"Triple Outsiders"
Gender and Ethnic Identity Among Asian Indian Immigrants

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(ABSTRACT)

This study uses literature on identity work to examine the gender similarities and differences in the ethnic identity work that Asian Indian immigrants to the United States do. It also looks at the changes Indian immigrants' understanding of themselves as Indian men/women due to migration. Interviews with thirty-eight first generation Asian Indian immigrants reveal that while food, clothing, language, and family roles are significant means of expressing ethnic identity, men and women differ in the kind of identity work they perform. Migration also changes men and women's family and work responsibilities, and thereby their social networks. This impacts their identity as Indian men and women in the United States. The study uses these findings to critique the ethnicity paradigm, especially the perspectives of assimilation, which calls for immigrants to adopt the ways of the dominant group, and pluralism, which advocates that immigrants retain their cultural practices and ethnic identities but treats ethnic groups as monoliths. Both the assimilationist and the pluralist models assume that men and women experience the process of migration and adaptation to the new context in similar ways. However, adaptation is a process that occurs differently by gender, and gender relations can create obstacles to assimilation. These models therefore need to be revised to pay greater attention to the varied experiences within groups, based on gender, and other identities such as age and social class.

<u>DEDICATION</u>

To Mihir, my sunshine

To Matt, my best friend

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CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study examines gender differences in the meanings that first-generation Asian Indian immigrants to the United States attach to their Indian identity. To examine this issue I draw on two research frames. The first is research on ethnic identity among Asian Indians. Second, my study draws on social psychological literature on identity to explore the meanings that Asian-Indians attach to their Indian identity and how these meanings vary by gender.   Below, I describe each of these research streams. Then I combine key points to derive my research questions.

The Ethnicity Paradigm

Research on the ethnic identity of immigrants to the United States has emphasized three possible outcomes – assimilation (or Anglo-conformity), amalgamation (the "melting pot") and pluralism. Of the three, which Omi and Winant (1994) collectively call the "ethnicity paradigm," the first outcome was considered inevitable, especially during the first half of the 20th Century, while the second was regarded as the ideal. Research since the 1970s has, however, challenged the earlier claims (e.g. Park and Burgess 1924; Smith 1939) that all immigrants would eventually assimilate into the dominant group in the United States. It has also highlighted the fact that for those who have immigrated to the United States after 1965, most of whom are people of color, and for racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, assimilation into a predominantly White population is neither possible nor necessarily desirable (Omi and Winant 1986, 1994; Waters 1990). The experiences of non-European groups in the United States have also proved that the reality of racial relations falls far short of the ideal of a melting pot, and that the melting that has occurred has been across ethnic but within racial and religious boundaries (Gordon's (1961) concept of the "triple melting pot").

The third perspective, pluralism, has been popular especially since the social upheaval of the 1960s, and it finds expression in the current emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism. Pluralism, which advocates an acceptance and indeed an appreciation of the differences between racial/ethnic groups, questions the notion that the culture/ way of life of the dominant group – Whites, broadly speaking – is the best and the "true"

"American" culture. It encourages minorities to maintain their distinct cultural practices and ethnic identities. However, as practiced in the U.S., pluralism and multiculturalism's push for tolerating and even embracing diversity ignores the intergroup inequalities inherent in the U.S. That is, to embrace or ignore diversity is a choice that the "mainstream" or dominant group has, because its own racial/ethnic identity is made invisible by its very "normalcy" or centeredness in a society.[1] The cultural pluralism currently popular in the United States (as opposed to corporate pluralism as practiced in countries like Switzerland) encourages diversity in the *relatively* less political areas of cultural practices such as food, clothing, music etc., but does not envisage a proportionate distribution of social resources. In other words, the power differentials between racial/ethnic groups remain unchallenged and assimilation (into existing political and economic institutions) continues to be the norm. This cosmetic pluralism turns attention away from the ways immigrants have to adapt and how adaptation affects their ethnic identity. Moreover, an emphasis on multiculturalism gives the erroneous impression that today's immigrants are not assimilating and becoming "American." This impression, along with other factors, has led to public support for a more rigorous control of, or even an end to immigration, and for greater pressure on immigrants to assimilate (for instance, the efforts to make English the official language of the United States).

In addition, researchers have criticized the pluralist perspective for ignoring how inequalities within immigrant and minority groups shape what is defined as "the culture" and "the ethnic identity" of the group (Das Gupta 1997). One basis of such inequality is gender. Feminist scholarship on immigration has emphasized the differences in experiences within the same immigrant group and often in the same family on the basis of gender (Bhattacharjee 1992; Das Gupta 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kibria 1993; Kurien 1999; Mankekar 2002). Research contradicts assumptions that migration to a more "modern" society is uniformly beneficial for women because it frees them from the shackles of oppressive traditions (Segura 1997). For instance, Dasgupta and Warrier's

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[1] Just as many members of the dominant group can choose to emphasize or ignore their ethnic roots: Waters' concept of optional ethnicity (Waters 1990).

(1996) work with Indian women who were victims of domestic violence illustrated how migration increased some men's power in the family, but increased women's vulnerability because they lost their support networks. Similarly, although the Vietnamese women that Kibria (1993) talked with gained new economic opportunities in the United States, migration did not end gender-based inequality within the family. Centering gender is therefore essential for understanding immigrant experiences.

The concern with gender extends to studies on ethnic identity as well, as accepting a uniform (that is, non-gendered) version of ethnic identity among immigrants helps maintain gender inequalities and restricts our views of a group. According to social psychologists, one's self is composed of various identities, "the meanings attached to oneself by self and others" (Gecas and Burke 1995: 42). Sociological social psychologists distinguish between personal identities, self-depictions based on the distinctive characteristics of an individual;[2] role identities which are based on the particular roles individuals perform (for example, mother, teacher, police officer); and social identities, which are based on their membership in various groups and categories, including socio-demographic categories such as gender, and race and ethnicity (Thoits and Virshup 1997). Ethnic identity refers to identification, by self and others with a larger group with whom one shares language and other aspects of culture and a common history.

> Ethnic identity is in essence… embedded in the presumed cultural heritage of the individual or group… Ethnicity can most readily be *symbolically represented contrastively*. It may involve self-consciously perceived variations in *language* and *customs* from others. It may be symbolized in affirmative *ritual practices* [emphases in original] such as dramatic symbolic representations recalling collective past ordeals or days of heroic triumph (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1996: 356-357).

Ethnic identity consists of "ethnic self-identification, a sense of belonging, attitudes towards one's own ethnic group, social participation and cultural practices" (Howard 2000: 374).

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[2] See Snow and Anderson (1987) for a different definition.

In their home countries, the experiences and identities of immigrant men and women are gendered. With migration, in the context of a different nation where they become a minority, immigrants' ethnic identity becomes salient (Kurien 2002), but gender differences presumably do not disappear. Instead, ethnic identities are gendered. That is, in a new country, differences in what it means to be a man or a woman within a particular ethnic group likely persist and also undergo transformation as the context in which these identities are experienced changes.

This study looks at the gendered meanings of ethnic identity among one group of new immigrants – Asian Indians. What does being an Indian mean for women and men? What aspects of their culture do they seek to uphold? Do all cultural elements have the same importance for women and men? What are the similarities and differences in the ways women and men adapt to the United States? How do they express (that is manifest or display) their identity? Answers to these questions add to the literature on the social construction of ethnic identity as well as on gender relations among Asian Indian immigrants. This study also provides a more nuanced understanding of how immigrants adapt to life in the U.S. It helps us go beyond the prevailing gender-neutral pluralistic advocacy of diversity and its assumption that immigrants simply retain their culture, by looking at how decisions about what elements to retain are made, and also, importantly, how these decisions vary by gender.

Asian Indian Identity

Asian Indian immigration to the United States began in earnest as a result of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which lifted the ban on immigration from Asia (Gupta 1999). In the absence of an Asian Indian community, faced with ignorance and often prejudice from Americans, that initial group of Asian Indian immigrants sought to maintain an ideal vision of India and uphold Indian culture and traditions for their children to emulate (Das Gupta 1997). Many wanted to protect their children from what they perceived to be the corrupt influence of mainstream American culture. Drawing from their own experiences of growing up in India, many immigrant families fossilized certain practices. Constructing a body of tradition that they viewed as "Indian," they

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invented the "authentic Indian immigrant family" and a "pristine" Indian culture (Das Gupta 1997: 574, 577). These inventions form part of the foundation on which their children constructed identities.

The rhetoric of pristine Indian cultural traditions, of a monolithic, unproblematic Indian identity and of the authentic family, may have facilitated families' efforts to maintain Indian traditions in the face of encroaching "Americanization." Individuals' experiences of family relationships and understandings of what it means to be Indian vary; that is, they are neither monolithic nor unproblematic. While culture shapes the meanings of our identities (Schwalbe 1996), these meanings are "not simply produced from 'above' through the rhetoric of elites to be consumed untransformed by social actors who are little more than judgmental dopes" (Read and Bartkowski 2000: 411-412). Similarly, ideas about the ideal Indian woman and the ideal Indian man abound, and have been appropriately criticized by feminist literature (Abraham 1999; Bhattacharjee 1992; Das Gupta 1997; Dasgupta and Warrier 1996; Kumar 1993). These ideals may influence some people's identities, but are not accepted uncritically by everyone. Rather, individuals attach their own cognitive meanings to their identities, and these meanings may be gendered. However, research on Indian identity among immigrants either does not take gender into consideration, as in Bacon's (1996) complex study of intergenerational change among Asian Indians in Chicago, or focuses on the identities of the children of immigrants (Das Gupta 1997; Patel, Power, and Bhavnagri 1996). Researchers have ignored how the meanings of ethnic identity among *first generation immigrants vary by gender*.

Studying the first generation's concerns and dilemmas vis-à-vis their ethnic identity adds to our knowledge of whether and how immigrants maintain and transform ethnic identity in a new context. It elucidates how various immigrants are adapting to their circumstances in the United States and may help us go beyond a sense of complacency (or fear, based on one's perspective) that the United States is becoming increasingly pluralistic. Moreover, the first generation's definition of what it means to be Indian (in this case) shapes their socialization of their children. It is the first generation

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that is actually "Indian" in the sense of having come from that country and brought that culture to the U.S., where it is then translated for the second generation in this new context. The first generation thus links cultures; they are the ones to have experienced both cultures first-hand, and they decide (consciously and otherwise) what to maintain and pass on to their children. The second generation's identities, based on this socialization, shape and will continue to shape what it means to be an "American." The second generation's social identities will also influence the forms that pluralism will take in the future.

Studying ethnic identity in the Indian immigrant community requires taking into account whether immigrants are recent arrivals (those immigrating since the early 1980's) or have been in the United States longer. The conditions that Indian immigrants face in the United States have changed since 1965. Few new immigrants share the isolation that the early immigrants experienced, due to the increase in the Asian Indian population in the United States, primarily through immigration: according to the 2000 Census, 1.7 million people identified themselves as Asian Indian alone, while in 1990, Asian Indians numbered about 800,000 (www.census.gov). Moreover, India has also changed, especially in the last 20 years. In India, the Indian middle-class has become increasingly westernized, while the early Indian immigrants' understanding and enforcement of Indian ways has remained rooted in an earlier time. Of course, many early immigrants travel to India frequently and are aware of the changes taking place in India. This does not, however, challenge their views on Indian tradition. Instead, it validates their efforts as upholders of Indian culture: "As preservers of culture, they take pride in being more Indian than Indians in India" (Das Gupta 1997: 580). Contemporary first-generation immigrants know a more open, westernized India than earlier immigrants. This literature review suggests that Indian ethnic identity may vary by gender and by time of immigration. My study focuses on the more recent, that is, post-1980 first generation immigrants. In the next section, I review social psychological literature on the meanings that individuals attach to their identities.

The Meanings of Identity

Among the various approaches to social identity,[3] both social identity theory[4] and self-categorization theory look at identity based on membership in sociodemographic categories such as race/ethnicity, religion, and gender (Thoits and Virshup 1997). Their focus is primarily on how people identify with others with the same characteristics and compare themselves against non-members; however, group memberships, such as being Indian, may interact with others such as gender to generate different meanings

We articulate the meanings we attach to our identities through "identity work"[5] (Schwalbe 1996; Snow and Anderson 1987). Identity work refers to a wide range of activities – verbal and nonverbal, such as dress and personal appearance, affiliation with others – that individuals perform to indicate to others who they are. According to social constructionist approaches, identity is not something we have, but something we "do" or perform in our everyday interactions (Howard and Alamilla 2001; West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995). For example, some of Bacon's (1996) respondents defined their Indian-ness in terms of national identity (that is, they were Indian because their parents were born in India); for others it involved "interpersonal roles and relations" such as being the "dutiful daughter" (Bacon 1996: 115). Respondents also expressed their identity by observing rituals, and through Indian food and clothing.

Ignoring gender differences in identity work leaves gaps in our understanding of the varied meanings of identity. For instance, Bacon's (1996) study is unable to answer the following questions: Are family obligations equally central to men and women's identity as Indians? As most women in India wear Indian clothes while men's clothing is primarily western, is clothing equally important for men and women's sense of being Indian? Do all cultural elements have the same importance for men and women? Are

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[3] See Thoits and Virshup (1997) for a summary of these theories.

[4] Social identity theory defines social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel in Thoits and Virshup 1997, p. 114).

[5] The research on identity work is based primarily on the work of Goffman (1959).

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there similarities and differences in the ways that Indian women and men adapt to the United States?

In this study, I investigate gender differences in the ways that first-generation Indian immigrants view their ethnic identity. When talking with research participants about what Indian-ness means to them, I asked them about what it means to *be* an Indian man/woman. "Each [identity] has a meaning, which is to say it evokes a response in us and in others" (Schwalbe 1996: 102). For my study, therefore, I define meaning as the disposition to behave in certain ways on the basis of one's (Indian) identity, i.e., as the ways in which Indians enact their Indian-ness. To understand these meanings, I therefore looked at an additional, secondary question: What identity work do Asian Indian immigrants do to maintain their ethnic identity? In what ways is this identity work gendered?

Research Questions

The purpose of my study is to explore the critique of the ethnicity paradigm, by examining whether and how gender shapes ethnic identity among immigrant groups. My primary research question is as follows:

What does being an Indian mean for first-generation Asian Indian immigrants and how do these meanings vary by gender? To understand this issue better, I ask two secondary questions:

1. What identity work do Asian Indian immigrants do to maintain their ethnic identity? Is this identity work gendered?

2. Is Indian immigrants' understanding of themselves as a man/woman in the United States different from their definition of being a man/woman in India? In what ways have their definitions changed? What, in their view, is the reason for any shift? A shift in the meanings of identities would help illustrate whether gender influences adaptation to the United States (that is, whether one group is changing more/faster than the other).

My study explores the meanings Asian Indian immigrants attach to their ethnic identity as expressed verbally and through their behavior. A qualitative method was best

suited to this study because it centers participants' interpretations of their experiences, while a highly structured quantitative study "makes it inevitable that individuals' own accounts of meaning are bypassed" (Simon 1997: 260). My research questions required in-depth information about the various ways in which Indians express their ethnic identity and their perceptions of any shifts in their identities. This information could be gathered most effectively though in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants in the study to discuss their thoughts and experiences in their own words. It also allowed me to uncover areas of meanings and expression of identity that I had not anticipated.

To discover the identity work Indians engage in, I asked participants about things they do in their daily lives that set them apart from non-Indians. I prompted them with questions about their food habits, choice of clothing and patterns of consumption of Indian goods, their family roles and relationships and the extent and nature of their interaction with other Indians and non-Indians, and their extent of involvement with Indian associations. I read the transcribed interviews and categorized responses on the basis of the key issues raised in the research questions (e.g. Bacon 1996).

The ways that first-generation Asian Indians define themselves have important ramifications for their lives and add to our knowledge about a group of post-1965 immigrants whose experiences are very different from those of earlier, European immigrants. Focusing on the experiences of non-White immigrants is especially important in light of the fact that people of color are expected to constitute more than 50% of the United States' population by the middle of the 21st century, with immigrants making up a large proportion of this population. This study contributes to the social psychological literature on social identity by exploring the gender variations in the meanings of ethnic identity. This study also adds to feminist scholarship on ethnicity by illustrating that research on immigrant experiences that ignores the impact of gender is incomplete. Just as Park's (1950) "race relations cycle" of assimilation did not apply to all minorities, pluralism's assumption of a uniform culture and ethnic identity *among* immigrant groups is erroneous. Immigrants' expression of their culture, through identity work, is gendered and therefore varies. Scrutinizing these differences will add to our

knowledge of how one group of immigrants adapts to a new context. In the next chapter, I locate my research question in the literatures on ethnic identity and gender, Asian Indian immigrants in the United States, and the meanings of identity.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Ethnicity Paradigm and its Limitations

The scholarship on immigrants' adjustment and ethnic identity in the United States began as a response to concerns about the impact of the large-scale migration of southern and eastern Europeans – the "new" immigrants who differed significantly from the "old" immigrants, primarily Protestants from northern and western Europe – at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

Popular opinion, public debate and scholarly work focused on three models of immigrants' incorporation into mainstream society – assimilation, amalgamation or the "melting pot," and pluralism. Assimilation refers to the process where minority groups renounce their culture and identity and replace it with that of the dominant group – defined as Anglo-conformity in the United States.[6] Popular sentiment favored the first model. Proponents of Anglo-conformity saw the "American," i.e., Anglo-Saxon character of the US being diluted by immigration, and hence urged immigrants to shed their ethnic baggage and become "true Americans." While researchers did not advocate this model, most of them saw assimilation as the inevitable outcome. This model competed with the amalgamation or melting pot ideal, which hoped for the emergence of a new "American" identity arising from the amalgamation of native (that is, Whites born in the United States) and immigrant (White European) cultures. A third perspective, pluralism, implied the coexistence of diverse ethnic groups that retained their cultural patterns (Gordon 1961; Kallen 1924; Massey 1981; Park and Burgess 1924; Stonequest 1937). In the United States, this refers to the coexistence of various ethnic groups, but the acceptance of the core elements (including the language, norms and values) of the dominant group by minority groups, who seek to participate in mainstream economic and political institutions while maintaining their cultural patterns within their homes and

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[6] Some scholars define assimilation as broader processes including Anglo-conformity, the creation of a new identity from the amalgamation of the cultures of dominant and subordinate groups, and cultural or structural pluralism. I use the term adjustment to refer to all possible experiences immigrants have in the new country.

communities (Yetman 1999). The pluralistic model was less common and did not gain popularity till the 1960s (Das Gupta 1997).

The assimilation and amalgamation models predicted that as immigrants were gradually absorbed into United States society (even if they retained some cultural practices), old ties based on shared histories would gradually wither away in favor of the more "modern" way of life prevalent in the United States. One of the factors underlying this prediction was the belief that in a modern, industrialized economy, rational ties that were based on economic exchanges would dominate over more emotional ethnic ties that were rooted in tradition.

The persistence, or revival according to some scholars, of ethnic identity among third-generation European immigrants in the United States in the 1960s and 70s called the assimilation and amalgamation models into question. While some scholars considered continuing bonds as primarily symbolic (Gans' [1979] concept of symbolic ethnicity), others viewed them as a revival of old ethnic traditions, as encapsulated in Hansen's third-generation principle (Parrillo 1997). Both perspectives acknowledged that ethnic identity had not disappeared in the face of increasing urbanization and industrialization, as had been predicted earlier (Alba 1990; Gans 1979; Glazer and Moynihan 1970; Gordon 1961; Waters 1990).

All three models have been criticized on other grounds as well (Omi and Winant 1994; Takaki 1989; Yetman 1999). Omi and Winant (1994) criticize the three perspectives, which they label the "ethnicity paradigm" for their inherent ethnocentrism. They point out that all variants of the paradigm use the "immigrant analogy." That is, they take the experiences of White European immigrants as representative of the experiences of racial minority groups and ignore the racial hierarchy in the United States which shapes the experiences of native-born and immigrant minorities.

The ethnicity paradigm also predicts that migration to an industrialized society will "modernize" immigrants' institutions, including the family, and make them more egalitarian. The paradigm therefore implies that migration to the United States is on the whole a positive experience for immigrant women, because it "liberates" them from their

"oppressive" traditions to lead more independent lives, similar to the lives presumably lived by their American counterparts. Research reveals instead that migration is not inevitably beneficial for women, but may actually result in greater oppression, especially for women who lose their support networks (Dasgupta and Warrier 1996). Migration also may provide women with opportunities to improve their situation, without ending gender inequality in immigrant institutions such as the family (Kibria 1993). Thus, the experience of immigration is neither wholly positive nor wholly negative for individuals (Kurien 1999). As well, the processes and outcomes of migration may be different for members of the same ethnic group and even within the same family, based on gender (Bhattacharjee 1992; Das Gupta 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kibria 1993; Mani 1993; Mankekar 2002). Research on immigrants that does not take gender into consideration is therefore incomplete.

For example, Bacon's (1996) study on Asian Indians in Chicago focuses on immigrant adjustment as a process unique to individuals and yet comparable across families. When looking at interaction in families, Bacon compares parents' experiences and views with those of their children. However, while Bacon does pay attention to the distinct experiences of parents and children, she fails to take gender into account. That is, variations may be rooted not just in distinctions among individuals (based on personality or age), but due to the differences resulting from socially significant identities based on gender, a "range of relationships of power among differently situated people." (Baca Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1997: 6). In viewing the family as a unit composed of members interacting at an equal level, Bacon ignores the fact that the experiences of sons and daughters within the same family may differ. For example, the various issues families debate, such as dating and marriage, and dress codes, may have different implications for them.

Immigrants' construction of ethnic traditions in a new context may also vary by gender, as a transnational study of ethnicity reveals (Das Gupta 1997). Immigrant groups construct their identity in relation to the "alien" cultures they encounter in the United States *and* vis-à-vis their counterparts in the home country. This cross-border

construction is not a simple process of "picking up the threads." Rather, some cultural beliefs and practices are abandoned and others are emphasized, and these choices are gendered. However, as Das Gupta (1997) points out, even the pluralist model uncritically accepts cultural practices as evidence of diversity without analyzing power differences within immigrant groups. In other words, it does not ask who, for instance, determines which aspects of their cultures immigrant communities retain (Das Gupta 1997). Das Gupta's (1997) feminist, transnational approach to ethnicity exposes the gendered nature of the traditions that Indian immigrants choose to uphold as authentic Indian culture, and the ways in which second-generation Indian women resist their parents' cultural expectations. Before discussing Das Gupta's research in greater detail, I will briefly summarize some of the literature on Indian identity and the ethnic identity of Asian Indian immigrants in the United States.

Asian Indian Identity

The idea of India as a single, unified nation, and an Indian identity, symbolizing the nation-state of India, emerged due to the efforts of nationalists who sought to overthrow British colonialism (Bhattacharjee 1992). Indian immigrants who came to the United States after 1965 ascribe not just to this identity but also to ideas about Indian culture and ideal Indian manhood and womanhood that were constructed during the nationalist struggle against colonialism during the 19th and early 20th centuries (Bhattacharjee 1992; Das Gupta 1997).

The nationalists sought to counter the Utilitarian and Evangelical portrayals of India as a primitive, stagnant and depraved society, as "proved" by the low status accorded to women and the "effeminacy" of the men, by drawing on India's "glorious" past. Ironically, the nationalists relied primarily on the writing of another group of Europeans – the Orientalists – to recreate this "glorious" Aryan history and use it to construct a new identity for Indian womanhood and manhood (Chakravarti 1989; Sangari and Vaid 1989; Tharu and Lalita 1991). These identities reflected not the reality of the times but the ideals upheld by the colonizers:

> The revivalist and nationalist construction of an anti-imperialist hero reflected an
> internalization of colonial definitions of the ideal man, choosing for him the

'manly' qualities lauded by the Victorians rather than those which local traditions held in awe, because the latter were scorned as effeminate by the British. The same can be said of the definitions of the 'womanly woman' … who was defined by reformers, revivalists and nationalists alike, using a mixture of Anglicism and Orientalism (Kumar 1993: 8).

During the golden age of Hinduism,[7] the nationalists claimed, men were brave, energetic and noble, while women were learned, spiritual, and dedicated to their conjugal roles to the extent of willingly accompanying their partners in death (Chakravarti 1989).

Alongside her conjugal role, another crucial role for the Indian woman was that of the mother (Chakravarti 1989). Not only was womanhood associated with motherhood, the nation itself came to be seen as a mother, and manhood was linked to protecting her (and Indian women in general), a connection that continued during the Partition of India in 1947 (see Butalia 2000).

By the beginning of the 20th century these ideals had become well established. Indian womanhood was equated with the spiritualism and mysticism of the East and contrasted to womanhood in the materialist West. The "independence of western society" (especially of western women) was unfavorable compared to the "extreme self-sacrifice of the Aryan society," the epitome of which was *sati* (Vivekananda quoted in Chakravarti 1989: 77). Thus:

> The nation's identity lay in the culture and more specifically in its womanhood. In the changed political and social environment the image of womanhood was more important than the reality. Historians and laymen would complete the process by ensuring, through continued writings in the twentieth century, that the image also came to be perceived as the reality (Chakravarti 1989: 78).

The dichotomization of the spiritual (and thereby superior) East and the materialist West continue in present-day India (Derné 1999). Indian-ness is associated with an emphasis on emotions, on family duties, and gender hierarchy while Westernization is associated with materialism, "unrestrained sexuality" and gender

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[7] The nationalists based their ideals of womanhood and manhood on an idealized Hindu past, but these constructions are "deeply embedded in the consciousness of the middle classes" (Chakravarti 1989, p.28) and are seen as *Indian* ideals today.

equality (Derné 1999). This construction of Indian-ness in opposition to Western cultures, of Indian womanhood as self-sacrificing, religious, modest and benevolent and as a representative of "nation, religion, God, the Spirit of India, culture, tradition, family" (Bhattacharjee 1992: 31) and of Indian manhood as powerful, virile, protective of and in control of women (Abraham 1999), continues in the United States. The nationalists were concerned with "revitalizing" Indian culture in the face of the colonial onslaught. Similarly, early Indian immigrants sought to "preserve" this culture that accentuated the superiority of the East to the West, against the incursion of American culture (Bhattacharjee 1992; Das Gupta 1997), and to transmit it to their children.

In India, the middle class has become increasingly westernized in the past 20 years, and norms, especially about dress (for women) and cross-sex interaction,[8] have changed.   However, in the United States, the ideal creation by early first-generation immigrants was largely unaffected by these changes. This lack of change, Das Gupta (1997: 581) cautions, is not primarily the result of the "museumization" of cultural traditions due to the geographical distance from India. Rather, the changes in India itself served to validate and justify the practices upheld among those who migrated to the United States. What the first generation defined as "Indian," and therefore worthy of preservation in the face of change in India, is not an uncontested package of practices transported and frozen in an alien context (especially given the amount of diversity in India). Rather, the earlier immigrants reconstructed "Indian" tradition to highlight the difference between "East" and "West" and thus prove its validity and its importance, and to counter the increasing westernization in India: "Developments in India serve as a measure of their [first-generation Asian Indian immigrants'] success in bringing up their children traditionally" (Das Gupta 1997: 580).

