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8. 1960S INDIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT GRANDPARENTS AND THE CULTURAL FAMILY NARRATIVE

ABSTRACT

Recent studies of aging Indian diasporic populations focus on grandparents who emigrate from India to be with their children or are in the U.S. seasonally. The post-1965 immigrant generation has been in the U.S. for almost fifty years and while the group is seen as a historic generation there have been relatively few accounts of their lives as seniors in the U.S. In *Indian Diaspora: Voices of the Diasporic Elders in Five Countries*, the editors point out the different aspects of aging including “physical, psychological, and social aging.” How do we understand and define the present situation of the aging post-1965 Indian immigrants in the U.S. in the 21st century? This essay explores how the role of the grandparent as defined by senior immigrants provides an opportunity to record and characterize how immigrant Indian and American national and cultural identities are expressed in changing family relations such as being grandparents to a third generation of Indian and multi-racial grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

In Jhumpa Lahiri’s opening short story, “Unaccustomed Earth,” an Indian immigrant father and his thirty-year old married daughter wrestle with their changing family roles from father and daughter to grandfather and mother. The immigrant father, a recent widower, immigrated to the U.S. in the 1970s with his wife and raised a son and a daughter in Massachusetts. He saw them both educated and settled in the U.S. Nearing 70, the father is now a single man who mulls over his relationship to his daughter and his grandson when he visits them in Seattle Washington:

“The more the children grew, the less they seemed to resemble either parent – they spoke differently, dressed differently, seemed foreign in every way from the textures of their hair to the shape of their feet and hands.

Oddly enough it was his grandson, who was only half-Bengali to begin with, who did not even have a Bengali surname, with whom he had a direct biological connection, a sense of himself reconstituted in another.” (54)

In this passage, the father expresses two different sentiments. The first identifies his reflections as a parent who has completed the task of raising his children into adults and also at the same time feels disconnected from the individuals that his children have become. The second feeling, however, is one of hope and connection to his grandchild in whom he recognizes bits and pieces of his own character that emerge as he takes on the role of a grandfather. The story asks us to consider what parents and their adult children have in common besides blood ties and familial history.

In the first quotation, the use of the term “foreign” evokes the immigrant narrative but it is reversed to give us the immigrant father’s point of view. The father sees his children as foreigners not only because of their physical traits and cultural references but also because they belong to a different generation and a different geographical space that has separated them from their parents. This complex picture contrasts with the second-generation point of view of many Asian American narratives that dwell on non-American or immigrant practices (language, clothes) of the parents associated with India. Importantly, the narrator is not a man who is looking at his teenage children or college-age children, but a man who is contemplating his adult child who has her own family. He can look back on his life and see the role he played as a parent and how he has moved beyond that role to express and live out his individual desires. In the story, it is a relief for him to be alone and away from the pressures and responsibilities of raising children. This is not to say he does not love his daughter, or wants to limit his relationship with her but the narrative expands the role of the father to include the thoughts and feelings of a senior who is free to have activities and a life where he does not have to live up to any expectations other than his own.

To be a grandparent is to also re-evaluate how you think about your own children and your relationship to them and perhaps confront the fact that the immigrants are now an aging population that may not be there to see the grandchildren as adults. When the narrator’s father in the short story comments “[h]e had not paid this much attention when Ruma and Romi were growing up,” (38) he recognizes that he did not have the time to spend with his children because he was busy working. The goal was always to get them educated and settled and in the story when he talks to his adult daughter he continues to advise her about her career. What surprises him is that he is able to see himself in his grandson in a way that he cannot with his children. The idea of being “re-constituted” is a reconstruction of his identity or a re-organization of how the father thinks about his own identity in relation to his daughter and his single life. With the grandson he does not need to be the breadwinner or the advisor but instead can interact with him in a domestic setting. There is a companionable air between the toddler and the grandfather. The toddler wants to spend time and be with the grandfather without his parent’s expectations, and the grandfather is able to pass along his love of gardening without being judged or measured by other adults. Moreover, when the father leaves to return to his home and travel partner on the East coast, it is the

daughter who wishes he would stay on a more permanent basis to interact with her child and be part of an extended family.

