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Research Article

Support Networks, Ethnic Spaces, and Fictive Kin: Indian Immigrant Women Constructing Community in the United States

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Abstract

Framed within the segmented assimilation perspective, this paper examines community construction by middle-class, professional Tamil immigrant women in Atlanta, Georgia. It argues that community building is a fundamentally gendered settlement activity predominantly performed by Tamil women. Using gendered labor, they construct a dynamic community across the settlement process, encompassing formal and informal, ethnic and non-ethnic components and sites, to take the form of wives' support and women's networks, cross-cultural friendships, ethnic spaces and fictive kinship. With the emergent bonding and bridging social capital, they chart their segmented incorporation as model minorities who are ethnic. In the process however, gender, race/ethnic and class hierarchies are often reinforced.

In this article, I discuss community¹ construction by middle-class, professional Tamil² immigrant women in Atlanta, Georgia. Framed by the segmented assimilation perspective on immigrant incorporation, this article asks three questions: (1) what are the forms of community constructed by Tamil women, (2) how is community building gendered, and (3) how does the constructed community facilitate their incorporation into America? By focusing on middle-class Tamil immigrants, this article advances the scholarship in several ways: (1) by theorizing community formation among South Asians it nuances our understanding of the ethnic landscape of Asians in the United States that has predominantly focused on East Asians; (2) by conferring visibility on a little-studied Indian regional group, it challenges the dominant imaginary of a homogenized Indian diaspora in the United States as being

predominantly North Indian (Gujarati/Punjabi); and in so doing (3) is attentive to the interactions and reconstitutions of stratifications of class, caste, and gender in shaping the Tamil experience in the United States.³ I argue that community building among professional Tamils is predominantly performed by Tamil women. They construct a dynamic community that takes the form of wives' support and women's networks, cross-cultural friendships, ethnic spaces, and fictive kinship. Although the emergent bonding and bridging social capital facilitates their segmented incorporation as model minorities who are ethnic, the process also reinscribes gender, race/ethnic, class and caste hierarchies.

Immigrant Communities, Incorporation, and Gendered Settlement

Community formation by immigrants in the United States is a fundamental settlement activity aimed at recreating connections lost in migration and facilitating adaptation (Reitz, 2002). Immigrant communities are thus alternatively theorized to either hinder or assist immigrant incorporation. The former view, espoused in classical and revisionist assimilation perspectives, identify ethnic connectivity through communities as impediments hampering immigrants' straight-line assimilation and/or resulting in a "bumpy" path to their eventual assimilation into a unified core American "mainstream" (Alba and Nee, 2003; Castles, 2002). Contrastingly, segmented assimilation posits segmented paths to assimilation, especially for post-1965 immigrants (Portes and Zhou, 1993). They can assimilate upwardly, severing old ethnic ties and integrating into the white middle-class, often possible for white immigrants; assimilate downwardly, a path associated with poorer and minority immigrants who adapt to native subcultures to assimilate into the underclass; or assimilate horizontally through rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of immigrant communities' values and tight solidarity (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee, 1999; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1999; Zhou and Xiong, 2005).⁴ Far from being a hindrance, immigrant communities are integral to this assimilation—facilitating upward mobility, or lack thereof in key American institutions (Zhou and Xiong, 2005). However, much of this theorizing focuses on working-class immigrants, with little known about how the process works among middle-class, professional immigrants like Tamils; and the framework undertheorizes gender.

Indian immigrants have been associated with the third path of segmented assimilation: of upward economic mobility, while being socially and culturally “traditional” (Khandelwal, 2002; Purkayastha, 2005a). As a result, in the prevailing American imaginary, Indians are perceived to be a “model minority” (Bhatia, 2008; Dhingra, 2008; Prashad, 2000).⁵ This does not however, preclude their marginality in American society, as despite their incorporation being likened to their whitening (see Gans, 2007), Indians experience racism and cultural discrimination stemming from, rather than despite their integration (Bhatia, 2008; Purkayastha, 2005a). This racialization has been exacerbated following 9/11 with Indians (and other South Asians) being characterized as the “brown peril”—a threat to the nation’s security, and its economy (Bhatia, 2008; Bhattacharya, 2008; Prashad, 2000).⁶ Indian ethnic communities then, constitute key sites of resisting racialization and of facilitating selective incorporation. Through ethnic communities, middle-class Indian professionals (and the second generation) network with successful coethnics, engendering their economic incorporation (Devi, 2002; Dhingra, 2003; George, 2005); deploy ethnic connectivity to retain cultural identity (Bhattacharya, 2008; Brettell, 2005; Rayaprol, 1997); and engage civically and in social activism to assert identities as Americans (Brettell, 2005; Dhingra, 2008; Rudrappa, 2004). Accordingly, ethnicity and ethnic communities are integral to the process of becoming American (Kurien, 1998; Purkayastha, 2005a; Rudrappa, 2004). Much of this work, however, theorizes Indian immigrant communities as largely emergent from formal organizations (ethnic/cultural/religious associations, professional/civic organizations, etc.). Thus informal sites of community, the nuances of the labor of community creation, and the possibilities of community building with nonethnics are undertheorized.

The gender and migration scholarship, although largely centered on working-class Latina and East Asian immigrant women offers some insights in addressing these lacunae in the case of middle-class Indian women. It posits that one of the manifestations of the gendering of migration is the gendered engagement of women and men in constructing and utilizing immigrant communities in settlement.⁷ Immigrant men are more likely to create and participate in formal large-scale, male-dominated, national-patriotic professional or recreational organizations (see Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Versteegh, 2000). Contrastingly, even while im-

migrant women engage in formal communities, they often create informal communities oriented around their families, and women's networks oriented toward kin, coethnics, and nonethnics, developed through their social engagements, community activism, and liaising between their households and larger American institutions (Alicea, 1997; Devi, 2002; George, 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Menjívar, 2000; Yeoh and Khoo, 1998; Yeoh and Willis, 2005).⁸ Thus, "if men are community pioneers in that they often lead migration, women are community builders . . . [working] to create communities in consortium with men and children" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, 174). In turn, these networks aid incorporation, albeit in gendered ways, through the reciprocity and exchange they embody (George, 2005; Hellerman, 2006; Salaff and Greve, 2004; Yeoh and Khoo, 1998).⁹

