reasons why first generation Indian immigrants are reluctant to racialize themselves: (a) In post-colonial India, "caste, class, religion, and region together provide ample markers of identity that result in intricate social hierarchies", and (b) in the present Californian political environment, where there is a concerted effort to reduce the privileges of illegal as well as legal "brown" people, there

is even more reason to sidestep “issues concerning both skin color and race.” Thus today’s “colorblind” politics of California, as evident in Prop. 209, is especially appealing to Indian immigrants, for it helps them to “avoid self-identification by skin-color or race” (George 1997:31-32).

So unwilling were some of my respondents to be marked by race that they denied having suffered any racial prejudice whatsoever in the United States. I suppose that admitting to experiencing racism would imply admitting racialization of the self. My belief is that these individuals wanted to deny having been racially discriminated against because they hoped to avoid racialization altogether. Significantly, these interviewees did mention incidents of racial prejudice that other Indian immigrants in their acquaintance had suffered. Meera said that since she herself was in a very junior position in her office, discrimination was unlikely to affect her, but she had heard of the glass ceiling that restricted Indian professionals in middle management from rising any higher. Urmila explained that given the multicultural, multiethnic, and largely immigrant population of the Bay Area, she was safe from racial prejudice here, but some Indian friends of hers who used to live in the Midwest had been forced to moved out of there because of rampant racism and religious bigotry there. Perhaps Meera and Urmila have never really experienced racial tensions of any sort in the U.S. But in this context, I must point out that Indian immigrants have come to the U.S. of their own volition, and that they have stayed on here of their own choosing. This makes it difficult for them to admit to their own selves that they do indeed experience racial slights in the U.S.

Once they arrive in America, Indians must now learn to be identified primarily as “people of color”. Though Indians are very conscious of their skin color, they relate skin

color mainly to Aryan descent, not to being “white” or “brown”. Indians do not consider race a prime marker of identity until they are forced to do so in the U.S. As I have said before, self and identity are formed by interaction of the inner psyche with the outer social milieu. Cued by his social environment to assume a “brown” identity, the Indian learns to play that role in the West. One’s own identity is inscribed in the gaze of the other. Identity is the result of visualizing oneself as others see one. If everyone around you sees you as “brown” then brown you are. Espiritu has analyzed identity reconstitution in America by Filipino immigrants, and she points out that not only is the immigrant self fashioned by the dominant gaze, it is negotiated so that it can evade majoritarian contempt, “As immigrant subjects are “being made” into “minority” subjects, their culture becomes represented as bounded, local, and limited --- a reconstruction of that which outside its relation to the dominant culture, knows no such terms…….Here I have been … interested in understanding how Filipino immigrants have employed ….. “alternative imaginaries” to fashion self-identities that evade, move beyond, and even invert the inscriptions and identifications made by state, capitalist, and patriarchal regimes of truth” (Espiritu 2003:215).

Stuart Hall writes of how “blacks” in Britain learned to embrace this other-imposed term as a mark of self-identification, and how they then came to unite under the banner of “black people” in order to fight for racial equality:

> Now one of the main reactions to the politics of racism in Britain was what I would call, “Identity Politics One”, the first form of identity politics. It had to do with the constitution of some defensive collective identity against the practices of a racist society. It had to do with the fact that people were being blocked out and refused an identity and identification with the majority nation, having to find some other roots on which to stand. Because people have to find some ground, some place, some position on

> which to stand. Blocked out of any access to an English or British identity, people had to try to discover who they were. This is the moment I defined in my previous talk. It is the crucial moment of the rediscovery or the search for roots….. The identity which the whole, enormous political space produced in Britain, as it did elsewhere, was the category Black. (Hall 1991:52-53)

Hall continues, "Black was created as a political category", it entailed a "change of self-recognition, a new process of identification and the emergence of visibility of a new subject, a subject that was always there, but emerging historically" (Hall 1991:54). Hall then tells us his own story. He relates how it was only after several decades of residence in Britain that he allowed his immigrant status to become a part of his self-identity, "I started to tell myself the story of my migration. Then Black people erupted and people said, "Why you're from the Caribbean, in the midst of this, identifying with what's going on, the Black population in England, you're Black." It was thus that Hall came into Black consciousness (Hall 1991:55).

Hall's description and analysis of the emergence of diasporic Black identity in Britain is instructive, but I must point out that unlike Blacks in Britain, Indian immigrants in the United States have seldom embraced, or even accepted, their "brown" identity. Rather, I have detected a tendency to sidestep "brown" racialization, and instead opt for an emphasis on "diasporic" or Asian Indian ethnic identity. Hence I will discuss racial strategies adopted by Indian immigrants in the U.S. in the following section.

(e) Racial Strategies of Indian Americans

In the pre-civil rights era, Asian Indians aimed at being racially designated as "white". For a brief period between 1908 and 1922, the American courts even granted naturalization and U.S. citizenship to Asian Indians on the basis of this designation. At

that time, only those held to be white were eligible for naturalization. Between 1908 and 1922, sixty-nine Asian Indians successfully petitioned the courts for naturalization. They argued that since Indians were of Aryan stock, they should be classified as Caucasians. Caucasian was synonymous with "white", hence they were eligible for naturalization. The American judiciary approved their petition, declaring that the term "white" was used to distinguish Caucasians from the Mongolian and Negro races. As Indians belonged to neither of these categories, they should be considered "white", and hence they should be allowed to undergo the process of naturalization (Jensen 1988). It might seem strange to us today, but, in fact, Asian Indians and their descendants were categorized as "white" right up to 1974. It was in the mid-seventies that the racial strategy of immigrant Indians underwent a radical change. Post civil-rights-movement legislation motivated Indian-Americans to lobby for minority status and the affirmative action programs that went with it. They campaigned strenuously, and the census authority moved Asian Indians from the "white" category to the Asian /Pacific Islander category in 1974. By 1982 Asian Indians qualified for American programs meant for minorities who had been historically discriminated against.[68]

Thus the racial strategy of the Indian immigrant community underwent a convenient shift from passing themselves off as "whites" to identifying themselves as "Asians". Have they benefited? Not much, because Asian Americans form a group that is too diffuse and too loosely connected to wield much clout. Most Asian American

[68]However, Indian Americans rarely benefit from university affirmative action admissions policies, because as it is, they are usually over-represented in American universities.

communities, that is Chinese, Indians, Koreans, Filipinos, Japanese, and Vietnamese people in America, do have a few things in common. For example, they usually aligned themselves with the predominantly white majority establishment that occupies most positions of power in the United States. They rarely make common cause with blacks and Hispanics. Thus, most Asian immigrant groups, including Indian Americans, supported Proposition 209 "California Civil Rights Act" that ended affirmative action in university admission policies. I found that, like many other Asian ethnics in America, Indian immigrants in the U.S. prefer to associate with whites and co-ethnics.[69] It is regrettable that Indian Americans are often chauvinists themselves, and they have been found to dislike social interaction with blacks and Hispanics in many instances. Many of my interviewees expressed relief at the comparatively small number of blacks in California. A number of Indian parents of U.S.-bred youth voiced their horror at the black hip hop/rap music, clothes, and gestures favored by their adolescent offspring. Meera Nair's movie *Mississippi Masala* portrays the Indian community's shameful fear of racial miscegenation with blacks. Nair is an Indian woman who grew up in Africa, and I imagine she has encountered this phenomenon in her own life. I wonder why Indians in America want to avoid socially repressed groups such as Hispanics, for after all, such groups are useful allies because of their enormous population. But I observed that interaction with, or imitation of, Hispanics is seldom welcomed by first-generation Indian immigrants. Ankita says, "I won't send my kids to S. high school, there are too many

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[69] Also, Indian Americans are sometimes envious of some Asian groups in the U.S., such as the Chinese Americans. The Chinese community in the United States is distinguished by its financial clout and large membership. Indians in the United States would be happy to associate with Chinese immigrants and other successful Asian ethnicities.

Hispanics there, my own Guatemalan maid's children study in that school!" Zarika, a second generation Indian American girl notes that Indian parents in the U.S. are determined to get their offspring married to a suitable Indian Hindu match, and they are vehemently opposed to any friendship with blacks or Hispanics, "Hindu Indians who speak the same language and are of the same caste are considered the perfect match, whites are good, Asians are OK, but a black or Latino girlfriend or boyfriend is considered a grave disappointment, and of course Muslims are a big No-No!" Furthermore, academic logistics often force Asian American scholars of different ethnicities to congregate in the same department in American universities. UC Berkeley's Center of South and South East Asian Studies, and San Francisco State University's Department of Asian Studies are examples from the Bay Area. This may sometimes foster alliances between U.S. resident scholars of various Asian ethnicities. Lastly, Asian Americans of different nationalities have sometimes united to oppose discrimination, prejudice, and racist crimes against Asian Americans.

Espiritu explains how "Administratively treated as a homogenous group, Asian Americans found it necessary to respond as a group" (Espiritu 1992:163). The U.S. Census Bureau proposed to lump all Asians into a single category for the census of 1980 and 1990. There was going to be no breakup of that category into its constituent nations of origin. But due to synchronized efforts by Asian American community leaders originating from different (Asian) nations, the U.S. Census Bureau agreed to include a detailed enumeration of each Asian sub-group in the census.

In 1982, Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, was beaten to death by two white men who allegedly mistook him for a Japanese. This incident pulled Asian Americans of

different nationalities together so that they could organize the prosecution of Chin's killers. Sadly, Chin's beaters were awarded outrageously lenient sentences: none of the killers spent any time behind bars. Though pan-Asian attempts to obtain justice for Chin were largely unsuccessful, the process did serve to further the cause of pan-Asian solidarity in America. Realizing that what happened to Chin could happen to any of them, Asian Americans decided to get together and fight against racially motivated violence in the U.S.[70] The Chin case revealed how likely it was for an immigrant from one Asian nation to be mistaken for that from a different Asian nation. Hence the need to unite to fight anti-Asian bigotry in the U.S. assumed an unprecedented urgency, prompting massive organizational efforts by Asian Americans across the nation.

As Espiritu points out, on the whole, Indian immigrants have been eager to join in the Asian American panethnic effort to fight for individual and united interests of the various Asian national-origin groups in the U.S. In the 1980s "Dotbusters" indulged in random violence against Indian immigrants in the U.S. (the "dot" refers to the *bindi,* a dot that Indian women paint on their forehead, a traditional Indian form of facial decoration). On September 27, 1987, Navroze Mody, a thirty one year old man of Indian (Parsi) origin, was badly mauled by a gang of white and Hispanic youth. He died a few days later in the

[70] Espiritu has written, "For Asian Americans, changing their world has meant expanding their social frame of reference and assuming pan-Asian identity. But this process of change has not been unilateral. Within the limits of their situations, Asian Americans not only changed themselves, but also the conditions under which they act. Adopting the dominant group's categorization of them, Asian Americans have institutionalized pan-Asianism as their primary political entity—thereby enlarging their own capacities to make claims on the resources of the dominant group. Nor has this process of change been unilinear. Within the broad pan-Asian boundaries, subgroup identifications remain important, leaving room for shifting levels of solidarity, backsliding, or dropping out of the pan-Asian framework altogether" (Espiritu 1992:161).

hospital. This incident took place in Hoboken, New Jersey (Misir 1996).[71] The urge to protect the Indian community from such racially motivated violence prompted Indian immigrant leaders to join the panethnic Asian American struggle to halt anti-Asian violence in the U.S.

Kumar affirms the likelihood of international alliances within Asian immigrant individuals, and specifically by fellow South Asians, in the following passage,

> Although identity politics in the diaspora unfortunately traps certain groups in ever-increasing isolation, the freedom from familiar constraints and from the dominance of the surrounding culture encourages other new coalitions …. In my argument for the possibilities of diasporic culture, there breathes possibilities that resist national wills and narrowly nationalistic identities. Differences collapse, sometimes out of ignorance, sometimes because of reconfigured conditions, as political choices, or as more mysterious shifts: the white patron in the restaurant doesn't know how to tell a Bangladeshi from an Indian, a Nepali queer activist joins a group of South Asian gays and lesbians, Indians and Pakistanis live and make music together. (Kumar 2000:229)

Cross-border alliances within the sub-continent are likely in the new country. However, it must be acknowledged that a pan-Asian American alliance is not easy to establish or maintain for any length of time. Inbuilt problems prevent successful Indian participation in pan-Asian ethnic mobilization in the U.S. As Espiritu herself remarks: "Coming from different homelands, Asian immigrant groups share no foreign policy

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[71] This incident is not only tragic, but ironic, because the Parsis are a minority community that migrated to Indian from Persia many centuries ago. The Parsis flourished under British rule, many migrated to U.K., U.S.A., and Australia after the end of colonial rule. Those who stayed on continued to be very westernized. Many older Parsis do not identify with India. They are nostalgic about their childhood and youth spent in the British colonial 'golden rule' (Luhrmann 1996). Thus Navroze Parsi was a victim of double dislocation, first from Persia centuries ago, and then his parents had left India to come to the west many decades ago. In the end, Navroze had to die for he was perceived as an Indian, but is that how he saw himself?

interests…. Domestic politics in India continues to be extremely important to Asian Indians in the United States…. It is of limited interest to other Asian Americans" (Espiritu 1992: 60). People of historically antagonistic nations cannot easily form coalitions with each other in their new country of residence. There are many difficulties in the way of Indians in the U.S. forming a coalition with other Asians here. History is one factor; Indian soldiers in the British army fought against Japanese soldiers in the Second World War. Post colonial India has suffered numerous casualties in border skirmishes with China. Thus, the Asian American community faces an uphill task in its attempts at unification, for long-standing political disagreements between the various nations of origin do not facilitate the formation of a united front in the U.S. As Espiritu has pointed out, internal divisions have dogged panasianism in the U.S. from the start. And South Asian immigrants who have come in after the legislative reforms of the mid-sixties have exacerbated this problem, because they have agendas and objectives that are significantly different from those Eastern Asian immigrants who had established a presence in this country long before the sixties' wave of new Asian immigration. In fact, due to India's history of border conflicts with its neighboring nations, recent immigrants from India even have trouble aligning with immigrants from the other nations within the Indian sub-continent: Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sikkim and Sri Lanka. (Espiritu 1992).