Das Gupta (1997) initially wanted to investigate, based on the ethnicity paradigm, whether Asian Indian immigrants had assimilated into the United States or whether they had held on to their Indian roots. She found that the ethnicity paradigm did not equip her

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[8] For example, in urban areas there are more cross-sex friendships and young people often go out in mixed-sex groups.

to analyze the responses of four of her respondents, second-generation Indian women whose parents immigrated to the United States before 1975. In her follow-up interviews with these women, she found that participants in her study had retained an "Indian"[9] identity. Rather than fitting together smoothly with each other like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, however, their "Indian" and "American" identities often came into conflict. The benign label of "Indian American" therefore obscures any conflict between the two identities. As well, it ignores gender differences in the experiences of such conflicts. Thus, while second generation Indian men *and* women experience the dissension between these identities, Das Gupta recognizes that their experiences are gendered such that women have greater limitations imposed on them. In the words of one of Das Gupta's respondents:

> I was never allowed to go away from home to study. But my brother has got away with a lot. Right now he is away at college. He worked night shifts and returned at three in the morning. Or he goes out at ten at night saying he would be back in half-an-hour but he stays out until twelve. That does not create a problem! (Das Gupta 1997, 583).

Das Gupta's (1997: 586) respondents engaged in "creative interpretations, resistance, and subversion of what it meant to be 'Indian' women" to forge new identities for themselves by reinventing the meanings of "Indian womanhood" and the role of women in families, and subverting parental expectations.

While both Das Gupta (1997) and Bhattacharjee (1992) extensively critique the ideal that first-generation Indian immigrants created, they ignore the gendered meanings that Indian identity has for first-generation Asian Indian individuals. The second generation lays claim to two identities, Indian and American, which are sometimes in conflict with each other. While first-generation Asian Indians also experience two cultures, they face different issues and concerns, and the meanings Indian-ness has for them may also vary, as the immigrants are more rooted in Indian culture (Das Gupta

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[9] Keep in mind that, given the diversity prevalent in India, the term "Indian" subsumes numerous regional/religious cultures.

1997).   My study focuses on these meanings, and how they vary by gender. In the next section, I will briefly summarize the social psychological literature on identity.

The Meanings of Identities

The examination of meaning is part of the social psychological scholarship on identity. The self, a person's image of and awareness about her/himself (Gecas and Burke 1995), is composed of identities or "labels" we construct or others attach to us (Schwalbe 1996).

> Identity refers to who or what one is, to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others. In sociology, the concept of identity refers both to self-characterizations individuals make in terms of the structural features of group memberships, such as various social roles, memberships, and categories… and to the various character traits an individual displays and others attribute to an actor on the basis of his/her conduct (Gecas and Burke 1995: 42).

As individuals perform numerous roles in society and belong to various groups, they possess multiple identities. Individuals regard some identities as more central than others (Stryker and Serpe 1994).

Sociologists focus on the embeddedness of identity in society, that is, they study identity vis-à-vis the social context in which the individual is located, while psychologists focus primarily on the cognitive processes that shape the self (Gecas and Burke 1995). The former distinguish between personal identities, which are self definitions based on the unique characteristics of the individual; role identities, which arise from the roles individuals perform; and social identities, which arise from an individual's social categories (McCall and Simmons 1978). Social identities are further categorized into two types, "individual-level identities" or "me's" (for example, "I am an Indian"), and "collective-level identities" or "we's" (for example, "we are Indians"), both of which are rooted in society.

Among the four major theories of identity, the two sociological theories, McCall and Simmons' role-identity theory and Stryker's identity theory, focus on roles individuals occupy in society on the basis of "me's". The two psychological theories, Tajfel's social identity theory and Turner's self-categorization theory, focus on "we's" based on individuals' membership in groups and social categories (Deaux and Martin

2003; Thoits and Virshup 1997). However, both "me's" and "we's" can be based on the social roles individuals perform and on their sociodemographic characteristics. In other words, individuals may identify (i.e., have a collective-level identity) with others who perform the same roles they do or they may have an individual-level identity based on a sociodemographic characteristic without identifying with other members of that group or category (Thoits and Virshup 1997). Furthermore, both social identity theory and self-categorization theory explain the formation of "we's" through the cognitive process of identification with others who have the same characteristics ("social categorization"). Deaux and Martin (2003) provide a model to bridge the gap between Stryker's identity theory on the one hand and Tajfel's social identity theory and Turner's self-categorization theory on the other, by emphasizing the inter-dependence between the two contexts in which individuals do identity work,

> [F]irst, the cognitive and representational context shaped by categorical membership, and second, the interpersonal context grounded in specific reciprocal relationships with others (Deaux and Martin 2003: 105).

Categorical membership influences the networks and relationships that individuals have access to. For example, Indian immigrants are more likely to interact socially with other Indians than with members of other ethnic groups. Interpersonal contexts, the level at which role performance takes place, in turn shape individuals' identification with a particular group or category. When individuals find acceptance and support within a particular network, their identification with that category is strengthened and vice versa.

A social identity based on a category is "a cognitive and representational meaning system, shared by large segments of the society, that can provide expected characteristics for those who belong to the category, prescriptions for behavior, and a narrative history of group membership" (Deaux and Martin 2003: 105). However, individuals may attach different meanings to a particular categorical identity, based on other collective-level identities they have; for example, the meanings Asian Indian attach to their ethnic identity

may vary by gender.[10]   The study of meanings has been a central concern of symbolic interactionism. While researchers offer numerous approaches to conceptualize meaning,[11] as Simon (1997) points out, most of this research relies on surveys and fails to deal with how individuals themselves comprehend the meanings of their identities. These meanings have to be examined, because while the meanings are to a large extent derived from society, there are also individual variations in the meanings of identities. As Stryker (in Kroska 2000: 384) points out with regard to marital identities, "there are multiple ways of being a spouse."

The meanings we give to our identities, whether "me's" and "we's," shape our views of ourselves: "to know what our identities are, and what those identities mean, is to know who and what we are, where we stand relative to others, and how to conduct ourselves in life" (Schwalbe 1996: 103). When the meanings of our identities are positive, we see our self positively, and maintain that meaning. When an identity is devalued and we cannot discard it (for example race/sex) we attempt to change the meanings of those identities (Schwalbe 1996) or create alternative personal identities that provide us with self-esteem (Snow and Anderson 1987). All of these tasks are "identity work" which can be defined as:

> anything we do, alone or with others, to establish, change, or lay claim to meanings as particular kinds of persons. As individuals, we must do some kind of identity work in every encounter. We do this when we give signs – through dress, speech, demeanor, posture – that tell others who and what we are, how we are likely to behave, and how we expect to be treated (Schwalbe 1996: 105).

The mythopoetic men in Schwalbe's (1996) study were engaged in collective identity work to repair the damage done, in their view, to the identity of "man" by feminists. This collective work included "rhetorical devices" (p. 120) such as the repeated use of the term "men's work" for group activities, the publication of books and articles presenting

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[10] Deaux and Martin (2003) do acknowledge that two social identities based on social categories may intersect, but focus on single identities based on ethnicity and nationality in their model.
[11] See Simon (1997) for a summary of approaches to meanings in stress research.

masculinity in a positive light, verbal affirmations, and group activities such as "hugging; touching or holding a man if he began to cry while telling a painful personal story; uninhibited dancing" (p. 133) and also occasional collective growls at the end of meetings "to feel your zest as a man" (p. 134).

Snow and Anderson (1987) also identify physical appearance and demeanor, use of props, association with certain individuals and groups, and verbal affirmations as forms of identity work. Their ethnographic study of the ways in which the homeless create positive identities for themselves focused primarily on verbal affirmations, or "identity talk" since the homeless lack the resources to engage in other forms of identity work.

For Asian Indians in New York City "the purchase and consumption of culturally marked goods and services, cycles of religious worship, attendance at public festivals celebrating Indian identity and relying on the Indian immigrant media" (Lessinger 1995: 27) are ways in which people maintain their ethnic identity.

However, research on ethnic identity among Asian Indians in the United States either ignores variations by gender or focuses on the experiences of the children of immigrants. This study fills a gap in this literature by exploring the gender variations in the meanings Asian Indian attach to their ethnic identity. I draw on symbolic interactionist literature on meaning to explore the identity work Asian Indian immigrants perform and the ways in which this work is gendered. In the process I also look at the shift in the Indian immigrants' understanding of themselves as Indian men/women resulting from migration. A study of this shift in the meanings of identities will help illustrate the gender differences in adaptation to the United States.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study examines how first-generation Asian Indian immigrants define Indian-ness, and the ways in which these identities are gendered. Sociological research on meaning and identity relies heavily on qualitative research methods to uncover how respondents define their identities (Bacon 1996; Das Gupta 1997; Kurien 1999; Schwalbe 1996; Simon 1995, 1997; Snow and Anderson 1987).[12] Quantitative methods and surveys provide generalizable findings, but because of their structured nature, they limit the responses informants provide and do not allow for discussion and clarification of emergent themes (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Since the purpose of my study was to explore the meanings people attach to their identities, a qualitative method best suited my study.

Research Design

I conducted extensive interviews with research participants. This research method has several advantages and limitations. I will discuss the advantages here and talk about the limitations of this method in general and within my study in particular at the end of the chapter.

In-depth interviewing provides "rich, freely elicited self-descriptions" (Kroska 2000: 382) and contributes to greater "coherence, depth and density" in the data because it allows the researcher to mold the interview to each participant (Weiss 1994: 3). Interviews also allow participants to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words (Reinharz 1992), which is essential for this project.

The interviews for this study were semi-structured; I had a list of questions that I asked all respondents, but I also added probing questions based on what the participants said. Semi-structured interviews thus allowed me to direct the interview in the direction I

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[12] Kroska (2000) introduces a new "vignette approach" for measuring identity. This method is structured and applicable to large samples, and is based on meanings provided by respondents in previous studies. It therefore solves the problem of other quantitative studies that rely on definitions provided by researchers. My study is exploratory, however, and the paucity of literature on Indian identity discourages the creation of vignettes.

wished, and provided me the flexibility to explore issues in detail. In addition, the conversational style of the semi-structured interviews helped me establish a rapport with my respondents and encouraged them to discuss issues or relate incidents they would not otherwise have thought of or spoken about (e.g. Sandelowski, Holditch-Davis and Glenn-Harris 1992). For instance, one respondent told me that her parents had married against their parents' wishes, and subsequent conversations indicated that this had had an impact on how she and the other girls in the family were raised and how the respondent was raising her own daughter. Another respondent talked informally about her in-laws and the tough time she had had living with them.

I tape-recorded all interviews with the informed consent of the participants. In one case, a couple, newly arrived in the United States, refused to sign the consent form (though they did not refuse to be interviewed or have it recorded on tape), even after I pointed out that it was in their interest and mine to do so. In another instance, a somewhat hesitant respondent got concerned when she saw the consent form and the tape-recorder, and after talking with her husband over the phone, refused to do the interview even when I offered to do it without the tape-recorder. Based on previous research experience, I had not anticipated any opposition to my recording the interviews, so these two instances were surprising. The fact that these individuals were recent immigrants and therefore wary of signing any document (especially due to stereotypes about the quantity and ease of law-suits in the United States) most likely played a role in their refusal. However, none of the other respondents, even recent arrivals, objected to the consent form or the tape-recorder.

I conducted the interviews between July 2002 and February 2003. Interviews were primarily in English, with some Hindi phrases thrown in. Some of the interviews were in a mix of Hindi and English. I followed the lead of the respondents and used the language they preferred and/or seemed most comfortable with. During the date collection process, I kept written records of the settings and atmosphere in which the interviews took place, my interactions with the participants, and my experiences at events organized by the local Indian association.

Qualitative researchers recommend that researchers analyze their data as they collect it (Strauss, and Miles and Huberman in Weiss 1994). I had my interviews transcribed during the data gathering process, though due to unforeseen circumstances, not all the interviews were transcribed right away. In instances where I had to return to finish an interview, I listened to the tapes and revised my questions during the second visit. After most of my interviews were transcribed, I read the interviews and looked for emergent themes. Besides some expected avenues of identity work (for instance, food and clothing), my reading revealed the almost universal emphasis Indian immigrants in my study placed on the strength of family bonds as an Indian characteristic that set them apart from Americans. Another issue was the conflation of Hindu identity with Indian identity by many participants. The chapters that follow are organized around these findings.

Sampling method

I used convenience sampling, specifically chain or snowball sampling, which "relies on previously identified group members to identify other group members of the population" (Henry 1990: 21) to get in touch with my informants. I contacted the then president of an Indian cultural association in a city on the east coast for assistance in contacting members who might be interested in participating in my study. The president provided me with a copy of the association's directory, which I used to contact potential participants for my study.

The process by which I picked names from the directory was somewhat purposive. While I did move alphabetically, I paid attention to the region the respondents were from (as indicated by their last names) to avoid over-representation of any one region. I also avoided interviewing people I knew. My initial phone calls to some of the people in the directory led to some interviews (and one outright refusal), and many of those respondents put me in touch with, or provided information to others who they thought would contribute significantly to my study. These contacts proved very useful, though subsequently I did return to the directory on occasion to call people on my own. All my respondents were members of the Indian association. I chose to interview association

members exclusively because my study explores the meaning of Indian-ness among those who consider their Indian identity to be important (and membership in such an association is evidence of that importance), not whether Indian identity is salient or central to those who emigrated from India.

<u>Sample</u>

I interviewed first-generation Asian Indian married women and men about how they express their Indian identity. The first generation refers to anyone who was born in, and spent his or her childhood and early adulthood in India, and then moved to the United States. I conducted 34 interviews; 30 interviews were with individuals, while 4 couples chose to be interviewed together. In all, I interviewed 23 women and 15 men. The men were much harder to contact, and seemed to have less time on their hands, as all of them were in paid employment, unlike the women, 17 of whom were full-time homemakers at the time of the interview.

The age of the respondents ranged from 28 – 63 years, with a median age of 38.5 years. Whenever possible, I tried to interview couples. Usually I would talk with the wives first, and then they would help me set up interviews with their husbands. Among the 38 participants in my study, there were 15 couples (and 4 couples chose to be interviewed together).   However, due to time constraints, I was unable to interview the husbands of all my female respondents. There was no instance of husband-only interviews. Most of my respondents (12 couples and 6 "singles") had two children, while the rest had one child. The children ranged in age from newborns to adults with children of their own.

Most of my respondents (24 out of 38) were on H1/H4 visas (work permit/ dependent of a person with a work permit, respectively; all the H1 visa holders were men, all the H4 visa holders were women), while 5 respondents had permanent visas and 9 were U.S. citizens. All my respondents came to the United States after 1980. Thirteen of them arrived between the years 1980-1995 and the rest have entered the United States since then, with the largest number (10) arriving in 2000. These "newer" Indian immigrants differed from the earlier Indian immigrants. Some of the earlier immigrants

were opposed to their children, especially their daughters, going out with groups of friends, moving far from home for college, or choosing their marital partners (Das Gupta 1997). My respondents had permitted or were willing to permit children to go out with friends, and in many cases in mixed-sex groups. Some of them had allowed this in India as well. Several of my respondents were also amenable to the idea of their children choosing their own marital partners as long as the partner was Indian and Hindu, Jain, or Sikh.

All except one of my respondents had at least an undergraduate degree from India. Twelve of the participants had a graduate degree and four among them had additional professional qualifications. Ten of the respondents were engineers, and four had trained as physicians. Six of the female respondents had acquired, or were in the process of acquiring, additional qualifications in the United States. Ten of the female interviewees had been employed in India, as schoolteachers, college professors, physicians, bank managers, professionals in marketing, etc. Four of the female respondents had, at some point in time, been employed in the United States, while four of them were in paid employment when they were interviewed. All the male participants were employed during the interview process. Most of the respondents were professionals; five of the respondents (including one couple) owned their own business (usually gas stations and motels).

My respondents could be labeled middle class: fourteen of the people (including 6 couples, since I interviewed husbands and wives in many cases) had incomes ranging from $31,000 -- $60,000; four (one couple) earned between $61,000 -- $90,000; two couples fell in the $91,000 -- $120,000 range; one respondent's husband earned between $121,000 -- $150,000; and two couples earned over $151,000. In two cases, husbands and wives gave me conflicting information about their annual income. In three interviews, I was unable to learn the respondents' income (usually because we ran out of time at the end of the interview). In addition, one respondent said that she could not choose a range as the annual income varied because her family had a business. Another

respondent could not provide the information because she had no idea about how much money her husband earned.

I had intended to interview only Hindu[13] immigrants because the last two decades have been characterized by considerable religious strife in India. Due to the rise of religious fundamentalism, religious affiliation may have become another important source of identity. Religious diversity among the participants would therefore have complicated the study. However, I did include three non-Hindus in the study. In one instance, halfway through the interview, I realized that the respondent was not a Hindu. In the other two instances, the participants, on hearing about my project through friends, expressed an interest in being interviewed. One of the interesting factors that analyzing the interviews revealed was the importance of Hindu identity for many Indian immigrants, and the conflation of Hindu with Indian identity. As a result, the interviews with non-Hindu immigrants provided a counterfoil to the conflation of Hindu with Indian identity, and helped reveal the invisible privileges that Hindus in India enjoy.

India is characterized by great regional diversity. Therefore, first-generation Indian immigrants could have identified with the nation as well as with the region/state of the country they originate from (Das Gupta 1997). They could also have projected their regional identity as an Indian identity, which is not problematic since my study was concerned with how people define Indian-ness. Therefore I sought to interview people from different parts of India. My sample included four people from western India, thirteen from the north, and eighteen from the south. However neither regional nor caste identity seemed to be a major issue for most of my respondents, and many of them had grown up in, or otherwise spent time in states other than their own. Caste affiliations were also not a salient issue, and with some rare exceptions, the issue of caste never came up in my conversations.

The data gathering process took much longer than expected, because most interviews had to be rescheduled at least once due to commitment conflicts. I was unable to complete one interview despite repeated efforts over several months. I continued data

collection until I reached "theoretical saturation": "the point at which researchers are no longer discovering new information" (Gilgun 1992: 35).

Limitations

My study involves a specific group of immigrants whose history of immigration, experiences in the home country, and sociocultural milieu in the new country are different from other groups'. Therefore this study is not generalizable to other immigrant groups, to the Indian diaspora beyond the United States, or to other non-Hindu Indian immigrants to the United States. Moreover, I interviewed only middle class immigrants. Their expectations about life in the United States, their reasons for migrating, and their experiences in the United States are likely different from those of working class Indian immigrants. Therefore this study is not generalizable to Indian immigrants of other social classes. However, this study helps us understand the gendered meanings of identity for first-generation middle class Indian immigrants in various parts of the United States.

One of the major limitations of interview research is that there may be a discrepancy between what respondents say and what they do (Derné 1995; Weiss 1994). Extended participant observation in various settings is an effective way to solve this problem, but limitations of time and other resources compelled me to rely on interviews. Another way to address this problem is to ask people specific questions:

> … [w]e will obtain more reliable information and information easier to interpret if we ask about concrete incidents than we will if we ask about general states or about opinions (Weiss 1994: 150).

I therefore asked participants to relate specific events where needed.

Respondents may also want to hide some unpleasant facts or unpopular views from the interviewer. The relatively un-controversial nature of my topic reduced respondents' need to obscure the truth. As interviews were private and confidential (unless the respondents chose to be interviewed with their spouses), informants were able to open up. My status as a first-generation Indian immigrant woman produced observations that would be hidden from non-Indian interviewers. Thus respondents felt

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[13] I include in this category Jains, since there is considerable similarity between Jainism and Hinduism.

free to criticize various aspects of U.S. society, while they would have been more circumspect before a non-Indian, and especially a native American researcher. Respondents also felt more comfortable criticizing aspects of India. The fact that some of them were slightly apologetic about it, and prefaced their comments with statements such as "I don't want to put down our country, but…" indicates that they would not be as critical before a non-Indian. My gender allowed me to interview women, usually during the day when husbands and children were away, in the privacy of their homes. Women, especially, felt comfortable talking about their experiences with their in-laws because their husbands were absent. In some instances, my gender was a hindrance when it came to the men; as a woman I rarely interviewed the men when they were alone.[14]

One of the criticisms leveled against qualitative studies is that the researcher's biases may color the study (Olesen 1994). Feminist qualitative researchers point out that researchers can be attentive to their views and perspectives and can use this in data collection and analysis (Olesen 1994). I actively managed my various identities during the research process, tailoring how I presented myself and the identity work I did based on the attitudes of my respondents. In Chapter VII, I address the identity negotiations I engaged in as I gathered data, and how my gender, race/ethnicity, immigrant status, and especially my marital status shaped the process and also helped me understand and interpret my interviewees' identity work. I have also quoted the participants' comments in the final narrative extensively (See Olesen 1994, for examples of strategies to ensure credibility).

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[14] Gender was not the only factor here. As many of the wives were full-time homemakers, they were home when I interviewed the men, on weekday evenings and weekends.

CHAPTER FOUR: FOOD, CLOTHING, & VERBAL IDENTITY WORK
THE BASICS OF INDIAN IDENTITY

Identity work refers to the wide range of activities people engage in – through their speech, their appearance, the way they live – to reaffirm for themselves and others who they are. In this chapter I explore three major avenues of ethnic identity work for Indian immigrants – the production and consumption of food, the use of Indian and non-Indian clothing, and verbal identity work. In the conclusion, I highlight the gender differences in the nature and extent of identity work performed by my respondents.

Identity Work

Identity work is "an interactional accomplishment that is socially constructed, interpreted, and communicated via words, deeds, and images" (Hunt and Benford 1994: 491). It refers to a wide range of activities – verbal and nonverbal, such as dress and personal appearance, affiliation with others – which individuals perform to indicate to others who they are. Researchers have uncovered various types of verbal identity work, that is, the use of talk as a means to affirm or deny an identity being attributed to one. For instance, the mixed-race women in Storrs' (1999: 201) study used racial narratives, including "selective disclosure" to emphasize their non-white identities and downplay their whiteness, which they stigmatize. The mythopoetic men in Schwalbe's (1996) study sought to get in touch with their emotional side and create an alternative to the mainstream construction of masculinity.[15] Schwalbe considers the use of the term "men's work" by the men to define activities such as reading poetry, hugging, dancing, even crying, as identity work because these essentially feminine-considered activities are redefined as "work" rather than leisure. Schwalbe (1996) also considers the phrase [we] "as men" as a form of identity talk, since it gave the participants in the movement a sense of belonging and hence, group identity. Snow and Anderson's (1987: 1348) ethnographic study of the ways in which the homeless create positive identities for

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[15] Though critical of the traditional notion of masculinity just as feminists are, the mythopoetic men did not identify with feminism. Instead, they accused feminism of blaming all men for women's problems and of making life harder for men.

themselves focused primarily on verbal affirmations, or "identity talk" since the homeless lack the resources to engage in other forms of identity work. They classified the various verbal strategies used by the homeless into three broad types – "distancing," "embracement," and "fictive storytelling."

While the homeless people in their study relied primarily on verbal identity work due to lack of resources, Snow and Anderson (1987) also list personal appearance as a tool in managing one's identity. People use clothing, jewelry, hairstyles (Storrs 1999) and even tattoos (Phelan and Hunt 1998) to project an identity.

Food, Clothing, and Shelter: Indian Identity Work

India as home: Verbal identity talk

One way that first-generation Indian immigrants in my study manifested their Indian identity was by sometimes referring to India as "home," a form of verbal identity work. It is, of course, not surprising that people who have been in the United States for less than ten years, many of whom are on work permit visas with a 6-year limit, would do so. Most of them also mentioned that they would like to get permanent residency visas for the United States. However, even respondents who had been in the U.S. for more than 10 years and were citizens of the United States, regarded India as home. For instance, *Rashmi*[16],[17] mentioned that she and her husband decided to take U.S. citizenship because they both felt that it was now their home. At the same time, however, she often referred to India as "back home." For example: "I like the way people are assertive out here. They'll tell you things point blank on your face… Back home, people still tend to… repress what they want to say." Again:

> Out here there is more equality in whatever you do. Here the construction worker and his boss both eat at the same table, can go to the same McDonald's, can buy the same milk, those kind of things which we don't see back home.

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[16] The names of all participants in this study have been changes to ensure confidentiality.

[17] To distinguish respondents' gender, women's names are in italics.

Many of my respondents expected children who were born and/or brought up in the United States to view India as home. For example, the children were expected to know the Indian national anthem and Indian languages, as *Madhuri* mentions below:

> [T]hey [should] know about their country… at the Indian Association there was a function, so they had taught the children the national anthem. If someone asked our kids to sing the Indian national anthem or who is the [powerful] person in India, or what else is the holy book, or what are the festivals there... if someone asked, they should be able to tell them.

Beena also mentioned her surprise when she found out that children of Indian immigrants do not know the Indian national anthem:

> The first function we had was a Republic Day… I figured that most kids would know the national anthem but a lot of them did not simply because they were born and brought up here… You know the thought process at that point… maybe I was also too naive and raw, but it just never struck me that they may not know it because I figured that being an Indian you would know *your Indian national anthem* [emphasis added].

Another important verbal manifestation of Indian identity was the use of Indian languages. Several of my interviews were conducted either to a large extent in Hindi, or more commonly in a mix of English and Hindi. Many of the study participants considered the use of their native language as an important manifestation of their Indian-ness, and listed knowledge of their native language, and in some cases, *any* Indian language, as something they would like their children to acquire and retain. Therefore, they were a little discomfited when their children spoke only in English, as *Rekha* was when I asked her if she would like her daughter to learn her native language:

> Oh definitely yes. At least I want her to speak my language. After coming here… I've seen that when she goes out, she has to speak only English. So she's not even able to talk [in my native language]. She understands fully, but she's shy to speak… At home, myself and my husband, we talk only in [native language]… She's more free in talking in English, which I don't like.

Madhuri expressed the same concern about the Indian children growing up here, though her own daughter is fluent in her native language:

> When I look at the children [of Indian immigrants], some of them are forgetting their mother tongue, they just talk to everyone in English. And when they go to

India they feel … bad because they won't understand the language there, because parents also talk to them at home in English here.

Interestingly, retaining one's native language was an important concern even for those parents who said that they used mostly English *even at home* in India. *Madhuri* reiterated the centrality of one's native language a little later in the conversation:

> At least [the children of Indian immigrants] should know their national language. Like that day at [a local international festival] they were asking people from each country how to say thank you in their language… they asked a Pakistani girl and she said 'shukriya' [in Urdu]… then they asked an Indian child, so he also said 'shukriya.' So I felt a little bad that these people do not know what we say in our language. Children should at least know the Indian language, Hindi.

While Hindi is the national language of India (along with English), Urdu, a language used in Pakistan, is one of the official languages in India as well (and many Hindi-speakers use Urdu words routinely in their speech) but *Madhuri* does not acknowledge it as such in this context.