The findings presented here are based on a year-long (2007–8) ethnography in the Tamil community in the Greater Atlanta Metropolitan Area. My choice of Atlanta was framed by its rapidly burgeoning Indian population attracted to its growing high-tech, business and financial services labor market (Odem, 2008). There is also a vibrant, organized Tamil community there evinced in the presence of the Hindu Temple of Atlanta at Riverdale, the Atlanta Tamil Church, the Greater Atlanta Tamil Sangam (Cultural Association), the Carnatic Music Association of Georgia, and numerous linguistic, dance, music, and charity organizations—a number of which became ethnographic sites.¹⁰ In addition to participant observation at Tamil community sites and in my participants' households, I conducted thirty-three life-history personal interviews (each approximately 3 to 5 hours in duration) with first-generation, Tamil professional women who immigrated to the United States between 1971 and 1995. They emigrated through three methods: the bulk as wives of economic and/or student migrants, a smaller group as single students, and a few as families with spouses and children. The majority first immigrated to other American cities before relocating to Atlanta in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, drawn by the growing economic opportunities for professionals and the Tamil cultural presence in the city. These women range in age from thirty-one to sixty-five years, and are engaged in a variety of professions, with the bulk comprising families with toddlers and school-going children, and the rest with college-bound and/or married children. Analysis followed a constructivist grounded theory method: coding at the

initial, focused, and theoretical stages, and simultaneous memo writing¹¹ and comparison across interviews to develop a narrative of Tamil women's community creation.¹²

Tamil Professional Immigration to the United States

Tamil Brahmins, who occupy the upper echelons of the caste hierarchy in Southern India have historically been the educated, priestly, and landowning caste. Commencing with British colonialism, they have transitioned into an urbanized, English-speaking, professional, middle-class group, overrepresented in occupations such as banking, education, administration, and information technology (IT), which became the basis of their professional international migration (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008). Accordingly, they comprise an important component of the increasing number of Indian professionals who have migrated to the United States following the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that created a preference for highly skilled and family reunification migration from Asian countries (Zhou, 1999). Like other Indian professional immigrants of the time, Tamil Brahmin immigration was motivated by the greater economic and employment opportunities in the United States compared with the high levels of unemployment; heavy competition and poor salaries that characterized the socialist economy of postcolonial India until it liberalized in the early 1990s; and the growing web of Tamil Brahmin migrant networks. Tamil Brahmin immigration was also fundamentally gendered such that independent migration was a masculine domain bolstering men's status as providers, while the movement of women was sanctioned only through married migration (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008).

Findings

Tamil Women: Builders of Community

Economic and social motives, especially the desire for better career opportunities than those available to them in India and improved educational opportunities for their children, guided Tamil immigration to the United States. Their migrant goal then was enhancing family socioeconomic mobility and the attendant quality of life difficult to achieve in India:

[The] U.S. was the most known destination. I had a number of acquaintances and relatives that had moved here. Materially they seemed to be very, very comfortable here, and they

would talk about their cars and their homes and how good the schools are over here. . . . [I expected life would be better in United States], better in every sense of the word. It's not as competitive compared to what we had experienced in India, better environments to live in . . . easy access to all resources. And yes, it [upward mobility] absolutely was my goal. (Saraswati Vinayak, 44, Corporate America Executive)

Considering that this was the dominant imaginary of the United States that circulated within Tamil Brahmin migrant networks and media discourses (see Bhattacharya, 2008), and in light of their middle-class position in India, Tamil women and men were unprepared for their initially precarious position in the United States. Despite being solicited immigrants especially during the IT boom of the mid-1980s through the early 1990s when the bulk of my sample emigrated (Purkayastha, 2005b), they were racialized and subjected to what they call "differential treatment." This included commentary about their phenotype and accents and, as some noted, being perceived as "poor third-world people. . . come here to make money," which served to marginalize them. Furthermore, their suburbanization heightened their sense of exclusion (Brettell, 2005).¹³ Here, they were not only isolated as minorities but also, by individualistic living arrangements with families as "solitary units," not embedded in a larger community as they were in India. Although they value the privacy afforded them as nuclear families, immigration also resulted in the loss of the extended kin safety net they had enjoyed in India.

Additionally, their professional status did not entirely insulate them against the precarious nature of their economic mobility as immigrants. In the postindustrial American labor market, job security was not assured even in highly skilled jobs. Further, the racialized immigration policies of the 1970s and 1980s confined them, as temporary economic migrants (H-1B visa holders), to short-term labor contracts (Purkayastha, 2005b). The devaluation of Indian credentials and glass ceilings limited their professional mobility, and coupled with the absence of extended kin networks, which in India buffer against economic adversity, rendered them vulnerable to job losses, and downward economic mobility, jeopardizing their migrant goals (Manohar, 2013). Unlike in India, where they are assured of belonging socially and nationally, as racialized immigrants in America, it becomes imperative to define and generate belonging by creating community.

My ethnography revealed that while Tamil men participate in various sites of community, more so than they did in India, Tamil women are the builders of community infrastructure—that is, spaces, and forms of community. Women work consciously to create community, assuming the bulk of the responsibility for and expending gendered labor in this effort. For them, being builders of community is mediated by the interplay of their agency and structural factors. First, the previously mentioned immigration policies, in valorizing male-dominated jobs, classify the highly skilled, professional immigrant as male, relegating women to dependent, homemaker statuses (Devi, 2002; Purkayastha, 2005b; Yeoh and Willis, 2005). This has implications for Tamil women because, coupled with gendered labor markets in India and despite being highly educated, they were not designated highly skilled in immigration (Purkayastha, 2005b). Additionally, the social sanctioning of married migration as the preferred route for Brahmin women's emigration resulted in the majority of my participants emigrating as wives of H-1B husbands. So Saraswati explains how, "although he [her father] was liberal and all that, he wasn't about to send me off to the States on my own. My way out was to get married and come here." But "H-1B wives" like Saraswati, are legally ineligible to work and forced into compulsory homemaking in the initial years of settlement. Correspondingly then, Tamil husbands were sole providers for their families until such time that wives' recredentialled to access professional work. In this climate, Tamil husbands increasingly value Brahmin masculine ideologies that associate masculinity with being professionally and financially successful to provide for families (Mahalingam, 2007):

His concern was only about the studies [for American recredentialing]. So he didn't think about all [family or community issues] that. Not even once he expressed anything about [family's difficulties]. I was thinking, "How come he's not thinking about that too?" Because his constant [goal] was to get the qualifications and get the job. That was the priority. Children were secondary. He knows that unless he does well and gets the job he cannot take care of the children. (Avni Shankaran, 58, CPA)

Tamil husbands, therefore, lacked the professional and/or time flexibility to devote to community building. Further, men's sense of community is connected to their work, taking the form of

professional networking, which, as I will show, does benefit their wives.