(f) Diasporic/Transnational Self

Because it is difficult to sustain pan-Asian American alliances, Indian Americans make efforts to build up a "diasporic", "*pravasi*" (the Hindi word for diasporic), or "ethnic Indian" identity. The word "diaspora" refers to people who have migrated out

from a home country to two or more separate locations. Such people naturally experience divided loyalties, for they have emotional ties both to their country of origin as well as to their host country. Sometimes they form associations that lobby in the new country for objectives in the old homeland. Thus, a triadic relationship is formed between the diaspora, the nation of their current residence, and their original home country. Based in homes both “here” and “there”, diasporic people are forced to maintain multiple identities that link them variously with different nationalities, races, and ethnicities. Multiple identities and numerous homelands are useful for navigating the contrary global political and economic situations that mark the life of a transnational. Globalization of culture helps to maintain multifocality of identity, just as objects, images, and meanings move back and forth between various nations. Transnational people are also transcultural. Not only are they fluent in more than one language, diasporic people are also fluent in more than one culture, and they have the ability to syncretically fuse heterogeneous cultural parts into a wholly new configuration.

In the first issue of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, William Safran defined diaspora as people who have themselves been, or whose ancestors have been, “dispersed from a specific original “center” to two or more “peripheral”, or foreign regions”. Safran emphasized that such people “retain a collective memory” of the homeland, they want to eventually return to it, “when conditions are appropriate”, and they continue to relate, “personally or vicariously” to the center of origin (Safran 1991: 83-99).

There are approximately twenty million Indians living outside India. They are globally dispersed in distant locations such as U.S.A., U.K., Germany, Fiji, West Indies,

Burma, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., Kuwait, Bahrain, and various African nations. The Indian immigrants I interviewed did not like to see themselves as "brown" (Americans) or "racial minorities"; instead they consider themselves "diasporic" Indians. Racialization to "brownness" locates them at a comparative disadvantage in class formations in the United States. In comparison to the negative experiences of exclusion and discrimination that a racialized minority status brings, diasporic consciousness serves to provide a positive identity. Building upon such strengths as the rich cultural heritage of India and its current popularity in the international milieu,[72] the majority of Indian immigrants in the U.S. see themselves with double vision, as immigrants who own houses in the U.S., but are not "at home" here. They are Non Resident Indians (N.R.I.s) whose hearts reside in their "true home", which is India. The self of such individuals is constituted of multifocal incongruencies that are blended to form a syncretic whole. Marked by what Paul Gilroy calls "double consciousness", that is, consciousness both as Americans and as ethnic Indians, Indian immigrants are very much aware of the contradictions between their residential and diasporic loyalties (Paul Gilroy 1993). Yet, they are hopeful that their membership in both their nation of residence on one hand, and their country of origin on the other, will help them to maneuver themselves to positions of power and influence in both societies.

Ulf Hannerz writes "In a way, all other things being equal, we may increasingly be who we are and want to be, wherever we are" (Hannerz 2002:227). Due to advances in technology, we have seen that mass media such as print publications, radio, and television, and also small scale personal media such as letter writing, telephone, fax,

[72]Yoga, Hindi movies, and Indian food, are currently very popular all over the world.

home videos, and email allow intimate relationships to survive and flourish across thousands of miles. Frequent travel, cable/dish television, and D.V.D./video rentals are also technological developments that may make a location half-way across the world more familiar than our next-door neighbor's home (Hannerz 2002).

The modern age is marked by the global migration of unprecedented numbers of individuals across continents. Due to the current proliferation of diasporic or transnational electronic and print media, post-nations have proliferated; diasporic populations can now keep in touch with each other and with the nation of origin even though they are thousands of miles apart. Immigrants can even generate electronic transnations which push against territorially bound politico-juridical nation-states in which the transnationals are actually resident (Appadurai 1996).

Writing a critique of recent immigrant narratives in America, Rosemary George questions immigrant writers who prescribe "assimilation as the proper destination of the fully developed immigrant" (George 1998:148), for such writers overlook the fact that for ethnic minorities in the United States, assimilation into the mainstream is possible only as a minority. Commenting on three "coming to America" stories written by three women of color: Esmeralda Santiago, Jamaica Kincaid, and Bharati Mukherjee, George writes:

> Each of these texts could be described very loosely as a narrative that records the growth of the protagonist from a diffident young girl to a young woman who authorizes or writes her own story. What interests me, in these and similar texts, is the degree to which these narratives problematize this logic of progression even as they move their protagonist simultaneously into adulthood and into the United States. This second journey that piggybacks on the first also implies a journey into the English language and into the "ethnic" narrative of successful progress that in itself becomes a sign of acculturation and assimilation as minority into the mainstream…….Unlike the many other stories told through minority cultural productions, the straightforward coming-of-age to America plot

> remains almost wholly overdetermined by the expectations of the appropriate posture to be adopted by those immigrants who wish to partake in the American grand narrative. (George 1998:136)

George critiques immigrant authors such as Bharati Mukherjee, Dinesh d'Souza and Richard Rodriguez for indicating that assimilation into the American mainstream is the only choice that immigrants have. She points out that immigrants are no longer merely immigrants, they are now members of a humongous transnational diaspora. In recent times, travel, communication, and media exchanges across continents have become so affordable and accessible that many immigrants find it possible and desirable to resist assimilation. Instead of devoting all their energies to assimilation into the American mainstream, they stretch their lives across a transnational network that makes it possible for them to be in constant touch with their country of origin (George 1996:148).

Sandhya Shukla has explained that the Indian diaspora reconstitute global identity of the self and their ethnic group by drawing on their national origins. By fantasizing about India and producing Indian culture abroad, they locate themselves in neither the "local" nor the "global", but in both; they are invested in neither the territory of the Indian nation-state, nor in the social fields of the United States, but in both. Creating a multicultural identity by imagining India outside its geographical confines enables Indian settlers in the United States to negotiate a respectable life here (Shukla 2003).

In fact, what I have understood as the immigrant adjustment strategy of setting up a diasporic identity, is not very different from what Rashmi Desai calls "accommodation", that is, adjustment as an ethnic group (Desai 1963:147). Both are resorted to as an alternative to "assimilation", that is, individuals becoming similar to the dominant population. On the whole, the conclusions of my analysis of first generation Indian

expatriates in the Bay Area are concurrent with those of Rashmi Desai's 1963 study of first generation Indian immigrants in Britain. Desai argues that in the first generation, Indian immigrants "accommodate" rather than "assimilate". Accommodation is a "tolerance of differences" between the host society and the immigrant community, whereas assimilation "leads to a process of identification" with the host society. Like Desai's subjects, the women I interviewed chose to "modify their dress, diet, and spending habits", but these are not deep changes, they are indeed "initial" and "rather deceptive" cultural changes that immigrants make in order to function among the host people. My subjects wanted to adopt certain American ways, and they did. But in the ultimate analysis, they could not be assimilated into American society without their accepting a minority status, a compromise that they chose not to make. Desai's description of the British Indian immigrant's refusal to assimilate with the host society foreshadowed the ultimate return of my Indian American respondents to the Indian ethnic community and to a diasporic Indian self.

How is diasporic identity emphasized? Globalization has made it easy to maintain a diasporic identity. While in America, Indians accentuate their ethnicity. When they had been resident in India, they had not been conscious of their pan-Indian or regional ethnicity. They were constantly immersed in it, so they lived it unthinkingly. In the new land, thousands of miles away from the fountainhead of Indian culture, they consciously re-enact it.

In contrast to their behavior in America, while they visit India, N.R.I.s advertise their links to America, and their ownership of American dollars/real estate/movable property. In a sense, the Indian community re-invents its Indian ethnicity in America, and

its American identity in India. Of course, it takes a lot of money to maintain full lives in two separate nations, and only the global elite can afford to do so (Ong 1999).

(g) Reproduction of Indian Culture in the Bay Area

In the San Francisco Bay Area, cultural and material artifacts required to re-create Indianness are regularly imported from India. Some are produced in North America and sold in Indian American retail stores. There are 143,022 Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area (2000 Census), and they have enabled the availability of materials and structures needed for the reproduction of Indian cultural practices here. Indian cooking utensils, statues of Indian gods and goddesses, prayer incense sticks, Indian spices, lentils, rice, *chapati* flour, and frozen foods are readily available in Indian grocery stores here. Indian stores also sell *salwar-kameez*, *saris*, periodicals, audiocassettes, videocassettes, and DVDs from the homeland. Indian immigrants bring Indian artifacts with them each time they return from a vacation to India. This easy availability of items of Indian material culture in America is a function of new technology and economic globalization. The time and expense of transporting goods and passengers has been drastically reduced.

The spatial re-creation of Indian culture in America takes place both in the Indian immigrant home, and in such special Indian locations such as the Hindu temple, the Sikh *gurdwara*, the Indian-Muslim mosque, the Indian-Christian church, the Indian store, Indian restaurants, Indian music and dance performances, Indian movie theaters, and Indian community centers. In the Indian home in the Bay Area, the *puja* (prayer) room or altar, or the location of the Guru Granth Sahib, Quran or Bible, is a center of Indianness. The pantry in the kitchen, or the walk-in closet in the bedroom, is often converted into a prayer room. Alternatively, a table top, or a shelf in a closet in the bedroom or living

room serves as the prayer niche. Statues and photographs of Indian gods and goddesses or religious texts are set up. Incense sticks, incense stick stands, conch shells, *diyas* (lamps), prayer bells, *kumkum* (sacred red powder), scripture books, and *misri* (Indian sugar crystals offered to the gods and then consumed by the worshippers) complete the prayer paraphernalia. The kitchen is another site for re-affirmation of Indian identity. The kitchen is stocked with Indian utensils and electric gadgets such as the *kadhai* (saucepan), the *tava* (griddle), the *saransi* (tongs), *idli* (rice cakes) moulds, and the electronic spice and rice grinder. Indian spices and groceries are stacked on the shelves. In the kitchen there is also a prayer niche dedicated to Ganesh, the Hindu god of good beginnings and prosperity. A recipe book filled with mother's Indian recipes, and cooking tips culled from Indian cooking-sites on the internet are other common features of diasporic Indian kitchens. The Indian expatriate home is decorated with Indian cushion covers, Indian bedspreads, Indian paintings, and Indian folk handicrafts.[73]

The public temple is another site for the re-creation of a Hindu spiritual ambience. Most Hindu temples are housed in made-over warehouses, shop fronts, or residential homes. They do not look like temples from outside. A few Hindu temples such as the Livermore temple in the Bay Area are located in less expensive areas where Indians have been able to afford a large tract of land and new construction. These have been fashioned by artisans from India in accordance with the cannons of Hindu temple architecture. They look like traditional Hindu temples from the inside as well as the outside. There are *mandaps* and intricate ornamental molding in the exterior. In the interior, there are big

[73] It is quite ironic that while resident in India, middle-class Indians decorate their homes with Western artifacts to show their sophistication, but after emigrating out of India, their home-décor efforts revolve around the display of traditional Indian objects-de-art.

statues and photographs of the Hindu pantheon of deities. A priest has been flown in from India and daily *darshan* (viewing the god) and *aarti* (ritual worship with lamps by the priest and the congregation of followers) takes place. The temples in the Bay Area have internet sites, and priests are available for communication by email and by cell phone. While there are many Indian-Christian Churches in the Bay Area; there is also a Syrian-Christian temple in Livermoore. There are many Gurdwaras in the Bay Area, the one in El Sobrante is well-know for its architectural beauty and enormous size. Indian Muslims frequent mosques in which other South Asians worship. The Bay Area also has two Indian community centers. These provide a location for elderly Indian immigrants to congregate and a site for Indian dance, music, and language classes.

In India, the passage of time is marked by *puja utsavs* (Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religious festivals), *eid / urz* (Islamic religious festivals), Christian holy days, and secular national holidays. Indians in the Bay Area attempt to do the same here by performing weekly prayers and fasts (in the Hindu calendar, Monday is dedicated to the god Shiva, Tuesday to the god Hanuman, Thursday to goddess Lakshmi, Friday to the goddess Santoshi Ma, and Saturday to the demi-god Shani). The Indian expatriate community celebrates major annual Indian religious festivals such as Diwali, Ganapati Puja, Durga Puja, Pongal, and Guru Nanak's birth anniversary. India's Independence Day, August 15th, is also commemorated by the U.S. resident Indians in India Day parades. Movie stars are flown in from Mumbai to lead the parade, immigrant children perform music and dance shows, and local immigrant-community leaders give speeches at such parades.

The Indian diasporic media is a significant source of information about current events, sports, fashions, movies, and music releases in India and in the Indian American

community. At least a dozen expatriate Indian newspapers and periodicals are published in the U.S. A monthly periodical called *India Currents* is published in the San Francisco Bay Area. Many Indian homes in the U.S. are equipped with a dish antenna that enables the residents to view cable shows beamed from India. The San Francisco Bay Area has an "international" channel on regular American cable T.V. This channel shows Indian programs for a few hours every day.[74] COMCAST cable, the mainstream cable provider in the Bay Area, provides an Indian channel (ZEE T.V.) in two counties in the Bay Area: Santa Clara and Fremont. There are also one or two radio frequencies in the Bay Area that regularly broadcast Indian talk shows and music selections (they broadcast in both English and Hindi). "Naaz" and "Saratoga AMC" are the two movie theaters dedicated to showing Indian movies. Acknowledging the financial contribution of the viewership of expatriate Indians, new Bollywood movies premiere simultaneously in India metropolitan cities and in major Indian immigrant centers in the West, such as London, Los Angeles, New York, and the Bay Area. "Raaga" and other Indian audiocassette, videocassette, and D.V.D. stores in the Bay Area stock the latest selection of Hindi and South Indian releases. The easy availability of media links to the home country makes it easy to maintain a diasporic identity, and it makes it possible to avoid plugging into the local culture of the country of residence.

(h) Drawbacks of Diasporic Identity

[74] In fact, this is a common feature in parts of the U.S. that have a large Indian population, such as the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, New York, New Jersey, and Chicago.

The drawbacks of diasporic identity include lack of up-to-date cultural reproduction, limitation of political representation, and threat to national solidarity. I will discuss these issues in the following section.

