

Lives in Transition: Stories of Three Foreign Elementary Students from India

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This qualitative study tells the stories of three Asian Indian children dealing with the initial phases of adjustment and acculturation at a multicultural elementary school in USA. Constructed using data collected through classroom observations and in-depth interviews with children, parents, and school personnel, these stories reveal important linkages between families and schools, and their respective roles in foreign-born children's acculturation into the host culture. The pressures to maintain Indian identity, language, food habits, and traditions are all important aspects of these children's experiences. The school context shapes their educational experiences and adjustment. This study also touches upon some important policy issues for schools in relation to multicultural programs, ESL instruction, native language instruction, and support services for their increasingly diverse student and parent communities. One such issue pertains to the recognition of student's ethnic and cultural identity in a public school. Key words: Asian Indian, Foreign Students, Voluntary Minority, Immigrant Education, and Multiculturalism in Education

These are the stories of three children – children who moved from India to the U.S. at a young age. These are the voices of Veena (an 11 year-old girl, fifth grader), Rohit (Veena's 9-year-old brother, a third grader), and Ajay (a 5 year-old boy in kindergarten). These voices were heard when they attended Jackson Elementary School in a midwestern university town. They, like many other students in their school, were children of international students who were pursuing their higher education at the state university, and lived in the university student family housing complex. In these families, usually one of the parents, more generally the father, was going to the university for some graduate degree or post-doctoral work. At the time of the study, students in this highly multicultural and international school came from about 45 different countries, and about 35 different language backgrounds. As the principal of the school remarked:

Our largest group by race is Asian, about 40 percent, but they come from a variety of countries.... We have about 23 to 25 percent African-Americans, about same proportion of White Americans, and then in small numbers we have Hispanics, and Native Americans. So it is really a mixed population, there really is not a majority.

This qualitative study, however, was not about the multicultural nature of Jackson Elementary School, or about the services that the school provided to children like Veena,

Rohit, or Ajay. My initial aim was to study and understand the experiences of Asian-Indian children in an elementary school -- how these children who come to the U.S. at a very young age with their parents -- adjust to a new educational and cultural setting. The objective was to understand how these children make sense of their schooling experiences in the U.S. at the time when they and their families are also struggling to adjust and settle in a new country, how they live through this transition from one culture to another, from one way of life to another.

In the process of data collection, I soon realized that one important factor in the adjustment of most of the foreign-born children in Jackson Elementary School was the uniqueness of the school itself, and the services that the school provided for them. Thus, my initial focus on understanding the experiences of three Asian Indian children got fused with the overall context of the school these children attended. The school's "multicultural program," therefore became an important link in the story of these children's experiences. I am now convinced that my study would have taken a different shape in another school where the student population would be more homogeneous and "American." This aspect of the school context will be dealt in a separate section of the paper.

Prelude to the Stories

Most Asian Indians come to the United States for two general purposes: to seek educational and occupational opportunities not readily available to them in India or elsewhere; or as dependents, predominantly the wives and children of those seeking such opportunities. According to the Open Doors 2001 report published by Institute of International Education, the number of foreign students from India increased from 42,337 in 1999-2000 to 54,664 in 2000-2001 - an increase of 29.1%, largest growth of the top 20 sending countries. In 2000-01 academic year, students from India made up 10.0% of all foreign students in the United States, ranking second only to China with 10.9%. In terms of educational growth as the motivating factor, Dasgupta (1989) reports that "the desire for higher education in America was either combined with the desire to visit the world or was inspired by 'successful people' in India who were already trained in Europe or America" (p. 44). Career advancement seems to be an important motivation for emigrating from India, and highly motivated Asian Indian students in American universities also seek immigrant status after completing their education in the United States (Sodowsky & Carey, 1987).

The uniqueness of the present study is that the participating families were not considered "immigrants" to date, according to INS definitions. They came to U.S. on a non-immigrant student visa. These were graduate student families, but were at the point of making decisions whether to live in U.S. as immigrants, or go back to India after finishing their studies. Through an analysis of the choices available to these two families, I was also able to understand some of the factors that may influence these important decisions that most of the Asian Indian students in higher education have to make when they are nearing their graduation, and these decisions ultimately put them in the category of immigrants or not depending upon the choices they make. The study, therefore, takes the reader a step behind the immigration, namely, why would these people in the present case choose to live in U.S. as immigrants or go to their own country, after finishing their initial objective of coming to this country. How do children react to these decisions and

what impacts do these decisions, which are largely taken by parents, have on children's schooling -- this, therefore, becomes another aspect of my present inquiry. I point out the specific issues faced by these two families in this regard towards the end of this paper.

Most often married international students at American university campuses are accompanied by their spouses and children, so the process of acculturation and adjustment in their new environment is a multilayered experience for these families. In this study, I wanted to explore the experiences of children in two international student families from India. While there is some research on the cross-cultural experiences of international students on university campuses in the U.S. (for example, Nicholson, 2001; Pinheiro, 2001), the experiences of the children accompanying these foreign students have been largely ignored. In some ways, these children's experiences may be similar to the experiences of other immigrant children in schools (e.g. with regard to proficiency in English language and emerging intercultural identities). But in other ways, their experiences are also unique especially when one considers the uncertainty of their migration status, which is decided by their parents. In this study, I wanted to explore some of these complex issues as experienced by three such children.

A substantive amount of research has been done in the field of minority education to provide explanations for the variability in patterns of school achievement and attainment of minority children (see for example, Chavkin, 1989, Commins 1992, Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, Delgado-Gaitan & Treuba, 1991, Erickson & Mohatt, 1982, Gibson, 1991a, 1991b, Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, Jensen, 1969, Lightfoot, 1978, Ogbu 1991, Suarez-Orozco, 1991). However, the primary focus of research in this area has been on the school experience of minority groups who are not particularly successful in school--usually nonimmigrants. Researchers have been primarily concerned with the school experience of those minority groups who did not chose to come voluntarily to countries in which they now reside in order to improve their social, economic, political status, or to achieve other desired ends. Ogbu (1991) makes a useful distinction between involuntary and immigrant minorities for explaining their performance in school. He points out that ethnographers have concluded from their observations that minority students' disproportionate school failure is caused by discontinuities in culture, communication, and power relations. However, these conclusions may not be applicable to all minority groups. "There may be different patterns of adaptation in school which lead to differential school success for immigrant and nonimmigrant minorities, partly because of different historical experiences which lead to different adaptive responses" (Ogbu, 1991, p. 4). It is, therefore, necessary to study education of immigrant minorities as a distinct field, related to, but not exactly similar to, education of other involuntary minorities in United States.

Asian Indians who have immigrated to United States in past several decades represent a population that is highly educated and professional. Nathan Glazer in his foreword address in *The New Ethnics* (Saran & Eames, 1980) has described these comparatively new immigrants as "a new and rapidly growing ethnic group fed by immigration. It is not like any of the others. It is marked off by a high level of education, by concentration in the professions, by a strong commitment to maintaining family connections, both here in the United States, and in India" (p. vii). Starting in late 1960s, as a result of changes in immigration laws (passage of Public Law 89-236, 1965) scores of Indians began to come with their families to live and earn a living in United States. By now, there is a clear evidence of the establishment of permanent Indian communities in

large urban centers such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Because of the persistent efforts of the Association of Indians in America, a separate category for Asian Indians was included in the 1980 census. Immigration records and U.S. census records show that Indians are among the fastest growing immigration groups in the U.S. today. The overall growth rate for Indian Americans from 1990-2000 was 105.87%, the largest growth in the Asian American community, with an average annual growth rate of 7.6%. Indian Americans represent .6 percent of the United States population with 1,678,765. Indian Americans comprise 16.4% of the Asian American community, and are the 3rd largest constituency in the Asian American community behind the Chinese American community, and the Filipino American community (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

These factors among many others make Asian Indians a distinct group demanding to be studied. Just as the conclusions drawn from the studies involving involuntary minorities may not be applicable to immigrant minorities, so is the case with different immigrant groups. It is essential to resist overgeneralization and understand the distinct characteristics of different immigrant groups in order to make their adaptation and acculturation experiences in the host society more comfortable and satisfying. Not much research is being done on the experiences of the immigrant groups that are positive contributors to American economy, and Asian Indians are such a group. Systematic study of different immigrant groups will also help to reduce the ill-feeling, and generate positive opinions among mainstream American population toward immigrants and what they bring to the economy and society.