Viewing India as home, on the surface, seems gender-neutral. Both men and women miss various aspects of their lives in India, including immediate and extended family, festive occasions, the close-knit and informal nature of friendships, etc. However, "home" can be both positive and negative, a source of strength and companionship as well as a site of control, as literature on domestic violence indicates (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Yllo and Bograd 1988**)**. The gendered inequalities within homes can make it harder for women to be themselves and speak their minds. This is especially true for the women who lived in joint families (that is, with their in-laws) in India. For them, leaving their "home," India, provides new opportunities that men take for granted.[18] For instance, *Rashmi* speculated on what her life would have been like if she was still living in India:

> I don't think I would be working. I don't think I would have gone for further education like I did out here. I'd still have probably been a full time housewife back at home… I think it would have been a very different upbringing for my daughter too in many ways I think. So I think it would have been different in a lot of ways.

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[18] Living in joint families has various advantages as well, as many women pointed out. For instance, women with paid employment do not have to worry about daycare for their children.

Madhuri talked about women having more time on their hands:

> Here you feel like you have an identity sometimes... it's nice. You can be a little independent. There [in India] there were so many social responsibilities... There they [women] become very housebound. Here everyone has individual lives… I'm not working, I do stay at home. But still, it feels different... There you are very housebound, because you have to take care of a lot of things, family, in-laws... Here in the afternoons some Indians ladies, we sit down, chat... There is a little more going out, visiting people... [T]here's more time here. So if I wanted to study or do something, I could.

This is not to imply that women do not have opportunities for career development in India, and that these chances are available only once they are in the US. In fact, some of the women in my study gave up lucrative careers before they migrated. However, the dynamics within their homes may change, whether they are employed or not, once they come to the U.S., as *Rashmi* explains:

> [I]n our Indian culture, the husband is considered equal to God traditionally and I find it a very hard concept to deal with in this day and age especially when both of us are full-time workers and both of us are bringing the bread in. I find that very hard to accept so I challenge that. And in some ways we've tried to change that and *I think it is more easily done over here since we moved than we did before* [emphasis added]…. [Y]ou have the in-laws living with you so that can be a big constraint I think because the mother-in-law does not want her son to be doing things [housework]… So that would have been one constraint… Another constraint would have been my own parents; my mom even to this day feels that she has to do everything for her husband, my dad. She wouldn't ever dream of lying in bed for an extra 30 minutes while he is up and around and she wouldn't let him fix her tea in the morning.

For women living in joint families (in India and the United States), their homes never feel like *their* homes; they sometimes feel like newcomers in a setting that their mothers-in-law own and maintain. Men, of course, do not experience this. For these women, moving to a new country gives them an opportunity to set up their own households, even while they still think of India as home. I asked *Kavita* what aspects of her life she would change to accommodate her in-laws, if they came for a visit, and she replied she wouldn't change much because:

I have this feeling that this is my house. [Laughs...]… There I used to feel – that is not my house, that is my in-laws' house… I'm much [more] attentive and now I feel I should change this in my house or change that. There, I did not have this feeling because I had to ask before doing anything. If they say – change this, I would; I used to do as a duty. Here, I have to do whatever it is – decorating my house or changing something or doing some purchase… [My in-laws] might get this feeling that they are coming to my house, so … [their interference] will be less I think. [Laughs...]. Maybe.

Clothing

[P]eople really appreciate Indian clothes and I love it when they say, "Oh! What a lovely outfit." I feel so proud to be wearing it. Maybe that's where my Indian-ness comes out… There are times when I feel very proud to be an Indian (*Beena*).

For women, more than men, Indian clothing is a marker of Indian identity. This is not surprising, as in India women are more likely to wear traditional clothing on a routine basis in all settings (including at work) than are men; for the latter, western wear is the norm for most occasions except the most informal and the ceremonial.[19] Many of the men echoed Mukesh's comment: "There hasn't been any change in [the way we] dress because we wear the same things in India also, [but] it does become a little different for ladies."   Some men did mention that they wore shorts more often in the United States. This was not because of concerns about "exposure" in India but instead was a reflection of the more casual mode of dress prevalent in non-work public settings in the United States.

In addition, as the men in my study were the primary breadwinners in their family, there was no scope for dressing in Indian clothes at their workplaces (where they spent most of their time). Women, most of whom in my study were homemakers, did not face similar constraints. While some of the employed women mentioned (as *Rashmi* does below) missing opportunities to dress in Indian clothes and accessories, some other women, including those who were taking various classes in local colleges and institutes felt free to (and a few indeed often did) wear Indian clothes to work and school. *Neeru*,

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[19] See Tarlo (1996) for a description of the changes in women and men's clothing during British colonialism and in independent (post-1947) India

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who worked in a store, made it clear to her employers that she would not change the way she dressed:

> [When I was hired] I told them [that] if there is any dress code I may not be able to work because I always wear saris, and I have my traditional attire. They said, "That is no problem. We don't have any dress code. On the contrary your dress is so good and ethnic"… I don't wear any other dress than sari. *Salwar kameez* [loose trousers and long tunic] I wear sometimes, only for travel or something. I am more comfortable in sari only.

This was a reflection of the differences in women and men's employment: academia and workplaces such as stores etc. do not have the same dress codes that offices do. Women who were full-time homemakers, of course, had more opportunities to dress in Indian clothes on a daily basis. Thus the gendered process of migration, which enforced women's dependency on men (many of the women were on H4 visas), also reinforced and in fact bolstered their role as "preservers of culture."

Despite the opportunities, however, most of the women had switched to western clothing in the United States, keeping Indian clothes for festivals and other community-wide activities, and for visits to the temple and other Indian homes. While some women liked the mobility that western wear gave them, most of them also talked about missing the frequency with which they could dress up in traditional clothes, especially the more elaborate ones, in India:

> I do like to wear our traditional outfits but the kind of profession I'm in… if I wore my *bindi* everyday and if I wore my *payal* [anklets] everyday and if I wore my Punjabi dress everyday [it would be a problem]… [O]n all our Indian occasions, Indian gatherings I will wear an Indian outfit, or when we go to the temple I try to wear an Indian outfit, weddings or anything like that, or parties… Sometimes I do [miss] some things, like in the hot season I love the *salwar* it would be so nice and comfortable. I always wore *payal* ever since I was a teenager until I came here… I had to get rid of them all so I kind of resent that. I still do wear bangles every now and then (*Rashmi*).

Men were not likely to miss traditional clothes. Unlike the women, even when prompted, men did not mention Indian clothing as an aspect of their life in India that they missed in the United States.

On asking women why they didn't wear Indian clothes on a regular basis in the United States, most of the women emphasized that on the occasions that they chose traditional clothing, they had not received any backlash from non-Indians for dressing differently. On the contrary, they usually received compliments. However, the attention they received made them feel self-conscious, as *Rashmi* points out:

> I just feel more comfortable wearing regular American outfits when I'm doing anything out…. People do tend to look at you differently I think. And when you are wearing regular clothes you are being one of them. I think they accept you a little bit easier… Nobody has really ever said [anything negative] but I think sometimes just actions, or the way people look or something just makes me more uncomfortable. That's it… More conscious.

Sadhana meanwhile talked about a feeling of discomfort rather than just self-consciousness:

> Initially when I came after my marriage I wore some of the [Indian] dresses when I went to Washington… People appreciated a lot but after that [September 11] some kind of feeling has come into them. I like to wear but I hesitate to wear outside because people have started to look differently… Before people were very friendly, they used to say hi, hello. But now if I go out in [an Indian outfit] they don't behave that well.

Thus, while seeking to maintain Indian-ness in various aspects of their lives, the women sought to downplay it when it made them the focus of attention in non-Indian public spaces. This made the importance of clothing as a marker of Indian-ness even more salient. Clothes are thus a significant aspect of identity for women.

This identity work is not confined to adults alone. Girls are socialized to take an interest and pride in being Indian through their clothing. As among adults, boys are less likely to dress in traditional clothes. Through this identity work however, it is not just Indian-ness that is being reproduced but also gender:

> Gender… is a situated accomplishment of societal members, the local management of conduct in relation to normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities for particular sex categories… From this perspective, gender is not merely an individual attribute but something that is accomplished in interaction with others (West and Fenstermaker 1995: 21)

Feminist scholars have discussed the role that clothing plays in this reproduction of gender norms in the United States. Girls' clothing, such as frilly dresses, impedes mobility and the kind of rough-and-tumble activities boys routinely engage in (Renzetti and Curran 1999). In addition, it reinforces and perpetuates the stereotype that girls are less disruptive and more easily managed than boys. This is true for Indian immigrants as well. When I asked about how boys and girls dress for ceremonial occasions, *Beena* responded:

> [T]he boys too dress in Indian outfits. But more often than not, I think parents do not encourage it too much either simply because… when they have Indian activities, the boys… till they get to a certain age [about mid-teens]… are not as involved with Indian dressing, Indian dance or whatever… [M]ost of the kids [boys], when they get there for an Indian function they're outside playing ball. And honest to God, you can't play ball in an Indian outfit… Boys most certainly will *very* rarely come with Indian clothes and I have a feeling that it has got to do with the practical aspect of it. That they are going to be playing outside and nothing is as convenient as jeans, shorts, to be out in the mud.

Traditional clothing for girls, being a little cumbersome and expensive, does not lend itself well to roughhousing. At the above-mentioned occasions, girls would usually get together in a group inside and talk, or sit and watch the festivities. Gender differences are thus reinforced; girls are encouraged to be focused on appearance, boys on play.

A gendered Indian identity is reproduced even when children (and adults) are dressed in western clothes. For many of my respondents, men and women, one aspect of Indian-ness, which especially set Indians apart from Americans, was that women didn't "expose," that is, wear revealing clothing. Of course, what is considered too revealing and therefore offensive, is subjective and varies, as evident below:

> [Y]ou won't see as many Indian kids wearing tank tops and spaghetti straps as you would the same proportion of Americans kids… I think that has got to do with the way we were brought up. We are not brought up to expose ourselves. We are brought up in a more conservative manner, we are more fully clothed (*Beena*).

> My personal feeling is like I can't see an Indian woman wearing shorts because I've been brought up in a traditional, a typical middle class environment… As long as they are wearing any modern dresses like jeans and all that I don't mind it… [I]f they are wearing most of the official dresses, office wear and all that stuff, I feel it's okay, it's good. But then, somehow I can't see women wearing

shorts, Indian women. I don't permit my wife also, I tell her that you can wear anything but I don't want you to be wearing bikinis, or shorts or anything like that (Ajay).

[Indian women here should follow] Indian culture… western dress you can wear, jeans or capris [but it should be] loose fitting… [J]ust because you come to US it doesn't mean that you can do anything and wear anything… [D]on't put on [tight] shorts… skirts are okay, even in India they allow skirts, so skirts loose t-shirts like that you can wear… I won't allow [my daughter] to dress up [inappropriately]. [A]s of now she is very lean, so now she can wear the sleeveless [tops] or shorts, she is just three and half years… maybe sleeveless [clothes] she can put on till seventeen… but my husband doesn't agree [to let her wear] sleeveless [clothes] (*Rani*).

Thus girls are expected not only to wear Indian clothes more often, but also to *be* Indian when wearing western clothes. Parents link inappropriate, especially revealing clothing, with inappropriate behavior such as dating, kissing or holding hands with the opposite sex. Both are viewed as signs of excessive independence leading to waywardness among American girls and therefore to be prohibited. Disapproval by the community for violating dress norms thus becomes a means to control women's bodies. While acknowledging that dress for women is changing in India, most people attributed it to the influence of western culture, and western-style media, and sought to prevent their children from emulating the dress of their peers in the United States and urban India. While boys had to follow certain norms of dress, these norms were related not to "exposure" and therefore sexuality, but to the style of clothing. *Neeti* was critical of what she called the "hippy style," that is, baggy and/or shabby clothing, and would not consider letting her son dress in such clothes:

[I don't like] that hippy style. I don't know what it is called over here. They wear such loose pants and are so shabbily dressed. That I would never like him to wear. Otherwise there is no restriction. The dress should be good because your dress and personality reveal a lot about you and if you are dressed in that way then it doesn't look good.

Food

I miss [Indian food] all the time, because here there's only one restaurant, now there are two. But that's still one kind of food, so I miss that… [My wife] she cooks well, so I have no problem. But, here because now we all work and

everything, it's difficult to cook the same [that is, Indian] food everyday. I miss that (Ramesh).

I miss eating the spicy food that I used to eat in India… Here we rarely get to go to Indian restaurants, and quite often we don't find them as tasty here. In India we have so many options, if we don't like it at one place we can go to the other, here we don't have many options. So if you don't like it when you go out you can't do anything you have to make it yourself… [A]nyway after marriage I've gotten more interested cooking good food (*Sadhana*).

Both men and women talked often about missing Indian food, and were thankful that there were increasingly more South Asian groceries available in the United States. Food items specific to particular festivals were remembered with a special fondness and longing to pass those traditions on to the children:

I remember my grandmother, for the kite festival she would make the *til ladoos* [sesame dessert]. I would like to see certain simple traditions continued… These are just strong traditions which I think, to some extent are important for your psyche… That's why the first year, when I came here, as soon as I could get access… for *Diwali*.. I made everything that we made in India… because to me it was getting in touch with the Indian-ness in me… I feel that maybe when they [her children] grow up that's what they will want to remember too, that this is what we did as children (*Beena*).

Children's fondness for Indian food was occasionally mentioned with a sense of pride in their Indian-ness:

[W]e eat Indian food everyday… Every meal is Indian. Of course weekends is Indian too; only once in a while like once a week we fix something American, Italian or Mexican. But [her children] know basically all the Indian food, I mean they are aware of it. They even name it what I should make… They love all this spicy stuff (*Sangeeta*).

Eating Indian food was not as visible a gendered marker of Indian identity as wearing Indian clothes was, but here too, we see a gender difference. While some men, on occasion, mentioned dishes that they liked to cook and were especially adept at, putting the meals on the table on a daily basis was primarily women's responsibility, whether they were in paid employment or not. An unequal division of housework is not unique to Indian families, as sociological literature has shown (Hochschild 1989).

However, when the preparation and consumption of food is infused with symbolic meaning – as being Indian – cooking Indian food or being unable to do so has additional implications. For the women in Mankekar's (2002: 83-84) study, "cooking Indian food was integral to their roles in the family and to their constitution as national and gendered subjects – indeed to their identities as Indian women." Similarly, for *Rekha*, being a good Indian wife meant not just cooking, but cooking the Indian food her husband liked:

> [I] get up in the morning, none of the Americans I think would do that. It's out of love I think, because of the worry that since he doesn't like American food, let me get up and cook for my husband Indian food. And especially since my husband is south Indian, he prefers *idli-dosa* for breakfast. So that's out of love, he doesn't like cereals, let me make *dosa*.

While *Beena* did not see cooking Indian food as one of her wifely duties and enjoyed the opportunity to try a variety of cuisines, she did regret the fact that she did not have the time to cook more *Indian* food, because preparing and consuming Indian food, for her, was an issue of health as well as a marker of Indian identity.

> If time permitted, I would like to *really* have an Indian meal everyday, simply because I think it is a well balanced diet and also because that craving for spices just comes back… When I was back in India [working], I would cook Indian food everyday… What I find I'm doing here is having more continental, more international food than I am having Indian food, at my home level, which I am not really proud of. I mean, from the health point of view.

Food became a means of identity work for my respondents during data collection. I was usually served tea and snacks (and also joined some people for meals); this was a form of identity work by the participants. Offering drinks (often hot tea/coffee) and snacks is an important component of Indian hospitality, and being hospitable is central to Indian culture, as *Renu* explained:

> Hospitality in our culture is a big deal. Out here neighbors will get together, they'll talk for 2 hours but they won't invite each other to their homes… In India that is so nice, they have 6 or 7 apartments on one floor and everybody's doors are open and your neighbor will just pop in any time… For us if any guest comes to your home we equal him with god… We do whatever they like or cook especially for them and we go out of our way to make it nice for the guest that's coming over, make them feel welcome.

However, cooking and serving food is a gendered activity, and therefore while both men and women extend hospitality to guests, women perform the actual tasks of being hospitable (cooking and serving). When I interviewed men, it was usually their wives who cooked and served me the food (in another case the husband joined his wife to cook the meal). In one instance, when the male interviewee served me coffee and snacks, his mother-in-law had prepared everything, and he explained to me that given her health, he did not want her walking up and down a flight of stairs to serve it. He therefore picked up the food from the kitchen and served it to me. Though some men did talk about the dishes they were good at, and invited me to come over sometime to experience their culinary expertise, cooking and serving was not a major source of identity affirmation for them. The men did not get up right away to cook something, as women were prone to do. Moreover, many women (whether I was interviewing them or their husbands) had snacks prepared, or had done the preparatory work for cooking snacks or meals before my arrival. The men, even though they knew of my visit, did not do so, indicating that while men may cook on occasion, it is not their *responsibility* to do so, and any cooking done by them is a special favor for their wife or guest/s.

With regard to food too, being away from "home" was sometimes positive. Some women felt thankful that their families, especially their husbands, were not fussy eaters who did not complain if they were not served Indian food every day, something that would not have been possible in India, especially in a joint family. *Kavita* mentioned that while she cooked Indian food on weekdays, she tried other kinds of food on weekends, sometimes even a light meal (such as sandwiches) if she didn't feel like cooking on a weekend, something she had never thought would happen. In India, every meal consisted of Indian food, and eating out was rare. In addition, some of the women mentioned that while they missed ceremonial occasions in India, they did not miss the burden of additional housework that such occasions entailed (Women in Mankekar's (2002) study made a similar observation). Men's accounts of such occasions (in Mankekar's study and mine) did not make reference to the housework involved.

The Impact of Migration

My purpose in this chapter is to demonstrate that while food and clothing are elements of Indian-ness that were important for my respondents while they were in India, they take on a new salience as a result of migration. They become markers of identity in an environment where speaking one's language, eating one's native cuisine, and wearing traditional clothing can no longer be taken for granted.

The identity work that Indian immigrants do, in the areas of language, food production and consumption, and clothing, is gendered in its manifestations and outcomes. In the process, Indian immigrants construct and maintain not just a gender identity and an ethnic identity, but a gendered ethnic identity; Indian women don't just cook but cook *Indian* food. Women whose families were amenable to eating a variety of cuisines were often thankful for that fact. Women who wanted to, and/or were expected to cook Indian food most or all of the time faced the challenge of finding ingredients, looking for substitutions, and devising short cuts to some of the more elaborate recipes. As a result, immigrant women's conversations often revolved around food, while men were more likely to "talk shop," sports (especially cricket) and politics (especially Indian politics).[20] These conversations reflected and reinforced circumscribed gendered roles. *Kavita* mentioned being frustrated by the fact that Indian women in the United States, once they got together, talked primarily about food and other family matters. Therefore, when she interacted with women like herself, who were going to school, she tried to stay away from the topic of food.

Since food is a form of identity work, even women who were happy about the fact that their family members were not fussy eaters wanted their children to readily eat and appreciate Indian food.[21] When children did like and specifically requested Indian food, women mentioned the fact with some pride. Conversely, children's lack of interest in Indian food could be a source of chagrin, as it may be seen as an indicator of the mother's

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[20] This observation is based on my experiences at social occasions before and during data collection.

[21] Another issue with regard to food was vegetarianism, which I explore in a subsequent chapter.

failure in making the children sufficiently Indian. Thus the responsibility of socializing children into Indian culture takes on additional dimensions for women as a result of migration.

Clothing, too, is a gendered manifestation of Indian identity. Girls and women are supposed to be not just Indian by dressing in Indian clothes but *modest Indian* women, so that their non-Indian clothes also have to be culturally appropriate. Concerns over women's clothing revolve around the issues of ethnic identity (and religious identity, which I discuss in a later chapter), and female sexuality: Indian women's bodies have to be covered and presented in a non-sexualized manner. To do otherwise is a negative reflection not just on the individual and her family but the entire Indian community. Women's bodies thus become the embodiment of Indian-ness itself, a representative of all that is good about Indian culture, in opposition to the negative aspects of U.S. society, some of whose worst excesses – divorce, extra-marital and premarital sex, teen pregnancies etc. – my respondents see as stemming partly from the excessive freedom enjoyed by women, as expressed in their clothing. While women in India too face restrictions regarding how revealing their clothing is, they do not face the additional responsibility of upholding Indian tradition in direct contrast to the mainstream American culture around them. Boys' clothing issues revolve primarily around style and not sexuality; nor is their clothing seen as an embodiment of ethnic identity. In other words, there were no similar requirements for men to be modest or *Indian* in their dress. Wearing Indian clothes was largely a matter of personal preference for them.

Conclusion

The social construction of gendered Indian identity thus reinforces the differences between Indians and non-Indians (specifically Americans), and between Indian men and women. The gendered nature of migration facilitates assimilation for men. That is, men can and do make the effort to fit in, while maintaining their Indian-ness in the less visible sphere of the home and community, where they are less likely to face a backlash for being different. The effort to maintain Indian identity through visible/ external markers such as food and clothing results in gender variations. Women, as upholders of tradition, face a

dilemma; "assimilation" or "fitting in" makes the process of cultural transmission to the next generation harder, yet not assimilating makes them more conscious of their identity. It also increases the burden (though they may not see it as a burden) of housework and limits the nature and scope of their interactions with other women.

The multicultural perspective, which advocates that women retain their ethnic identity, is well intentioned but limited, because it assumes that ethnic identity has the same meaning for all people in a group. As my research shows, the meaning of ethnic identity and its expression varies.

Finally, while this chapter primarily has focused on the particular types of identity work among women, this does not imply that men do not experience Indian identity. For most of my respondents, one crucial aspect of being Indian was fulfilling one's family responsibilities. For men, this especially meant providing economically for one's immediate and extended families, and the uncertainty created by temporary work permits added to men's challenges to their roles as *Indian* men. The family as a site of identity work is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: FAMILY AND INDIAN IDENTITY

One goal of my study is to explore Indian immigrants' understanding of themselves as Indian men/women and how these definitions may be changing in the United States. One way to address this issue is to look at men and women's roles in the family, since the family is both gendered and a central institution in Indian society.   In this chapter I will illustrate how gendered Indian identities and roles are reshaped in the changing context of migration. That is, as some individual behaviors change, aspects of their roles that reinforce gender and ethnic identity are retained, but in an altered manner.

Indian Family Structures

Family relationships, and the dutiful performance of one's various family roles are an important part of Indian identity (Bacon 1996; Bharati 1985; Chopra 2002; Derné 1999; Lessinger 1995; Markus and Kitayama 1990). In studying how men and women in India interpret the cultural messages they see in Indian films, Derné (1999: 18-19) points out that:

> Identifying unrestrained sexuality with Western cinematic stories and clothing styles, filmmakers and filmgoers identify Indianness with a restrained sexuality and a focus on family duties… with respect for emotion…[and with] gender hierarchy.

In other words, not only are family responsibilities a central part of being Indian, but so too are gendered dimensions that are not only different, but also unequal. For instance, Simon's (1995, 1997) in-depth interviews with 40 employed and married parents found gender differences in the meanings that women and men attached to the same roles – those of spouse, parent and worker. Before exploring family roles in the United States, we will take a brief look at Indian family structures, especially the joint family.

Despite India's enormous religious, caste, ethnic and class diversity, and the significant regional differences in kinship patterns (Uberoi 2001),[22] Indian culture emphasizes subordinating the individual to the family unit. Especially in northern India,

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[22] Uberoi (2001) believes that regional differences in kinship patterns are increasingly being whittled away.

the joint family[23] is upheld in public discourse, and particularly in several popular Hindi films, as the ideal Indian family structure. The joint family takes various forms. In its most basic and common form, it consists of a couple, their children, and the husband's parents under the same roof. In rare cases, all of the husband's kin (his parents, his brothers and their families, and his unmarried sisters) live together. It is this household that is upheld as the ideal, though it has never been very common in practice:

> The cultural ideal of the large multi-generational joint family is more related to [the] patterns of affective ties [among primary kin whether they share a household or not] than to any actually existent groups now or in the past. [Leave alone cousins, even] brothers and their wives and children, all living together till they are parted by death, belong… more to folklore and mythology than to real life (Madan 1993: 421)

While joint families of the second type are rare, Indians nevertheless feel and are expected to feel strong affective ties for extended family members and to participate in the major events (e.g. marriage, death rituals) of their lives.

Family and Identity Work

I characterize strong attachment to family members, and fulfillment of various family responsibilities as forms of identity work. Of course, Indian immigrants do not bond with their families and perform the behaviors associated with their family roles *because* they want to prove that they are Indian, in the ways that they may wear Indian clothes or eat Indian foods as a manifestation of Indian identity. However, to the extent that they identify their family roles as setting them apart from Americans, these become Indian traits, and therefore types of identity work. Consequently, Indians look down upon people who do not fulfill family responsibilities such as taking care of family members, but are especially critical when the actors are Indian. In the following sections, I explain the identity work Indians do in connection with the family.

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[23] Family researchers make a distinction between family and household; in common Indian parlance, the "joint family" refers actually to a "joint household." See Madan (1993) for details.

<u>Attachment to family</u>

The centrality of the family was evident in my interviews, as *Rekha's* comments about missing her family reveal:

> Family relationships… That's what keeps us together… Even after [coming] here… without thinking of my parents or my in-laws or my sister, the day doesn't pass... You know we can't phone every day, it's so expensive… [We] wait for that Saturday, weekends, oh I'm going to talk to my relatives!… Especially I miss my family very much.

Participants in the study saw attachment to one's family as an especially Indian trait, and they often referred to their perception of the lack of intergenerational bonding between family members among Americans as a characteristic that set the latter apart from Indians:

> In India there is a strong family culture, but not in America. In India parents take care of their kids till they find a job and after finding a job the kids take care of the parents because the parents have done so much for them. In America you don't see that; parents bear the responsibility of the kids until they are 18 and kids don't do anything for them after they turn 18; they visit them occasionally on Mother's Day or Father's Day (*Sadhana*).

> [W]hen the child is born [here], the first few formative years the parents dote on their children… Slowly the thing wanes and… except in certain more educated families, the bulk of them by the time the child becomes 18, there is almost an estrangement… And, it is bad that when they become 40 or 50 and when the parents are 70, 80, you still have this notion of – I have to call my Mom to see if it's okay for me to come and visit her on some Saturday or Sunday – to me that changes the whole meaning of what family is, and I find that kind of really hard to accept (Rakesh).

> At a particular point in life, we look upon bringing in our parents into our households. But here… They always remain satellite families. You don't see the parents move back in, unless *really* they are physically handicapped or whatever. But on a psychological level, or an emotional level, you don't see that happening here… They will visit. They probably live in the house next door, but moving into the same house is like the last resort (*Beena*)

Deepak illustrated this point with an experience he had when working in Germany:

> [E]verybody had brought their family, and in my case my mother also was there because I'm the only son, my 3 sisters are married, and she came with me… [My employers] asked me to [list] the family members [for insurance purposes]. I

wrote my mother's name, they said – no, your mother is not a family member…
we will not cover her insurance. I said – sorry, I do not agree with you… I am the
only son, my 3 sisters are married and in our case mothers don't live with their
daughters, they live with their sons. I don't have [a] brother, where do you expect
me to keep my mother? So … they said – okay, we had not strictly said that you
cannot bring your mother, so we will cover her insurance. But the very next day,
they sent a [memo] to India saying that in future, please take care that we will not
cover insurance for anybody's parents if they come. So, I said… "your definition
[of family] says that you should keep your parents away, this is not right."

