Human Capital and Resilience: An analysis of the Identity Issues of Asian Indian American Women in the Diaspora

In the contemporary globalized world, the effects of immigration on diasporic Indian women from Asia is examined here to investigate if the human capital they accrued helps them in their resilience, even as they negotiate their daily lives in the United States. The formal education these diasporic women acquired in India before they immigrated to the United States, along with the higher education they acquired in the host country constitutes the human capital. Given the dimensions of human diversity, how do they deal with the interface between ancient societal norms in relation to global adaptation? Does the combined effect of cultural transmission by dual institutions of family and school play a part in enhancing resilience when women negotiate their multifaceted role-playing? This inquiry explores the prejudices experienced by women in light of gender, race and globalization and analyzes the manner how they contend with the new homeland and the newly constructed identity.

My ethnography describes the stories of some immigrant women from the Indian subcontinent, and their narration illustrates the socio-cultural continuities and the endurances in the lives of these women as they negotiate a space for themselves in the Indian diaspora in America. The hyphenated identity of the Asian-Indian-American woman immigrant has developed because of constant collaboration and communication, providing the interface between the capitals they accrue, which can be human, financial, social, cultural and political components, against the backdrop of those that they already had, for instance, the values disseminated by religion, family and community life.

The Indian Diaspora has been a worldwide phenomenon for centuries. Yet, looking through the diasporic lens at the worldwide dispersal of populations it is evident that the recent expansion of the Indian diaspora is a social transformation of global significance. The dynamics of this transformation presents a thought provoking and stimulating paradigm shift as to the reasons for this approach for international immigrants. The question also arises as to how these individuals cope with or survive in the new diaspora, and eventually form individual identities, which might or might not correspond with the old traditional identities that Indian immigrants formed as bonded or indentured labor. However, there is a dearth of scholarly studies as not much has been chronicled about the socio-cultural history of immigrants from India, whether men or women. There were many impediments as the Asian Indians took their initial journey. The diasporic phenomenon of migration and the upheaval from one's roots to an unknown, alien foreign territory laced by a multiplicity of issues. Adjusting to cultural differences and conforming to the new norms was the first obstacle, compounded with financial problems and

socio-economic hurdles. Diferencial treatment of gender and preservation of class hierarchies even in a foreign land and the over-riding persistent quest of attaining upward mobility became prominent.

The trans-nationality of the Diaspora has been focused on in many studies (Nesterovych, Volodymyr (2013) where Diaspora is defined as a minority ethnic group of migrant origin and settled in a foreign land (that) maintains its continuity as a community. It also maintains sentimental or material links with its land of origin. In sharp contrast, Hintzen (2004) defines as "In the final analysis, "diasporic identity is a stand taken by those who are excluded from the modern space on racial grounds, in making claims of belonging by tracing their acquisition of modern attributes to origin, and racially defined homelands". So clearly, some scholars focus on the trans-nationality of the diasporic phenomenon, while others focus on the immigration process itself.

Social history of women's migration to the United States:

Post 1965, the immigration process to the United States consisted mostly of men but then their women and children followed. In her study, Purkayastha, (2005) states that the arrival of Asian Indian women were under different conditions. The economic prosperity of the Indian American community has been deliberated upon however, the history of immigrants from India as a collective group with socio-cultural issues has not been discussed. While the financial and political history of immigration from India is replete with stories of professionals and entrepreneurs who migrated, women's issues were not prominent. History was pulsating with his stories, but her stories were never told. There exists a paucity of literature about the lives of the Asian Indian immigrant women in the diaspora. There is no reference either about their coping mechanisms in the alien socio-cultural milieu that they found themselves in, or of the educational achievements and professional skills. In this study, the tales narrated by these Asian Indian immigrant women chronicle the way they chose to rise beyond the initial experiences to charter their own paths.