(1) Lack of Authenticity of Indian Cultural Reproduction in the Bay Area

All cultures are continually under production and formation. Hence we need to be critical of the assumption of authenticity. Questions such as "Is the Indian culture re-created in America authentic?" and "How can the diasporic individual aim for authenticity?" are meaningful only if we examine the various implications of the concept of cultural authenticity. As Luhrmann has said, the diasporic identity is one of the narratives that the immigrant selects in order to negotiate a space for herself, "Being who you purport to be, being true to yourself, being genuine, seems ---on the surface, at least – to be more difficult in a world in which one's nationality is not obvious, one's historical past cannot be assumed, and one's ambitions and hopes and achievable goals cannot be read from one's surroundings"(Luhrmann 1996:200). And, the immigrant's "route to authenticity --- and that described by West, Suleri, and Appiah --- is to continually reinvent herself through sequentially identifying with contradictory narrative self-descriptions, while simultaneously learning to treat them as just that: narratives to be manipulated"(Luhrmann 1996:203).

I believe that Indian diasporic culture is authentic in the sense that it speaks the truth of the aspirations of the immigrant community. Naturally, it is impossible for Indians in America to exactly replicate the living, and forever evolving, culture in India. What they produce in the name of "Indian culture" is authentic only in so far as it responds to immigrant needs. "Indian culture" as experienced in the U.S. is the mass

culture of the Indian diaspora, embodied by popular Bollywood stars performing huge live shows in America, convenient ready-to-wear Indian fashions in synthetic silks that appeal to N.R.I. tastes, and religious rituals commonly observed by the Indian immigrant community. The last includes remote *darshan* and *puja* (electronic worship for a fee, available on the internet web pages set up by specific temples in India), Ganesh *puja* (commonly performed by local Hindu priests before opening a new business enterprise), *Griha Pravesh puja* (*puja* to bless a new house), *Vahan puja (puja* to bless a new car), *namkaran* (christening a new born baby), and *annaprasanam* (blessing the first solid food consumed by an infant).

Expatriate attempts to replicate Indian "high" culture, such as Indian classical dance and music, and the works of renaissance regional poets, playwrights, and choreographers are patronized by only a tiny minority of the diasporic population. Mass culture represented by Indian movies is synonymous with "Indian culture" for the majority of Indian diasporic individuals in America. Also, it must be noted that the cultural practices, moral values, and role expectation promoted by community leaders as "Indian" are extremely outdated. Even with time and space compression accomplished by new technologies of mass and personal media, transportation, and communication, there is a massive time lag between culture as it evolves in the homeland and the manner in which it is evoked in the diaspora. Reminiscent of the India that aging community leaders emigrated from many decades ago, Indian culture re-invented in America is out of step with the India of today. Current urban India is much less parochial and conservative, and much more tuned to global trends than before. But immigrant community leaders are unaware of these new developments, or they don't care to acknowledge them. In fact,

Indian culture as made in the U.S.A., gives rise to a certain amount of hysteria about not paying adequate respect to elders within the community. While it is true that Indian culture does uphold geriatric power, putting too much of emphasis on this aspect of Indian culture only helps older community leaders who want to consolidate their hold on the rest of the community. It also helps Indian immigrant parents to strengthen their hold on rebellious second generation youth. Sucheta Mazumdar argues that there is a hidden agenda in the reproduction of Indian culture in the American diaspora. It is to prove the moral superiority of ethnics over Westerners, and to keep American-raised offspring from rebelling against the older generation of Indian immigrants (Mazumdar 1996). I believe that Mazumdar is not wrong. If this is the case, then in my opinion, progressive sections of the Indian community in the United States must condemn such a negative agenda, and they should make an effort to build positive alliances with other ethnicities in the U.S. But my question is: Why does Mazumdar ignore the lack of choices for identity formation? If not (inauthentic) Indian cultural reproduction, then what? Indians in America are often considered an "inassimilable" model minority. On account of their skin color, attempts to "blend in" by wholeheartedly adopting, faithfully mimicking, and marrying into, the Western culture of the American majority are unlikely to succeed. I believe that the obsession with perpetuating a diasporic Indian identity is sometimes caused by a misguided desire to turn majoritarian superiority on its head, and claim moral and cultural superiority over the Caucasian mainstream.

The recent controversy about the California middle school social studies textbook is an example of divisions within the Indian community about how to represent itself in the United States. The state of California revises its textbooks every six years. It

welcomes suggestions from the public in this effort. In 2006, two separate self-appointed entities called the Vedic Foundation, and the Hindu Educational Foundation, suggested edits to the textbooks. They claimed their objective was to soften the emphasis on inequitable or disreputable Hindu practices such as caste, *sati*, and polytheism in the textbooks. However, Indian immigrant secular groups such as Friends of South Asia, and Coalition Against Communalism, as well as scholars of Hinduism such as Harvard Sanskrit Professor Michael Witzel, and renowned historian Prof. Stanley Wolpert, protested against the revisions suggested by the Foundations. They explained that these revisions erased past and contemporary histories of oppression for the sake of a falsely positive portrayal of Hinduism. In the end, the Board of Education accepted only a few of the suggested revisions of the so-called Hindu groups (*San Francisco Chronicle*, February 28, 2006).

(2) Accentuation of Difference and Voice in American Politics Limited to Communitarian Representation

Indian culture, as fabricated in the U.S., feeds on the conception of "Indian culture" as "different". Needless to say, Indian culture is truly very different from American, or for that matter, Western culture. But it can be argued that the accentuation of difference prevents the Indian community in the U.S. from attempting to modify its behavior in order to blend in with the American cultural mainstream. Whether assimilation should be a goal for the community is debatable, but the fact is that there are certain advantages of blending in which are forfeited by Indian community leaders' determination to reiterate their distinction from mainstream American culture. Many Indian community leaders inflate their value to the community by trying to ensure that

Indian immigrants do not try to join the political process as “Indian American” individuals but rather as “Indian immigrants” who are part of an “Indian lobby” that can only be represented by an Indian immigrant leader.

Werner Sollors argues that power relations dictate the invention of ethnicity. He quotes the Afro-American writer Charles W. Chestnut on this subject. The question is: Who benefits from the invention and preservation of ethnicity? Do the ethnic people benefit, or do the dominant non-ethnic “mainstream” powers benefit? Chestnut writes: “Frankly, I take no stock in this doctrine [of preserving one’s ethnicity]. It seems to be a modern invention of the white people, to perpetuate the color line. It is they who preach it, and it is their racial integrity they wish to preserve – they have never been unduly careful of the purity of the black race…..Are we to help the white people to build up walls between themselves and us, to fence in a gloomy back yard for our descendants to play in?” (quoted in Sollors 1989:xvii). Thus over-emphasis on ethnic identity feeds into the American propensity for what Espiritu calls “differential inclusion” of minorities and other subordinate groups in the social fabric (Espiritu 2003). Clearly, for Indians the danger of emphasizing their ethnic distinctiveness is an increase in their cultural and political marginalization.

(3) Limits to Ethnic Diversity vis-à-vis National Solidarity

Appadurai has pointed out that America is fabled as the land of immigrants, and it does indeed allow a pluralistic flowering of a thousand ethnicities in its lands, but there is a limit beyond which ethnic, transnational and diasporic centrifugal tendencies cannot pull against centripetal American values of nationhood and loyalty to the nation of residence. Diasporic identities and networks are so prevalent, that they threaten the

current supremacy of nation-states in the world order. Raging national battles over bilingual education, academic curriculum, welfare stateism, affirmative action, and abortion "suggest that the metaphor of the mosaic cannot contain the contradiction between group identities, which Americans will tolerate (up to a point) in cultural life, and individual identities, which are still the nonnegotiable principle behind American ideas of achievement, mobility, and justice" (Appadurai 1996:72-173).[75]

Notwithstanding the drawbacks mentioned above, and despite the patent lack of authenticity of "Indian culture" (re) produced in America, most Indian immigrants I spoke to feel that the diasporic card is the only card they can play to their advantage. The problem with emphasizing the American identity is that many Indians suspect that they can "take their place in America" only as "model minorities", as (inferior) "brown" people, a position they are unwilling to assume. Unfortunately, many Indian Americans are locked into a rather skewed world-view which imagines that the diasporic identity is the only one that inverts mainstream doctrines of racial hierarchy, and paints "difference" as a positive quality, as a sign of spiritual superiority over the decadent West.

(i) Class Formation

What of class formation? The few thousand Indian immigrants who came to the U.S. before the 1965 Immigration Act were mostly from agricultural communities in Northern India. They worked in the lumber industry, in railroad construction, and in

[75] Ong disputes the claim that diasporic elites work against the nation state, for she shows that they function within restrictions set up by the state that has by now established new alliances with capital-rich global citizens (Ong 1999).

farming. By the middle of the last century, most of the tiny first wave of immigrant Indians had settled in central California. They bought or leased land and became farmers.

The Immigration Act of 1965 opened the U.S. borders to an inflow from nations that had previously been banned from sending immigrants. The provisions of the Act of 1965 explicitly stated that only Indians with professional qualifications would be allowed to immigrate to the U.S. Their families were also allowed entry. Hence the post-1965 wave of Indian immigrants are highly educated and well qualified. Both economic and occupational indicators show that the second wave of Indian immigrants in the U.S. have been extremely successful. But once the '65 wave of immigrants became U.S. citizens, they began to bring in non-professional family members who were not very successful in America. They opened gas stations, convenience stores, and motels, but still found it hard to make ends meet. Some became cab drivers, nannies, and cooks. As Madhulika Khandelwal has written, there is a significant number of Indians who live in dire poverty in America, but they are not acknowledged by the American Indian community as their own (Khandelwal 2002).However, on the whole, Indian Americans are still a model minority. The 2000 U.S. census showed that Indian Americans had among the highest income percentile in the country. The median household income was $60,093, about 155 % of the national average (2000 U.S. Census Documents *www.census.gov*). In the 1990 census, Asian Indians declared incomes that were 115% of the national average. 50% of Asian Indian males were shown to have professional/managerial occupations, that is, twice as high as the U.S. population, and 34% of Asian Indian females indicated that they were in professional/managerial occupations. The poverty rate among Asian Indians was only 10% (William Darity *et al,* "Dressing for Success: Explaining Differences in

Economic Performance Among Racial and Ethnographic Groups in the U.S.A." unpublished manuscript, 1994, quoted in Kamala Visweswaran 1997).

Like Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, and a few other ethnicities in the U.S., Asian Indians in the U.S. have done so well that they are often held up as an example for others to follow. American conservative thinkers often see Indians as a model minority; and they sometimes use the example of the general economic success of the Indian community to chastise other minority groups, who are asked to account for their relative lack of economic success.

Most of my subjects, professional Indian working women in the Bay Area, strongly emphasized their high-end incomes and substantial real-estate holdings in order to indicate a superior class position. Nitya said, "We Indians know that we must save. That is why we have all become financially secure. My house did not cost all that much when I moved into it, but now its value has grown to one million!" Arjun insisted that I take a ride in his latest prize possession, a brand new Mercedes Benz car he had purchased a few months a go. His wife smiled sweetly and told me that she did not want to drive his new automobile, she was happy with the Volvo her husband had given her a few years ago. Rama said, "Yes, I work a six-day week, sometimes I have to work till very late in my office, I definitely work really hard in my job, but look, I now earn 100K. It's worth all the hard work I put in!"

Many of the more successful women I interviewed were in middle management positions in American corporations. While they were proud of how far they had come, none of them had risen above mid-level management (unless they owned their own business). I noticed that many of these women occupied mediatory positions. Aparajita

worked as a shop floor manager for many years. She mediated between the senior management of the shop and the salespersons, backroom workers, and janitorial staff. Her present position of Human Resources Manager also performs mediatory functions to ease communication between junior and senior employees in her company. Smita occupies a similar mediatory niche. She is an outsourcing software-production manager. Her job is to communicate the requirements of the senior management of her company to the software developers located in India. She shuttles back and forth between the company headquarters in San Francisco and the software writers in Mumbai. Lakshmi is a manager in the manufacturing department of a Bay Area biopharmaceutical corporation. She mediates between the Caucasian Vice President of Scientific Development and laboratory technicians, many of whom are racial minorities.

My informants' principal concern was to make enough money to buy the status symbols required to qualify as "middle-class Americans". This was their only perspective on the class situation they were in. However, my view is more critical. Mediation is about directing workers to follow the directives of the manager class. Since the managerial class is most often white, mediatory Asian Indian immigrants usually facilitate the subordination of minority workers. Indians in the U.S. seek positions where they supervise not so much blacks, but more commonly in California, Hispanics, and other Asians who are not proficient in English. Even first generation Indian immigrants usually possess good English reading, writing, and speaking skills, but many other first-generation immigrant Asians and Hispanics, who do not have a history of British colonial domination, are not proficient in English. This puts them at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* Indian job-seekers for management positions.

In colonial India, Western-educated Indians formed a colonial middle class that was subordinate to the British and superior to the Indian masses. The Western-educated Indian bourgeoisie supervised the working poor and also oversaw the execution of the orders of colonial masters by Indian labor. In the post-colonial situation, the progeny of the Western-educated bourgeoisie led the "brain drain". The "brain drain" is the emigration of highly educated and professionally qualified youth who could not find suitable employment in India. Historically trained to act as mediators between the ruling class and the masses, the Westernized Indian bourgeoisie re-enacts its mediatory role in its new country of residence.[76]

Kamala Visweswaran writes:

> The class composition of the South Asian diaspora in the U.S. is historically specific….. I would suggest the importance of understanding its mediatory position between white dominated power structures and less privileged communities in both colonial and post-colonial periods. That is not to say that the class composition of the salaried or merchant communities that comprise the "middleman minorities" remains stable over time: class formations like social formations change throughout history. It is however, to say that a prior historical experience of structural position as a middle term may lend itself to the anticipation of a middle position in new contexts. It is precisely the mediatory ability, that active negotiation of invitation and exclusion, that has made possible the community's flexible insertion into U.S. race relations, making it diasporic by design. (Visweswaran 1997:17-18)

Visweswaran has identified the colonial historical roots of the Indian American-immigrant middleman-minority position. None of my informants explicitly articulated awareness of the strategic usefulness to themselves of their ancestors' experience of

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[76] Similar mediatory narratives have been played out in various other Asian and African nations such as Burma, Fiji, and Uganda. Indian expatriates in these nations attempted to maximize their class character by inserting themselves in a mediatory position in racial formations in these locations.

mediating between the managerial class and the workers. But many informants did make a point of letting me know that their father had been in a managerial position in India. They also emphasized that they were from Western-educated, progressive, liberal, elite or upper-middle class families in India. Such families are typically part of the "*babu*" class of knowledge workers who managed colonial interests, and now manage post-colonial industries and the state administration. Megha says, "My father retired as a very high ranking executive in a formerly British owned company in India. My parents were from this very overeducated family. Everybody in the extended family has some advanced degree. We all read and listen to music. We revel in it!" A few of my interviewees also mentioned that when they arrived in the U.S., they greatly benefited from their prior knowledge of English, another hallmark of successive generations of those who mediate between the managerial class and the workers in India. Their proficiency in English continues to serve them well throughout their working years. Jishnu, whose grandfather held a prestigious position in the British colonial government, says, "I can express myself as well as, sometimes even better, than native born Americans, and when they hear my presentations and read my reports, they can't believe how good I am! The British education and training I received in India has stood me in good stead!"