Lahiri's title story in her most recent short story collection introduces some of the current trends and issues in Indian American communities. The stories are not about the process of immigrating or assimilating to American life but instead focus on the maturation of the immigrant community and changing familial roles with their second-generation children. In the story, the daughter, Ruma observes, "[b]eing a grandmother transformed her mother, bringing a happiness and energy Ruma had never witnessed." (27) The process of transformation that the daughter observes in her mother is a realization on her part that her immigrant parents are individuals who are more than the traditional roles of mother and father and that their lives have not stopped but also evolved and continue to evolve after the children leave the home. It is the idea of transformation and reconstitution that the role of a grandparent evokes in both the immigrant and second generation that resonates with the Indian immigrant seniors I interviewed in my study.

At a recent meeting of my mother's lunch group in Madison, Wisconsin one of the most prevalent discussions at the table was how to prepare for the visits to and from the grandchildren. When I asked one of the lunch guests about being a grandparent, she said:

"I never imagined being a grandparent or growing old when I was immigrating. I did not really know my grandparents. I was interested in getting a better education and making a better life for my future children."

This response highlights some of the issues of the established Indian immigrant generation from the 1960s who did not think about aging or establishing a community in the U.S. when they immigrated but who are adjusting and thriving in their lives as senior citizens and grandparents in the U.S. After 40 years in the U.S. it is the role of grandparent that challenges the narratives of Indian immigrants as foreigners and their second-generation children as assimilated Americans and illuminates how family and cultural roles are not as easy to distinguish in multi-generational and aging immigrant populations. One manifestation of the complexity of cultural identity is how Indian immigrant seniors adopt American ideals of self-reliance and independence in their own lives and yet simultaneously emphasize passing on Indian values such as familial loyalty and cultural traditions for their grandchildren.

Recent studies of aging Indian diasporic populations focus on grandparents who emigrate from India to be with their children or are in the U.S. seasonally. The post-1965 immigrant generation has been in the U.S. for almost fifty years and while the group is seen as a historic generation there have been relatively few accounts of their lives as seniors in the U.S. In *Indian Diaspora: Voices of the Diasporic Elders in Five Countries*, the editors point out the different aspects of aging including "physical, psychological, and social aging." How do we understand and define the present situation of the aging post-1965 Indian

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immigrants in the U.S. in the 21st century? This essay explores how the role of the grandparent as defined by senior immigrants provides an opportunity to record and characterize how immigrant Indian and American national and cultural identities are expressed in changing family relations such as being grandparents to a third generation of Indian and multi-racial grandchildren.

METHODOLOGY

For this essay, I was interested in recording the stories of immigrant Indians in the U.S. who came as graduate students (or their spouses) between 1960 and 1970. From 1960 to 1980 there was a marked increase in the Asian foreign-born population in the United States. The relaxation of immigration restrictions by the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act saw populations rise from 490,000 in 1960 to 825,000 in 1970 and to 2.5 million in 1980 (U.S. Census data). The interviews I conducted were with ten Indian grandparents (4 men, six women) all of whom had immigrated to the U.S. from India between 1960–1971, remained in the U.S. to raise their children, and are now grandparents to children ranging in age from 3–16. All the interviewees currently reside in Madison Wisconsin, are retired, and live independently in their own residences. Their ages range from 65–80 with the median age of 70. Their children and grandchildren reside outside their home and often live in different cities and states. I asked a series of similar questions to all the participants about how they experienced and defined the role of a grandparent and was able to visit most of the subjects in their homes. I recorded the interviews in July of 2010 and also asked follow up questions in February 2011.