For these immigrant women, queries about the validity and authenticity of their homeland, and their very existence arises when inquiries like 'where are you from' questions the legitimacy of their foundation, in a sense, implying rootlessness. According to Srinivasan (2001), this might result in a loss of self-assurance and self-confidence for the immigrant women, coupled with the fear of never replying adequately. South Asian women immigrants have always faced the persistent question regarding the identification, definition and clarification of their characteristics and attributes. Some women declare themselves as both Indian and American, but this is a recurrent theme and along with the relentless questioning of her identity and homeland, leads her again to question her own self. Bhatia (2007) contends that in the period following the initial immigration of professionals to the United States, the first generation, qualified, middle-class Indians transformed into "people of color". However, a contradictory view argues that Asian Indian

Americans are no more the marginalized minorities of yesteryears. They have now created an identity for themselves that goes beyond those descriptive adjectives.

Methodology

This is an investigation to examine the resilience of these immigrant Indian women in integrating in new cultural contexts, and explores the challenges experienced by women in light of their gender, race and ethnicity, globalization, and the diverse aspects and the different tones of their unique cultural nuances as immigrants. It conveys new ways of thinking about and imagining the concept of culture and identity in the diaspora, as exhibited in the Indian diasporic scene. In an effort to encapsulate the culture as a whole and to write about the group, an exploratory ethnographic study was conducted. Through an examination of the narratives and practices in the daily lives of these women, it was a quest to cognize, recognize and fathom how these individuals socialize and mobilize the resources.

I am an Asian Indian woman in the Diaspora and hence, I am aware that my subjective stance as a researcher has blended with the objective factual circumstance. I am not a bystander in the study, and I am sensitive to the responsibilities of conducting such a study. As an ethnographer and participant observer, I had to delve deep into the psyche of the women in the community to explore their core beliefs, their usage of language, cultural notions and the subsequent changes in their behavior or perceptions as they found themselves in a transformed context. I found that the interaction with the women that I interviewed contributed to my own learning about the hyphenated Asian-Indian–American community, and my subjective prejudice is to be considered even as I study the women.

This qualitative study validates and further tries to discover how these issues regarding the multiple, sometimes fractured and hyphenated identity and the all-pervading questions of ‘Am I Indian’, ‘Am I American’ or ‘Am I Both’ and ‘In what way am I both’ are experienced and articulated by Asian Indian women. Through a triangulation of data sources: survey, case histories, and interviews - my intention was to capture the portraits of the Asian Indian immigrant women.

This study is part of an ongoing investigation that I am conducting over the last two years. For this inquiry, I studied twenty-one women of Asian Indian origin who completed a survey and then were individually interviewed regarding their experiences about migrating to the United States. Their interviews were then transcribed, interpreted and the findings were examined from a cultural perspective. This was a purposive sampling as the women were mostly educated; some of them had professional careers and mostly did not belong to disadvantaged backgrounds. The time elapse from the time that they had migrated from India to the United States ranged from twelve to twenty-four years. The age range was between thirty-five to sixty years.

While conceptualizing this study, for some time now, I have been an integral part of this immigrant community. My interactions have resulted in a dialog about their day-to day negotiations and living the suburban American life in some of the New York and San Francisco area neighborhoods. This interaction has further led me to be involved with the cultural aspects of the community, and I am a witness to the artistic scenario of the Indian subcontinent, reconstructed here as it plays out and blends in, both in the New York and the San Francisco area cultural scene. This is the beginning of a long journey for my study, and I feel that as the cases emerge, each different in its own opinion, expression and declaration; their representation should be chronicled, in their own voices.

Born and raised in families who adhered to cultural values and traditions which supposedly have their origins in different parts of India, these women were very different from one another. India is comprised of different regional states and different communities, which are as disparate as different countries. Additionally, these women hail from different racial and ethnocentric groups. They speak different languages, have varied cuisine and diverse culture and in many cases, and in addition, their religion might not be the same. They have dissimilar ideological stances about child – rearing and other values such as women's role in the family, and individual freedom of the married woman. However, as immigrants in the United States, they are homogenized as a conglomerate whole, and are subsumed as part of a larger group, as Asian- Indians or even referred to as Indian-Americans.