Second, at first glance, it appears that Tamil women have more time to devote to building community, considering their own location as homemakers. More important, however, is that, as they become parents, they experience a heightened salience of motherhood in the United States (Manohar, 2013). Accordingly, Tamil women activate what Inman et al. (2007) call Indian women's "transactional socialization" wherein "women are expected to sense and adapt to changing environments," (93) to assume the almost sole responsibility for family life, and for the social and cultural adaptation of their families to America (George, 2005; Yeoh and Khoo, 1998; Yeoh and Willis, 2005). They therefore reinforce Brahmin feminine and mothering ideologies (see Manohar, 2013), which emphasize the heightened family-centric nature of women compared to men, to identify community building as their gendered responsibility, an integral component of their care work as mothers and wives in the United States (Devi, 2002; Lakshmi, 1990). It also becomes their agentic settlement strategy of "rebuilding the social fabric in which their lives are embedded" (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998, 172).

Unlike in India, where community building is a relatively effortless process for women (because it involves family and kin who are generally present), it is transformed in the United States to one requiring concerted effort and substantial investments of time and labor. Tamil women acknowledge that, for many, this was their first attempt at constructing community in ways distinct from the more community-maintenance responsibilities accorded to women in India (Rayaprol, 1997). In the process, they naturalize community building to be "women's work"—that which women are "naturally inclined" to do, and for which men lack the "personality." So Saraswati notes:

Women need that social outlet [of communities]. I don't know, maybe [it's] because they're basically nurturing by virtue of being a woman and by virtue of the mothering experience. I think women generally want to build a family unit [and] they want to build that sense of connectiveness with the world in general.

Therefore, by policing the gendered boundaries of this work so it becomes a site for performing femininity and of being good mothers, they reinforce Tamil gender hierarchies.

Forms of Community Constructed by Tamil Women

Tamil women's efforts at constructing community occur throughout their life course in America. Commencing almost immediately from their arrival in the United States, it continued contemporarily when I met them in Atlanta, as they progress from being newly married wives to professionals and to becoming/being mothers balancing professional work and family life, although not necessarily in that order. The community they construct is dynamic, taking on a variety of forms, each responsive to the structural exigencies experienced at the particular stage of settlement. Through it they generate social capital to facilitate their incorporation. *Social capital* here refers to the benefits and resources accruing from relationships among people and the attendant processes of loyalty, mutual obligation, reciprocity, and exchange (Coleman, 1988; George and Chaze, 2009; Hellerman, 2006). Accordingly, Tamil women construct community to encompass formal and informal, ethnic (Indian and/or Tamil) and nonethnic components, taking the forms of wives' support and women's networks, cross-cultural friendships, ethnic spaces, and fictive kinship.

WIVES' SUPPORT AND WOMEN'S NETWORKS

Immediately after their arrival and during initial settlement in the United States, Tamil women rely very heavily on friendship and support networks that they build with Indian women. For the majority of them, this takes the form of wives' support networks, although for those who emigrated as students and/or families (13 of 33 participants), these networks included female school friends and/or family members. These networks are salient in navigating the host of challenges they faced as new immigrants. First, was their unfamiliarity with American society, including the management of everyday life. This referred both to the social reproduction activities (e.g., cooking, cleaning, etc.) required for well-being, and those important to establishing lives here—such as banking, being mobile, etiquette and dress.

Second, they were experiencing some level of emotional distress, especially exacerbated in the case of H-1B wives like Revathy Venkatesh, a thirty-two-year-old Corporate America Executive:

I came here and sat at home. I don't think he [her husband] had a clue that what would bother me the most would be sitting alone at home and being dependent on him for money. I

didn't realize that you can't go by milk on your own without having a car. I was completely independent in India and suddenly, now, I was depending on this guy. I didn't know who the hell he was [as they had recently had an arranged marriage]. It was HORRIBLE! [with emphasis]. It killed me that I had to depend on this guy who I didn't know from Adam to go get milk!

For women like Revathy, arrival in the United States was marked by growing dependence on husbands— financially because of their compulsory homemaking and physically due to their suburbanization in areas lacking public transportation.¹⁴ Many characterize this period as “debilitating.” Further, as newly married women who emigrated following their arranged marriages,¹⁵ they were as yet unfamiliar with their husbands, which made their dependence on “strangers” whom they “didn't know from Adam” especially hard.

In an effort to mitigate these challenges and facilitate their adaptation, Tamil women create support networks with similarly positioned Indian wives and/or female family members (Salaff and Greve, 2004). Drawing initially on husbands' professional networks, H-1B wives befriend colleagues' wives, a benefit of the latter that is often undertheorized (for exception see Yeoh and Willis, 2005). Women also network through their professionals-dominated apartment complexes, in their schools, and through their parenting tasks. Referencing their designation as “nurturant weavers” (di Leonardo, 1987), Tamil women then build friendships through gendered activities—social gatherings, regular visiting, extended phone conversations, and mothering tasks:

His [husband's] friend's wife. Her husband was working in the same place as my husband. And from day one, they asked us to come over. And almost twice or thrice a week I would go visit them . . . she was not working either and she had two little kids. I would literally visit their house twice or thrice a week in the afternoons . . . like between 2 and 5 pm and just hang around and talk. (Arundhathi Chandran, 45, Entrepreneur)

I observed that, at this stage in their settlement, as new immigrants, the shared need to adapt to America surmounted the regional and linguistic differences among Indians. Accordingly, these wives' support and women's networks are pan-Indian in character, including other Indians rather than only Tamils (Khan-

delwal, 2002). With Indians, there is a presumption of “shared culture” premised at this point, on a national identity bereft of caste, religious, or regional tendencies and juxtaposed to the “new and different” American counterpart (Bhalla, 2006). The presumed sense of “group belonging” now enables them to use the “familiar” to chart the “unknown” to strategize their incorporation not in terms of being ethnically isolationist, but as Hema Nagaraj, a thirty-two-year-old architect notes, “reaching out and assimilating, giving up the herd mentality, but not forgetting [one’s] roots.” This need to assimilate—explained in terms of learning to socially and culturally operate in American society, learning new skills, and adapting ethnic practices—is oriented toward their goal of upward economic mobility and is reinforced by the exclusivity of these networks to middle-class, skilled immigrants.

