

EXPERIENCE AS COUNTERPOINT:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HOME, HAPPINESS & AGING AMONGST
FIRST-GENERATION SOUTH ASIAN MIGRANTS IN THE U.S.

by

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ABSTRACT

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Under the Supervision of Professor Kumkum Sangari

Susan Stanford Friedman writes that “Home comes into being most powerfully when it is gone, lost, left behind, desired and imagined” (202). My dissertation addresses notions of home, nostalgia, happiness and aging often found in South Asian diasporic fiction, and from the results of a qualitative study I conducted in which I interviewed five migrant couples who moved to the US from India for educational and professional purposes in the 1960s and 1970s. This project draws on and contributes toward the fields of Migration and Diaspora Studies, Transnational Studies and South Asian Studies. My research aims to explore more uncommonly discussed issues pertaining to first-generation migrants such as the challenges they faced upon arriving in the US, her/his experiences adjusting to the US, and how the migrants in my study perceive and locate the idea of home. Moreover, my dissertation focuses on issues of happiness and (arranged) marriage as represented in the genre of “ladki-lit” and in what I call “generational fiction” as well as ideas on this topic as discussed in the narratives of the participants in my study. Finally, my dissertation explores aging and care in the transnational family and how the migrants, both in fiction and in my study, reconcile aging in a place that is now considered to be home. In doing this, I argue that the migrant figure, though often discussed as being nostalgic and “dwelling in displacement” is only one way of seeing the migrant, and that scholarship could benefit from

exploring migrants as changing and transforming over the course of time. In my dissertation, I use the idea of counterpoint, a multiplying of ideas, to bring together the representations of South Asian migrants in fiction and the self-representations of the migrants I interviewed in order to see how these representations can work together to complicate and expand the understanding of first-generation South Asian migrants in the US.

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To
my parents

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INTRODUCTION

As a daughter of first generation migrants from India, I first conceived this project as a way to rebel, a way to go against the grain of what I thought was commonly expected of second generation South Asian Americans and also, as a way to understand myself, and to reconcile the confusion that often comes with hybrid identities. This project began as an attempt to understand marriage in the South Asian diaspora as I was concurrently being shown resumes for potential husbands, fielding phone calls and emails from family regarding the timeliness of marriage, and being introduced to young suitors looking for a “good Indian wife.” In reading fiction written by South Asian diasporic authors, I looked for myself in the characters. I read the novels of popular authors such as Kavita Daswani, Amulya Malladi, Anita Jain, Poonam Sharma, Anne Cherian and Advaita Kala, because at the time, they appeared at the top of many booklists for topics on marriage and the second generation South Asian American. And though, at times, I could relate to the generational tensions often depicted in novels of this genre, I found myself resisting at the same time. Based on my own experiences, based on the theoretical works of Salman Rushdie, James Clifford, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Kumkum Sangari, Sarah Lamb and Sara Ahmed, and as well as the fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, I knew there was more to South Asian novels than what was available in *ladki-lit*. And that is where this project really began.

Theorists and scholars have been studying, researching and writing about “home” in regard to migration and diaspora for decades in an attempt to not only see how home is conceptualized in the diaspora, but to explore the relationship between nostalgia, exile and displacement. Much focus in scholarship has been on the exile, the displaced migrant, and how that migrant might reconcile losing her/his homeland, and having to adjust to another. Salman

Rushdie argues that there is no way to retrieve one's homeland after migration and that migrants are nostalgic for home, and inevitably create "imaginary homelands" after migrating because migrants are not "capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that we lost" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 10). Cultural theorist, James Clifford, argues that migrants are "dwelling in displacement" and that this dwelling results in a "lived tension" for which the migrant must "make the best of a bad situation" (*Routes*, 257). But what about the migrant who has left their homeland by choice? Susan Stanford Friedman argues in "Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora" that "home too can be a place of loss, of being lost" (203). So, what about the migrant who is not comfortable, or happy, at "home" and pursues a life elsewhere? What is the nature of loss, home, and happiness for *this* migrant? This dissertation calls into question the nature of home and nostalgia for the category of migrants who left India in the 1960s and early 1970s in order to pursue educational and professional opportunities in the US.

Friedman also writes: "The magical phrase - there's no place like home - is also doubly cryptic. 'There's no place like home' means home is the best, the ideal, everything that elsewhere is not. Places elsewhere can never bring the same happiness as home. Alternately inflected, the phrase turns into its opposite. 'There's no place like home' also means that no place, anywhere, is like home. Nowhere is there a place like home. Home is a never never land of dreams and desire. Home is utopia - a no place, a nowhere, an imaginary space longed for, always already lost in the very formation of the idea of home" (192). Much scholarship has focused on trying to locate this place called home, to determine if it is imaginary, to explore the loss that comes from being away from home, and yet, what if home is not a singular place, or a place at all – what if home is an idea to which we attach so that we feel like we belong?

Or, alternatively, what if home is not *only* one place? Or, what if the person who determines where home is transforms over time? It is common to think that as individuals, we each have our story, and we are who we are. And yet, that does not mean we are only one thing. Stuart Hall writes in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” that “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (222). Hall continues, “Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation” (225). Much like identity, what constitutes the migrant is not only the moment the migrant left their homeland and arrived in a new place, but the transformation and the production, the becoming, that took place in the years and decades that follow. To fixate on the migrant as “dwelling in displacement” or being “haunted by some sense of loss” as Clifford and Rushdie have suggested is to say that this is the experience of the migrant that is most notable, or most valuable to explore. However, this dissertation aims to explore alternative ways of seeing migrants, and find productive ways to understand happiness, home and aging in the diaspora.

The work that this dissertation performs is grounded in the English Modern Studies program the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee and is approached from a multi-disciplinary perspective following the rich traditions of diaspora and South Asian migration studies. With texts ranging from Aparna Rayaprol’s work on negotiating identities in a disjunctive immigrant community (1997) in which Rayaprol looks at the American Hindu Temple and discusses women’s involvement in the cultural reproduction to Avtar Brah’s work that complicates concepts of difference and diaspora (1996), the literature on South Asians living in the US and

UK has emerged from disciplines such as literary studies, women's studies, anthropology, sociology and history as well as from fields such as cultural studies, migration studies, South Asian and postcolonial studies. More specifically, I envision my project as contributing to and expanding upon notions of home and imagined communities (Anderson 1991, Friedman 2004), tradition (Bhabha 1994) and cultural identity (Hall 1994, Bhatia 2009). Thus my dissertation will be positioned at an intersection of this scholarship and will be contextualized in the South Asian diaspora.

In conceptualizing this project, I had read a wide array of "chick-lit" written by South Asian diasporic women, coined "ladki-lit," with "ladki" being the Hindi term for "girl." This genre of fiction centers on the social, professional and family lives of second-generation South Asian female protagonists who struggle with their parents and the idea of being Indian in the US. This genre of fiction has been widely popular, with its book covers adorned with sarees, spices, henna, and jewelry. In fact, Penguin Books Executive Editor, VK Karthika, stated in an interview that, "Chick lit has taken off big time...but still we have more readers than writers. For all its seeming effortless and breezy writing, we find it difficult to come up with more titles to keep up with market demand" (*Indian Express*, 2006). And because the market is still not saturated and sales remain high, it is critical and useful to analyze this under-researched genre to better understand the disconnects, gaps, and conflicts between the first generation South Asian migrant and the second generation daughter.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will examine three novels from the ladki-lit genre: Poonam Sharma's *Girl Most Likely To*, Amulya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry*, and Anita Jain's *Marrying Anita: A Quest for Love in the New India*. These are counterposed to another subgenre of South Asian diasporic fiction that I will call "generational fiction" in that these

novels examines different generations and revolve on similar conflicts as presented in ladki-lit, but from multiple perspectives. I have focused on Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, as well as her short stories, "Third and Final Continent" and "Unaccustomed Earth." In addition to Lahiri, I explore Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel, *Before We Visit the Goddess*. I explore different sections of these works throughout this dissertation and revisit the texts often in order to discuss how the ideas of home, happiness and aging in the South Asian diaspora are considered and represented.

In reading these novels and short stories, I recall a conversation I had with Kumkum Sangari regarding my research. In my frustration over finding so many of the same themes constantly revisited in ladki-lit, I said, "if only I could talk to some migrants themselves and listen to *their* stories." From this conversation, I designed and conducted a qualitative study with the help of Rachel Spilka in which I interviewed five migrant couples who came to the US from India in the 1960s and 1970s in order to pursue educational opportunities. In conducting this research and interviewing the migrant couples, which I describe in further detail in Chapter One, Robert Yin notes in *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, that as a research tool, conducting a multiple-case study "contributes uniquely to our knowledge of individual, organizational, social, and political phenomena" and "the distinctive need for a case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (2, 3). In conducting this research, I found that there is a rich contribution these stories can make in better understanding the different life phases of the migrants who chose to leave their homelands and that these interviews could provide an alternative method of understanding the migrant.

I use these interviews that took place over the course of one year throughout this dissertation, breaking up the conversations and using them in different sections, to explore how

these migrants narrate their decision to leave India, the challenges they faced in the US, how they conceptualize happiness in regard to raising their children, and how they reconcile their decision to age in the US. I have organized this dissertation in order to look at the different life stages of the migrant, starting with their decision to leave India in their 20s, and then transitioning to their experiences in parenting and ending with a discussion on their plans for retirement and aging in the US. And while the purpose of this dissertation is not to compare fiction to the narratives of those I interviewed, there is much value to be gained in counterpointing what currently exists in scholarship with their narratives.

While postcolonial scholars and authors of South Asian diasporic fiction have extensively elaborated concepts of loss and displacement in their works, often and at times to reject the binary of assimilation and “otherness¹,” my dissertation examines and restructures these concepts by counterpointing them with migrant narratives which articulate possibilities for happiness as well as loss. In Wendy Brown’s essay, “At the Edge,” she writes:

Counterpoint involves, first, the complicating of a single or dominant theme through the addition of contrasting themes or forces; it undoes a monolithic element through the multiplication of elements. Second, counterpoint sets off or articulates a thematic by means of contrast or juxtaposition; it highlights dominance through a kind of reverse othering. (568)

Counterpointing, in this sense, may disturb and complicate dominant current discourse on South Asian migration² to the US by expanding comprehension of multiple discursive systems

¹ First coined by Spivak in her 1989 article, “The Rani of Sirmur,” “othering” refers to “a process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes...The business of creating the enemy...in order that the empire might define itself by its geographical and racial others” (171, 173). Said also discusses the notion of othering in his 1979 text, *Orientalism*. Rejecting the binary between assimilation and othering in postcolonial theory often provokes the theorizing of hybridity as Bhabha discusses in his 1994 text, *The Location of Culture*.

² In my project, the term *migration* functions as an umbrella term that encompasses both *immigration* and *emigration*. The focus of this project is to look at the movement of people from one place to another, and therefore

that have created familiar diasporic themes of loss, displacement and nostalgia. At the same time, counterpointing can help to defamiliarize the self-narrations of migrants by making room for critical distance so that the emotional/personal implication of interviewer and interviewee does not overwhelm interpretation. Brown continues:

“At once open ended and tactical, counterpoint emanates from and promotes an antihegemonic sensibility and requires a modest and carefully styled embrace of multiplicity in which contrasting elements, featured simultaneously, do not simply war, harmonize, blend or compete but rather bring out the complexity that cannot emerge through a monolithic or single melody. This complexity does not add up to a whole but, rather, sets off a theme by providing an elsewhere to it; indeed, it can even highlight and thus contest dominance through its work of juxtaposition” (367).

The purpose in using counterpoint as a framework for my research is to multiply our understandings of the South Asian migrant experience and to see how different fictions and various oral narratives can serve as a counterpoint to one another. In doing this, I aim to look each melody independently in order to appreciate and explore each of their qualities in an attempt to see how we can understand ideas of home, loss, nostalgia, happiness and aging in the South Asian diaspora with more depth and complexity.

Furthermore, within the overlapping fields of sociological fieldwork, ethnography, oral history and oral narratives centered on South Asian migrants, minimal work is available on South Asian migrants who left for the purposes of educational and professional opportunities in the 1960s and 70s. While it was difficult finding texts that were directly applicable to this dissertation, texts such as Vincent Her’s and Mary Louise Buley-Meissner’s *Hmong and*

migration and *migrant* are used more regularly in order to avoid the political undertones that are associated with *immigration* and *immigrant*.

American: From Refugees to Citizens, Anna Mansson McGinty's *Becoming Muslim: Western Women's Conversions to Islam* and Chia Youyee Vang's *Hmong America: Reconstructing Community in Diaspora* played an integral role in helping shape my approach to this dissertation. These texts emphasize the value of drawing from people's stories and experiences in order to create meaning and this dissertation follows in their paths in an attempt to do the same.

Overall, my dissertation supplements and calls into question key notions of identity, tradition, home, representation and experience that have circulated in scholarship and theory from the late twentieth century to the present. By offering new significations of such familiar notions, my project contributes to the theorization of migration in scholarship by looking at the productive aspects of migration, rather than only what is lost. Moreover, I designed my study to involve those I was writing about by making my best attempt at understanding their stories. Those who migrate, those who live the various experiences often thought of as being related to migration, rarely have a way to tell their story, and I designed my study so that I could listen and share. It was one of my intentions in conducting this qualitative study to meet with migrants, open the conversation, and then to provide them with the space to think, recall, remember, narrate and reformulate the stories of their lives, and then to offer my most sincere interpretations of their narratives. I did not want to stand on the outside and make claims about their lives. My study not only positions me as a participant-observer, but also provides me the opportunity to discuss and converse with participants about what meanings can be construed from the lives they attempt to recall and explain.

Chapter One, "Qualitative Research Methodology & Participants" outlines the design of the qualitative study that I conducted in order to set the stage for the work that this dissertation aims to accomplish. There are very few qualitative studies looking at South Asian migrants from

India to the US in the 1960s and 1970s that focus solely on migrants, and the intention behind conducting a qualitative study was to see what the migrants' narratives could contribute toward developing a more complex understanding of South Asian migrants. This chapter explains the research questions that the interview questions are based on, as well as the structure of the interviews and the demographics of the participants I interviewed. In addition, I provide a brief introduction to each of the couples that I worked with. Given that this is a somewhat unconventional dissertation that works with scholarly material, a wide array of fiction, and the narratives of the participants in my study, I also provide an outline and explanation for how the dissertation and chapters within are structured. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the ethical considerations I encountered in designing and carrying out this study given that I belong to the community that I was working with.

Chapter Two, "Writing Home in the Diaspora: (Re) Presenting the Not-so-Nostalgic Migrant" explores and complicates the ideas of nostalgia and home as often represented in migration and diaspora studies. In much of the scholarship on migration and diaspora, the migrant is seen as "dwelling in displacement" or nostalgic for an imaginary homeland, and I argue that though there can be productive aspects of nostalgia and loss, there are also productive aspects of those who choose to leave their homelands. Thus, the focus of this chapter is to examine the migrant who left his/her homeland for educational and professional opportunities, or to pursue a higher quality of life, and to explore that migrant's relationship to their home/homeland and nostalgia as represented in the novels *Serving Crazy with Curry* and *Girls Most Likely To, Before We Visit the Goddess*, *The Namesake* and the short story "Third and Final Continent" as well as the results of my qualitative study. Moreover this chapter looks at the first generation migrant's reasons for migrating to the US as well as the challenges first generation

migrants faced upon arriving in the US. In analyzing the first generation migrant, I also bring to the surface their need for independence from their parents, their pursuit of happiness as well as how they conceptualize home. I argue that many migrants who journey for their own purposes emphasize and recall their desire for survival and success over notions of loss and nostalgia.

Chapter Three, “Happiness as Counterpoint, Happiness as Explanation,” examines the next phase of the first generation migrant’s life: parenthood. This chapter analyzes generational tensions and conflicts between the first generation South Asian migrant and the second generation daughter. This chapter focuses on the key phrase spoken by many of the participants in my study, “We just want our kids to be happy.” The complex notion of happiness is the framework of this chapter through which I complicate concepts of marriage and Indianness. By looking at the popular genre of “ladki-lit,” or in other words, the South Asian version of “chick-lit,” I look at the resistance that the second generation protagonists in the fiction have against “arranged marriage” and I raise the question of why arranged marriage has been the focus of so much fiction and what it means for a marriage to be “arranged.”. In addition, I look at the ways the female protagonists in Amulya Malladi’s *Serving Crazy with Curry*, Poonam Sharma’s *Girl Most Likely To* and Anita Jain’s *Marrying Anita: A Quest for Love in the New India* resist their parents, particularly their mothers, be it by exercising their sexuality, seeking and prioritizing their careers, and pursuing financial independence. In Section II, I look at the responses from the participants in my study regarding the challenges in raising their children in the US as well as their hopes and expectations for who their children marry and how they get married.

Chapter Four, “Aging and Care in the Transnational Family” looks at how South Asian migrants are planning for their later years in the US. While many of the participants of my study had imagined that if they had stayed in India, they would perhaps be living with their parents and

taking care of their aging parents, they are now confronted with the reality that they, too, are aging, and need a plan. I look at the fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri in Section I as aging is explored in her novel, *The Namesake*, as well as her short story, “Unaccustomed Earth.” In addition, I analyze the narratives of the migrants I interviewed in order to capture and explore the anxieties that exist regarding aging. While in Chapter One, the participants of my study recall their urge to leave India and pursue their lives in the US, Chapter Four complicates this idea given that they now must age independently as well.

“In Conclusion: A Self-Reflection” discusses my experience as a researcher and a daughter of South Asian migrants and the complexities that come from being a part of the community that I was attempting to study and represent. In this section, I also discuss areas for future research that I hope to undertake.

Moreover, throughout this dissertation, I am aware that as a daughter of first generation migrants, and as a reader-turned-critic of *ladki-lit*, my experience with this research has been mediated first by the fiction, and then by the narratives of my participants. This was one of the most challenging aspects of this project as one genre was often influencing the other genre, and my experiences were often mediating both. It was difficult to bring both fiction and oral narratives together in this dissertation, and this dissertation is an unusual attempt at looking at concepts of migration, home, loss, diaspora, marriage, happiness and aging. However, there is value in the counterpoint, and this research suggests that the migrant is not a fixed concept. The first generation migrant, as represented by the fiction I have included as well as the narratives of my participants, changes over time. The aim of this project and the chapters to follow is to complement, contradict and counterpoint familiar notions of the migrant stuck in time in order to uncover and discover the stories that have thus far not been told, but could profoundly contribute

to our understanding of the first-generation migrant who chose to leave India. This dissertation argues that the migrant is not static, rather migrants can be fluid, and are constantly shifting, balancing and reconciling, much like the structure and issues addressed in this project.

CHAPTER 1:

Qualitative Research Methodology & Participants

This chapter outlines the methodology and design of the qualitative study that this dissertation is based on and how this dissertation emerged from the results of my qualitative study. The first section of this chapter describes the rationale and purpose of the qualitative study, the parameters and design of the study and pertinent participant information. The second section of this chapter describes the method of inquiry for approaching fiction and the oral narratives that were collected in the qualitative study and it will also explain how the chapters are structured in this dissertation.

Section I: The Qualitative Study Study Background

Because very few studies to date have examined South Asian migration narratives from a qualitative perspective, I was careful to approach my study from several angles. Thus, I pursued three thematic clusters in this research. The first theme that emerged from the interviews concerns generational familial conflicts and notions of happiness alongside gendered perspectives within the family regarding love, marriage and aging. The second concerns migrant experiences of cultural memory and its relationship to nostalgia and home, and the third brings out the importance of interpretive mediation in recounted experience and self-representation.

Homi Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture* (1994), “The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities - as the grounds of cultural comparativism - are in a profound

process of redefinition” (7). I pose the following research questions with the intention of contributing to the understanding of this process of redefinition.

1. How are scholarly notions of happiness counterpointed by migrants’ different expressions of arranged marriage in India and in the US?
2. How does the migrant consider aging in the US in regard to how their parents have aged in the US or in India?
3. From the perspective of migrants, what and where is home? In what ways do migrants remember and forget their birth homes?

Exploring possible answers, my dissertation demonstrates how migrants have lived and experienced their diasporic lives. For example, I investigate what is involved in the creation of imaginary homelands, including not only conscious effort by individual migrants, but also collective practices by migrant communities.

From October 2010 to October 2011, I conducted a qualitative study by collecting oral narratives through interviews that examined the self-narrations of six first-generation migrant couples from India residing in a Midwestern metropolitan area with a population of approximately two million people. Though for the purposes of this study I am specifically looking at Indian migrants, this is within the broader context of South Asian migration to the U.S. In addition, I chose to work with migrant couples in this region of the Midwest due to time and travel constraints. However, I also chose to conduct my study in this region because there is a long history of Indians living in the area, and because I was most interested in working with couples who had been living there for three to four decades, this metropolitan area was a suitable location. I found this group to be particularly accessible given that my family has been a member

of this community for the past thirty forty years and therefore I have a unique and close understanding of this community.

In order to conduct a qualitative study, I wrote a research proposal for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee’s Human Research Protection Program. The role of the IRB is to “to ensure the adequacy of the research plan, to minimize risks and to maximize the potential for benefit from human subjects’ who participate in research” (<http://www4.uwm.edu/usa/irb/>). In my proposal, I indicated to what extent I would be working with participants, how I would be using data collected in the study and ensured that I would conduct this study in an ethical manner. This study was approved by the IRB on November 12, 2010.

Setting and Participants

In order to obtain the most meaningful results, I designed a multiple-case study and selected a total of five men who migrated from North India during the 1970s for higher education with wives who followed them to the US after marriage. These couples have settled and have been raising their families in this region for nearly four decades. The couples were from relatively lower-middle class families in India, but after three to four decades of living in the same area, all have reached “upper-class” status as it would be defined in the US. In addition, the couples selected are nearing or have reached retirement, and have children who are married. Choosing to interview members of this generation fulfills my objective to record and analyze the first-person oral narratives of a wave of migrants whose recounted experiences and self-reflections have not been addressed substantially in scholarship.

I also want to look at a group of people that migrated for educational opportunities because their circumstances of migration are quite unique socially, economically and politically

and differ from those of migrants who traveled to the U.S. in later decades³. Even though the participating couples are a homogeneous group, this will enable me to identify patterns across “like” and similar groups⁴. More than surveys or other methods of collecting data, interviews allow time for reflection and revision of ideas on the part of both interviewer and interviewee. For example, I found that as interviews took on a conversational ease, I could improvise additional questions based on what I was hearing and learning. At the same time, interviewees had the time to re-think and revise their own recounting of events and ‘experiences,’ which provided a more complex and layered picture. At times conversations were longer than expected due to the constant revising and expansion of responses in an attempt to best capture what and how the migrant wanted to re-present their story.

A pool of suitable participants were contacted based on certain criteria such as when they migrated, whether they migrated for educational purposes, the circumstances surrounding their marriages, their career choices, and whether their children were married or not. I first narrowed my group of participants by selecting participants who had migrated from lower-middle class families and small towns in India to attend graduate programs in the United States. Participants were further narrowed down as I was seeking to interview men whose marriages were arranged by their families in India. A breakdown of all participants is as follows:

- Lakshmi and Anil: Lakshmi and Anil were married in 1963. Lakshmi was born in the State of Chattisgarh in India. Anil was born in the State of Uttar Pradesh in India. Their marriage was arranged by family members as

³ See Ceri Peach’s “Three Phases of South Asian Emigration” in *Migration, the Asian Experience*, edited by Judith M. Brown and Rosemary Foot. New York: St. Martin’s, 1994.

⁴ On the other hand, interviewing such a homogenous group can be limiting because it may minimize the opportunity to detect diverse perspectives and behaviors. It may also be important to interview couples from different socio-economic classes in order to make this project more representative, which I will discuss at greater length in the Conclusion.

someone from Anil's family had seen Lakshmi and inquired about her. After their marriage in 1963, they lived together in a city in the Indian state of Haryana for seven months. In 1964, Anil moved to the United States to attend to pursue a Ph.D. Lakshmi joined him in 1965. Lakshmi and Ajit have three children: their first daughter was born in 1965, their second daughter was born in 1970, and their son, the youngest, was born in 1976. Each of Lakshmi and Anil's children are married to Caucasian spouses, and they each have 2-3 children of their own. At the time of this interview, Anil and Lakshmi were both in their mid to late 60s. While Anil had entered retirement, Lakshmi did not have a career outside the home.