History and Her story

Of the twenty – one women interviewed, some narratives are included in this study, as not all the case studies could be included in this article. Soha is at one end of the spectrum, where she came to the United States as a young bride with a high school degree, and completed her education with the help of grants. She conveyed that at times she suffered from a psychosis of fear fueled by uncertainty in a distant land. In her personal life, the ever presence of the family and the values attributed to a family life it is all pervasive, as she was initially hesitant to absorb and assimilate into the new culture, although she was a part of it. Gravitating towards her family back home, and her siblings, she conformed in a quiet way to her new identity. In the initial stages, societal interactions were less frequent because of the language barrier, and she narrated stories about the difficulties she faced as a young mother at the grocery store or the subway station. She clings on to a culture in her own imagination even as she tries to sing the English lullabies for her daughters, unconsciously meandering and translating those songs to her favorite folklore, which her mother sang to her, and finds solace in memory trips back to the homeland. However, she admits that her endurance level has increased over the years, and as she describes herself, she states that she is not afraid of the unknown world any more, as she learned to navigate it at her own pace. Having experienced language discrimination at work in the banking system, she is an

emancipated woman now in certain ways. She has emerged from an intimidated young bride to a mature woman who can take charge of her own life. The adversities she faced as a young immigrant woman, she states, because of the lack of her language proficiency and lower middle class social status has given her the courage to overcome any difficulty in later years. Herein we get a glimpse of the personal agency taking charge of her life, as she built it quietly, competently and with finesse. In Soha's case, it was perceived that she would not openly reject the molding and casting given to her, but through an active decision of her own, she attempts to shape her counter culture. Culturally isolated and withdrawn, she initially resisted the imposed values and norms. Not openly challenging the gendered practices of her family and its version of 'Indianness' in the prevailing American society, chose for herself a new interpretation of 'being Indian'."

Of the women interviewed, Rhea was at the other end of the spectrum, a medical graduate from a prestigious university in India, had worked a few years as a doctor in a hospital in San Francisco, and now has her own clinic, clearly successful in establishing a career of her own. Married to a successful banker, she came to the United States and continued her studies here. Many of the respondents were married to men who either were studying or started working in the United States and the women followed later. Some of them either continued with higher education or embarked upon her own career in the United States. Rhea was cultured, affluent, claiming high self-esteem and self-worth, and had risen beyond the usual stigma. On the work front, she noted that she has faced discrimination and claims that, as a woman, and as a 'woman of color', she was not initially given the position and financial benefits that she deserved, and had to earn it through years of labor and hard work. She had the dual task of proving her mettle to the community as well as to her family. The combination of her social, cultural and financial capital keeps her in the forefront of social activities.

Sarini deemed the home and family to be the primary responsibility of the woman, and initially remained as a homemaker. She is married into a highly intellectual family with many members in the medical profession. However, her early marriage prevented her completion of studies, and hence she initially suffered from low self-confidence. Taking the course of her life in her own hands, she enrolled in part time courses at the University, and at times, resorted to catharsis in the form of various types of physical and creative activities. She is emotionally stable, but without a formal education and less exposure to society, Sarini was socially awkward initially despite a high social standing in her younger days. In her case, the social prestige that she enjoys is the result of financial capital rendered by the doctor spouse. So fortuitously, the financial capital is translating itself into social capital, with her own subsequent educational qualifications adding to it in later days. Over the years, Sarini deftly adopted multiple identities to withstand the effects of social ineptitude both at home and in society. She has not faced overt forms of discrimination, but covert ones in many instances, but she noted that one could overcome those by adopting different strategies. Of all the interviewees, she stood out as the most comfortable one in terms of adapting to

whatever situation that she is placed in, exhibiting the strength of her personal agency.