Since the sizable influx of Asian Indians to America is quite recent, the topic of marginality among the current generation of school- and college-going Indians whose parents were immigrants is not very well explored. However, from various observations and the limited number of studies that are available, one finds that the children of Indian immigrants in America do very well academically and are well behaved socially (Agarwal, 1991; Bandon, 1998; Gibson, 1987, 1988; Nimbark, 1980; Rangaswamy, 2000, Saran, 1985). My study was an attempt in the direction of understanding some of the issues related to the educational experiences of Asian Indian children from their perspective and that of their parents and teachers.

Finally, an important part of the study was my own perspective that I brought as an Asian Indian graduate student at the same university. At the time of the study, I was living in the U.S. for two years with my husband, who was also a graduate student. Being an Asian Indian, and living in the same university housing complex as my participants, did make me an insider in many ways to the culture and ways of life of my participants, giving me an advantage in understanding their perspectives. But at the same time, at many points of the study I had to struggle with my own biases and subjectivity creeping into the data collection and analysis. I was also an outsider to the setting in two important ways. First, I was not a mother, and therefore I had not personally experienced some of the dilemmas Indian parents in the study felt in regard to the upbringing of their children in a new cultural setting. Secondly, being a foreigner, I was an outsider to the American public school system, which was an important part of the study. This research project however, was of special interest to me as I was also struggling with issues of adjustment in a new cultural and educational setting. Doing this study gave me an opportunity to reflect on some of my own biases and beliefs about living in a foreign country as

immigrants. In this way, the project also became an important personal quest for me. I discuss more about this issue in the following section.

Composing the Stories

The researchers working in the naturalist paradigm believe that there is no single, objective reality “out there,” and that people perceive and construct their own realities based upon their experiences and understanding of the world around them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My aim in this study was to understand the experiences of three Asian Indian children and their families, so the reality I was seeking was constructed. I was trying to make sense of people’s experiences, and these experiences were constructions of my participants. They were telling me how they felt about certain aspects of their lives, and how they made sense of their experiences. I was making sense of their sense of reality. In this way, I was actually constructing reality based on the constructed realities of my participants. Furthermore, I was not dealing with a single construction of reality. Even though the aim was to understand the experiences of children, I thought it was important to get a sense of what their parents thought of their children’s educational experiences, and also how the teachers of these children helped them adjust in the school setting, in addition to the teachers’ own experiences with these and many other international students in their classrooms. Thus, I was working with multiple realities, or sometimes multiple constructions of the same reality.

Gathering the Stories

The school, Jackson Elementary, where I did my study was selected partly based on some prior knowledge about the school’s international student population, partly on its convenient location, and partly on its record in encouraging research on diversity related topics. I wanted to do the study at an elementary school, because I was interested to learn the experiences of the children who come to the U.S. with their parents at very young age, and are still not as “Americanized” as middle or high school aged children. Also, the peer pressure is just starting to show its effect at elementary level, which would allow me to understand the emerging conflicts in children’s lives. I contacted the Office of School University Research Relations at my university with my research idea and a brief written proposal. This office was instrumental in setting up my initial meeting with the school principal. I discussed my research idea with the school principal at length and sought his formal consent prior to beginning the formal study.

For the selection of my participants, the initial step of identifying the Asian Indian students in the school, and talking to their teachers if they wanted to participate in the study was done by the school principal. From the teachers who agreed to participate, I had to eliminate one case, as the child in question (Ajay’s brother) was a special education student, and studying his case would have added more layers and complexity to the issues. Once the children were identified, I contacted the parents myself and explained to them the purposes and procedures of the project. As an international student I lived in the same university housing complex as these children’s families, which helped in establishing the contact and building a rapport with the parents. They were also encouraged to call me with any questions or doubts they might have in regard to their involvement in the project. About a week later, with the help of the teachers a consent

letter was sent home to parents for their signature. All the participants (and the school) were given pseudonyms for the purpose of anonymity. It is important to mention that while I lived in the same neighborhood as my research participants, prior to this study I had not communicated with Ajay's family, and the only contact I ever had with Veena and Rohit's family was at a social event in the neighborhood.

The study was conducted in multiple naturalistic settings. I observed the children in their classrooms, and also rode the school bus with them a few times. I interviewed the teachers at the school during their free time, sometimes in their classrooms at the end of the school day, sometimes in the library and once in the office of the school psychologist. For my interviews with parents, I switched the setting from their homes to my home, depending upon the convenience of my participants and mine. I interviewed children in different settings too, sometime in school in between classes, sometime informally during the classes, sometime at their homes, sometime at my place, or even in the playground near their home. This variety of settings widened my focus and enabled me to understand their experiences from multiple perspectives. All these natural settings allowed my participants to feel "at home" and did not restrain them in any perceivable manner (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

In the children's classrooms, my role was of a participant-observer. At times I read some of the books with the students in the classes, and at other times I was more of an observer sitting at the back of the room, taking notes. I also assisted one teacher with some project activity at few occasions, and at other times I helped some students in the class (who were not my participants) with their work. All the field notes from the observations were word processed and coded.

In order to understand the school context better, I interviewed the school principal, the administrator of the "multicultural program", the librarian, and four teachers that teach the children in my study. These interviews were semi-structured, and ranged from 20 minutes to an hour long, and often conducted more than once. In addition, some of the casual conversation with the teachers and other people in the school proved to be very useful. I also collected some useful information about the school in the form of written documents about the school's multicultural program. In case of parents and children, the interviews were again semi-structured, and often open-ended, ranging from 10-minute casual talk to 45-minute long interviews conducted at different times. First, I interviewed the parents together, and later mother and father separately to get multiple perspectives on the issues. I gave the choice to parents to talk either in Hindi or English, whatever way they felt comfortable, and most of them chose Hindi. This in itself indicated their intent to maintain Indian identity, which they also emphasized for their children. All the interviews were tape-recorded, and later transcribed and coded.

Open-ended conversations with the children were more useful than semi-structured interviews. The children felt more free and uninhibited when I let them talk about any of the things they wanted to talk about. Most of the data collected through these conversations was highly relevant, and even if it did not directly fit with my research agenda, it helped me understand the children better, and get a feel for the things that interested them. This gave me a chance to use those topics to get them to answer some of the questions I had. With children, as well as their parents, I found that they were also curious to know about my family. Two children even wanted to see the pictures of my parents and siblings (which I did show them). Ajay, the five-year old kindergartner, who was very fond of drawing and painting was very interested to know about my sister

who is an artist, and thus art or pictures gave us a topic to talk about. In the process I was able to hear his views not just about art, but also on issues such as his ambitions, his parents' expectations of him, and his relation with his brother.

To better understand the school context - the diverse nature of its population, the multicultural program, and the services provided to international students in the school, I triangulated the data by asking similar questions from different data sources. The written documents about the history of the multicultural program, and its philosophy were also useful. I also used classroom observations and interviews as means of triangulation for understanding the children's interaction patterns, behavior, and experiences at school. During the course of this study, I attended several Indian social gatherings and celebrations in the town and reflected upon my experiences to understand my socialization and acculturation in order to explore the feelings and experiences of my participants. At two of these gatherings, I got an opportunity to talk to one of the three children informally and get some valuable information.

Constructing the Stories

Data analysis involved various steps. After a first reading of all the transcripts and field notes, I made a tentative list of the issues reflected in the data. This list underwent a lot of additions and subtractions with subsequent readings of the data. The grouping and re-grouping of these issues in categories was followed by cutting and pasting sessions. As a result, I developed a broad scheme of organizing the different sub-categories in more comprehensive and inclusive categories. My analysis was more holistic and inductive in nature, as I was trying to paint a comprehensive picture of the experiences of these children (Creswell, 1998). I was looking at the wider scenario of the adjustment of these children in a new educational and cultural setting, rather than their specific classrooms. Thus, during the data analysis stage, I was more interested in the general patterns emerging from the data, rather than the individual teacher-level factors, which may or may not facilitate the student's adjustment (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The writing is descriptive given the nature of the research topic. Following Creswell's (1998) advice, I have used a writing style that is personal, familiar, highly readable, friendly and appealing to a broader audience. By providing a level of detail that allows writing to come alive (Richardson, 1994), my goal is to transport the readers directly into the worlds of these children and their experiences at school and home. Only then can the reader transfer the interpretations to another setting with other minority groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba, whether a working hypothesis developed in context A might be applicable in context B has to be answered empirically: the degree of transferability is a direct function of the similarity between the two contexts, which they refer to as "fittingness." Fittingness is described as the degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts.