- Priya and Mohan: Priya and Mohan were married in 1974. Priya is from the Indian State of Uttarakhand. Mohan is from New Delhi, the capital of India. Mohan moved to the United States to pursue his Masters of Science degree in 1970. Mohan had relatives that knew Priya's parents. Mohan traveled to India to meet Priya, and after a ten day courtship, in which Priya and Mohan spent some time getting to know one another, they exchanged rings and had a large wedding. Priya then joined Mohan in the US in 1974. Priya and Mohan went on to have three children: their oldest daughter was born in the late 1970s, their middle son was born in the early 1980s, and their youngest daughter was born in the late 1980s. Their oldest daughter has two children, their middle son was recently married to an Indian woman, and their youngest daughter is unmarried. At the time of

the interview, Priya and Mohan were nearing retirement and had co-owned a business venture for many years.

- **Jaya and Rakesh:** Jaya and Rakesh were married in 1974. Jaya was born in the booming city of Bombay, while Rakesh was born in a large industrial city in the State of Uttar Pradesh. Rakesh's uncle and Jaya's father had worked together, and suggested the idea to Rakesh and Jaya that they marry. They were not pressured to marry one another, and had the option to decline. Rakesh had been studying in the United States since 1969, pursuing his Masters in Science degree in Engineering at a Midwestern university. He returned to another prestigious university to do his Ph.D. where Jaya joined him in 1975. Jaya and Rakesh have one daughter, who was born in 1980 and was recently married to an Indian man of her own choosing. Jaya and Rakesh are both in their 60s and have both had long professional careers.
- **Neelam and Vikas:** Neelam and Vikas were married in 1981. Neelam was born in the State of Uttar Pradesh while Vikas born in New Delhi. Their marriage was arranged by their families, and Vikas agreed to marry Neelam based on her simplicity when he met her. Vikas had been living in New York since 1971 while he was pursuing his Ph.D. Neelam moved to join him in 1982, after being separated for 13 months. They went on to have two sons, both born in the 1980s. Their elder son is now married to a Caucasian woman and their younger son is unmarried. Both Neelam and Vikas have had long, professional careers and are nearing retirement.

- Mamta and Sanjay: Mamta and Sanjay were married in 1978. Mamta was born in Bombay and Sanjay was born in a large city in Madhya Pradesh. Their marriage was arranged by their families, and both Mamta and Sanjay agreed. They were engaged immediately and married nine months later. Both Mamta and Sanjay moved to the United States in 1979 so that Sanjay could pursue a Ph.D. in Business. They went on to have three daughters: their oldest daughter was born in 1982, their middle daughter was born in 1985 and their youngest daughter was born in 1990. Their eldest daughter is now married to an Indian man of her choosing. Both Mamta and Sanjay have had long, professional careers and are nearing retirement.

I had originally planned to include in my study participants from more diverse backgrounds, given that all of these families went on to reach similar socioeconomic statuses and all practice Hinduism (or Jainism in the case of Mamta and Sanjay). However, I chose to look closely at this particular group in order to see what similarities might surface and how I might complicate what might seem like a homogenous group. While each couple migrated for the same reasons, for educational and professional growth, and have reached essentially the same level of socioeconomic success, they are a fairly diverse group given their upbringings and how they approach and narrate their lives in the US.

Also, working with only five couples allowed me the time and flexibility to work with each couple closely. Rather than timing the interviews, I was able to allow them to go on for however long both the participants and I needed. Knowing that they were selected from a large

pool of people and that this was a chance for them to narrate their stories also gave each couple a sense of excitement and urgency to meet with me. My participants indicated that they were also very interested in working with me and therefore it became clear that this study was mutually beneficial – I would be able to pursue my research interests while they would eventually be able to read about how their stories fit in amongst the stories of their peers.

Data Collection Methods

I designed my study in two phases. The first phase of this study consisted of a recorded, structured interview with each of the migrant couples during which I asked questions about their family structures in the US and India, as well as the reasons for their migration. I scheduled each interview via email and allowed the couples to choose the locations in which they would be most comfortable. In each case, they invited me to their homes, and we sat in their living rooms. I used a small recording device that I made them aware of, and then placed it on the side tables so as not to distract from the conversation. Using a recording device was useful for transcription purposes, but also so that I could more actively engage in the conversation(s) taking place. I took hand written notes on a notepad occasionally as the interview was going on, and double-checked their responses at times for clarity. In this phase, I asked each couple the same set of questions in order to establish a basis for comparison from which to begin analysis and interpretation. Because this was a pilot study and had not conducted prior interviews, and because I belong to the community that I am studying, I was careful to design my study and interview questions with preconceptions of what I thought might happen, and what I assumed participants would say. This allowed me to understand any biases and preconceived notions I might have and to create some critical distance.

The structured interview questions are as follows:

Part A: India to the U.S.

1. Where in India are you from?
2. What was your knowledge of the U.S. as a child? Did you ever dream of coming here?
3. Why did you decide to move to the U.S.? When did you move? Did you come to the U.S. together?
4. Did you face any initial challenges when you moved here?
5. How often do you travel to India, and what do you do when you are there? Do your children travel with you? Have your grandchildren been to India? How many homes do you have in India?
6. Where do your parents live? Do they come to the U.S. to visit if they are in India? Who do they live with in India?

Part B: Approaches to Tradition Since Moving to the U.S.

1. Were your children born in the United States? Did you face any challenges raising your kids in the United States that you imagine you may not have had in India?
2. What traditions have been most important for you to maintain in America?
3. What traditions have you tried to instill in your children and as a family? Are there any traditions you have decided not to maintain? Why?
4. Because you have grandchildren, what are your hopes for them in regard to how they are raised? Are there any traditions you would like to maintain with them? Are there any traditions you have decided not to maintain? Why?
5. What is your sense of community in this city? Do you feel that you have been able to maintain a sense of “Indianness” while living here? Is this important to you?

Part C: Marriage

1. What is the date of your marriage? Did you get married before or after you moved to the United States?
2. How did you two meet? How did you decide to get married?
3. What are your thoughts regarding marriage when it comes to the marriage(s) of your children? What do you value the most or want for them? How much do ethnicity, race, caste and religion matter to you?

Part D: Other

1. What is your relationship to your religion? Do you find it easy to practice your religion in the U.S.?
2. What is your plan for when you retire? Where do you plan to live?
3. Do you feel that it was a good decision to move to the United States?

The structured interview allowed me to draw on participant responses to questions about life events in order to develop the open-ended questions for the second round of interviews. It was important for this phase and this study to see what each couple holds onto, and how they remember their pasts because I wanted to gain an understanding of how they chose to raise their families and live in the U.S.

The second phase of interviews consisted of a recorded, open-ended interview with each of the individual participants to evoke their thoughts on shared milestones; this also allowed each participant to speak freely without the influence of their spouse, with unlimited time, and to reflect on their feelings in regard to specific choices they made within the home, where they feel they belong, and whether they assign their “belonging” to a specific place. As I did in Phase I, I allowed the participant to choose the location of the interview. Some participants invited me to their homes, while others preferred a more remote location such as a coffee shop or their offices. It became apparent during this phase that the individual participants appreciated the time to independently reflect upon their experiences.

The open-ended questions that guided this interview are as follows:

1. What does home mean to you? In other words, where is your home and why? How has your sense of home changed in your life?
2. Has your sense of “home” influenced the ways you carry out traditions in America and how?
3. What are your opinions about love and marriage in regard to how you got married and how your children have gotten married?
4. How have your traditions shifted or changed as a result of living in America?
5. In what ways do you feel America is modern or traditional in regard to India?

In conducting the first two rounds of interviews, I realized that how participants communicated their responses, particularly the voices in which they spoke, their tone and

inflections, should also be carefully considered. In *Case Study Research*, Yin discusses how qualitative studies are more effective when researchers observe and examine “contemporary phenomena within some real-life context” (1). In other words, it is most ideal to conduct a case study when the researcher has little control over what happens. This became especially clear in the second phase because even though I asked only five questions, these questions sparked more than two hours’ worth of conversation for each participant. It was difficult to predict what each participant would say, and therefore conversations often went down paths I had not foreseen. Given that the tone was very conversational, the participants demonstrated an ease in discussing their lives and also seemed to forget they were being recorded. The intention in conducting these interviews was to create some aspects of a “real-life context” by conversing over coffee and tea, rather than meeting in a formal setting.

Moreover, collecting data from so many participants and over the course of two very different interview phases allowed me to achieve methodological triangulation in my study. Berg suggests that using different modes of inquiry allows researchers to “obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; a means of verifying many of these elements” (5). It was important to my study to use methodological triangulation because it helped explain how the interviews unfolded and why. Yin argues that methodological triangulation “allows the investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal and behavior issues” and this became apparent in my interviews as I noticed that I was able to observe more carefully because I was implementing not just one method (*Case Study Research*, 98).

Data Analysis

My goal in data analysis was to account for all of the data I collected and to follow the methodology of the field of qualitative research. According to Yin, it is necessary to “attend to *all* the evidence, displace and present the evidence separate from any interpretation, and show adequate concern for exploring alternative interpretations” (109). In order to ensure such quality of analysis, I transcribed and organized all of the data I collected in a systematic manner. As each interview was completed, I transcribed the audio recording of the interview, my observational notes, and my interpretive notes in order to have a complete transcription of each interview. I transcribed each interview using transcription software in which I listened to the dialogue through a headset and dictated through a microphone what was being said on the audio recording. I double-checked my transcription to ensure that I did not miss anything. I tried my best to capture the way that each interview was flowing, the participation interaction and the non-verbal communication. Because I had been keeping memos from my interviews noting recurring topics/themes, I then began to do a preliminary coding of the transcribed interviews. This was an important method I used in that it was useful to record reflective notes on what stood out; this offered insight into what I was learning as I was conducting the interviews.

The next stage in my data analysis was to code my data and develop a category system. I read my transcriptions line by line, and began to divide the data into analytical units. In other words, I began dividing the data by highlighting key terms in a color-coded system where a specific color was designated to particular themes that were beginning to stand out. I kept a master list of each color code and category designation. This part of the data analysis process, the coding and categorization, was very much an interpretive process. I used inductive codes in my data analysis, meaning codes that were developed by examining my data, rather than using

predetermined codes, because I wanted to curb my analysis against any preconceptions I had prior to conducting my interviews.

Once all of my data was coded and categorized, I made charts in which I segmented my data into lists that pertained to each category. I enumerated the data, meaning I quantified the data, by looking at the number of times certain key words were used by my participants. This entailed performing a close reading of my transcribed interviews. I only chose terms to quantify that the participants used on their own, rather than terms I had included in my questions, or thematic terms that I had determined when shaping my research questions. It was important in this stage of data analysis to look for relationships that existed between the categories and then to corroborate and validate these relationships using specific quotes as spoken by my participants. Once I felt my data was sufficiently analyzed, I then analyzed the categories and preliminary interpretations to design and organize this dissertation. The three most significant ideas that emerged from the two phases of interviews are divided into the next three chapters in this dissertation.

Section II: The Dissertation Structure

Each chapter in this dissertation will be divided into two sections with an introduction at the beginning to provide a guide to what the main objectives of that chapter are. The first section of each chapter will discuss the theme of that chapter as found in the fiction I am examining and I will discuss that theme alongside theoretical texts exploring common ideas. The purpose is to select and explore moments in the fiction to analyze, thus using fiction emblematically, to see how the theme is represented in the novels. The second section of each chapter will describe the interview results of the qualitative study, and the section will explore how the oral narratives further contribute to a discussion of those very themes discussed in the first section.

The purpose here is not to compare common themes as found in fiction and the oral narratives, but rather to juxtapose and explore how these themes can be looked at with further depth and from different perspectives. The intention in dividing each chapter into two sections is to disturb what might be stagnant in literature and theory concerning South Asian migration and transnationalism. It is necessary to dismantle the knowledge one has and to reassemble it, and as a researcher studying the community of which I belong, this was critical. This is a different kind of textual analysis which attempts to mediate between realms, and function as a triangulation, coming from different angles to explore the theme in question. As discussed by Cohen and Manion in their text, *Research Methods in Education*, triangulation is “an attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (254). Moreover, in *Teachers Investigate Their Work; An Introduction to Action Research across the Professions*, Altrichter, et al argue that “triangulation gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation” (147). Thus the objective in this project is to approach important and recurring tropes found in the South Asian migration discourse using different mediums, such as fiction, oral narratives, and scholarly work in order to see where ideas converge, and which ideas may be most relevant and meaningful.

It is also important to note that by using theoretical and methodological triangulation, it becomes easier to eliminate bias. If, after all, ideas do in fact begin to converge, then as researcher, my suppositions may be more likely to fall to the side. If, however, I rely on one method, such as looking primarily at what is represented in fiction, then it is more likely to become biased and project my ideas onto the fiction that I am working with. Also, as I will discuss later in this chapter, while it is very difficult if not impossible to rule out bias and preconceptions especially in a qualitative study, it is important to be cognizant of their presence

and potential impact on the project. Therefore by using triangulation as a methodology for this project, I am more likely to ensure as objective a study as is possible.

In *Opening Spaces: Writing Technologies and Critical Research Practices*, Sullivan and Porter argue that research methods are “situated in and through their methodologies...their meaning derives, to a certain extent, from their enactments of those methodologies” (45). While I used qualitative case study methods such as conducting interviews and observing participants during interviews, the research methodology is the guiding philosophy or theoretical framework that helped me as a researcher determine the appropriate methods and approaches to interpreting the data I gathered and constructing this data into meaning.

Ethical Considerations

I encountered several limitations and benefits during this qualitative study in designing and carrying out interviews. A central concern is analysis of the investigative ethics involved in interviewing people from a community to which I belong. In Brenda Jo Brueggemann’s 1996 article, “Still-Life: Representations and Silences in the Participant-Observer Role,” Brueggemann, a hearing-impaired scholar, discusses the dilemma of walking the hyphen between participant and observer that was brought to light during research she conducted on how deaf college students attain English literacy skills. She divides her chapter into three sections by first looking at the role of the participant-observer in ethnography, then by discussing her study specifically and the challenges she faced, and then finally raises some thoughts and questions regarding the dilemma of representation and silence.

Brueggemann raises the question in this chapter of how the researcher can identify with the subject and if it is possible to refrain from inserting meaning into the silences while also

maintaining the role of the observer. She suggests that no matter how much a researcher may need to be neutral, that in qualitative research, “we are always partially subject, partially researcher, partially participant, partially observer, partially self, partially other – never exclusively one or the other” (33). In addition, Brueggemann suggests that reflexivity is not necessarily the remedy to this predicament, but that this discomfort, this constant back and forth movement and/or questioning of whether one has represented the subject accurately is a constant struggle that perhaps is something that researchers conducting qualitative research must be aware of and attempt to reconcile.

In my attempt to reconcile the concerns that Brueggemann raises, I had to make a concerted effort to stay within the confines of the qualitative study and not reach beyond into the familiarity I have with being a member of the same community as my participants. In working with participants that I have known socially for several years, it was very important to take measures to protect this study against bias and to maintain confidentiality and integrity in the interviews and analysis that took place. I was careful to choose participants based on the criteria I had put in place, and to maintain professionalism while conducting the interviews. It should be noted that in the excerpts from the interviews, I refer to the female participants as Auntie, and the male participants as Uncle as this is a common form of addressing familiar elders in Indian culture. Often times, it was necessary to remind participants that this was an academic and professional inquiry as opposed to a casual, informal discussion. In addition, I was cautious not to use any personal knowledge of the participants when conducting and analyzing the interviews and focused primarily on their narratives and what they each chose to reflect upon. This was a concerted effort on my behalf as the researcher as I was aware that bias could be a concern when conducting a study with participants that I knew prior to the study.

While my experiences have been different than their experiences given that I belong to the next generation, I do have familiarity with the Indian culture present in the community to which my participants belong, and I have familiarity with the members of this community. However, one of the reasons I wanted to pursue the study of first-generation migrant narratives rather than focusing on the second-generation South Asian-Americans (their children) is because I felt it was important to allow critical distance between researcher and topic, but also because I felt it was important to challenge my own preconceived notions that were primarily based on my reading of popular South Asian diasporic fiction and my own experiences as the daughter of South Asian migrants. Given my position, I had to maintain a level of professionalism that perhaps my participants were not expecting, insisting at all times that we interacted formally and kept the personal conversations at a minimum during the interview times.

In addition, during my data analysis and interpretation of my results, it was necessary to look strictly at the data without inserting my personal opinion. This was made possible by the need to corroborate and validate my results and also my decision to use theoretical and methodological triangulation as my approach. Moreover, because I had intended to conduct an exploratory case study, I tried not to have any preconceived notions as to what types of answers I would get through the interviews and how my participants would react. I found that after even the first interview when I began to notice that participants responded in ways that I had not anticipated. I wanted the data to speak for itself, to reveal itself and the patterns that emerged as a result of interpreting the data as opposed to ideas based on my experience as a child of South Asian migrants. Regardless, as a precautionary measure, prior to conducting these interviews, I also made sure to identify my own propositions. Yin argues that researchers may try to discuss too broad a scope and therefore have a difficult time focusing on what is most important and

relevant from the study (23). Therefore before I conducted the interviews, I developed some theoretical propositions in order to identify what my biases may be upon approaching the interview questions and my participants. Having the propositions in mind and actually typed alongside each data set helped me to focus on the most relevant information from the interviews as opposed to inadvertently seeking out the information I presupposed.

In this sense, “representation” is a key term that I will work with and against, drawing primarily from Yin’s *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* and *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy* by Peter Mortensen and Gesa Kirsch. I discuss and critique my own complicity in this act of representing and simultaneously being represented and “recognized” by the interviewees in the Conclusion of this dissertation. Also, I explore the dual role I experience as questioner and a part of what I am questioning, the notion of being both an insider and an outsider, or belonging and not belonging. Moreover, in the Conclusion, I examine my own bias and objectivity and the self-reflexivity necessary in carrying out such a study.

CHAPTER 2:

Writing Home in the Diaspora: (Re) Presenting the Not-so-Nostalgic Migrant

“Identity is changed by the journey.”
--Madan Sarup, “Home and Identity”

“There’s no place like home, there’s no place like home.”
--Dorothy, *The Wizard of Oz*

It would be difficult to count the number of times in my life that I have been asked where I am from. In fact, upon meeting most strangers, this is one of the first questions I hear. Depending on the tone of the question, I attempt to respond. Sometimes, I respond with saying that my parents are from India, and I was born here. Other times, I say, “I am from Milwaukee, and where are you from?” I find myself getting tense any time I am asked this question. Would this question be asked of someone with a different skin tone? Perhaps this question of where I am from, coupled with my concern over the second-generation daughter figure, was the impetus for pursuing this research. How does one configure where she/he is from? Is it geographical location at birth? Is it where one’s physical house is? Is it where one’s family is based? Where, after all, is home, and how does one know where she/he is really from?

It is this oversimplified question, along with many more, that have made migration and diaspora studies so complex a field. For the migrant, locating home has been a difficult task. Salman Rushdie argues in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticisms 1981-1991* that there is no way to retrieve one’s homeland after migration. In one of his most noteworthy excerpts, Rushdie discusses the issue of being a migrant writer:

...it’s my present that is foreign, and the past is home, albeit a lost home
in a lost city in the mists of lost time...exiles, or emigrants or expatriates

are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated...our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that we lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (9, 10).

Much of migrant scholarship has been focused on the idea of the exile, but the focus of this chapter is to examine those migrants who left their homelands for educational and professional opportunities, or to pursue a higher quality of life, and to explore this migrant's relationship to their home/homeland and nostalgia as represented in South Asian diasporic fiction and the results of my qualitative study. Furthermore, I explore the nature of loss for this category of migrants, and alternatively, I suggest what they might have gained.

According to Lisa Lau in her article, "Making the Difference: The Differing Presentations and Representations of South Asia in the Contemporary Fiction of Home and Diasporic South Asian Writers," "...some of the Indias created by the diasporic communities may be no more than imaginary Indias. Be that as it may, the images of South Asia propounded and disseminated by the diasporic writers have the power of creating/recreating a South Asia to the wider world, (especially to a Western world, given the readership), and through the countless retellings, the 'true' portrayal of India may be warped, skewed, and distorted" (Lau, 242). Lau supports Rushdie and explains that "this skewed perspective may not be due to authorial irresponsibility, but is in fact the inevitable consequence of diasporic life" (Lau 242). Rushdie does not blame migrants and/or migrant writers as he suggests, "it may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken

mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (Rushdie, 11). The issue then is not only how to locate home, if that’s possible, but also how to then represent one’s homeland that one cannot actually know, and yet provide a “true” portrayal.

One way to represent “home” is to remember home, often done through re-telling and through writing. In Azade Seyhan’s text, *Writing the Nation*, Seyhan considers issues of loss and identity in diasporic literatures. Seyhan writes, “Memory is a phenomenon of conceptual border zones...it is an intersection and interdiction. It dwells at the crossroads of the past and the present...it is embedded in the past and will have to be retrieved by symbolic action. Memory marks a loss. It is always a re-presentation, making present that which once was and no longer is...Memory – and its partner, forgetting – define the consciousness of migration, diaspora, and borders. The act of remembering – past lives, present homelands, past ways of being – is symbolic, that is, a process of meaning making that is dependent on narrative and figuration” (10, 16). The trouble in remembering, the trouble in representing the homeland through memory, is as Rushdie notes, a migrant is likely to create nostalgic constructs of what might have been. And yet, the migrant bears the risk, knowingly or not, of (mis)representing what never was.

This depends, however, on how one looks at nostalgia as a concept and at the nature of home. Svetlana Boym writes in “Taboo on Nostalgia,” that “Nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy” (xiii). What is interesting in this definition is that this home that one longs for may never have existed, and it may only exist in one’s mind. It is an idea, and ideal, that one constructs based on a longing. Many scholars, as noted, have discussed migrants as nostalgic for their homeland, longing deeply for a return, attempting to recreate the homeland in the new

country. In contrast, Boym notes that “first-wave immigrants are often notoriously unsentimental, leaving the search for roots to their children and grandchildren unburdened by visa problems” (xv). In regard to exile, Boym discusses how an exile is “at once homesick and sick of home” and exiles “remember their old homes, cluttered with outmoded objects and bad memories and yearn for a community of close friends and another pace of life that had allowed them to dream their escape in the first place” (xix). This idea of escape can be interesting and useful for this research if posed for migrants who left their homelands for educational and professional advancements. To understand some migrants as people who distanced themselves from their place of origin, a self-imposed removal of sorts, makes the departure voluntary and thus changes the understanding of nostalgia into a longing for perhaps something familiar, something comfortable, but not necessarily the homeland itself.

In order to understand the category of South Asian migrants I am discussing in this project, it is important to understand the context through which they came to the US. The category of migrants I am looking at are those who came to the US on educational grants and professional grants under the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965⁵. The migrants who came during this wave of immigration, often coined “the model minorities,” due to being highly-ranked at their universities and being able to contribute talent and innovation to the US, chose to leave India to pursue educational and professional opportunities. Some of the migrants in this category were married prior to moving to the US while others returned to India for a brief time specifically to get married and return to the US. In many cases, the men married educated

⁵ INS Act of 1965: The INS Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, abolished the national origins quota system that had structured American immigration policy since the 1920s, replacing it with a preference system that focused on immigrants' skills and family relationships with citizens or residents of the U.S. Numerical restrictions on visas were set at 170,000 per year, not including immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, nor "special immigrants" (including those born in "independent" nations in the Western hemisphere; former citizens; ministers; employees of the U.S. government abroad). Retrieved from: http://library.uwb.edu/guides/usimmigration/1965_immigration_and_nationality_act.html

women who then went on to pursue careers in the US, and in some cases, the women chose not to work initially but eventually went on to have a job, often for the economic prosperity of the family. It is through this category of migrants that I am interested in examining those who left their homelands in order to achieve economic and professional success. In leaving their homelands to pursue careers, one question that arises is if the first generation migrant is seeking independence from their own parents.

In the following sections, by looking at certain South Asian diasporic novels and by analyzing the responses from the participants of my study concerning issues of home and the challenges they faced as early migrants, I explore earlier phases and experiences of the migrant's life that are under-represented in scholarship. In this chapter, I aim to complicate the idea of loss, nostalgia and home in order to better understand what it means to be a first-generation migrant. Moreover, by providing alternative ways of understanding the migrant, this chapter aims to first analyze how the migrant is represented in two popular "ladki-lit" (chick-lit) novels, Amulya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry* and Poonam Sharma's *Girl Most Likely To*. I look more extensively at this genre as well as these novels in Chapter Three. In Section I, I also look at the genre of fiction that I call "generational fiction" and I focus on Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, *The Namesake*, and her short story "Third and Final Continent" as well as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel, *Before We Visit the Goddess*. In Section II, I counterpoint the novels and short stories with how the participants in my study attempt to represent themselves in terms of the challenges they faced when moving to the US, and how they conceptualize home.