With the assistance of support networks, Tamil women acquire crucial skills in the United States. They learn to drive, affording them mobility; cook by adapting Indian foods, enabling most to continue practicing vegetarianism; and even rework their apparel (nonethnic clothes in public), necessary for the engagement with American workplaces:

My friend and I, we lived close to each other. And we were in the same boat [meaning] we had just got married So [together] we found out about [how to get] the driver’s license, we learned [studied for license] together. He [her husband] was teaching me to drive and hers was teaching her, so every day we would [exchange], “Oh I did this you know. . . .” (Namrata Gurumurthy, 38, Librarian)

More importantly, given the economic goals of their migration and the barriers to their labor market entry (see George and Chaze, 2009; Purkayastha, 2005b), these networks are salient to their economic incorporation. In particular, networks orient Tamil women toward reeducation in the United States—that is, acquiring American credentials—as the most salient pathway to their labor market access, and one that the bulk of my participants then used:

I had no job. Nobody wanted to give me a job [because] I was an H4 [visa for spouses of H-1B migrants]. He [her husband] had a good friend who had gotten married to a girl who was a professional here. She had gone to school here. And she

actually was one of the people who instigated me to go to school. She was very, very supportive of me going to school. (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

Friends assist with the practicalities of reeducation—exchanging information about American universities, choosing programs of study, and preparing for entrance exams—and provide emotional support to persist despite the demands of family life and Tamil women’s frustration with the need to retrain. For some Tamil women, like Avni Shankaran, a fifty-eight-year-old CPA who emigrated with her family, family-based women’s networks assisted them in finding jobs in the United States. Given the trust between family members and potential employers, female family members often stood as “guarantors” of participants’ abilities and skills in the absence of formally recognized credentials:

See when we came here, no jobs were readily given because I didn’t have U.S. experience or U.S. qualifications. There was a bank [where] my sister knew the manager. So she approached him and said, “My sister is going to prepare for the CPA exam and she wants some experience.” So the manager agreed he’ll keep me in the audit department.

Finally, these networks afford women gendered social capital unavailable through men’s networks (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Menjivar, 2000; Versteegh, 2000). Tamil women exchange intimate information about body and beauty care (e.g., waxing, eyebrow threading, and manicures), the availability of medical care for children, and their reproductive health especially relating to pregnancy and child care. Divya recalled the wife of her husband’s Indian colleague “who I visited a lot when I was pregnant and after [her son] was born. I had a lot of baby questions and she had a lot of advice.” As first-time mothers, far from the extended family that assists with mothering in India, Indian women friends helped Tamil women learn the practices of how to care for children (dealing with childhood illnesses, best foods to feed babies, purchasing baby equipment; foods to aid women’s postpartum recovery, etc.). Some even recalled friends organizing traditional religious services for a safe birth, as their families might have done in India. Additionally, these networks also offered significant emotional support—a safe space to vent their fears in ways they could not with husbands, whose experiences as primary economic migrants dramatically differed from theirs:

I mean it [women's networks] is very important because it's somebody to talk to. It's like counseling. I really needed it. It helped me to talk to her. It made me feel like "OK if I really need to talk, there is somebody with whom I can talk." The sense of feeling like wanted. That somebody cares for you. They [having friends] did help [in settlement process].
(Arundhathi Chandran, 45, Entrepreneur)

It is noteworthy that this preference for creating and using women's friendship networks in settlement is framed by the newness of Tamil women's marriages and by Indian socialization that encourages same-gender peers and friendships over cross-gender ones. This makes Tamil wives like Arundhathi, hesitant to rely only on their husbands (which would have also increased their dependence on them) or on the latter's largely male friend-circle.¹⁶

Needless to say, as valuable as these networks are they are not free from tensions (see Hellerman, 2006; Menjivar, 2000; Salaff and Greve, 2004). Most of these arose in networks of women relatives wherein hierarchies of age in families often created conflict. However, the bulk, who relied on friendship networks, rarely recalled any power struggles (e.g., betrayal or exploitation). I theorize that this is for two reasons. First, the social capital dispensed by these networks most often takes the form of skills, information, and emotional support rather than material resources (e.g., jobs, money, food, or services) that can not only become scarce but are also competed for. Second, as middle-class immigrants, these networks are richer than those of their working-class counterparts (George, 2005; Menjivar, 2000). They are populated by professionals who have more economic and social resources, located in suburban communities where distance forces networks to be small, thus enabling greater availability of capital, and regularly renewed with the continuous arrival of skilled immigrants with newer stocks of information and knowledge (George, 2005; Zhou, 1999). Perhaps what is more important is that the salience of wives' support and women's networks is in the immediacy of migration and settlement. Their prominence dissipates as Tamil women simultaneously expand their community to include nonethnics while narrowing it to only Tamil Brahmins as they proceed through the settlement process. Therefore, with the exception of a few participants, the majority of Tamil women are no longer in touch with the Indian women with whom they once formed these friendship networks.

CROSS-CULTURAL FRIENDSHIPS

Despite their own attempts at adaptation discussed previously, Tamil women's racialization renders their incorporation fragile. This emerges from the paradox of being characterized as the model minority where, to quote Prema Devarajan, a thirty-eight-year-old physician, even as "they [Americans] have this idea that Indians are smart, Indians speak good English and Indians are hard-working, highly qualified professional people," Indians are still outsiders who have to prove their ability to succeed economically and socially (Bhatia, 2008; Dhingra, 2008; Prashad, 2000). This is especially apparent in their professional workplaces, where, as women of color, Tamil women like Parvathi Nadar a sixty-five-year-old IT professional encounter glass ceilings to their professional mobility – "the promotion to the higher level, I had to fight for it. My reviews had the highest scores, but they still refused to give it to me. He [her boss] gave it to one junior [to her] . . . and he's a white guy."

Aware that these experiences are also shared by some of their husbands, for Tamil women, this raises the specter of uncertainty in upward socio-economic mobility in America. In an effort to circumvent this risk, I argue that they strategize their incorporation by choosing to embody the model minority. They therefore highlight and reinforce what is considered to be "Indian" middle-class "cultural" capital—the ability to work hard, attain high academic standards, and exhibit superior English-language skills—casting these "cultural" attributes as critically important individual resources needed to overcome their racialization to be "successful" in the United States. This, in turn, allows them to self-identify as "culturally superior" to other racially subordinate groups (East Asians, African Americans, and Hispanics), at once distancing themselves from these and participating in the latter's othering by maintaining that their disadvantaged social locations are due to their individual failures (Prashad, 2000). With the exception of few participants, this maneuver enables them to avoid seeing themselves as a discriminated group, but rather as different—where their difference is unique. Vidya Pillai, a thirty-nine-year-old IT professional observes:

[Americans] might not appreciate you from day one. They look at the work, how you do your job, how fast you do it. It takes time, but you can always prove yourself. And more,

you should prove yourself. I was smart enough that way to get things done and you get respect after that. Discrimination, that comes only when you are a dud, yes? Once you have your work in hand and you prove yourself . . . no one stops you after that.