'My lived experiences', said Nita, who grew up here in the United States and qualified as an engineer, 'are the experiences of growing up bicultural, raced, and gendered in the US'. With an Irish American father and an Indian mother, she questions as to what is her race and ethnicity. In terms of her physical attributes, she cannot fully blend in either ethnic group, but more importantly, she states intensely that she has inherited attributes from both parents in terms of character and intellect, which have been advantageous. However, she adds that in the professional realm, she has faced innumerable instances where the less-skilled ones from the majority group bypassed her, but her belief in her academic and professional skills prevailed. She states that she has survived because of the support and strength of the family, as the firm conviction of the cultural group was that hard work always is rewarded. She adds "My mother was accomplished in child–rearing practices of India, and my growing up years were replete with narratives of epics and mythologies of India, keeping up with the oral traditions where stories are cultural artifacts are transmitted from one generation to the next. My mother and aunts narrated the grandeur of the epics to me, so that my origin and my roots are very dear to me. I am also richer by the experiences that I gained from my father's side of the family, as the combination of the Indian Irish heritage has largely contributed to my development. 'My actual lived experience in the United States as the daughter of immigrants has been a challenge, but this has shaped my personal identity", she added.

A few of the women interviewed had entrepreneurial talents too. After a successful career in Criminal Forensics, one of the respondents, Tara, set up a real estate business so that she could spend more time at home with her children. She added her communication and social skills to the intellectual skills that she already possessed, and by channeling them into successful interactive people strategies, succeeded in creating a booming real estate project. She defined and established her own identity in this way, and was able to face society on her own terms because of educational qualifications, her cognitive flexibility and a higher financial standing.

One factor that stood them in good stead was their sound education. A degree from the American International School in Mumbai helped Sana as she was familiar with the American education system to a certain extent. She also graduated from a reputed institution, the Indian Institute of Technology. In India, education is a very important aspect of life and maybe the most important factor in raising children in middle-class societies. From time immemorial, the Guru or the teacher is revered for his/her knowledge. However, India, still a developing country, cannot financially reward the educated and qualified people as much as in the United States, and a qualified, skilled and educated person tends to have a better life in the United States, in terms of material comforts. Moreover, Asian Indians have placed a great emphasis on foreign academic credentials since the days of the British colonization. Many people consider foreign education superior

to indigenous education and their children's future has a high premium, as education is the stepping-stone towards vertical social and financial mobility.

A proficiency in the English language was one of the attributes prominent in the lives of these respondents, as most of the professional women exhibited a high level of fluency in the English language. Bhatia's (2007) study also reiterates that most professional urban Indian women who immigrated to the United States have attended "English medium" or 'Convent schools" and are fluent speakers and writers of English. Other than Soha and Sarini who attended regional schools and did not have mastery over the English language, most of the other respondents had attended English medium schools in India, which might have contributed to their self-confidence at the initial phase of their immigration when they had to communicate with the American society. Those who had difficulties in speaking or write fluently in English, like Soha and Sarini, faced greater problems in communicating with the American society, and therefore took some time to master the language. Once they were fluent, interactions were easier and life became less stressful. Thus a comparison between these respondents' reactions indicate that those who had the benefit of the linguistic capital found less hurdles, and were accepted more easily in the American society.

Mina, another immigrant woman noted

"My diasporic Indian ethnicity is not my only social identity, I am now consciously aware of my status as a minority. I was not a minority until I came to the United States. Hence, I feel I am constantly swerving from a person of no significance as a member of the marginalized minority where all that matters is my race and ethnicity, to my professional status as a lawyer where my qualifications and achievements matter and I am once again a person of significance. The pendulum sure swings to the extreme end!"

Analysis

As in a qualitative mode of study, the logic behind the experiences of the respondents interweave with the explanations. Therefore, at this point the question arises does this indicate that the human capital accrued by these women help them master the personal agentic characteristics that results in success. In different ways, the socio-cultural, human and financial capitals are all contributors to the identity formation of the women in the diaspora.

A common theme that appeared was that the women in the study attributed their achievement to the family and the socio-cultural value systems with which they grew up. One of the vital and overriding factors that came out in the life of the Indian women in India was the preservation and perpetuation of traditional value and culture of the community, mainly by and through women, almost as if they were the guardians of heritage and legacy. However, in modern times, fiscal conditions at home demand that they also contribute to the budget of the family, and at times maintaining both is a question of balance.

What emerged was that part of the success could be attributed to the college education accrued by these immigrant women in postcolonial urban Indian cities, and the subsequent higher education in American universities. Coupled with this, these Indian women were keen to succeed, and hard work and intelligence paid off. In addition, the privileged social status that they enjoyed in India and the socio-cultural and financial capital assembled through family and community networks propelled them into one of the most professional, exclusive segments of society in the United States.