Both men and women mentioned the company of family members – not just their
immediate natal family (parents and siblings) but other relatives too – as one of the things
about India that they miss most in the United States.

My family members are [in India, including] my nephew, niece. They are my
kids' age. They're also growing… I can see my kids growing, but I'm not able to
see them, so I'm missing them. By that time, don't know when I'll meet them,
they'll be grown up (Amit).

Some of the participants regretted the fact that their children were growing up
without close relationships with their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. *Rani* made
a concerted effort to ensure that her children were at least familiar with the names and
faces of extended family members. She also insisted that the children talk with family
members every week, and frequently pulled out the family album to explain who was who
to them.

Fulfillment of family responsibilities

Not only do respondents miss their families, but they also regret the fact that they cannot
rush to the aid of family members in an emergency. In talking about the care giving and
assistance that Indians are expected to provide as family members, the gendered nature
of family and roles become more apparent.

Care giving for the extended family: Men and women are both expected to assist
extended family members, but in the context of different roles. For men, the role of son
is primary; for women the role of daughter-in-law is.

The Good Son – As most Indian communities are patrilineal, sons, especially the
eldest son, have traditionally been responsible for taking care (especially materially) of

their parents. Sons also fulfill any responsibilities of the parents that they may be unable

to perform, such as the education and marriage of younger siblings.[24] Thus while both

men and women missed their families and wished they could be on hand to assist them, it

is much more a part of men's duty, as good Indian sons, to do so. Rakesh criticized what

he considered to be the neglect of the elderly that he saw in the United States, but also

regretted the fact that he was unable to take care of his parents, who were in India:

> [T]he way we nurture the elderly in this country, I think, is really despicable…
> Now, whether, when I grow old - would I expect me to be taken care by my
> children – I don't think that is correct. But, I feel that I am not able to take care of
> my parents, unfortunately, because of the distance. They are so far away; they did
> not want to come here.

Ramesh's situation was more poignant; he missed his mother's funeral due to visa

problems. In Hindu tradition, it is usually the oldest son who is expected to perform the

last rites for his parents:

> [M]y mother died and I could not make it to India in time… and the time was so
> constrained that even they could not wait for me longer so whatever rites they had
> to do, they had to go ahead and do it. And only hurt stays in me is just because
> when my father died I could not see it and when my mother died I could not see…
> [T]here is a belief that elder son has that duty or responsibility or Dharma[25] or
> whatever you call it. I could not fulfill it. About my father, I was angry that they
> did not make me fulfill it, when I could have done it, while they felt that I'm a 10-
> year-old child. For my mother the destiny had different things for me. So, it's
> okay. Life goes on.

The Good Daughter-in-law – While sons are expected to look after their

parents, daughters-in-law do the actual care giving, especially when they live with

their in-laws. Women, unlike men, expressed ambivalence towards joint families.

Respondents in my study lived in both types of joint families (that is, some lived

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[24] Daughters also perform these tasks, but it is much more unusual, and therefore a big deal if they do do
so.

[25] Dharma can be defined as "the essence of a thing, its virtue, that which makes it what it is." (Easwaran
1985: 15). Here it refers to duty.

with just their parents-in-law, while others' households included their husband's siblings and their families), and listed the advantages and disadvantages of such arrangements. One of the biggest advantages of the joint family is child-care, which is primarily women's responsibility. Women who live in joint families and are in paid employment do not have to worry about their children while they are at work, as the older, non-employed women in the family take care of their children during the day. A second major advantage is that socializing children, especially with regard to religious and secular cultural traditions, is much easier. For this very reason, *Beena* envied first generation Indian immigrants in her community whose parents lived with them.

Living with one's in-laws however, does place restrictions on women, and some of them mentioned the distance from their in-laws as one advantage of living in the United States.

> [One advantage is that] I'm away from my in-laws. [Laughs]... I have never lived in a joint family. And I cannot live by others' rules; I'll do what I want to… There are no mental tensions also otherwise always you have to live superficially… If you are in a joint family the whole day, because I stayed there [with in-laws] for 2 months, you don't get any time for yourself. Fix breakfast in the morning, and then after that is done, prepare lunch… Here when you are leading your independent life, when the kid goes to sleep you have those 2-3 hours for yourself, you can watch a movie or read books… [I don't miss] Only in-laws. I miss my parents a lot. [Laughs] (*Neeti*).

> [W]hen you live in a joint family, you have to sacrifice also… you have to ask for their permission before going [out]. But, if it's a single family, you go out and you and the kids can eat out. ... [Here] There's no pressure in the sense that I have to cook by this time or… When I was in India, before marriage I used to wear all types of dresses, but when I went to a joint family, 10 years I wore only sari… (*Kavita*)

Sangeeta had never lived with her in-laws but talked about the positive and negative experiences of a relative, and explained that she would have a hard time living in a joint family:

> In a joint family I think responsibility is more… You can't wear whatever you want to especially when in-laws are at home… [My relative] every weekend she would have like 25 people in her house for dinner. Poor thing, she would work

fulltime and come and cook full meal everyday… You don't have freedom [in a joint family], that's the main reason… I never wanted to live in a joint family. Never… Even when it comes to food, if I feel like I can cook fast food… When you are with in-laws you have to have a full meal, the kind you are habituated to both times [lunch and dinner]… If we feel like, my husband and I can go to the movies anytime, or for dinner... [My relative] couldn't even eat out… [Her husband] always wanted his parents to accompany them wherever they went. She went to [another city] for 10 days after her wedding; the whole family went with them, her in-laws, brother-in-law everyone.

Kavita explained another disadvantage of sharing the household. She and other members of her extended family had a much smaller circle of friends in India than she does in the United States. One reason for that was their busy schedule. The other reason was that her father-in-law did not want his sons' male friends coming to his home because he had young, unmarried daughters:

[M]y father-in-law [said] that you should not have a very big friends' circle because there were two daughters in the family. So the boys [i.e. Kavita's husband and brother-in-law] had the restriction that their friends couldn't come home because we have daughters.

While men, as good Indian sons, are expected to take care of their parents, they do not have parallel obligations towards their in-laws. Therefore *Sangeeta* appreciated the fact that her husband had helped her family by helping to arrange and pay for her sister's wedding. Men, however, did not express similar appreciation for their wives' efforts on behalf of their (men's) families or the accommodations women made when they moved in with their in-laws or when their in-laws came to live with them. The gender inequality is thus evident. As women's tasks and accommodations are expected by the culture, they are taken for granted and often invisible; as men's efforts are seen as going beyond expectations, friends and family praise any effort on their part for their in-laws. In addition, given the patrilineal tradition in most Indian communities, men are expected to help their own parents. In contrast, when women help their natal families, they often face condemnation for focusing too much on their natal families to the perceived detriment of their "own family," that is, their in-laws.

Men's assistance (as sons, and in rarer instances, as sons-in-law) takes the form of financial help, tasks in the public sphere (for instance dealing with financial and medical bureaucracies, etc.), and leading rituals. These tasks reinforce their position as heads of households and decision-makers. Women's tasks (as daughters-in-law and daughters) involve actual care giving, that is, taking care of the physical needs of family members (cooking, cleaning, nursing etc.). As a result of migration, men are unable to fulfill some of their responsibilities, but other tasks, especially financial assistance, are facilitated by migration. Earning in dollars enables men to send money home to their families. Thus the inability to perform one kind of task may be compensated by another. The responsibility of financial assistance becomes a crucial component of the role of a good son. In contrast, women's responsibilities of care giving are reduced as a result of migration. Women express ambivalence towards this change; while they are happy about the reduced workload, they are also a little regretful that they are unable to fulfill their roles as daughters-in-law. The role expectations of adult children and children-in-law thus vary by gender. In the absence of extended families, the nuclear family becomes the context in which Indian immigrants perform their gendered care giving tasks.

Care giving in the nuclear family: Although men and women are both expected to contribute towards the well being of the family, a gender demarcation in the roles in the nuclear family exist as well, paralleling the differences in the joint family.

Men as Breadwinners -- Men are expected to be the primary breadwinners and provide financial security for their wives and children.

> I believe that if I married her and if I have a family,… I should be able to keep them self sufficient… [T]hey should not be put to hardship because I'm not earning enough, or I should teach them to live within our limits… I believe it's my responsibility as Dharma that at least I have to feed them, I have to shelter them, provide their basic needs (Ramesh)

> Indian men are basically very good because they take up the responsibility of their wife and kids... They work and look after their kids and satisfy the wife's needs. Here, I've seen that the women do the maximum work, men don't do that much. Women take care of the kids [economically, and] keep them nice and take more responsibilities on the whole. Men here share very few responsibilities when

compared to the women. But in India the man takes up the maximum [primarily economic] responsibility, his family is his responsibility (*Sadhana*).

With some rare exceptions, for most of the families in my study, it was the husband's job that led to their migration to the United States, and the women followed their husbands. The fact that many of the men were on temporary visas (an H1B or work permit that has to be renewed after 3 years, and is valid for a maximum of six years), coupled with the economic uncertainty of the last two years, created a sense of economic insecurity among many families. Of course, all members of the family were affected by it, but the men were especially worried, as they were the primary breadwinners. A few of them briefly wondered aloud whether they had made the right decision in coming to the United States. This was especially true for those who had given up prestigious positions in large corporations in India and for whom the move to the United States was professionally a step down. Some of the women, too, gave up prestigious occupations (such as physician, college professor, bank manager) to accompany their husbands. However, while some of these women missed their occupations and the privileges (especially independence) that went with them, none of them expressed the self-doubt and sense of insecurity due to leaving their jobs that the men expressed; they were not considered by others, nor by themselves, as the primary breadwinners of the family.

Women as Domestic Laborers – Women, as wives and mothers, have the primary responsibility for taking care of the household, even if they have paid employment:

> [In my role as a wife, I must] cook for him! Indian food! [laughs] Get up [in the] morning, none of the Americans I think would do that. It's out of love I think, because of the worry that since they don't like American food, let me get up and cook for my husband Indian food… [since] he doesn't like cereals… Cleaning the house, and washing… doing laundry for my husband. Looking after kids, that's the life what we're leading here every day… I think it's the same [in India] (*Rekha*).

Not all of the female participants believed that they should shoulder the entire burden for housework and childcare. They saw this as the expectation from the "typical" woman in India and were glad that things were somewhat different for them, especially in the

United States. They expressed gratitude and felt lucky that their husbands were not as "demanding" and did help around the house:

> I have been lucky my husband is not very much the typical Indian man… Which would be that the Indian woman has to do everything… He's helped me bring up the children, he will help with the kitchen, he will help with the dishes. Not just simply here, even there… He has respected the fact that I am not … the traditional Indian woman as people imagine. [For the traditional Indian woman], Everything is for the husband first, they won't eat their meals before the husband… I think that is expected when you are an Indian woman… He would understand that I would eat with the kids, and his food would be laid out… I have friends, for example, physicians, who would wait up for their husbands, and would lay out their husbands' clothes for them after their shower. I could never see myself doing that, which I guess is non-Indian of me or whatever, but most Indian women are expected [to do so], taught growing up like that (*Beena*)

Still, the gendered nature of the domestic division of labor persists even among such women. For instance, in India, Beena and her husband were in the same profession, but she appreciated his *help* with what was *primarily her responsibility* – housework. Similarly, *Kavita* began her interview by maintaining that her domestic division of labor in the United States was more equal:

> In India, ... [women] mainly they are considered to make their homes. The main investment outside the house and main decisions in the family only men will take… But, here it's equal… I'm lucky that my husband is very adjusting, some of the people I have seen so fussy about the food. He's mentally prepared now also, [that] if I work, he's ready to [do house-]work… like you have to make some preparation for the next day, get the kids dressed…

At the time of the interview, Kavita was taking courses and interning, but neither of these were considered "real" jobs. Interestingly, later in the conversation, Kavita felt that her share of the housework would remain unchanged:

> I feel that if I get a job, my husband will pay [a] little more time towards kids. At present he is not doing anything. [Laughs]… I don't think that [my] contribution [to housework] will be less because I don't think he will be able to do any household work. [Laughs]… Even he [doesn't] know how to load laundry, and all those things. He [doesn't] want to learn. [Laughs...].

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Given women's greater actual responsibility for housework (whatever their perception of how the work was divided), women pointed out both advantages and disadvantages of moving to the United States. They missed the household help that was easily and cheaply available (for the middle and upper classes). Some women who were not in paid employment and who felt lonely during the daytime in the U.S. also missed domestic help for the companionship that they provided. An invisible service that female hired help in India provide is companionship during daytime hours, even if for a short while. At the same time, the women appreciated the conveniences that made housework (including bill payment) much less of a chore.

Another major advantage women saw in being in the United States was that they could expect their husbands to do more without facing the censure of their in-laws, and even their parents. For their family members in India, such expectations from men are neither appropriate nor even Indian:

> [I]n India he never cleaned the utensils. [Laughs]. [Here] Whenever I used to go for the class I used to return around 10:30, so he would make the kids eat, clean the kitchen, and clean the utensils. I think if my in-laws [find out] they [will] not like [it]– you are making our son do the dishes (*Kavita*)

> [S]ometimes when I do talk to my father he thinks I've become too Americanized. He clearly tells me … you are expecting too much… Me expecting my husband to help me with the dishes was an American way of thinking even though I had worked full time and come home at the same time as my husband did; he [my father] felt that was Americanized. The fact that I wasn't cooking a full meal everyday for my husband was Americanized, that I tried to just cook noodles and pasta and we are okay with that, that's being Americanized to him… He doesn't see why I should go out to work, why can't I just stay at home and take care of the house and the kid and the husband… I did not [agree with him]. I think it was just being human to ask for help (*Renu*).

Men expressed similar sentiments regarding the gendered nature of the domestic division of labor in the United States. As a result of migration, some of the men were doing more housework, though Pradeep and Rakesh candidly admitted that while they thought they were doing a lot, their wives probably wouldn't agree:

[N]ow I think I do a lot more [housework than in the past]… I've changed diapers. I wish I could do more. [My wife] still thinks I should do more. [Laughs…]. She's probably right; I have to agree with her. It's a hard battle because this is not what I grew up with… I enjoy cooking… but I can't do it every day. So a compromise we made is I wash dishes and she does everything else. But it's easier said than done. As long as it's just the two of us at home that's no problem. Then if, for example, say her mom comes, she says [to me] – no no no you get out of there… I don't think I help as much as I should but I think I'm definitely doing a lot more than I'd probably done if I was in India I think (Pradeep)

In India it's all very clear-cut, men don't do [housework], women do it. But again, like I said, in my family, we were a little bit more progressive, and my father did so much housework. Again, I do a reasonable amount of housework; my wife would say – Not at all [laughs..]. But, I think I do reasonable amount of homework myself (Rakesh).

While Pradeep, Rakesh, and some other men mentioned that they were doing more housework, they all pointed out that this was not the case for men in India and for many Indian men in the US. According to Pradeep, the transition to the US was harder for many men, as compared to women, because they were expected to do tasks that were identified as physical labor (and hence not to be done by the middle class), or as women's work, both of which also points to the devalued nature of such tasks:

[Indian] women really love the freedom here… For an Indian man I think it's the opposite. We are used to doing whatever we like whenever we like and then you have to come here you have to get with the program… I think it's a big change for them, depends on your upbringing of course but not many of us are used to… sharing domestic duties… Most of us haven't even been raised to take care of ourselves, [let alone] other people. So when you come and live by yourself then you realize – I don't have basic survival skills… like cooking or cleaning… You are used to a society where you can do whatever and the woman will take care. I think that's the big adjustment even for me or even for a couple other close friends… and some of us have made the transition. I don't think any of us have made a perfect transition… then I see another bunch who haven't made [any] and they are really struggling with that, they may get into problems because of that.

[W]hen we came to America, [cleaning bathrooms] is one of the things that we [had] to do. In India that was considered manual labor, and you just didn't do it. I went through the initial stage of – Oh gee. I have to do this, and only laborers would do it there. After a certain time, I got used to the notion. And, now, it's almost like these are some things that you have to do for yourself... The thing

was, there is nothing bad about doing the housework – this is the notion that I had to work on in getting it in my blood. Now, once I've gotten it into my blood, it is difficult for me to get it out, in a way (Rakesh).

Some of the men mentioned that they liked doing some tasks:

I may not be doing the dishes, if I was in India. [laughs..]... That is the strange thing; I don't think I would be very happy about [not being able to do the cleaning]… I don't like the way [the hired help] cleans my bathroom; I have to do it myself (Rakesh).

I'm a good cook… My grandfather used to cook, he liked to cook, my father loved to cook so I picked up... I used to cook while in [India]. Every Saturday Sunday I used to cook… I'm doing [the same here], every Saturday Sunday I do it (Sameer).

Even [in India], I was more of an outdoor man. We used to have a yard like this, I used to love cleaning and doing all those things, I used to like manual work. I can do dishes but I can't cook. [Laughs…] (Shaleen).

When the men talked about their contribution to the housework, it was primarily in reference to specific tasks they enjoyed doing, rather than all the routine chores around the house. This also indicates gender hierarchy: They could *choose* tasks to perform and leave others out. In addition, even the men who were doing more housework did not take on the responsibility of housework and childcare, irrespective of whether their wives were in paid employment or not. They usually "helped" their wives with the work:

I try to do… 90% of the [housework and childcare] myself, but there are times when I feel that I need help, that's the time he comes in and then I just have to ask for it… If somebody could do it voluntarily it would be easier, for example if [the baby] is crying… the 1st person to go and pick her up would be me because we get into those kind of roles automatically. Sometimes, I wish the roles would be changed, in the sense at least my husband would be more receptive to that and go and pick her up. He does that sometimes but majority of the times I do it. That … bothers me some times… I feel that there should be a mix and match [of household tasks] (*Richa*).

When men talked about the housework tasks they did, it was usually with a sense of pride in their skill at non-traditional tasks, tasks usually performed by the working class, and by women (see Rakesh, Shaleen and Sameer's quotes above). The men

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converted what would be considered routine work for these groups into "special" skills because middle class men rarely performed them. Women did not talk of their non-traditional tasks (e.g., driving, yard work) in the same manner, as special skills.

As mentioned earlier, migration to the United States centralizes the relationships in the nuclear family, and, especially for those who had lived in a joint family, the interaction between family members changes:

> In India, if we count our 4-person family, it was not so close. There was no time to talk with my kids, with my husband. Here there is no one else; it's a much smaller world for me here… My husband says that in 10 years we did not talk as much as we did in the last 2 years… [From] that point of view… [migration is] good (*Kavita*).

While women attributed the great intensity in nuclear relationships to the change in family structure, men attributed it to the changes in their work circumstances, that is, to less time spent at work, less time spent commuting, and fewer or no travel requirements in their job, which reflects the great impact the nature of their work has on men, in that it significantly influences their family relationships:

> I used to actually be away from home while I was in [India], almost 20 days I would be away. So being here the biggest change which has happened to me is I'm with my family. That's the reason I really left that job, software job, that was a very lucrative job… I opted for a lower salary to come here just to be with my family... [T]here is a certain age after which I think kids need you. I mean you can't leave them alone, you can make money everywhere but if you're not spending it with your family there is no fun in that money (Sameer).

For both men and women, the shift in the family structure and the distance from extended family members brings their role as caregivers in the nuclear family to the forefront. The higher standard of living and greater educational opportunities in the United States makes men's roles as breadwinners easier, but at the same time, for some of the men in my study, it also brings about a sense of insecurity as to whether they will be able to fulfill their duty as husbands and father if they are laid off. Women's home-making responsibilities are made both easier and more difficult – the higher standard of living makes housework easier (appliances cut down on housework, personal transportation makes running errands easier, sealed homes prevent the entry of dust and

therefore reduce time spent cleaning). In addition, the absence of disapproving family members and neighbors allows women to expect more household help from their partners. At the same time, the burden of housework increases due to the absence of paid help. In addition, some of the women mentioned that factors that provide them with greater independence here (personal transportation and a driving license) also add to their workload. While in India their husbands may have run some of the errands, the women do more of these tasks in the U.S. The distances between places (their residence and stores), and the absence of wandering salespeople, selling everything from steel utensils to fresh vegetables, adds to their work.

<u>Indian identity and tolerance within marriage</u>

Sociological research in the United States finds that conflict about the division of housework contributes to marital tensions that may lead to divorce (Hochschild 1989). The high rate of divorce and incidence of single-parent families was one of the factors that my participants almost universally cited as a negative aspect of American society and something that set Indians apart from Americans. Respondents listed several factors among Americans that they felt were responsible for this difference: Lack of commitment towards relationships; an excessive emphasis on individualism, and even selfishness in American society; and the economic independence of women (which according to a few respondents was an aspect of increasing westernization, causing more divorces in urban India). In contrast, certain characteristics of Indian culture, according to the respondents, made divorce a rarity in India, and among Indians in the United States.

> Indians believe in only one wife and one marriage, and whether it is good or bad, they leave it to their fate and go on. But I've seen in America… two or three marriages are very common. So probably first or second marriage I suspect [is just for] trial and error… Divorce… is so common here, which is not so in India. I mean, divorce is considered as a stigma in India (Amit).

 According to the men and women in my study, Indian marriages stay intact because people are more committed to all familial relationships including the marital one. Marriage is a sacred pact that can be violated only in cases of abuse. My respondents

viewed incompatibility, or lack of happiness, or boredom in the relationship as ridiculous reasons to end a marriage, especially if there were children involved:

> [M]y neighbor… said she is living with a doctor… she divorced her husband because she was just bored with him. That's the reason she gave! I was really shocked to hear all that… It's not like that in India… [Here] Just out of boredom they leave their husbands. [*Rekha*]

The strong commitment to marriage is aided by the cultural emphasis on tolerance, in this case, tolerance of the differences between oneself and one's partner:

> One of things that is Indian is tolerance… And I think it is such a valuable asset to any human being… I think the way we are brought up back home… we grow up very tolerant of human nature... We just accept people for who or what they are. We accept people with our shortcomings… I think it is *very, very* integral to our Indian-ness (*Beena*).

> I think we are much more tolerant and I think that's a great quality… The amount of divorce rates are so low because the spouses are tolerant to[ward] each other. Once you're married most of the people, now maybe it's changing a little, you treat the relationship as very sacred and you know that everyone has got their plusses and minuses... [H]ere... when the times are good you're happy with each other but when it goes bad, you cannot stand it… the word tolerant also is probably a little derogatory bit. When you say you're tolerant you're thinking that you're superior and the other one is not. It is appreciating each other, sort of (Shaleen).

It was this capacity for tolerance, according to several respondents, that made arranged marriages such a success in India. All the couples in my study had their marriages arranged by others.

While tolerance and commitment was taught to, and expected of, both men and women, women appeared to shoulder a greater responsibility for keeping the family together than men did:

> The wife can make the peace within the house if she wants… always there will be problem, but the wife… can understand and make the life peaceful for the husband. If husband-wife relations are calm, life will be easy… [the] relationship between husband and wife is such that it's the duty of both the person, but the wife has a bigger duty to perform… because in most of the houses the husband is the main source of income… don't put more problems in front of him (*Kavita*)

Amit's description of his search for a wife reveals this gender disparity:

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[A]mong all the girls [I met], I realized that [my wife] was more submissive than them. I'm dominant, I don't want any dominant [wife]… [a girl with an elite education] today maybe because of marriage and all that, she may be very submissive… But tomorrow [she may say] that you are from Bombay city so what? I am also from [an elite institution]. And ego problems start… [With] my dominant attitude or behavior, I was looking for a more submissive kind of girl and [my wife] was very submissive, and …not very extroverted, not *very* smart… I went… [about a] very methodical way of searching [for] my wife, and I think I succeeded.

One manifestation of commitment in marriage was the use of joint accounts, and a few of the participants expressed shock at the idea that some couples in the US maintain separate finances, a definite sign, in their view, of a lack of trust. *Sangeeta* described, at length, the amazement of her coworkers when she would hand her unopened paycheck to her husband for him to deposit. She found their views completely at odds with her notions of what a marriage is all about, and she still sees it as strange, but a reflection of the excessive individualism in the United States. Thus, even when *Sangeeta* was in paid employment, traditional gender ideology remained unchallenged, as her husband managed the finances. *Sadhana* shared *Sangeeta's* views:

In India the husband and wife share equal responsibility in everything. That is, if both husband and wife are working they will jointly put the money in the bank and not that each of them puts his/her money in the bank… It's not like the husband keeps his salary separately and the wife hers. Both share equal responsibility towards the children, both parents look after the children… I don't have much of an idea [but] from what I see in movies I feel that [here] husband and wife don't trust each other and keep secrets from each other. That does not happen in India… There is understanding between the couple and this leads to long-lasting marriages.

Sacrificing for family members

A major aspect of being an Indian parent, and something which respondents felt set them apart from Americans, was the practice of sacrificing for one's children. This sacrifice involves several things: sacrificing the company of family to come to the U.S., sacrificing more prestigious jobs in India so that their children could have better

economic and educational opportunities in the U.S., sacrificing economically, and even sacrificing socially so that children did not have to spend time with baby-sitters.[26]

> In our culture, parents make a lot of sacrifices for their children. Here's that's not so much the case, children have their own lives. Till they are 16-17, [parents] look after them. After that they look after themselves. We don't do that (*Madhuri*).

> [P]arents there make a lot of sacrifices for the sake of their children. It's not like they will leave their kids and go out to enjoy. They will see what they have to do for the children and make sacrifices accordingly… Like the mother will not leave the kids home and go to clubs and parties. Even if they attend parties they do so as a family and the party will be such that it is good for children and not bad… (*Sadhana*)

> [Here] the kids can be kept with baby sitter, [American parents] don't know what kind of baby sitter but [they] want to go out for a movie, so [they'll] go… I would not do that… We missed so many parties because we [did not want to hire a] baby sitter… [W]e used to force the kids to come with us if we had no choice and if we had [a] choice, we would just say no. I believe that it's not my duty or my responsibility or my Dharma as you call it [to leave the children with a babysitter to go watch a movie]… I can live without that movie or I can get the video home and watch it at night because all Indian movies are available (Ramesh).

Both men and women are expected to and do sacrifice for their children, but ideally and in reality, women sacrifice more than men do. Hindu mythology and popular culture idealizes the ever-sacrificing, self-effacing woman in the role of wife and mother (Kishwar and Vanita 1984, Leslie 1989, Mies 1986, Minturn 1993, Narasimhan 1990). Among my respondents, too, women appeared to make greater sacrifices than the men did. The reluctance to engage baby-sitters usually results in women being home full-time.

Some of the reasons respondents gave for migrating to the United States were to be financially secure and to ensure better educational and economic opportunities for their children. Both men and women sacrificed for this goal. The move to the United States was a downward move for some men, who had higher positions (and in well-known

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[26] In India, children are present at most social occasions. In the few instances that parents cannot take children along, extended family members or neighbors baby-sit. Older children usually stay at home by themselves.

companies) in India than they had in the United States. For some women, however, it meant giving up careers entirely and becoming economically and legally dependent on their husbands. Most of the women did not regret doing so, though several of them did miss their jobs and their sense of independence. This economic dependence, coupled with the view that separate finances are a sign of lack of marital trust and commitment, places women at a disadvantage. Literature on domestic violence among immigrants points to women's economic and legal dependence on their partners as one of the big barriers that prevents them from leaving abusive relationships [Bhattacharjee 1992; Hays 1993; Jang, Lee and Morello-Frosch 1990].