Section I: The Early Migrant in Fiction

As I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, much of the popular fiction from South Asian or South Asian diasporic writers involves a narrative plotted around a second generation, female protagonist who is struggling to pursue her own path with the pressures of the difficult, unyielding migrant parents who are stuck in their ways, insisting that their daughters should have “traditional” Indian values, rituals and practices. Many of the ladki-lit novels are written in the third person, an outsider looking in on the generational conflict, a narrator both omniscient and at the same time potentially limited in her/his knowledge of the various situations, contexts and characters. Through the narrator’s perspective, we often see a story expressing the second generation daughter’s irritation with her mother, her inability to please either of her parents, and the pressure she feels to be someone she feels she is not, someone more Indian, someone less free. In much of ladki-lit, however, we only see the first generation migrant through the context of the tension with their children. The reader is told how the migrant parents react to situations, however, we do not know their stories prior to having children such as the struggles they may have experienced or the paths they chose to take when it came to their careers.

What we do know about the parents in many of the ladki-lit novels is that they have an idea how their families *should* be, and they are frustrated and confused. In Amulya Malladi’s *Serving Crazy with Curry*, we learn how Saroj, the migrant mother, has dealt with her daughter’s suicide attempt and what she had wished for her family: “The United States never became home. It was a foreign land, and even though Shobha and Devi said they were American, Saroj tried to instill Indian values in them. In Shobha she succeeded to a point, but with Devi...well the proof was in the *payasam*. Hadn’t she just tried to kill herself? If only they had stayed in India, things

would have been different, better, Saroj was sure of it” (86). Later in the story, we get more perspective on Saroj’s thoughts about her family: “The third picture on the mantel was of the four of them, Avi, Saroj, a fifteen-year-old Shobha, and an eleven-year-old Devi. Saroj wore a heavy brown and ivory colored silk sari, Avi was in a dark suit, Shobha wore a classic green and red half sari, while Devi wore a maroon blouse with puff sleeves and a silk skirt in maroon and gold. They looked like the typical south Indian family... This was the family Saroj always hoped for. Her daughters dressed traditionally, with white jasmine in their hair, a handsome husband by her side, and India in the background” (130). In observing this perspective of her attitude, we learn more about Saroj and her thoughts on raising her children in America. Saroj seems to believe that even though she went against the grain and had a love marriage herself, what she wanted all along was the “typical south Indian family” with “India in the background” (130). This glimpse into her personality and thought process indicates that one of her central emotions is disappointment with her family life, and that she is especially displeased with her daughter, Devi, and her actions and life choices. Saroj wanted what, in her eyes, seemed traditional. The migrant as represented here looks at the “India in the background” in a rather nostalgic way, as though that backdrop would have guaranteed a happier, more satisfying life and family structure.

Novels written with a first-person narrative seem to present a very particular perspective, one that allows the reader to see only what the narrator wants the reader to see. Many chick-lit novels are told from a first-person perspective, and in most chick-lit novels, the narrator is the second-generation daughter, or the rebel daughter of strict, “traditional” parents. The reader is limited to only one side of the story, though there are moments in the narration which give a more intimate sense of what is taking place. The inner thoughts and feelings of the main character and narrator can develop an intimacy between the reader and the narrator. However,

the first person narrative that we often see in ladki-lit offers a very singular perspective, and can confine the reader's impression of the migrant parents to the perspective of the narrator. In Poonam Sharma's *Girl Most Likely To*, the narrator and second generation daughter, Vina, gains the sympathy of the reader primarily because she feels her parents do not accept her for who she is and that in their eyes, Vina is always doing wrong. For example, Vina recalls a conversation with her mother during which her mother is scolding her for her rude behavior toward a potential suitor (albeit he is gay, and Vina's mother does not know this yet):

“*Beti*...your father and I tried to raise you with the proper values...but where are these men you spend time with? Where have they gotten you? What are the results of all this independence you talk about? At some point, the time to do things right will pass...It must have been a failure on our part that we did not raise you better. I accept that...Your father and I only want what is best for you, Vina, but we don't know what else to do. Now I think that maybe we should just leave you to do what you feel is right” (160).

We see here that Vina's mother allowing (or hesitatingly accepting) Vina's desire for independence did produce the results either Vina or her mother wanted. Vina's somewhat sarcastic response to this provides some insight on the tension they experience with one another and also might cause the reader to empathize with Vina:

“Obviously that night I chose not to sleep in my old bedroom. Because like all ungrateful children who don't love their parents, I had the audacity to live alone in midtown Manhattan...my choice to spend \$2,000 per month for a shoe box in the sky had nothing to do with the fact that I was a gainfully employed, grown woman in her late twenties who enjoyed her independence. Clearly, I did it because I hated them” (161).

So though we get the dialogue shared between Vina and her mother, the interpretation comes from the first-person narrator (Vina) and we do not get a sense of where Vina's mother's concerns are coming from, aside from the idea that Vina expresses that she is not doing what her parents want her to do. The migrant parent is then a very isolated figure in this context, difficult to understand, and only represented by the daughter whose perspective is mediated by her own experiences and concerns.

Whereas most of the *ladki-lit* I have read focuses primarily on the second generation daughter figure as I will discuss in the next chapter in detail, I have found that the novels that explore the first-generation migrant experience in the US are very useful for providing insight on their lives prior to raising their children. For the purposes of this research, I call this genre "generational fiction" as it attempts to tell the stories of both the migrant generation and also the second generation born in the US. I would argue that while generational tension has been tackled throughout *chick-lit*, generational fiction has provided a more thorough illustration on the South Asian family in the US, spanning the lives of the migrant couple and then looking also very closely at the experiences of the second generation, are more useful for understanding the complexities of the South Asian diasporic family.

In Jhumpa Lahiri's 2003 novel, *The Namesake*, she tells the story of a Bengali family who has moved to the United States, specifically Cambridge, Massachusetts, so that the male protagonist, Ashoke Ganguli, can pursue a graduate degree in engineering. His wife, Ashima, experiences many more challenges than her husband, not knowing the language, not expecting so many cultural barriers, and resisting the adjustments she was being required to make in her life. Together, Ashoke and Ashima raise their children, Gogol and Sonia, and simultaneously endure and witness the conflicts between cultures and the trials of raising American children. The novel

describes the feats and losses that come with migration and marks a specific moment in US history when South Asians as a group were fairly sparse in the US. Chapter 1, titled “1968,” gives a brief background of Ashoke’s train accident that was the impetus for his journey to the US. After his nearly deadly accident and his lengthy recovery, we learn that Ashoke felt compelled to leave India:

“Ashoke began to envision another sort of future. He imagined not only walking, but walking away, as far as he could from the place in which he was born and in which he had nearly died. The following year, with the aid of a cane, he returned to college and graduated, and without telling his parents he applied to continue his engineering studies abroad. Only after he’d been accepted with a full fellowship, a newly issued passport in hand, did he inform them of his plans...His mother, speechless, had refused food for three days. In spite of all that, he’d gone” (20).

We see here that Ashoke had a plan that differed from what his parents wanted for him. He had a plan for himself. After spending five years attending graduate school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Ashoke travels back to India to pursue marriage. In 1967, after being introduced to Ashima by his parents based on a response to a matrimonial advertisement by Ashima’s parents, they wed (with full consent and enthusiasm), travel together to Cambridge and have their first child in 1968. In this first chapter, the reader sees not only why Ashoke felt the need to leave India, but also Ashima’s willingness to move to the US after marriage, and their experience of having a child in the US without any family nearby. We are told of Ashima’s experience in the hospital room prior to giving birth: “It is the first time in her life she has slept alone, surrounded by strangers; all her life she has slept either in a room with her parents, or with Ashoke at her side” (5). Later, after being told by her doctor that her delivery will be a normal one, we learn of her concerns:

“But nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she’s arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all. It’s not so much the pain, which she knows, somehow, she will survive. It’s the consequence: motherhood in a foreign land. For it was one thing to be pregnant, to suffer the queasy mornings in bed, the sleepless nights, the dull throbbing in her back, the countless visits to the bathroom. Throughout the experience, in spite of her growing discomfort, she’d been astonished by her body’s ability to make life...That it was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved, had made it more miraculous still. But she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare” (6).

The narrator uses the word “miraculous” to describe Ashima’s ability to handle the feat of pregnancy away from her family in India. The narrator also acknowledges Ashima’s conflicting feeling of terror at managing motherhood on her own in the US, and what we are presented with is a mix of emotions, a range of feelings that attempt to describe everything that Ashima is going through. Ashima goes on to tell Ashoke, “...hurry up and finish your degree...I’m saying I don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It’s not right. I want to go back” (33). Here, again, we see that Ashima is having a hard time with the idea of being away from her family, of raising Gogol without family nearby. This suggests that the migrant parent is more than the unyielding, strict parent to adult children as we see in the next chapter, but that she/he can also be an overwhelmed, young adult in the throes of early parenthood as well.

Yun Ling writes in “Restorative Nostalgia and Reconstruction of Imaginary Homeland in *The Namesake*,” that Lahiri “writes about the Indian American people’s nostalgia for their home country” (73). Ling later writes that “the Indian people in *The Namesake* are very nostalgic about their past and tradition” (75). The passages quoted from the novel above, however, tell a different story. While Ashima is experiencing fear, she seems to also be experiencing wonder.

While they do miss their families, they lose the urge to return to India for good. Over the years, as Ashoke and Ashima become more and more settled, their group of friends also grows, and they begin to feel more at home. Their parents pass away in India, they grow older and their children grow older. And what we get is a story of their lives, not only of the longing or loneliness they felt in the beginning, soon after they moved from India to the US, but spanning nearly forty years, in which we are presented with Ashoke and Ashima's feelings in their early 20s as well as their children's feelings as they enter adulthood and journey through marriage and even divorce. And though the novel ends with Ashima's going away party as she prepares to journey back to India for six months, and travel back and forth, we are given a glimpse of the sadness Ashima feels in leaving the US and selling the home she had built with her family:

“She feels overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and is now in its own way foreign...For thirty-three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she's worked. She will miss throwing parties. She will miss living with her daughter, the surprising companionship they have formed, going into Cambridge together to see old movies at the Brattle, teaching her to cook the food Sonia had complained of eating as a child. She will miss the opportunity to drive, as she sometimes does on her way home from the library, to the university, past the engineering building where her husband once worked. She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. Though his ashes have been scattered into the Ganges, it is here, in this house and in this town, that he will continue to dwell in her mind” (279).

This excerpt suggests that it is not necessarily the location that Ashima will miss, but rather her children, the people, the routine, the things she currently enjoys doing in life, and the home in which she lived in with her husband. This story in which we, as readers, are able to recognize the

life phases of migrants over time, represents the migrant parents as people, not just early migrants or strict parents, but people who grow over time and are constantly becoming.

Similarly in Lahiri's short story, "The Third and Final Continent," we get a first-person narrative of the migrant's 1964 journey from India to London to Cambridge, Massachusetts in pursuit of a higher education and then a job. In this story, we see that the narrator has to work very hard to make ends meet, initially living at the YMCA for six weeks, saving money for an apartment: "...for although I was no longer a student I was on a budget all the same...in the end I bought a small carton of milk and a box of cornflakes. This was my first meal in America" (175). He continues, "for the price of one cup of tea at a coffee shop, I filled the flask with boiling water on my way to work each morning, and brewed the four cups I drank in the course of the day" (176). It is apparent that in these early stages of the narrator's life in the US, his major concerns revolved around his finances. There is no mention of missing his family, or feeling far away from home, but rather the focus is on figuring out what to eat, where to live, and how to afford his life in the US on a meager salary while also saving money for renting an apartment of his own upon his wife's arrival from India. In a letter from his wife Mala which arrives soon before she does, she writes, "I write in English in preparation for the journey. Here I am very much lonely. Is it very cold there. Is there snow. Yours, Mala" (189). Contrary to much of the scholarship on the migrant figure, Mala notes that she is lonely *in* India, and that she is preparing for the journey. Importantly, it is her choice to have married someone who lived abroad, and she had agreed, just as Ashima had.

We also get a sense of the arranged marriage that the narrator and Mala had and how, initially, her husband, the narrator did not have any intimacy with her. In the week following their wedding, we see that there is not much feeling whatsoever:

“For five nights we shared a bed. Each of those nights, after applying cold cream and braiding her hair, which she tied up at the end with a black cotton string, she turned from me and wept; she missed her parents. Although I would be leaving the country in a few days...I did nothing to console her. I lay on my own side of the bed, reading my guidebook by flashlight and anticipating my journey” (181).

This indifference in the narrator’s tone speaks of his unfamiliarity with Mala, and though they shared a bed, at this stage in their arranged marriage, that was all they shared. As Mala travels to Cambridge to join her husband, grows accustomed to the surroundings, and meets the homeowner with whom the narrator had rented a room, we see a change in the tone:

“Now it was I who laughed. I did so quietly, and Mrs. Croft did not hear me. But Mala had heard, and, for the first time, we looked at each other and smiled. I like to think of that moment in Mrs. Croft’s parlor as the moment when the distance between Mala and me began to lessen. Although we were not fully in love, I like to think of the months that followed as a honeymoon of sorts. Together we explored the city...at night we kissed, shy at first but quickly bold, and discovered pleasure and solace in each other’s arms” (196).

Here, the narrator reflects on how love grew and developed between him and his wife, and we see that this, too, was another issue that many South Asian migrants had to deal with in earlier decades. Because many South Asian migrants did not know their spouses very well prior to living alone with them in the US, it could be suggested that alongside financial stability, learning to be married and getting to know one another, was a rather large feat and perhaps one of the primary focuses of their early years in the US.

What this excerpt also suggests is that intimacy grows, certainly in their marriage, but also within and among the diaspora. Boym describes the shared experience and writes in “On Diasporic Intimacy,” that “to feel at home is to know that things are in their places and so are

you...it is a state of mind that doesn't depend on actual location" (251). Home is often equated to a physical location, a house. However, the longing or nostalgia that a migrant feels is not often for a physical location. It is for something more, something deeper. Boym discusses nostalgia in regard to intimacy and asks the question of "how does one communicate the pain of loss in a foreign language?" (251). There is a need for the migrant to have some connection, some understanding from someone. Boym's definition of diasporic intimacy speaks to this:

“[Diasporic intimacy] can be approached only through indirection and intimation, through stories and secrets. It is spoken in a foreign language that reveals the inadequacies of translation. Diasporic intimacy does not promise an unmediated emotional fusion but only a precarious affection – no less deep, while aware of its transience. In contrast to the utopian images of intimacy as transparency, authenticity, and ultimate belonging, diasporic intimacy is dystopian by definition; it is rooted in the suspicion of a single home” (255).

Even though two people may not speak the same language, or come from the same place, or as in Mala and her husband's case, they may be strangers - it is the mutual nature of their journeys abroad through which they can connect and develop intimacy. Boym defines exile as “about suffering in banishment and springing into new life,” and this “springing into new life” can be experienced by migrants who are not exiled and who travel for their own purposes. It is from this “shared longing without belonging”, that communities are formed (Boym, 256). Benedict Anderson has discussed the notion of imagined communities extensively in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Anderson writes that a nation often elicits the feelings of a community because it is “always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” and that this “community” is in fact imagined because “members...will never know most of their fellow members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their

communion” (6, 7). There is a sense of shared history and identity that brings migrants together to create an intimate diasporic relationship, and it is perhaps this diasporic intimacy and imagined community that has created a social memory in the South Asian diaspora. Boym describes the shared experience which creates an intimacy as: “Love at last sight is the spasm of loss after the revelation; the tenderness of exiles is about a revelation of possibility after the loss” (254). Though Mala and her husband are not exiles, their relationship also involves a “shock of intimacy” that comes as a surprise to both of them (Boym, 255).

The narrator in Lahiri’s “Third and Final Continent” gives the reader a sense of his journey as he recalls it, at times difficult and at times beautiful. He tells of their decision to become American citizens, how they visit Calcutta every few years, and how they have a son now who attends Harvard University nearby. In watching his son go through college, he feels a sense of comfort: “In my son’s eyes I see the ambition that had first hurled me across the world. In a few years he will graduate and pave his way, alone and unprotected. But I remind myself that he has a father who is still living, a mother who is happy and strong. Whenever he is discouraged, I tell him if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot conquer” (198). The narrator reflects on his own experiences and challenges, and refers to his sense of ambition that was the impetus for his journey. This ambition cannot be overlooked when discussing migrants who left India for educational and professional advancement because as we see in the case of the narrator, loss and nostalgia are experienced differently. The narrator has a sense of pride that he was able to survive such obstacles. He is confident that both he and Mala have overcome so much and so their son is bound to have an easier life as a result. It should be noted, however, that the generational conflict as we see in many chick-lit novels could arise from this very confidence. The narrator, having endured so much and overcome so much in order to be

successful, and perhaps “happy,” may have a hard time seeing the second generation struggle in new and different ways.

As the narrator reflects on his life at the end of the short story, the reader can see that he is in fact nostalgic, but not in the way that one might expect:

“While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times it is beyond my imagination” (198).

Indeed there is nostalgia in these sentiments. This migrant is nostalgic for the past, but not necessarily for the homeland. The narrator is nostalgic for his full life, the experiences, the memories he made with his family as well as the journey he has made. He describes his life as an achievement, and he is “bewildered” that he was able to handle the challenges, and it is beyond his imagination how much he has done in his life. Leaving his home behind in India and then leaving another home in London are parts of his story, but not the entire story. What is missing from many South Asian diasporic novels is the life that comes after; there are thirty years of life in the US that come after those initial years following the migration that are often unaccounted for in South Asian diaspora fiction. In not being told these stories, the reader experiences a gap in time – either the reader delves into the life of the early migrant who is confused and missing India and struggling to manage a new marriage and life in the US, or reads stories about migrant parents dealing with their unmarried, rebel daughters who reject their parents’ hopes for them. What about the middle life, the missing years of the migrant? Lahiri has noted in interviews that as the daughter of migrant parents, she is familiar with the experiences of Gogol having a “strange” name in *The Namesake* and that “Third and Final Continent” is the story of her father.

It could be suggested that her life has influenced her plot lines and the perspectives of her narrators. But what is most notable about her narrators and her stories is that she attempts to tell a more complete story, stories in which her characters develop and grow over time, stories that are not overly nostalgic of a life left behind but also do not romanticize the diasporic life.

There are far too few novels that span the life of the migrant, or narrate the older age of the migrant. Lahiri is one of the very few authors to tackle this angle of diaspora fiction, showing the value of the migrant figure's story over time and giving attention to both generations in order to reveal the many complexities that exist within the self, and the family. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a highly-acclaimed and award-winning author and poet, also looks at the story of three generations of women in her 2016 novel, *Before We Visit the Goddess*. In this novel, we are told the story of three generations of women and the complexities of their relationships. The plot does not deal with diasporic tensions or nostalgia, but it spans over sixty years of conflict (both personal and family-related), growth, hostility and love. The novel tells the stories of Sabitri in the 1960s as a young adult, Bela, her daughter, moving to the US to follow love, and Bela's daughter, Tara and her experiences as a second generation child.

In giving each generation equal attention, and showing each woman age over time, the reader is able to see the challenges, the misunderstandings, and the different perspectives that each young-woman-turned-adult has. The novel ends in 2020 with Tara now having an adult child of her own, and getting ready to take her mother to Senior Living Facility. As she packs up Bela's home, she comes across letters sent to her from Sabitri, her grandmother, letters she had never read before. And in these letters, she reads the stories of her family, and learns the history of her family. The novel comes full circle, starting with Sabitri and ending with Sabitri, with so much in between.

In reading the letters, we see that memory, story-telling and reflection can strongly influence one's understanding of what one has not experienced. In sifting through the many letters from Sabitri, Tara realizes, "My grandmother had started telling me a story. Her story. The story I'd been longing to know since I saw her photo. No, I'd needed to know this story all my life, though I hadn't always been aware of the need" (202). Tara shares the letters with Bela, and together they learn how their journeys really began. It is because the novel focuses on different characters in each of its chapters and narrates the story from the first-person perspective in each chapter, that the characters are unaware of the trials and tribulations of the others. It is in packing up Bela's home, looking through photos, and remembering, that Bela can begin to show compassion and appreciation for Sabitri, and Tara for Bela. In these final moments of the novel that many truths are uncovered, and Bela and Tara are able to clear up the many, many misunderstandings between the generations.

Another important aspect of Divakaruni's novel, in particular, is that it does not focus on the typical generational struggles regarding arranged marriage and dating, etc. Rather, the novel explores plot lines that are creative and new to the genre, in a way reviving the genre and showing that there is a likeness between the South Asian and other diaspora groups. Lisa Lau writes in her article, "Making the Difference: The Differing Presentations and Representations of South Asia in the Contemporary Fiction of Home and Diasporic South Asian Women Writers," that "It is only a tiny handful of writers such as Anita Desai whose works... explore similarities between East and West rather than set them up as irreconcilably different" (253). Authors like Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amit Majmudar, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Thrity Umrigar are among the few novelists writing about the South Asian diaspora who approach topics that are not constantly identifying the exotic, and focus instead on the shared conflicts that

are relatable to an audience which is not fixated on generational conflict and arranged marriage and also speak to diaspora from other regions.

Lau finds the need to write home, and record the typical diasporic topics to be exhausted in scholarship and fiction. She notes, “Apart from the cultural entanglement (which can also be regarded as hybridity), diasporic South Asian writers have in common the deep desire to ‘look back’ to South Asia, to write and discuss at length the confusion of identity they are experiencing. This process of ‘looking back’ which has been described as nostalgia, seems irresistible to diasporic writers” (241). In attempting to look back, however, and to remember home, many writers take on, perhaps unintentionally, the role of representing both India and the diaspora. Lau writes, “the images of South Asia propounded and disseminated by the diasporic writers have the power of creating/recreating a South Asia to the wider world, (especially to a Western world, given the readership), and through the countless retellings, the ‘true’ portrayal of India may be warped, skewed, and distorted” and that “writers are therefore at least partially responsible for contributing to the creation of a diasporic culture” (242). Even though Rushdie does not blame the authors for potentially misrepresenting or stereotyping to some degree, because as he says diasporic writers deal in broken mirrors, author Shauna Singh Baldwin feels differently. She writes, “Say ‘I am a writer,’ and you assume responsibility for recording, describing, capturing the world, giving it back with all its pain and confusion organized and rendered into narrative with linguistic beauty and humour” (31). Fiction does not exist in a cultural vacuum – it is a reflection of the world we live in, and it reflects something back as well. And there is much to learn from these reflections and so they cannot be discounted in their value and importance. As Lau states, “the diasporic South Asian women writers find themselves in a position of disproportionate influence and reach, and their portrayals of South Asian women

regarded as representative” (243). Given the clichés that we too often see in diaspora fiction from South Asia, I would argue that it is important, and necessary, to show the narrative of arranged marriage, family conflict and generational tension which I discuss in the next chapter. In these stories, the migrant seems stuck in time, but there is value in looking more fully at the migrant figures. There is value in reading *their* stories, and in seeing that, though one’s experiences may be different, intimacy does not have to be limited to the diaspora but can be developed anywhere through the sharing of experiences and telling of stories.

Section II: Remembering the Rebellion

In attempting to understand the lives of the migrants I interviewed in my study, it was very important for me to ask the participants to reflect on their early days, why they decided to move to the US, and what challenges they encountered in their early years in the US. From there, I asked them to consider home, and where it might be for them. While so much scholarship has been focused on nostalgia, longing and the exilic nature of migrants, one of the main purposes of my study was to find out if there was more. In this section, I share their responses and at times, full conversations, in regard to two main questions; the first question asked them to share the challenges they faced upon moving to the US and the second question asked them where they consider their home to be. I posed these questions to my participants and I was unsure what the responses would be from my participants. Though I had preliminary ideas, the participants’ reflections, narratives and stories suggested that perhaps there is more to understanding the migrant than I initially thought, particularly in regard to their need to be successful in the US, and their struggle to survive in the US.