Madison is a college university town and also the capital of the state of Wisconsin. Madison (population 220,000) is the location of the University of Wisconsin-Madison (40,000) and serves as destination city for many international as well as domestic students. In 1960, Madison's population was 126,000. The racial demographics according to the 1960 U.S. Census show that Madison was the home to a primarily white demographic. Less than 2000 inhabitants were African American and 200 were listed as "all other."ⁱ The low numbers reflect the fact that many foreign students did not fill out the Census or a non-standard method of data collection across different parts of the state.ⁱⁱ Higher education was the primary reason most of the interviewees immigrated to the U.S. and all of them came to Madison because of the University of Wisconsin. All the men immigrated to the U.S. because of opportunities for educational advancement either as students or faculty members. All four men pursued a graduate degree in the U.S. and three of the four attained a graduate degree at UW-Madison with one taking a position as a faculty member. Five out of the six women interviewed were married when they immigrated and five out of six already possessed undergraduate degrees and then pursued advanced educational degrees at the UW Madison.ⁱⁱⁱ Education was the driving force behind this group's desire to immigrate and after achieving that goal, all of the interviewees said their intent was to return to India. This differs from

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senior immigrants who come to join their families under family reunification and other immigrant groups who immigrated for employment opportunities. The desire to return to India rather than settle in the U.S. is also apparent in the amount of time that the group retained their Indian citizenship, which was an indication that they wanted to return and use their new found knowledge in India. Two of the men returned to India to work in the late 1960s and then decided to come back to the U.S. As one interviewee said,

“I was proud to be part of a new nation and I wanted to go back and help build up India. But at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s the political situation made the U.S. a better choice to do the kind of research I was interested in.”

In my group, most did not decide to become citizens of the U.S. until the 1980s or 1990s, over twenty years after they first came to the U.S.

I grew up in the city of Madison, Wisconsin in the 1970s and the first Indian community that developed was centered on the university. The screening of Hindi films (before the advent of the VCR) was an occasion for the gathering of Indians and South Asians and the films were shown on 35mm reels in college lecture halls. Community members went to talks about India and South Asia, saw and participated in Indian musical and cultural programs, and socialized with a group of 20–30 families. In addition, there were new groups of international students and friendships developed through personal relationships and organizations such as the Indian Student Association and Association of Indians in America (AIA). Because the numbers were small, people divided into groups more by age rather than by state or language affiliation. I remember everyone talking about being Indian even though in our groups we had Gujaratis, Punjabis, North Indians, and South Indians. Everyone communicated in English but as children we also developed an ear for hearing different regional languages interspersed with English. Currently, Indians refer to this, for example, as “Hinglish.” In the 1960s and 1970s there were no Indian restaurants or Indian grocery stores in Madison so there were trips to Chicago for Indian supplies and there were gatherings at people’s homes, university settings, and church basements for home cooked food from all regions of India, music, and festivals.

For my oral interviews, I found it was initially difficult for the interviewees to think about what role they would like to play as grandparents. Although they recognized the role of a grandparent, their own personal experiences with their grandparents did not necessarily prepare them to think about what kind of relationship they wanted to develop with their own grandchildren. One interviewee said, “I think because we still get together with the people we have known for thirty years it does not feel like time has passed. We are still seeing our friends.” Thus being a grandparent is one aspect of their life but does not define their identity. The majority of the interviewees had grandchildren who were 7 or younger so most of their comments and interactions with the grandchildren

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concerned caretaking and entertainment. One grandparent did discuss her teenage grandchildren as they entered high school but it was in relationship to their education rather than their social and cultural practices. What all of them said was that they wanted to pass down knowledge of and pride in their Indian cultural heritage while at the same time recognizing that the grandchildren were American.

“It’s a much different time than when we were raising our children so they do different sorts of activities than we did with our kids.”

All of them felt a distance from the rigors and politics of contemporary child rearing and yet at the same time enjoyed their interactions with the grandchildren. Even though all the interviewees are American citizens (and have been for many years) it is their Indian heritage (as seen separate from an American heritage) that their children and they wish to emphasize as their cultural legacy.