One of the prominent features that materialized from the interviews was that there is a connection between the human diaspora and the economy, and therefore, more than encountering ethnic or racial discriminations, the socio-economic status of the family somewhat shapes women's identity in the diaspora. Sarini and Soha came to the United States as 'coy' brides, and the sheltered lives that they had led even in the United States did not contribute in any way to the experiences that they had to face in later life. Their new "selves" had to emerge to its new form, and the dynamics of metamorphosing to their newest selves was traumatizing to a certain extent. Despite her lack of educational achievements, Sarini has a higher status in society because of the financial standing she enjoyed, and the elite society that she now belonged. On the other hand, Soha confessed that her financial difficulties prevented her from associating with the dominant society. It might have been her own hesitance in assimilating, as she admitted that when people spoke to her, she would just smile and nod her head as she did not understand a word of what they said, suppressing all her sadness and anger and frustrations at such times. It took a long time for these two women to evolve to their present state of self-worth and self-concept. In due course of time, Soha overcame these obstacles of cultural hurdles and linguistic difficulties to establish her career as a banker.

The Indian immigrant women recognized that the combination of intelligence and grit was a crucial factor to find a footing in the American society and in enduring their day-to-day lives. Nita found her engineering degree was instrumental in her success, while Rhea's medical degree and Sana's Ph.D. in Chemistry all stood in good stead in the workplace. Higher paid jobs and hence a higher status in society were the resultant effects of their educational accomplishments.

The immigrant scene is sometimes viewed upon as if the immigrants are lacking in cultural endeavors and accomplishments. However, the immigrant and minority statuses of these women undoubtedly contribute to the richness of the cultural activity scene. Upon arrival on the shores of the United States, these women experienced a sense of isolation and to overcome that, they actively looked for immigrants with similar experiences. They found refuge, a commonality, and some shared aims in their experiences, and this united them to find comfort in the solace that others were also facing similar circumstances. They spend time together to provide cultural and social unity, and form emotional bondages. This is when the culture of the homeland flourishes as it creates stronger bonds. The primary reason for immigration for these Indian women being financial and social vertical mobility, some of these women had to strive to develop relations, both

professional and social, with the host society. Some succeeded while some could not assimilate so easily. Given the economic conditions in the United States, a qualified professional would have the potential to earn substantially more in the United States than in India. So Indian women are cognizant of the financial motivation to immigrate to the US from India, work towards that end, and find a harmonious life–work balance.

The narrations revealed that the respondents tend to re-imagine and relive memories of the homeland, which are now blurred with time and clear and comprehensible concepts of the place and events that they left behind are now imprecise and somewhat distorted. The memories are indistinct, yet they are powerful, a land of birth that exists only in the dreams. Tara's narratives of navigating the wheat fields on her cycle in Punjab riding to college for her undergraduate years is in sharp contrast to the subway ride she took to attend college in New York City for her Masters' degree. These memories lend it a dreamy eyed feeling, as if looking through tinted lenses, and concepts of a quixotic homeland as compared to the stark reality of day-to-day existence in a foreign land. The vivid imagery becomes all too real for Tara; her mother did not have a singing voice, so at night she did not sing a lullaby, instead she tucked her daughter by reciting poetry, which now Tara recites to her granddaughter. Components of the culture that these women have grown up with, and are now mere memories motivate them to relive the past. And thus, singing Kabir and Tagore's songs, enacting plays in the community, attending concerts in Indian classical music, training in various forms of traditional Indian dances; regular viewings of Indian movies, attending the contemporary art and literature scene, the cuisine and attire, child rearing practices; make them evoke nostalgia about the past.

Conflicting emotions take precedence over reality as a longing or wistfulness envelopes these women, of a homeland that they conjure in their mind's eye even as they negotiate their space in a world of turmoil. As Tara recites poetry, and Soha sings her lullabies to her daughters, these immigrant women from India, construct narratives of the previously experienced homelands as reconstruction of tales from a far off land, albeit their own homeland, and transplant these narratives to the accepted new homeland. These modalities and these chronicles and narratives and tales and personal histories become the mechanism and the apparatus through which Indian women remotely connect with the homeland they left behind.