The Decision to Leave India

Given that the category of migrants I have aimed to study *chose* to leave India for the US in order to pursue educational opportunities, it is important to understand how the participants in this study made the decision to leave. Many of the participants discussed throughout the interviews that they had varying levels of familiarity of the US through media, films, music, and through their family members and neighbors who had travelled abroad, but to take the step to leave during the first major wave of migration from India to the US is no small decision. For Mohan, the urge to leave was a matter of will:

Angy: So how did you both decide to come to the US? And what was that process like?

Mohan: Mine was that I finished my engineering and then after I finished my degree, I was about 21 years old, I felt at that time, I didn't want to start working in India right away. I wanted to get another degree and do a graduate program overseas. So that's when I thought to come to the US and get my Master's. That's the reason that most of us that traveled in the late 60s, came here for advanced degrees. That was because of what Kennedy had done, to open the borders, to bring immigrants to the US. At that time, they didn't want to bring the labor type of people in. Canada was doing that and England was doing that, but in the US, the visas were being given for studies or for graduate school. So when that opportunity was coming, I willed myself for that.

For Sanjay, the issue was similar. He was looking for more opportunities and after trying many different things in India, all roads were pointing to the US:

Angy: Why did you decide to move to the US?

Sanjay: I came to study. To give you the story, basically, after I graduated from engineering, I took a job. After undergraduate, I went directly to Masters. I finished Masters, and I took the job in the industry. After one year, I left that and I started a new job that was started by

the government for educated people. I did that for a year and a half and then I got sick of that too. So I went into a teaching job, and then I started thinking about the Ph.D., because that was required. At that time there were not many Ph.D. programs in India, so that's when I started thinking about the US.

Angy: How did the idea of the US happen?

Sanjay: That was natural. If you want to do a Ph.D., that was the place to go. One of my colleagues came a year before me, so I piggybacked. We came in the same program in the same scholarship.

After graduating from his Master's program in India, Sanjay attempted to work in India and tried a few different jobs before realizing that perhaps pursuing a Ph.D. in the US was the next step.

Sanjay did not express a strong desire to teach or pursue a Ph.D. in the excerpt above, but he does explain the chain of events that led him to the US, and this chain of events centers on him trying to figure out his professional path.

In Anil's response to this question of how he came to the US, he brought up a very useful point that Sanjay and Mohan did not:

Anil: In my case, up to my Bachelor's degree, I had no idea where America is. By the time I got to my Master's program at a government college, there were a lot of faculty members that had come from England. In my college, there were no Ph.Ds. from the US. Eisenhower made a trip to India in 1959 and that made everyone's mind change. So the next thing was that I was going to go to the United States. I was sending letters and I didn't get an assistantship here or financial aid. But then the University wrote me a letter that I had gotten a teaching assistantship in the US. Because we had no money to come here otherwise.

Anil notes the very practical matter of needing money to study in the US. While some of the participants' families had funds to purchase airfare to send their sons/daughters abroad, in some

cases, the parents of the participants had to borrow money from friends and other family members to make the travel possible. Many of the participants did not come from particularly wealthy families, but quite the opposite, and gathering the funds to pay for travel was challenging enough. The participants relied on the funding from the universities to which they had been accepted. Many pursued their graduate degrees while earning pay for being Research and/or Teaching Assistants. As the interviewer, and a listener of these stories, these responses had a profound effect on me, likely because I could identify. Imagining Anil some 45 years earlier, eager to study abroad and looking for a way to achieve this, seeking help from family, hoping to receive funding from a university – this story made it clear that the participants in my study were not so different from others pursuing higher education and opportunity and that I, we, needed to know more about them. The gap between this first generation migrant and myself, a second generation South Asian American, was narrowing as I realized that Anil was not so different than me.

Challenges Faced in the US

One of the main reasons I felt it was important to discuss the challenges the migrant faced in initially living in the US was because much of the scholarship I had been reading focused on the challenges specifically within the marriages of the migrants. Since many migrants in the late 1960s and early 1970s were married to persons they had been introduced to by family, in many cases, the couples did not know one another very well, and certainly had not lived together prior to marriage. In much of the scholarship, and in many novels that focus on arranged marriage, the wife in particular appears to be quite lonely and unhappy upon her arrival to the US. It was my initial impression, formed by the popular genre of *ladki-lit*, that many of the challenges that the

migrants encountered would have to do with marriage and living with someone they did not know. In the cases of the migrants I interviewed, however, the stories varied quite a bit, and the challenges they described were fairly practical:

Angy: What were some of the challenges you faced? I guess they might be different. What about for you Uncle?

Sanjay: Well, I was pretty much busy with getting adjusted to studies, the new place, the culture, the language... I wasn't educated in the English language so I have bigger challenges - language. The first year was pretty much gone in learning the different style of teaching, the different classes... The system was very different than in India. So that was the main challenge. Obviously, you're short on money, and since both of us came together that was another big challenge.

Angy: Auntie, for you?

Mamta: Personally I think it was very difficult being away from family. Especially him being busy, and living in a small apartment, and we came in the winter, so that was the hardest part, because we had never seen any winter in India, especially in Bombay, and never wore a cardigan my life. And then in the apartment there was something to look out to, just cold. That was the worst part. Missing family, not being able to talk to them. The loneliness. But then we met a few Indian students and then, you know... We were so newly married, and naïve, it didn't bother us... Whatever we had was great, we were happy with what we had. The furnished apartment they gave us and the pots and pans (laughter).

Angy: So you were newly married, did that present any challenges?

Mamta: I don't think it was that difficult. We managed. Financially also we were not too strained. We brought enough stuff with us from home to last us for the first six months [clothes, dry food]. Slowly we learned things here, we met friends. My brother was about two hours away. So once in a while he would come over and take us some places. Because we didn't have a car initially.

Sanjay: Yes that was a big challenge.

Mamta: There was no public transportation. So taking the bus, waiting, getting groceries, missing the bus and being cold, all that stuff. And falling on ice all the time, because we didn't have the right shoes or clothing when we first came. Being in the cold weather, everything was ice, so you're skating on ice. But I guess we were young so it didn't bother us. We took it along as an experience and we kept going. And other American families were there for us.

Mamta and Sanjay reflected that they did not actually have many challenges when it came to being newly married, but rather it was the more underestimated obstacles of getting around, and handling the cold weather that they were not accustomed to. Perhaps they did not provide details, or the importance of marital difficulties had faded over time, but what they remember are the logistical challenges that took some time to get used to. For Priya and Mohan, the conversation was similar, but it included the overall concerns that they had about their status in the US and their purpose in migrating to the US:

Angy: So when you moved here, it's likely you faced different challenges. How would you talk about these challenges personally or as a newlywed couple?

Mohan: It's a big cultural shock. Even though we had a background living in Delhi and were exposed, but when you first arrive here, the biggest challenge is that all of your decisions are your own decisions. Everything that you are going to do, how you are going to find an apartment, how you are going to get from your apartment to wherever you live and work... yeah there are some resources available at the university but after that, you are basically fending for yourself. And coming from India, where we are all living a very sheltered life, there is always somebody there to take you, guide you. And here, the financial was not the biggest burden, but there were other things around. Like, how do I get somewhere? Basic things.

Priya: Especially being part of an affluent background, everything was done for us. Here, you're all alone. You have to clean your toilets, you gotta cook and you think 'what's going on?'

Mohan: You are now responsible for yourself. You are coming this far to a totally different land where you now have to not just study but you also have people who kind of looking at you, living in a fishbowl, you have been sent there. You have to not only fulfill the mission, but you have to do it well, so that your folks at home can be proud of it. The pressure to succeed because you had come this far, and now that you are here, you are studying hard, and trying to make sure... the biggest thing at that point was that America was just getting into a recession stage. So, once you graduate, you wonder 'is there going to be a job for me?' At that point, when you come on a student visa, if you don't get a job, you have to go back. So that's the pressure I am trying to get across to you. You have to make sure you do well.

Priya: And money too. His parents gave him money, but he didn't want to squander that. He wanted to earn and succeed at what he was doing. He didn't want to be a failure and go back.

Mohan: You have to make sure that you are secure when you finish your degree, you have to do well in school. Culturally, being young, you want to go out, you want to meet with people, you get very excited about meeting these nice white girls, but then there is a language difference even though you can speak English, the words mean different things over here. So it was an exciting time, but you know, once that year and a half Master's degree got over, then life got a little better. Because then you have a job. So I moved from the east coast to the Carolinas. I was lucky enough to get an engineering position even though it was a recession. Then things got exciting, things got better, very exciting actually.

One can see from Priya and Mohan's responses that they felt an immense amount of pressure to succeed and make their sacrifices worthwhile. Mohan notes that he was now responsible for himself, and this was new to him. They no longer had their families around them to provide a

safety net nor did they have the luxuries of domestic help that they were accustomed to, as Priya notes. Both Priya and Mohan were experiencing the independence that they pursued when deciding to leave India, but still, this freedom was new to them nonetheless and came with its own challenges. Mohan also mentions “living in a fishbowl” implying that his family, his neighbors and friends in India, his colleagues in the US – everyone was watching him to see if he would succeed, or at least this is how he felt. So while one might expect the challenges to involve missing home, or feeling lost, the more pressing ones were to make sure that they were able to maintain their visa status, earn money and remain in the US. Mohan did not want to disappoint his family, or fail, given that he made such a big move to leave home and travel so far. Mohan suggests that moving to the US had to be worth it. The feeling of pressure that Mohan felt in his first few years resonates in the tone of his narration indicating that he remembers the stress well. At no moment in this part of the interview was Mohan nostalgic for those days.

In talking to Anil and Lakshmi, their responses to this question regarding the challenges they faced, were lengthier and more detailed. It seemed in their candid recollection that they felt the change in environment deeply and that it had a profound effect on them:

Angy: So when you came here what challenges did you face?

Anil: The biggest challenge which most Indians don't say is the language barrier. We had a lousy accent. Although I had passed the TOEFL exam, I was advised to take an ESL course. I had no idea America would be the kind of thing I found. I was coming from a village. And the school I came to is also very good. But the biggest thing was we were not prepared - we did not know what we were getting into. It's a good thing we were alone. We were busy learning and I'll tell you stories - I pretty much ruined her good clothes in 1965 because I didn't know how to operate a laundry machine, and Indians are very stubborn bunch. We will not admit that this I don't

know. I could've asked a person and he could have told me to put a quarter but I refused. The biggest thing was a big cultural gap. As a matter of fact, the second day in the department, we had either erasers on the blackboard or we have pencils with one end that we called rubbers but that word was not used and when I asked the secretary for a rubber, she thought what is going on, this kid is bad. I said to my professor I didn't know what I did and why she was mad, and he asked me what I did and I said all I did was ask for a rubber. So he got up, went to the secretary and talked to her. But you have to see how much more conservative they were. A year after I came an Indian leader who looked black went to the south and went where he wasn't supposed to be - a restaurant and they put them in jail. We had no idea. A story that you should keep in mind is that in my second I was walking at school, I am walking and I am Brahman, the top caste in India, I was first-class in my university and an American walks by and said "hey here comes another nigger" and that's true, it happened - this was the time, in 1964, anyone from India unless he was very, very fair, maybe he was taken as a Spaniard, otherwise he was a nigger. Now I don't care what kind of Indian you are that kind of statement will jolt the heck out of you. And here I am thinking I was the chosen guy from India, a Brahman and that was a big teaching - it was very humbling. Food was another big thing. I pretty much went to the bathroom in the plane ... the very smell of roasted beef... I wasn't used to it... I was used to goat meat with a lot of curry and spices. The flavor of roasted beef drove me into the bathroom. The culture was very, very shocking, a shocking difference of cultural experience.

Angy: And Auntie, what about you?

Lakshmi: The same - the language, culture. When I go walk in the union building, girls and boys hugging and kissing and I would turn my face the other way. That was a bit shocking for me. I did not see any birds around because I came in September and all the birds had flown away. I didn't see any cows and was wondering, why don't you have any cows here? So uncle took me to a dairy farm to show me cows (laughter). It was really shocking. And then my host family, she knew that I was a vegetarian so she invited us to our

house for dinner, and she made rice with chicken and she took out the chicken from the rice and I had tears in my eyes, I cried. It was really shocking.

What is most interesting in the accounts from Anil and Lakshmi is that not only did they have different experiences, but they were experiences that included humility, fear, disgust at times and shock. They were unprepared for the culture shock and did not know what to expect, and then it seems that with each new experience, their “shock” was accumulating and they had to adjust repeatedly. Moreover, for migrants in that time period, their way of coming to the US was through education grants. Some of the male participants in this study were from small towns in India, and had excelled in their studies and were therefore awarded grants and scholarships to study in the US. For their families, and for them, this was a very big accomplishment. However, upon arriving in the US, they were met with some resistance, as in Anil’s case, and not only was this unexpected, but it was humiliating. Anil had to swallow his sense of pride, and understand the new context and environment that he was in. In addition, Lakshmi had to adjust to her surroundings as well. She was surprised to see public displays of affection, and was even more distressed by the food. However, she recalls Anil taking her to see cows at a dairy farm, and one can see the affection between them, even in the early stages of their arranged marriage⁶.

In Jaya and Rakesh’s case, they reflected on the many challenges they faced, and were also quite candid in wanting it to be known that the transition was not easy:

Angy: When you first moved here, what was your sense of the initial challenges?

⁶ It should be noted that one of the more special moments of the interview was when Lakshmi and Anil recall exchanging letters with one another while Anil was in the US, and Lakshmi was still waiting to move to the US to join him. Lakshmi remembers running to the mailbox every day to see if a letter had come from Anil. She noted that at that time, it was very difficult (and expensive) to make long-distance phone calls, and letters took weeks to arrive. But in that waiting period for the letters to arrive, their affection for one another grew. Certainly these letters that many of the migrants saved are an avenue for future study.

Rakesh: Well, survival. I came here on a scholarship, and you know, you don't have any relatives; you don't have family here, so if you are out of money, you end up on the street. So you have to make sure that next week or next month's rent and expenses were paid for, so that was a big thing.

Angy: And Auntie, what about you?

Jaya: Oh, too many (laughter). Even though I had been here before, and I've been to Europe, it wasn't that it was the first time I was leaving India. But my challenge was... You know, it's adjustment to the person you married, because you hardly know each other. So first of all you have to get to know your spouse. And then the other challenge was learning to cook... Driving was not such a hard challenge for me, because I had driven in India. But to cook, to adjust to life here, there are no parents to guide you, no one to guide you actually. You have to make her own decisions, I was just 20 years old. Cleaning, that was a big challenge. The weather... we came here in January, the middle of winter.

Angy: Anything else?

Jaya: Well you know everything over here, going grocery shopping... Basically everything was a challenge. The only plus point I had was that I had been here before, I could speak English. So language wasn't an issue at all.

Rakesh: I knew English but I did have an accent so sometimes people couldn't understand you.

Angy: So when Auntie came to join you, Uncle, did you have any challenges?

Rakesh: Well yes. The first thing is you realize that you have somebody that is dependent on you, that you are responsible for her well-being, and Auntie may not say it but I will say it, she came from a well-to do family, monetarily. And particularly the way she was raised, her parents didn't control how much money she could spend, so when she came here, I was doing my Ph.D., but I had a half-time job also. I was making a lot more money than the other students would make. I was making a comparable salary to a starting engineer at that time. But I had nothing. Because I used to

live like if I have to move from one town to the other town, I will put everything in my car and move. One television, some clothes, couple of utensils... I don't know if I even had couple of utensils or not... a record player, and it could all fit in a car, you know, a carefree life. I was renting a room in a house so I didn't need any furniture. It was a very loving family, and American family, but very loving. They treated me like their family member. I would watch TV with them, I would eat in the kitchen and all of that stuff. Obviously when we got married, I had to find a place to live. And I went and applied for married student housing. It was an apartment but the rooms are very small. There was a bedroom, living room, and kitchen. Very small. And Auntie looked at it and said no. So we rented a decent one-bedroom apartment that was not furnished. So then we had to buy all the furniture and stuff. So I still recall that there was a furniture sale at somebody's apartment, so I took a practically brand-new leather furniture...I don't know if it was leather, but it was very nice, absolutely clean, nothing torn. Shiny bright. But because it was used, she got very mad. How can we buy used furniture? Even though I was doing reasonably well, better than a student, affording new furniture was very tough. After getting married, my challenges were that Jaya had much more expensive taste that I did. Making sure that she was happy, but that we lived within our means, was a bit of a challenge in the beginning. For a few years. Just like her, trying to understand the person a little bit, and the whole goal that you just want to make the person happy. You don't necessarily do things to make the other person happy because you don't even know the person. We just got married. That's the stuff you learn in a courtship. I had no idea. I didn't know her. So you do things thinking that she will be happy but even that didn't work sometimes.

Again, we see that finances were a concern. But also, survival. When the migrants came to the US, they earned meager salaries for doing research or teaching, and this was what they had to live off of. Their wives could not initially work because they did not have the visa status to work,

and so especially in cases where there was a difference in socioeconomic status within the couple, this posed a big challenge. Rakesh notes that “you realize that you have somebody that is dependent on you,” and because none of the wives in this study were able to work in the early years after arriving in the US, the husbands in this study had to be financially responsible for their wives. Independence from one’s parents and life in India also came with the economic dependence of the wives, and so the question of what it means to be independent must be raised. Is one ever really independent? Moreover, each wife, and even each husband, in my study were fairly accustomed to having things done for them in India by family and domestic workers – cooking, cleaning, etc. Both Priya and Jaya note that they now had to cook, they had to purchase their own groceries and this was something they were not used to. This posed challenges as they were not accustomed to the labor of domestic work. So when it came to having to do these tasks independently, there was resistance which was followed by a learning curve and adjustment.

In hearing about these many challenges, ranging from financial stress, to cultural differences and shock, to learning about each other and being married, I am reminded of Rakesh’s comment that his greatest challenge was “survival.” In leaving more comfortable lives behind in India, the migrants in this study had quite a bit of stress and burden to bear, being in a new country, learning the system of both education and society, and then also attempting to navigate marriage with someone they did not know very well. While I had thought they would reflect more on missing their homes, and being lonely without their families, they did not provide much sentiment on this topic. Their responses were practical, logistical and included day-to-day concerns that they experienced as well as their overall concerns about their purpose in being in the US. However, they did not indicate that they were nostalgic, overly sad, or feeling

very isolated or displaced. Rather, their focus was on persisting through the challenges and obstacles and after so much uncertainty and stress, finding stability in the US.

Locating Home

Perhaps the missing nostalgia during the interviews can be explained or better understood by how the migrants discussed their location of home. In Gloria Anzaldua's famous text, *Borderlands*, she writes, "I had to leave home so I could find myself" (7). She continues, "But I didn't leave all the parts of me: I kept the ground of my own being.... So yes, though 'home' permeates every sinew and cartilage in my body, I too am afraid of going home" (7). It was my initial impression that for the participants in my study, "home" meant India, the place they left behind to start anew in the US. I, like many others, had pictured "home" as one's point of origin, where one was born, where one was raised. So what I did not expect was the responses from the migrants I interviewed when asked where they feel their home is. I list our conversations below by participant without interruption in the following pages so as to analyze them as a whole given that many of the responses are quite similar, and the conviction with which the participants responded to this question are more effectively related collectively:

Sanjay

Sanjay: Home is here. It changed a long time ago. Once we started settling here and had kids here. This has become the home.

Angy: Do you still think of India as home?

Sanjay: Well definitely, yes. A second home yes. But this is the primary home.

Mamta

Angy: What does home mean to you? In other words where is your home, and why?

Mamta: I think home is here now. I have lived more than half my life here now. I think, even in the US, initially we were traveling, but now I feel that this is home, because I think the kids were born here, they went to school here. We were in Pennsylvania, and we traveled from there for a job and then another job. And once the kids came, we said this is it. It's also because of all of our friends, we know people here. We think to move somewhere now, it's a little scary.

Angy: In what sense do you think of India as home?

Mamta: Well, my parents are still living there. My friends are still there. But it doesn't feel home, because where I grew up in my childhood, that home is gone now. But we still love it there, is still like to be with our family. I think my in-laws home becomes my own home now and a little but more important, I feel like it's my place. It's another home, I would say. I wouldn't say more, because I don't really have a shelf in that closet.

Angy: Where do you feel more comfortable?

Mamta: In my opinion I feel more comfortable here. In India, especially my father's home, I don't feel any different. It just comes along with taking care of an older person, and the stress. When you're here, you're the boss.

Priya

Angy: What does the word home mean to you? In other words, where do you feel your home is? Has your sense of home changed?

Priya: Yes, it has.

Angy: In what ways?

Priya: Well, this is home now. I go home – I still call going to India home, that's still my home. But, I am more attached to this home more than that, which is strange because I never thought I'd hear myself say that.

Angy: So you're more attached to here now? Why is that?

Priya: Well my kids are here now. One of them is married and she has two children. You know. All the kids are here. My life is here. Home I only associate with my parents now. That when I go to visit them because my parents are there.

Mohan

Angy: What does home mean to you? In other words what is your home and why? And how has your sense of home changed?

Mohan: Home is certainly where we are today. This is where the family is. This is where you come home to back to work, where you basically feel comfortable. This is home, where we are, in this house. Some folks might say my home is where I came from, my parent's home, or whatever. But when you get a certain area for so long, especially in this year were 15 or 16 years you know that this is your destination this is where you're going to be.

Angy: Has that changed over time? In any way do you consider India home?

Mohan: Not really, no. This is home, this is home, in the US. This is where we are. Yes, you go and visit your ancestral home. You were there for two weeks or three weeks, whatever. But then you gravitate back to where you belong. Home was always this area.

Lakshmi

Angy: How do you think of home where is home?

Lakshmi: Actually now this is my home. India, when I go after leaving 45 years ago, we go there but we do as a guest now where no one talks anything and you feel like an outsider. I feel this is home because that's where I was brought up to tell you the truth. After 20 or 22 years, the rest of my life is here, so I feel America's home.

Angy: Are you comfortable with that idea?

Lakshmi: I think so, I do, because when I go to India, after a few weeks, I feel like going home. After meeting everybody and seeing things I think we should just go home, there's nothing to do there. So, where you live that's your home. When I go there I do like it for

three weeks but after about two weeks I'm ready to leave. My family is here. The children are here, my friends are here, and I miss everybody. So that's why I consider this is home.

Anil

Angy: Where do you consider your home to be?

Anil: The choice is between here and India? This is my home. The US is my home.

Angy: Why?

Anil: Out of 67 years, you spend 46 here, than your home is here, not in India. You have been uprooted.

Angy: So your roots are here?

Anil: The roots are here. And if they are not very good, then we should build them. The three children are here, the grandchildren are going to be here, we're here. So the home is here.

Neelam

Angy: What does the word home mean to you? In other words, where is your home and why?

Neelam: Until I was married, my home is where my parents were. You kind of feel that is your home because you always lived there, you feel comfortable with them, you know you love them and they love you and so that becomes your home. And you know it's permanent. That's the feeling you have when you are home.

Angy: So home is permanent?

Neelam: You feel secure, you know people living with you are caring for you, and you care for them. And you have a long-lasting relationship with them. That's home.

Angy: So then that the location of your home, given how you think about home, has changed?

Neelam: Yes, of course. After you get married, it changes. Once you get married, you still kind of think that your parent's home is your home, but, the way you start thinking changes once you are married. You get married, and with how we are raised and how we

are told, now your husband's home is your home. Consider all of them your own like you consider your parents. And you do start feeling in your heart that this is now your home. You married this person and that this is his mom's, dad's, brother's, his sister's home, and with your heart you care for them. It's different how in the long run you learned who likes you and who cares for you because then things can change anytime... But the home becomes where you and your husband live.

Angy: So when you think of India, do you consider India home?

Neelam: Actually, I don't anymore. I think over time, this change comes. And I don't know when it comes. When your kids are little, you still go back to India, and that's your home. But I think, slowly and slowly, when your kids are growing, and you were growing, you feel like no, this is your home, where you are living with her husband. I don't think I can go back... Well, my parents are not there. But until they were there, I did feel comfortable going there because you still have the sense that people who live in this house care for and love you, and you feel like it's home. The same way you go to your in-laws home, you have the sense. I guess, I was living with them in a joint family, I would've still considered that as home, but not after so many years. I think this is the home. And that's my in-laws house.

Jaya

Angy: What does home mean to you? In other words where is home and why and how has your sense of home changed?

Jaya: Originally home used to mean Bombay. But now home means here.

Angy: And why has that changed?

Jaya: Things have changed back home, it's not the same any longer, the people you knew, the relationships, I feel like a visitor now. After a couple of weeks I feel I need to go back home now. People are too busy with their lives.

Angy: Any other reasons?