Indians do not make sacrifices only for children; they are expected to do the same for other family members, especially parents and siblings. For instance, women may get married, against their wishes, for the sake of the family.

> I didn't want to even see [my husband] at all because I hadn't planned to [get married]… I was planning to study [on]. But, my mom said there's no harm in seeing [the prospective groom]… She kind of like, not forced me, but she sat and talked to me [and said] that if you don't tell yes now you have 3 sisters sitting behind you. I'm not forcing you to get married but you see your future… Actually, she made me think wisely. I was acting childish like I really didn't want to get married and so my mom really helped me make the decision of getting married and I'm really grateful to her because that was a really good decision I made (*Sangeeta*)

> I used to live in [a city]… I always wanted to get married in [the same city] because I was so familiar with the place I could go anywhere by myself and didn't have to depend on anybody to drop me at the college or to work… When my family came upon [my husband's proposal], everything was good including his education and job but because he lived in America I was very concerned and afraid. Then my brother told me to be confident… He told me that it's so difficult for Indian parents to find a suitable boy for their daughter and if the girl throws tantrums in spite of finding her a nice boy then the parents are helpless. Then I looked at all those criteria that he is good, he is educated and this is the kind of boy my family wants for me. I liked everything about him but I didn't want to leave India (*Sadhana*).

Another way in which women make sacrifices for family members is to stay in an abusive marriage, whether the marriage was arranged by family members or self-arranged, for fear that the stigma of their separation or divorce will affect the marriage

prospects of their younger siblings, especially their sisters (Mehrotra 1995). Thus, while family roles call for sacrifice, the nature and extent of that sacrifice is gendered.

Respect for elders

Another manifestation of identity work within the context of the family was the notion of respect for elders, an apparently gender-neutral expectation that is gendered in practice. Participants in my study mentioned respect for people older than oneself, especially older family members, as a very important aspect of being Indian and something that seemed sorely absent in American society. This respect took several forms: not using the first names of anyone older and/or socially superordinate to oneself; referring to parents' friends and acquaintances as Uncle/Auntie (usually the English terms are used); and not answering back, or using an inappropriate tone of voice:

> [H]ere they call you by names even to elders… [A]n American, if I go to their homes, father introduces me as [Sameer], even his 6 year old is going to call me [Sameer]. But anybody [I] introduce to [my daughter], she will automatically call him [Sameer] uncle… By calling uncle you [are saying] that – hey, this is an elder [person] I need to respect him (Sameer).

> Here, they don't respect each other a lot… First of all they call out by [first] names to anybody, like when I was working, my boss … was my father's age, everyone used to call him [by his first name]. In India you say uncle or… kind of a respectable [title]. We don't see that here and here language is bad. They curse each other, from childhood itself you see. Indians don't do that… That harshness is present in the language, it's not the politeness [that] Indians have. Indians I think talk very sweetly, very politely (*Sangeeta*)

> [Indians] try to teach [children] respect but out here they are so independent in the way they think or question… That kind of becomes a little bit of a problem... [We should teach them] not to talk back or at least [that] if [they] do question [it should be] with a certain tone or attitude. Sometimes [my daughter] talks very angrily or something – don't talk to me in that tone of voice - or something like that you have to tell them. She'd often talk to my father-in-law in that kind of tone of voice and I'd have to tell her no, you can't talk to him like that he's your grandfather. [She said] But he was aggravating me. I said – even then you can't do that. So trying to show that in our country we don't usually yell and snap and do that sort of thing (*Renu*).

For some, a child's questioning a parent's decision is also a mark of disrespect. Adult children, meanwhile, are expected to show respect by taking parents' and other seniors'

opinions into account when making decisions; this is an important marker of Indian identity.

> The basic part of Indian culture is [that]… till [children] get married, their parents expect the children to listen to them, follow them, and follow their instructions… I wouldn't be as possessive as probably my parents have been to me, I'll be more flexible [with my children]. But at the same time, the basic principle of listening to father, not questioning him, I would expect my children to follow that, at least till they grow up (Ajay).

> [I would like to teach my children] respect for [their] parents… say if I tell him to do something, he would not answer me back… [I]f I say [turn-off] the TV and go study, he answers no, …this is my TV time … this kind of answer I will not expect. So if I tell them something I know I'm doing this for their good, so I would like to control their…I would like to guide their destiny (Amit).

> I know one of the things about Indian-ness is… you always take seniors' opinions… And those opinions *do* matter… [M]y gut feeling would be, because they [Americans] are brought up with so much freedom, I don't think they really ever grow up taking parents' consent to do what they want to do… (*Seema*)

Thus, being Indian involves maintaining age hierarchies within the family. Women in joint families are sometimes unable to voice their own opinions out of respect for elders and thus do not feel completely at home.

Both men and women are expected to be respectful to elders and social superiors. Traditionally, the hierarchical nature of the marital relationship subordinated wives to husbands, and women therefore did not refer to or address their husbands by their first names. This practice is disappearing in urban India, but wives are still likely to address their husbands by the more polite pronoun, while husbands are not expected to reciprocate. Most of my female respondents, too, when speaking Hindi, used the more respectful pronouns when referring to their husband, while male respondents did not do so.

Preservation of Indian culture and identity through gendered socialization

Another aspect of identity work is socialization of children into Indian culture. The labor of socialization is gendered, in that mothers are expected to bear the

responsibility for this task, and the outcome of socialization is also gendered, in that girls and boys receive different messages about what it means to be Indian.

The gendered labor of socialization: Indian parents were very concerned about passing on their culture and values to their children, thereby enabling their children to have an Indian identity. Knowledge of at least one Indian language (preferably the parents' native language), of Hindu mythology, philosophy and rituals, of Indian music genres and dances, were among the things many respondents mentioned as crucial. To facilitate this socialization, most of the Hindu parents in my study sent their children to the *Balvihar*, a program organized by the local community to teach children about Indian secular and religious (Hindu)[27] festivals, Indian history, music and dance, values and morals (for which stories were drawn from various traditions around the world). While the focus was on Hinduism, the children were encouraged to learn about other religions. One of the proposed trips for the *balvihar* children was a visit to a local synagogue. Some of the participants in my study were actively involved in the *balvihar* program – they organized activities, held discussion, arranged for guest speakers, worked to get their efforts funded, and involved the children and adults in the community in international cultural programs organized by the city. Both men and women participated in these efforts. Still, the task of socialization was gendered. In the *balvihar*, both men and women held discussions for the older children, and participated in story telling, but women were more likely to organize the arts and crafts sessions, and teach the children music and dance.

Family members often assumed that women would socialize the children. Women, especially those without paid employment, had more time on their hands, but also had the responsibility to "mold" the children.

> The maker and binder of every house and nation is a lady. If the mother
> will teach wrong things to kids, the home will be spoilt, and if home is
> spoilt, the society, and then country and then everything gets spoilt
> (*Kavita*).

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[27] This did create a concern for non-Hindu parents, an issue that will be discussed in the next chapter.

[A]ll the culture is given by mother… family binding also is done by a woman… [I]f the kid does something good then everyone says he is Mr. so and so's son and if the kid does anything [bad] they are like –his mother didn't teach him anything… It's hidden somewhere that a mother is supposed to give all that good things to a child so that he brings glory to his father… Even [when employed] the mother has to fulfill her responsibilities (*Neeti*).

Neeti's statement is indicative of the different expectations from and outcomes for men and women within the family. While both men and women socialize children, it is women's responsibility, and women are criticized for failing it. However, a job well done does not garner praise for a mother; rather accolades go to the father, who gets the credit. As the popular phrase (slightly altered) goes, "nobody notices what women do until they don't do it." *Neeti's* comment also reveals the inherently patriarchal structure of Indian families: Children belong to the father, and the mother's labor of socialization adds to his stature and prestige.

In addition, although both men and women talked about being religious, women were more involved in ritual practices (certainly, more ritual fasts and festivals are prescribed for women than men). On a few trips to the local temple, I noticed that while some men were very active in and led the devotional singing, more women than men were present. In addition, many of the men and the boys were outside the temple, talking and playing, respectively. The few women outside the prayer hall were usually in the kitchen area, getting the communal meal (partaken after the prayers) ready. Sometimes, a handful of men would assist the women in this task. While young girls could be found outside the prayer hall (but usually inside the building) playing, older girls were often inside the hall or helping the women with the meals. Thus girls and boys learned early on about their different responsibilities vis-à-vis religious duties.

The gendered socialization of children: As mentioned above, girls and boys received different messages about the nature and extent of their involvement in religious activities. Although boys and men do not participate as actively as girls and women in the rituals, men are usually in charge of religious organizations. Thus men are the leaders, and women the foot soldiers. Children observe this gender difference in their

homes and in the community, and learn that men and women have different and unequal responsibilities.

Besides being the primary religious functionaries in their family, females are also responsible for preserving the honor and prestige of the family, and part of women's commitment towards their family includes behaving appropriately:

> [My husband likes Indian girls] Because they are shy and modest. *For the sake of her parents and brother and all* [emphasis added] when she goes out and meets people, she's scared to do something wrong. They feel that they have to stay on the right path, do the right thing. It's not that she's not independent or doesn't want to achieve something in her life… But here the culture is such that a girl can stay out till late in the night even from a young age… If you look at Indian girls or Indian custom from that perspective they are really good (*Sadhana*).

Girls are taught to exercise self-control and restraint when in public, because their behavior reflects not just on them as individuals, but also their family (and especially their mothers, who are, after all, responsible for their socialization). Concern for family honor also leads parents, in India and the United States, to exercise greater control over their daughters than their sons. This does not imply that boys are free to do as they please. Boys, too, are expected to behave, but boys are not expected to be "shy and modest." For instance, smoking and alcohol consumption are frowned upon for both sexes, but especially for girls; both sexes are expected to dress decorously, but for boys the concern is excessively baggy or "hippy" or expensive, brand-name clothing, while for girls the concern is primarily revealing clothing. While any sexual activity before marriage (including hugging and kissing, and for some people holding hands in public, or having a boy/girlfriend) is prohibited, the concern over girls' sexual behavior outweighs the concern over boys'. A few of the respondents believed that the parents of girls have a harder time, and more reason to be concerned about raising daughters in the United States than do the parents of boys:

> [American children are] more mature… they enter more into things which adults should do… and the kind of dresses they wear… The boys' clothing [doesn't bother me]… only the girls', which are more revealing kinds of dresses… [I]f I had daughters, probably I would be more worried about how to protect them from this society… so, touch wood, I don't have daughters. That would be a big concern for anybody in this country, those who have daughters…because it's such

a free society… [Y]ou wouldn't like your daughter to look like that or wear clothes like that or talk like that or hang around with boys of her age (Amit)

One more thing I've noticed is that those who have daughters take very good care of their daughters… Like they never leave them alone… Because it was in the news about girls being abducted. So maybe they are scared. And sometime there were 5-6 cases in a span of 10 days. I think they are more scared because all have been girls; boys haven't been abducted. So maybe they are scared (*Neeti*).

A fear of sexual molestation also leads parents to exercise a greater control over girls' movements and interactions. Many of the parents mentioned that they did not allow their daughters to have sleep-overs, especially at the homes of non-Indians, and *Sangeeta* related a detailed story about her daughter's class-mate, whose American single mother allowed the girls to engage in inappropriate behavior such as dancing to "wild" music. Sangeeta was happy to report that her daughter herself decided not to interact too much or have sleepovers with American girls; since that incident, she has had sleepovers only with her Indian friends.

Kavita believed that parents of both boys and girls face difficulties in raising their children in the United States, but the issues they face are a little different:

[W]hen we planned to come here, everyone said – for you it's okay because you have a boy, for girls it is difficult. But, I don't feel that way; it's difficult with boys also because here when they go to school they have all types of activities like drugs… So, it's equal, either it is a boy or a girl, the problem is for both of them. In fact, there are other types of problems with boys here… Like homosex[uality], all those things. That is not there in India, even if it is there it's not so open. Here it's equally difficult or equally easy for both boys and girls…

So for Kavita, only a certain type of sexual behavior – homosexuality – was a matter of concern where boys were involved, while for girls, cross-sex sexual behavior was inappropriate. This difference has an impact on how children are monitored because norms about interpersonal interaction are different in India (and among Indian immigrants in the U.S.) than they are in the United States. While cross sex actions like hugging and holding hands are taboo, similar same-sex interaction is not a matter of concern. Thus, while Kavita is worried about homosexuality, boys' interactions with one another do not raise a concern probably till they reach adolescence or young adulthood. However, girls'

cross-sex interactions are a matter of concern from a very early age. That, coupled with the fear of molestation, leads parents to socialize girls to be more wary of non-family members and to exercise greater control over their behavior (see DasGupta 1997).

The Impact of Migration

The family is a central institution in Indian society, and almost all my respondents cited their strong family ties as a characteristic that distinguishes them from Americans. Indians see themselves not just in the context of the nuclear family; their roles within the extended family, as in-laws, uncles and aunts etc., are also important to their identity. Carrying out their responsibilities in these roles is an important part of their identity work.

As the above analysis indicates, broadly speaking, Indian men and women do similar identity work with regard to the family, that is, maintaining family ties, caregiving, socializing children, respecting elders, sacrificing for the family, and committing to family relationships. Still, gender differences are evident in the nature of the tasks men and women are called upon to perform. Both men and women take their obligations seriously and as important parts of their identities. At the same time, fulfilling these obligations, and thus being Indian, in a new context creates both more opportunities and some constraints. Some are similar by gender; some are not.

Although both men's and women's performance as caregivers to the extended family changes with migration, women's duties as daughters-in-law change more than men's duties as sons. Some of the men send money to India for their family, either on a routine basis, or to meet special needs. In addition, they also stay in frequent contact with relatives in India via the phone and the Internet. Women, especially those who lived in joint households, are relieved of their tasks as caregivers to the extended family, unless they have extended family members living with them in the United States. This change in the family structure has positive and negative ramifications, in the form of greater independence but also increased childcare responsibilities and a weakening of ties with extended family members. Women's domestic labor burdens both increase (as they have greater responsibilities here) and decrease (through the use of household appliances and other conveniences).

A central aspect of the joint family idealized in Indian culture is that the conjugal relationship and the relationship between a couple and their children are subordinate to loyalty to the larger group. Even when people do not live in a joint household, ideally they are expected to sacrifice within their nuclear household for the good of the extended family. Migration to the United States changes this scenario. Although people stay in touch with and assist family members in India, the nuclear unit becomes central. Both men and women see this change as positive, as they can strengthen their marital relationship and improve their communication with each other and with their children. However, women's childcare responsibilities also increase accordingly, as there are no grandparents and other relatives around to engage the children's attention. Living in a new culture as an ethnic and religious minority also makes the task of socialization of children much harder, especially for women who bear the primary responsibility.

Women bear a greater burden of sacrificing for and committing to their familial relationships than men. One may conclude that migration makes commitment to their marital relationship inevitable for women, in the sense that it fosters legal and economic dependence on men. At the same time, migration also provides greater educational and economic opportunities. Some of the women in my study were pursuing careers and using opportunities not available in India. A larger number, however, had to give up careers in India to come to the United States. These women's roles as wives and mothers therefore became even more central to their identities as Indian women.

Changes in men and women's family obligations bring about some modifications in their behavior, and therefore their role performance, but not in their middle-class, gendered identities.[28] Men and women's understandings of their role responsibilities do not appear to change in the new context. Men are still the primary economic caregivers, though their focus is now more on the nuclear family. Women are still the primary

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[28] While Indian immigrants change their role performance, I am not using the concept of role change as used by social psychologists. Turner (1990, p. 88) defines role change as "a change in the *shared* [emphasis added] conception and execution of typical role performance and boundaries." Thus, for instance, as wives and mothers, Indian women still provide domestic labor, but the nature and extent of

domestic laborers, also predominantly in the nuclear family. Some of the men do more housework and other physical, and therefore demeaning labor, but these tasks are redefined as skills that men perform as part of their caregiving roles as husbands, assisting their wives in what is primarily the latter's responsibility. Some women take on new tasks such as running errands and driving the children around, but these are defined as part of their duties as good wives and mothers. A women's paid employment is a means of assisting her husband with his responsibility. Other research among South Asian immigrants also shows that women's paid employment is viewed as an extension of their feminine duties as wives and mothers; such constructions reinforce rather than challenge traditional notions of womanhood (Dhaliwal 1995). Thus, the loss of a job due to migration does not create the sense of insecurity among women that it would among men, as being the primary breadwinner is not a part of women's identity. However, it does enlarge their roles as wives and mothers, and these become more central to their identity, especially as they have to socialize children into Indian culture in the United States.

Conclusion

Indian culture emphasizes family ties, and both men and women take their family roles seriously. However, as the above analysis shows, there are differences in men and women's responsibilities as adult children, as partners, as in-laws, and as parents. Migration to the United States somewhat modifies these responsibilities, as the family structure changes for some respondents, and therefore in role performances. However, these modifications are incorporated into existing meanings of the identity of Indian man or woman.

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those tasks changes. However, the understanding that Indian wives are responsible for domestic labor does not change as a result of migration.

CHAPTER SIX: INDIAN = HINDU?
RELIGION, ETHNIC IDENTITY AND GENDER

I found that Hindu Indian immigrants in my sample often see their Hindu identity as synonymous with or more crucial than their Indian identity. They deny the Indian-ness of non-Hindu Indians. Much of the Indian identity work they do is thus often Hindu identity work, including creating institutions to transmit Hindu-Indian culture to the next generation. Their identity work reinforces inequality at two levels – it excludes non-Hindus from the dominant group's (i.e., Hindus') definitions of Indian-ness, and it maintains gender inequality by reinforcing the more passive images of ideal Hindu womanhood. Though migration offers women opportunities to challenge some of the traditional gender roles, especially in the household and the local community, the patriarchal structure of the household or community does not change. In addition, the images that help challenge traditional gender roles are also ironically used by Hindu nationalists to reinforce the superiority of Hinduism over other religions, especially Islam.

Indian vs. Hindu Identity

The sub-continent of South Asia is the birthplace of several major and minor religions, viz. Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and various indigenous tribal religions. Conflict between Hindus and Muslims led to the partition of the Indian sub-continent into two nations in 1947. Pakistan (East and West), constitutionally an Islamic state, was established as the homeland for the area's Muslims.[29] India, while predominantly Hindu, emerged as a secular, pluralist republic with a religiously diverse population – Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Sikhs, Parsees, Jews etc. However, Hindus are the numerical and sociological majority.

The Salience of Hindu identity in the United States

Ethnic and religious identities become more salient for immigrants as they become minorities in a new context (Kurien 2002). For Hindu Indian immigrants, not

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[29] Eventually East Pakistan became the nation-state of Bangladesh.

just their ethnic and national identity as Indians, but also their religious identity as Hindus is thrown into relief:

> When you go to a small town in [the] southern part of United States, you are considered three-way outsiders. One, you are [an] outsider because you are not a local-town boy. Second, you are [an] outsider because [of religion]… that you are not a Christian, and the third because you are not even an American. So you are kind of looked at in three different ways (Ramesh).

Researchers list several reasons for this: As religious minorities, non-Christian immigrants to the United States are compelled, often for the first time, to think more deeply about their religion when they are questioned by others (Kurien 1999, 2002; Warner 1993). Beliefs and practices that were taken for granted back home are viewed as novel, different, and maybe even deviant, and practitioners have to develop a deep understanding of the same in order to explain them to their children or to defend them:

> The main purpose [of *balvihars*, classes to teach children about Hindu/Indian culture] is to make our children have pride; understand their roots, where they come from, understand their heritage, their culture and what does it mean to be a Hindu… People tease [the children, saying] you worship cows… So, until our kids know what it is to be a Hindu, how can they even argue the point or how will they defend themselves? Why is it you're a vegetarian? Kids get a lot of questions and we encourage them to bring all those questions to us. There are lots of cases where the parents don't have an answer or they don't know how to explain it... [The kids] are different [from their peers], the color of their skin is different, their eating habits are different, their religion is different. So, they shouldn't feel like the odd one out. They should still have the self-esteem (*Deepti*).

Second, religion is an important element in the cultural socialization of the next generation (Kurien 2002). This need to socialize children, along with the desire to intermingle with co-religionists, leads immigrants to interact and form community organizations with others of a similar background. Thus, religion becomes a crucial basis for community formation (Kurien 2002; Williams 1988).

> [W]hen we are away from home and away from our culture I think we make an extra effort to cling on to those values and ways of thinking and morals… and I think we do it more to pass it on to our children so that they know where we are coming from or what our roots were… [I]f you don't make that effort you could

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easily lose that because these kids are all the time living in the outside world and when they come home they need to know what their roots were. So I think we may subconsciously be making an extra effort at preserving all of that heritage… (*Rashmi*)

Especially for Indian immigrants of diverse linguistic, regional, and caste backgrounds living in relatively small Indian communities, religion is a powerful unifier. Many of the Indian immigrants in Kurien's (2002) study pointed out that they had become more religious since coming to the United States. Some of my respondents also attested to the elevated importance of religion in their lives:

I like to observe [festivals] because of the food and stuff like that. But, as for the religious aspect of it… I try to do it but I can't force myself sometimes… Actually, I was even worse growing up. I never used to believe in God. So, I've not given up anything, in fact I'm acquiring. At least, I tend to pray once in a week… I go to the temple, I do *bhajan* [devotional singing]. I do that for relaxation mainly and I'm adapting, as I'm growing older. Mainly, the other thing is to teach my kids as an example… Unless you show it to them, you can't just tell them. You need to set an example, right? (*Richa*)

[Growing up, the environment at home] was not that much religious, or religion-oriented… I think probably [I am more religious here]. I don't remember going to the temple that often, in India, probably I do it little more over here… [because] generally [the] temple is the main body, from which all the activities [originate], where people meet… even a dance, they have it at the temple… Even the *balvihar* they have at the temple, so you are going to the temple every week (*Rashi*).

I grew up in a fairly broad-minded environment… I was [not] brought up rigidly with a religious household where you got up in the morning and prayed to God and you did all your *pujas* [worship]… No. So I have not brought up my children to do that. However… when I came here and I started attending temple over here, and doing *satsang* [religious gathering], I did feel to some extent, to some degree, that I missed out on something. It may not be that important when you are young but today I feel I should have learnt this when I was younger. And that is what I think I would like my children to have some exposure to…   I would like for them to be able to have some knowledge, some understanding of what Hinduism is all about… (*Beena*).

According to Rajagopal (cited in Kurien 2002: 115) another reason why many Hindu Indians emphasize religious identity is because they want to prioritize ethnic and

religious over racial identity and thus "avoid their problematic racial location in this country." Being seen as Hindus with Aryan ancestors[30] prevents them (especially upper caste and North Indian Hindu immigrants) from being lumped with other undesirable racial/ethnic minorities in the U.S., such as Blacks and Hispanics, and helps them align themselves with the White majority. While many Indians believe in and seek to project their group as a model minority (and therefore would probably not be too opposed to being identified as Asian), they are disconcerted by the fact that when referring to Asians, most public discourse focuses primarily on East Asians, rendering South Asians (in this case Indians) invisible.[31] Hence, a religious identity makes them more visible and separates them from other Asians.

In addition, in the post-September 11 era, an emphasis on religious identity helps Hindu Indians set themselves apart from Muslims (Indian or otherwise) and feel closer to the White majority in the United States. Articles in the Indian and Indian immigrant media often talk about the similarities between the United States and India (for instance both nations are not Muslim countries,[32] are ethnically diverse, are committed to democracy, and are faced with problems arising from Islamic terrorism) that offer the opportunity for even closer ties between the two nations.[33] Ravi's comments are a reflection of this sentiment:

> India is not a Muslim country, you know, so our [U.S. and India's] interests are common… Indians are treated with respect… I have not faced any problem, as such, anywhere.

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[30] Some historians have discredited the theory of the Aryan invasion of India, while others have disagreed with the opposite view that the Aryans originated in India, and India is therefore the cradle of European civilization (Kurien 2001).

[31] Interestingly, non-Indian South Asians have a similar problem with the term South Asian. Discussions on South Asian listservs indicate that Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans often are mistaken to be Indians, and feel that the label of South Asian renders them invisible.

[32] This is especially in relation to Pakistan, an Islamic state, and India's rival. Contrary to several Indians' expectations (and to their chagrin), Pakistan has emerged as an even closer ally of the U.S. after 9/11.

[33] During the Cold War, while India was part of the Non-Aligned Movement, it did have closer ties with the former USSR. The disintegration of that nation, and the liberalization of India's economy since the early 1990s, has led India to seek closer ties with the U.S.

Portraying India as a secular and even predominantly Hindu (and therefore not Muslim) nation helps Indians distance themselves from other religious minorities, especially Muslims (Kurien 2002). Hindu identity[34] thus becomes more critical, and Indians in the U.S. make it more crucial.

<u>Inventing a new Hindu identity</u>

When immigrants recreate their cultural institutions and practices in their new home, these creations do not just mirror their counterparts "back home" but have new elements that borrow from and respond to immigrants' environments. As they try to socialize their children and build community, Indians create a form of Hinduism that is unique to the American context[35] (Kurien 1998, 2002; Williams 1992). Participants in my study used two of the forms of community organization that Kurien (1998, 2002) identifies – *satsangs* and *balvihars*. *Satsangs* refer to religious gatherings. In the community I studied, people gather every fortnight at the local temple and sing devotional songs for about two hours. The *satsang* culminates in an *aarti* (worship) followed by *prasad* (food consecrated by the Gods) and dinner. The dinner is usually sponsored and prepared by a member family of the association. Notices about upcoming *satsangs* are placed on the local temple association's listserv.

Balvihars (and affiliated youth forums) are programs to socialize children into Indian, and especially Hindu culture. Children learn about Indian history, Hindu mythology, philosophy, norms and values, and they are also taught music and dance, and crafts for special occasions. The *balvihars* are held at the local temple, and the activities have a strong religious flavor, as *Beena's* explanation of the purposes and the organization of the *balvihars* indicates:

> [O]ur basic goal is to get [the children] familiar with why we Indians bring up our children the way we do, with a certain set of rules, norms, regulations… dress code… dating rules or whatever. Why we have these certain limitations… That is what our basic goal is, along with giving them some knowledge of the Indian [emphasis added] scriptures, the Indian books, what is the *Ramayana* [a Hindu

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[34] It is identity that becomes salient, while practices, such as visiting temples and performing worship may increase, decrease, or remain the same as in India.

[35] This is true of Indian immigrants in other parts of the world as well (Dusenbery 1995).

epic], the *Gita* [a Hindu philosophical text], the mythology, all of that… Our children are involved with music, dance… [W]e start off with an opening prayer, which is in English. We have introduced five two-line Sanskrit *shlokas* [chants] so that's what they will be learning. Then after that we have about a ten-minute talk on any current activity whether it is Indian or not, any religious festival, or how people are celebrating and what they are celebrating. Then we break up into smaller groups and with the very younger ones… we will just read to them stories which are basically of Indian origin or Asian origin and … similar stories in the west… Or we may pick up a theme of courage or some moral value and have stories read on them… With the middle group we again focus more on preparing them to be able to read the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharat* [a Hindu epic], a little more on the history of India… With the older kids [our goal is] to get them familiar with the *Gita*… to keep them in touch with the richness of the Indian culture and the roots… [and] give them an understanding as to why we are different.