A qualitative researcher is expected to provide sufficient information about the context in which a study is conducted so that anyone else interested in transferability has a base of information appropriate to make the judgment (I prefer to look at it as collaboration between the writer/researcher and the reader). The description must specify everything that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings. Findings are not part of the thick description, although they must be interpreted in terms of the factors of the thickly described context. In this paper, I have organized the descriptions

with the aim of using them for building a story around the experiences of the participating children (Wolcott, 1990). I have tried to avoid making any judgments on the teaching style and personal behavior of the teachers as that was not the purpose of the study. But there are some general school-level policy implications that are derived from the descriptions and these are referred to briefly in the conclusion of the report.

Establishing Trustworthiness of the Stories

Qualitative researchers attempt to capture the world of their research participants by understanding their perceived realities and interpreting that from their own subjective perspectives as researchers and individuals. Krieger (1991) believes that the outer world, or our “external reality” is inseparable from what we already know based on our lives and experiences, which construct our inner reality. In exploring the worlds of my research participants, I realized I was working with their constructions of the realities of their lives as parents, students, potential immigrants, but mostly as individuals dealing with issues of cultural displacement, adaptation, adjustment, and accommodation. As I tried to look for patterns and themes in the data, my personal construction of my reality as an Asian Indian, as an international student, and as a potential immigrant often surfaced and interacted with the constructed realities of my research participants. While minimizing the “distance” and “objective separateness” (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) between myself and my research participants, I still found it necessary to monitor my subjectivity by recording my reactions and opinions in a journal as I went about the data analysis. The constructed realities of my research participants and mine, and the interactions among these different interpretations of realities provided for an inter-subjective interpretation of the data.

The length of the time spent on the research setting, doing observations, and conducting interviews was an important factor in establishing a trusting relationship between myself and the research participants (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This determined, to a large extent, the reliability and trustworthiness of the information gathered in the study. Observations, interviews, and casual conversations were used to triangulate the data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also maintained a research log where I kept a record of the interview and observation schedules. I also maintained a subjectivity journal through which I regularly evaluated my bias in seeing and interpreting things and people in and around the research setting.

I regularly discussed portions of data with colleagues, friends, and faculty. This was important for additional analysis and interpretation, and also for checking of my perceptions of the reality. This method of peer-debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) also served as a tool for triangulating the findings of the study. I also shared the interpretive process with research participants, by obtaining their reactions to the working drafts of the interview transcripts and fieldnotes, and also by sharing with them the progress of study. Through this, I was also able to verify whether or not I was reflecting the insider’s perspectives. This form of sharing also helped me in developing new ideas and interpretations of the phenomena around the research participants and me. The participants were also asked to make me aware of the sections of the data that, if made public, could have been problematic for either personal or other reasons.

“Part of demonstrating the trustworthiness of your data is to realize the limitations of your study” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 147). As a qualitative researcher, I have

detailed the particular circumstances and the context of the study, and have discussed the limitations of the study. I have also described the unique characteristics of the research setting and the research participants that illustrated the issues under study in some lights but not in others. I do not make any generalizations about the findings of the study, but provide adequate information about the cases, and the issues emerging from the interpretation of the cases for the readers to make their own naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995) about the phenomena.

People in the Stories

Veena Deven and Rohit Deven lived in a two-bedroom apartment in the university family housing complex with their parents and an older sister, Pallavi, who attended the middle school in the same district. The family belonged to a very small, underdeveloped town from Karnataka, a state in South India. Their home town was actually officially included in the “backward” area list of the Government of India. Ganesha, the father of the children, was working at a notable research establishment in India. He came to U.S. about four years ago to pursue a Ph.D. at the university on a prestigious international scholarship. Ganesha explained his reason for coming to this country in these words:

Well, it was not just U.S., but I wanted to go abroad, call it a craze, or a desire, wish.... Well, it was not craze, though.... I did not just think of coming to U.S.A. I was in fact more eager to go to Canada or Australia. I don't know why, because I did not know enough about any of these three countries, I had been educated in India, now I wanted to experience the system abroad, how it is, and... I thought this will have a higher value too....

His wife, Kamala, and three kids moved to the U.S. a year later, giving Ganesha some initial time to adjust at the university and at the same time go through the legal formalities to get proper documentation to call his family through the university international student office and the INS. After coming to the U.S., Kamala worked at a local garment factory initially for a little while to supplement the family income, but was now a full-time housewife taking care of the family and household. Veena and Rohit started school in grade 3 and grade 1, respectively at Jackson Elementary School.

Ajay Dutt, my third participant lived with his parents and an older brother in the same neighborhood. In this case, it was Ajay's mother, Nisha, who was pursuing a higher degree at the university. Nisha was the first to come to the U.S., about two years ago -- leaving her husband and two sons back in India -- who followed her a year later. Karan¹, the older son in the family was a special education student in grade 3 at the same school, and as his mother told me, was the primary reason for the family to be in U.S.

¹ Even though Karan's school experiences were important to be studied, I decided not to include his case, as it added another, much deeper dimension to the general case or issues related to educational experiences of other three children. So I restricted my study to Ajay, the younger son in Dutt family. While interviewing the parents, I made this known to them, as I did not want them to feel forced to talk to me about the details of Karan's special needs, their interactions with him, or Ajay's interactions with Karan.

Basically, we thought that this was the way that it would help Karan. We planned to come to this country so that I could get a degree, and get a foothold in this country and get a job, because I knew without a degree I could not get a job, so... Also, since Karan had some special needs, I thought I should get myself trained in that area. I got a B.Ed. in special education in India. Then I got Karan admitted in a regular school and I insisted that he should go to a regular school because socialization experience is so important. He was actually a borderline case... . So I decided that I am going to fight for this child and send him to a regular school. And he went to a regular preschool, nursery and all that. After that the teacher said that he can't go to a regular school. His abilities in academic area were lacking, though his social skills were very good. So I decided that the time had come to come to America. And the only way I saw it happening was by coming here, get myself an education. So I left my children and my husband back in India and came here.

Now that the family was together, Bhanu, Nisha's husband, was primarily responsible for taking care of the children, while their mother was busy with her education. This, in itself made this case very unique and exceptional in terms of the parental roles of the mother and father. This kind of adjustment was hard for both of them, as Nisha remarked:

Because he had worked for ten years with [this company]... and all of a sudden he had to resign. It was very hard for him to reconcile with the fact, you know he had such a busy schedule there and he was heading a very good marketing position in the company. But he decided and said that since we made a commitment.... Also for me to go back to school after 10 years I was totally against it for some time. I was all the time at home in India, a caretaker with my two children at home, looking after them, staying home, cooking and cleaning. So for me it was totally a change of role. Suddenly to come out of the home and start going to school --it was really difficult. But since Karan is benefiting, and it was a decision that both of us made so we are sticking by it. Everybody goes through hard times.

The two families were very different in many ways, making the data richer and deeper. The initial motivation for coming to the U.S., who was the first member in the family to come, and the parental roles in the family were important differences. But another important difference was in their desire to live permanently in the U.S. or go back to India, again for very different and personal reasons. More of this is discussed in a later section.

Stories of Early Experiences

"I felt good, because I think America is a good placebecause there are so many good things here, like toys and stuff...." This is how Rohit put his first impressions about the U.S. in words, while his sister, Veena expressed her feelings of fear that she had when she first came here in these words: "When I first came here... I felt bad, because I thought I'll have no friends or anything...I thought that it would be my first time and I didn't know any English." The difference in perception of these two children could probably be

due to the age at which they came here, and what they expected to find here. Veena had already been in school in India where she was studying in her mother-tongue. School was a big part of her life in India, and she therefore, expected the same in U.S., but with the fear that here she would have to learn English. On the other hand, Rohit was attending a kindergarten in India, which used Hindi as medium of instruction. Devens, being from Karnataka, have Kannada as their mother tongue, and so Hindi was a second language for Rohit in the Kindergarten. Since he had already spent a year in school, which had a different language than his as the medium of instruction, he probably did not expect that to be any major problem to be worried about when he came to the U.S. That is why he said: "I don't know" when I asked if he was also scared about not knowing any English. Kamala summarized the initial reactions of her kids in these heart-felt words:

When we came, it was hard. Because kids were studying in Kannada medium there, they did not know any English at all. So they did not like it. For six months, they used to cry - why did you bring us here? Whenever we used to call [India], they used to cry and say, we'll go to India. Whenever I used to scold them, they would say: why did you bring us here? For this only? All three used to say that and cry. I also did not like it in the beginning.