During these years of developing their professional selves, they were playing multiple roles. Combined with being accustomed to socialization practices, and the acclimatization to the American way of life, they adjusted themselves to a newly married life and children. They were playing the role of the mother and wife while building their career. Family or society were not of much help to these new immigrants, and networking was scarce despite their high education and generally middle class backgrounds, which the American new mothers and wives had. Questions that constantly arose were that of how one would juggle marriage and job, and what would happen if the woman became pregnant. Soha missed her

mother not being around, to give her advice on issues related to child rearing. Every time there were arguments on touchy issues that arose in her marriage, she would think of her mother in India and wondered how her mother would have handled the problem. The struggle of making it as a professional woman in the American workplace and negotiating her role as a traditional Indian mother and wife was one of the difficult challenges that these women faced in their early years in America.

Reconstructing and negotiating their identity has been the main impediment for the progress of the Indian American immigrant women. The twenty-one women interviewed saw themselves as professional Indian-Americans as their primary identities and then as immigrants. However, these identities were construed based on their own experiences in the Diasporic phenomenon, and dynamically re-interpreted repeatedly, resulting in multiple, fractured, hyphenated identities. The identities of these immigrant women were perceived as contradictory or inconsistent based on their temporal and spatial existences. These women, deep down in their psyche, were cognizant of the changes that are occurring, and developed multiple identities and flexibility as a mode of survival, and as immigrants, they accepted or rejected the different identities in diverse contexts as the necessity demanded. Mina stated that initially she was a minority in a social group of white strangers but professionally mixed with the dominant groups when she was at the University, preparing for her JD Bar (Law) exams. It was like switching from one entity to another, and after a period, it was easier.

Contradictory views exist as the dominant society stereotypes these women as smart, articulate, knowledgeable, well educated, well versed in the classics and the muses, techno-savvy, progressive, liberal, and yet as 'minorities', and, in many cases, are not ready to accept them into the dominant society. It results in a constant struggle for them to assimilate and adapt to the cultural and normative values that the American society lives by. On the other hand, their own smaller ethnic community desires them to perpetuate, preserve and disseminate those values that they had landed with, many years ago. It creates a schism between the 'progressive' and the 'traditional' Indian, a constant tussle, a pull and push effect that affects the lives of women. These women have to undergo powerful transformations in the diasporic process, acculturating, adapting and assimilating as the circumstances necessitate.

'My aspirations and dreams would be fulfilled if at the end of the road if my children get a good education and they are eventually happy. I would have then fulfilled my objective of immigrating here"

said Mina, and this is what most first generation educated women from the Indian subcontinent hope for the families. They are still context bound, the context being family, and while living a liberal lifestyle they still abide by traditional forms of thought processes and societal beliefs. Conformity rules and individualism gives way to collectivism, and one conforms to the norms of a collectivistic society, where family requirements take precedence. Most Asian Indian women do not erase their ethnic background to fit in; rather they find themselves following the same values of respect for education and work ethics that

the extant society abides by. Those values are similar, and parents often want children to follow those values. In this manner, these Indian women found that they could be deemed the 'other' and yet find acceptance in the workplace.

Although the lives of the women in this study maybe diverse and different, they represent a tapestry of individual threads that are intricately woven, as the experiences that they have faced in their home country and as immigrants are similar and yet so different in numerous ways (Das, Ashidhara, 2012). As highly educated successful professionals, generally they are respected, appreciated, and have earned a higher status than many other immigrants in the American society have. They have themselves contributed to the enhancement of their social capital, through financial and educational capital, and intelligence and hard work and meritocracy, which is rewarding. They have finally incorporated the hyphenated identities as part of their lives. Tara, the forensic specialist, reported that as an expert in her career, her professional status was more important than her social standing, and that she was a forensic expert and later a real estate agent first and a 'brown-Asian-Indian-immigrant-woman' later. In his study, Bhatia also found that many professional Indians, both men and women, thought of themselves as professionals first, and as 'minority' came subsequently. Nita, the engineer, believed that her proficiency as an engineer and her professional skills mattered more than her dusky appearance.