However, within the segmented assimilation framework, migrant incorporation is not just predicated on immigrants' actions, but also on acceptance by the group they are trying to incorporate into (Castles, 2002; Gans, 2007; Zhou, 1999). Tamils associate upward mobility with the upper-middle class, non-Hispanic white group. Becoming model minorities involves not only economic mobility, but also developing what Neckerman et al. (1999), call "minority cultures of mobility"—acquiring the cultural skills and practices symbolic of achievement and prestige by and of this group (Gans, 2007). As they put it then, "getting to know 'these' people," what Savitri, identifies as "some of them," is therefore essential:

You are here [United States] aren't you? This is their environment. That's why getting to know the people [is important]. To adjust to their environment, you need to know the people here, at least some of them, so you understand how things are here. (Savitri Ramanan, 61, Physician)

Accordingly, Tamil women build a form of community I call "cross-cultural friendships." Through the diverse school campuses they attend as students, their white-dominated professional workplaces, and the suburban communities where, as parents, they supervise their children's involvement in American leisure activities (soccer, band, scouts, etc.), they befriend upper-middle-class, white, American women/mothers. These friendships afford Tamil women the bridging cultural capital (see George and Chaze, 2009) to develop a culture of mobility. Through these friendships they learn these American's family practices, such as childcare practices involving talking to rather than dictating to children, expecting children to be independent by being responsible for their homework without continual parental supervision, which they incorporate into their own parenting. These networks also assist Tamil women's acquisition and use of middle-class, Standard English in their workplaces, and of their ability to communicate confidently and succinctly (Gans, 2007). This is similar to the observation of Neckerman et al. (1999) among middle-class African Americans who work to

speak Standard English to signal their class mobility. Additionally, through professional friendships Tamil women acquire and internalize the “American work ethic”—what they describe as “being self-directed, independent, efficient, organized, a good networker and communicator,” distinct from the work culture of India. This professional socialization, in conjunction with the Indian cultural traits listed earlier, buttress their earlier claim of their hard work and productivity precluding their discrimination.

Perhaps most important to Tamil women is that befriending American women provides them what they call “a crash course in American culture,” needed to mediate incorporation for their American-born/-raised children. Being the model minority is not just proving their own upward mobility, but facilitating the intergenerational experience of it by their children, thereby enabling the latter to circumnavigate their own racialization as Indian Americans. For Tamil women, this means not merely accumulating sufficient resources (see Zhou and Xiong, 2005), but also, a heightening in America, of their Indian middle-class valuation of education as a vehicle of mobility. Therefore, their friendships with like-minded American mothers (see Manohar, 2013) orient them to the ways to facilitate this including educational milestones to be achieved, schools and activities to enroll children in, and strategies for well-rounded development that Tamil women then carefully weigh and follow:

Now I’m struggling with summer camp. “Do I have to send my daughter to summer camp, what are the ins and outs and pros and cons?” I don’t know. But my friend says that they’ve been sending their daughter to summer camp, she’s gone to the camp, her grandmother’s gone to the camp . . . so things like that, I think that’s really where having a good community makes a difference. (Kamala Vivek, 46, Scientist)

In these ways, Tamil women credit cross-cultural friendships in preventing their isolation within the Indian community and with facilitating connections with American society, albeit the segment they want to assimilate into. In the process, they develop a culture of mobility, which enables them to resemble their upper-middle-class white counterparts on the key symbols of mobility (e.g., speech, dress, behavior, some household arrangements, work ethic, and academic achievement). In so doing, they are able to prove themselves as “worthy” immigrants, capable not only of

the economic assimilation expected of them, but also of some level of social assimilation. Therefore, I observed that for some Tamil women, these were close friendships, such as in the case of Gauri Ananth, a forty-three-year-old Corporate America Executive, who invited her American friends to domestic cultural celebrations and socialized regularly with them. For a number, however, while valued, these were utilitarian relationships, oriented more toward developing their minority culture of mobility. By using cross-cultural friendships to embody the model minority, Tamil women are able to position themselves as high-achieving immigrants, while displacing the threat of racialization to individual and cultural efforts. This is especially evinced in their appreciation of the “equality” of American society such that even as nonwhite, immigrants they “too” can “succeed.” There is little recognition that in the process, they appropriate racial imagery such that racial hierarchies are retained and perhaps even heightened.

ETHNIC SPACES AND FICTIVE KINSHIP

Even as they chart incorporation by embodying the model minority, I submit that Tamils are very particular not to become white. Rather, they seek to retain ethnicity and their cultural distinctiveness, especially for their American-born/-raised children. This concern is because as model minorities, they have cast their difference as unique and worth preserving, and because of the racialization their children encounter, a product of their integration as model minorities (Purkayastha, 2005a). This racialization occurs in the continued designation of Indian culture as “backward,” embodying “deep-rooted un-American customs and tendencies” (Purkayastha, 2005a, 37) and “pagan religions” (Kurien, 1998), and therefore incommensurable with its “mainstream” American counterpart (Dhingra, 2008). This is experienced in the upscale, white Northern Atlanta suburbs in which they reside, and the private schools their children attend, where, as often the only people of color, their children are ridiculed for their cultural practices (Manohar, 2013). Fearing that their children might be pressured to assimilate by rejecting their cultural origins, Tamil women emphasize ethnicity as an affirming identification and resistance to racialization, working to construct and transmit Tamil ethnicity and culture. Corroborating extant scholarship on Indian immigrants in the United States, my ethnography reveals that Tamil

women construct a narrow, homogenized version of Tamil culture that is upper-middle-class, Hindu and Brahminical in orientation, premised on their memories of the past, which they designate as “authentic” and thus the basis of the Tamil ethnicity they are attempting to preserve (Manohar, 2013).¹⁷ Therefore, at this stage in their settlement, where, as mothers, they are keen to socialize their children into this ethnicity, they become the embodiment of women as “keepers of culture,” (Kurien, 1999) who through their behavior pass on culture to succeeding generations. They do this by creating a distinct Tamil community in Atlanta, centered on the preceding notions of “authentic” ethnicity—namely, ethnic spaces and fictive kinship.

Ethnic spaces: Ethnic spaces refer to formal voluntary cultural associations and places of religious worship located in the public arena. Appropriating Tamil gender ideologies that position women as “custodians of religious and cultural convictions” (Rayaprol, 1997, 25), Tamil women build ethnic spaces through their greater involvement in these compared to their male counterparts. This occurs both through “everyday religious, cultural and social activities” (Rayaprol, 1997, 25) normatively associated with women and through nonnormative ones that breach gendered labor boundaries. First, temples are not only places of religious worship, but also cultural centers, hosting a variety of secular events oriented at bringing Tamils together (Dhingra, 2008; Kurien, 1998). For instance, the Hindu Temple of Atlanta organizes an annual Thanksgiving luncheon; sponsors communal celebrations of festivals that are usually privately celebrated in India; and hosts a variety of classes (e.g., music, yoga, and Sanskrit), dance and theatrical productions. Tamil women are the lifeblood of this outreach—planning, organizing, and volunteering at these activities (Rayaprol, 1997):

When you go to the temple, most of the time, the women are the ones who plan all these things [activities]. . . . When it comes to cooking [at communal events], children participating [in activities], or bringing musician[s] from different places . . . women plan these things. (Shanta Anand, 58, Teacher)