Jaya: You know, I think our friends here, my daughter being here most importantly, and our friends or family here. I am more comfortable with them than relatives back home. That is from my heart.

And finally Rakesh:

Angy: What does home mean to you? Where is home and why?

Rakesh: Well this is my home.

Angy: So this physical place?

Rakesh: If you asked me ‘where is your home’, I will say, physically, this. If asking emotionally, I would say America is my home. I don’t consider India is my home.

Angy: And why is that?

Rakesh: Maybe I’m different than others in that regard. A long time ago, I recognize that I can’t go back. I feel a lot more comfortable here than I do there.

The responses are strikingly similar, and while I had anticipated the discussion on this question would be extensive, each participant was quick to respond, very clearly, and without hesitation. Home is here, in the US. What is notable about Mamta’s response is that she does not express much nostalgia for India as her former home. She states it quite empirically: “That home is gone now.” Moreover, Mamta enjoys being the boss, and in control of her home in the US, whereas in India, she feels “it just comes along with taking care of an older person, and the stress.”

For Mamta, home is where the children are, and even though her parents are still living, India does not feel like home. India did feel a bit more like home as long as their parents were there, but now that their parents are gone, and their children are in the US, home is in the US. Priya notes that she only associates home with her parents because her day-to-day activities are in the US. Neelam feels that she was comfortable visiting India while her parents were still alive, but in their absence, India does not feel like home. This becomes critical in Chapter Four on

aging in the US because the participants of my study are confronted with the conflict of leaving their parents behind to age without them, and then having to reconcile that they may age alone in their newfound home. These notions of home involving one's parents are important for Chapter Four as these same firm sentiments become problematic for them in terms of aging in the transnational family.

We see that for Sanjay, the location of home “changed a long time ago” meaning that the location of home can change – it is not static or fixed for some. For Sanjay, India can be a “second home” but it is not the main home, so one can have two homes, but India fell in rank long ago. Lakshmi, too, feels that given her 45 years in the US, home has changed and that when returning to India, she often feels like “an outsider” and finds that “there’s nothing to do there” so she is more comfortable in the US. Similarly, Jaya notes that “things have changed back home, it’s not the same any longer.” Home, like the migrant, can transform. However, what is most notable from these accounts is the firm denial of India as their home. This untraditional, unexpected response to this question was expressed in a very distant manner and this surprised me. Many of the participants expressed a confidence in locating home in the US both because their parents were no longer alive in India leaving nothing to anchor them there and also because they had children living in the US.

Anzaldúa writes, “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry ‘home’ on my back” and this seems to align with how my participants felt when asked this question (21). When it comes to locating home, the participants of this study feel more comfortable in the US, and it seems that having children in the US planted their roots here. As the participants grew older, their notion of home changed as they had to raise their children and ensure that they had the tools and opportunities to succeed in their lives. In becoming parents, the location of home shifted. It could also be said

that as the location of home shifted, so did the participants' focus – they were now parents with the responsibility of raising children in the US.

To reach the milestone of having children, the participants in my study had to struggle quite a bit and it became apparent that their focus was to pursue what they hoped would make them each happy, and make each of their families proud. Their responses suggest that they did not have the time or the luxury to spend being nostalgic for home and their former lives in India, but rather, that they wanted their move to the US to be worthwhile. In seeking educational and professional advancement and growth, they had to look forward, not backward, and this influenced not only how they thought of home, but also how they approached their early years in the US. It became apparent that leaving their homelands to plant seeds in a new place, and to uproot themselves from India and root themselves in the US by developing careers and having children, was their motivation. To succeed and to survive were their primary goals, with their own happiness at the forefront. To be nostalgic for India did not come up in the interviews suggesting that perhaps their happiness was to be pursued in the US. And though Boym, for instance, is looking at the productive aspects of nostalgia, these interviews help us look at and bring meaning to the productive aspects of those who chose to leave.

CHAPTER 3:

Happiness as Counterpoint, Happiness as Explanation

“Mummy, I just want to be happy.”
“Beti...I don’t want you to be happy. I want you to be married.”
--excerpt from Kavita Daswani’s *For Matrimonial Purposes*

For several decades, a predominant theme in diasporic literature, film and scholarly work on South Asian migration to the US has been the various conflicts between first generation South Asian migrants and their children. It is quite common for diasporic South Asian fiction and film to depict the immigrant generation as unyielding, unfair, strict, unfairly “traditional,” and holding onto some notion of the past, some notion of home, and the second generation daughter in particular as wanting to be free, desperate to be happy. In the popular 2002 British film, *Bend it Like Beckham*, we see a constant struggle between the young daughter and her parents who refuse to let her play soccer and explore her potential. They want her to be Indian, to maintain some level of Indianness, and the homeland. Her parents want her to be a “good Indian girl.” It is this depiction of the migrant parents as unwavering and closed off from anything “American” that made me question why. Why, after all, was it a big deal if an Indian girl wanted to play soccer? Why was this considered not Indian enough? But also, with so much focus on the tension within the family, it became important to ask why this tension was the predominant theme in South Asian diasporic fiction and film.

At a cursory level, it occurred to me that migrants might fear raising children in a new environment, or not know how, and that their daughters simply wanted independence⁷. This

⁷ The idea of independence is mentioned throughout the genre of ladki-lit as something that the second generation daughters desire, often implying that independence means being able to do whatever one wants without any influence or consequence. The use of this term in this way is problematic given that choices are most often dictated by multiple forces.

chapter will explore the conflicts regarding marriage between the first generation South Asian migrant parents and their American-born daughters as discussed in both South Asian diasporic fiction and the study I conducted, while raising the issue of happiness – who and what determines it, and in this context, how is it attained? Is happiness for the second generation possible, or is it only imagined?

In order to understand the idea of (un)happiness in this context and why the migrant is often depicted as unyielding in their Indian ways, it is useful to explore and study the migrant as represented both in fiction and in the interviews I conducted. The notion of the migrant being lost or confused after arriving in the West is not a new one. Well known scholars and highly acclaimed theorists have been writing about the migrant struggle for some time, and in ways quite similar to the themes I was finding in fiction and film. Theorists of cultural identity and migrant experiences such as James Clifford discuss migrants as “dwelling in displacement” and therefore existing in a “lived tension” (255). In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Clifford writes that terms such as “diaspora” and “diaspora communities” imply that migrants are “not here to stay” (255). Clifford indicates that the term diaspora implies a physical displacement, a dislocation, and as a result, he writes, “diaspora cultures mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (255). This dislocation suggests that a migrant is somewhere he or she is not supposed to be and therefore has to “make the best of a bad situation” (257). Clifford’s notion of displacement, that “diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension” prevails in postcolonial theory (255).

Following Clifford, I often have assumed that many migrants “dwell in displacement” as a consequence of not belonging anywhere anymore. If the migrant is in fact lost, and without

roots planted in their host country, it would ring true that migrants might constantly wish for what they cannot have again or anymore. It is even possible the migrant creates imaginary homelands as I discuss in Chapter Two. This attempt to re-create the homeland in the US then would make sense, and the resulting conflict with the second generation would also make sense. My graduate research was initially grounded in literary and cultural critiques of South Asian diasporic fiction and film that dealt with similar tensions; however, this dissertation suggests that South Asian migrant narratives can be a rich source of alternate readings of diasporic tensions, especially in regard to happiness and marriage. The focus of this chapter is to better understand the pursuit of happiness by exploring the representations of migrants and their tormented daughters in South Asian diasporic fiction, alongside ideas of happiness and marriage in the interviews I conducted.

The significance of “happiness” as a concept rose to the surface while I was conducting interviews with the participants in my study. Many noted that they came to the U.S. to have a better future, for themselves and for their children. Upon interviewing my participants, what struck me was that each participant said the exact same thing, a common phrase that is often taken for granted. When asked what they wanted for their children in the U.S., they each responded “We just want them to be happy.” It’s a simple statement, heart felt and seemingly honest and sincere. However, this commonly used statement is oversimplified, as though the hope for happiness is so simple. And this is what made me question – what is happiness? Who determines the definition of happiness or if happiness has been achieved? What happens when the definitions differ? Or the requirements differ? Sara Ahmed, in *The Promise of Happiness*, writes, “if one’s persons happiness is made conditional on another person’s happiness, such that the other person’s happiness comes first, then the *other* person’s happiness becomes a *shared*

object” and essentially, happiness “is associated with the renunciation of desire” (63). The migrants here have sacrificed so much to journey abroad and start new lives. They have invested everything into their children. In fact, one participant noted that his children “are his only asset.” If the children then are not successful in terms that the migrants can understand, which seems to be the requirement for happiness, then the migrant is not happy. If the daughters in this case solely fulfill the desires of their parents, they sacrifice their own happiness. The daughter feels she can be happy if she is allowed to achieve her own happiness and if she is allowed and trusted to navigate her own life.

Julie Annas suggests that we “think of happiness as something to be achieved, or not, by living a life of one kind or another” (49) and that “we are faced with the point that we do think of happiness as an achievement in the way we live our lives” (50). So I suppose the question then is, whose achievement is it? Is it for the daughter to achieve her own happiness, or is it the achievement of the migrant parents should their daughter find happiness? And the question I am left with is, can both happen at the same time?

Section I: Freedom as Happiness in South Asian Fiction

What I have found most interesting in recent fictional narratives about young South Asian American women is that very few female protagonists seem to be happy, and have cohesive healthy relationships with their migrant parents. Many of the novels include the prevalent theme of marriage where the daughters, the “brides-to-be,” reject their parents’ involvement in “arranging” their marriages. In fact, in much of the South Asian diasporic fiction, the young heroines react to the pressure of their parents in very similar ways. In this chapter, I will discuss Poonam Sharma’s *Girl Most Likely To*, Anita Jain’s *Marrying Anita: A Quest for*

Love in the New India, and Amulya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry*, in which the unhappy, struggling female protagonists seem to pursue happiness by seeking freedom from their mothers, domestic drudgery, and arranged marriage and fighting for their freedom to express their sexuality, pursue their careers and choose their partner on their own. I chose these three novels because they are representative of a wide range of fiction with very similar story lines indicating that many authors are attempting to represent the issues such as generational conflict, marriage and the difficulties their female protagonists face upon trying to negotiate and figure out who they are in the diasporic context.

I discuss these texts, in particular, because they fall under the quickly growing and highly influential genre of "chick lit." As defined by Pamela Butler and Jigna Desai, "chick-lit novels tell clever, fast-paced stories about young, predominantly white women's messy journeys of personal and professional growth—heroines gain self-knowledge and self-acceptance, and are thus empowered to take control of their intimate relationships and professional lives" (2). In a way, chick-lit is a sort of bildungsroman for the young female, coming of age, and attempting to understand her place in the world. This new wave of women's fiction emerged in the mid-1990s after the novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* debuted in 1996. Given the popularity of this series of novels as well as many famous novels to follow such as *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) and Candace Bushnell's *Sex in the City* (2006), a new genre was developed, one in which protagonists represent "real" women who are mainly white, middle-class, professionals who are single and seeking love in the big city. The novels tend to be similar in their first-person point of view, in their plots and also in their style – funny, quirky, self-reflective confessionals of the young woman seeking happiness.

Given that chick lit is so closely tied to the local, with references often to restaurants, street names, local stores, as well as issues revolving around culture, race, and politics, several sub-genres emerged thereafter, such as “ladki-lit,” “sista-lit,” “Jewish chick-lit,” and “Brit chick-lit” that retain the same formula but weave in particular themes in order to cater to particular audiences. In ladki-lit in particular, the focus is on marriage and generational tension. And while chick-lit and its many subgenres are often reduced to being easy summer beach read by critics, I argue that ladki-lit represents the anxieties revolving around female identity especially in the transnational, diasporic context. Jigna and Desai argue that “the rise of particular subgenres might also tell us something about the preoccupations of mainstream U.S. feminism, at least as it is represented in popular fiction. Rather than reading this expansion as simply more of the same, we might ask why issues such as immigration and race (“Bollywood” and “black” chick lit), labor (“nanny lit”), and consumption (“shopping lit”) are such popular topics in contemporary women’s genre fiction” (3). Given the popularity of ladki-lit and its widespread sales, it is very important to see how this genre represents the South Asian diaspora.

Ladki-lit is of particular interest in my research because of its focus and preoccupation with marriage and generational conflict. While marriage and generational conflict in the South Asian context are perhaps more seriously handled in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruna’s collection, *Arranged Marriage*, or Monica Ali’s, *Brick Lane*, or Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*, it is important to look at the “popular culture subgenre of South Asian women’s fiction that is sometimes called ‘ladki-lit,’” (Aguiar, 186). Butler and Desai note in their essay that “the criticism of chick lit as apolitical, consumerist, and tawdry is already too familiar” and that “this wholesale rejection of chick lit demonstrates a lack of regard for how genres operate and, specifically, how subgenres may work to undermine and rewrite the form and its attendant

discourses” (3-4). In other words, while it is easy to dismiss chick lit as not being serious fiction, there is something to gain by looking at what has made it so popular and what this might represent. Jigna and Desai suggest that though it is easy to belittle ladki-lit and argue that they are simply “postfeminist” narratives of chick lit [that] reflect an obsession with consumption and sexual desire,” it is possible that the focus on consumption and sexual desire might reflect the young protagonists ways of negotiating tradition and “becoming American” (6).

Marian Aguiar describes ladki-lit in her article, “Arranged Marriage: Cultural Regeneration in Transnational South Asian Popular Culture,” as a “transnational phenomenon,” given that these novels are published by publishers around the world, have exploded in demand, and are often found on Indian bestsellers lists (190). Aguiar goes on to commend these novels by noting that “the marketing and reception of these novels, as well as their plots, promote the concept of arranged marriage” (189). My concern with this statement is that while it is useful to explore South Asian chick-lit in terms of relating the concerns of the second-generation, to say that these novels promote the concept of arranged marriage is misleading. To promote arranged marriage would mean that these novels are supporting, or encouraging the concept of arranged marriage and depicting it in a positive light. However, that does not seem to be the case. In fact, what drew me to this genre of literature in the first place is how strongly these novels suggest that the first generation, especially in their opinions on marriage, is something to rebel against.

It should be noted, however, that arranged marriage as a concept is very broad, and often misunderstood. According to Aguiar, “arranged marriage has become an object of fascination in the West, a point of revulsion, outrage, curiosity, and even envy” yet “despite the widespread recognition of arranged marriage as a concept and its association with South Asian traditions, it is surprisingly difficult to fix a definition” (181, 182). Part of the reason it is so difficult to come

up with a singular definition of arranged marriage is because the practice varies based on nation (even region), religion, socioeconomic status, education, family practice amongst other things. The practice of arranged marriage has roots in many cultures where the duty of finding a partner for a family member is the family's responsibility. There are many forms of arranged marriage, with the most stereotypical case being when the bride and groom meet on the day of their wedding. However, arranged marriages should not be conflated with this blind arrangement. Arranged marriages take place in many different forms ranging from introductions facilitated by family members or friends to relationships made possible by dating websites or matrimonial advertisements. It must be noted that partner selection is often based on factors such as socioeconomic status, education, religion, etc. In addition, arranged marriage should not be confused with forced marriage or child marriage. While extreme cases of forced marriages or child marriages do exist, they very much differ from arranged marriage because they do not involve consent. For the purposes of this research, I define arranged marriage in the South Asian diaspora as the bringing together of two people based on both the individual's choice, with the assistance and/or influence of the family and community based on factors such as socioeconomic status, education, religion, and race.

Arranged marriage is often discussed as being a central theme in South Asian diasporic fiction, leading to the tension between the migrant generation and their South Asian-American daughters. To understand this further, it is best to look more closely at each of the three novels I am focusing on in this chapter and their overlapping themes. In each of the three novels, the young women live in big cities such as New York and San Francisco, and though they live within driving distance of their parents, at the overripe ages of 27-33, they avoid as much contact with their parents and families as they can because their aging involves the pressure to get

married. Anita states in *Marrying Anita: A Quest for Love in the New India*, “shaadi,” the word for ‘marriage’ in many Indian languages, is the first word a child in an Indian family understands after *mummy* and *papa*” (20). This sort of upbringing, this constant pressure to be married, to be good Indian girls, is what motivates these women to move out of their parents’ homes, leave the suburbs, and enter the big city in search of a more “American” lifestyle. Vina, in Sharma’s *Girl Most Likely To*, says, “I was born preoccupied with my future” and this is what has caused her to push her family away.

More than anything, however, it seems that these protagonists are motivated to leave their homes because of the model that they have witnessed throughout their lives thus far – their mothers. In *Serving Crazy with Curry*, Malladi writes that Devi “didn’t want to be her mother” because she did not want the same “fucked-up marriage” her parents had, nor did she want to simply have children, serve her husband tea and his meals, and take care of her family (170). Further, interestingly, the fathers in these novels do not speak too much. The mothers are the primary enforcers of “tradition” with constant telephone calls and questions about what their daughters are up to. Anita’s mother, for example, expresses her frustration with getting her daughter to “settle down” and exclaims, “What can I do? I’m trying so hard to find a boy! I’ve put out so many advertisements in the newspapers. Even I’ve started looking on the Internet, but she is not doing. That girl is not serious about *shaadi*” (Jain, 23). And it is hard for these daughters to argue with their mothers because as Devi irritatingly observes, her mother is “obviously delighted with the idea of pleasing her husband” (Malladi, 189). Thus, it is this model of their mothers staying home and taking care of their families, and this constant preoccupation with marriage, that they run away from. Because they have not seen that it is possible to be

“independent,” have careers and raise a family all at the same time, these protagonists resist and rebel.

These protagonists want more than their mothers experienced and they want to be financially independent. Devi certainly wanted more; she wanted to “start her own company, be as successful as Daddy (no, more successful)...find a good man to love and marry, have a houseful of children, and *still* have a stellar career” (65). It is not, then, that they completely reject family, but that they reject staying home and not pursuing lives outside their homes. Further, they each wonder what would happen to their mothers if their fathers were to leave them. Devi even sees the strain in her parents’ marriage and feels that “if they were not Indian, they would’ve gotten a divorce” but would not get a divorce because her mother would not know how to manage on her own as she had never worked outside the home. Yet, in attempting to avoid what perhaps seems like a lifeless path, I have noticed in many texts of this genre a trend in which the various daughters of immigrant parents feel they must choose between their ambition and marriage, and because they pursue their careers, their families feel they are rejecting marriage. Vina’s mother in *Girl Most Likely To* comments on Vina’s ambition by saying that “we educated you so that you could have a good life, not so that you could forget about family and tradition entirely” (159). What is interesting is that the young protagonists have never said they want to abandon the possibility of having families and husbands. Rather, they also want to pursue dreams outside of a dream of marriage.

In addition, Sharma seems to add another twist in *Girl Most Likely To* as to why these protagonists want to prioritize their jobs. Vina states, “I comforted myself with the fact that there was at least one aspect of my life that was under my control: my career” (71). Sharma suggests that perhaps having a career is the only thing that these women can do to have control over their

own lives because their families are constantly attempting to decide everything else for them. Having successful careers, earning money, having savings accounts, buying fancy shoes and purses, and having the free-will to spend however they please, provides them with a sense of agency that they otherwise do not feel they possess. In addition, it makes them more like their peers, colleagues and American friends.

Even more so than the consumerist activities of American and European fashion trends, this popular genre focuses heavily on sexual desire. For daughters of conservative immigrant parents, it seems especially difficult to manage one's sexual desires in the throes of a culture that more easily embraces sexuality. Premarital sex, or even premarital love for that matter, is considered scandalous and therefore prohibited because this type of behavior would not simply disgrace the young girl, but the entire family as well. However, sexual freedom is another way that these female characters in the novels act out against the expectations of their families. In every possible way, they attempt to keep this part of their lives separate from their parents. In *Girl Most Likely To*, Vina, for example, has no problem occasionally going to a bar, having a few too many martinis and ending up in a stranger's bed. Vina justifies her secrecy by stating that "the best way to maneuver my Indian and American cultural identities would be to keep certain things about myself to myself" because "a lifetime of my parents' injured expressions at even the mention of any male who wasn't Indian had taught me otherwise" (Sharma, 38, 121) – she learned that it was necessary to compartmentalize her life. In *Serving Crazy with Curry*, Devi also quietly has affairs with various men and even becomes pregnant by her own brother-in-law without her family knowing. And in *Marrying Anita*, Anita "has had sex in the past – and not just with those two long-term boyfriends" (53). Expressing their sexuality, though kept from their families, seems to be the only other way aside from their careers to exercise any agency. And

though they are not entirely promiscuous and do exercise more self-control than their peers, they feel, in a way, relieved of the pressure from their families by going to bars every night, drinking heavily, by dating whomever they please and having sex.

When sex and alcohol fail to relieve these characters of their familial tensions, they each feel the need to escape. In varying levels of severity and intent, they are so overburdened by the pressure to get married and navigate their cultural identities that they fall apart and must leave. In *Girl Most Likely To*, Vina has a breakdown and decides to take a vow of silence in Fiji as she meditates for two weeks, away from her family and with no contact or access to her New York life. In *Marrying Anita*, after so many attempts to build the life she envisioned, Anita finally hits a brick wall and leaves her family in New York and moves to New Delhi, away from everyone, and moves into an apartment by herself so that she can start over. And in the most extreme of cases, in *Serving Crazy with Curry*, Devi feels the only solution, the only way to get away, is to commit suicide. When her attempt to take her life fails, she also takes a vow of silence even though she is living with her parents and does not speak for months.

Given these common tropes and story lines in these select novels, it is very difficult to suggest that these novels promote and encourage arranged marriage. I would argue these novels are doing the opposite. Though not all of the novels in this genre directly involve an arranged marriage, these young protagonists are constantly resisting the idea of marriage as suggested by their parents. While Aguiar interprets Anita's return to India in *Marrying Anita* as entertaining the idea of an arranged marriage, Anita speaks very negatively of arranged marriage, and notes that she was returning to India "to find a modern Indian husband on [her] own terms" (Jain, 53). Moreover, these novels depict the arranged marriages of each of their parents in a fairly negative

light as well. From these young heroines' perspective, those marriages do not appear to be happy, healthy, or consisting of real love.

In fighting against the pressure to get married and rebelling against their "Indianness," however, what is most interesting is that each of these protagonists also feel that they have failed at living the perfect "American" lives they had set out to live. It seems these characters have the impression that being born in America assumes the freedom to control their own lives, their own destinies and that they could shed their "Indianness" without feeling any remorse. The American way was supposed to bring them happiness. What they find, however, is that there is not an easy way to shed their "Indianness" nor was being "American" the solution they were seeking. In the end, each of the young women, in their "coming of age" moments that are typical in chick lit, find ways to accept their two cultures and realize that hiding "behind the façade of nonchalance" and running away from their families was not the solution, but rather that they need to pursue what they wanted openly and that what they want is not that different from what their parents want for them (Sharma, 19). Each of these young women were pursuing love and marriage and hoping for happiness, and at the same time resisting or struggling with the pressure to get married because they felt the pressure was coming from their parents, their culture, their "Indianness." What these novels are suggesting, whether it is intentional or not, is that it is this pressure to be entirely "Indian" and represent India while living in the U.S. that makes young South Asian American women claustrophobic, confused and incapable of leading happy lives.

This raises the concern about how "Indianness" is represented in ladki-lit. The young women in these novels are rejecting any notion of arranged marriage, which for all practical purposes in their circumstances only means being introduced to potential suitable matches. However, it seems that being introduced to potential partners means giving in to their

“Indianness,” and accepting defeat in their self-imposed expectation to be successfully or fully American. These protagonists have the impression that marriage is pursued independently in the U.S. and that being in the U.S. means they should have the freedom to choose whomever they want to marry without any influence. What is concerning about this idea is expressed in Shilpa Dave’s article, “Matchmakers and Cultural Compatibility: Arranged Marriage, South Asians and American Television.” Dave writes, “The proliferation of stereotypical representations of arranged marriage in opposition to Western ideals of a romantic love marriage...presents Indians and Indian Americans as culturally and racially foreign to the US” (167). By illustrating arranged marriage is such a negative light and as such a cause for tension, these authors participate in prolonging the stereotype and turning South Asians in the U.S. in to the “other” while ignoring that marriages are so commonly arranged in the U.S. amongst all cultures, even more blatantly in the 21st century given reality dating television shows and dating websites such as Match.com and Eharmony.com where the entire premise on matchmaking is based on compatibility. According to Dave, it cannot be ignored that “non-South Asians are exposing themselves to highly choreographed meetings with their future partner” and that television shows like *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* “move towards a convergence of Indian American and American cultural practices in relationship to marriage because the depiction of Indian families who are concerned for their children and see marriage as an alliance of families, can be compatible with parents and families on the reality shows who also want the best for their children” (171). Market arrangements and family-based arrangements are happening both in the US and in India, and by making this a completely South Asian issue exotifies South Asia. The problem then is when authors of *ladki-lit* fixate on arranged marriage as a central theme, as a central issue causing unhappiness in their character’s lives as though they are being forced to marry someone they do

not want to marry, the representation of South Asians and the migrant generation is negatively affected.