Anthropologist Sarah Lamb discusses the process of aging among Indian Americans in the U.S. and the different expectations that certain generations have that are culturally identified as the “Indian” way and the “American” way. Her work primarily focuses on seniors who have immigrated to join their adult children who are more cognizant of Indian ways and American ways. She describes the idea of “trans-national living” where

“...Indian American seniors end up self-consciously taking on practices, values, and modes of aging they regard as American although often ambivalently doing so with both reluctance and eagerness” (60).

I would take this concept further by observing that immigrants who have settled in the U.S. and lived in the U.S. for 40 or 50 years have access to U.S. social services and many of them are U.S. citizens who qualify for Medicare and make the policies on health care and where to live their political fights.

To use Lamb’s terms, an American mode of living means living independently in your own place whereas an Indian mode of living is moving in with your children. All the interviewees I talked to are very aware of debates on healthcare and Medicare because they are affected by it. In fact, many of my interviews joke about how when they go out to eat together they all take out their pillboxes to make sure they don’t forget to take their medication. Some topics that they discuss include insurance policies, recent surgeries, and increasingly, funeral services.

None of them are interested in retiring in India because all their friends and their children are in the U.S. They are engaged with U.S. politics on the local and national level and have an established community in the U.S. that includes Indian and non-Indian networks. The ability of this group to assimilate and work within American institutions is highly developed and yet their cultural memories and traditions are equally important to them. Although my subjects are immigrants from India, the expressions and comments of the interviewees on the subject of grand parenting tend to lack ethnic specificity and instead conform to stereotypical American middle class observations about grandchildren that include generational

differences and passing down family history.^{iv} What comes out of these conversations is an examination of the changing family roles that are occurring when the immigrant generation becomes grandparents. The interviewee's relationship to being a grandparent highlights some of the contradictions of "living in the American mode" and yet also being Indian for long-term resident Indian immigrant seniors in the U.S.

The concepts and results that follow arise from three main areas of inquiry. First, how do the subjects define the role of a grandparent and second, how does that role compare to their role as a parent. Finally I address how the interviewees thought about what legacy or values they would like their grandchildren to learn from them. What I find is less of a discussion about what is Indian and what is American but rather an opportunity for the subjects to reflect on their own stories and how they ended up as grandparents. On one hand they want their grandchildren to learn about India and their cultural history but on the other their relationship to the grandchild is a secondary role that does not embody their interests and life. The conversations and discussions mirror the idea of reconstitution of the Indian seniors' lives where they are seeing the scope of their lives as they interact and think about their grandchildren. These are the stories that they want to pass on and yet most of the children are not as aware of their parent's history and their grandchildren are too young to learn.

The interviews provided an opportunity for the Indian senior immigrants to reflect on their own lives. Many were more engaged when telling me their personal stories than in thinking about their role as grandparents, perhaps because their role as a grandparent was only one facet of their lives as opposed to the other activities they were engaged in as senior adults. Because all the interviewees have known me for most of my life, I also felt as if I was a stand-in for some of the stories that they wanted to tell their own children but perhaps their own children had never asked. Most of the interviewees continue to talk to me about these issues even after this study was completed.

FAMILY ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

In my discussions and conversations I opened up the interviews with questions about individual family histories, which were about their memories about grandparents in their own lives, and how their parents interacted with their own children. Most of the interviewees did not have a solid recollection of their grandparents or their interactions were very sparse. Many of the grandparents died when the interviewees were young or before they were born. One interviewee remembered her grandfather's devout religious practices and another remembered playing cards with her grandparents. For two of the interviewees, the Partition between India and Pakistan in 1947 also figured prominently in family life and structure when their families moved from now Pakistan into India. In general, the paternal grandparents were more prominent in all the interviewees' lives. In the

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case of one senior, she remembered going to see her maternal grandmother when her own mother was pregnant:

“My grandmother interacted more with her sons’ families. When my mother was pregnant with my siblings we would go and spend time—sometimes several months—with her. She was very strict and traditional. Like a lot of Asian women at the time she preferred the male children. The males got all the attention and the girls were there to work. I guess my relationship with her was mostly related to “fear.”