The social and the cultural capital that forms the Indian women's community is generally supportive of the immigrant women's problems. The collectivistic Indian community looks after its own. Contributory factors that help set the tone in which they negotiate their hyphenated identity are the socio-cultural milieu of the homeland and the host-land, and in addition, the anticipated participations from their existing and the new socio-cultural context.

What this study found is that no matter what the circumstances are, and how unsurmountable obstacles may be, the Indian women immigrants are able to overcome these challenges due to their commitment to education and hard work. Researchers like O'Sullivan, and Sheffrin, (2003) have argued that human capital increases through education and experience. Human capital has also been viewed as the skills, quantum of knowledge, adaptation to the new habitat and the diverse circumstances in their lives, the social and personality attributes, as well as experience possessed by an individual, viewed in terms of their value by a country. Furthermore, education is an investment in human capital that pays off in terms of higher productivity. Thus, the combined elements of education and experience, resilience and versatility, cultivating human network and exploring beyond the ordinary, in this case immigration to a new country, has increased the human capital of these women, and set them forth on their to success. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) has offered a nuanced conceptual alternative to human capital that includes cultural capital, social capital, economic capital and symbolic capital. It is my proposition that these alternative factors have merged in the case of these immigrant women. Appadurai (1986) stated that exploration of knowledge and commodities, and issues of exclusivity and authenticity are relevant to cultural capital and educational capital. Derived from and through education, human

capital serves as a leveling mechanism, whether it is credits from college, or practical ideas to modify one's attitude. A good education can help overcome many barriers as it provides cognitive flexibility and fluency. Regarding academic capital, Bourdieu, (1984) argued that it is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission contributed by the school and the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family. Academia has value-inculcating and value-imposing operations, helping in the accumulation of experience and knowledge when applied beyond the bounds of the curriculum.

Conclusion

This ethnographic study found that the identity of the Asian-Indian-American woman immigrant has developed because of constant collaborations and communication between the capital they accrue; human, educational, financial, social and cultural against the backdrop of those that they already had, like the values they did abide by and disseminated through religion, family and community life. However, the women who have succeeded are those who had a good education, fluency in the English language and acquired the necessary professional skills. It appears that when the American society confers upon them a hyphenated identity as an immigrant, and relegates them to a minority status, these immigrant women adapt themselves to the situation in a resilient manner and live their lives. They adopt methods of coping like getting another degree or skill, working hard and investing in extra hours to obtain a better salaried job, trying to give the best education for their children and generally strive towards upward mobility. Those who were unable to do so are mainly those who did not get the advantage of an education or relevant skills like Soha who eventually got herself a college degree in spite of many hurdles, and overcame these obstacles to make a life of her own. The resilient spirit manifests itself in many ways. This study was particularly interested in what makes the Indian American immigrant woman click in spite of adversities, so that in spite of the hyphenated identity, she is able to adapt, acclimatize and adjust.

So, in this immigrant American society, what the immigrant Indian American women are asking is for society to cast another glance at them, and see that they have forged for themselves a different identity, not just a marginalized minority or a 'woman of color' vying for jobs with the existing members of the majority. The extant society has to accept and understand the new identity these new immigrants have developed over the years, 'assimilating' and 'adapting' as circumstances necessitated. Nevertheless, these women have definitely negotiated a space for themselves, and are constantly re-negotiating their existence. Like all other immigrant women, Indian American women initially have to work without privileges in spite of high accountability for themselves and their families, given the space, the mentality and the circumstances they are in, whether in the family or in the professional sphere. However, as they gradually find their voice, establish their presence on American soil, claim their needs and live up to their

responsibilities, they will recognize the privileges and the freedom that they are granted, and use it to make a difference in their own lives and in the lives of others without that privilege. For many of the women who still have no choice, keep on voicing and asking for answers, even if the voices might be soft.

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