Second, as Kurien (1998) explains, Hinduism is adapted in the United States to assume an ecumenical practice—that is, “uniting deities, rituals, sacred texts, and people in temples and programs in ways that would not be found together in India” (56)—

and a congregationalist format—that is, communal rather than private/domestic practice as in India, including Sunday worship. Tamil women are instrumental to this public and communal practice of Hinduism. While religious services are conducted by male priests, my participants served in auxiliary capacities: participating in rituals like anointing deities, decorating temple spaces, and leading prayer and hymn recitals. As Rayaprol (1997) notes, the labor shortages in the United States to perform the specialized temple tasks (usually paid labor assigned to different castes in India), and the need to create ethnicity here, loosen patriarchal restrictions, enabling women to perform roles, not typically performed by women in temples in India. Third, the temple also provides formal instruction on Hinduism for children through a *Bala Vihar* (child development) program on Sunday mornings (Kurien, 1998), where they are taught Hindu scriptures, prayers, and devotional songs. Tamil women are key conveners of the *Bala Vihar*—responsible for its administration and as volunteer teachers:

I have been teaching in the temple . . . the Sunday school [what *Bala Vihar* is often likened to] for 10 years now. I always try to do it. It's one big thing that I don't give up even if I have to travel [for work]. I make sure I always travel on Sunday afternoons. (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

Finally, Tamil women also have long-standing commitments to local Tamil classical music and dance associations, regularly attending weekly practice sessions, participating in concerts and recitals, and serving in administrative capacities as presidents, treasurers, and secretaries of these organizations. Building ethnic spaces enables Tamil women to network with other Tamil Brahmin families and to access crucial ethnic capital such as instructional facilities, knowledge and information about appropriate ethnic activities for children, and emotional support of like-minded Tamil mothers. In turn, they assume the primary responsibility for the ethnic socialization of their children—spearheading their families' regular participation in these spaces, and maintaining religion/culture within their homes. In turn, they embed their families within an upwardly mobile Tamil Brahmin community that provides a support structure in which Tamil ethnicity is affirmed. This offers their children an incorporation pathway, which reinforces their ethnicity:

The *Bala Vihar* and temple has been a big HELP because in that environment, they [her two sons] are with tons of other children . . . they are all Indian, they're learning about Hindu culture. And they try to kind of assimilate what they learn in that with what they see out here [American society]. They try to get a balance between the two, living in the U.S. and still retaining Indian culture. (Kamakshi Swaminathan, 44, IT Professional)

For the women, being builders of ethnic spaces enables them to occupy the privileged position of being influential community leaders and the public (albeit informal) face of the Tamil community. Tamil men are not absent in the creation of these spaces. Most play a supportive role—accompanying families to the temple and socializing with each other while they wait on their families to complete their engagements, agreeably doing the physical labor of setting up cultural events (carrying, setting the stage, etc.), and preserving memories in their capacities as family photographers. A number of them are also involved in the administration of these spaces, while others are members of music troupes alongside women.

Fictive kinship: As more established immigrants, keen to construct a regional/linguistic, caste-based ethnicity for their children rather than a pan-Indian one, the pan-Indian friendships that supported Tamil women's initial settlement in the United States now become less important. Thus, when I met them, Tamil women had drawn their networks closer, limiting them almost exclusively to other Tamil Brahmin professional families in Atlanta. With these Tamils, they create an informal dimension of Tamil community—"fictive kinship"—premised on shared linguistic and cultural origins in India, presumed to better assist in transmitting "authentic" Tamil culture and generate belonging:

I would say you know, 90 percent of the people we've met is through the temple. And it [friendships] is clearly [based on] the background we come from . . . we all mostly are [Tamil]. The group becomes even smaller [than in the past] because once you don't talk the same language [mother tongue] there's not much [connection]. So you kind of narrow the group in that way. (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

This corroborates the observations of Bhalla (2006) and Khandelwal (2002) that as Indian immigrant communities age and become settled with more diverse Indian groups, pan-Indian communities

dissipate. These are replaced by regional-linguistic ones to better preserve the particularities of regional cultural practices and identifications.

Building fictive kinship is, however, not as easy as merely participating in ethnic spaces. Corroborating extant scholarship, Tamil women also perform a significant amount of what di Leonardo (1987) refers to as “kin work” (442–3) primarily through the domestic realm. This includes engaging in “social visiting” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, 179), namely gatherings, domestic celebrations of festivals, and children’s playdates, the planning and implementation of which (e.g. invitations, cooking etc.) is predominantly done by women (Alicea, 1997; Espiritu, 2003; George, 2005). Building fictive kinship with other Tamil Brahmin families is aimed at rebuilding a support system akin to the extended family networks enjoyed in India. This serves two purposes. It facilitates ethnic transmission and preservation by grounding children in an extended network of similarly socialized children who share similar family values and thus might engender the collective embrace of ethnic distinctiveness. Together, these families can reinforce an incorporation path that involves being model minorities who are ethnic. It also affords their families a safety net particularly salient considering their isolation in dispersed, suburban Atlanta neighborhoods:

We all just need social support [in the United States]. What I mean by social support . . . we have a set of families that are so close that we will just step in and do things for each other without any questions asked. Just like when you are at home [India], you expect your sister or your brother or your parents to be there when you need. (Janiki Parthasarathi, 44, Professor)

In this way, through ethnic spaces and fictive kinship, Tamil women create a close-knit Tamil community that constitutes a “safe space” (Dhingra, 2008, 48) of unconditional belonging to practice ethnicity. Furthermore, this community also confers advantages in facilitating incorporation. Through it, ethnic difference is portrayed as distinctive, and worthy of pride. The hope then is to replace their children’s embarrassment over their difference with knowledge of their cultural origins, which might ease their interactions with American society. Janiki is emblematic of this, noting that her sons’ participation in *Bala Vihar* and the temple has exposed them to “our

religion and culture,” enabling them to understand their origins and answer peers’ queries in their Christian private school. Importantly, associating with upwardly mobile Tamils enables them to reinforce their model minority incorporation strategy and thereby distance themselves from native minorities.