The gender expectations of the interviewees’ grandparents did have some effect, especially on the women. For this interviewee she later says that she believes her role as a grandmother is

“to set a good example as a woman for both her granddaughters. I want to encourage them to have no restrictions...and make sure that they can do whatever they want to do.”

She wants to make sure that the limitations that Indian parents sometimes put on their children to go into the fields of engineering or medicine (and ones that her parents placed on her) are not the only options that her grandchildren will hear about. The absence of role models in their own experiences gives them an opportunity to create their own way of interacting with their grandchildren. Since many of them did not live in an extended family with grandparents in the home they do not expect to do this with their own grandchildren. Many of them used to visit their families for an extended time such as one month but as one interviewee said,

“we liked to get together with the whole family because we had a lot of people to play with but we were happy to return to our place.”

In East Asian and South Asian cultures the stereotypical expectation is that the senior parents will reside with the children and any other arrangement such as seniors living in a retirement home is seen as a failure on the part of the family. (Fukuyama, 1993) In this case, they do not think of American or Indian cultural traditions but one that comes from their own experiences and is contrary to the stereotypes associated with Asian culture where extended families are the norm.

In their own children’s lives the role of the grandparents varied but most of the interviewees said that because of the distance between their parents in India and their children in the U.S. that it was difficult for the grandparents to have a large influence in their lives. One interviewee had her mother living with the family and that fact greatly influenced her daughter’s relationship to Indian language and culture because her daughter grew up speaking an Indian regional language:

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“Even before my parents came to the U.S. my daughter enjoyed going to stay with her grandparents in India. She learned Indian languages and traditions from her grandparents.”

The implication is that it was the grandparents rather than the parents who had the time to spend with the kids. Two interviewees left their children with their parents for an extended time when they came to the U.S. and then sent for them later. But when I asked if they would be able to take care of their grandchildren in the same way they both said that it would be too complicated because of the activities that their grandchildren were involved in:

“the kids today have soccer practice or swimming lessons or are always on the go. I play cards or read books.”

A lot of the activities the kids want to do involve more physical effort and many of the seniors I talked to are unable to keep up with that schedule. In fact, some of their children feel the same way. Some other seniors travelled back to India on an annual or bi-annual basis but as the children grew older (especially after high school) this became more difficult. This is one of the key issues of immigrant life especially for those who immigrated before the 1980s---that many had to leave their parents and their families behind and start creating a sense of Indian values and cultural heritage for their families in the U.S.

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND FAMILY LEGACY

All the interviewees said that they never thought about grandchildren as they were raising their children. They did their job as parents so the grandparent role is an unexpected luxury. In fact, many of the interviewees said they had never been asked the questions, what is the role of a grandparent, and what do I want my grandchild to know about me, until I asked them. Since most of the grandchildren of the interviewees are young---below the age of 10-- it's difficult for many of the seniors to tell their stories and give general advice about life or school especially when you see them infrequently. When I asked how they would teach their grandchildren about their Indian heritage I received various answers but there was some difficulty for all the interviewees in defining what it was that they could pass on that was Indian besides their own stories:

“I guess I could tell them about me.”

The majority of interviewees I talked to have multi-racial grandchildren (only 2 are full Indian). None of the grandparents mentioned this as an issue but there was an awareness that their grandchildren would grow up with American cultural values. One man said:

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“After all they [my granddaughters] are citizens of this country and this is their home but it’s important for them to know the U.S. is also the home to people from India like me.”

Her heritage, he says, includes knowing that America is the home of people from other parts of the world as well as those who have been here for generations.