To help the children learn English, Kamala used to tell her husband to speak to the children in English at home, as she herself did not know enough English. This she realized later was wrong, as her children, at the time of the study, no longer spoke their native language at home. Though there was no more crying, and children had made enough friends over the period, both Veena and Rohit still struggled with English language after three years. This is an important issue to be explored in more detail later.

Ajay was slightly over four years of age when he came to the U.S. He had been away from his mother for one whole year, so his initial reactions were more of joy and happiness on being with his mother. Two other factors that worked in his favor were his young age at which it was easier to adjust in the new environment, and his familiarity with English language. Both Ajay and Karan actually spoke English at home, because of Karan's special needs. Their mother explained the situation:

Both of them [Karan and Ajay] had learnt English in India..... I would like them to know Hindi as well. I really would have liked them to know Hindi, but it just so happened that Karan's speech therapist thought that it would be better if he learns one language only. So we decided that it would be good idea to teach him only one language, and we chose English.

They made this choice mainly because many of the better private schools in big cities in India, and especially in Bombay (now renamed Mumbai), where Dutt family belonged to, have English as the medium of instruction. Since Karan was already going to a school in India, his parents thought it better to let him learn only English, which he would have to learn even if they had stayed in India. This special situation had made English as the primary language of conversation in Dutt family especially with children (because the parents often spoke in Hindi with each other). It was this ease and proficiency in English language that Ajay joined Jackson Elementary School when he turned five. Thus, Ajay's

knowledge of English language put him in a better situation than Veena and Rohit in a new school setting.

Stories of School Experiences

Learning English was an important part of school experiences for Veena and Rohit. At the time of the study, both attended English as Second Language (ESL) classes, and had been doing so for the last three years. As a fifth-grader, Veena spent half of her school day in ESL classroom and half in the regular classroom, as per the school's policy. At the beginning of the school year, she was tested to see if she still needed ESL instruction, and, as her ESL teacher put it:

We found that she was actually a borderline case. I was earlier thinking, it might be a possibility that she would be in regular class, but it depended on the test... But she entered the class with fairly good academic level of both written and oral English. And this is not very unusual for children who have been here that long... Oral English definitely gets quite good... Even though they are very proficient in language, as far as academic skill goes, they still need support. So, as far as oral proficiency is concerned, Veena is very good, but reading and writing....

So Veena's struggles with learning English continued, which her regular classroom teacher commented upon in these words: "I think she still struggles with English sometimes, and she sometimes has problem with some difficult English vocabulary, but she doesn't let that stop her."

Rohit, on the other hand, was one of the three students out of a total of 20 in his class who went to ESL class for only half an hour in the morning to work on their reading and writing skills, and spent rest of the school day in the regular classroom. His classroom teacher saw his English proficiency as "talking-wise, yes; reading and understanding things, no....A lot of times he has problems with comprehension."

In Ajay's case, the language did not pose a problem, because of his previous knowledge of English, and also because most of the Kindergarten learning experience at the school was activity-oriented.

Both Veena and Rohit perceived their on-going struggle with English language in less severity than their teachers. Rohit remarked: "Sometimes I don't understand some word that my friend speaks...I look into the dictionary." Veena also shared the concern: "Sometimes, I also have this problem, then I ask somebody, and he or she tells me what it means." But Veena also worried that she asked too many questions: "Sometimes I think I ask too many questions, and I think she [teacher] gets tired of me, so I just don't ask her." Their parents saw the situation through a different perspective. They both thought that since Veena had adequate knowledge of her mother-tongue, both oral and written, it had been easier for her to learn English, and since Rohit did not learn his home language while he was in India, he was having much harder time in school with reading and writing in English. This opinion of the parents was actually formed by what the teachers in the school had been telling them at the parent-teacher conferences about the language-learning theories based on their education and experiences of teaching in a multilingual school. Also, when the Devens compared the performance of Veena and Rohit, they found the teacher's theories reliable. Both the children were however quite fluent in speaking English, and had also picked up the "American" accent in their speech. This

was common for most of the international children in the school who had been in the U.S. for two or three years.

The school context was an important factor in regard to children's experiences related to learning English. The overall character of the school, its multicultural and multilingual nature, and the kind of services the school provided put children like Veena and Rohit at much ease than what they might have felt had they been in some other school. The school's "multicultural program" which emphasized maintaining home language at the same time when children were learning English and which also provided ESL instruction for the Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, made the students feel that their home language and culture were important thereby accelerating the acquisition of the second language and acculturation to the new environment. The administrator of the multicultural program at Jackson Elementary described this phenomenon:

It really does help put children [at] ease, if they are new, because they see a lot of children struggling. We find that when the kids leave their regular classroom, where people speak, for the most part, better English, and they go to their ESL classroom, they are much more comfortable, because there in their ESL classroom, everybody is learning English and they know that. And then when they start to learn more English, they become comfortable in their classroom....We also find that it helps our American students, or our native English speaking students to realize that people all over the world speak different languages....we feel that it is beneficial to everybody in the school....We also have a foreign language program for our native English speakers. So they take foreign language so that they understand what the limited English students are going through. Otherwise, especially little kids who don't know, who don't have the concept of language, they might think that this person [LEP student] is dumb... He doesn't know this simple word.... So because they are learning another language also, they know what it is like....

I observed the working of this multicultural program during my classroom observations in Veena's regular and ESL classroom, and also in Rohit's regular classroom. There was a noticeable difference in Veena's classroom behavior in these two settings. She was a much more active participant in her ESL class than regular classes. She was also more talkative and confident in her ESL classroom. While this sense of comfort in a classroom could be due to teacher level differences to some extent, the most important reason in this case, however, was the ease created by the presence of other LEP children, sailing in the same boat as Veena, and the feeling of adequacy provided by the composition of the class. The presence of a Korean teaching aide in the classroom also made the setting more inviting and comfortable for the children who could identify with her. The ESL teacher herself was able to speak three languages thus making learning of a second language appear attainable and rewarding to the children.

In her regular classroom, I found Veena to be more quiet and restrained than she was in the one described above or many other ESL classes that I observed her. She asked a lot of questions, and answered many more in the ESL class, than in her regular classes. In her own words: "I like ESL....I like Math also, but in ESL we don't study Math..." Her interactions in the school were also shaped by the nature of her ESL classroom. She regarded three girls as her best friends, two of them were in her ESL class, and the third

one was an Indian girl who lived near her home, went to the same school in grade 3, and always sat with Veena in the school bus. Veena explained how she made friends:

I used to be shy, and I would not speak English. There were these people who used to sit on my table in school, they also did not know English. We just tried to talk or something, so we became friends.....I have some American friends too.....But sometimes, when I have some American people in my group, like when we have to do a project or something, I feel shy because I don't play outside with them, so I don't know them well enough....

Her interactions with her school friends mainly revolved around teachers, other students, homework, and occasionally about movies.

Rohit had more American friends, this was mainly because he spent almost all the day in regular classroom. In the afternoon, eight of the LEP children from Rohit's class would go to ESL classroom, leaving 12 native speakers of English, including the foreigners who were also fluent speakers of English in the class. Thus, Rohit interacted mostly with the children who spoke English as good as he did or better, and he called all of them "American." Rohit, however, also played with the two Indian girls who lived near his home, but referred to them as his "sister's friends." His conversations with his friends covered many topics, mostly TV, Power Rangers, and other American children's stuff. He showed an enthusiasm to visit one of his American friend's (Paul's) house more often than his parents would allow him. He talked with great excitement about his visit to Paul's house on his birthday.

This difference in the socialization patterns of Veena and Rohit implies that their classroom interactions were directed by their school schedules. In other words, how much time they spent with native English speaking children and LEP children influenced with whom they interacted more freely and also the kinds of things they talked about with their friends. These interactions are important as it is through them that the children are socialized into any culture. The difference in the socialization patterns of these two children from the same family could also effect, which one of the two becomes "Americanized" more quickly than the other. However, some important points are in order here. First, the interaction of these children with other Asian Indian children is an important dimension that influences both the acculturation of these children, and also their challenges at maintaining their Indian culture and identity. Second, what kind of interactions these children would have once they are outside of Jackson Elementary School, and in a more "American" mainstream school would also effect their socialization and acculturation. This would require a longitudinal study following these children. Third, the length of their further stay in U.S. would be an important factor in itself. And last, but not at all the least, the acculturation of these children is very much influenced by the interaction patterns of their families, and the pressure to maintain Indian identity. This is what I will turn to in the next section.