Being in the middle helps to establish oneself economically, it also places one mid-way in the social hierarchy. But a mediatory position does not provide adequate security to Indian expatriates. Therefore they re-activate ethnicity in order to bolster their self and identity. Ethnicity provides a convenient hook on which to hang one's identity. Focusing on the ethnic distinctiveness of the community serves two purposes: Indians in the U.S. can hold themselves apart from blacks and Hispanics, two groups that first

generation Indian immigrants would like to outdo economically. They also avoid miscegenation.[77] Second, the Indian colonial and diasporic history of mediation between separate races is emphasized each time they remind the American public of the ethnic heritage of Indians in the U.S. *Desis* have found a unique niche for themselves in America. They are at the juncture of different racial and class groups; it is regrettable that while Indian Americans help to connect disparate racial and economic clusters, they also assist in the oppression of marginal and subaltern people by the dominant race and class.

(j) Two Identities, Two Selves

The long duration immigrants I interviewed and interacted with, displayed remarkable speed in moving from "being Indian" to "being American", and back and forth between the two persona, as and when the situation required. They undertook both performances with gusto. These individuals seem both "more American" and "more Indian" than any of the other persons I interacted with. As I have said before, the great length of duration of residence in the U.S. has made this group acutely aware of the intricacies of American social, political, financial, and cultural life. But over the years, long duration immigrants find themselves becoming increasingly conscious of their brownness, and of how brown people are often shut out of positions of influence and power in the West. Hence, these immigrants attempt to project a different aspect of their persona: their ethnicity. Diasporic identity is enhanced by the reproduction of Indian culture in the U.S. Not skin color, but moral values, educational qualifications, historical heritage, language, food, ancient performative arts, and the purported economic success of the community are highlighted. Unfortunately, there are many Indian immigrants in

[77] Sad to say, Indian Americans are very chauvinistic.

the U.S. who make a pathetic attempt to show Indians in a superior light by showing other minorities such as Hispanics and blacks in a negative light. Sometimes invocation of Indian identity is even an attempt to invert the assumed superiority of the values of the Caucasian norm by inserting Indian morality at the top of the hierarchy of cultures. Another reason for showcasing diasporic identity is that it accentuates the long history that Indians have of being favored middlemen-minority collaborators with white powers in both colonial as well as post-colonial diasporic multiracial formations. Re-activation of Indianness is also meant to impress the value of being Indian on the still unformed minds of expatriate Indian children and youth, so as to keep the younger generation close to their parental family and community.

Self and identity are shaped by the interaction between the individual and the surrounding social milieu. In the 1940s, C.H. Cooley and G.H. Mead argued that human society is marked by the necessity for learning symbolic or conventional meanings of words and actions. These are learned through social contact communicated through symbolic interaction, that is, by visualizing oneself in the manner that others see one. Shared symbolic systems are needed for role playing. It is possible to learn to play roles only because individuals can take the roles of others. G. H. Mead identifies two stages in the development of the self. First comes “I”, that is, the inner, unpremeditated subjective self. And then come “Me”, which reflects upon symbolic communication with others, and which is then able to incorporate societal values into the self-concept (Mead 1934).

Irving Goffman wrote about the interaction of the self with others in face-to-face encounters. He built upon G. H. Mead’s concept of the relation of role playing to the development of the self. Goffman portrayed all social behavior as a constant dramatic

performance. Whether in private or public interaction, the self is always "presented" in a histrionic production – all human behavior is role-playing. Goffman's studies led him to the analysis of impression management. He observed and recorded the impressions that individuals projected to each other in different routines of inter-personal behavior in various environments (Goffman 1959).

Eric Erikson held that identity is a process located in the "core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture, a place which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities" (Erikson 1968:22). Erikson followed Freud's formulation of id-ego-super ego. To Erikson, identity was related not only to internal development, but also to interaction with society. According to him, the ego of all persons undergoes eight stages in their life cycle, and social exchange patterns emerge in these stages. An "identity–crisis" normally takes place during adolescence, but a crisis in any stage of the life cycle can precipitate an identity crisis.

George Herbert Mead outlined a separation between "I", that is, the inner, subjective self, and "Me", that is, the self concept, the self that emerges through symbolic and role assigned communication with others (Mead 1934). My understanding is that the "I" of first generation Indian working women long-settled in the U.S. remains largely Indian, but is decidedly American in certain moral values, tastes in food, clothing, and leisure activity preferences. The "Me" is transformed to a transnational/diasporic/*pravasi* "Me". This is because the long duration working female immigrant is constantly poised between radically different cultures. The longer the work experience in America, the greater the capacity for presentation of a repertoire of behaviors that conform to expectations prevailing in the workplace, and in other American contexts. The inner self

continues to be somewhat Indian, even while it is gradually influenced by American mores. Moreover, expatriate Indian women who have lived and worked in the U.S. for long return to Indian choices in a few key aspects of their lives for the sake of building up self-respect and an adequate identity. Indian immigrant home life retains its ethnic flavor not simply because of the links to an Indian past, but also due to constant re-affirmation and active "Indianization" in the present. Indianization is initiated by those very women who are adept at projecting an American self when the situation demands it. This recursive pattern of reproducing Indianness in America arises out of a need to reinforce a sense of self-adequacy, and is not perceived to be in contradiction to an American identity (Steele 1988). In fact due to various macro politico-economic factors, Indians in the U.S. believe that a strategic (and partial) return to their ethnicity will help them to rise in class/race formations within the U.S.

While I did find a contrast in "for presentation to Indians" roles, identities, and selves, and "for presentation to so-called mainstream Americans" roles, identities, and selves in the lives of the women I interviewed and observed, I found that the longer they have been in the U.S., and more specifically, the longer they have been in the American workforce, the more adept they become at switching back and forth between the two identities. In fact, they often cross over from one identity to another, and back, both at work and at home.

For example, Megha, a university professor who has been in the U.S. for two decades says, "When I am a teacher, like, whatever sensibility, Indian or American, helps me to get my point across, that is what [I use]." So she scolds her students for making a "typically American comment" when they call a French "elitist" for including many

French words in her book. Megha tells her students that “only Americans refuse to learn other languages, and think that anybody who speaks any other language is elitist.” In her words, “ So sometimes, in these sorts of occasions, I allow them to see that I am an outsider….I’ll present myself to my students as a teacher, and then, when it is relevant,…..I’ll introduce my experience of India.” But, at other times, for example, while teaching a class about American society she says to her class, “But this is a problem WE have to face,” saying WE as an American.

Urmila is a physician in the South Bay. She has been in the U.S. for more than two decades. Many of her patients are Indian. Indian or not, almost all her patients call her Dr. Bannerjee. But those patients that she knows as friends also, call her Urmi. Those of this later group who are younger than her call her Urmi*di* (short for Urmila *Didi*, *Didi* is the Bengali word for elder sister). So here we have a professional-client relationship between a physician and patient turn from the American (Western) practice of referring to the physician as “Doctor” to the Indian practice of imputing kinship to all of one’s elders. However, for all non-Indian patients, Urmila continues to be Dr. Bannerjee. Urmila is comfortable with this back and forth switch between being “Doctor” and being “*Didi*”.

Shupriya is a systems auditor at a private university in Northern California. She has lived in the U.S. for eighteen years. Shupriya is the President of a professional organization called Information Systems Audit and Control Association. Though Shupriya was the only Indian in the organization for a long time, recently a lot of Indians have enrolled in it. A few of them are board members. An Indian male board member remarked to Shupriya, “Oh, it is really nice to see Indian women take positions of

leadership. Indian women don't want to take leadership in professional organizations, they just want to do their work and come back and….so it's really nice." This is a rather innocuous remark, but I believe that such a remark transforms Shupriya's identity in the organization from that of primarily "President" (a non-ethnic professional role) to that of an "Indian woman", an ethnic and gender role. But having faced similar situations before, Shupriya was not rattled by this sudden change in role. She says, "He made the comment to me. I didn't go into it any more because he must have felt it. And he meant it as a compliment to me. It wasn't that he was trying to denigrate me. So I said, "Oh well, you know, maybe a lot of women don't have the opportunity to come up.""

SETTLED IMMIGRANT NON-WORKING WOMEN: IN A TIME WARP

Comparative analysis searches for variance in experience across different groups. While my study mainly focuses on Indian working women in the U.S., I also interviewed a number of settled non-working U.S. resident Indian women in the Bay Area. My purpose was to find out the difference, or lack thereof, made by participation in the American workplace. I found that immigrant non-working Indian women in the U.S. exhibit a very low degree of Americanization. Confinement to their home and to the Indian expatriate community has resulted in effective insulation from American society. The media, local services (such as stores, physicians, banks), and the children of these women were their only link to American ideas, customs, behavior, morals, law, art, and belief systems. In most cases, the husbands of non-working expatriate Indian women did not encourage the Americanization of their wives or children.

To my surprise, I found that settled Indian immigrant non-working women were not only less “Americanized” than any of my other respondents, they also exhibited a lower degree of identification with current Indian thought and practice than any of my other interviewees. What they seemed most comfortable with was the culture of the India of the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s, that is, the India they had emigrated from. In a sense, these women lived in a time warp. Despite their frequent visits to India, their behavior and mode of thinking was frozen in the cultural habits of the India of many decades ago. In America, they formed close-knit communities with other settled Indian immigrants. Most of their friends were other non-working Indian women who had settled in the U.S. along with their families.

Kusum says, “I love to visit India, I visit India often, but I usually end up feeling out of place there too. I don’t relate to my school and college friends anymore. I wear *saris* and *salwar kameezes*, they wear pants, shirts, jeans, or the new *kurtis* and micro-mini *salwar kameezes* that are the latest fashion there. I chat about the latest achievements of my children, they tell me about their own achievements at work. Most of them have flourishing careers in India. I am not employed.”

Arunima says, “Because my children are growing up in the U.S., I am very particular about speaking to my children in Bengali, and making sure they reply in Bengali. But when I visit Kolkata, I find that all their cousins, that is, my nieces and nephews, constantly chatter with each other in English, not Bengali!”

Paulomi says, “You know how I have problems with American culture. I hate the sex and violence shown on American T.V., the emphasis on dating, and the drugs in American junior high and high school. But despite all these bad influences, I think I have

been able to bring up my daughter very well. She listens to me. She goes to school only to study there, she doesn't waste too much of time on socializing. My husband and I don't even allow her to go the mall on her own or with her friends. But look at the young people in India now a days. What strange clothes they wear, all M.T.V. type clothes! They start dating in high school! And when they grow up, they don't want to be doctors, engineers or teachers any more, they all want to be fashion models or beauty queens! They grew up in India, but what Indian culture have they learned?! My Moni was raised in America, but she is more Indian than them!"[78]

G.H. Mead distinguishes between "I", representing inner spontaneity, and "Me", signifying a connection to others (Mead 1934). "Me" is the reflection of oneself inscribed in the gaze of the other. "Me" enables individuals to incorporate social values into their self-concept. Due to their upbringing in India, the "I" of both working and non-working Indian immigrant women in the U.S. is essentially Indian. But what about their "Me"? Working immigrant women are constantly exposed to the American "other" at work. Hence they become increasingly capable of playing the role that the American co-worker

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[78] Non-working Indian women both in the U.S. and in India speak of disillusionment with the promise of globalism. In fact Gurcharan Das echoes this sentiment when he writes: The relentless onslaught of globalization makes people everywhere deeply uneasy. The prospect of living in a homogenized and faceless world is not a pleasant one. No one particularly likes the idea of the global culture. The global media ensures that we increasingly watch the same banal shows, hear the same capsuled news, listen to the same silly advertising slogans, and are moved by the same collective emotions. Regimentation under a mass consumer society of worldwide dimensions is a stifling prospect. And for what – so that we may have more and more consumer goods and material possessions? We are lost in a maze of large and anonymous organizations. We are filled with a profound sense of being alone in an unheroic world, with little control over our destinies. At other times we react to our alienated existence with tedium and boredom. These feelings of loneliness and alienation are the most acute in the most successful and competitive economies – the United States, Japan, Germany, and South Korea. (Das 2002:355, 2002).

expects them to, that of an American employee and American workplace colleague. This also helps them to perform expected roles in non-work situations in America, such as at the store, the doctor's clinic, the child's school, sport events, movie theaters etc. This transforms their "Me" from completely Indian to significantly American. Naturally, some part of the "Me" of working Indian women in the U.S. remains Indian due to the effects of the past, and due to a recursive pattern of a limited return to Indianness in certain areas of one's life.

In the case of non-working Indian women, there is very little Americanization of the "Me". Deprived of the opportunity to interact with Americans, Indian immigrant women who do not work outside the home fail to observe or learn general attitudes and behavioral characteristics prevalent in American society. The "Me" of such women is reflective of the community in the midst of which they spend maximum time and in which they are most comfortable: the Indian immigrant community. Within this community, they usually limit their interaction to other non-working Indian women resident in the U.S. with their families. Communication within this highly integrated community is frequent and thorough, including daily phone-calls or emails, weekly lunch or dinner get-togethers, social exchanges at weekly classes in which immigrant children are taught Indian dance, music, language, or religious texts, and monthly meetings at Indian regional and religious festivals at the Hindu temple.