Most of the interviewees stressed that the Indian values they wanted to pass on were the importance of family and family ties to their success and the other was to get a good education. In this case, to most of the interviewees, being Indian meant putting family first and being American meant putting personal desires first. The contradiction was that in order to get a good education, almost all of the seniors I interviewed had to leave their family to immigrate to the U.S. and most of them came either by themselves (6 interviewees) or as a married couple (4 interviewees). One interviewee said that since his grandchildren were young, he would focus on developing a relationship with them in the hopes that it would lead to later conversations. In the meantime he was working on his collection of family letters as something he could leave for them in the future. Others wanted to make sure that although the grandkids are American that they have an important heritage and that they have “strong roots.”

Many of the interviewees talked about sharing India with their grandchildren in terms of consumer goods or as a geographical space rather than as specific cultural values. For example one senior said,

“...we watch Indian movies and the kids love to dance to the Indian movie songs,”

and another remarked that her grandchildren

“...wear Indian clothes we buy them when we go to India.”

When I asked what kinds of stories they might tell one said,

“...we have these tales of India stories that we read them so they can learn about the history and mythology. My granddaughter is very interested in religious figures like Krishna and Buddha.”

Some have visited or talked about going with their children and grandchildren on a trip to India as an important way to share their culture. Four of my interviewees went with their children and grandchildren to India and found it rewarding because they were able to show the young children where they grew up. But the trip meant more to the second-generation children than to the grandchildren who tended to have problems with the food, noise, and travel conditions. In getting parents to engage with the grandchildren, the second generation started asking more questions of their parents and their lives. One of my interviewees said that after the trip her daughter wanted to talk to her more about her life experiences. In this case,

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the relationship between the immigrant mother and the daughter was evolving through the interaction of the grandparents and the grandchildren:

“My daughter kept asking me about what it was like for me to raise her. It’s important to my daughter to teach her children about being Indian so she asks me a lot of questions.”

The multi-generational trip opened up an opportunity for the adult second-generation child to talk to her mother about other aspects of her life that did not address her role as a mother.

Some of the grandparents discuss how their daughters are interested in teaching their children about India through comics, Bollywood, TV shows, clothes, and cultural organizations but with two working parents the grandparents note that their own children’s lives are much more difficult when it comes to raising children. Their own input and influence also seems to be dependent on how the children relate to their parents and the role they want their parents to play as grandparents.

The adult children who are daughters include the parents (especially the mothers) in their children’s life and want to pass on to their own children what they now see as important in their childhood. For example, two women talked about how their daughters wanted them to teach some words in Hindi or a regional language (Gujarati, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, etc.) to the grandchildren. One mentioned sharing a religious tradition. But in general, the activities that the interviewees do with their grandchildren such as reading books, playing games, and travelling together do not necessarily have a specific ethnic or cultural component to them. The interviewees (3) whose grandchildren live in town have more of an opportunity to influence their grandchildren and be a part of their everyday life:

“We are luckier than some of the other people because we get to see our grandchildren almost every day. We are a part of their lives. This is different from a lot of our friends.”

They see them for multiple days every week, perform caretaking duties, and are in a position to share their food, language, and other traditions. However, for the other interviewees their role as a grandparent is just one facet of their life that occurs 3 or 4 times a year as opposed to the more demanding full time role of a parent.

GRANDPARENTS AND THE ADULT PARENTS

One of the more difficult questions to answer was how they thought about the role of a grandparent compared to the role of a parent. One interviewee put it like this:

“When we became parents we were just starting out in life and we wanted to make sure our child was properly fed, educated, and cared for but as

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grandparents, we have money, we have time, and we are not responsible for disciplining the grandkids. This is what makes it fun. Of course [the kids] recognize that too.”