The content being taught in the classroom was important in itself. During one of my observations in Veena's ESL class, I found the teacher reading a Korean fairy tale. The teacher later told me that she was doing a unit on space, and chose some fairy tales as part of the unit to discuss some of the myths and mysteries associated with space. She also informed me that children would also be reading from a fairy tale book from India. Veena described her feeling about reading the Indian book in the class as follows:

Sometimes I feel that if there is something bad, something that I think is bad about India, I wish this were not there in the book – oh, why did she have to read this? I think that she should not have read the book. If there is a good thing in the book, then everyone says - wow, this country has really good stuff. So that is good.

The issue regarding multiple voices in the curriculum is a highly debated one. The multiculturalists argue that curriculum has to be made relevant to the children in the classroom, and the teacher should try to provide material that students can relate to in a meaningful way. However, Veena's additional point was that this "multicultural" material should also make the students feel good about their country of origin, culture, and language. The teachers at the school also addressed other important dimensions to making the curriculum relevant and multicultural, as the fifth grade regular teacher said:

Our curriculum is pretty much set, and there is nothing much we can do, but we try and kind of bring different things into the discussion....it also depends on how much more work you as a teacher want to put into it. Our ESL teachers at different times do different projects with the students, keeping in mind which countries are represented in the classroom.

The third grade regular teacher also added: "It [bringing different cultures and countries into the discussion] is possible at some level, if it is integrated in the curriculum. But there is so much that a third-grader has to do curriculum-wise, that there is not enough room for it." Thus, even in a multicultural school like Jackson Elementary, where one would see the displays which read: "WE share a world for all our differences of politics, race, economics, abilities, culture, and language -- WE share one world" and "To be tolerant is to welcome the differences and delight in the sharing" and "Celebration of Our Ethnic and Cultural Heritages" in the school office, it is important to indicate that the teachers and students faced certain challenges in their efforts to provide truly multicultural education to students.

Stories of Identities

There is nothing wrong in having friends from different cultures, it is in fact enriching. But at the same time, having more Indian friends gives a sense of belongingness to the children, that we are Indian....That way I can still feel closer to my roots. Because I think that I have lived all my life in India, and my attitudes, and beliefs are deep rooted. That you can't change....So I know that since both my kids are going to grow up here, it is very easy for them to become Americanized. And I'll feel very bad if they become totally Americanized.

This is the way Nisha felt about maintaining Indian identity in her kids. Nisha and Bhanu had more Indian friends who came to their house for parties and socializing. Nisha made a distinction between family and professional friends, family friends being "totally Indian," and professional friends being "American or others." Ganesha explained the family's interaction as "kind of less with non-Indians, at family level. But because of

being on this scholarship, I have few [non-Indian] friends also with whom we meet regularly. Kamala also meets with them.... but at festivals, etc. of course, there is more interaction only with Indians. Others won't understand what is going on." Thus one important factor influencing the adjustment of these children was the interaction pattern of their parents, who socialized mostly with Asian Indians. The children get a stronger sense of their Indian identity when they see their parents talking in native language with other Asian Indians. This, however, can also give the children a narrow conception of building friendships in a foreign culture.

Both families wanted the children to maintain their Indian identity, and they believed that the way to do that was by maintaining the customs and traditions they followed in India. Kamala maintained her family's tradition of doing some daily *puja* (ritual of worshipping) at home, even though, she felt bad that she couldn't get all the needed *samagri* (holy materials needed to do the *puja*) in the town. Ajay's parents also maintained the tradition of celebrating *Ganesh Chaturthi* (a religious holiday to worship Lord Ganesh, celebrated with great pomp and show in Bombay, where Dutts were living in India). Both the families celebrated all the major Hindu festivals with their Indian friends, but at the same time parents shared the concern that it was hard for kids to remember all the rituals and traditions associated with the celebrations because of "being here." Nisha felt very strongly about maintaining Indian culture, but was determined not to force anything upon her children. She believed that it was parents' responsibility to provide needed encouragement for children to maintain their Indian identity. She explained at length:

I think I am putting a lot of pressure on myself which I shouldn't be doing. But I think I will try my level best that they should retain their culture, but at the same time not letting them feel guilty if they forget. Because I think I don't want them to feel that they don't know much about Indian culture when they are older....It is not their fault because if we haven't been able to provide that kind of atmosphere at home, how can you expect them to know it. How can you expect that because they are not in that environment....How can he know about the culture, unless I make a conscious effort to tell him, to talk with him over and over again about traditions, festivals, dress, etc. ...and then through language, music, food. But I am not going to make it mandatory that you should know definitely that what is *veena*, *sitar* (Indian musical instruments) etc. But I will give them exposure to those things. But not make it stringent that they must learn. If they learn, very well, I'll be very happy. But if they don't I'll be disappointed, but then I can't help it. It is sad, but you can't have everything.

Kamala and Ganesha on the other hand did not feel so strongly about some of these things, as at the time of study they were quite sure that they would go back to India in a couple of years. Kamala believed that telling the children that they would soon be going back to India kept her children under a check and prevented them from becoming totally "Americanized." She put her decision as clearly to her children as she did to me: "I say to them, we have to go anyway....there is no way that we are going to stay here.... I have told them straightforward that we have to go after a year."

In some ways, Kamala was less worried about her children losing their Indian identity because of their plans to go back to India in the near future. Nisha, on the other

hand was concerned because her family was going to live in this country, and it was therefore up to her and her husband to ensure that their children did not lose their Indian identity. Thus, the difference in the emphasis these two families placed on providing exposure to Indian culture and arts was mainly due to the difference in the needs perceived by the parents. Since Veena and Rohit would probably go back to India, their parents did not find it necessary to keep reinforcing the Indian culture through various arts and music, but to Nisha and Bhanu, it was important as they were convinced that their children, who would be living in the U.S. could not learn about these things if they were not given specific opportunities. Another reason for the difference was the prior exposure the parents, and especially the mothers themselves had had to many of these cultural activities when they were in India. This of course was also determined partly by the place where they grew up and lived most of their lives, and also by their formal education level. Though in both the families, the fathers were highly educated, there was a noticeable difference in the education levels of the mothers. Kamala who came from a small village in Karnataka, did not speak English at all and had a high school diploma. On the other hand, Nisha was a college educated, urban woman, and was pursuing a graduate degree at the university. These differences in the parental education level, especially the education of mothers could be another factor at play here.

However, there were some common things both the families did to help maintain their Indian identity. Food was one such thing. Both the families cooked and ate Indian food at home regularly. All the three children emphasized their preference for Indian food. During our conversations, Ajay was also curious to know if I understood the names of the Indian dishes that he was telling me about -- those that his mother made for him. His Indian identity was being reinforced in a way through my acknowledgment that I knew what he was saying and that I also cooked some of those dishes at my home. Kamala, being a homemaker maintained a more traditional division of gender roles in her household. She was the primary caretaker and in-charge of the kitchen. This, in her view, was also a tradition that helped her maintain Indian identity of her family: "If the kids are born here, and growing here, they might change. But in case of my children, they lived for some time in India, and are now here for some time, at home, they don't see anything American. It is totally Indian at home."

Food also brought in an additional dimension to these children's adjustment at school. In India, most of the schools don't have provision for free or subsidized lunch at the school and children usually carry lunch from home. Veena and Rohit perceived the "lunch thing" as problematic sometimes, especially because they did not eat meat (many Hindu Indians do not eat meat for religious or cultural reasons). As Veena explained:

Sometimes [in the school cafeteria] they have vegetables, I take that,... Or sometimes, if they don't have vegetables without meat, I take that but leave the meat part, and eat only the vegetable part.... Sometimes they have pizza, cheese pizza, or something - I eat that....

Ajay's mother also shared this concern in these words:

Food is a big thing too. Here, the lunch that they give in school, it is totally different. And besides, he [Ajay] is very fussy about food. So, that is a big adjustment, because here they give ham and chicken in school, which he doesn't

eat at all. And he feels strange if I give him dal-bhaat (rice and lentils, a common Indian food) in lunch box, he feels awkward. ... May be hesitation that they are all eating something else and I am eating something else. So he doesn't like that. He says I'll also have sandwich. So there is that kind of thing he is adjusting to.