Not all of the organizers of the *balvihar* see it as vehicle only of Hindu religious

instruction:

One of the things I'm doing as part of the *balvihar*, I've planned a first field trip… [W]e are going to a Jewish Synagogue. I want to show these kids how other people pray… Whoever wants can come… I fully expect a lot of kids will not show up… [because] there is a fear in parents to expose their kids. I think their primary fear is that their kids might marry a non-Indian and they are doing everything possible to avoid that. I think that is what drives their lives (*Deepti*).

[The purpose of the balvihar is] to teach them culture, heritage, religion on the side, because I do not push religion… Because very simply I don't know what religion is, I don't know how I can define God… and I don't want the child to get a wrong message from me. And there may be a Sikh [a religious group] child, there maybe a Punjabi [an ethnic group] child, there maybe a South Indian [ethnic groups] child... because we have diversity in India. We have different Gods, we have different languages, we have different religions, we have different cultures. I cannot be dogmatic and say we will learn this. But my aim is to show them where we come from, what is our background. What is India, what was India 6000 years ago, what was 5000 years ago… What was the freedom struggle about. What were the great people. What India has done for the world. What is Indian culture, and how we are different than the others and how we are similar like others… At the same time [we impart] some moral education, to say you['ve] got to speak right, you got to stand up and say no, you got to learn not to do drugs… So [it provides] cultural, ethnic, moral, heritage (Ramesh).

Deepti and Ramesh's vision of the *balvihar* was very different from many parents' wishes about what they would like their children to learn in those sessions:

> I send [my children to the *balvihar*] because I want them to [have]… the awareness about God because I don't have time to teach them… and they miss elders here… [At the *balvihar*, they learn] some stories [from Hindu mythology], Goddess Saraswati stories, Goddess Lakshmi stories. *Shlokam* [chants] also I want them to teach, like Ganpati *shlokam*… some [devotional] songs… like *bhajans*… that is good enough (*Rani*).

The religious instruction that forms a part of the *balvihar* syllabus necessarily excludes non-Hindu children. The religious instructions are not a problem in themselves, since all religious communities seek and have the right to transmit their religious beliefs to the second generation. However, the *balvihars* combine religious and secular instruction and thus exclude non-Hindu children (despite Ramesh's intentions) from the socialization to relatively secular elements[36] of Indian culture, especially in small Indian communities where Indian religious minority immigrants do not constitute a critical mass to set up their own alternatives for non-religious cultural socialization. *Neeti*, a non-Hindu[37] interviewee, was thus wary of what was taught at the *balvihar*:

> In balvihar I would be interested only in the activity, like karate or something like that. They recently started something… some garba [a type of dance] steps or something like that. If they teach these kinds of things I'll be interested. But at some stage they were teaching Gita and shloka. In that I will not send [my child].

Thus, *satsangs* and *balvihars* are a new way of "doing" Hindu. While *satsangs* are not unknown in India, they are not very common and are sometimes associated with particular sects. Similarly, given the Hindu milieu in India, parents do not feel a need for *balvihars* there (Kurien 2002). Both of these forms of identity work are the result of migration. Not only are these new, they are also gendered. I will explore the gendered nature of this identity work later in the chapter. In the next section I explain why I view

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[36] It is hard to completely separate secular and religious, especially Hindu, elements of Indian culture. For instance, the *garba*, that *Neeti* mentions, is usually performed during the Hindu festival of *Navratri*, and the traditional songs accompanying the *garba* are paeans to the Hindu goddess Durga.
[37] When referring to participants in my study I use the term non-Hindu, rather than identify their religious affiliation, in order to protect their identity.

religious activities by Hindu Indian immigrants as an example of identity work to maintain *Indian* identity, not just *Hindu* identity work.

<u>The equation of Indian and Hindu identity</u>

While some people in my study made a distinction between being Indian and being Hindu, many respondents referred to specific Hindu traits as "Indian", thus blurring the distinctions between the two. Being Indian thus meant being Hindu:

> I go to temple almost every weekend. So Indian culture is maintained every way. [My daughter] is aware of all the *Indian* [emphasis added] festivals – *Raksha-bandhan*, *Diwali*, *Holi* she knows. *Ram-navami* just passed. On Gandhi-*jayanti* [Gandhi's birthday] we had *balvihar* so we talked about it. On *Dashehra* we will be talking about it (*Sangeeta*).[38]

> [W]e celebrate all the Indian functions... Because now, as you grow older, I feel you start understanding the values and importance of things you did in your childhood or that you saw done... For example, I remember my grandmother for the kite festival would make the *til ladoos* [sesame desserts]... So these are just strong traditions which I think, to some extent are important for your psyche.... at least to me... That's why the first year, when I came here... for Diwali [a Hindu festival] I made *faraar*... because to me it was getting in touch with the *Indian-ness* [emphasis added] in me (*Beena*).

> [O]ne reason why India was ruled by other countries like Muslims or Britain [was] because we were fighting among ourselves... [B]ut India never lost its roots... [T]here are only two civilizations in the world, one is Chinese and other Indian. In last five thousand years that culture remains... In hundreds or thousand years there [has been] no organized thing [that is, Hindu religion is not organized], but even then we survived. That is something great about India. We may bend but we may not be broken (Gyan).

Gyan thus implicitly states that India is a Hindu country (and Indian civilization is Hindu civilization), and both the British (he doesn't use the term Christian) and the Muslims were outsiders. While British rule in India was a relatively recent event, Islam came to northern India about 1000 years ago, and even earlier to South India.

Equating Indian culture with Hindu culture reflects the invisible privilege that

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[38] *Sangeeta* thus identifies as Indian both secular (Gandhi's birthday) and Hindu festivals. Major festivals of other religions (*Eid*, Christmas) do not figure in her list, though they are national holidays in India.

dominant groups enjoy (McIntosh 2000). As the sociological and numerical majority in India, Hindus can define their way of life as the Indian way of life. This privilege is further reflected in some respondents' proclaimed lack of knowledge about Muslims, even though 12% of India's population of over 1 billion people follows Islam.[39] Ramesh, talking about his landlord's troubles with a previous tenant, said:

> [M]aybe the people who were there … they were cooking [food] outside or doing something. Because they were Muslims, I don't know whether their cooking styles were different or anything.

The lack of information about Muslims reflects not just dominant group privilege, but also of the high amount of segregation between Hindus and Muslims (and other religious minorities, especially Christians) in India.[40] This segregation is reiterated in the immigrants' wish that their children marry other Indians, preferably of the same region and religion as the parents. Inter-religious marriages were palatable, but the acceptance depended on the religion – Hindu marriages with Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs were okay, while Hindu-Christian, and especially Hindu-Muslim marriages received the greatest opposition.

> No, I have no problem [with my daughter marrying someone from another region or religion]. No problem as long as he is Indian. Of course if Muslim then I'm going to be probably against it too because again their culture is different than Indian culture, Hindus. They have the permission to marry even 2 or 4 times, which is not there in Hindus[41] (*Sangeeta*).

Sangeeta later added that she would be opposed to her daughter marrying a Christian as well.

> I would prefer a Hindu girl [for my son] because I'm Hindu… [D]efinitely not a Muslim. I would not accept that, because… not all Muslims are bad… I know some Muslims here who are very good people. But by and large, my own belief is that it is a more militant religion compared to other religions. It's less tolerant,

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[39] After Indonesia, India has the largest Muslim population in the world. There are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan, the country that was created as a homeland for the sub-continent's Muslims.

[40] Respondents did not profess the same degree of ignorance about Christians; one possible reason is that many of them attended missionary schools in India.

[41] Indian personal law allows Muslim men to practice polygyny, while bigamy is a crime among Hindus and other religions. However, in actual practice, bigamy appears to be prevalent among Hindus as well.

so…I do not want to take the risk of getting a Muslim girl in my home for my kids, you know… If there is no choice, then probably one can go for it, but when there are many choices, I believe—why take the risk? (Amit)

Dominant group privilege also allows Hindus to scapegoat Muslims and blame them for India's problems. Sameer listed overpopulation as one of India's major problems and blamed politicians and certain "communities" for this. When asked to explain who he meant, he referred to the poor, "uneducated" masses and:

> … Muslims. Is there any control in their population? Is there any control in number of marriages they do? So they are expanding left and right, their population is more than what we have in Pakistan today. Muslims in India are more than what is in Pakistan, it's more than about 10% of our entire population.[42]

Some other respondents also expressed anti-Muslim prejudice. The events of September 11th may have made it easier for people to be more open about their prejudice against Muslims. In addition, they felt free to do so before me because my name indicates I am Hindu.

> [I] has become very hard for me to accept the Muslim religion after September 11th. It is much much harder for me to have any kind of sympathy or understanding for Muslims, at this point (Rakesh).

Ironically, at another point in the interview, Rakesh had mentioned that among the most important aspects of Hinduism, in his view, was its spirit of openness and tolerance:

> It is inherent in the Hindu religion, in the culture, in the practice, to be truly open, to accept other faiths, to accept other points of view. It is something that is totally ingrained in our [culture], much more so than, I think, in any other culture, and I think that is very important.

Not all of my respondents considered being Hindu as synonymous with being Indian. *Deepti* and Rakesh made a distinction between the two, and privileged Hindu identity over Indian identity. In Rakesh's view, India as a nation-state is a relatively new and artificial construct. Given India's enormous ethnic diversity, there is very little that

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[42] The proportion of India's Muslim population (about 12%) has not changed significantly since Independence in 1947.

people from different parts of India share in common. What is shared, however, is the Hindu religion:

> I make a distinction between Indian and Hindu… Being a Hindu is more of a trait for me than being an Indian… A lot of the cultural things… Indian music, classical music – they are not necessarily Indian... They are part of Hindu tradition rather than just really Indian. Because being Indian is really too amorphous… Hindu [identity] truly is more uniting than being Indian… You don't see this glorious "Indian unity", and all that stuff in India. It's a kind of very romantic notion that Indians overseas appear to have… Because it doesn't really unite, in my view. What does really unite them is their Hinduism… that is truly shared among all across the country. Saints, it doesn't matter where they are from, [are] always respected all across the country… Take Jaydeva… He's a saint from Orissa [mid-eastern Indian state]. But the songs that he composed are part and parcel of the *Carnatic* [South Indian classical music] tradition in a very big way, so much so that people may not even know that he is actually from Orissa… Anything that makes you a Punjabi is so far away from anything that makes you a Tamilian or Telugu. On the other hand, if you're a Hindu from Punjab or a Hindu from Kerala, you still have the same traditions, you still share the same fables and parables and all that sort of thing. So, for me that is the deciding kind of factor rather than being Indian, as such…

When asked about the location of Non-Hindu Indians in this vision of Indian-ness as subordinate to Hindu identity, he made a distinction between different types of non-Hindus. He regarded Buddhists and Jains to be almost Hindus, since both religions have "Hindu roots." He distinguished between Muslims in Southern India, who are, in his view, assimilated into Indian (that is, Hindu) culture and Muslims from other parts of India who have retained a distinct Muslim identity, and are therefore different:

> [W]hen you see the Muslim community, let us say in the South, as an example, in fact it's very hard to see them and consider them being very different. They happen to be of a Muslim religion, but if you really look at it, it seems as though they might have done the conversion as a very pragmatic sort of thing. They were offered some short-term benefits, perhaps. In other words, in all the other ways they seem to have the same kind of outlook... And, to me it's almost like it's just yet another facet of the Hindu culture; they all have the Hindu roots but, somehow, they have taken on this additional God, in a way, which is really artificial. But then, there is also a segment of really truly Muslim kind of

population. I think they are an alien culture to the Indian community. I don't see them ever really assimilating into the Indian fabric. Maybe, the Muslims in Hyderabad, the Muslims in Kashmir, the Muslims in UP - they are all in that kind of category, I think. I don't know too much about them… Christians, on the other hand appear to be much more assimilated, at least the ones that I have seen – Syrian Christians, the people from Kerala – I see them all as being just yet another facet of Hinduism, they just converted.

Rakesh thus regards as acceptable those Muslims who do not have a distinct Muslim identity and have to some extent assimilated into Indian culture, and in a sense, in his view, stayed true to their "real," namely Hindu, roots. Indians with a distinct and visible Muslim identity are, in his opinion, suspect because of their lack of assimilation into and (re)acceptance of Hindu cultural elements. Due to this perceived lack of assimilation, he expressed the suspicion, later in the interview , that they are not really patriotic, since they owe more allegiance to their religious (i.e. pan-Islamic) community rather than the nation-state of India. He cited the example of some Indian Muslims' support of Pakistan in India-Pakistan cricket matches as evidence of this. Thus non-Hindus are not really Indian, since they are not Hindu.

Deepti believed that what really set her apart, as an Indian, from Americans was her religion, and therefore Christian Indian immigrants were not very different from Christian non-Indians:

> Well, there are lots of non-Hindus in India. For example, I do have some very good friends, who are non-Hindu from India, they were all Christians, they go to church here. They live their life exactly the way a non-Indian friend of mine would live theirs. Their food habits, their religion, everything, I don't see any difference between the way they live their lives and a non-Indian.

She thus denies non-Hindu Indians an Indian identity and way of life that is uniquely theirs – neither Hindu nor American.

The influence of nationalist Hindu organizations[43]

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[43] Researchers use the term "nationalist" instead of "fundamentalist" because there are no common fundamental principles in Hinduism; there is no founder, single text or religious leader accepted by all Hindus as THE religious authority.

In blaming Muslims for India's numerous problems (overpopulation, poverty, terrorism, sectarian violence, etc.), in doubting their patriotism to India, and in portraying India as an essentially Hindu country, these respondents echo the sentiments and propaganda of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP; World Hindu Council) and like-minded Hindu nationalist organizations, even though some of them also criticized these organizations for manipulating Hindu sentiments for narrow political gain. Ramesh's criticism of the lack of assimilation among some groups of Muslims and Christians is similar to claims by Hindu nationalist leaders that minority groups in India owe their very survival to the beneficence of the Hindu majority, and should therefore not do anything that may upset the dominant group. Ramesh's apparent contradiction in extolling the principles of tolerance and pluralism in Hinduism but also criticizing Islam reflects ideas popularized by these organizations. The organizations claim that the rights of minorities will be ably protected in a Hindu *Rashtra* (nation) because pluralism and acceptance of different faiths is the essence of Hinduism. However, they also believe that "outsiders" (successive waves of Muslim invaders from Western Asia and eventually the Mughals, and the British) conquered Hindu India due to divisions among Hindus. They also believe that the descendants of these outsiders in contemporary India, that is, non-Hindus, have taken advantage of the patience and tolerance of Hindus to win special rights and concessions and "minority appeasement" from vote-hungry, manipualtible politicians. These non-Hindu groups thereby threaten the basic rights and even the very existence of the Hindu majority. Some nationalist leaders therefore advocate that Hindus sacrifice principles of pluralism, secularism, and tolerance and rise up to fight for and defend their rights.

According to Kurien (2002), the salience of Hindu identity in the United States, and the use of religion as the basis of community formation make local (Hindu) organizations more receptive to the ideas of such nationalist organizations. These sentiments are evident in the literature published by pan-American organizations such as the Federation of Hindu Associations (FHA) of which several local Indian associations in the United States are registered members. Kurien (2002) contends that removed from the ground realities of the negative impact of nationalist organizations in India, the children

of immigrants find these organizations' emphasis on Hindu pride and the rediscovery of Hindu roots especially attractive. Indeed, it is widely believed that the VHP gets a substantial amount of financial support from Hindus (first and second generation immigrants) outside India, and especially from those in the United States.

The increasing acceptance of Hindu nationalist sentiments of such organizations has considerable implications not just for the local Hindu organizations, but also especially for immigrant women and their daughters. The organizations reinforce inequality in two areas. One, they perpetuate religious inequality by portraying India as a Hindu nation and denying the Indian-ness of non-Hindus. Second, the organizations idealize images of Hindu man-hood and woman-hood that perpetuate gender inequality. The appeal of the Hindu organizations' message of Hindu pride is thus dangerous, since part of the message also involves regressive gender roles. This issue will be discussed in a later section.

Hindu Identity Work

In the context of the above discussion of the synonymity of Hindu and Indian identity, some of the identity work covered in previous chapters appears to take on an added dimension. That is, it involves maintaining not just an Indian gendered identity but also actually a Hindu gendered identity.

Food

Missing one's traditional food and passing on culinary traditions to the next generation are forms of identity work shared by immigrants from most cultures. However, two aspects of diet that may be more specific (though not exclusive) to Hindus are vegetarianism[44] and strictures against beef eating. Of course both these practices are not exclusive to Hinduism; Buddhists, Jains, and some Sikhs in India also tend to be

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[44] There are various types of vegetarians. In India, veganism (avoiding all animal products including dairy) is very rare. Most commonly, vegetarians avoid all meat and seafood; some don't eat eggs as well. Some orthodox people (usually the elderly) abstain from consuming onions and garlic. Orthodox Jains do not eat vegetables that grow underground. In addition, some people abstain from any of the foods mentioned above on certain festive or religious days/weeks/ months of the year. There are gender norms regarding meat consumption too; in some regions where meat and/or fish are a common part of the diet, Hindu widows have traditionally been required to abstain from such food.

vegetarian (many Sikhs also avoid beef). Nor are all or even most Hindus vegetarian

and/or beef-avoiders; regulations about meat consumption vary based on caste and region.

Nevertheless, vegetarianism is probably more common among Hindus (and Jains) than

among the followers of other major world religions. Many Hindus also consider

vegetarianism as a part of being Hindu, as one of my respondents did:

> [Y]ou are what you eat, I strongly believe in that. So, it's very important to be
> vegetarian… because of the Karma philosophy. The [concept of] reincarnation is
> basically you are what you eat. There are 2 ways, if you're meat-eating and you
> love to be meat-eating, you're mentality eventually gets blunted and you tend to
> get an animalistic attitude where everything is just eating, drinking, mating. It's
> only your self-defense. So, if you go by the Karma philosophy, you won't go
> higher up in the ladder of the your conscious [consciousness]… And, the other
> aspect is if you're vegetarian … , you're still killing plants, so what about that?
> The right answer actually to that is because you offer the food to God [it's okay],
> because God doesn't ask you to offer meat. When he says no killing, he doesn't
> say - no killing human beings, it's no killing animals, that is basically what is
> implied. That's where vegetarianism comes to be important, I think (Shaleen).

Rakesh considered vegetarianism an important aspect of Hinduism, though it was not the

most important thing:

> [Vegetarianism] is not the ultimate… It is important, but then, if somebody could
> not be [vegetarian] then I'm not going to… view it as being very negative if you
> don't follow that. Yes, to me it is an important trait.

For vegetarians, especially those who consider it an important part of their way of

life, living in the United States poses special challenges as they navigate the culinary

landscape, especially when traveling. There are fewer options when eating out, often

vegetarian dishes are cooked in utensils and handled with gloves that had previously held

meat, strange new dishes and ingredients when eating out are suspect, and food servers'

assurances that a dish contains no meat are not always accurate:[45]

> We eat mostly vegetarian food but here we don't get a lot of vegetarian food when
> we go out to eat... We have pizza places, Taco Bell or some Indian restaurant. We
> can't eat anywhere else so we just end up eating donuts if we don't see a Taco
> Bell on the way. We find veggie burgers at some places but they aren't really

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[45] Some of these observations are based on my personal experience.

good… Even if I go to Subway, they use the same gloved-hand for non-veg stuffing as well as for veg so I can't bring myself to eat that (*Sadhana*).

Social occasions with non-Indians also pose a problem:

> [I]n [my son's] school, 1st time they arranged pizza in the last class, I said – I'm on fast, I cannot eat. [Laughs]… I felt that if they order pizza they'd order something non-veg, because here everyone eats meat. So, before going itself, I told them - I will not eat… [But] There was cheese pizza also. [Laughs...] (*Kavita*).

> [We are more comfortable in the company of other Indians]. One main factor is the food. Being vegetarians and everything even if I want to invite [Americans over], maybe I start wondering what do I cook, what would I do (*Rashi*).

Given these concerns, some mothers (since women are primarily responsible for cooking) suggested that they were not opposed to their children eating meat (usually everything except beef), so that their children would not face similar problems:

> I do worry [about] my son going to the university with the kind of food habits he has. [H]e has not picked too many foods habits here, which I would like him to do. He may continue to be a vegetarian if he wants to, I am not particular, but I think he loves vegetarian food. But he has to learn to adjust in the university with the available food, and not crave for Indian food, which I am afraid he might do initially. So I do wonder that I may have to carry some frozen stuff for him sometimes, and thankfully the university is not too far (*Usha*).

> [My children] both don't like [meat]. I force them, that to survive here you should eat. Once I forced, but they said - no. So, I said – okay, I will not force (*Kavita*).

Thus, while vegetarianism is an important part of their identity, several parents are amenable to their children not maintaining the tradition due to the context they are growing up in. For parents who considered vegetarianism as rooted in Hinduism, vegetarianism continued to be important, and they hoped that their children would abstain from eating meat. *Deepti* regarded Hinduism and a vegetarian lifestyle as the two aspects of Indian culture she wanted her children to retain, even while they gave up everything else. She also recognized that her children would face questions about both, and therefore considered the *balvihar* as a good place to explain to children the philosophy underlying vegetarianism:

[Some aspects of Indian culture that I would like my children to retain are] Hinduism, the religion. Religion is important and vegetarianism is very important. Those are the only 2 things… I don't care whether they eat *rotis* [a flat bread] or pasta so long as they are vegetarian… [They can marry Indians or non-Indians]. I don't have a problem, either way. I'm concerned if their food habits are different. I'm saying – I don't care who you're marrying make sure he or she is a vegetarian… [U]ntil our kids know what it is to be a Hindu, how can they even argue the point or how will they defend themselves [against questions about their beliefs]. Why is it you're a vegetarian – kids get a lot of questions and we encourage them to bring all those questions to us [at the *balvihar*].

Rakesh described his children's adherence to vegetarianism in the face of peer pressure and even possible ridicule as a sign of independence and a means to assert one's identity:

[W]herever they go, [my children] are able to say – I'm an individual, my characteristic is that I'm a vegetarian, I'm not going to bend… It's a way of asserting your identity, at the same time not being obnoxious about it. It's like I'm not going to cry if I don't get vegetarian food, but, if I get vegetarian food I'm going to eat that; if it's not there I'm not going to compromise my principles… [I]f [the children]… eventually end up eating meat I wouldn't lose sleep over it; I wouldn't feel that I failed or anything like that. But, I'm also confident that they are not going to do it casually; they won't do it because of peer pressure or anything like that. They may do it if they don't have a choice…

I think vegetarianism; that is important [for the children to retain]… It's a little battle here because here people don't understand vegetarianism. If you're a vegetarian they're sort of very surprised and may be looking down upon you. I'm surprised because it should be the other way… I want to teach [my children] because it is going to be tough because everywhere they go if they have to be vegetarians they have to be very apt with the answers and be very strong on their beliefs, why they're being vegetarians (Shaleen).

Food choices are thus an important aspect of Hindu identity work for some Indians.

<u>Gender and vegetarianism:</u> Several of the couples in my study were vegetarian. In cases where one partner was vegetarian, it was more likely to be the wife. Only one of the couples I interviewed had a vegetarian husband and a wife who ate meat. For such couples (with one vegetarian partner), diet does create a concern, but the issues vary due to gender. Since women do most of the cooking, vegetarian women are often reluctant to cook meat at home, and the husbands therefore indulge outside the home, whether in

India or the United States. When the situation is reversed, and women marry into vegetarian joint families, eating meat even outside the home becomes harder. *Neeti* mentioned that when she visited her in-laws in India, her brother-in-law and she would buy chicken and fish snacks and eat them on the sly. *Sangeeta's* relative faced a similar problem:

> Her in-laws were strict vegetarians. [She] eats non-veg but she couldn't eat even if she wanted to. Even eggs were not allowed inside the house. She couldn't even eat out. She couldn't say – okay, we'll eat out today. If they go she has to take her in-laws with her.

Neeti was particularly upset when her in-laws wanted her son to be raised vegetarian like his father:

> [W]hen I was staying [with my in-laws] for 2 months, doctor had told me to give him [son] half-boiled egg yolk. [My mother-in-law] didn't allow me to give him [eggs]. I told her – mummy doctor said do that. She said – no, you can't cook egg in this house as long as I'm here… I got angry… But what could I do? My [mother] said – you don't give him anything now, don't go against your in-laws. You do whatever you want when you go to America.

So while migration to the United States poses extra problems for vegetarians, both men and women, for women like *Neeti*, it provides opportunities to live and raise their children as they see fit.

Even vegetarian women sometimes face problems when relatives with certain dietary preferences live with them or visit, especially in the United States:

> … My in-laws don't eat even garlic and onion. They do [special religious observances]. They won't eat potatoes for 4 months [and will eat] before sunset. When they come here they follow all their regulations. I don't have any problems. If they have to follow all that, they have to, but when they come here we can't go out to eat because they don't eat anything outside. Nothing at all. So, they have to eat home made meals everyday. [They can't travel much either]. When we would travel we used to take some food with us, some kind of snacks. But how long will that last? So, you can't travel much with them (*Sangeeta*).

In vegetarian families, women, who are responsible for cooking, face the dual burden of finding ingredients for cooking Indian food (as discussed in the previous chapter) as well as vegetarian food. The ingredients of processed foods have to be

examined extra carefully to ensure there are no meat additives, a task made harder by unfamiliar ingredients and vague phrases like "natural flavors." Eating out also poses major hazards, as the recent controversy over McDonald's french fries reveals. The fast food chain recently admitted that it uses beef to flavor the fries. Thus, when planning long trips, women have to go the extra mile and carry homemade non-perishable snacks for the family.

In conclusion, for vegetarians in general, migration to the United States changes food habits, to the extent that they might encourage their children to assimilate into the mainstream. On the other hand, for those who consider vegetarianism as important to their religious identity, their beliefs often get reinforced, and vegetarianism takes on connotations beyond just culinary tastes and religious beliefs to be a measure of one's independence and ability to stand one's ground in the face of the pressure to assimilate. Women in vegetarian families have to make an additional effort to cook vegetarian meals for their families in a culture where vegetarianism is not the norm.