The primary responsibility as the parent was to be the provider but as grandparents the boundaries are very loose and hence the relationship is based on enjoying your time together. The emphasis is on experiencing new things and learning together rather than worrying about child management. All the men and some of the women I interviewed expressed the same sentiment—as a parent they were focusing on their career and their work to provide a secure financial future with their children. The benefits of retirement one man said, is that he has more “free time” to spend with his children and his grandchildren. Most of the seniors admitted that one of the best parts about being a grandparent was

“not being responsible for discipline and being able to hand that task off to their children.”

For my interviewees, there was a gender difference but as with many of their answers there was not a primarily ethnic component to their answers. Their style and impressions of grandparenting reflects an American middle class grandparent who lives independently from the children and grandchildren. The women tended to express the difference between being a parent and grandparent more concretely because they noticed how their roles have changed from primary caregiver to part-time playmate. As mothers, one of the woman said “the children were their first concern” and as a parent she was much more “conservative” with her own children. She wanted her own children to follow Indian traditions as much as possible, which meant no dating for the daughters, strict dietary requirements, and the desire that her children marry Indians. As it turns out, none of the children married Indians and her grandchildren are multi-racial. As a grandparent, she tells her daughter to be more lenient. As a mother her role was to regulate the children’s lives from what they wore to what they ate. As a grandmother she wants to be the one who

“consoles her grandchildren when the parents get mad at them.”

Also there was the desire, said another woman,

“to pass on Indian traditions and language.”

As a grandparent, many of the women talked about being free to spend time with the children but without the responsibility for discipline or the decision-making involved in day-to-day life. That job has passed on to their children. When they were mothers, there was a concerted effort to teach their children about their ancestry and heritage. As a grandmother, one of my interviewees wonders,

“What will they [grandchildren] be like in the future?”

because she realizes she may not be there to see them as adults. One grandmother wants her granddaughters to be strong independent women and learn from her story as a young unmarried Indian woman who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1960s to follow her dreams.

Two of the men pointed out that because they were busy working as parents they didn't spend as much free time with their own children. One man said that as a parent the children were a financial and educational "responsibility" but as a grandparent you now have

"the luxury to spend some time with them and then pass them on."

Now, he can play with the kids and read to them. The men are able to assume the role of caregivers in a manner that they could not do as the head of the household. None of the men were changing diapers but they all liked reading and interacting with the grandchildren and at the same time were relieved to get back to their own routine after the children left. One of the men said that being a grandparent is

"easier because you are not burdened with their life and their emotional and financial security."

As a grandparent you can be "a resource" and can also influence them if you see them often or have local contact.

As seniors and parents of adult children their family is still of primary concern but not part of their everyday life unless the children and the grandchildren live in town.^v In more recent times, Judith Treas and Shampa Mazumdar have pointed out that that senior newcomers tend to

"reside in extended family households" and "be cared for by family members" (245)

but this does not necessarily lead to a successful transition to life in the U.S. and points out some of the constraints with family support. All my interviewees lived in independent residences and only three of the people (two out of the three are a married couple) I interviewed had grandchildren living close by or in the city. The rest expressed a wish that the grandchildren and the children would live close by but there was also a general recognition that they did not want to live with their children. As one interviewee said,

"I value my independence but I also know that I am getting old."

So while all the interviewees expressed that they wanted their grandchildren to value the importance of family the reality is that the children live all over the country and the people and friends that have known them their whole lives are in one town. They do not want to leave that. Thus the discussions about grand parenting were also linked with community and familial relationships.

The blood ties of the family are vital to all the interviewees but the social Indian communities that have lived and grown together in Madison are also another kind

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of intimate relationship. This group is living in the American mode because they are integrated with mainstream society where their personal histories as Indian immigrants were tied to their family relationships. In other cities there is now movement towards entrepreneurial and social networks created by Indian seniors for immigrant seniors that relieve the isolation and address the needs of the senior population such as Indian food catering services, buffet lunches, and oral history and memory sharing programs. (Mehta and Singh 2008) There is not yet a critical mass in Madison to establish these but several members of the community have been contemplating how to retain their strong community ties and independence, and maintain their family ties. For this group cultural history and oral histories can be an important method of passing on cultural and ethnic values that can reach the youngest generations and showcase their importance as part of the Indian diaspora and the American immigrant experience.