I theorize, however, that constructing a Tamil community in this way is not without its tensions. First, in constructing Tamilness as Hindu, upper-middle-class, and Brahminical, the community is exclusionary, rendering invisible Tamil Christians and Muslims. While present in small numbers in Atlanta, they are often sidelined: for instance, as briefly noted by a Tamil church leader about his difficulty advertising Christian events on the Tamil Sangam website. Also, although unacknowledged, there is a subtle restriction of membership to professionals. This is evinced in the fact that all leadership positions in the community are populated by upper-middle-class professional Tamils, and that activities are oriented to the upwardly mobile (e.g., offering donations, attending ticket-only cultural events, and sponsoring prayers). As a result, I contend that class differences are also rendered invisible.¹⁸ Further, corroborating extant scholarship, the tight-knit of nature of the Tamil community becomes a mechanism of social control especially over the behavior of women (Espiritu, 2003). Through gossip and critique (see Kallivayalil, 2004), Tamil women monitor each other’s fulfillment of the gendered responsibility of community work, creating pressures for them to conform to be “good” women and wives. Saraswati now observes:

There are expectations from other people [Tamils] within the society. Like for instance, I missed every single music concert in this year and I know that a lot of my friends are peeved with me about that. And then it becomes too overwhelming [for] the women especially because men can always find a way out.

Finally, while constructing a multifaceted community affords Tamil women opportunities for “self-expression, satisfaction, . . . sociability, leisure and fun” (Alicia, 1997, 613)—illustrated by their friendships and participation in ethnic and American activities—their larger share of the labor in building community heightens patriarchal gender inequities in their increased social reproduction work (Alicia, 1997; Espiritu, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Yeoh and Khoo, 1998). As professionals with busy, demanding work schedules, the physical

work of constructing community and the emotional work of managing people and networks significantly increases their second-shift labor, leaving Tamil women to confront a time bind that carries the personal repercussions of tiredness and stress (see Espiritu, 2003) and a slower professional growth compared to husbands.

Conclusion

This article examines community construction by middle-class, professional Tamil immigrant women in Atlanta. Advancing the segmented assimilation perspective that undertheorizes the role of gender in immigrant incorporation, it finds that community building among Tamil Brahmins is a fundamentally gendered activity disproportionately performed by Tamil women. They appropriate and reinforce Tamil Brahmin gender ideologies in the United States to position community building as their gendered responsibility as wives and mothers aimed at benefitting their own and their families' settlement. While this corroborates work on the gendered nature of community work among immigrants (see Ali-icea, 1997; di Leonardo, 1987; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Menjívar, 2000), I contend that as middle-class, professional immigrants, the imperatives, processes, and outcomes of community formation by Tamil women advance our insights into immigrant community formation.¹⁹ Unlike their working-class counterparts, who, because of their location within unfavorable structures of opportunity are more concerned with survival, Tamil professional women's community building is oriented more toward maximizing opportunities for socioeconomic mobility and ethnic retention. However, considering that the structural exigencies of their settlement and their racialization can potentially endanger these goals, community building is Tamil women's agentic response to these vulnerabilities, aimed at generating social capital to engender their "success."

For most women, being community builders in this way is a relatively new and unfamiliar responsibility, learned and devised in the United States. They therefore, expend significant time and labor to build community using predominantly gendered ways: informal networking; socializing; organizing gatherings, celebrations, and events; transmitting culture; and community involvement, in contrast to the more professionally oriented labor their husbands deploy in building community around their workplaces. The community women construct is fluid and dynamic (see Es-

piritu, 2003), developing across Tamil women's settlement process. Furthermore, advancing the extant scholarship, I find that Tamil women build community to embody formal and informal, ethnic and nonethnic components and sites. This community then takes various forms—wives' support and women's networks, cross-cultural friendships, ethnic spaces, and fictive kinship—generating a plethora of social, economic, and cultural capital to chart their segmented incorporation (Hellerman, 2006).

While it appears that Tamils follow the third path of segmented assimilation, one expected of Indians, I argue they do it in a distinctive way (Khandelwal, 2002; Portes and Zhou, 1993). They choose to become model minorities who are ethnic. Being model minorities is not only about their economic incorporation into the upper-middle-class white group, but also their social incorporation in developing a minority culture of mobility that includes "white" symbols of prestige (Manohar, 2013; Neckerman et al. 1999). It also involves retaining Tamil ethnicity in their children. Ethnic distinctiveness is not only the underlying base of being model minorities, but also a resistance to the heightening racialization of their Indian American children that is the product of their incorporation as model minorities. The community they build is integral to this endeavor, in the resultant bonding and bridging capital generated (Coleman, 1988; George & Chaze, 2009). This includes: social, linguistic, and cultural skills to live in the United States; the American work ethic; knowledge of American household arrangements and of superior educational and extracurricular facilities for their children; assistance with their own labor market incorporation; and ethnic capital to transmit ethnicity. Moreover, the tight-knit Tamil community they construct with similarly positioned Tamil Brahmin families in efficacious in buttressing this incorporation strategy. While effective for them, their incorporation strategy, however, carries the toll of reifying race/ethnic hierarchies, and thereby underplaying the structural nature of inequality.

Finally, the immigrant community they construct is not without hierarchies of power. This is most evidenced in the exclusionary nature of the Tamil (ethnic) community, where framed by its upwardly mobile, professional, and Hindu character, Tamils who fall outside these parameters are rendered invisible. Furthermore, despite its value, community building is a double-edged sword for Tamil women. It becomes a site for their experience of power, espe-

cially in resisting their dependence on their spouses, assuming positions of leadership and visibility in their community, and being cultural brokers between their households and American society. Tamil women are thus on the frontlines of determining the appropriate incorporation pathway for their families, and although no doubt aided by their spouses, they take the lead in charting this. At the same time, similar to other immigrant women engaged in community work, this gendered responsibility increases their social reproduction work. This not only leaves them confronting a time bind as busy professionals, but also heightens Tamil gender inequities, as the tight-knit Tamil community becomes a mechanism of social control of women's behavior (Espiritu, 2003). In sum then, this article argues that community building by Tamil women is a gendered settlement activity integral to their incorporation as model minorities who are ethnic in the United States. By interrogating gender, (middle) class/ caste, and the regional specificities of an Indian immigrant group, it addresses the lacunae in the extant scholarship suggesting a need for such attentiveness in future research to generate a more holistic understanding of immigrant communities in America.