CONCLUSION: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF BY INDIAN IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONAL AND SEMI-PROFESSIONAL WORKING WOMEN EMPLOYED IN THE SAN FRANCISCO-OAKLAND-SAN JOSE AREA

In my study of the self and identity of Indian immigrant women employed in the San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose Area, I have used analytical tools from various disciplines such as cultural anthropology, social psychology, women's studies, and ethnic studies. Postcolonial analysis and the recent literature on globalization have also been of enormous assistance to me. I have minutely mapped the exact manner in which labor-force participation and the length of residence in the United States intersect in their effect on the construction of self conception by middle-class Indian women living and working in the San Francisco Bay Area. I am hopeful that my research results are a worthy contribution to immigrant studies, and that my study is specially relevant to not only the 1.7 million Indians in the United States, but also to general analysts of the current scenario of accelerated regional, intra-national, and inter-national migration across the globe.

I found that Indian women who have spent a short time living and working in the U.S. are still extremely unfamiliar with American cultural practices. It takes them a year or two to familiarize themselves with American accents, monetary currencies, driving practices, and general behavioral expectations. Indian women are better acquainted with American ways after a couple of years of residence and employment in America. By this time, they find it quite easy to effectively function in the American workplace and in American society in general. In fact, after a decade or more of employment in the American workplace, Indian immigrant women become adept at "behaving American".

They are equally, if not more, comfortable with American food, clothes, and leisure time activities as they are with Indian ones. This makes it easier for them to "fit in" while interacting with Americans in the workplace, and also in non-work situations.

However, prolonged interaction with "mainstream" Americans results in a perception that irrespective of age, occupation, financial status, or general abilities, Indian immigrants are viewed by "mainstream" Americans primarily as "brown people". Yen Le Espiritu writes,

> Ethnicity is forged and changed in encounters among groups. Because groups possess unequal power, they face unequal choices in these encounters. For the less powerful groups, ethnicity is not always voluntary, but may be imposed by a more powerful group. This imposed ethnicity may or may not match the subordinate group's established cultural and organizational practices. When there is a mismatch, members of the subordinate group often have to change their world to adapt themselves to the demands of the outside world.(Espiritu 1992:161)

Being brown in America, Indians have secured a mediatory niche for themselves in American race and class formations. Predisposed to middlemanship by their colonial history of mediating between white colonial powers and the native laboring masses of India, post-colonial Indian bourgeoisie who migrate to the U.S.A. act as a middleman minority. They facilitate the execution of the directives of a mostly white managerial class by a working class composed of whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians.

While the social and financial security achieved by a mediatory position is quite gratifying, Indian immigrants in the U.S. are not satisfied with it. They would like to be something more than conveniently positioned "brown people". Also, being racially prejudiced themselves, they would like to distinguish themselves from other people of

color such as Hispanics and blacks. A re-composition of Indian ethnicity provides a suitable vehicle to fulfill such yearnings. Indian ethnicity provides a convenient hook on which to hang one's identity. A return to India ethnicity bolsters self and identity, and this is not perceived to contradict the formation of an American identity. Indians in the U.S. feel that a strategic (though partial) re-activation of Indian ethnicity will help them to rise in the race/class hierarchy in the U.S. and provide them with an upwardly mobile American identity. Misguided by chauvinistic notions of ethnic pride, displays of Indian ethnicity are also meant to show that Indian spirituality, family oriented Indian values, superior Indian moral standards, higher levels of Indian educational and economic success, and a glorious ancient Indian historical heritage are indicators of the general superiority of Indians over all other American races and ethnicities. In the main, this is a sadly misguided attempt to improve the position of Indians in America.[79]

Resurrection of Indian ethnicity also provides a path to the establishment of an Indian global diasporic identity. There are Indian immigrants all over the world, for Indian immigration began with the export of Indian indentured laborers to African, West Indian, and other remotely located plantations in colonial times, and has continued in the post-colonial era in the "brain-drain" of highly qualified Indian technical professionals and students to the West, and the outflow of Indian white and blue collar workers to the oil-rich nations of the Arabian Gulf. A few Indians have earned phenomenal fame and riches outside India. Millions of *desi* immigrants across the globe attempt to make the achievements of these few spectacularly successful Indians abroad a part of their own

[79] It is misguided to attempt to put down other races; the correct alternative is to treat all races and ethnicities equally.

identity by projecting a "global Indian" self in their dealings with the natives of the lands they have settled in. Indian transnational networks shape income-generating projects, marital alliances, and artistic fusion across several distant continents and oceans. In the overseas situation, local and global connections of the Indian regional level flourish just as vibrantly, if not more so than pan-Indian global networks. In the Bay Area, events organized by local chapters of pan-Indian American associations such as the Federation of Indian in America (F.I.A.) are sparsely attended, but local Indian regional associations such as those of the Punjabis, Tamils, Telegus, Bengalis, and Marathis are very popular. Regional Indian congeries also have effective global systems. Gujarati and Sindhi global loyalties have translated into transnational import-export enterprises and Patel-Motel chains across entire continents.[80] Tamil, Telegu, and Andhraite regional collaborations across the world lead to technological globe-spanning businesses, such as outsourcing computer-software programming from Western locales to Bangalore and Hyderabad. Bengali sitar maestros resident in the U.S. jive with fellow-Bengali *tabla* players settled in the United Kingdom and produce "world music". These are a few of the innumerable current examples of Indian regional socio-economic networks that function at the global level. Presentation of the ethnic self in the country of settlement is intimately linked with the desire to benefit from transnational pan-Indian or Indian regional ties across the globe.

Despite the projection of Indianness, American cultural competence continues to be a requirement of professional and personal survival and success in the U.S.A. I discovered that the self of Indian expatriate women who have lived and worked in the

[80] A Patel-Motel is a motel owned by an Indian. Indian motel owners are usually Gujarati, and Patel is a common Gujarati name; hence such motels are often called "Patel-Motels".

U.S. for long is both very “American” and very “Indian”. Their high degree of Americanness is due to long and thorough interaction with “mainstream” Americans. In fact Indian women in the American workplace feel the need to prove their cultural competence by fitting in with their American co-workers. At the same time, their great extent of Indianness is due to re-production of diasporic Indian ethnicity in specific aspects of life in order to build up self-esteem. Post-migration self-esteem diminishes upon perception of one’s “racial minority and hence non-elite” status in America, re-evocation of ethnicity appeals to several Indian women as a means to boost self-esteem. Though both “American” and “Indian”, Indian professional women are often evaluated as not American enough at work and inadequately Indian at home. Though they are easily hired and promoted for technical positions, due to a widely held perception that Indians lack communicative skills, they are rejected in positions requiring inter-personal skills and managerial abilities. Also, Indian women are trained to be modest and accommodating, hence they are at a disadvantage in the American corporate environment where the commonly accepted work ethic favors self-promotion and self-assertion. At the same time, traditional men and women within the immigrant community often criticize “modern” Indian women in America for their “un (Indian) womanly” forthrightness and aggressiveness.

Being largely confined to the home, non-working expatriate Indian women are effectively insulated from American society. Hence, their level of Americanization is low. Surprisingly, such women exhibit very little identification with the culture and values of present-day India. The majority of these subjects lived in a time warp. They still function according to the culture of the India they had emigrated from, the India of two to three

decades ago. America-resident Indian women who are employed have greater agency than their non-working counterparts, for despite their residence in the progressive environment of the U.S., the traditional Indian patriarchal bias continues to be extremely active in the lives of Indian housewives in the U.S.A. The absence of extended family in the country of settlement allows greater opportunity for companionship between immigrant married couples and more chances for married women to act independently. Yet, newfound privacy and the absence of mediating family seniors in America also heightens the peril of domestic abuse and wife battering when things go wrong in an immigrant marriage. Indian women in the U.S., especially those who are not employed, do not know how to go about seeking help from the administrative and healthcare systems in the U.S.

In this chapter I have used the analytical concepts of self and identity formulated by diasporic theorists as well as symbolic interactionists such as George Herbert Mead and Irving Goffman to examine the degree of Indianness vs. Americanness of professional immigrant Indian women in the San Francisco Bay Area

I have differentiated between Indian expatriate women in the Bay Area on the basis of variables such as length of residence in the U.S. and duration of employment in the American workplace. While I have mainly focused on working women in the Indian community, I have also studied a small group of non-working women for the sake of comparison.

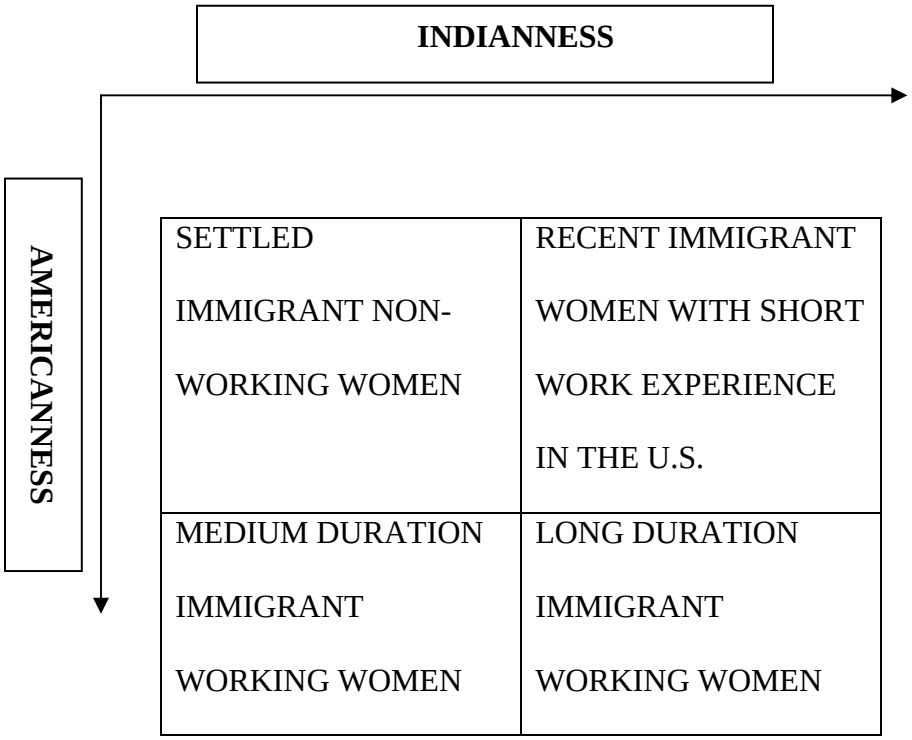

Fig.1. Indianness vs. Americanness in four categories of Indian women in the San Francisco Bay Area. The variables against which Indianness and Americanness have been measured are a) length of residence in the U.S., b) labor force participation

I found that Indian women who have spent a short time (approximately less than two years) living and working in the U.S., are still extremely unfamiliar with American cultural practices. Due to the recent forces of globalization, current middle-class Indians are exposed to significant doses of American multi media and material goods even without stirring out of India. Though significant, these penetrations of American culture are not enough to enculturate prospective immigrants to the U.S. After the initial shock of arrival in the U.S., it takes a year or two for "F.O.B." (Fresh Off the Boat) Indians to familiarize themselves with the American spoken accent, monetary currency, driving

practices, and general behavioral expectations. In this initial phase, both Mead's inner "I" and outer "Me" continue to be Indian.

Indian women are better acquainted with American ways after a couple of years of residence and employment in America. They find it quite easy to effectively function in the American workplace and in American society in general in this phase of their adjustment to American life. It is at this stage that they begin to enjoy the unparalleled freedom of individual choice, unrestricted consumerist pleasures, and financial security that America offers. The internal psyche represented by "I" remains Indian, but the "Me" that represents modification of concepts of the self in accordance with external influences undergoes extensive Americanization.

After a decade or more of employment in the American workplace, Indian immigrant women become adept at "behaving American". They are equally, if not more, comfortable with American food, clothes, and leisure time activities as they are with Indian ones. However, prolonged interaction with "mainstream" Americans results in a perception that irrespective of age, occupation, financial status, or general abilities, Indian immigrants are viewed by "mainstream" Americans primarily as "brown people". Does being brown in America mean social and political subordination? Not necessarily. Indians are said to be, and they want to be, a model minority. They have secured a mediatory niche for themselves in American race and class formations. Predisposed to middlemanship by their colonial history of mediating between white colonial powers and the native laboring masses of India, post-colonial Indian bourgeoisie who migrate to the U.S.A. act as a middleman minority. They facilitate the execution of the directives of a mostly white managerial class by a working class composed mainly of blacks, Hispanics,

and Asians and some whites. Indian immigrants in California are commonly employed in positions where they direct Hispanics, blacks, and Asians to follow the orders of mainly white higher management.

From my conversations with Indian immigrants in the Bay Area, I have come to believe that while the social and financial security achieved by a mediatory position is quite gratifying, Indian immigrants in the U.S. are not satisfied with it. They would like to be something more than conveniently positioned “brown people”. Also, being shamefully chauvinistic themselves, they would like to distinguish themselves from other people of color such as Hispanics and blacks. A re-activation of Indian ethnicity provides a suitable vehicle to fulfill such yearnings.

A return to Indian ethnicity bolsters self and identity, and this is not perceived to contradict the formation of an American identity (Steele 1988). But of course, the question of authenticity is very relevant here. As Luhrmann has said, “Authenticity is the “really real” of personal experience and selfhood becomes a particularly heightened problem in postcolonial culture because anxiety over labeling is central for the selves whose history is steeped in cross-identification and rejection” (Luhrmann 1996: 201). To put it simply, as Homi Bhabha has pointed out, the problem with people of color, whether postcolonial or immigrant, is that they identify with whites, so how can they be proud of their own heritage? Yen le Espiritu has pointed out that through reversed beliefs in superiority, ethnic minority families and communities in America have indeed found a suitable discourse to dismiss their own rejection by white culture. In fact, I discovered that Indians in the U.S. feel that a strategic (though partial) re-activation of Indian ethnicity will help them to rise in the race/class hierarchy in the U.S. and provide them

with a “voice” in American politics. The exhibition of Indian ethnicity is also an extremely misguided attempt to convince everyone of the so-called “superiority” of Indians over others, specifically over blacks and Hispanics.