It was, therefore, an additional adjustment for these children at school while they were adjusting to the larger culture of the American school and society. On the face of it, it may not appear to be a major problem, but being a vegetarian Indian I could understand how these children might feel at certain times. Veena shared a story about her Korean friend who often brought her own food from home, to illustrate the adjustment she and many other international students at the school had to make with regard to the school lunch. For the risk of missing the essence of the issue, I present the following excerpt verbatim from my conversation with her regarding this story:

Veena: ... but my Korean friend, she brings Korean food from home, and the teacher always looks at that. I don't know why. Then she whispers to other teacher, look how she eats with chopsticks, and then she whispers about the food. I told my friend, why does she always talk about your food.

Beloo: so you think if you bring your food from home, the teacher would....

Veena: yeah, she would lean over and look at my food.

Beloo: would you like that.....

Veena: no, I would not like that... And sometimes they make fun of it....

Beloo: of food, you mean the teachers....

Veena: yes, they don't say it, but sometimes you can tell. Some boys or girls also make fun of that. Like my Korean friend who brings her food, there is this boy who makes fun of that. He would say, see how her food is, and then he would say can I have one, can I have one, then he will take it, and throw it away, and laugh at that.....

Beloo: hmm. I think if this happens to me, I would feel very bad.

Veena: I would feel bad too.

Occasionally, the food issue also entered into the children's classroom experiences. In Rohit's third grade classroom the following incident occurred on a particular day:

Grade 3 classroom, 19 children

Rohit is sitting with three other boys -- one is from Pakistan, other a white American, and the third one is a newly arrived student from Korea who doesn't

speaking any English. I pull up my chair and join the group. The teacher tells the class: "We know that parent teacher conference is coming up this Friday. Why don't we make something that parents can look at while they are waiting for their turn to talk to the teacher. We did the unit on food groups last week, so we can make restaurant menus....you can all write the names of some dish in all of the six categories ---- Appetizer, Beverage, Vegetable, Protein, Grain, and Dessert." The teacher then goes on to show an illustration on the board and gives examples of the items children can write in different food categories. She points out at the chart displaying food groups and I notice that the "proteins" group had pictures of different kinds of meat, nuts and eggs. She also shows the class how they will fold the paper, make the menu, and other details. The paper is handed over to all the students, and in few minutes, the students are getting busy writing menus for their restaurant -- "Kid Cooks." Rohit writes candy for appetizer, apple juice for beverage, lettuce for vegetable (he spells lettuce as letice), bread for grain, and candy again for dessert. He has missed the item for protein. A student from the class who happens to be on the "job-time" as teacher's assistant at that time is going around the tables and seeing that students are doing their work. When she looks at Rohit's menu, she asks him: "what will you have for protein?" Rohit: "I don't know, I don't like proteins." The girl then says: "you can put meat, nuts, or eggs, see" (pointing at the chart). Rohit: "Good idea." He writes nuts in the space near proteins in his menu. The American boy sitting on the table says: "Why nuts for proteins?" Rohit does not answer. The Pakistani boy sitting next to him says: "Protein means meat -- like chicken, I have put fried chicken in my menu. But some people don't eat meat." Rohit says: "I don't like meat."

Rohit was probably feeling slightly embarrassed to say that he didn't eat meat, so he would rather say -- "I don't like meat." Maintaining their food habits was, therefore, hard for these children, since at home they ate only Indian food.

Another important issue in regard to maintaining children's Indian identity was the maintenance of native language. In Ajay's case, he did not know his mother-tongue because of the special situation of his family, though he understood Hindi a little. However, his parents emphasized the need for both their children to learn Hindi as they thought it would enable them to converse better with their grandparents. They also felt that since Karan (their older son) was now proficient enough in English, it would be okay for him and Ajay to learn Hindi or any other second language. Ajay himself showed an enthusiasm in learning Hindi, and Telugu (a South Indian language that his mother and maternal grandparents spoke).

Veena and Rohit had gradually stopped conversing in their native language, and now mostly responded in English to their parents who generally spoke to them in their native language. As Veena herself said: "Sometimes I can't think of some word in Kannada, so I say it in English. Sometimes I speak in English with my grandmother on the phone.. and she doesn't understand...So I forget..." Their parents were concerned about the loss of native language, but accepted the fact. They did not make any special efforts to help children retain their native language, other than talking to them in Kannada themselves. This kind of situation where children mostly speak in English could very often alienate them from their parents or grandparents and may even weaken the family

bonds. However, there were no signs of this happening in the Deven family at the time of the study.

The multicultural program and policies of the Jackson Elementary School played an important role in maintenance (or non-maintenance) of native language of these children. The school emphasized the need for use of native language at home, not just for casual conversation, but also for facilitating the expansion of students' vocabulary by discussing the academic concepts in their native language at home. In addition, the school provided native language instruction in about 15 different languages to native speakers for a period of 35-40 minutes a day. There were some policy restrictions to this, however, which also applied to Asian Indian students in the school. As the administrator of the multicultural program explained:

Actually for our students from India, we don't do a whole lot for them in maintaining [native language], because among our Indian students, for the most part, we have a few Hindi speakers, a few Kannada speakers, a few Gujarati speakers. We don't have a large enough group of one Indian language. So we can't offer native language support in any language like we do for the Chinese students or the Korean students, because there are more students who speak that language. Unless we can show that we have 5 students that are not English speakers and that all of them speak the same other language... we have to have at least five, otherwise we just couldn't do it. I mean, the money only goes so far...but we do try to give the parents information about how to keep up the native language. At the beginning of the school year, we have a meeting and we encourage the parents to continue to speak in their native language and to talk about concepts that the children are learning in the school in their native language. And at the school we try to be sensitive to students who need to discuss things in native languages so that if someone was having difficult time understanding, we might find an older student to come and help a younger student understand.

Two important things are worth mentioning here. First, Gibson's research (1988) with Asian Indian immigrant families in rural California has shown that parents wanted an all-English curriculum for their children. However, in my study parents in both the families (and also other families that I talked to casually but whose cases I have not discussed in this paper) wanted some kind of native language instruction at the school. The children also expressed willingness and enthusiasm to learn their language at school, though Rohit at times was not so sure if he would like that. This expectation was mainly because of parents' awareness of the school's multicultural program and the services available for native-language instruction for other language groups in the school. Second, and more important is the fact that even though the two families that I interviewed (and several others in the neighborhood) had different Indian languages as their mother-tongue, the parents wanted instruction of Hindi (the most commonly spoken Indian language, especially in the northern and central regions of India). Thus, though the school did not get enough Indian students who spoke same Indian language to justify giving instruction in that language, it could have offered native language support in Hindi, which was welcome to, and in fact demanded by the parents.

With regard to discussing the academic concepts in native language, which the school suggested to its international parents to help children expand their native language

vocabulary, the Devens and Dutts didn't do anything at all. Kamala did not speak much English, so she was not able to work with her children on discussing their school work in Kannada. Ganesha on the other hand was too busy with his own studies and research to devote that kind of time to his children's education. Nisha and Bhanu spoke in English with their children for the most part for their own special reasons, and were thus not able to do what the school suggested. All the three children were at risk of losing their native language despite the efforts of the school and parents.

An interesting thing happened during the last phase of my data collection stage at the school. A second-generation Asian Indian undergraduate student at the university volunteered to teach Hindi once a week to the Indian students at the school. This turn of events was sure to add further dimensions to my study. Four Indian students, including the two who were participating in my study, started going to Hindi classes. In my conversation with the volunteer-student, I found out that she herself could not read or write in Hindi till last semester, when she took an elementary course in Hindi in the Foreign Languages department at the university. Her own Indian identity and experiences of growing up in the U.S. speaking mostly English, and learning Hindi in college had encouraged her to volunteer at the school as Hindi instructor. All these issues were making my study richer, but at the same time unmanageable to allow me to explore the depth of each of these issues. Besides, the time constraint was another inhibiting factor. So I decided not to go into the details of the Hindi class issue for the present study.

Stories of Future Migration

One important factor that influenced educational experiences of these children was whether their families would decide to live in U.S. or go back to India. This came up in many of the issues discussed above, for instance, parental emphasis on children's Indian identity, maintenance of native language, and rigorous academic training at home. Therefore, this issue demands further discussion at this point. The two families in this study were different in this regard.