Notes

1. *Community* refers to a "network of relations," based on social trust relations and the voluntary involvement of individuals, rather than merely a "spatially defined unit" (Pisseli, 2007, 867).
2. Tamils are a linguistic/ regional group, hailing predominantly from the Southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu on the east coast of India where they stratified along caste, class, religion, and place of residence in India (rural/urban), resulting in varied histories of migration. British colonialism in India witnessed the emergence of a Tamil diaspora in the former British colonies in the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean (see Sivasupramaniam, 2000). The sample for my study only includes middle-class, Tamil Brahmin (upper-caste) immigrants from India and not from the diaspora.
3. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer at this journal for her/his insights into this.
4. Considering the greater ethnic/ racial and class diversity of post-1965 immigrants, the varied paths to immigrant assimilation are determined by the interaction of individual factors (e.g., education, linguistic abilities, and age on arrival), institutional factors of exit and reception (e.g., pre-/postmigration class/race status, place of residence, economic conditions, and immigration policies), and

- the stratified structural organization of the United States, which “intentionally or unintentionally exclude non-whites” (Zhou and Xiong, 2005, 1122).
5. Even while the “occupational, educational and residential success” of Indians that “resembles or surpasses [that of] their white-middle class counterparts” is valorized, they are also characterized, in the American imaginary, as “hardworking, passive, uncommunicative and submissive” (Dhingra, 2008, 43)—and hence a model minority. This imagery, however, ignores growing evidence of class disparities and adverse incorporation outcomes—including downward mobility, poverty, and racial discrimination—among Indian immigrants (Bhatia, 2008; Prashad, 2000).
 6. See Prashad (2000), among others, for analyses of “brown peril”—how in their (mis)association with terrorism and with economic outsourcing, Indians are perceived to imperil the American nation.
 7. In making this claim, these theorists argue that gender, in interaction with other structures of difference (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, and nationality) organize the entire process of immigration such that charting arrival, settlement, and incorporation are not only raced and classed, but also gendered (see Devi, 2002; George, 2005; Hellerman, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Menjívar, 2000).
 8. For women, community construction is attributed to their gendered responsibility for care work (see Devi, 2002; Menjívar, 2000; Salaff and Greve, 2004). The communities men create tend to be sites of male-only participation, oriented largely to their professional mobility (Versteegh, 2000). Although these aid the economic advancement of their families, the dearth of nonwork and nonmale resources compared to those of “women’s communities,” is theorized to limit their efficacy to the overall settlement of families (see Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994 and Menjívar, 2000).
 9. Men’s networks are theorized to be richer in economic resources (e.g., finding well-paying jobs and getting monetary help) and women’s to be richer in more noneconomic ones (e.g., information about housing, employment, knowledge about women’s reproductive health, and assistance in skill acquisition). An important reminder is that even as immigrant communities facilitate settlement and incorporation, their efficacy is determined by the structures of opportunity in which they are located. Also, they can become sites for reproducing inequalities (see George, 2005; Salaff and Greve, 2004).
 10. In 2000, Indians in Atlanta numbered 40,381, about 80% of the total Indian population in Georgia (Atlanta Regional Commission, 2008). Despite this burgeoning Indian presence in Atlanta, part of a national trend of immigration into the South (see Dhingra, 2008), practically all research focuses on populations in New York City, Chicago, or Los Angeles (for exceptions see Brettell, 2005; Dhingra, 2008).

11. Within the constructivist grounded theory analytic approach, memo writing is a tool to explicate coding categories that emerge from the data. By describing the properties of the code, memo writing aims at abstraction—i.e., identifying the interconnections between categories—to build a coherent theoretical framework emergent from the data (see Charmaz, 2006).
12. The data presented here is not intended to represent all Tamil immigrants or even those in this geographic region, but rather serves as a case study of possible processes of community formation. In reporting my results, pseudonyms have been used to protect participants' identities, although age and profession are as reported. The professional group titled "Corporate America Executive" refers to women who worked in a variety of capacities as management professionals.
13. Bhatia (2008), among others, observes that for professional Indian immigrants, suburbs are the "initial point of entry rather than . . . inner city ethnic enclaves as in the previous eras of immigration" (Brettell, 2005, 255).
14. In their early settlement then, Tamil women recall losing the independence they had enjoyed in India. As middle-class women, they had had chauffeurs and/or easy access to public transportation to be mobile, and had some financial autonomy because of either their paid labor or family.
15. Here *arranged marriage* refers to Tamil women being introduced by their parents to their prospective spouses, some of whom had been visiting India seeking matrimonial alliances. After several meetings, the couple made the decision to marry, with the marriage often occurring within a few months of their meeting.
16. Women friends do not preclude the fact that especially for H-1B wives, husbands too assist in adaptation, with skill acquisition and encouragement of reeducation.
17. I hypothesize that this particular emphasis of Tamils being Hindu is also part of an effort to distance themselves from the association of South Asians with Islamic terrorism post-9/11 (see Bhatia, 2008), and with their almost automatic discounting as Christians based on the assumption of the latter being "western" nationals. The three Christians in my sample attest to the latter, in the questions of how they as Indians can be Christian. Barring the emphasis on Hinduism, these women participate in the outlined construction of Tamil culture, often admitting that their participation in the Tamil church is only to engender fluency in the language (in which the service is conducted), and with cultural practices in their children. In addition, I observed that although the practice of Hinduism has been adapted to the United States, in their emphasis on practices from their upbringing in India, there appears to be minimal influence of Hindutva. I am, however,

unable to make a definitive claim due to the lack of data. The salience of Hinduism to the construction of Tamilness is also evidenced in the physical geography of Atlanta. The “public” face of the community is the Hindu Temple of Atlanta, several Hindu scripture instructional institutions, and Tamil cultural associations. The latter, while secular in their membership, celebrate and showcase predominantly Hindu festivals, resulting in the relative invisibility of the small Tamil Christian and Muslim communities there.

18. This could be an effect of my sampling criteria. As my sample, did not include any working-class Tamils, it is possible that, as Espiritu (2003) suggests, middle- and working-class Tamils’ “work, residential and leisure lives rarely intersect” such that they belong to separate communities, “catering to their particular class interests and needs” (118). That said, however, my claim is based on my observations that (1) perhaps as a function of the geographic location in Atlanta, the Tamil settlement there is predominantly of upwardly mobile, professionals, and (2) is echoed in a similar public manifestation of the Tamil community there (e.g., physical spaces and networks). To me, there appeared to be a palpable invisibility of other class statuses in these spaces. The Tamil community echoes the dominant imagery of the Indian community in Atlanta being professional (as opposed to that of older immigrant cities like New York City), evinced, e.g., in the local Indian magazine that primarily showcases issues relevant to this group.
19. In so doing, this article contributes to the small, but growing scholarship on skilled immigrants in the United States, expanding it beyond a focus on labor market transitions (see Purkayastha, 2005b; Yeoh and Willis, 2005). E.g., in her work on Filipino immigrants in San Diego, in a similar vein to mine, Espiritu (2003) theorizes the deployment of women’s bodies and sexuality in constructing a moral, ethnic community. She, however, fails to consider the role of women in the building of formal (and informal) Filipino community sites in San Diego that is the focus of my work.

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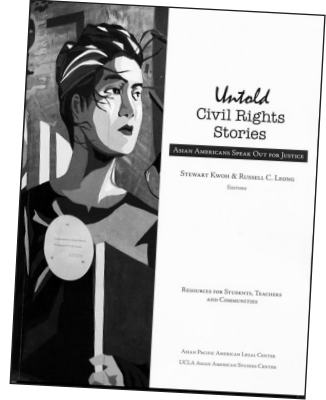
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