In highlighting accommodative or group adjustment strategies of the Indian immigrant community in the United Kingdom, Rashmi Desai foreshadowed my conclusion that Indian immigrants choose alternative paths to individual assimilation (Desai 1963). The proliferation of globalization has changed accommodative strategies somewhat. Easy availability of diasporic media, goods, and services enabled my informants to establish a diasporic identity, very much as participation in an ethnic Indian sub-economy enabled Desai’s subjects to accommodate to British life. Geographical proximity of co-ethnics is a common factor in both studies.

As far as class status is concerned, Indian Americans believe that in this paradigm too, accentuating Indian ethnic heritage will serve to consolidate the Asian Indian mediatory class position by reminding the American public of the Indian bourgeoisie’s past of serving as middlemen for white colonial powers (and diasporic post-colonial forces too, in Africa, Fiji, West Indies, etc.).

The self of Indian expatriate women who have lived and worked in the U.S. for long is both very “American” and very “Indian”. The high degree of Americanness is due to long and thorough interaction with “mainstream” Americans. The great extent of Indianness is due to reproduction of diasporic Indian ethnicity in specific aspects of life in order to build up self-esteem. A major part of the immigrant adjustment process involves re-adjusting one’s sense of self. An Indian professional who might have been unemployed or underemployed in India, might nevertheless have been part of the social

elite in India on account of his high caste, extensive family connections, or high level of education. Due to his technical qualifications, such a person might have no problem finding employment in the U.S., but after prolonged interaction with “mainstream” Americans, he or she may suffer from low-esteem due to a belief that as a “brown” person, he or she has no hope of becoming a part of the social or political elite in the U.S. While this is a common complaint in the Indian immigrant community, the truth is that due to the great wealth they have amassed here, or due to the political connections they have nurtured over the years in the U.S., or due to their brilliant academic achievements here, many Indians in the U.S. have in fact been successful in penetrating American elite circles.

Symbolic interactionism is a conception of the human world which holds that people use symbols to interact with each other and with the environment to fulfill their needs. Human beings use symbols to give meaning to their world. The assignment of symbols to specific objects, makes social interaction possible. Social interplay enables individuals and groups to construct a specific reality. Though social reality is an artificial construct due to the phenomenon of reification, human beings usually regard their social order as prior, immutable, inevitable and necessary.

Humans treat themselves as part of their objective environment. The self is created through interaction between the individual and society by means of collectively ratified symbols. The self is socially produced in that an individual can only be what socially available symbols allow him to be. The individual’s personal qualities, capabilities and intentions are shaped by and reflected in, socially available symbols. But the self is also individually created because human conduct is the result of interplay

between individual spontaneous subjective impulse and objective reflection about one's spontaneous response to a situation.

The "Me" directs individuals to take the role of others towards themselves in order to tailor their behavior to social expectations. Once the "Me" has performed its role, the "I" comes back into action. The "I" and "Me" are phases of alternating consciousness. Thus human action is self referential, for the self comprises a crucial part of every individual's environment. Human action is also decided by the expected reactions of significant reference groups with which the individual interacts.

We have seen that the expectation of others is crucial in deciding behavior by the self. Yet, human behavior is not perfectly predictable. This is partly because no individual is the same in the eyes of all others. Hence, the expectations of different people are varied.

The individual changes his self in each case in order to fit the expectations generated by the role of the other. Thus an individual might develop contradictory self-conceptions (identity, self-image and self-esteem) which make it difficult to accurately predict conduct. Another factor that causes unpredictability is that human impulse cannot always be brought under control by socialized self-reference.

Using the tools offered by symbolic interactionism, my research goals have included analysis of the "I"-"Me" phase function in my informants, identification of divergent role-expectations, and a resolution (or not) of contradictory self-conceptions.

The inner "I" of long duration immigrants is no longer fully Indian; due to prolonged American influences, it also significantly American. The outer "Me" is

diasporic in that it constantly alternates between newly learned, but well rehearsed, "American" roles and so-called "traditional Indian" ethnic roles.

I interviewed ten settled Indian immigrant non-employed women. Such women exhibit very little identification with the culture and values of either America or present-day India. Due to the recent privatization of industries, the exponential growth of multinational corporations, and the extensive penetration of global mass media into India, the nation has changed enormously in the last decade. The women of this group were unwilling to acknowledge recent sweeping changes in Indian attitudes and perspectives. I believe that the inner psyche of these women remains Indian, and their external self is reflective of the tightly-knit community in the midst of which they have found shelter, that of fellow-Indian immigrant wives who are not employed.

My topic of research touches close to my own life. I am not exempt from the prejudices, shortsightedness, and aspirations for upward mobility that I have described among my Indian immigrant interview subjects. I suppose that like other Indians who reside in the U.S., I too have a contested self and identity. I try to "fit in" and "act American" with my American colleagues, neighbors, my children's school teachers, and store clerks. At the same time, I proclaim my ethnicity when the occasion demands it. I am Indian American, but how much of Indianness do I have left in me and how much can I reproduce? How American should I be, and how much will I be allowed to become? While I attempt to conform to American "mainstream" culture, I also wear my ethnicity on my sleeve, celebrating Diwali annually with lighted lamps on my doorstep, and a presentation on the meaning of Diwali in my son's school. Of course, diasporic Indian ethnicity is not my only social identity. Like all individuals, I am located in multiple

positions of social peripherality as well as centrality. I may project my diasporic identity actively, but I am also conscious of being a brown immigrant. I did not think of myself as brown until I came to the West. In India, my Westernized education, my upper-caste status, my ancestral roots in Eastern India, and my gender, were the main markers of my identity.

I arrived in America more than a decade ago. I still remember the thrill I experienced when my flight from Mumbai touched down in Los Angeles International Airport; I had arrived in the United States of America! Later that day I began to decipher the intricacies of the American accent, local currency, and American traffic rules. I learned to drive on American roads in a couple of years; it was such fun to drive to the mall and shop for American consumer goods that were out of my reach in my hometown in India! My proudest moments were when I furthered my dream of professional achievement in an academically-rigorous American university environment. I know I am carrying the weight of the academic and class aspirations of my entire extended family as I progress towards completing my degree.

Resident in California since the mid-nineties, the racial diversity of California has prompted me to define myself in racial terms. My own brownness came to me reflected in the behavior of those around me. Hall reminds us that identity is "always constructed though splitting, splitting between that which one is, and the other." Thus the self is defined by one's own vantage point, but it is also narrated from the position of the other. The self is "inscribed in the gaze of the other" (Hall 1997:48). At stores, seeing salespersons articulating their words over-carefully when they spoke to me, I understood that they were not sure that I comprehended their American accent. I witnessed my pre-

schooler son's confusion about whether he should color human figures in his coloring book pink, as most of the children in his class did, or brown, as is his own skin. A couple of years ago I went to City Hall to attend my naturalization ceremony. There I saw a sea of brown, yellow, black, and white immigrants around me, and I was one of them. Gradually I came to confront my own brownness. I began to identify myself as a brown woman.

Every time I show my U.S. passport to immigration officials, I remember that I am no longer a sojourner, I am an immigrant, here to stay on in the U.S.A. My knowledge that I am here in America for good makes it difficult to complain about any real or perceived racism or classism in the U.S., for I know that it is my choice to stay on in this country. Stuart Hall has written that identities are never complete, they are never finished: "Identity is always in the process of formation" (Hall 1997:47). This has certainly proved to be true in my own life. I identified myself as a highly-educated, upper-caste, Eastern Indian woman when I resided in India. But I now see myself as a "female minority immigrant" and as a "global multicultural transnational woman". I know many separate worlds and I can function in all of them, but I am not sure that I am a complete "insider" in any of them. In my dissertation I have analyzed women who found themselves in similar intersections of nationality, employment, home, and class affiliations. I am confident that my analysis of how immigration, race, gender, class, and employment impact the experience of self and identity of Indian immigrant working women in the San Francisco Bay Area will be useful to future students of gender and migration.

CHAPTER FIVE : CONCLUSION

This dissertation has been an exploration of the forging of selves and identities of Asian Indian working women, mainly professional and semi-professional, in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area. Such an endeavor may be considered worthwhile for several reasons. Arguably, anthropologists today must be cognizant of sweeping changes in global populations in the current era of late capitalism. Traditionally a study of the "other" in the colonial and capitalist periphery, anthropology must now adjust to the entrance of the "other" in unprecedented numbers into the Western core metropolis. The "self" of the global metropolis and the "other" are in closer proximity than ever before, and the discipline of anthropology must record and analyze the intermingling of the two in the brave new world of incessant cultural and racial hybridity in the era of far-reaching technological and financial liaisons across national and ethnic boundaries.

Secondly, from a theoretical point of view, there are some interesting issues in the problematic of studying the construction of Asian Indian women's selves and identities in the United States. Globalization has brought about flows of finance, technology, goods, people, and ideas across the globe in unprecedented volumes. Capitalism from its inception in the North Atlantic seaboard brought about increasing global exchanges. Now in its advanced stage, capitalism has compressed time and space so radically that we cannot assume isomorphism of the nation and its citizens anymore (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). This has created, as Arjun Appadurai (1996) has argued in his work on the cultural

dimensions of globalization, cosmopolitan and diasporic identities that consist of disjunctive components. This dissertation attempts to analyze the construction of selfhood by women who have been able to immigrate to the United States due to neo-liberal immigration policies approved by the American state in the mid-sixties. I have analyzed the making of self and identity of professional working women in the Asian Indian diaspora in the Silicon Valley in this context.

Thirdly, it may be very worthwhile to notice the salient presence of the Asian Indian professionals in United States from a pragmatic point of view. There are 1.7 million Indians in the U.S. Approximately half of Asian Indian women in America work. The Silicon Valley is marked by a large presence of Indian professionals, many of whom are women. These women are a worthy subject of study for they form a substantial proportion of technical workers in the informatics industry. My question is: how do they construct a self and identity that is adequate to negotiate racialization and sexism, to the extent these are [perceived as] features of the workplace in the U.S., and gender bias and parochialism at home? Needless to say, apart from the issues above, from the vantage point of contemporary research in gender studies the problem in focus in this dissertation also appeared worthwhile.

The establishment of Indian immigrant communities in North America commenced with the arrival of North Indian laborers in the lumber mills and railway construction sites in Canada and U.S. in the late nineteenth century. The trajectory of developments since then has been outlined in Chapter One, along with a brief discussion of the theoretical approaches relevant to the problems developed in this dissertation. The

ethnographic insights of Hondagneu-Sotelo, Shamita Das Dasgupta, and Suzanne Brenner about gender, work, and identity have been critical to the development of my own research theories. Theories of global, transnational and diasporic identity as developed by Arjun Appadurai, Yen Le Espiritu, Ulf Hannerz, Aihwa Ong, Lisa Lowe, Stuart Hall, Anthony King, and Immanuel Wallerstein have shown me new paths for the analysis of immigrant consciousness. Post colonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Tanya Luhrmann have produced eloquent studies of the psychological dissonance of individuals who are placed betwixt and between the ideologies of now extinct colonies, and the neo-nationalist chauvinistic beliefs of newly-liberated homelands. Scholars of the Indian American immigrant experience: -- Rosemary George, Sheba Mariam George, Vijay Prashad, Amitav Kumar, Sandhya Shukla, Madhulika Khandelwal, Sayantani Dasgupta, Karen Leonard, Sucheta Mazumdar, Sangeeta Gupta, Priya Agarwal, and Kamala Visweswaran -- have provided me with a road-map to research the day-to-day realities of cultural assimilation, racial exclusion, ethnic resurgence and model minority politics in the United States. George Herbert Mead's theory of self and mind, Erving Goffman's understanding of the interaction order, and Erik Erikson's studies of identity and personality also provided theoretical foundations for the study. Since the increase in the influx of non-European immigrants in the sixties and the civil rights movement newer immigration theories emerged; the contributions of Harry H. L. Kitano, Roger Daniels, and Ronald Takaki, among others, address the very relevant issue of ethnic separatism and minority status created on the basis of differences of race and ethnicity. This dissertation also attempts to construct a theoretical model of the various stages of female Asian Indian diasporic identity formation in the Silicon Valley.

I have conducted extensive interviews with Asian Indian professional working women in the Silicon Valley. There are at times, interspersed in the preceding pages, lengthy first person narratives by my subjects; I considered it useful to allow the women to speak in their own voice. As I have shown above, my interviewees displayed contested identities in which the performance of American assimilationism conflicted with that of diasporic Indian ethnicism. Undoubtedly the level of assimilation or accommodation vis-a-vis mainstream American society increases with length of residence and employment history in the United States, but parallel to that there is an increasing emphasis on Indian diasporic identity among those who have a long residence experience and employment history. It has been argued in this dissertation that the following model explains how these conflicting trends develop in the self and identity of Asian Indian women in white collar professions in the Silicon Valley.

In the *first stage* of identity formation, in the first couple of years in the U.S., my subjects dealt with the shock of arrival in America. Due to the pervasiveness of Western culture in ex-colonial India, my subjects had imagined that they were adequately familiar with Western culture to negotiate the intricacies of daily life and culture in America. Yet, when they got off the plane from India, they found that their ignorance of local linguistic accents, currency, cuisine, clothing fashions, traffic regulations, and modes of behavior, were sufficiently alienating in the U.S. to cause them great discomfiture.

In the *second stage*, my subjects became increasingly familiar with American ways of being. After a couple of years of residence and employment in the U.S., Indian immigrant women became adept at “being American”. They were as comfortable with

American linguistic nuances, behavioral codes, cuisine, apparel, and leisure time activities as they were with Indian equivalents. This made it easier for them to “fit in” while interacting with Americans in the workplace, and also in non-work situations. In this stage, the women completely identified with the host population.

In this *third stage*, immigrant residents in the U.S. for more than a decade, having had prolonged interaction with “mainstream” Americans, appear to be skeptical of effective assimilation. They voice a belief that irrespective of age, occupation, financial status, or general abilities, individuals of Asian Indian origin are primarily viewed by “mainstream” Americans as “racial minority immigrants”, or at best, as a “model minority”. My subjects conveyed to me that they would like to be something more than a conveniently employable “model minority”, that such a characterization is racialized and make Asians part of the “inassimilable” minorities in the U.S., and that in this country they will be perceived as ethnic minorities in the foreseeable future. As Espiritu has said, by practicing selective inclusion, the dominant majority’s includes racial and ethnic minorities in spaces where there is an economic need for them, but not in social contexts. Also, being racially chauvinistic themselves, Asian Indians would like to distinguish themselves from other ethnic and racial minorities such as Hispanics and blacks.