The Devens did not want to live in the U.S. as immigrants, the parents expressed the desire to go to India in the near future, probably in a year or two. Ganesha felt that after finishing his Ph.D., it would be "professionally" better for him to get some job experience in U.S., before he started applying for jobs in India. He made this very clear that "at this moment [I am] looking at my career prospects," but believed and rightfully so, that his family's future prospects were closely related to his professional advancement and financial standing in the society, whether in India or in the U.S. Kamala shared her husband's belief, but at the same time worried that if they lived in this country after Ganesha finished his studies, they might never go back. Though she was not able to pinpoint the specific conditions that would lead to this, she attributed this to the flickering nature of human heart and mind. As she said:

Ganesha used to say that we'll go after finishing the Ph.D. but now...he thinks that if he works for a year, he'll get some experience, he'll get good job in India. I tell him that if we stay for another year, we don't know how things will change or we might also start thinking differently. I am thinking one thing now, I might think differently tomorrow, even after an hour. So...

She had, however, her very special reasons why she wanted to go back to India at the earliest possibility. This had to do with raising her children, especially her daughters in a “traditional Indian way.” With Veena and her older sister entering their teen years, Kamala was concerned about them getting “Americanized” and involved with dating and “stuff like that.” She also expressed her concern about some of the TV programs, and tried her best to keep a check on what shows her children watched on TV:

I don't let kids watch many programs. I just let them watch kids' programs, I don't allow them to see any program, which has some stuff like that, you know,... sex, or any adult programs like that... But sometimes, they do watch when I am not at home. Sometimes, when there is some scene like that, they start giggling and turn their eyes away... I laugh and tell them that you don't have to see these programs at all...

Kamala was also concerned about the influence of peers in school on her daughters, and believed that “things are not so bad in India, at least in our town.” She firmly believed that going back to India was the only way her children could be raised according to the Indian values with regard to cross-gender peer relations. According to Kamala, the conflict between more liberal American values and more “traditional Indian values” especially related to dating and premarital sex creates a state of ambivalence among children and adolescents. The situation becomes tougher since the children of parents like the ones in the study are socialized into American society either since birth or very early years. This is also one of the main causes of inter-generational conflicts in Asian Indian families. Kamala added that as long as she and her children were in the U.S., it was important to remind the children of their Indian identity: As she said:

Earlier they [the children] used to listen to me, now they don't care many times. And oh, I forget to tell you this...sometimes they start making some comparisons too. They say, here the parents, American parents do this or that with their kids, they treat their kids like that, why don't you do it. ...Well, I tell them that we are not Americans, we are Indians, this is what we are and how we do things. I tell them to keep that in their mind, India, their grandparents...

Children had their own reasons for going or not going back to India. Both Veena and Rohit expressed their liking for school and teachers in U.S. more than in India. Their point of comparison was mainly based on how the teachers treated the students, as Veena put it: “here, they don't yell at children, or never hit them.” The “detention system” appeared to be much lighter punishment than what these children had probably been through or witnessed in their school in India. Veena also believed that here she had learnt more in math than what she did in India, because “there my teacher used to talk all the time, and we never got to do all the fun stuff that we do in school here.” Less homework or sometimes no homework was an attractive feature of the school for Rohit. Parents in both the families were, for the most part, “supportive of the school program” and appreciated several aspects such as project-based teaching, extra-curricular activities and lack of rote learning. They were, however, also concerned that the American school system in general lacked academic rigor. Two examples they shared in this regard were not enough homework, and use of calculators in math classes. Ganesha clearly expressed

his preference for Indian system of schooling with regard to academic standards, and for his children to study in India. This was also one reason why he and his wife wanted to go to India in the near future.

Rohit expressed his liking for America also in terms of the toys and “other fun things that children can have in America.” However, both the children missed their grandparents, and Veena very vividly remembered her grandfather’s farm in India and the peacocks she used to see there. Rohit summarized his desire to go to India in these words: “if they have the same school, same teachers, toys, and other stuff and if I can have the same friends I would like to go.” But Veena expressed her ambivalence as: “I am not sure....sometimes, I would just like to take a visit and come back here.” Their parents were aware that the children would not like to go to India mainly because of the school, but as their mother told them:

We have to go anyway, if kids want they can come back when they are older. Then, they will be more mature, and understanding. They will know what is good or bad. Right now, it is easier for them to fall for such things, which we don’t like. There is so much influence of culture and friends. But now, there is no way they can stay. We have to go to India....

At the time it appeared that the Deven family would go back to India in the near future, but the important thing to be noted here is that this decision would be based mainly on what parents think: for Ganesha it would be professional reason to a large extent, and for Kamala, it would be her beliefs about raising her children with “traditional Indian values.” How acceptable this decision would be for the children is something that needs to be delved into further, and will probably require following the children in their initial periods of adjustment in India. The most important thing to be addressed, however, is the fact that different people in this family had different reasons for going back to India or staying here, thus implying that emigration/immigration is not as simple a phenomenon as often considered to be.

Veena and Rohit would go through another phase of adjustment if they went back to India, both at school and in the larger social-cultural environment. It may be another cultural shock for the children after living 4-5 years in a much technologically advanced, liberal, and open society like U.S. A lot of this would however depend on where they live in India, many of the big cities will offer similar lifestyle to a large extent, though with noticeable differences. However, since all three children in the Deven family had lost their native language to a large extent that would emerge as an additional factor in their adjustment. What school they go to in India, and what medium of instruction the school would have -- these factors might complicate the issue further. But as Veena remarked:

I think I am going to learn [Kannada] pretty soon. Because when I came here, I learnt English very soon...I always think that I will be the only one in my school who would know English. Like I will be famous or something. Like I will be the only one to know English so I will be very smart. In India in schools they do have English lessons, so if I had, I wouldn’t have any problems.

Her statement was based on her belief that she would be going to the same school she used to attend before she came to U.S. Now, with a better job and improved financial

status, her parents might want her to go to a private English-medium school, and thus things would be different than what she expected. In any case, the children would require some adjustments in India, similar to the ones they had to make when they arrived here, yet different in nature.

Dutt family on the other hand was sure that they were going to live in the U.S. and once Nisha got a job after finishing her degree, her husband would also start thinking about his career prospects. Their decision was based primarily on the needs of their older son, Karan, who, they believed, could avail of better medical and educational services in the U.S. Another factor influencing this decision was the fact that Nisha's two older sisters were already settled in U.S. as immigrants and they could probably help Dutt family to permanently migrate. This decision would have definite impact on Ajay's educational and socialization experiences. The parents were concerned about many of the issues discussed in the preceding pages, and had their own solutions to resolve many of these dilemmas. The most important thing that they felt, was maintaining Indian identity in their children. A lot of this could be taken care of, as Nisha believed, by living in a place which had some Asian Indian families:

That's why I think wherever I get a job, I hope there is enough Indian population there, I hope it doesn't happen otherwise. I would like to live where there is some Indian community there. I don't know may be I am conservative in that sense, but I just feel that it is important. If there is some Indian community, they [her children] would get some chance to speak their language, interact with Indians, and... And I'll feel very bad if they become totally Americanized....and for no fault of theirs.

Thus Ajay would be experiencing different pressures than Veena and Rohit about intercultural or bicultural identity. Even at the age of five, he was fully aware of this conflict when he told me: "I want people to be just one. Mine is not like that. I am American and Indian. Some people are like that and some are not like that." He also vaguely remembered his home and the beach in Bombay, but added: "that is so far from America." He kept emphasizing that he liked Chicago very much. He had been to Chicago with his family during a recent vacation, and described Chicago as: "so beautiful, because on the dark night, they put Christmas tree outside... On Christmas time, I saw them...the Christmas lights last year.... And it is so beautiful. And I wanted to go into the buildings also which I saw. They are so big." Bombay, his home town is a big metropolitan city in India and has many skyscrapers. His visit to Chicago, and seeing the big buildings and Lake Michigan probably reminded Ajay of Bombay in some ways, the buildings and the beach where the family servant used to take him for a walk sometimes. These were his memories of India. And he and many other children like him who come here with their parents at very young age, try to place their memories in the things they see here, as Ajay saw in Chicago.

Lessons from the Stories

Ogbu (1991) makes a distinction between voluntary and involuntary immigrant minorities. This distinction seems too simplistic. As the children's stories in this study suggest, the decision to migrate mainly rests with their parents, and sometimes these

decisions may even be against the wishes of the children. Children like Veena, Rohit, and Ajay, who come to this country with their parents, go through some tough periods of adjustment in their first few years. The pressure to maintain Indian identity, language, food habits, and traditions are all important aspects of their experiences. The school context plays an important role in their educational experiences and adjustment. There are important linkages between the family and school of these children, and both play important role in their acculturation into the host culture.