This is also problematic because, given the popularity of *ladki-lit*, there is increased visibility of South Asians in the U.S. According to Rifat Anjum Salam in her text, “Second Generation South Asians: Negotiating Tradition and Becoming American,” “the increasing visibility of South Asians has two consequences for the dominant society’s understanding of this group. The first and most positive effect is to provide visibility for people of South Asian descent in a variety of different contexts and professions. However, the fascination with South Asians’ marriage choices and focus on arranged marriage, serves to marginalize South Asian Americans, excluding them from the mainstream because of the ‘exotic’ practices that persist despite educational and economic acculturation” (10). I would agree with Salam that focusing on the “exotic” creates more boundaries than it bridges. Where these South Asian diasporic authors have an opportunity to draw parallels between “Indianness” and “Americanness,” they rather widen the divide by focusing on difference. Moreover, these novels suggest that the first generation is to blame for making the lives of their daughters so difficult, and essentially, unhappy.

With that said, these novels, representative of so many others found in the *ladki-lit* genre, suggest that there are anxieties surrounding the construction of the female South Asian American subjectivity. The second generation experience is important and should be looked at critically, but perhaps the focus on arranged marriage is not what is most critical given that arranged marriages, as noted earlier, are taking place amongst non-South Asians in various forms. The deeper issue here may be what marriage represents in this context. Dave writes that “for Asian Americans marriage is often associated with the retention of culture as well as the creation of

future generations” (169). As Inmam, et al, found in their study titled, “Cultural Transmission: Influence of Contextual Factors in Asian Indian Immigrant Parents’ Experience,” “living in a culturally incongruent community, first-generation parents perceive themselves as having the sole responsibility of imparting cultural values to their children, which results in restrictive behaviors by the parents” and that “actively reproducing the traditional culture and establishing a cultural identity in their children become important parenting goals for these immigrants (94). If one of the goals of the migrant generation is to impart a cultural identity on the second generation daughter, then the South Asian American female subjectivity is bound to be conflicted.

With the second generation daughter having the responsibility of carrying traditions and an Indian culture to the next generation, it seems that this could create forms of cultural schizophrenia and the inability for a woman to understand herself as an autonomous individual with any agency. In all three novels, this is what causes Vina, Devi and Anita to finally breakdown because they feel so much weight on their behavior. The weight they carry is not given to them only by their parents though. This weight has traveled with their parents, through their parents, and onto the second generation so that they can be the enforcers of such Indianness. It is perhaps that they have very little idea of how to navigate a hybrid life in the midst of this internal and parental tug-of-war that causes them to try to run away.

In *Marrying Anita*, though Anita tries to run away from her present life and start anew, she attempts to run back to the place where she feels will save her: India. She believes that perhaps going to the place where it seems she belongs will fix her problems and bring her happiness. However, what she realizes in attempting to find a husband in India is that “dating in Delhi is no less complicating, perplexing and ego deflating than in New York” and that “Indian

men are only interested in sleeping around” (Jain, 148, 190). This very much confuses Anita’s notions of India having the answers to her problems. All three characters feel that having an “arranged marriage,” or essentially, marrying an Indian man, would be a simple and immediate solution they do not want their culture, their parents, or their “Indianness” to control them. And again, we find that these novels are oversimplifying the issue at hand and depicting India and Indian culture to be restrictive.

This seems to be similar to what Priya Shah discusses in her essay, “Second-Generation Indian Americans and the Trope of Arranged Marriage.” She writes “the East is constructed as the land of oppression, tradition, and material concerns, while the US is shown to be a ‘freewheeling’ space of female choice and opportunity” (3). Shah states, that “Indian Americans are interpellated by a ‘regime of representation’ that encompasses the images of Indianness produced by strains of US and Indian popular culture” (2). Shah blames US and Indian popular culture as reproducing the notion of arranged marriage incorrectly and she writes, “within the diasporic context, a fear of Western contamination attains fervent immediacy and the practice of arranged marriage becomes the locus for the working out of nationalist identity vis-à-vis the diasporic community” (4). If, as Shah suggests, South Asian American popular culture has an agenda to work out, a nationalist identity via the diasporic community, I would argue that these novels suggest that the mainstream Indian and American national cultures have just as much, if not more, control over these protagonist’s lives as they feel their parents have. Perhaps more pressingly, these authors suggest that it is not the parents fault for insisting upon marriage, rather that these characters are fighting and rebelling against marriage as an institution. Though they want companionship, this preoccupation from birth about marrying well and settling down is what they fight against.

Nationalism, in many ways, can inhibit the woman's ability to articulate herself and act freely. Especially when a woman migrates, she carries with her the burden of the nation, its values, traditions and mores. Anne McClintock discusses this at length in her essay, "No Longer in a Future Heaven: Gender, Race and Nationalism." McClintock argues that nationalism, especially in the context of migration and marriage, must be viewed as a gendered discourse because men and women experience migration and nationalism quite differently. She emphasizes that women over the course of history have been held back for the advancement of the nation and for the maintenance of patriarchal values. Women as "bearers of tradition", as the pillars of the nation, however, lack a sense of nationality or identity for they only "serve to represent the limits of national difference between men" (105). So, given McClintock's notion of the woman as carrying the nation but having no identity of her own and little understanding of the expectations one's primary nation impresses on them, the female characters in the novels I have discussed become figures that are truly displaced, in the sense that they are out of place, belonging neither in India or in the U.S., because the patriarchal expectations of the sending-nation and homeland become quite difficult to navigate in the host-nation. As Anita says in *Marrying Anita* about her friends who were born in India and living there, "they are part of something, this New India, that I can never fully claim as my own, for I have grown up in America – a country to which I could also never lay full claim either" (Jain, 79). The second generation daughter, as represented in much of *ladki-lit*, cannot pursue happiness effectively then because their identities are pre-determined and yet still, constantly taking shape.

Similarly, Deniz Kandiyoti argues that "national identity and cultural difference are articulated as forms of control over women" in her essay, "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation." Kandiyoti writes that nations "mobilize women when they are needed in the

labour force or even at the front, only to return them to domesticity or to subordinate roles in the public sphere when the national emergency is over...[because] the state itself is a direct expression of men's interests" (376). This suggests that women are important and critical to the needs of the nation which, in turn, are dictated by the patriarchal power that the nation-state exerts on its female citizens. Further, Kandiyoti warns, "wherever women continue to serve as boundary markers between different national, ethnic and religious collectivities, their emergence as full-fledged citizens will be jeopardized" (382).

These novels force their readers to ask, "What is the function of marriage?" While many people think of marriage to be a private practice between two people and their families, marriage is actually a very public act that requires public approval. In her book, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, Nancy Cott writes that the public decides upon the terms of a marriage and the public determines who can marry whom. We certainly see this to be true when it comes to same-sex marriage, but for heterosexual marriages, this public state control is often disguised and the state is involved in legal marriages, for instance, since the couple needs to sign a license and requires state sanction. Cott argues that historically in the U.S., "actual marriages of the proper sort were presumed to create the kind of citizen needed to make the new republic succeed" and that the defense of marriage needs to be seen as a defense of a particular social and political order. Further, the expectations of male and female gender roles in marriage have transformed into expectations about male and female roles in society. Therefore, the shape of marriage and the definitions of marriage have also been part of defining citizenship and the nation. This is in part why the female protagonists in the selected ladki-lit know that their sexual independence is threatening and harmful to their "Indianness," and also why they must keep their sexual activities a secret from their parents because their parents are the closest thing capable of

representing the cultural pressure they are trying to avoid/escape. For example, any sense of female purity that these characters are supposed to be representing is contaminated when they do not abstain from premarital sex.

Further, their ambition and desire to pursue careers and work outside the home also threaten marriage and their relationships to their nation. As I stated earlier, these protagonists do not want to be domesticated caretakers of their families and they do not want to only work inside the home, as their mothers did. French Feminist, Christine Delphy, uses marriage to show that women share a common oppression in her essay, “The Main Enemy,” from her book *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women’s Oppression*. Delphy argues that the family is the location of the economic exploitation of women because their household work is not considered to be a good that can be exchanged except through her husband, that is, women do not gain from their work within the family, and in economic terms, marriage is the institution through which conditions for household labor are made possible. It is this unremunerated labor within the home that Vina, Devi and Anita are resisting by pursuing their careers, but the problem is that they must then choose between their independent lives and their potential family lives. This appears to be the case for the majority of the protagonists of *ladki-lit* – they want love and marriage, but they resist these things because of the way it has been presented by their parents and the way they have witnessed marriage and love to be as they were growing up. So, ultimately, whose purposes are served when such a dichotomy exists? These novels are set up such that the daughters must choose between themselves and their families, between loneliness and marriage. Why must it be that seeking freedom becomes synonymous with choosing loneliness? And why should choosing marriage mean that the daughters must also give up chance of happiness?

Sara Ahmed might call these female protagonists, this figure of the South Asian second-generation daughter, a killjoy. In Ahmed's terms, to kill joy is to "open a life, to make room for life, to make room for possibility, for chance" (20). The second generation daughter, the kill joy, is the one who disrupts the ability to just be happy with the things that are supposed to make us happy. Why, after all, can't she just do what she needs to do in order to be happy? Hasn't she been given everything? Why is she still so miserable, and why is she resisting happiness? If the *ladki-lit* heroines allowed their parents to introduce them to suitable partners (South Asian or South Asian American men), and if one of them worked out, then the idea is that happiness will be achieved. But, we return to the question, whose happiness will be achieved? Ahmed suggests that for the daughter, "it is for the sake of her own happiness and the happiness of her parents that she *must* find happiness in the right place, which is in the happiness of a good man" and "for the daughter not to go along with the parents' desire for her marriage would not only cause her parents unhappiness but would threaten the very reproduction of social form" (58). This suggests that perhaps the preoccupation with arranged marriage in *ladki-lit* is actually a preoccupation with intermarriage, meaning marriage between people of different races, castes, religions, etc., because if the second generation daughter is tasked with reproducing a cultural identity, then this may require marrying the *right* "good man" and anything else is killing joy. Rifat Anjum Salam writes that "the decision to choose partners outside or within one's ethnic group is also connected to the individual's adoption or rejection of the American values of autonomy and individualism" so the act of killing joy, or rebelling against the migrant parents, also means rebelling against one's parents' culture (5). And while Ahmed applauds killing joy because it makes room for possibility, these novels portray the killjoy as wanting to kill joy and at the same time desperately wanting to make her parents happy.

Section II: Wanting Happiness for Another

As a counterpoint, “the complicating of a single or dominant theme through the addition of contrasting themes or forces,” to perspectives on marriage and the relationship between the migrant generation and their children that we see in the fiction I have discussed, one of the goals of my qualitative study is to multiply and further complicate notions of happiness, parenting, and daughtering in the diaspora (Brown, 568). The reason I pursued qualitative work is because even though I could see the killjoy in each of the fictional characters I was studying, I felt there was more. Why would the first generation migrant make their child so miserable? Certainly it was visible – the tension, the frustration, the deception, the rebellion. So why? Is it just the migrant’s need to hold onto the homeland? Are the migrants really so unreasonable, so insecure? Or are there additional, deeper, more meaningful ways to understand the migrant, and therefore understand the representation of Indianness in South Asian American diasporic fiction?

According to Inman and Howard, et al, “these parents had to raise their children within a predominantly non-Asian Indian society, with limited social supports and cultural structures” and therefore many migrants initially taught their children what they knew (93). Madhulika Khandelwal found in her research, as described in her book, *Becoming American, Being Indian: An Immigrant Community in New York*, that “there is also a widespread sentiment that the biggest problem [migrants] face with Americans is that ‘they do not understand our culture’” (35). Khandelwal continues, “this perception produces a desire...to educate others about their traditions and gain acceptance for them in America. Their own children are often included in the category of ‘others’ because, to many adult immigrants, they do not seem to embrace Indian culture as their parents do” (35). One of the main purposes of my study was to address this concern and explore which aspects of Indian culture and traditions the migrants carried with

them and reinforced in the U.S. in order to transmit their Indianness to their children. However, one of the unexpected results of this study was that in narrating their experiences, and attempting to explain the choices they made throughout their time in America, it became apparent that they not only had very specific anxieties about raising children in the U.S. but many of their responses centered on the idea of being happy. This section will explore my participants' concerns in raising their children in America, alongside their thoughts on arranged marriage while demonstrating the value my participants have placed on notions of happiness, both for their children and for themselves.

Before looking at how these participants discussed raising their children, however, it is useful and necessary to understand the circumstances of their own marriages. In asking each of the couples how they were married, they each responded that it was an arranged marriage, and yet, when asked to elaborate, it was clear that the term "arranged marriage" had multiple definitions. Learning about how each couple was brought together also helps shape a better understanding of their wishes for their children. In the case of Jaya and Rakesh, they did not know each other at all prior to getting married, but had met each other once in the company of their families:

Angy: How did you two come together?

Rakesh: Well what happened was, I had gone to attend my brother's wedding, without realizing that I will get married. When I was there, they talked about how my maternal uncle was mentioning Jaya, and how I should meet her. So Jaya and Jaya's parents came to see me, that's where I was at that time, my parents were there at that time. So they came to see me, I met Jaya, and we said this is it. And then in a couple of weeks, we got married.

Angy: And Auntie what were your impressions? To what degree did you have a say in any of this?

Jaya: Well I did, it was just my dad and me that went. If I said no, my dad would've been fine with it, but to some extent, my mom was like you cannot say no.

Angy: So if there is a major opposition, you could have said no.

Jaya: Right. It wasn't like I was forced into it. I had an option to say yes or no. And you also have an option to say yes or no.

Rakesh: Absolutely.

Jaya: We weren't pressurized that much. He had no pressure at all.

Rakesh: In my case, my understanding was that my parents had advertised, that's what you do in India - that our son is willing to get married. So they had received some correspondence from some girl's parents, and my parents wanted that I meet a few more girls before I make up my mind because Jaya was the first one I saw, and I didn't meet any of the others. She was only one I saw, and they were surprised, that normally when boys going from here, the typical story is they meet several girls and then make a decision. I said I didn't need to see any other girls. I said she was fine. There was absolutely no pressure. Especially after living here for many years, my parents never would have ever said, no, you need to marry that person.

Angy: So what took place in that two weeks from when you met to when you got married? You only went for your brother's wedding so you had minimal time.

Jaya: Dad and me, we had flown to see Rakesh, so we had to fly back to Bombay, we had to get ready for the wedding, and then come back to his home again for the wedding. It was very rush rush for us.

For Jaya and Rakesh, much like Lakshmi and Anil, the wedding took place quickly, and though they had the ability to decline the marriage proposal, all parties involved agreed. As Rakesh notes, he did not need to see any other potential partners as he was satisfied with Jaya upon meeting her once. In the two weeks between that moment and the wedding day, Jaya and Rakesh did not correspond as they were busy preparing for the wedding with each of their families.

Other couples had more time to get to know one another. For Mamta and Sanjay, they got to know each other fairly well after being introduced to one another by family members and getting engaged at the same time:

Mamta: I think one of his brother in-laws mentioned to my father that he was in town visiting. And he said let me bring Sanjay over in the evening. They were thinking of marriage. And so he came to see us in the evening, had dinner, and then I met with him. My family was very open, they let me meet with him and talk to him alone. I didn't have to dress up like the old days and serve him tea. We just chatted then he decided to not take an answer until we met outside of the house and go for a cup of coffee or something to which my parents agreed. So we did that. The short version of the engagement was done right then, it was basically exchanging a coconut with a rupee, and that was done right then. The pact was made. The ceremony and celebration happened later, 3 or 4 months later. And in the meantime, he decided to move to my city for a job. Then we got married, almost 8 or 9 months later. So the engagement lasted about a year. But, you know, in our family, we had the freedom to meet each other, so it was not a problem.

Mamta notes that she did not have “to dress up like the old days and serve him tea” indicating that times had changed in her family as well and that her “family was very open.” Given that they “had the freedom to meet each other” after being engaged on that same evening, they took the 8-9 months to get to know each other.

Priya and Mohan had a ten-day courtship prior to getting engaged and their story is as follows:

Mohan: In my case, I got a picture of her and I thought she was attractive, very attractive. I was ready to settle down. I had finished my degree, I had worked for a few years, I had my good times and I thought this is the time to settle down. So I told my parents I am ready and is there somebody, so they sent this picture. I flew over there [India]. She had met my parents already because she was

going to college already. So they picked her up and said Mohan is here. She lived in a dorm there. We met and I was only in India for ten days. I had to work fast. So the courtship is like this. My brother was going that evening to drop her back to the dorm. If he was going to drop her, that means my opportunity would be gone. I said to my brother, why are you taking the trouble. Let me drop her. It was half an hour drive, and I thought I can get half an hour alone with her.

Priya: The rest was family time. All together.

Mohan: All together, sitting together, having dinner together. I am looking at her, I like her but she is feeling awkward. She had known my parents, but not me.

Priya: I met them once. I didn't know them.

Mohan: But you knew why you were there.

Priya: Yes, I knew why I was there. But it caught me off guard.

Mohan: Yeah, kind of awkward for her, but at least we had a nice evening. Then I took her back. And our courtship began right away. I knew I liked her and I knew the family was good.

Priya: As we talked more and more, I got more interested.

Mohan: It was the facilitating of a marriage, it was not arranged. My parents liked what her parents did. They liked what my family was all about. So now if she and I got together and liked each other then it would go forward. So after the 20-25 minute drive to her dorm, I asked her if she was in a rush to get back, and she must have liked something and said no, not really. I wanted to be a gentleman first. So she said we have time. And so then we began to drive. Around Delhi. So we clicked. When I dropped her, I asked her when I can see her. I asked for tomorrow. So we met every day for 2-3 days. I took her to a very nice place. I asked her to dress up. I dressed up too. It was our third evening, I knew I only had a week more. I said you know why we are meeting, do you think this will go somewhere.

Priya: You asked me if I ask you to marry me, would you say yes. I said I will talk to my parents and let you know. I at least didn't kill the deal (laughter).

Mohan: I asked her if I could see her tomorrow, and she said yes, so we met for another two or three days, and she must have talked to her

parents. And then they came over. So now the courtship continues, and I am at the 9th day. I am telling her that in America, at this age, there are a lot of girls, and they don't go to a certain guy if they see a ring on the third finger, so can we do a little ceremony that can indicate a ring exchange. She talked to her parents, and her mother felt this is moving too fast.

Priya: I am the only daughter. My mother didn't want me to do it. My father was all for me going to the US. He wanted me to go. My mother didn't want me to go past Delhi.

Mohan: So our courtship was fast. But it was moving toward the right direction. I pushed it a little more to get the rings exchanged. I knew once I leave, I had applied for my green card, and that would normally take 9 months to a year, and once you apply for that, you can't leave. So that's why I came there in a hurry, get this thing going in a hurry, and then come back and apply for the green card. So I knew in this particular situation if I did apply, I wouldn't be able to leave. So we had our ring ceremony, so that we did get engaged. After I came here, we were talking on the phone every week, and exchanging letters, and reading to each other, and that's where it built up more and more and it became more solidified. I had found out she was my soulmate. She was everything I wanted in height, looks, education, family. There were a lot of letters. We couldn't talk that time. It was \$3.50 in those days [per minute]. We could only talk for three minutes. You book a call, talk for three minutes, and hang up. So everything was in writing. Those were literally what you call love letters. You express yourself in writing. This is how 9-12 months was - to prove to her, to prove to her.

While Anil and Lakshmi and Jaya and Rakesh were married in the more commonly known form of arranged marriage, we see that Mamta and Sanjay as well as Priya and Mohan had the opportunity to spend time alone with one another and that, in effect, the decision was theirs. It could be suggested that they were allowed to spend time together because they were each pre-selected and pre-approved by one another's families; however, still these courting experiences are not often found in discussions of arranged marriage in scholarship or fiction. We

also see that Mohan had his own set of criteria in terms of “height, looks, education and family” indicating that he was very active in selecting who he marries which can also help reshape or reformulate common ideas about arranged marriage that the bride-to-be and husband-to-be are complacent. Here, we see that all parties seem very involved. With this in mind, it is interesting to see how the same participants, narrate their experiences in raising their children in the US, and also how they explain their rationales for having opinions on who their children should marry.

Challenges in Raising Children in the US

In speaking to each of the couples both together and then individually, it became clear that there were many unknowns in raising their kids in the US which they feel they may not have experienced had they stayed in India. Many of the couples admitted that there were challenges to raising their kids when it came to dating and leaving the home which resulted in tension. Mamta and Sanjay, though a bit reserved in their responses, expressed the possibility that perhaps they did not know everything that was going on with their children. While their responses indicated that they did in fact have challenges while raising their three daughters, more so in their middle school and high school years, they also noted that while their children had “all the freedom” to do whatever they wanted to do, they were not allowed to date, and it was important that they have Indian values:

Sanjay: In the early ages, there were not many challenges. As they got older it became more challenging. Because they got exposed to the culture here and all that. In the later ages especially, when they got to middle school and high school, they had more challenges. At least I found it more challenging.

Mamta: It was challenging both ways, education wise and socially. We were worried more. We trusted them fully. We were not worried that they would get onto the wrong track, but the stress was there,

in case they were late and what might have happened? But I think that would be in any country. I think they had all the freedom, they were just good kids.

Angy: Was it the same for all three of them?

Mamta: Our youngest was a little more outspoken, a little more Americanized. Let's put it that way, I think. She did well so there's no problem as such. She never did anything different than her sisters, because I think she had that, that I have to do what my sisters have done, so she didn't go against anything. But she did bring up the question, one time, that why can't I date in high school? That was it, that was one question, and it stopped. And nothing happened, so I thought, okay, it's fine. She was a little more outspoken that way. I think she doesn't love everything Indian, like food wise and all, as much as her sisters do. I think being the younger one also. But they grew up with their grandparents. Since his parents used to live with us, every few months they would be here, and it would be a stretch of three months or four months or six months, so all three of them were used to having grandparents in the house. There were certain limits and restrictions, and a certain value system. Indian food was made every day. Even though I would always make at least one or two international meals during the week which we all ate together. It was never that my kids were eating one food and we were eating another. Except for our parents because they had religious restrictions. But the children always grew up with that outlook, taking care of grandparents, seeing the respect that we have.

Angy: Did that play a role, do you think, in how they behaved?

Sanjay: I think so.

Mamta: I think it must have. They knew they had to come home, and they would talk to them. They would not invite a lot of friends all the time. They have never complained, but I think to myself sometimes, did we restrict some things? Were they not able to do some things? Maybe I have rose-colored glasses and I don't see beyond that. Because I think they won't talk to us. The other thing I feel, I feel there is all the respect, all the openness. But there seems like a line that they won't share everything that's going on, and I wonder if everything is alright. They protect us probably by

not letting us know what's going on outside. In school, I would find out from other kid's mothers. Then I would come back and say 'why didn't you tell me?' I would hear more from outside than my own kids telling me what's wrong. Because I think they were either afraid, or they were protecting us. I feel sometimes they would think that if they told me, I would take it in the wrong way, or stop them from going out or meeting people, I don't know what it was. But there was that certain line...I think with the grandparents, the Indian value system was kept in place.

Here, we see a few different concerns being raised. Not only does Mamta see her youngest daughter as "a little more Americanized," she also feels that as parents, they did not know everything that was going on. Their perception that their children kept certain things from them suggests that these things might have gone against the "Indian value system" that was "kept in place." As a result, Mamta feels she was not privy to much of what was going on. It is interesting to note that in this case, the children are protecting their parents. Also, their youngest daughter, being "more outspoken" questioned why she was not allowed to date in high school. It seems that though Mamta and Sanjay do believe that they gave their children every freedom, they were not allowed to date like their peers, and so it is possible their kids were restricted in some ways. It is also possible this was easier to control given that the grandparents were living in the house with them, and maintaining a system of respect and obedience. Mamta and Sanjay compared themselves to their friends who were very conservative in their parenting:

Mamta: There are families who have conservatively brought their children up.

Angy: Do you feel that that was effective?