CONCLUSION

In September of 2010, President Barak Obama signed a proclamation declaring National Grandparent's Day. The text links the presence of grandparents in our lives to an essential part of American identity:

[Grandparents] "have a special place in our homes and communities, ensuring the stories and traditions of our heritage are passed down through generations. On National Grandparents Day, we honor those who have helped shape the character of our Nation, and we thank these role models for their immeasurable acts of love, care, and understanding."^{vi}

The proclamation insists that our national identity and cultural heritage not only "have a special place," but also "helped shape the character" of America. With senior immigrants, their stories and their presence continue the narrative of the U.S. as a land open to immigrants where everyone can pursue the American Dream. While Grandparents Day exists to honor the presence of grandparents, it is their past rather than their present existence that is being honored. To be a grandparent means you have left a national and personal legacy and for immigrant grandparents, they are trying to share that legacy with their children and grandchildren. The reflections on their immigration journeys and the stories of their lives were of interest to me because as a second generation child I am able to appreciate what I could not until I was an adult and wanted to pass these stories on to a third generation.

Although my group of oral interviews is a small subset, I think the responses to my questions highlight some interesting issues related to grand parenting, and aging Indian immigrant populations. I hope it will lead to additional studies about older Asian American immigrant groups in the U.S. and the generational differences and patterns between immigrants in the last four decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century.

1960S INDIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT GRANDPARENTS

NOTES

- i In 1960 Wisconsin's population was 4 million. According to Census data, race designations were white (Hispanic and Caucasian) and non-white populations that included mixed race, Negroes, Am Indians, Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino. The "all other" category included Asian Indians, Korean, Polynesian, Indonesians and other non-white. The Wisconsin population of Negroes in 1960 was 75,000 and the All Other category was listed at 18,000. Within the "all other category" the largest racial minority was American Indians.
- ii The conditions and categories changed for the 1970 census so it's difficult to make comparisons of different racial populations. Also the 1970 U.S. Census for the first time was mailed to U.S. residents so that had an effect on some of the reporting numbers because of protests to the Vietnam War, the government draft, and government policies. University of Wisconsin records on international students are also difficult to trace by country of origin or difficult to trace in general before 1970 in available institutional reports.
- iii Historically, the University of Wisconsin had a close connection to the newly independent nation of India in the 1950s and also developed one of the first academic departments focused on the study of India and then South Asia. The university was one of the first to offer language courses in the different languages of India and continues to be a center of South Asian language study in the U.S. As a leading institution in the study of India in the 1950s and the 1960s the UW also attracted foreign students from India because of its reputation and faculty exchange program. On his first state visit to the United States in 1949 (India was newly independent in 1947) Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited the cities of Boston, New York, Washington D.C. and Madison Wisconsin. Honored by the Governor, and the President of the University, Prime Minister Nehru delivered an address outside in November on the lakefront side of the Student Union at the University of Wisconsin. This special relationship between the University and intellectuals and academics led to an exchange of visits from faculty members from all over India in areas related to urban and agricultural planning, engineering, and medicine.
- iv For an interesting comparison on Senior Asian and Hispanic living arrangements, see Douglas T. Gurak and Mary T. Kritz's article "Elderly Asian and Hispanic Foreign-and Native-Born Living Arrangements: Accounting for Differences" in *Research on Aging*. 32(5) 567–594.
- v Szinovacz, M. 1996. Living with grandparents: Variations by cohort, race, and family Structure. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 16, (12): 89–89–123. This is an interesting study which takes data from the National Survey of Families and Households that discusses how socio-economic status determines the tendency for black grandparents to care for their children and grandchildren in the household and how the major issue for whites is for the children to care for seniors in the household.
- vi Presidential proclamation 8560—National Grandparent's Day 2010 (September 10, 2010)

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