Clothing, gender, and Hindu identity

As mentioned in Chapter 4, clothing is a marker of Indian identity much more for women than it is for men. In the area of clothing too, religion plays a role. While the sari is seen as a ubiquitous *Indian* dress, in some regions of India it is an indicator of religious identity. Thus, Sikh women in Punjab often wear *salwar kurtas* (loose trousers with usually knee-length tunics and a scarf/veil) rather than saris, which are associated with Hindus. After 1984, when Sikhs were killed by rioting mobs (primarily Hindu) in Delhi, there were reports that many Sikh women stopped wearing saris as a sign of protest and an assertion of their Sikh identity. *Salwars* have also traditionally been worn widely in many areas of Pakistan, and may be seen by some (Indians and non-Indians) as a "Muslim" dress as well. *Renu*, a Hindu, suspects that her clothing may have twice led security personnel at a local Wal-Mart store to assume she was Muslim and check her belongings on her way out:

> We went to Wal-Mart twice, so probably thinking of us as Muslims or something else, they checked every thing… I had *salwar kurta* on… after September 11, people feel that [if someone has] *salwar kurta* on, they are probably Muslim or

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something… So they checked all my stuff… I felt at that time that I was different [i.e. became self-conscious]… [P]eople feel [*salwar kurta*] has something to do with Muslims. Muslim people mostly wear salwar kurta.

Poonam too associated *salwars* with non-Hindus, specifically Muslims, and talked about how there are no significant differences in physical appearance between people from Western and South Asia, and nothing that can tell Hindus apart from Muslims:

> [N]obody knows the difference between each one of us, we all look the same, right? All the Middle East people or Asians, we all mostly look the same… [After 9/11] if you had read the consulates websites, they told us to put big *bindis* [dot worn on the forehead predominantly by Hindu women], the Indian consulate or embassy, they requested us to wear big *bindis*, this only is the difference. What else is the difference between us and them? Even the *salwars* we wear they wear.

The *bindi* is an important marker of Hindu identity, especially in northern India,[46] hence the consular injunction to Indian women to wear *bindis* so they could be identified as Indian, and therefore not Middle Eastern or Muslim (since India is seen by outsiders as primarily a Hindu country) and thus avoid hate crimes.[47] *Kavita* reiterated the link between the *bindi* and Hinduism as expressed by her husband:

> [I]n India I would never be like this [i.e., without *bindi*, some jewelry etc.], there was always a bangle in my hand. I brought everything with me, but it's just not possible to wear those things. Even my husband says sometimes, "wear a *bindi* at least when you're home." I'm wearing one today… *Bindi* is a necessary part of Indian culture, right? I've lost the habit… So, he says, "*you've become a Muslim after coming here, you never wear a bindi*" [emphasis added].

Thus *Kavita* identifies the *bindi* with Indian culture, but not wearing one makes her look not just like a non-Indian but like a Muslim, Indian or not.

Thus, Indian women's clothing is an indicator of their gendered Indian, and particularly their gendered Hindu identity, and many accessories, especially marriage

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[46] The identification of the *bindi* with Hinduism is not pan-Indian; in many parts of southern India, the *bindi* is a cultural rather than a religious symbol and is commonly worn by non-Hindu women as well. Increasingly, in other parts of India, it has become a part of the fashion.

[47] Ironically, in the 1980s, a nativist gang in New Jersey called the "Dot-Busters", opposed to Indian immigration, assaulted Indian women wearing *bindis*.

markers, are also an indicator of their status as married Hindu women, and here they face a dilemma. Although they miss Indian clothes and the other accoutrements of dress,[48] many women prefer to wear western clothes because of the weather, the issue of comfort, and especially because wearing Indian clothes made them self-conscious. At the same time, these very markers of Indian and especially Hindu identity can be a source of protection in the face of the anti-Muslim backlash. This makes the importance of clothing as a symbol of Hindu-ness even more salient. It helps them against hate crimes or profiling, and through their dress, Indian women are expected to *be* Hindu *women* and maintain the distinctions between themselves (and their families) and other minorities, as well as between themselves and their husbands.

Clothing is not an important means of expressing Indian, Hindu, or male identity for men. There are no marriage markers (that parallel the wedding band among Christians) for men in most regions of India. Traditionally, the number of strands in the sacred thread that upper caste men wore around their torso indicated marital status, but urban upper caste men have given up wearing the thread, or when they do wear it, it is under their shirt, and therefore not visible. Gender inequality is thus evident through dress – women's status, as married or not, is crucial to their identity; this is not so for men. Clothing is thus an important issue for immigrant women, but not for men.

Hindu adaptation strategies

Research on Hindu immigrants in the United States indicates that a new "American Hinduism" is emerging, which is different from the Hinduism practiced in India or in other parts of the world with sizeable Indian populations (Williams 1992). This is not unique to Hindus of course; other immigrants also develop new forms of religious practice as a means of adaptation to the new context. Williams (1992: 232) identifies five "ideal type" adaptation strategies among Indians – individual, national,

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[48] These include the *bindi*, bangles, anklets, nose-studs/rings, toe-rings, *sindoor* (red power in the parting of the hair, worn by married women), and *mangalsutra/tali* (necklace symbolizing the married status of a woman).

ecumenical, ethnic and hierarchical. In this section, I will focus only on those relevant to my study: the individual and the ecumenical strategies.

Individual strategy: Individual or private religious practice is fairly common among Hindus in India. While there are community-wide rituals and celebrations, Hindus are more likely to engage in private worship at home and even in public spaces such as temples (for instance, there is no notion of a Sabbath or a common hourly/weekly/daily time for prayer as there is in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions). Most Hindu homes have a private shrine where daily worship takes place, and some of the major Hindu festivals, such as *Diwali*, involve worship within the home/business. This private tradition is carried on in the United States. However, the difference is that, in the absence of the requisite "skilled labor" (Williams 1992), lay individuals have to perform the prayers that religious functionaries may have been conducted in India. While the functionaries in India tend to be male, in the United States both women and men have to take on these tasks for their households. There is thus an expansion in women's roles as religious functionaries.

As in India, more ritually prescribed prayers and fasts apply to women than to men, and women are more likely to be aware of and engaged in religious activities, and are indeed expected to do so. The expectation that women are the upholders of religious traditions is evident in the following comments by Atul and Amit:

> [Our religious practices are the same here] same festivals, my wife fasting.
> She knows everything, like today is this [festival] and today is *Ekadashi*
> [auspicious lunar phase] or whatever, and we should do everything. But
> for me, in India I [didn't] do anything, here also [I don't]. [Laughs]… So
> for me it's [the] same, [and] as for my wife, she maintains the same thing
> (Atul).

> [W]e do [worship] only at *Diwali* and… If someone has a birthday, we do one.
> Sometimes my mom from India, we talk to her and she says, tomorrow is… this
> or that [festival], she'll tell [my wife], so she might do some *puja* [worship]… Of
> course, whereas in India… my mom does every day *puja* … that we don't have
> here.

His wife[49] also mentioned that he saw religious tasks as the responsibility of women. Noting that he does not engage in daily worship, she says that he tells her, "'this is your duty, my duty is to go to work and come. I have faith in God.' He never goes and lights a lamp. He never does that." Ironically, Amit's wife was not very interested in doing such *puja*. She was interested less in rituals and more in meditation, but was expected to perform the rituals and fasts, and do all the preparation work for the same while in India and the United States:

> [In India] half of the year, there will be some or the other festival, the family will get together and special food will be done, and there will be *puja*… Sometimes, it becomes difficult with [a] job also – you have to go to work and there is *puja* at home also. But that is 50% good and 50% not good. [Laughs]… [The advantage is that] the children develop good *sanskar* [values]. Here, I'm not able to tell them that much about our Indian culture and our customs… [The disadvantage is] Idol worship, initially I also used to do before marriage. But now, my way of thinking has changed [in favor of] meditation… [Yet when there was *puja* at my in-laws'], my contribution would be lot more than other people because I used to do it as a duty not as a custom… Duty in the sense that whatever preparations are needed for the *puja*, my mother-in-law is not feeling well… so I have to do that work… I never did it with a devotional attitude… I did it as a duty.

Distance from her in-laws has made it easier to avoid some of the chores.

Usha expressed similar sentiments; as a career woman with a full-time job, social obligations during festivals and ritual occasions sometimes overwhelmed her, and while she missed them to some extent in the United States, she was happy that she was not obliged to participate in every occasion. *Rashi* described herself as a private person (unlike her outgoing husband) who didn't miss the numerous social occasions (related to festivals and life course ceremonies) in which she had to participate:

> You… miss out on all the major events in life, maybe like weddings… I don't think it is a disadvantage to me because even over there I probably wouldn't like it, on a personal level. I think I am getting to be more of a private person, or more of a closed personality… [My husband] probably likes all those things, but I didn't like all these things even over there, so… I am happier over here, because I am not forced to do anything.

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[49] For confidentiality reasons, I will not use her pseudonym here.

While both women and men miss various aspects of Hindu religious traditions as practiced in India, men's participation in the private sphere does not undergo as significant a change as women's does. Unless they are religious functionaries, men in India and the United States leave the daily worship rituals and the minor festivals to the women. It is only during the major festivals, once or twice a year that they may be called upon to play a greater role in the United States due to the absence of priests. As religious conservators, women in India and the United States bear a greater responsibility for performing ritual tasks. Migration to the United States makes ritual performance easier and harder. Distance from family and neighbors allows women to forego practices they dislike or are indifferent to. On the other hand, keeping track of festive days[50] and procuring the paraphernalia needed for rituals[51] becomes much harder and they have to look for creative substitutes.

Another task that is harder for women is that of religious socialization. As the parent responsible for socializing children, transmission of religious (and secular) traditions is also primarily women's responsibility (Rayaprol 1997). This task is made more difficult in the United States, where children are not immersed in a Hindu milieu in which they constantly learn about the religion through observation and participation in religious activities on a regular basis (Kurien 1999, 2002). Indian communities therefore band together to establish structures that will help them in this task of socialization.

Ecumenical strategy: Indian immigrants' need to socialize children in cultural and religious traditions that are different from and sometimes the reverse of the mainstream has led them to build special community programs for this purpose. Religious work at this level involves an ecumenical strategy (Eck 2000; Williams 1992). Sectarian, regional and linguistic differences are overlooked[52] as people come together to worship as a community in *satsangs*, establish *balvihars* for children, and build temples. In the

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[50] Most Hindu calendars are based on the lunar cycle; hence their dates on the Gregorian calendar vary from year to year.

[51] Such as fresh flowers, special holy leaves, uncracked coconuts, etc.

[52] However, such differences may sometimes create tensions, especially if one group predominates, as seemed to be the case in the community I studied.

process, a Hindu "great tradition" (Williams 1992: 239) is created, a tradition that is not as evident in India. For instance, in India, most Hindu temples are built around one central deity, though other deities are also housed in the complex, in smaller niches (Eck 2000). However, in the United States, temples often house a variety of deities to accommodate the diverse wishes of the local community (Eck 2000). This is the case with the temple of the community that I studied. The practice of Hinduism thus undergoes a shift in its new home.

The gendered nature of *satsangs*: As mentioned earlier, *satsangs* and *balvihars* are organizational forms that have emerged as a response to Hindus' minority group status in the United States. Activities in these organizations are gendered. I participated in a few *satsangs* before and during the process of collecting data, and noticed gender differences in the extent and type of involvement in the *satsang*. Usually more women than men attended the *satsang*, and the seating was segregated; women sat on the left side of the hall, men on the right. Both men and women led the singing, and some men were enthusiastic participants. At the same time, several men would also gather outside the temple building, engaged in conversations. By contrast, women who were not participating in the singing were usually in the kitchen area of the temple, making arrangements for the meal that is served at the end of the *satsang*. Women do most of the cooking for the *satsangs*. Thus performing these responsibilities affirms their identities as devout Hindu women. Both boys and girls would also often move in and out of the prayer hall; boys would be engaged in games outside, girls would be engaged in play or conversation in the hallway. In the process of reaffirming Hindu identity through *satsangs*, gender identities are also reaffirmed. The adults reinforce and the children learn the fact that the minutiae of religious practice is primarily women's responsibility, while the organizational tasks, such as making arrangements for major festive occasions, and heading religious organizations is men's responsibility.

The gendered nature of *balvihars*: Children in the *balvihar* (from 5 years to late teens) are divided into three age groups. Especially children in the oldest age group are encouraged to raise topics of concern to them, such as various aspects of Hinduism

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(polytheism, vegetarianism, idol worship), conflicts with parents over issues of dating, arranged marriages, cross-sex friendship, girls' clothing, etc. The discussion leaders attempt to explain parents' viewpoints to the children based on Indian (and Hindu) culture:

> I try to explain to them basically what are the repercussions of that kind of exposure [i.e. revealing clothing such as tank tops and clothes with spaghetti straps], why do we [Indians] not encourage that kind of exposure, why do we insist on being more decently clad, what could happen, especially when they are at this young age where a lot of times, they are not doing things intentionally… And when you talk to them and tell them why are we saying no, I think a lot of times they are willing to see the reason… That's the kind of situation where I think we [Indians] certainly do things differently. I mean it is not that we are totally narrow-minded and we are saying okay, no shorts… Obviously shorts, you know you can't say no to them but… most Indian parents are concerned about overexposure. They would not let their kids expose as much (*Beena*).

Thus the instructors at the *balvihar* seek to reduce conflict between parents and children by explaining the parents' perspectives to the children. In the process, children develop an Indian identity. Both boys and girls learn what it means to be Indian and Hindu, by learning the actual religious and secular practices (for instance, touching elders' feet or other, nonphysical greeting norms instead of hugging) as well as the reasons for the same practices (such greeting norms denote respect for others). However, boys and girls also develop different, gendered identities. For instance, appropriate clothing is important for boys and girls, but girls have the additional responsibility of wearing more Indian clothing, as well as *being* Indian (that is, modest) when wearing western clothing. While both boys and girls receive a religious education, the gendered division of labor among adults in *satsangs* and *balvihars* imparts the message that Hindu women have different responsibilities than Hindu men do; for instance, women maintain their Hindu identity by performing rituals and fasts, while men do so by organizing large-scale religious celebrations and making Indians and Hindus more visible in the local community.

Moreover, in providing cultural explanations for various Indian practices such as dress and greeting norms, the *balvihar* instructors might make it easier for teenagers to

accept their parents' viewpoints, but they also place the weight of a whole community and culture behind these norms. For instance, girls' wearing revealing clothing is not just a matter of the taste of a particular set of parents and extended family, but carries the disapproval of a whole culture behind it. To go against these norms is to thus invite community disapproval. Rebelling against such traditions therefore becomes harder for teenagers. While both boys and girls face these pressures, the gender differences in degree and kind of behaviors that are prohibited, as mentioned in the previous chapter and apparent in the quote above, result in girls facing greater prohibitions.

Activities in the *balvihar* among instructors are also divided by gender. Again, both men and women are involved in the construction and implementation of the *balvihar* curriculum. However, women are more likely to teach arts, crafts, dance and music, while talks and discussions on Hindu mythology, philosophy, Indian history, moral and ethical issues are conducted by women and men. Similarly, in the communities Kurien (1999) studied, women taught most of the *balvihar* classes. Once again, the minutiae of Indian culture are portrayed as women's domain.

The Impact of Gendered Hindu Identity Work

According to Kurien (1999), the fact that women take on a greater share of responsibility for socialization at the family and local community level has its advantages and disadvantages. A major advantage of this increased workload is that it allows women to challenge some of the more traditional images of women in Hinduism. Men's roles as responsible husbands and fathers (who share household chores in the absence of paid help) are emphasized. Girls are encouraged to think for themselves, to pursue higher education and successful careers, and at the same time stay rooted in their cultural traditions (a double burden). In fact this was one of the arguments used against dating by my respondents – that teen years are best spent concentrating on one's education and future career. Women are thus able, within their families and the local community, to recast some of the ideas of ideal womanhood, by portraying women's role as not solely that of nurturing wife and mother but also that of a professional.

A disadvantage of this responsibility is that it increases women's workload and also the stress and doubt about not doing a good job. Moreover, while women are able to expand female roles beyond that of the self-sacrificing wife and mother, this recasting of ideal womanhood takes places within the context of a patriarchal family set up. While women are able to challenge some gender roles, such efforts are, according to Kurien (1999), patriarchal bargains (a term she borrows from Kandiyoti 1988) that add to women's responsibilities. Women's may not be seen solely as wives and mothers but they nevertheless are *primarily* wives and mothers. In other words, they bear the greater burden of domestic labor, the responsibility for keeping the family together, and for socializing children. Their paid employment is secondary to their domestic responsibilities, and in encouraging girls to be career-minded, *balvihar* instructors are passing on a double burden to the second generation of Indian women. Women are not given the option of foregoing family responsibilities in order to be career-oriented single women. On the other hand, while boys are encouraged to be responsible and helpful in their roles as fathers and husbands, they are not encouraged to take on an equal share of these tasks or be *primarily* husbands and fathers. Their domestic responsibilities are subsumed within their economic roles as providers.

Thus, the overall structure of the family is still patriarchal, and immigration laws that prohibit women from employment for the first few years reinforce women's dependence on men. This dependence is often upheld as an example of the great sacrifice that parents make for their children (as was seen in the previous chapter). This sacrifice, and the overarching image of the Hindu woman as ultimately self-effacing, pious, and chaste becomes celebrated in the process of creating an ecumenical Hindu and Indian culture, and the immense diversity in gender relations in India is flattened. As (Kurien 1999: 650) notes, "The idealized family based on traditional gender images from Hindu religion is a central icon in the construction of an American Hinduism."

This is especially evident at the national level, where the leadership of pan-Indian organizations such as the Federation of Hindu Associations consists primarily of upper class, upper caste men (Kurien 1999, 2002). Influenced by the Hindu nationalist

movement in India, these organizations celebrate the great "golden age" of Hinduism (before the successive waves of invasions from Western Asia) and the high position traditionally accorded to women before the repressive gender practices of Islam slowly permeated Hindu society.[53] This does not mean, however that the organizations idealize all possible images of Hindu womanhood at their disposal. Hindu tradition does have numerous examples of obedient, self-effacing wives and mothers who sacrifice everything for their families, especially their husbands. At the same time, it is also one of the few world religions that worships various forms of the Goddess – from benign, peaceful ones (such as Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, and Saraswati, the Goddess of learning) to powerful, violent ones who epitomize *Shakti*, or the female creative force (for example Kali, who is portrayed as wearing a garland of men's severed heads). Indian history also celebrates images of *viranganas*, brave warrior women who have fought to protect their kingdoms. These organizations celebrate Goddess worship as an example of the high position of women in the Hindu tradition, and also take pride in the professional advances Indian immigrant women have made,[54] but it is the benign Goddesses that are celebrated while the various manifestations of *Shakti*, and the *viranganas* are usually ignored (DasGupta and Dasgupta 1996; Kurien 1999). I would like to add that some of the more violent images may also be set aside as a response to the questions and ridicule that Hindus may face from others, for example, the Southern Baptists' portrayal of Hinduism as the "Religion of Darkness" because of the worship of Kali.

When the images of *Shakti* or *viranganas* are used, they are appropriated and placed within the context of the family (for instance, the powerful Goddesses are worshipped within family roles as wives or mothers) to show the gender-egalitarianism of Hindu-Indian culture. This portrayal is constructed to better fit the context of more egalitarian gender relations in the United States and thus is more relevant to the second-generation women. In other words, second generation Hindu women are taught that Hinduism has a tradition of strong, exceptional women who exercised their power for the

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[53] A contentious claim.

[54] The astronaut Kalpana Chawla, who died in the Columbia shuttle disaster, is an example.

benefit of their family, and especially their children (including humans); this power is not to be used for one's selfish interests. Thus, ironically, even the powerful images become means to reinforce patriarchal family structures.

The images are also used to reinforce religious inequality. Hindu nationalist organizations and their manifestations in the United States use the tradition of powerful female Goddesses to point to the superiority of Hinduism over other religions, especially Islam. Sometimes (especially in India) the Goddess imagery is used to mobilize women to fight (sometimes by using violence) against "the enemy," that is non-Hindus, especially Muslims.

Thus doing Hindu-Indian identity work in a new context both offers opportunities to alter some of the gendered expectations as well as places constraints and reinforces gender and religious inequality as a homogeneous ideal is created that flattens out the diversity in India.

Conclusion

As a result of migration to the United States, Hindu identity becomes more salient, and immigrants devise new strategies to maintain this identity and transmit it to their children. Since Indian and Hindu identity are often seen as synonymous, the identity work immigrants do as Indians is often religion-specific, though it is often not recognized as such. At the same time, these identities are gendered. Food habits may become easier or harder to maintain, especially for women, since they are responsible for housework. For some immigrants, food habits take on additional connotations as statements about one's identity and independence. Clothing, especially for women, creates a dilemma, as Indian clothes make them more self-conscious but also become more salient markers of their Hindu identity and therefore presumably a protection against religious profiling. Women's responsibilities for maintaining Hindu practices and socializing children into the tradition increase within the household and at the community level, within the structures created for this purpose. Women are thus able to challenge some of the traditional gender images. However, at the national level, organizations are still

patriarchal and broadcast a homogenized image of ideal Hindu womanhood that places additional burdens on women of the first and second generation.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DOING GENDER, DOING INDIAN
THE RESEARCHER AS SUBJECT AND OBJECT

In this chapter, I focus on the conscious and unconscious identity work I performed during my research. My experiences and interactions with respondents illustrate that identities are neither uniform nor static, but acquire salience based on the context and also shift over time. In addition, the differences in my interactions with men as compared to women highlighted the centrality of gender. My respondents perceived me not just as an Indian or as a woman, but as an Indian woman. In examining my own identity work, I gained additional insight into the process of identity work in general, and the gendered nature of Indian identity work in particular.

Identity Work During the Research Process

The self, a person's image of and awareness about her/himself (Gecas and Burke 1995), is composed of identities or "labels" others and we construct or attach to us (Gecas and Burke 1995; Schwalbe 1996). Since individuals perform numerous roles in society and belong to multiple groups, they possess multiple identities. Individuals regard some identities to be more central than others, based on the context (Stryker and Serpe 1994). Not only do we prioritize certain identities, we also manage them, that is, we seek to project a certain identity to others; this is identity work:

> [A]nything we do, alone or with others, to establish, change, or lay claim to meanings as particular kinds of persons… We do this when we give signs – through dress, speech, demeanor, posture – that tell others who and what we are, how we are likely to behave, and how we expect to be treated (Schwalbe 1996: 105).

During the process of data collection, I engaged in conscious, deliberate identity work to indicate my "Indian-ness" to the participants, so they would consider me an insider, and therefore be willing to disclose thoughts they would otherwise be hesitant to mention to an outsider (for instance, statements critical of mainstream American culture). This does not imply that I was engaging in false pretenses. As a first generation immigrant, my Indian identity is salient. However, like most minorities who have significant contact with the dominant group, I inhabit several worlds, and I foreground or

subsume my Indian identity (to the extent that it is possible to do so, given my physical appearance) based on the context. As I read the transcripts of the interviews and my notes, I realized that I had also engaged in unconscious identity work. My identity work took various forms:

Food

Food became a means of identity work for me in several ways. Consuming the food I was offered often led to discussions with the interviewees about availability of ingredients, cooking styles in India and the United States, effective substitutions (with regard to ingredients and cooking processes), dietary preferences, etc.   These conversations, while providing me with an insight into the culinary identity work of my respondents, were also a way I connected with and did "Indian-ness." Such conversations are common among Indian immigrants, especially among women:

> [Among friends] here, the discussion mostly revolves around food. [Laughs...]. [In India, since I was a professor], it was mostly about college… and problems at home. Here, it's only food… Because here we mostly meet at a potluck, or a get-together in which everyone has been invited to eat, or to teach each other some new dish which we've learnt. The other reason is there everything was open, everyone knew what's happening in each other's family or each other's job status. Here, everyone is of different status; some [are] in business…   [And since many of the women are homemakers] if you talk about [work] they will not like. Here also I have 2 or 3 friends who are doing [an] internship, so when we [talk], we never discuss about food, we discuss about what's happening in the internship, what problems we are facing… But other friends, only food (*Kavita*).

As I read my interview transcripts, I realized that I had had "food conversations" with men too. However, my gender is what prompted these conversations. The men were informing me, a woman, about their skills at a task that is seen as women's (and hence my) work, and which they are not expected to know much about. Had I been a man, the men would not have bragged about their cooking skills. The conversations then would likely have revolved more around sports rather than food.[55] In the process of these conversations, therefore, both respondents and I did gendered identity work.

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[55] In one case, where a male respondent and I established a great rapport, we did have extended conversations about sports and politics.

Clothing

I dressed in Indian clothing for almost every interview. I wore *salwar kurtas*, my usual choice for summer, but in this case it was a deliberate choice, as I wanted to foreground my Indian identity, and counter my non-Indian-ness, arising from my accent and from my being married to a White American (in situations where people did know this fact). The conscious choice I made to wear Indian clothes parallels the choice the women in my study are faced with everyday. The difference was that Indian clothing is a means for me to portray my first-generation Indian identity, which my changing accent and marital choice may not make evident. As I compared this identity work on my part with my respondents' comments, I realized that as recent immigrants, they do not have to "prove" their Indian-ness. Their dilemma is over whether to foreground this identity (and wearing Indian clothing makes many of them self-conscious) or not. Men do not face this choice. As a man, I would not have been faced with this choice, whatever the nationality and ethnic identity of my spouse.

Moreover, I was being Indian not just by wearing an Indian dress but also by being modest. Like many of my female respondents, my clothing is conservative (though unlike many of them, I do not identify it as a necessarily Indian characteristic, nor do I see it as important for second generation Indian immigrant women to emulate such "modesty"). On their part, meanwhile, some respondents admitted to putting on *bindis* because I was visiting them, thus engaging in conscious identity work for my benefit. In the process, they also reaffirmed my Indian identity – since an Indian woman was visiting them, they wanted to look Indian.

Every time I walked into an Indian home, I took off my shoes. This is a common practice in several parts of India, and I did it out of habit. This established my Indian credentials; none of the interviewees commented on it, because they did not find it remarkable that I would think to do so.

Language

During the initial contact with respondents (which usually took place over the phone), I tried to tone down the Americanisms in my speech and revive my Indian accent,

especially if the respondent had a pronounced Indian accent. Thus, it is not just through the use of language that one is Indian; one can also be an Indian while speaking English. Interviews were conducted in English, but if it appeared that the respondent preferred to speak in Hindi, we often switched to Hindi.

At the start of the interview, questions revolved around the respondents' education and employment, and region of origin in India. This provided me with numerous opportunities to establish rapport with the interviewees. If they were from South India, and especially from the state of Andhra Pradesh, I would mention my brother-in-law, who is from the same state. This use of family connections was not just an attempt on my part to establish rapport and ease the interview process (especially with non-Hindi speakers, with whom a shared language was not a link); it was also a way of doing Indian-ness. Discussing extended family and friends, and establishing links is a common way to "break the ice" in India. It helps establish a more cordial, informal, and perhaps even longer-term relationship. I was thus not just being a researcher but also an Indian in the process. My informal initial conversation with one couple led to the discovery that their son was a colleague of a relative of mine, and this link provided a means for us to continue the conversation and the contact beyond the interview.

My Indian-ness was also acknowledged by respondents when they made comments such as "as you know, in India," or remarked that I would understand certain things as I was also from India:

> I'm a [… caste]. Because you are from India, so you'll understand [what that term means] (Amit).

> Sometimes I feel like [as an immigrant] you're left in between both worlds, you're neither all the way American, neither all the way Indian… *I don't know if you have ever felt that way but I often feel sometimes that I don't belong here or there* [emphasis added] (*Renu*).