Mamta: No, we didn't think it was effective and that's why we didn't do it. Lucky for us that his parents were not very strict, and my parents let us grow independently and gave us all the freedom, and sent us on trips as we were growing. I did everything before coming to this country. By the time I came to this country, I was driving, I was

swimming, I had done everything that possibly other kids here might have done, except for maybe waterskiing or skiing on the snow slopes, things we didn't have. So it wasn't that we weren't given the freedom to do everything. We were allowed to do everything. Therefore for us to let our kids do everything, it was no big deal. It was normal; we thought we should let our kids do these things.

Angy: Do you think it was because you are from a big city?

Mamta: Maybe big city, maybe also my parents' outlook, maybe they were also on the modern outlook that they let us grow that way. When we went to English schools, my parents told us later, that other people were criticizing them, that God, you sent your children to English schools, you sent your children to convent schools... But his family was a rare one, they were removed from the whole society but they wanted to do these modern things. So I guess that's why we didn't restrict our children as much, and that's why we gave them every opportunity that we could.

What is interesting to note in Mamta and Sanjay's responses is that they felt they had given all of the freedoms they had to their children, and that they did not restrict them in any way especially given that Mamta says her parents had a "modern outlook." In Mamta's words, "for us to let our kids do everything, it was no big deal." However, at the same time, they did not let their daughters date in high school, so it is important to note how they are defining "conservative" in regard to their friends, and how the grandparents are modern when it comes to how they raised Mamta and Sanjay, but at the same time, are considered as a way of maintaining the "Indian value system."

Priya and Mohan elaborated a bit more on some of the challenges in raising daughters especially, and the thought process and reasoning behind these challenges:

Priya: Oh yes, of course we had challenges. We didn't like [them] going out and staying late at night. We didn't want to get into drinking and drug problems. You hear such horror stories about high school

kids sleeping around. They're on drugs and alcohol. Those are challenges. We were scared, we were scared of all those things.

Mohan: Going back almost 25 years, the generation was very different than now.

Priya: We were very strict.

Mohan: It was challenging to the point that we were trying to raise them like we were raised. That's what made it harder for the kids. Even though they were in junior high, we were still keeping curfew until 10:30 at night time which now you would laugh at us.

Priya: Laila never had a curfew later than 10:30. Ever. Even in high school, senior year.

Mohan: Being the first born. You always are very tough on your first born. And being a girl.

Priya: You hear horror stories and we didn't want our girl to be there.

Mohan: We are trying to be the best parents and make sure that everything we do is protecting them and she would say she could take care of herself, but since we are the parents, we know more, we know better, plus the last word is our word, so we were pretty hard.

Priya: And rightly so. In high school, a lot of them become pregnant. You see one or two and your mind freaks out. You don't want your child there. We would say let me drop you to the party and pick you up, and she would decline going to the party due to being embarrassed. Every Friday or Saturday night, we knew there would be arguments in the house after work. She would want to go out, even if we let her, she would be dressed up and wear long earrings and we would say, 'why are you wearing long earrings?' Now we don't care, we are a bit more mature.

Mohan: The bigger challenges were trying to raise her with Hindu values in a place with a different culture.

Priya: There were also no Indian girls her age.

Mohan: There was no culture at that time that we could raise her with. We would do puja in the house, take her to weddings, and interact with Indians, boys or girls. At least that culture is quite similar. And then fighting, and in a sense resisting, other girls and boys coming to our home for sleep overs was a major challenge. Those types of things you want to protect your young.

Priya: We didn't let her go to sleepovers. Needless to say we were quite

conservative parents.

Mohan:

We still are.

Priya:

We still are to a certain extent. We are halfway in between.

Mohan:

We are adjusting. It's hard for any parent. Ask anyone. Even Laila now gets scared for her own daughters. They are born and raised here. You all think you are totally from this culture, but really, deep down you are also from our culture.

Mohan:

If things are kept very divided, it would be very hard not just for us, but for you all as well.

Angy:

Were you different with Ray than you were with Laila?

Priya:

Absolutely.

Mohan:

Five years age gap.

Priya:

Not just that. He's a boy and she's a girl. There's totally a difference. Our Indian mindset *is* like that. You can't help yourself. Plus who gets pregnant? The girl does, right?

Mohan:

It's not just Indians, even the Americans feel the same way if there's a boy or a girl. There's a girl, you're always more protective because you have to be careful. Whether it's an American family with a boy or an Indian family with a boy, he can go somewhere and fend for himself, he can fight, he has two hands. Girls are more vulnerable. That's the fear. It's not always that she's going to get pregnant.

Priya:

No, no, I am just saying, who gets hurt? A guy can still run and fight back. A girl is a little more defenseless.

Mohan:

Yeah, you're just not as strong. Another cultural thing is that if we didn't go to a church, and other friends went, then how would our kids feel? So that was the lack of a temple.

Priya:

I did teach the kids though don't do anything that you don't want to look at yourself in the mirror. Keep that in the back in your mind. I always told them that. Don't do anything that would make you so ashamed that you don't want to look at yourself.

We see here that in Priya and Mohan's reflection of raising their kids, though they want to seem reasonable, they articulate the genuine concerns they had especially raising South Asian American daughters. In this case, as parents, they are the protectors. Notions of being

“defenseless” or getting pregnant appear to be American issues for Priya and Mohan, and this was the cause for their strict parenting. However, these are Indian issues as well, as are rape and sexual harassment, so this is not particularly an American concern, but at the same time, these issues serve as a cultural rationale for restricting their daughters. Mohan also notes that the lack of a Hindu Temple in the community during the time he was raising his kids affected them and this suggests culture had to be reproduced in the home as opposed to in the Temple.

Anil and Lakshmi expressed similar concerns in raising their kids, especially their daughters, but also indicate that their approach was to attempt to raise their kids to be independent:

Anil: I was always concerned that the children here in school would not be treated the same as a regular American. My daughter was a little bit on the darker side, my son was also dark. My other daughter had a hard time some of the students used to call her names. The understanding I had, that our children up to primary school or mid-junior school would have a lot of difficulty. The only way they could overcome, and I'm telling you the facts, I have never looked at the grade reports from my children's hands. I would always say it's not my business. I would go to parent teachers conference listen what they were saying and tell them what they could do to improve. But our idea was the only asset we have is the children themselves. And that's it. If they can make their lives, we have succeeded. It's probably a good thing to do, what else could I have done. We can't make other people's lives, it's they who will do it.

Angy: Were there any cultural challenges with the kids being raised here and what you expected of them?

Anil: No, I'll tell you. An Indian child probably knows India much better than we think. He is watching you. She is watching every movie, every argument you give, and those arguments are shaping your child. We never told our children to do anything. They knew everything. We never forced them for anything. We never even forced them to do kitchen work or yard work. It was up to them. And luckily for me, my kids were grown up before I got weak. We

never bothered them for anything - I never asked my son to do the lawn-mowing, he did it on his own but he would do it wrong and so we thought we are better off doing it ourselves. We are very lucky.

Lakshmi: We never imposed on our kids. Whatever you do, it's up to you. You will deal with the consequences and you will learn from it if you make a mistake.

Anil: We are the least conservative Indians in town.

Lakshmi: We don't care.

Anil: Many pose to be less conservative, but deep down they are not.

Lakshmi: Down in your heart for Indian girls there is a little less freedom.

Angy: Was it different for your daughters than for your son?

Lakshmi: Of course. Deep down in your heart, that's the way you grow up. It's for protection. They have every freedom. But we don't know. Our daughter use to complain that why are you only afraid for girls, you think your son can't make somebody pregnant? And then I opened my eyes. All of the kids have the same arguments. The sons can make the same mistakes as the girls. But we didn't know at that time how to adjust. Slowly, slowly, you have to take it, you're not going to do anything and you're not going to win. If you want to have peace in your house, if you want to have love from your children, you have to let them be free, because they won't listen.

Anil: There is a statement, the people who defeat you are your children.

Lakshmi: Every parent gets dictated by their children.

Anil: Many will not admit it but it's true.

Lakshmi: This is true for American parents as well.

Here we see that not only is there the concern that a daughter can get pregnant, but again, the daughter needs more protection. Interestingly, Anil commented that their children are their “only asset,” and with this perspective, while Lakshmi also notes that they “don’t care” about imposing on their children, we get a sense as to why migrants may seem “unyielding” in their ways. And at the same time, in saying that “every parent gets dictated by their children,” Lakshmi suggests that parents adapt to their children and transform over time. Though Anil and Lakshmi feel they

were “the least conservative Indians in town,” this does lend itself to asking how one defines the term “conservative.” Also, to say that the children are their only asset implies a pressure on the children to do well in their lives and be successful.

Along the same lines of being “the least conservative,” Jaya and Rakesh, too, felt they did not have expectations of Indianness for their daughter. In their responses, they indicated that being Indian was not of the utmost importance to them:

Angy: Did you face any challenges raising Nila in the US?

Rakesh: No.

Jaya: Umm, I mean, I would say a little bit, because obviously the kids who are born and brought up here lean more toward the Western culture. But it wasn’t so hard teaching Nila the Indian culture, and she didn’t resist or dislike it. She was quite amiable about it. I mean, we never had a Christmas tree, and she was fine.

Rakesh: No, we had a Christmas tree a few times.

Jaya: But it wasn’t a big deal that we didn’t have it.

Rakesh: Let me rephrase that. And correct me if I am wrong. But neither one of us are very well versed in Indian culture even though we were brought up there. For example, the wedding. I don’t know what is what, or what different things need to be done. Nor did I have too much interest. Not necessarily that I am Westernized, but that it wasn’t important. The important thing is that people be happy. So it was not if Nila is being brought up like more or less like an American kid that she is missing out on Indian traditions or cultures because I didn’t know myself those things. And whatever little I knew, I didn’t necessarily believe that it was important. I am not saying there is any harm in practicing them, but it didn’t matter to me. So, I think more or less, she was brought up like a typical American child. She had a lot of freedom, but certain things no parent would accept, like drugs or being drunk. But it was never an issue. So, that’s my deal.

Jaya: The only exposure I had because I didn’t come from a strict family, we were allowed to go out. We were brought up differently. The only thing I knew about Indian culture was the festivals, the holidays, Diwali, Rakhi. And that was it. But if you

asked me about any ritual, or the religion, I learned it all over here. Even my Hindi wasn't that good. I learned it from him.

Rakesh: So, for example, we never talked much in Hindi, and we still don't. So Nila never learned Hindi at home. She learned it on her own when she went to UW-Madison. After a couple years there, she somehow got interested and said I have got to learn Hindi so she took three classes in Hindi there and learned how to read and write.

Jaya: I just feel like you're a hypocrite when you push the Indian culture too much. They say oh, our children can't do this, they can't go to prom, they can't go to Homecoming, they have to talk in Hindi. Blah blah blah. But then, those kids are turning into rebels, and they have all kinds of social problems. We never did that. Nila went to prom, she went to Homecoming but the basic thing is that she's a good human being.

Rakesh: And things like you have to have a good education and stay away from drugs and getting drunk. I drink wine, and that's perfectly fine. And I have no problem that Nila drinks. That's no problem. But I don't want her to get drunk and stuff like that.

Jaya: Be open.

Angy: So openness is important.

Jaya: Yes, we always had an open door policy.

Rakesh: Well we think so. We don't know.

Jaya: But we had the policy. And it has worked.

Jaya and Rakesh suggest that instilling Indian culture in their daughter was not a top priority, mostly because they did not feel that they had a lot of Indian culture themselves nor did they practice religion very much in India. According to Jaya, she "learned it all over here" so this raises the question of what one attempts to produce in the US, and why. Moreover, they did not want that their daughter to be restricted from doing things her peers were doing, such as Homecoming and Prom, because as Jaya notes, those who were very restricted by their parents turned into rebels. Jaya and Rakesh focused their parenting on their daughter being happy, not

necessarily being Indian, which raises the question of if being happy and being Indian are mutually exclusive ideas.

Partner Preferences & Selection for their Children

In wanting their daughter to be happy, which they repeated again, they also expressed that they did not insist that she marry a specific type of person. Though Jaya and Rakesh were married within two weeks of meeting each other only once, and also experienced quite a few challenges in adjusting to married life, mostly pertaining to finances, Jaya and Rakesh insisted that when it came to their daughter, their only requirement for her future spouse was that he hold the same values that their daughter had. Those values included being a good person, caring for others, and trying to do good in the world. When asked if they had a role in their daughter getting engaged, they responded:

Angy: So you have one daughter. What was it that you value the most for the person that she married? What do you want?

Jaya: I would want somebody that she obviously loved and cared for. That they have similar interests, they were compatible. My opinion what has always been that don't just look at the boy, look at the family too. I feel that it's very important, it reflects on the guy. And the way that we brought her up that she makes the right choice. That the value she was taught, that they should come into play when she makes her choice.

Angy: What are those values? Is that open-ended? Could she have married anyone?

Rakesh: We did not place any restrictions in that regard. Just like any other parent, I want my daughter to be happy, nothing more nothing less, and her life.

Jaya: That was of utmost importance.

Rakesh: Nothing else mattered more. Being happy, and being healthy. So whomever she finds that happiness with is most critical. From what I know of my daughter, she would not be happy unless she

married somebody who is intelligent; she's very affectionate so he has to have caring characteristics.

Jaya: Money is not so important to her.

Rakesh: I am saying so because I have seen Indian boys or Indian girls marrying let's say Americans. And they are very happy. When you find some American men who are much more participating than even Indian men in the culture. And I have seen American families and if they are happy and they care for each other quite a bit. I have seen a grown-up American whose wife was very sick, and he quit his job, just like that, to take care of his wife. So you see that in all different cultures, it's not just one culture. So just generalizing that Indians are this way and Americans are that way, is hard. The more critical thing is that the person has the characteristics you want.

Jaya: The main thing with our daughter is that all her life, even being an only child, money has never been important to her. It is to do good in the world, even now she works for the US treasury she could've had a job in the private sector making more money than that but it was important her. But that's why she likes her fiancé because he is the same way. For him it is more important to teach the inner city kids tennis in the summer than running after money. We never said she only has to marry an Indian, or only an American, or anything else.

Rakesh: In her case, she made it very clear that we can't even introduce her to anybody. I can't even pass on her email or telephone number so that they could take it from that point on. She didn't even want that. So I said, okay, if that's what you want. Obviously we were not very happy about it. There were a lot of nice boys and families that said let them talk to each other and go out. I said we are just facilitating, putting you in touch. And she said no, so we said okay.

Angy: That's interesting. Fiction indicates that the girls feel a lot of pressure.

Jaya: We are not even the same castes. I am a totally different person in my upbringing than Uncle [Rakesh]. Even my daughter's fiancé is South Indian. We never said anything about who she should marry.

Rakesh notes again that it is a universal parental wish for one's children to be happy. So given that Jaya and Rakesh were so different in their upbringing, caste and socioeconomic status, they express that they did not really attempt any match-making with their daughter, given her strict order that they not do that. This is contradicted, however, when Rakesh states, "Obviously we were not very happy about it" as it seems they did want to introduce their daughter to potential partners. In addition, they do not recall ever giving an indication to their daughter that she marry an Indian man. And while their daughter was engaged to a (South) Indian man at the time of this interview (and now married), this was not a specific requirement that Jaya and Rakesh put forth.

Priya and Mohan elaborated quite a bit on their thoughts on dating and marriage. While Jaya and Rakesh narrated their parenting as involving a lot of openness and freedom to pursue happiness in the way that they thought best, Priya and Mohan offered insight on why they guided their children the way that they did:

Mohan: So in your research and your discussion, you are talking about families, and talking to people like us, are you also talking to people your age? Like our son? Who is 28, and what he has gone through? Was he asked not to date? He may say something, but we told him, yes, you can date, but after a certain age. Our youngest daughter is 21, she's a senior and we don't want her to spend time meeting people. But our thing is, wait until you are out of college, and you meet the real person, not a person who just dances well and can chug six beers. I mean, that's great, but that's not the person. We say, sure, meet with those people, but when you come out of college, come out with bridesmaids, not your husband. So when you come to work in the real environment, after you have graduated, then you are in the real market, and you know what this person is. You will at least know that yes, he can dance, he can drink, he can party, but has he accomplished something in his life.

Priya: Think of yourself, four or five years ago. Would you have thought of yourself as the same as you are now? Now you would want some meat [substance] with the guy.

Mohan: The thing is, whatever we have seen that happens in this culture when they are in high school mode and yeah, there are exceptions when people do marry high school loves, for example like the president of our company, married for 40 years and high school sweethearts, but those are far and few between. Before you know it, there's divorce. That's the caution that we were telling you guys when you were all in college, just wait a moment and delay it a bit. That's the difference, I guess, of some of the dating culture.

Priya: I know how a lot of our friends think. We are kind of in between. We still have our generation gap with you all. That will never change. It never does change. We used to think our parents had a generation gap with us. They didn't agree, but I see now that we do have a generation gap. It's an ongoing thing. I don't care which country you're in, it's ongoing. But having accepted that, we are still a little more open minded, liberal and outgoing. But at the same time, we are also somewhat frozen with stereotyping. In our minds, we would love to facilitate a marriage and hope that they do it in our own culture. But if not, we would not be opposed to them marrying a different culture.

Priya and Mohan's philosophy on dating, as they describe it, indicates that they wanted their children to wait to be out of college before they focused on finding a partner because then they would be "in the real market" for marriage, suggesting as parents, as people with more experience, they know the best time for their children to start meeting potential partners. Mohan also points to one of the differences in dating culture that "before you know it, there's divorce" which suggests that perhaps divorce belongs to American culture. While Priya and Mohan do consider themselves to be "open minded, liberal and outgoing," they also admit that they would like to facilitate a marriage for one of their children and successfully facilitated their oldest daughter's marriage:

Angy: So what are your thoughts when it comes to the marriages of your

kids? Your oldest daughter is married, but your son and youngest daughter are not. What are your hopes and expectations?

Priya: The family is very important. We needed an educated family. We needed someone similar to our family with similar values. After all it is a union of families, not just the two kids. Everywhere we go, we meet the in-laws too. When both sides are cohesive, then the couple seems to handle life better. If you hear from your mother that your in-laws are horrible, it affects you. If both sides are supportive, everything goes better. So we wanted an educated family, someone who could take care of our daughter, she was used to some luxuries in life, we wanted compatibility.

Mohan: But in our oldest daughter's case, before it got to marriage, she was dating. Our hope as parents always is to have someone compatible either in our culture or in our family background. This is always our interest. She was not reined in that it only has to be Indian. But this is what our hope is. Same with our son too. We keep reinforcing that any time we get. But in her case, she had a couple boyfriends to the point that we thought maybe she is serious. Good for her and good for us. In our case though, someone suggested the man she eventually married, and we found that out and felt they need to meet. It was facilitated.

Priya: There were two or three others we facilitated too, and she was not interested. She had a list and I would get irritated. I said what kind of guy do you want? I have shown you four doctors, well to do, educated. She said get me a Punjabi, get me a 6-foot tall guy, an Ivy League guy. Backing off the parents thinking that we could never find that guy. We found him and she said he must be a dork, but she agreed to meet him. She thought she will just come and meet him.

Mohan: So we facilitated a meeting.

Priya: So she thought fine, my parents want me to meet him. On the other side, his mother liked our daughter. But he was resistant.

Mohan: They all resist. How are you going to meet a person? Either you are going to meet at work, or at a bar, or it's going to be somewhere you are partying. You will see a person by the face. You don't know, maybe at work you know about education, but outside you don't know. A facilitator has checked out the

background. How do you find out? So that portion of the family background, or skeletons, or something about her character or family that you don't have to worry about. So meet somewhere on a blind date, and if you like her, you go on a next date. It's up to you.

Priya: Example is you meet someone and you like the persons look, and you find out he's a mechanic. Are you going to marry a mechanic? You see him and fell in love at a bar, but you don't know what he does. And by the time you find out, it's too late.

Mohan: It takes time to get to those questions.

Priya: So what happened was as fate, this is destiny and fate. He told his mom that someone had invited him to give a lecture in Chicago, and he will spend a couple hundred dollars at Morton's steak house, and get his mother off his back. He wasn't willing to admit it but he liked the pictures. He's only four years older but it's a big gap at that time. So the moment they met, it was a done deal, and they both knew. She found everything and when she came home she wouldn't tell me anything. After a while, she was talking nonstop and I knew. We didn't say anything after. We would talk on the sidelines.

Mohan: Yes the parents would talk here and there. Nothing concrete though. We were just waiting.

Priya: And it doesn't always happen. It only happens when things are right between the two. It takes the right person and its destiny, then it happens.

Angy: So for your son and younger daughter, it's the same thing?

Mohan: You facilitate the marriage. That's all. You help to the best you can. To find a girl with a good family background. Our son and her have to be the people who decide who make their own decision.

Priya: We have shown our son quite a few girls, one who he did see from New York who he saw for a few months. They are both Indians. They said stay out of it. They said we will see what happens.

Mohan: That is the same feeling her parents had. They said if it works out, that's great anyways. And that it's not our fault. Forcing doesn't even come. We are a lot different than our parents were even. People from smaller places were like that, people only saw their spouse when they lift the *ghungat* [veil]. That's the stigma of

arranged. Even for our case, that never happened. We would never do that to our own kids. There are thousands of people who did do that. That's what movies are perpetuating.

Priya: But you saw *Namesake*, she came out different than what she looked like it. That's why they said marriage is like dice, you don't know what you're getting.

Mohan: But someone knew your moms family and someone knew your dad's family.

Priya: Even now when we facilitate, we check things out. We want a family that is compatible. Somewhere you find someone who knows something.

Mohan: So it's not that big of dice. Unless there is something in the personal character that you don't know.

Priya: Friends know. If I know you from childhood, I know you don't go sleeping around. So that's why they say watch what you do.

We see the back and forth responses and at time contradicting messages. Facilitating the marriage appears to be the method that Priya and Mohan believe in most strongly given that it implies they have done enough research on the potential partner to know if she/he is appropriate for this son or daughter. In terms of being an appropriate partner, Priya and Mohan seem to value "an educated family" and someone who could provide the luxuries that their daughter was used to in life, meaning a mechanic would not suffice, so class-differences must be considered in this case. In the case of their oldest daughter, though it was trial and error, they did play an integral role in facilitating an introduction between their daughter and her husband. In doing this, it could be said that they were ensuring that their daughter married someone they approved of and someone who they thought would be a good match. In the case of their son, the same was true. At the time of the interview, their son was not married, however, after some time, they were able to introduce him to a woman that he eventually married. Their approval, especially given their strong feelings toward compatibility and family background, is critical in their children's partner

choice, and the ideal scenario that they “reinforced” anytime they could was that they hoped their children would marry Indians. And though Priya and Mohan were very involved in the selection of their two children’s spouses, Priya notes that “this is destiny and fate.” There is an interesting double-narrative taking place here of the parents’ and daughter’s desire and of the ‘boy’ and his parents’ desires and seemingly, the families play a very important role in partner selection and recognizing family compatibility. We also see that given how Priya and Mohan were married in the 1970s, their approach to marriage for their children has not changed much. A meeting was facilitated by their parents in India and this is the practice they are most comfortable in implementing with their own children in the US.

Similarly, Mamta and Sanjay noted that they did have a preference on who their daughters marry:

Angy: Given the way that you had the opportunity to meet each other and know each other a little bit before marriage, what are your thoughts regarding marriage for your kids?

Mamta: In school, we were not very keen that they would start dating. But once they went to college, I was open with the idea that they should find somebody and see somebody. But we never talked about us arranging a marriage. They are free to meet with someone, and I trust they will find the right person, in the sense of what would fit our family and our values.

Angy: Did you have any preferences or requirements?

Sanjay: Nothing straight, I don't think we had any strict requirements. I don't think we really ever spelled it out. It was kind of understood. To get a better fit, the thinking was that they need to be from a similar background, so then you have a better fit, and the chances of success are higher that way.

Mamta: Being vegetarians, following the Jain religion, which of course would be close to Hindu religion, but if someone is going to be a completely different caste or community, it might be a little difficult. We're not against that they marry a White, or things like that, but there would be challenges.