In this stage, Asian Indian women in the U.S. became acutely aware of being “misrecognized” as “brown immigrants” by “mainstream” Americans. In some other contexts “Misrecognition” has been the unexpected result of faithful “mimicry” of the ruling race by the ruled ethnicities (Homi Bhabha 1994). In the U.S. my subjects identified with the “whites” but the latter, the mainstream, in the immigrants’ perception,

did not accept them. Due to my subjects' conviction that "Americans" saw them mainly as "Indian immigrants", my subjects embraced the role of ethnic representatives of India. Thus, the emphatic identification with the Asian Indian minority is caused by the perception of native-born Americans that Asian Indian women are not regular Americans, but they are primarily stereotypical "Indian immigrant women". As Espiritu (1997) has pointed out Asian women often become what the dominant majority perceives them to be. Of course, there are other reasons too for the attachment to "Indianness": it is an old habit, a source of comfort, a long held identity, and a link to older and younger generations.

Indian ethnicity provides a convenient hook on which to hang one's identity. A return to India ethnicity bolsters self and identity, and this is not perceived to contradict the formation of an American identity. Indians in the U.S. feel that a strategic (though partial) *re-activation of Indian ethnicity* will help them to rise in the race/class hierarchy in the U.S. and also allow them to stay within the model minority position. The re-production of Indian ethnicity abroad has a *leit-motif*: to underline the supposed superiority of Indian "spirituality", moral standards, and historical heritage. Other observers have also noted that non-white ethnic groups use the discourse of moral superiority to transform negative ascription into positive affirmation. These are some of the factors which account for the reassertion of ethnic identity in what has been termed above the *third stage*. Despite the reaffirmation of Indian diasporic identity, American cultural competence continues to be a requirement for professional and personal survival and success in the U.S. At the same time, Indian diasporic women are expected to be the bearers of ethnic culture in the immigrant community (Sucheta Mazumdar 1998; Shamita

Dasgupta1996; Priya Agarwal1991), particularly as mothers who should transmit "Indian" culture to the children.

Arguably, the above explanation of the reassertion of ethnicity may enable us to understand the immigrants' dilemma and the complexities of assimilation on which much has been written from the 1960s to more recent theoretical interventions. From the vantage point of the woman immigrant, in this instance the Asian Indian, certain new perspectives emerge – other than the perspective of reclamation of ethnic identities from the late sixties through certain movements in the public sphere concerned with civil rights and/or cultural autonomy and agency-hood of native Indians, Chicanos, Asians, etc.

My belief is that in the first 0-2 year's duration of residence and work experience in the U.S., my informants seemed to undergo an identity crisis. The ego identity of individual personality is based on group identity and social heritage. The group and social environment changes radically when new immigrants first enter a new country. They become especially conscious of this change when they interact with local people at work. Due to the shock of acculturation and Americanization, including the pull of the durability of the ethnic (and initially, national) consciousness, my informants thus all experienced a climactic psychological change. Despite the continuity of inner identity, a perception exists that many if not most old social habits, skills, behavior and values are irrelevant in the new situation. The resultant struggle to rapidly adopt locally accepted customs, moral standards and skills causes an internal strife that appears to be resolved as a function of the time that it takes to adjust to the new environment.

The conflicting demands of the roles of career-oriented woman in the American workforce on one hand, and that of the traditional Indian housewife on the other, create considerable dissonance in the psyche of Asian Indian immigrant women. As the immigrant enters the second stage, the positive psychological effects of joining the American workforce begin to be felt: first, that the Asian Indian woman has more opportunity to acculturate into the mainstream of American culture, and, second, independent identity formation of the Indian immigrant career woman is aided by the emphasis on male-female equality in the workplace (this emphasis may be superficial, but nevertheless, even the rhetoric, if not the practice, of workplace gender equity makes a psychological impact). The tendency to be *Indian at home and as "American" as possible in the work context* asserts itself.

Indian-ness at home means, inter alia, a return to the inequitable patriarchal relations that characterize the traditional Indian family. This inequity at home is difficult to accept for Indian immigrant women who aspire to be treated as well as men in their place of work.

In the long run, let us call it the third stage, increased exposure to non-Indians in the work place hastens the realization that Asian Indian immigrants are unlikely to be completely accepted as "one of us" by Americans. Rosemary Marangoly George criticizes immigrant writers who promote assimilation as a primary immigrant ambition, for such writers overlook the fact that for ethnic minorities in the United States, assimilation into the mainstream is possible only as a minority (1998). Such a minority identity has to be reconciled with the workplace requirement of "Americanness".

All of these contradictory demands on the self create a conflicted, dissonance-ridden self. It has been argued that all comprehensive models of the self contain a self-system that functions to "sustain phenomenal experience images of the self, past, present, and future as having adaptive and moral adequacy"; the goal of the self-system is to "maintain global conceptions of self-adequacy" and people eliminate the effect of specific self-threats by "affirming central, valued, aspects of the self" (Steele 1988: 289). On account of conflicting demands on their self due to the situation of the immigrant Asian Indian working women as described above, particularly in the stage when they have had long residence and work experience in U.S., they need to respond to the threat to self-integrity and the internal dissonance by various means, including the re-affirmation of Indian ethnicity.

While the above set of arguments, concerned with a major thrust area of inquiry in this dissertation, is mooted in Chapter One and elaborated in different chapters throughout this work, Chapter Two is focused upon the motivations and experiences of the immigrant Asian Indian women who step out of home to the American workplace. The testimonies of women I interviewed show clearly that while psychological, social and economic motivations are at work, the predominant motivation is economic. The increase in work participation by women as a general trend in recent times in the U.S. has been explained (England 1992) in terms of the growth in the numbers of single women, an unprecedented growth in the service sector, and the need for double income in a family where one partner may be unemployed or under-employed due to recent cyclical recessions. The first explanation is not very relevant so far as Asian Indians are concerned since there are few single permanent migrant females, and the divorce rate is

low. The other two factors are pertinent: most of the subjects are in the service sector, reflecting the general pattern among Asian Indian women, and double income is desired by my subjects both as an insurance against failure of one income and also to enable access to higher living standards. My Indian American interviewees were frank about the importance of a "supplemental" female income.

As has often been said, it is not economic pressure alone but the family context and background which matter (Stier 1991). There is a pressure of expectation: the level of education is well above average in the Asian Indian community including females (Ortiz 1994), expected productivity in the labor market is high, the parental background of immigrants is favorable to engagement in skilled or professional work. As I have shown, work participation of women "back home" in India is, according to the 1991 Indian census, also high: the national average is 35.9 per cent in the 15 to 59 age group, and even higher at 43.6 per cent in rural India. My interviews conducted in India also indicated a favorable climate of opinion in the middle classes, to which class the immigrants generally belong; the desire to find work and enhance family income seems pervasive in India as much as in the U.S. But in comparison to the Indian community in the United States, in India there was a lower level of acknowledgement of the importance of a "secondary" female income.

Expectations are connected with status enhancement as well. What Brenner (1998) has pointed out with respect to women's role in Javanese society regarding production and conservation of wealth, and transforming it into cultural objects for the enhancement of the family's status, applies to the Indian American community as well. The pattern is the same in the case of the Chinese immigrants as depicted by Aihwa Ong

(1999): a major ambition is to convert economic capital into prestige capital in the new land as in the old country. In the age of consumerism the acquisition of material objects is also the highway to status enhancement. However, other than high consumption and acquisition, my subjects, particularly non-working Indian women in the U.S., also mentioned educational achievements of children and participation in cultural activities, usually in the domain of their own Indian regional culture as further paths to status.

The most important consequence of working and earning, and therefore an implicit motivation for Asian Indian women stepping out of home to earn in the workplace, is the agency that it brings to the woman in the family. As in the case of some other Asians in the U.S. (Espiritu 1997,2003), in the Asian Indian family the woman who earns also acquires the power to make decisions. Secondly, the fact that the working woman is exposed in the workplace to the idea of equality between the sexes in American culture, loosens the hold of patriarchal values in the family -- at least in part, according to the subjects interviewed. Moreover, access to the process of acculturation into the world out there, the American world, is itself a potentially liberating experience. The extent to which that potential is realized would depend, of course, on the particularities of family context and cultural practices of the segment of Indian society it belongs to. In the conservative Indian point of view there is a prejudice against the career woman (the analogous concept, *wanita karier,* in Indonesia is analyzed in Brenner 1998). The interviewees did not emphasize this as an impediment, though they did provide, sometimes unwittingly, indirect evidence of persisting male prejudices, e.g., the stereotyping of the male being exempt from duties of child care or household chores like cooking.

Finally, a few of the subjects in this research mentioned gender barriers to advancement in employment, and it is true that occupational gender segregation affects the Asian Indian working women studied here, especially as far as sex segregation characterizes the North American labor market as a general phenomenon. To a lesser extent, this is also true of the gender gap in wages. Many of the women interviewed were computer professionals, physicians, research scientists, university employees, and others who had escaped occupational gender segregation. But the interviewees also included Indians employed in children's pre-schools, day-care institutions, old-age homes etc., traditionally women's occupations and poorly paid jobs. In some of the newer industries in the Silicon Valley, H-1 visa status foreign immigrants have been working on low salaries in software design, computer graphics, animated video production services, and computer aided design (CAD); some women are thus employed while other types of services they used to perform cheaply, e.g., data entry, data processing, business office back-room work, are being out-sourced to India and other countries. Thus employment in "technical" positions does not always mean good wages and advancement opportunities for these women.

To sum up, the drive for higher consumption levels and upward social mobility and hence the drive for employment to earn, the pressure of expectations, the ambition to gain status, the possibility of acquiring agency and authority within the family, and associated motivations have been at work to pull the Asian Indian women from out of the home to the workplace. This development leads, as we have seen earlier, to the production of an "American self" in the workplace, distinct from the "Indian self" in the

Asian Indian home. After the excursion to the workplace in this chapter, in the next we turn to the Asian Indian immigrant woman's home and community.

In Chapter Three, in attempting to situate the Asian Indian women in relation to their family and the immigrant community, we encounter first a baffling difficulty in weaving intelligibly into one narrative the evidences of little increments of improvement in the existential condition of the vast majority of such women and some small measure of empowerment that came their way, on the one hand, and, on the other, the giant leaps of freedom and responsibility for a few Asian Indian women with superlatively successful careers. The latter are often held up as exemplary cases, but the less visible majority follow a different trajectory. My interviews mainly revealed that trajectory, though the data on the super-successful are not to be ignored. Among the Indian professional and semi-professional Indian immigrant women I interviewed in the Bay Area, there were a few who had mustered up the courage to reinvent the traditional Indian male-female equation. In such cases, Dasgupta's (1998) claim on behalf of Indian American immigrant women that "Passive or insulated womanhood is not our reality" rings true.

What were the small gains made by the majority of immigrant women who entered the workplace in the U.S.? A major gain seemed to be access to family resources, ranging from a car and a joint bank account to bigger things such as education for advancement of career prospects. The latter is a big investment but many instances of this kind of support were found. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, a feeling of empowerment came to the woman once she started to contribute to the family kitty. It has been reported (Standing 1985) that in India the woman who works for wages continues to

be within the system of gender subordination in the family, due to low female wages and the woman's lack of control over the uses to which her income is put – although the same research reports that the self-perception of the wage earning woman is better than their non-earning counterparts. Standing's thesis may be true of segments in India, but so far as Indian immigrant families in India are concerned, empowerment within the family is positively associated with the wife's earning member status in the family. Standing is of the opinion that access to family resources is one of the prime indicators of status within the family. While comparison over time is difficult, i.e., comparison of the time when the wife was unemployed with the time when she was employed, in the immigrant families which came under my scrutiny in the present piece of research such access to status was greater for earning wives compared to non-earning wives. Along with this one may also notice another small gain: a little flexibility in the attitude of the husband regarding childcare and housework, a little more willingness of the husband to share such work. Finally, the ability of the wife who earns to spend money as she likes seems to matter a lot to her, judging by the responses of the subjects interviewed. To them it is a blessing to be part of the American high-autonomy, high-consumption society.

What the working women in immigrant Asian Indian families gain is to be considered in the light of certain constraints in which she is situated. We have to consider first the fact that a constraint on realizing the full potential of the status of being gainfully employed is that the family demands certain behavior patterns. The Asian Indian immigrant family brings in its baggage stereotypes about the family and male and female roles. This is not unique. It has been demonstrated (Espiritu 1997, 2003) that even though Asian Americans feel empowered by employment in the American labor market,

and even though they are glad of the absence in America of interference from the patriarchal extended family, first generation Asian immigrant women are reluctant to attempt to assert equality with their men. They fear forsaking traditional values and practices for fear of losing their husbands, who are materially, emotionally, and culturally essential for bringing up the children. The family is the seat of their ethnic identity, they do not want to lose it. Likewise among the Asian Indian subjects interviewed in the Bay Area, there is a strong tendency to "cling to the family" and hence to the marital relationship, although sentiments against patriarchal values of older times may be verbalized. The rationale for "clinging to the family" is that it is a refuge in times of distress, economic or social, the bulwark of defense for the individuals who are in a place they do not belong to. For the woman the price to pay for this may be acting out a subservient role to the husband.

There are many small ways in which this happens in everyday life. Almost all the subjects interviewed are in nucleated families in the U.S., and not in what are called joint families in India. Thus there is space for redefining roles. I noticed a flexibility in this regard. But the continued reluctance of the husbands to share housework and childcare was clear from what the respondents said and also from their silences. Due to a belief in mothers being the best nurturers for their children, most immigrant mothers, or want-to-be mothers interviewed, rejected the option of fathers performing anything but minimal childcare (however, female hired child care was common among double income Indian immigrant families). Moreover, there was a general tendency on the part of female interviewees to attribute their own success in the workplace to the sagacity or helpful attitude of the husband.