> You don't have freedom Meeta, that's the main reason… I never wanted to live in a joint family. Never. Because I feel that there is some sort of restriction that prevents you from doing what you want to. *Don't you think* [emphasis added]? (*Sangeeta*).

I think all Indian [women] do the same thing as far as I know, cooking for their husbands [even if they are in paid employment]… *For example, even you. You cook at night Indian food right, every day*?… [emphasis added]. [I]t might depend [on] what your husband likes. Suppose if he had liked Indian food everyday, you would have cooked Indian food right? (*Rekha*).

In India, if you see, human life has no value literally I felt. You see your servants, the way people talk to each other, everything is in terms of money. *Don't you think?* [emphasis added] You can't relate with your servants much. Okay, we try to talk nicely, but I've seen how people behave with them. (*Lakshmi*)

At times, I unconsciously identified myself with the interviewees by remarking on sights, sounds, or smells in their home that reminded me of India (such as the sound of a pressure cooker in the background during the first interview) and using the pronoun "we" when referring to a particular practice:

Sangeeta: No girl born and brought up here will massage her papa's head or legs at night. [My daughter] does that every night… At least Papa's definitely, sometimes even her grandmother's. If [asked] then both the girls will walk on her legs [to relieve pain].
Meeta: Oh, they walk on the legs *just as we used to* [emphasis added]?
Sangeeta: Ya. So that I think will definitely in the future help me and her out in every way.

In some of the quotes above, respondents were able to identify with me because I was a woman (for instance, Sangeeta's and Rekha's quotes). It is possible that I would have bonded with male respondents on different issues had I been a man. However, even though I came to the United States for better educational/employment opportunities like many of the men did (rather than follow a spouse), this shared experience did not become a way for us to build a rapport. In most of my interviews, therefore, I felt that my gender was much more important than any of my other identities. I was an Indian immigrant woman, and the men and women reacted to me as they would to other Indian women, rather than viewing me primarily as a researcher, a professional, or a fellow Indian (irrespective of gender). Thus, to talk of ethnic identity in isolation is erroneous.

Interaction

There was a difference in the way I interacted with respondents, depending on their level of informality, and especially their gender. When talking with women, I would

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often sit on the same couch, or even on the floor in front of them. When seated at a dining table, I would put one foot up on my chair, and some of the women did the same thing. All these stances implied a level of informality in the interaction, and familiarity with the body language of women having a conversation in India. This strategy was partly deliberate, since I did want the women to feel comfortable, and realize that I was at ease and wanted a conversation with them, and was not there to "INTERVIEW" them. It was also a way for me to be comfortable; most interviews were over an hour long, and sitting on the floor allowed me to shift positions and move around. Women would often walk into the kitchen to make me tea and snacks or a meal, and I would follow them there, usually pausing the interview (but carrying on a conversation on a wide range of topics).

My interactions with men were different. I never sat on the floor in front of them. The men and I sat on different couches, and if seated on the same couch, we would be at either end. At the table, we would sit facing each other, rather than side by side, as I sometimes did with the women (there was one exception, where the male interviewee and I established a good rapport). Usually the women (and children) were around when I interviewed the men (since these interviews took place during the evenings or over week-ends), and they would walk in and out of the room during the course of the interview. In some cases, the wives were away (usually for short periods of time). I was often conscious of this fact, but it led to some discomfort only in one instance. I had gone to interview a male respondent and his wife was away when I arrived (she walked in part-way through the interview). Not only did we sit on different couches, we also sat almost at opposite ends of the room. I was acutely conscious of this, because I had interviewed the wife a few days earlier, and she had emphatically stated that one of the (admirable) characteristics of Indian culture was that women did not sit close to unrelated men.

Besides body language and interpersonal spacing, there was also a difference in the types of questions the women and men had for me. Both men and women wanted to know how long I had been in the United States etc., but women were more likely to ask me personal questions, such as whether I was married, how long I had been married,

whether I had any children, (and in some cases, I felt obliged to explain why I didn't have any, as I would have to similar acquaintances in India). This questioning was another form of identity work. Sometimes Indians acquire such personal information about each other right away. However, such questioning takes places within and not across gender lines. Men would therefore be hesitant to ask women such personal question unless they were much older than the women.

My respondents and I were thus "doing" a gendered Indian-ness in these interactions. Through our informal conversations and demeanor, the women and I reaffirmed each other's Indian identity. In consciously maintaining a distance between the male interviews and myself, I was being the "good" Indian woman. As a non-Indian, I would have been allowed more leeway in terms of my dress and demeanor. At the same time, as a non-Indian or a man, I would not have had similar access to and informal conversation with the women.

Negotiating Two Identities

There was one aspect of my life I deliberately tried not to reveal to my respondents (unless asked directly), and that was my marriage to a White American. My main concern was that respondents would not open up to me and discuss their views frankly (for instance, they could possibly hesitate to be critical of India and the United States). My reservations about doing so were borne out by some respondents' reactions to me when they found this fact out. In a couple of instances, the interviewees' attitude towards me changed subtly. At the start of the interview, one couple was very welcoming and said that they had expected my husband to accompany me and join them for a meal. However, when they found out, as I was leaving, that my husband was not Indian, their manner cooled a bit, and when I met them a few days later at a community event, they were not very friendly. In another instance, a respondent whom I had started to interview (but couldn't finish the interview since we ran out of time) saw my husband and me at a community event. When I tried to reschedule the interview, she expressed surprise at the fact that I was married to a non-Indian, and said she had numerous questions for me. However, after repeated attempts to reschedule the interview over the next two months, I

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gave up. The respondent was a very busy woman, but I was left wondering whether the revelation of this aspect of my life had anything to do with my failure to finish the interview. In expressing her surprise at my non-Indian husband, the respondent did reaffirm my Indian-ness. Indians usually assume that extremely westernized/urbanized (and therefore not very Indian) women or second-generation Indian women marry non-Indians, and therefore her surprise indicated that she did not expect someone like me, who was very Indian, to have done so. There are gender differences in these assumptions as well. Since it is expected that women adapt to the culture of their husbands, my Indian-ness came as a surprise. Indian men who marry non-Indian women are expected to incorporate their wives into Indian culture, and their Indian-ness is not viewed as suspect or surprising.

Not all respondents distanced themselves when they learned about my non-Indian husband. Some of them did express the apprehension that they might have said something offensive, and I reassured them to the contrary. Other interviewees knew, before the interview, that my husband was not an Indian. Nevertheless, they did not hesitate to express their views. For instance, one woman said that Indian men were better husbands because they were more responsible; others were unhesitatingly critical of various aspects of the culture and ways of life in the United States. However, it is possible that they may have kept certain views (for example, on inter-religious/inter-racial marriages) to themselves.

Conclusion: Identity as a Contextual Process

I found myself (consciously and unconsciously) foregrounding and emphasizing my Indian identity more emphatically when participants knew about my marriage than I did for other respondents. While I did this to establish a rapport with them, this points to the fact that identity is not static or uniform but contextual. In situations where I perceived my Indian-ness to be suspect (and therefore more salient) I did more identity work. My respondents' identity work too reflects how the salience of ethnic identity shifts according to context. Their conscious attempts to maintain and transmit Hindu-Indian culture and religion within their homes, their involvement with *satsangs* and

balvihars, their pride in their children's Indian-ness reflect the salience of their ethnic identity in the United States. The need for such efforts does not arise in India where everyone around them is an Indian. In that context, regional and/or caste identities become more salient.

My study participants' understandings about what it means to be Indian made me wonder about what I define as being Indian. It led me to examine my identity work, and see identity as a *process*, rather than as fixed or static. Over the years in the United States, I have started doing more conscious Indian identity work: I do a lot of guest lectures in college classes on India, wear Indian clothes (including *bindis*) more often, watch Indian films and listen to Indian music much more than I ever did in India, and participate in community-level activities to a greater extent. Some of this is, of course, facilitated by the easy availability of Indian goods in the United States today. On the other hand, as I spend more time in the United States, I do find that my attitudes and views are becoming increasingly different from those of many friends and family in India. The external markers of Indian identity that I use indicate that I have become more comfortable with my Indian identity in the new context. At the same time, I have become increasingly uncomfortable with some aspects of Indian-ness that most of my respondents regarded as essential to being Indian, such as strong extended family ties and especially living with parents. My identification of Indian-ness with secular ideals has also become stronger as the Hindu nationalist movement has gained ground in India. However, these differences have not led me to question my Indian-ness. Rather, I have re-defined Indian-ness for myself to highlight some aspects and ignore others, much as my respondents seem to do as they move to the United States (for instance, their redefinitions of their identity as Indian sons/ daughters-in-law, etc.). Examining the shift in my definition of Indian-ness helped me understand the process for my respondents. In addition, the centrality of my gender in my interactions with respondents has proven that ethnic identity is gendered.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

The goal of my research was to explore the gender similarities and differences in the identity work in which first-generation Asian Indian immigrants engage, and to explore any shifts, due to migration, in what it means to be an Indian man/woman in the United States. My primary research question was: What does being an Indian mean for first-generation Asian Indian immigrants and how do these meanings vary by gender? To understand this issue better, I asked two secondary questions: First, what identity work do Asian Indian immigrants do to maintain their ethnic identity? Is this identity work gendered? Second, is Indian immigrants' understanding of themselves as a man/woman in the United States different from their definition of being a man/woman in India? In what ways have their definitions changed? What, in their view, is the reason for any shift? Exploring gender differences, I believed, would point to the problems in the pluralistic perspective that celebrates diversity and the retention of cultural traditions by immigrants without critically analyzing the role of power and inequality within immigrant groups. Examining identity work would also reveal as erroneous the assumption many Americans hold that the excessive emphasis on pluralism has led to a decline in assimilation (by recent immigrants of color into White American society).

Below, I present the similarities and differences in the ways first generation Indian immigrants define and manifest their ethnic identity along gender lines. The differences were especially evident in the areas of food production and consumption, clothing, definitions of family responsibilities, and performance of religious rituals. The gendered nature of identity work was related to the differential pressures women and men experience to assimilate as well as to retain their ethnic identities. These differences demonstrate that pluralists need to look critically at not just differences between ethnic groups but also at differences within groups.

Gender Differences in Identity Work

One of the avenues for being Indian is expressing Indian identity through food consumption and production. Both women and men miss particular culinary styles, ingredients, and the wide choices of Indian cuisines available when eating out in India.

However, they manifest a gendered ethnic identity through food. While both men and women engage in consuming Indian food, it is women's responsibility to produce Indian dishes on a regular basis. When men engage in this task, they do it as a means of helping their wives, or to indulge their hobby, but not as a routine task that is their responsibility. In this sense, it is not just the case that Indian women cook but, in doing so, they preserve and transmit Indian culture, and also transmit gendered messages to their children. Moreover, in vegetarian households, women have the added responsibility of navigating a culture where vegetarianism is rare and ingredients are often unfamiliar, to ensure that their families have nutritious Indian vegetarian food available. They are also responsible for socializing their children to not just eat but also appreciate Indian food. Food is therefore much more a part of women's everyday life and central in their interactions with other Indian women. This reinforces the view that women are primarily concerned about household matters (and not about the larger world of sports or politics), and socializes young girls and boys into separate, gendered Indian identities.

There are significant differences in men and women's clothing in urban India; men wear western clothes on a regular basis, while women wear primarily Indian clothes (though this has been changing in recent years). This difference is carried over to the United States. Men continue to wear western clothes, while women face a dilemma. While Indian clothing and other accoutrements of dress are an importance source of their Indian, and Hindu identity, and can be a protection against religious profiling, it also makes them more visible and self-conscious. Many women in my study therefore gave up wearing Indian clothing in non-Indian settings, but did miss Indian clothes, especially saris. In addition, marriage markers, an important manifestation of Hindu-Indian, gendered identity, add to the dilemma since some women are hesitant and even fearful about giving these up (in case such disavowal is inauspicious for their marriage). They therefore devise creative ways to maintain these markers while ensuring that they are not visible to others. For instance, they pin their marital necklaces to the underside of shirts, and apply vermilion powder in a dot under their hair, etc. There are no parallel marital

markers for men, who are spared this dilemma but are still "Indian" men. Thus marital status is not an important part of manhood either in India or the United States.

Another aspect of clothing that is linked to identity is the issue of "revealing" clothing. Indian women are expected to be Indian not just by wearing Indian clothes, but also by wearing western clothing that is non-revealing. Indian women's bodies have to be covered and presented in a non-sexualized manner, and a violation of this norm is a negative reflection not just on the individual and her family but also the community, and culture as a whole. For boys, the concern about clothing is linked to its style (most parents had an aversion to baggy clothing) and price, none of which are concerns related to ethnic or gender identity[56]. Women's bodies are thus the sites where the ideals and values of a nation and religion are manifested. Again, as with food and other aspects of clothing, Indian women's identity work is not just an individual activity but representative of the larger community.

The family is a central institution in Indian society, and an important site of identity work for my respondents, who saw the strong ties they had with family members, and the low rate of divorce and remarriage among Indians, as characteristics that set them apart from Americans. Indian men and women do similar forms of identity work, in that they are caregivers for other family members, socialize their children, respect their elders, are committed to and sacrifice for the family. However, all these tasks are gendered. For men, care giving involves providing for family members financially, performing ritual tasks, negotiating with bureaucracies, and decision-making. For men, therefore, their family responsibilities are intricately tied to their paid employment. Women's care giving tasks involve housework, nursing, and socialization, and their paid employment is an added responsibility.

The roles in which several of these tasks are performed also vary for men and women. For men, the central role vis-à-vis the extended family is that of the son, while

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[56] It is possible that my respondents associated baggy clothes with "gangs" or Black culture, and thus were averse to it. However, none of the people critical of baggy clothing made any references to the above groups.

for women it is that of the daughter-in-law. Migration has an impact on men and women's performance of these roles. I illustrate the gendered impact of migration on this and other aspects of identity work below.

The Gendered Impact of Migration

The various manifestations of Indian identity such as food, clothing, language, fulfillment of family responsibilities and so on were important for Indian immigrants while they were in India, but they take on a new salience in the United States. They become markers of identity because they can no longer be taken for granted.

Distance from the extended family makes it harder for men to perform some of their roles as sons but facilitates others, especially providing economic resources for their natal family, while distance from the extended family relieves women of most of their responsibilities towards their in-laws. This is often a source of relief for women, but makes some of their tasks towards their nuclear family, especially childcare and socialization of children, harder.

Migration makes men's and women's roles within the nuclear family, that is, their roles as spouse and parent, more salient. Men spend more time with their family, and take on some household chores. Women's domestic labor burdens both increase (as they have greater responsibilities here in the absence of domestic help and other female family members, and due to new tasks such as driving children around) and decrease (through the use of household appliances and other conveniences). However, none of these bring about a change in the meaning of what it means to be an Indian man or an Indian woman. Men are still the economic providers of the family, and their additional tasks are defined as part of being a provider. Women are still the primary caregivers, and their paid employment, if any, is secondary to their home-making tasks.

Women's roles as wives and mothers become even more central to their identities as Indian women. For many of my female respondents, migration actually increased their dependency on their husbands, since visa regulations restricted them from paid employment and even further education for a few years. Women gave up not only their

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paid employment but also thereby the social networks that supported their identities as workers (primarily professionals). Social networks are crucial for identity management:

> Participation in a social network generates social support for a particular identity claim. Based on the degree to which one's membership in a group category is recognized and accepted by others, this larger identity may be reinforced or, alternatively, devalued and eventually abandoned, depending on the networks in which one participates… Networks that prove not to support a chosen (or assigned) social category will generate pressure for change in some form (Deaux and Martin 2003: 107).

The social networks that women became a part of after migration reinforced their roles as *Indian* wives and mothers, and not as professionals; the notion of the Indian woman as self-sacrificing and as primarily a homemaker is reinforced in the absence of networks that support women's identities as professionals. Thus macro factors such as immigration regulations and the patriarchal structure of Indian families that prioritize men's employment over women's influence the process of identity management.

For my respondents, nuclear family relationships became more central due to migration. Migration bolstered not just their gendered role identities as husband/wife and father/mother but also provided them a context to strengthen their social identities as Indian men and women. My respondents often compared their roles as spouse and parent with the same roles as performed, in their perception, by Americans, and attributed the differences to culture. They defined being a committed spouse and parent as being Indian. Their interactions in the interpersonal context thus strengthened two inter-related social identities – gender and ethnicity.

It is not just their Indian identity that becomes salient for my respondents; their Hindu identity also comes to the forefront. Indian Hindu immigrants interact socially with other Indian Hindus. To socialize children, Indian immigrants create new institutions, such as *satsangs* and *balvihars*. Indian immigrants therefore "do" Hinduism in new and unique ways. Interpersonal interactions in these institutions reinforce their identities as Hindus and help their children acquire gendered, Hindu identities. While these efforts help with community formation and socialization of children, they also make local organizations more amenable to the message of Hindu Nationalist organizations that

perpetuate and in fact advocate inequality at two levels, inequality between Hindus and non-Hindus (especially Muslims) and between men and women. Even the powerful female figures from Hindu mythology and Indian history that these organizations use to highlight the superiority of Hindu religion (as being more gender egalitarian than other religions, a claim that is useful in the United States) are actually subverted to promote religious and gender inequality.

Migration increases women's responsibilities as religious functionaries and socialization agents, and therefore their opportunities to present more gender egalitarian messages but the gendered division of religious tasks within the local organizations reinforces men's and women's separate (and unequal) religious responsibilities. Men's and women's commitment to and performance of these roles strengthen their social identities as Hindu men and women.

To Be or Not to Be (Assimilated)?

In debating the extent to which pluralism does or does not hinder assimilation, the literature assumes that any differences that might accrue in this regard are due to race/ethnicity; the ethnicity paradigm ignores gender differences within groups. By contrast, however, I found gender differences in the pressures and opportunities (from within the immigrant community and mainstream society) to assimilate.

The gender differences in India, and the gendered nature of migration to the United States lead to greater expectations of assimilation by men and also facilitate their assimilation. Men's employment is the major impetus for migration. All the men in my study were employed and therefore expected to assimilate. In India, employment in professions where English is the primary means of communication, and the every-day use of western clothing makes assimilation easier for men.

Women, on the other hand, have a harder time assimilating, and deal with contradictory forces. Their increased household responsibilities, including grocery shopping, yard-work, transporting children to school, sports, and other events, meeting with teachers etc. require them to learn new tasks (such as driving etc.) as well as be familiar with English and with some of the norms of U.S. society. In these very public

spheres, being different (especially as manifested through dress) makes them very visible and exposes them to potential discrimination by non-Indians, especially Americans. On the other hand, their responsibilities as primary upholders and transmitters of Indian culture require them to *be* more Indian. Women thus face dilemmas, such as whether to change their clothing styles, whether to encourage their children to start eating meat, and the like.

Studying the identity work done by Indian immigrants reveals the gendered nature of the *process* of assimilation. That is, the immigrants in my study are assimilating, but at different rates, and in different areas, based on gender. The changes in men and women's responsibilities affect the extent to which they are expected to and can assimilate. The differences in men and women's identity work also indicate that different aspects of Indian culture hold different significance for women and men. Thus, it is incorrect to speak of a singular Indian identity, since this work, and the related identity is inherently gendered. The multiculturalists' uncritical advocacy of diversity does not take into account the pressures that men face to assimilate. It also ignores the fact that women face pressure to maintain ethnic identity (whether they want to do so or not).

Research on immigrant experiences that does not take gender into account is thus incomplete. Both the assimilationist and the pluralist models assume that men and women experience the process of migration and adaptation to the new context in similar ways, and that the two processes are mutually contradictory and cannot coexist. In advocating assimilation for all, the proponents of this model ignore the pressures that women in minority groups may face to preserve and pass on their culture to the next generation. Ironically, in advocating diversity, pluralists ignore the pressure that women face to maintain and transmit their culture to their children (sometimes against their will). These models therefore need to be revised to pay greater attention to the varied experiences within groups, based on gender, and other identities such as age and social class.

Conclusion: Linking Micro Processes with Macro Concerns

Examining Indian immigrants' identity work reveals the links between a micro-sociological concern – the social psychological process of identity management in interpersonal settings – and the macro-sociological debate about the gendered outcomes of migration for immigrants who are racial/ethnic minorities. My study contributes to both areas of study.

The social psychological research on identity has traditionally maintained a distinction between role identity and social identity. Recent work, such as by Deaux and Martin (2003), offers a model that integrates the two types of identities via the contexts in which identity processes occur. However, this model looks at one social identity at a time. My research shows that role performances in interpersonal settings can be used to manage (bolster or downplay) multiple social identities. For instance, my respondents used their parent and spouse roles to strengthen their *gendered ethnic* identities. My study thus points to the need for models that take multiple identities, at multiple levels, into account. My study has looked at two social identities – gender and ethnicity. A third crucial identity, that intersects with these identities, is social class. All my respondents were middle class. Future studies need to examine class differences in how immigrants manage their gendered ethnic identities.

My study also contributes to the literature in ethnic studies by exploring the *processes* of assimilation and pluralism as they occur at the interpersonal level. It investigates how individuals manage gendered ethnic identities in their day-to-day lives. Examining the processes of adaptation will help us better understand how changes in the outcomes of migration occur.

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Education

Ph.D., Sociology, May, 2004
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA
Dissertation: Gender and Ethnic Identity: Asian Indians in the United States

M.S., Sociology, May 1995
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA
Thesis: Wife Abuse Among Indians in the United States

Graduate Study, Sociology, 1991-1992
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

B.A., Political Science, 1991
St. Xavier's College, Calcutta University, Calcutta, India
Minors: Economics and History

Teaching Interests

Race and Ethnicity
Gender and Development
Sociology of Gender
Social Stratification
Introductory Sociology

Research Interests

Ethnic identity
Gender and immigration
Relations between Asian Indians and other racial/ethnic groups in the United States
Domestic violence

<u>Teaching Experience</u>

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Roanoke College, 2002-Present

Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Roanoke College, 1998-2002
Introduction to Sociology (SOCI 101)
Minority Peoples/ Race and Ethnicity (SOCI 224)
Sociology of the Family (SOCI 226)
Sociology of Gender (SOCI 229)

Instructor
Dating, Marriage, and Divorce (SOC 2014), Department of Sociology, Virginia Tech, Summer 1998
Individual and Society (SOC 2304), Department of Sociology, Virginia Tech, Summer 1995

Graduate Assistant, Department of Sociology, Virginia Tech, 1992-1998
Sole responsibility for *Gender Relations* (SOC 3014), Spring 1997, Spring 1996, Fall 1995
Prepared teaching materials, prepared, administered, and graded exams, advised students, placed course material on electronic reserve for *Dating, Marriage, and Divorce* (SOC 2014), *Social Organization and Social Problems* (SOC 2004), *Introduction to Women's Studies* (WS 1824), *Women and Work* (SOC 5624), *Research Methods* (SOC 5214), *Sociology of Religion* (SOC 4024), *Sociology of Aging* (SOC 3714), *Minority Group Relations* (SOC 2024), and *Introduction to Social Anthropology* (SOC 1014), Fall 1992 - Spring 1995, Fall 1996, Fall 1997, Spring 1998.

<u>Research Experience</u>
Qualitative interviewing
Dissertation on the gendered nature of Asian Indian ethnic identity in the U.S. involved semi-structured interviews with 38 immigrants, 2002-03.
Master's thesis on wife abuse among Asian Indians in the U.S. involved semi-structured interviews with 28 women, 1994

Graduate Assistant, Department of Sociology, Virginia Tech, 1992-1998
Conducted archival research on various topics, Fall 1992 - Spring 1998
Translated and transcribed taped interviews from several dialects of Hindi to English, Fall 1992 - Summer 1995
Analyzed contents and coded data from newspapers - Summer 1993

Publications

> Mehrotra, Meeta. 1999. "The Social Construction of Wife Abuse: The Experiences of Asian Indian Women in the United States." *Violence Against Women* Vol. 5(6): 619-640.

> Mehrotra, Meeta. 1996. Review of *The Construction of Religious* Boundaries*: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition,* by Harjot Oberoi, in Review of Religious Research. Vol. 37(3): 281-282.

> Mehrotra, Meeta, and Bradley R. Hertel. 1996. "Authenticity in Hinduism: Who, What, How?" Pp. 229-250 in Lewis F. Carter (ed.), The Issue of Authenticity in the Study of Religions, Vol. 6 of David G. Bromley (ed.), *Religion and the Social Order*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Presentations

> Mehrotra, Meeta. "Triple Outsiders: Ethnic Identity and the Experiences of First Generation Indian Immigrants in the United States." Paper presented at the 55th. annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, New York City, NY, March, 2003.

> Luff, Tracy L., Meeta Mehrotra, and Kristi L. Hoffman. "Service Learning as a Tool for Developing Sociological Imagination." Paper presented at the 66th. annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society, New Orleans, LA, March, 2003

> Ruiz, Florinda, R. Pettit, Monica Capra, Meeta Mehrotra, and Joshua Rubongoya. "International Faculty and Staff." Panel presentation, Conference on Globalizing Education at Liberal Arts Colleges, Salem, VA, November 2001.

> Hertel, Bradley and Meeta Mehrotra. "The Ongoing Synthesis of the Western and Hindu Calendars In India." Workshop on Time and Society in Modern Asia, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen. June, 1998.

> Assar, Nandini and Meeta Mehrotra. "Impacts of Race/Ethnicity, Class and Gender in the Interactions Between the Researcher and Participants." Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, Toronto. August, 1997.

> Mehrotra, Meeta, S. Patel, and Susan Shome. "Globalizing the Curriculum: Women's Voices from India." Panel presentation, Virginia Women's Studies Association Conference, Roanoke, VA. September, 1996.

> Mehrotra, Meeta. "A Feminist Examination of Wife Abuse: The Simultaneous Experience of Disciplines." Annual Meetings of the Midwest Sociological Society, Chicago, IL. April, 1996.

Mehrotra, Meeta. "Immigration Status and Wife Abuse: The Experiences of Indian Women." Annual Meetings of Sociologists for Women in Society, Washington DC. August, 1995.

Grants
Recipient of a $2000 Curriculum Development Grant from the Faculty Development Committee, Roanoke College, to develop a new course titles "Gender and Development."

Co-recipient (with Greg Weiss and Bill Hill) of a $2000 grant from Fintel Library, Roanoke College, to purchase materials for teaching about Native Americans, Spring 2002

Co-recipient (with Bradley Nash) of a $2000 grant from Fintel Library, Roanoke College, to purchase videos for Introduction to Sociology courses, Spring 2001

Professional Service
Reviewer

Family Relations
Gender and Society

Other Service
Member, Faculty Advisory Panel on International Education, Roanoke College
Conducted focus group discussion on issues of diversity within the History Department at Virginia Tech, Fall 1997
Member of organizing committee, Virginia Women's Studies Association Conference, Fall 1996

Professional Memberships
American Sociological Association, 1992-present
Sociologists for Women in Society, 1993-present
Association for Asian Studies, 1998-2004 (intermittent)

Community Service
Association for India's Development -- Blacksburg Chapter
Secretary, 1998-1999
Project Coordinator, 1999-2000

Languages
Hindi
Bengali