This study also touches upon some important policy issues for schools in relation to multicultural programs, ESL instruction, native language instruction, and support services for their increasingly diverse student and parent communities. One of the most pressing concerns this study has revealed pertains to the recognition of student's ethnic and cultural identity in the public school. There are many compelling arguments on both sides of the debate regarding the recognition of ethnic, cultural, and religious identity of people in public institutions. Philosophers, educators, sociologists and policy makers at different levels are all engaged in the discourse on how to deal with the increasing diversity in American society. Should schools as public institutions be concerned with their students' cultural and ethnic background? If yes, what steps can schools take to make the minority cultures feel respected and appreciated, to make these culturally and ethnically diverse students adjust to the mainstream culture while at the same time allowing them to maintain their individual and group identity? Should schools at all be concerned with maintenance of native culture and language of the immigrant minorities, or leave this for the families? Some of these questions have been explored throughout this study. Also, what conflicts and pressures children in the immigrant minorities face in their adjustment in a foreign culture, what role does school play in accentuating or alleviating these dilemmas, what role do families play in this regard -- this study explores some of these issues in regard to a specific ethnic minority.

The findings of this study can be applicable to other schools that deal with issues in minority education, especially ethnic, linguistic, and immigrant minorities. The atmosphere and policies of the school where I studied the experiences of three Asian Indian children, and the background of their families are important context in which these children's experiences are situated. The "thick description" of the context provided in this paper will enable the reader to get a feel of these children's experiences in school and the factors that shape those experiences. However, I do not claim any generalizability of these findings, not even to other Asian Indian families, because each individual family's background is an important determinant. This was made clear in my study with just two families -- in one family, it was the mother who was a graduate student, and in the other, it was the father; in one family, the children were proficient in English even before coming to U.S., while in the other the children still struggled with English. However, I am positive that many of the issues explored in the report are applicable to other ethnic minorities, including Asian Indians and international student families. This is because even though the backgrounds and motivations are different, and so are the conflicts and dilemmas faced by different groups and even by different families in the same ethnic groups, they all face some similar challenges of being members of minority cultures in U.S. At some level, this helps them identify with identity related conflicts faced by members in other minority groups. The thick description of my participants and their context can help the reader to vicariously experience the lives of these people and transfer that to other similar or not so similar settings.

Stories Yet to be Told

This research has been a journey into the lives of three Asian Indian children in order to understand their adaptation into the mainstream American culture, their experiences at school, and their expectations, aspirations for growing up with hyphenated identities. In order to bring families and schools closer, it is important to listen to the voices of the children and parents from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is equally important to understand the perceptions of teachers and school administrators about the educational experiences of these children. This study provides a model for future research in the area of minority education by including the perspectives of both families and schools in order to get a complete picture of the ways in which children living in two cultures experience American schooling.

The lack of literature on educational experiences of Asian Indians and their children in the U.S. has been an important driving force behind the present study. This group is unique in terms of its immigration history and adaptation patterns, its educational and professional achievement levels, and its socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (Dasgupta, 1989; Gibson, 1988; Nimbark, 1980; Saran, 1985). It is, therefore, important for schools to understand the specific issues and belief systems that shape the cultural models of schooling and the educational experiences of the children in these families. More in-depth studies focusing on “lived experiences” are needed to investigate the interconnectedness between inter-cultural experiences and schooling of Asian Indian children.

In future research on the educational experiences of Asian Indians in the U.S., attention must also be paid to the issues concerning representation, under-representation and misrepresentation of aspects related to India and Indian culture in school curriculum and textbooks. In another study (Mehra, 1998), one of my research participants raised an important question – “Why do kids have to know about all the details about every American president when there is so much more in the rest of the world that they can know about?” Trying to answer this question can be a good starting point for changing school curriculum to represent all the different cultures and groups of people that make American society and American schools multicultural and diverse. A meaningful representation of Indian culture in the school curriculum, however, should not only include a discussion on holidays and food, but also focus on its contribution to the world knowledge.

Some parents in this study implied in their comments that teachers and principals need to understand the beliefs and value systems of people like them who are newer arrivals to the U.S. This understanding could help school personnel clarify their opinions and judgments about the academic ability and achievement levels of Asian Indian children without stereotyping. Parents like the ones in this study may have different expectations with respect to the role of schools in preserving the cultural identity of their children. Some may expect schools to provide some support in maintaining the native language and culture of children, while others may consider this a sole responsibility of families. Further study is needed to understand the newly arrived ethnically diverse parents’ expectations of the schools, and to determine if schools have the resources and capacity to meet those expectations.

To facilitate involvement of culturally diverse parents in their children's education, it is important for teachers and school administrators to identify and comprehend the particularities in parents' cultural models of schooling. As organizations, most schools however, are not structured to respond to the cultural needs of individual students and families. Instead, there is a tendency on the part of teachers and administrators to look for patterns and commonalities that may help them in understanding their families better and also in addressing their concerns. A challenge for educators, thus, is to continuously attempt to understand the families in their diversity and complexity, while looking for some common threads in the beliefs and experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds that influence the children's experiences and performance in schools. A bigger challenge is to avoid creating additional stereotypes in this pursuit.

Methodological Reflections

Denzin's (1989) view of interpretive inquiry not only allows for researcher subjectivity, it demands it in order for the reader to "connect" with the phenomenon under study. An important dimension to doing qualitative research is the perspective that the researcher brings to the research setting – including his or her bias and subjectivity. In studying the experiences of people from a particular ethnic group, the case becomes more intriguing when the researcher belongs to the same ethnic group as the respondents. Conducting this research has also resulted in many methodological dilemmas that demand discussion and reflection by those interested in qualitative research. Elsewhere I have discussed at length the various dilemmas that emerged during this study (Mehra, 2001).

The nature of the research problem and the methodology used in this study demanded a descriptive style of writing throughout. Use of direct quotes from the interviews with research participants lends validity and reliability to the findings. I have also described how I monitored my subjectivity in order to establish trustworthiness of the data and its analysis. An important question that emerges now is this: how accurate and important is such writing? If we acknowledge that a researcher's subjectivity is a necessary and vital element of the inquiry process, shouldn't that be a mediating factor in the text of the original research report? At this juncture of my writing, I am inclined to think that a better way of providing an enhanced understanding of the attitudes and experiences of Asian Indian parents and children to the readers would have been to incorporate more of my subjective thoughts and methodological reflections, my experiences and my identity, within the text of this paper. The questions that emerge then are: When does a qualitative study about others become a study about self?; is it appropriate?; and does too much discussion of the researcher's self overshadow the voices of the people whose stories the researcher wants to tell in the first place?

Van Maanen (1988) talks about "impressionist tales [which] present the doing of fieldwork rather than the doer or the done...[and which are] a representational means of cracking open the culture and the fieldworker's way of knowing it so that both can be jointly examined...[by keeping] both subject and object in constant view" (p. 102). Arnold (1994) addresses the question of researcher subjectivity by examining some issues relating to the practice of incorporating a fieldworker's voice into research reports. He offers an "impressionist" account of an evening spent at a fraternity house by a

participant-observer, and also claims that a story such as this is enriched by including autobiographical elements in the text. In closing this paper, I am tempted to ask the question-what kind of knowledge would have been constructed if I had written this paper in this sub-genre of “impressionist” tales. Am I ready to write “personally” which Krieger believes is “doing social science in a responsible manner” (1991, p. 2)?

Coda

As I come to the end of this paper, I find it appropriate to leave the reader with few final words that came from the children whose stories I just told in preceding pages. Their words conclude the paper much better than any words I can come up with. And after all, this whole exercise was about presenting their voices – voices that so often are silenced because researchers and academics are interested in analyzing and processing what those voices mean. Often the meaning is right there – in the children’s words themselves. So, let’s hear those words again.

“I like school here, more than in my country.”

“Sometimes, ... she reads some part of the answer from the book, and she uses some hard words, she uses something like... I don’t know how to pronounce the word, like something...”

“I like ESL...”

“I used to know Hindi but I forgot.”

“If sometimes some teacher asks if anyone is from India, I say I am, and then I would help them”

“When we go back to India, my mom won’t be wearing pants in India... She will be wearing saris.”

“But I don’t understand Hindi, I understand some, but not all....”

“I love Bombay... I lived there.”

“I like America, but I have lived here very long, and now I want to go back to Bombay. But I like every place that I go to....”

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