Notwithstanding these constraints, to dismiss the impact of the entry of women into the labor market will be a mistake. The family in the U.S. is not what it used to be back home, nor is the new working woman a replica of the "*Bharatiya nari"* (ideal Indian woman) inhabiting traditional imagination. Excessively negative portrayal of the oppressed and backward women from India, often by well-intentioned feminist radicals, has been criticized by immigrant Indian observers. (Dasgupta 1998, Mohanty 1991) As we have noted, there is also an agenda emerging for further empowerment of women, for their protection against ill-treatment or battering at home, for raising the level of consciousness of rights, in the immigrant women's organizations (e.g. Maitri), as well as in the writings of feminist activists and academic critics with immigrant Indian background and knowledge.

With regard to women's role in relation to the immigrant community our evidence shows that it is the women who are regarded in the community as the bearers and preservers of culture (Chatterjee 1993). Not only are they expected to enculturate their children in the home so that the next generation retains Indian culture, or some imagined version thereof, but in the community also – in the cultural events, religious festivals, national day celebrations, and similar community gatherings -- where the men, usually in Western business dress, ensure the presence of women in traditional Indian garbs. The vast majority of participants in public demonstrations of ethnic affiliations through cultural activities are women. On the part of the women there appears to be a readiness to accept this role, perhaps partly because this accords well with the self-affirming emphasis on ethnicity their own workplace experience demands, a point that was made earlier. It has been quite insightfully pointed out that the family is less important a site for identity

assertion than the community; families are relatively "free to exhibit wide variations and highly idiosyncratic patterns of interaction and adjustment", happily living in the boundaries between different identity concepts, whereas the community is more concerned with defining what it is to be an immigrant and the ideational aspects of this experience (Jean Bacon 1996).

The cultural representations of "Indianness" in community forums are essentialized versions untrue to authentic "lived culture", according to some scholars of Indian immigrant background. It has been suggested that the leaders of the Asian Indian community have vested interest in preserving and promoting "Indian heritage", in that essentialized constructions of homeland cultural identity help preserve patriarchal authority and discipline rebellious American- born teenagers (Sucheta Mazumdar 1996). Moreover, these researchers contend that the political dividends of being perceived by the Establishment as a "model minority" are appreciated by these leaders and women of the community are assigned the role of being the standard bearers of the "Indian heritage" which unites the community. Both in respect of family and the immigrant community, the discourse of "Indian heritage" was of importance. This heritage is open to diverse readings and that was true of women's status as well. It is heartening to see an activist observer's remark that we should evoke the *virangana* [female warrior] tradition of Indian culture, rather than the cult of feminine dependence on men (S. Das Dasgupta 1998).

In Chapter Four the theme of Introduction, the construction of self by Asian Indian immigrant women, mainly professional and semi-professional, in the San

Francisco Bay Area is revisited – with an attempt to integrate into the theoretical discussion the empirical data and analysis in the preceding three chapters.

The analytical concepts of self and identity formulated by symbolic interactionists have been used to examine the degree of Indian-ness vs. American-ness of professional immigrant Indian women in the San Francisco Bay Area. The main area in focus was the interplay between their Indian self/identity and their American self/identity, both of which are of course influenced by an interaction between an inner core psyche and the surrounding social milieu. I have differentiated between Indian expatriate women in the Bay Area on the basis of variables such as length of residence in the U.S. and duration of employment in the American workplace. While the focus was on working women in the Indian community, I also studied a small group of non-working women for the sake of comparison.

I have divided professional Indian working women in the Bay Area into three categories: (a) recent entrants, that is, women with short work experience in the U.S. (one to two years). (b) Medium duration working women (residence and work experience of two to ten years of work and residence in the U.S.). (c) Long duration working women (residence and work experience of more than ten years in the U.S.). The self and identity in these three categories was compared with that of Indian non-working women resident in the U.S.

The recent entrants, we have seen earlier, despite some exposure in India to the culture of the countries of the North, specially the Anglophone countries, through media and material goods, are discomfited by their unfamiliarity with American social and

cultural practices. Their enculturation takes time and in the meanwhile what Mead had called the inner "I" and the outer "Me" continue to be quite Indian.

The medium duration residents begin to function effectively in the American workplace and in the society they are thrown into and the working women appreciate the consumerist pleasures, financial security, empowerment within the family, and various kinds of freedom which were beyond their access earlier. The "Me" that represents modification of the self in response to external influence undergoes Americanization. The drive to fulfill behavioral expectations while in the American public gaze and to be accepted in the workplace is a powerful incentive at this stage.

After a decade or more of residence and work experience, the immigrant women become adept at "behaving American" but they are also more keenly aware that they are not quite part of the mainstream in American society. This is when there takes place a re-invention of their ethnicity. An important point to note is that none of the subjects interviewed spoke of actually experiencing racism at work, but they did report an experience of social unease – a consequence of being unable to find "sisters" or mentors or followers in the American mainstream. Being seen as "brown" or "racial minority immigrants" by the general populace, I have argued, leads to a self-recognition, a new perception of ethnic "difference". Although Indians as a rule are very conscious of their skin color, the normal Indian habit of mind would be to describe themselves not in terms of skin color but in terms of caste, religion, linguistic community, social status, place of residence, etc. When prompted by the powerful "mainstream" to assume a "brown" or racial and ethnic minority identity, the Asian Indian encounters an "imposed identity" and placement in an implicit hierarchization.

The Asian Indian perception of a social disadvantage in their placement as brown people or a racial and ethnic minority, their experience of being looked upon as one of the "others" by the mainstream population, as well as their acceptance of the fact that they will remain a minority distinguished as "different" -- all of these lead to an urge to develop a positive identity and a diasporic identity serves that purpose. Thus it is possible to read the emphasis on diasporic identity as a stratagem of self-presentation on the part of Asian Indians who reactivate their Indian ethnicity to bolster their self and identity. This reactivation is not perceived by them to contradict their desire for acceptance in the new country as Americans and their strenuous effort to "behave American" in the workplace -- on the contrary it is seen as a means of securing acceptance. It is the quality of the character of the host society, the tolerance of differences, which allows the strategy to work.

The reactivation of ethnicity happens in a variety of ways in both the private and the public sphere. Ethnicity is displayed to the public in community events, in religious congregations, in public performances enacting Indian "culture", in the presentation of a narrative of high level of Indian heritage in prose, in "spiritual" discourses purportedly on India's moral superiority. In the Asian Indian home the cuisine, the décor, the display of cultural artifacts, in patronizing numerous retail shops selling imported consumption items from India and cinematic and musical productions, in the pursuit of Indian culture through training children in performing arts -- there is a reassertion of ethnicity. As we have described earlier, Asian Indian women, both working and non-working women, play an important role in these processes, especially at home but also in public events.

Emphasis on diasporic identity and ethnicity is essentially a strategy for immigrants who realize that true assimilation is not possible, that in the perception of the mainstream they will continue to be "different" and one of the "others". This realization comes after long residence and work experience in the U.S., not so much to the newcomers. Hence what we have called re-activation of ethnicity is observed not so much among the newcomers, but chiefly in the third of the groups we have described above, differentiating on the basis of duration of residence and work experience in the U.S.A. Those who have spent many years of their lives on the road to "Americanization" reach a point where they also begin to learn to be "Indian".

Finally, I cannot claim to have found out the ultimate truth about people's lives and thoughts and, needless to say, identities are fluid things. But, if I may be allowed to end on a personal note, the effort to immerse myself in the immigrant community, to understand the segment I chose to study, to look at the life experience of women who were my "subjects", became a rewarding journey of self-exploration.

APPENDIX I

GLOSSARY

aadhaa: half

aamar gaa jole jaye: I burn with anger

aarti: worship with lights

annaprasan: a ceremony to commemorate the first solid food taken by an infant (typically at 6-8 months for males and 7-9 months for female infants)

babu: Sir/gentleman

bhaat: cooked rice

bhadrolok: gentleman

bhajan: Hindu devotional song

Bharatiya nari : Indian woman

Bharatiya parampara: Indian heritage

Bharatiya purush: Indian man

chapati: Indian flat-bread

daal: lentil soup

darshan: viewing/ seeing

deshe: in the homeland (in this case: India)

Desi: a term used by immigrants from the Indian subcontinent to refer to themselves; it is inclusive of all *diaspora* from the Indian subcontinent, whatever their gender, religion, caste, age, or class might be.

diya: lamp

ei deshe: in this country (in this case: U.S.A.)

eid: Islamic holy day

elaichi chai: cardamom tea

Ghaddar: revolution

ghar: home

gram: village

griha pravesh: Hindu ceremony in which a new house is blessed through a special ritual

gurdwara: Sikh temple

haat: street bazaar/ marketplace

idli: rice cakes

jhulen-wale-lal: Sindhi Saint

kadhai: Indian wok

khayenge: we will eat

khichdi: rice and lentil curry

kumkum: red powder

kurti: shirt tailored in the traditional Indian style

lajja: shyness/shame

lok ey ki bolbe: what will the people say

mandap: temple dome

mazdoor: laborer

mela: funfair

misri: sugar crystals

namkaran : Hindu ceremony in which an infant is given a name

nikli hoon: I have come out

ora bhalo noy: they are not good

paissa kama ke laungi: I will bring in money

paratha: Fried unleavened bread

phuchka: bite-sized unleavened bread balls

pravasi: diasporic

puja: worship

roti: Indian bread

Sahib: master

salwar-kameej: Indian shirt and trouser (typically narrow and tapering toward the ankles) ensemble

saransi:tongs

sari: six to nine yards of fabric (silk, cotton, chiffon, nylon etc.) draped around the body by Indian women

sati: a ritual that has not been practiced in India for more than a century, *sati* is the self-immolation of a Hindu wife on her husband's funeral-pyre

Shakto: worship of the Devi/Durga/Kali

shap ey bor: a curse becomes a boon

tabla: Indian drums

tava: griddle

theek: alright

urz: Islamic holy day

utsav: festival

Vaishnav: worship of Vishnu

yoga: traditional Indian spiritual and physical exercises.

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Tell me your life-story in a few sentences. Where were you born? Where did you spend your childhood and adolescence? Where were you educated? What is the last degree you obtained?
2. Do you work outside the home in paid employment? If so, do you work part time or full time? What position are you employed in? How long have you been employed? Why is your work important to you?
3. Are you married? How did you meet your husband? Do you have children? If so, how many? What are their ages? Do you live with family or do you live on your own?
4. For how long have you been in the U.S.? How old were you when you came here? How were you able to migrate to the U.S.? When did you last visit India? How often do you visit India? How often do your folks come from India to visit you here? How long do they stay?
5. What are your working hours? When do you usually leave home for work; when do you come back home from work? What work do you do at home? What housework/childcare chores do you do? What housework/childcare chores does your husband do? Who cares for your child/children while you are at work?
6. What do you do in your leisure time? Have you seen any movies recently? Were they English or Hindi movies? Have you read any books recently? Who were the authors? Have you been to any plays/concerts/dance recitals recently? Were they Indian?

7. Who are your closest friends? What is their ethnicity? Where/ how did you meet them?
8. Do observe any religious practices? If so, which ones?
9. What language do you speak at home? How many times do you eat Indian food in a week? How often do you wear a *sari*/*salvar kameej*?
10. Why did you migrate to the U.S.? Do you plan to stay on in the U.S. for good? If so, why? If not, why not? Name five pros and five cons in the life of an Indian immigrant in the U.S.
11. Have you ever faced any racial or ethnic discrimination?
12. Describe your relations with your colleagues at work, and with your neighbors. Do you socialize with them often? When, where?
13. Describe yourself in a few sentences.

APPENDIX III

RACIAL AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION IN CALIFORNIA

Table 4: Race alone, or in combination with one or more races in the State of California

Race	Percentage of the total population of the State of California
White alone	46.7%
White (including Hispanic whites)	63.4%
Black or African	7.4%
American Indian or Alaskan	1.9%
Asian	12.3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.7%
Other	19.4%
Hispanic	32.4%
Not Hispanic	67.6%

Source: Census Documents *www.census.gov*

Table 5: One race (State of California)

Race	Percentage of the total population of the State of California
One race	95.6%
White	59.6%
Black or African	6.7%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.0%
Asian (Asian Indian)	10.9% (0.9%)
Other Asian (mixed)	1.2%
Some other race	16.8%
Two or more races	4.7%

Source: Census Documents *www.census.gov*.

Table 6: Change in California's racial composition in the last decade

Race	2000	1990
White	46.7% 15,816,790 (The total for 2000 is 16,538,491 when counting people who listed more than one race)	57.2% 17,029,126
Hispanic	32.4% 10,966,556 (Hispanics can be of any race)	25.8% 7,613,599
Asian	10.8% 3,648,860 (the total for 2000 is 4,030,025 when counting people who listed more than one race)	8.8% 2,613,599
Black	6.4% 2,181,926 (The total for 2000 is 2,370,367 when counting people who listed more than one race)	7% 2,092,446

Source: Census Documents *www.census.gov*

Table 7: Ethnic Diversity in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area*

County	Pacific Islander (%)	White (%)	American Indian (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	Black (%)	Other (%)
Alameda	0.6	40.9	0.4	19.0	20.3	14.6	4.2
Contra Costa	0.3	49.2	0.6	17.6	12.5	14.6	4.7
Marin	0.1	78.6	-	11.1	4.5	2.8	2.7
Napa	0.3	69.1	0.5	23.7	2.9	1.2	2.3
San Francisco	0.5	43.6	0.3	14.1	30.7	7.6	3.3
San Mateo	1.3	49.8	0.2	21.9	19.8	3.4	3.6
Santa Clara	0.3	44.2	0.3	24.0	25.4	2.6	3.2
Solano	0.7	49.2	0.6	17.6	12.5	14.6	4.7
Sonoma	0.2	74.5	0.8	17.3	3.0	1.3	2.9

*Note: Santa Clara County includes Palo Alto, San Jose, Morgan Hill; Alameda includes Oakland, Hayward, Pleasanton, Livermore, Fremont; Contra Costa includes Walnut Creek, Brentwood and San Ramon. The racial and ethnic mix in each county as given in the table is simplified. Hispanics have been subtracted from each racial category -- hence "black" shows non-Hispanic blacks; "white" shows non-Hispanic whites etc. This method allows for recognition of Hispanics as a group to compare to others, though Hispanics can be of any race. (Census Documents *www.census.gov*)

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