- Sanjay:* There would be more challenges. The way we see our role, we can kind of just advise them or guide them.
- Mamta:* Because within Indian communities also, you can be in two very different families. One from North, one from South, and it could be two completely different cultures. So I'm not saying that marrying a White would be any different. So keeping as close... we are closest to the Jain religion and to Gujaratis and to those close values. It works for us. In our oldest daughter's case, he was a Gujarati and a Jain. And again, the second thing that worked out best, was that she grew up in a small community in which there are very few Indians in school and he also grew up in a very small community, where there were Indians, but not as you would see in New York. So that fit also worked.
- Angy:* Was there just a general understanding then that maybe you would prefer somebody as close to what you are as possible?
- Sanjay:* I think the kids know.
- Mamta:* We never spelled it out. We have never told them - I've heard parents come out and say, that I told them not to marry a Black or White. We have never said anything 'til today. They just know that this is our family and this is what should be right.
- Sanjay:* I think the understanding is there.

Mamta and Sanjay note that they trust that their daughters will find the right person. With Sanjay confidently responding that “the kids know” and “the understanding is there,” it could be said that while they may not have explicitly told their daughters that marrying an Indian was preferred, it was possibly implied. And it seems that marrying an Indian was not the only issue but that there seem to be caste, religious and regional preferences as well. There is an anxiety over intermarriage noting that while they are not against it, “there would be challenges.” Given how Sanjay and Mamta were married, with time for getting to know one another, it could be said that this would be what they want for their daughters given the men meet the necessary (or preferred) requirements.

Lakshmi and Anil also felt that they did not put pressure on their children to marry an Indian and that they “were very open.” In discussing whether they preferred an Indian son-in-law or daughter-in-law over an American, however, they remembered a specific incident with their oldest daughter that made them question their “openness”:

Angy: So, given the way that you were married, what were your thoughts in regard to your children getting married? Did you have any ideas for them for when they were growing up?

Lakshmi: Not really. Deep down in our hearts we thought that if they marry Indians that will be great.

Anil: We were very open. When our oldest went to Columbia, we had it in our imaginations that maybe they'll marry Indians. The idea of that, that the children should marry Indians, didn't really get away from our minds until our oldest wrote us the letter. I don't know if I have that letter, she should have it someplace, but it was a very, very convincing letter. She had prepared the letter as though she were an attorney. That we fully understand where we are, that we know the culture, that we know your problems, but we also know we have to live here and this is it. So we received the letter and the night she gave me the letter I read it and I said this is it. They were in India...he was in India. By fear they did not tell us. She wrote to me after we came back from India. We were all in Bombay and we could have met him but she did not tell us. We knew she was in India but we did not know the Mike was in China and had come to India and was in Bombay with her. They did not go together to Bombay. But I mean she was scared. I saw her in Benaras.

Lakshmi: After Mike left, she came to meet us.

Anil: Later on we found out, and I said how silly. You can see. It's a key issue. First-generation immigrant kids, in terms of marrying over here, were just as concerned and depressed as their parents were. I'll give you a story. We were in a doctor's home... There was the first child of Indian origin to our knowledge, and her father had announced that my daughter is going to marry an American. And I'm telling you, there were probably 50 Indians with samosas in their hands and these stupid things froze. They had no idea of the gesture they were giving to the other family. And I said this is

ridiculous. Nobody congratulated the man. I was the only person who went to meet Matt and congratulated him and his parents. The rest of the Indians were frozen.

Lakshmi: Everyone was shocked. Nobody could believe it... our daughter was the third [in the community]. The others opened the pavement [paved the path] for her and we thought if they can take it we can take it.

Anil: The children in the 60s, 70s, 80s...They lived two lives - one with her parents at home and altogether different people with their people at school. If we could hear all the kids in a pizza parlor in the basement, I think we would faint. The discussions they would have, we would faint. That's how it was. We were ignorant of what was going on.

For Lakshmi and Anil, they had to face the realization that their daughter was too afraid to tell them the truth about the man she was dating, the man who eventually became her husband. It was a touching moment when Anil recalled reading his daughter's letter because it was at that moment when he realized his children were dealing with the same confusion as he was. It occurred to them that though they had intended on keeping an open-minded home and a close relationship with his children, it was that "deep-down" desire that their daughters marry Indians that may have led to the secrecy and the writing of the letter. The tone in which Anil reflected on this event, this realization that their daughter had been traveling India with her boyfriend unbeknownst to them, indicated that Anil knew the open home he had attempted was not what his daughter experienced. And it was in telling this story that I could see Anil felt a sense of regret that his daughter had to keep secrets from him. This was not his intent in parenting and perhaps something that he did not expect or anticipate, but something he could understand and identify with. There were not many moments in any of the interviews during which it seemed the

participants felt they had done something wrong, but Anil's story was one moment that stood out as difficult for him to accept.

We can see here in both accounts the complexity with which each couple raised their children. There was not a large community or extended family helping to raise their children, their children were their sole responsibility and their behavior, their success or lack thereof, was a reflection of the sacrifice they made. According to Inman and Howard, et al, "living in a culturally incongruent community, first-generation parents perceive themselves as having the sole responsibility of imparting cultural values to their children, which results in restrictive behaviors by the parents. Within this context, actively reproducing the traditional culture and establishing a cultural identity in their children become important parenting goals for these immigrants" (94). However, this does not seem to be something that the migrants are clearly aware of as they are making those choices.

In looking at how my participants' narratives counterpoint the fiction discussed in this chapter, I would argue that these narratives add to our understanding of the South Asian migrant parent's difficulty in raising children in the US. Moreover, in analyzing their responses, it becomes apparent that there are many contradictions indicating that as any parent, they may not have known exactly the best way to avoid conflict. As Mohan says so often, parents just want their children to be happy, and perhaps these narratives can contribute toward a sense of understanding, so that the narrative is not just of the unyielding South Asian parent, stuck in her/his traditional ways, but of a parent, transforming over time, trying to do their best to ensure happiness for their children. We also see that an understanding of how the participants were married contributes to an understanding of what they expect for their children. While it appears that some of the couples wanted to maintain the way in which they were married when it came to

their children, it seems that Jaya and Rakesh as well as Lakshmi and Anil attempted to be a bit more open-minded, especially over time. Anil and Lakshmi especially realized after their first daughter that perhaps it was better for their family to change.

The tensions between South Asian migrant parents and their “American” children is a complicated web of desire, and perhaps they are caught in a cycle of wanting happiness for one another, without any real understanding of what might make the other happy. What I can say is that the migrant figure, the strict unyielding, far too “traditional” parent that we find in fiction is not only that, but rather the migrant is vulnerable, and the migrant is unsure. As the participants in my study narrate their experiences, I was able to see that these are in fact reflections. These narratives are present, shaped understandings of what and why certain events took place at the time. And now, as they retire and are in their 60s and 70s, with nearly 40 years in the United States, with all of their children married, and with children of their own, it becomes a little clearer that happiness does in fact come in many forms, and often not in the ways we expect them to.

CHAPTER 4:

Looking Ahead: Aging and Care in the Transnational Family

Upon asking Lakshmi and Anil to reflect on what they have lost by migrating to the US, Lakshmi answered as tears filled her eyes, “I lost my family.” This jarring moment in the interview was unexpected given prior affirmations that the US was her home and had a profound effect not only on Lakshmi, Anil and me. This moment also helped shape my understanding of how migrants live transnationally, dwelling at times in the middle of two places⁸, confused at times between their role as parent and their role as child. Much of the scholarship on migrants in their older age has been focused on their conflicts with the second generation, the trials and tribulations and generational tensions concerning marriage as discussed in Chapter Three, for example. However, discovering and understanding how first generation migrants are planning for their later years as well as how or if they care(d) for their own parents who may reside in India carries substantial weight given that both situations directly affect how notions of the transnational family are produced. How do lives change when children migrate? This chapter attempts to explore those changes and challenges as suggested by fiction, literary criticism and scholarship on aging, studies on diaspora and the migrants themselves.

To understand aging in the contexts of migration and the transnational family, this study is situated in a conceptual framework that draws on theories of gerontology, transnationalism and the emotions involved in transnational aging such as guilt and dependency. All together, they

⁸ In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Clifford writes that terms such as “diaspora” and “diaspora communities” imply that migrants are “not here to stay” (255). Clifford indicates that the term diaspora implies a physical displacement, a dislocation, that is not fixed and as a result, he writes, “diaspora cultures mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (255). This dislocation suggests that a migrant is somewhere he or she is not supposed to be and therefore has to “make the best of a bad situation” (257).

comprise a theoretical lens through which I examine how South Asian migrant seniors' prospects of aging have been shaped by the families they feel they have lost as well as the families they have built in the United States. In other words, by exploring the aspects of aging in recent fiction, the role aging plays in current and past literary and critical theory, and the perceptions of aging and retirement as narrated by my participants, this chapter aims to complicate, problematize and expand notions of aging in order to allow for multiple representations and meanings of aging and care in the transnational family.

As Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) state, transnational families are defined as “families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders” (3). In this study, the transnational family is looked at as “continually onward and outward bound, quite different from diasporic communities that instill social imperatives for going back to their places of origin” (Vuorela, 81). In addition, for the purposes of this discussion, transnationalism will be discussed as involving a socio-cultural process through which migrants link their country of origin to their country of settlement, a process through which ideas and meanings are created and exchanged.

The complex grey area of aging in the transnational family is a very important aspect of migration because as the participants in my study assumed (based on what they had seen growing up), had they each raised their families in India, it is likely they would have lived with their children upon retirement, or that at least one child would have remained in the family home and raised his/her family there. Each participant indicated that this is not the case now that they have settled in the U.S. and thus a discussion of revised expectations is relevant to the

negotiation of traditions and related to shaping concepts of happiness as discussed in Chapter Three and the growing presence of transnational families.

Research on the effects of migration has largely focused on the emotional diasporic tensions that migrants experience such as that of nostalgia, loss, displacement, loneliness, amongst others (Clifford, Rushdie). Diaspora and migration studies tend to pay close attention to the first generation migrant and their U.S. born children, looking at generational tensions and what is lost from the homeland. And yet, as stated, a major component of the homeland that is quite often ignored or dismissed are the parents that the first-generation migrants leave behind. Notions of guilt and memory are present in scholarship and yet the one thing that anchors these ideas, the parents, have been left out to some extent. These left-behind parents tend to be wrapped up in the notions of ‘home’ yet the various implications of leaving one’s parents behind remain unpacked in scholarship in the context of the South Asian diaspora. Indeed migrants are thought to be nostalgic for home, but could they also be understood as the profoundly guilty children of the parents they left behind? As migrants, they are discussed in scholarship as autonomous adults, individuals exercising agency and personal ambition, leaving the homeland journeying to a faraway land in which they must overcome obstacles, mainly cultural differences. But to talk of aging in a transnational setting, it is necessary to explore not only the relationship between the migrant and their U.S. born children, but also the transmission of guilt, the relayed guilt, that travels from one generation to the next.

In Minna Zechner’s, “Care of Older Person in Transnational Settings,” she writes that “Transnationalism and transnational family life may contain elements of discomfort: distant members of transnational families miss one another and they have feelings of abandonment, regret and loneliness (Parrenas Salazar, 2002, 44). This phenomenon is documented in the vast

amount of research on transnational families which largely focuses on mothers who work as domestic servants and who have been forced to leave their children behind in order to provide for them (Romero, 1997; Anderson, 2000; Hochschild, 2000; Parrenas Salazar, 2001; 2002; Parrenas 2005). Within this framework, the focus is on transnational motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). However, children are not the only ones in transnational families who have been left behind and are in need of care, guidance, resources and help” (32). The study of the transnational family should not be solely focused then on the migrants and their children abroad or the children who have been left behind by their migrant worker mothers, but also on the elder adults who are left behind because many of the choices and decisions that migrants made with their own children once living in the U.S. may be a result of their transnational relationships with their own parents.

Before discussing the various concerns surrounding first-generation aging in the U.S, or the act of leaving one’s parents behind, however, it is important to explore the processes by which certain conceptions of aging came to be in the context of the South Asian diaspora. In Sylvia Vatak’s study titled, “To Be a Burden on Others: Dependency Anxiety Among the Elderly in India,” Vatak writes that in India, “it is not uncommon to hear a parent suggest to a child – or to another within the child’s hearing – that the care lavished upon the child has been motivated largely by the desire to ensure the parent’s own security and well-being in old age” and that “parent-child reciprocity is, thus, conceptualized as a life-span relationship” (66). In her study, she found that her participants “considered happiness in old age possible only if one lived surrounded by members of the younger generation, ideally supported, fed, and catered to them, and freed from such concerns as making a living or balancing a household budget” (68). Vatak found from her participants that their responses “draw inspiration both from what their culture

has conditioned them to expect and from what they have observed in the past and the present in their family, community and society, of other people in situations similar to their own” (64). In other words, for as long as they could remember, in their family histories, living in a multigenerational⁹ home was not only common but expected. Anything outside of this would indicate the disintegration of the family because “co-residence has frequently been conceptualized as an indicator of a close-knit family with strong family solidarity that ensures support for older family members” (McDonald, 1183).

Many scholars on Indian traditions and norms regarding aging associate these norms as having emerged from the Hindu religion. Helen Miltiades notes in her study, “The Social and Psychological Effect of an Adult Child’s Emigration on Non-Immigrant Asian Indian Elderly Parents” that expectations of living in multigenerational homes can be explained by cultural specificity theory, in that “every culture has prescribed norms which regulate family life” and in this case, “in the ideal family, sons would live with their parents” and “once married, the son would bring his wife to live with his parents...this meant his parents could expect assistance from their son and his wife” (34). Miltiades relates this to Hindu beliefs and explains:

“Manu, the lawgiver of Indian Hindu society, prescribed, almost 1000 years ago, certain norms which were to govern familial behavior in each of the life stages....Manu’s laws explicitly state the relationship between parents and their sons. As sons could never compensate their parents for giving them life, they were required to show their respect by obeying their parents...Hinduism contributes to the Indian value system through the goal of *dharma*. *Dharma* means duty, and refers to the responsibilities a person has

⁹ Scholarship in this area of study commonly uses “joint-family home” as a way to discuss “traditional norms” however this term often includes extended families within the same home with divided property rights of the home. For the purposes of this discussion, I will be using “multigenerational home” to describe homes “consisting of more than two generations living under the same roof” (<http://www.gu.org/OURWORK/Multigenerational/MultigenerationalHouseholdInformation.aspx>).

in their everyday life according to their place in the life cycle. Since the values in Hinduism are embedded in everyday life, knowledge of the customs and norms, and compliance with these traditions is expected, not only by family members, but by the surrounding community as well...Indians function collectively... caring and being cared for are integral components to a smooth functioning family” (34-35).

Based on Miltiades suggestion of how family roles were prescribed centuries ago, she continues that these “traditional norms still prevail” in Indian culture and these traditions have become commonplace regardless of religious following (34). In other words, Miltiades suggests that what once originated as a religious belief has shifted over time into the day to day ways a family functions. According to this line of thought, a sense of duty and obligation to one’s family is inherent in the expectations of Indian family members, and focusing on individual needs is not the top priority. This concept is especially important because upon discussing notions of aging and retirement with my participants, it was clear that their mindsets had to shift from what they were used to in India or what they had grown up perhaps taking for granted. There was an understanding in our discussions that a multigenerational home had been the family norm and that perhaps living in America required an adjustment of this family tradition. But as Miltiades suggests, is religious belief the origin of such expectations?

Lawrence Cohen suggests in his gerontological study titled *No Aging in India: Alzheimer’s, the Bad Family and Other Modern Things*, that gerontology and the perception of growing old in India is indicative of a conflict between cultures and value systems, not religion. He finds that many of the participants in his study spoke along the lines of “We no longer have the support of children; *our* families are breaking apart” (104). The participants that Cohen is writing about spoke as a collective, not just about their individual experiences, but of the

experiences felt and feared by many. Cohen's participant responses seem to substantiate Miltiades' suggestion that traditional norms prevail and are engrained in the beliefs and expectations of many aging Indians. But Cohen suggests that gerontology in India is not about the more practical aspects of aging, but rather focused on the moral decay of tradition and family in India. Cohen writes:

“One does not have to be old to experience the sense of loss. What is at stake may not be only the abduction of a good old age but that of the known self. This abduction is from a state of wholeness marked as the joint family. The telling of the narrative presumes that the victim-narrator experiences his or her distance from this state of wholeness as an episode of violence in both space and in time. The villain who abducts is, in the oral narratives I collected, often modernity but more often "the West"... The originating point of the narrative as a temporal sequence, then, is located with the violent action of a villainous West. To read the repetitious quality of Indian gerontology's insistence upon the Fall against "the facts" as but collusion with or mimicry of internationalist gerontology's Aging and Modernization paradigm is to ignore this centrality of the West as villain in the narrative. Gerontology in India is predicated upon a sense of Kulturkampf and of a consequent threat of the loss of self. Its movement both tracks this loss and challenges it through the reification of a morally superior Indianness, represented as the inclusive and embracing family” (104).

Here, what Cohen suggests is that gerontology in India, and aging as a concept, is predicated on the belief that India is in moral decay, a moral decay that can be blamed on the West for disturbing an otherwise solid family structure. Cohen argues that old age in India is a

social and cultural construct. Therefore old age is not as much about marginalization of the elderly, as many participants may feel, but rather how old age is experienced by the elderly. The public discourse on old age is a web of complicated intersections as Cohen writes, “Put crudely, the choice is usually framed as being between biology and psychology, on the one hand, culture and language, on the other, and economy and society, on a third. Three-handed things are fairly monstrous, and most often one of these drops out of the explicit contest and lurks in the background, leaving the job of the scholar the resolution of what appears a weighty dualism” (xvi). To conflate this complex phenomenon of aging in India as simply being caused by the West is to ignore what is happening within the country and its various cultures. Moreover, to defend India against the West as morally superior because of the multigenerational home system and to feel that anything less results in a loss of self ignores some very practical matters.

What Miltiades suggests does not account for a changing India nor does it depict the far more complex circumstances surrounding the multigenerational home. This notion of the multigenerational home being “traditional” and “cultural” ignores the very practical issue of *necessity*. According to Barik, Agarwal and Desai in their 2015 article, “After the Dividend: Caring for a Greying India,” “In 1991, the Indian population comprised 57 million elderly; this has now doubled to 104 million” (108). Barik, et al continues, “Given the nature of work elderly people do during the early years of life, and the lack of a savings mechanism and pension system, a majority of the elderly in India continues to work beyond the legal retirement age for formal sector workers. When they are unable to work, they are usually dependent on the familial transfers in the absence of a sound government support system” (110). Without social security, it is practical for families to live together and pool resources. The material situation in India in many ways lends itself to multigenerational homes because it is more cost-effective. And while

the article notes that “most elderly persons (72%) continue to live with their children and other family members,” Barik et al also states that “with the gradual decline of employment in traditional sectors (like agriculture), opening up of new jobs in global settings, and growing individualism, it is often argued that the multigenerational family system is under stress” (111). Based on Barik’s findings, it could be said that it is impractical or even impossible to age independently in India without the finances to do so.

With the multigenerational family system under stress and with an understanding that one may not have the financial security/stability to age independently, how does one hedge their bets against the global job market and the potential taking away of future care-takers? In *Solid:Liquid, A (Trans)national Reproductive Formation*. Kumkum Sangari argues that the declining female-child sex ratio and in turn, the preference for sons in India, is partially due to the expectation of old-age support and patrilineal continuity (15). Sangari writes, “The long-standing preference for sons as future heirs and carers is also being reconfigured in the twin contexts of an emergent small-family norm and a refurbished yet anxiety-ridden patrilineage, in which the imagined rationale of the patrilineal family as an economic unit with a joint interest seems tenuous” (42). She continues, “If a son is construed as a long-term investment with deferred returns, as an insurance or a pension substitute, old-age support from him is seen as uncertain. He (and his wife) may or may not field future adversity, disability, impoverishment. He thus becomes a risky investment, a measured risk that is taken to avoid other risks, or preferred to the equally measured risk (a legally and/or socially assertive daughter) that is not taken” (42). In other words, or to put this in more simple terms, this suggests that since the global job market is already taking sons away from their family obligations, and daughters often get married into other families, it is in one’s best interest to have only sons. This notion suggests,

however, that multigenerational homes are not necessarily only a representation of Indian traditions, or ‘dharma,’ or the love of one’s family. Rather, Sangari and Barik suggest that old age care is a material necessity that is planned for, expected, in many cases even pre-determined, and most certainly, invested in.

Aging: A Transnational Problem

Given that Indians living in India are gradually having to learn how to live with declining familial support, it could be suggested that first generation Indian migrants have had to do the same. This subject matter seems to be a source of confusion and tension because this is, as novelist Jhumpa Lahiri calls it, “unaccustomed earth.” In other words, it is important to explore South Asians living in the United States in particular because the first major wave of migrants, meaning those who traveled to the US on education grants under the 1965 Immigration Act¹⁰, are now entering retirement age, uncharted territory for South Asians on a wide scale thus far. Many migrants were selected based on their academic successes in India and therefore those who left India for the US to study and/or work professionally were an elite group. Nearly 85,000 scientists, engineers and physicians migrated to the United States during this wave (Subramanian, 2002). And at the time these migrants came to the US, most if not all were familiar with one main mode of aging: that one mode being that a typical South Asian household was patri-local, and usually multigenerational. When a daughter married, she would relocate to her spouse’s parents’ household, and would become a member of that household (Miltiades,

¹⁰ INS Act of 1965: The INS Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, abolished the national origins quota system that had structured American immigration policy since the 1920s, replacing it with a preference system that focused on immigrants' skills and family relationships with citizens or residents of the U.S. Numerical restrictions on visas were set at 170,000 per year, not including immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, nor "special immigrants" (including those born in "independent" nations in the Western hemisphere; former citizens; ministers; employees of the U.S. government abroad). Retrieved from: http://library.uwb.edu/guides/usimmigration/1965_immigration_and_nationality_act.html

2002). It is commonplace for married brothers to also share a household during some part of the household life cycle. As stated, typical households in India often consist of parents, sons, spouses, unmarried daughters, and grandchildren with brothers and their families sharing property expenses and income (Lamb, 2009).

Certainly when many of the migrants traveled to the US for the first time at tender ages of 20-25, their retirement and how they would age was not the most pressing concern. These migrants did not have their parents present, and given the technology during the mid-1970s, any contact with their parents was through telegram or short telephone calls. Without an authorial presence, these migrants were on their own to make decisions and plan their futures. And given the Social Security system in the US, and how many migrants with professional jobs were automatically contributing toward their 401K plans (enacted in 1978) and retirement plans, the future was not something they needed to be initially concerned with. Essentially, their later-life concerns were already being managed from a financial perspective, and so they were able to focus on the more pressing issues such as raising children, negotiating traditions and earning a living. However, in the past decade, these very migrants have had to confront their retirement and what they want or have to do, and whether their children, the second generation, would consider the age old “tradition” of multigenerational homes or if this is even what they want for their own lives. And the number of migrants in this position is considerable. According to the 1990 US Census data, 1.4% of the total Asian Indian population was 65 years or older. In 2000, just ten years later, the Census identified 800,795 (7.8%) Asians who are 65 and older. Adding to that the people who have advanced into the 65 and older age range since that Census, now 3.4% of the Asian Indian population is 65 years or older. According to the National Indian American Association for Senior Citizens (NIAASC) 2000 projects, approximately 10% of the Asian

Indian population is 60 years or older. In fact, “Asians are the fastest growing ethnic group after Hispanics and African-Americans. Among Asians, Indians are the third largest ethnic group, after Chinese and Filipinos (American Community Survey, 2007). By 2020 immigrants are projected to represent nearly one-quarter of the 55 million individuals who will be over 65 years of age (Administration on Aging, 2008)” (Sharma, 129). Given the significant increases in numbers of South Asian elderly in this country, it is worthwhile examining and paying greater attention to their modes of retirement and how they plan to age alongside how they experience aging in the context of the transnational family.

Very little attention has been paid to this growing population, however. Bhattacharya and Shibusawa write, “the needs of older Indian immigrants are often ignored because of the stereotype that Indian immigrants are a model minority...due to the fact that Indians in the United States have the highest income than any other group, including non-Hispanic Whites” (448). Susan Koshy explains that “their education and class status position these new immigrants as model minorities in an emerging US knowledge economy. In relation to India, they form part of the model diaspora, the economically successful segment of the new diaspora linked through burgeoning economic, cultural, and political ties to the home country” (350). But being the “model minority” does not eliminate the concerns and tensions many migrants feel about their aging process. The very fact that Indian migrants have been so successful, amongst the highest earners in the country, leaves many migrants feeling quite vulnerable when it comes to aging and retirement because suddenly, there is only so much they can control. Journeying abroad, encountering and overcoming the challenges of education, finances, family, language, etc. places these migrants in positions of strength, but with aging comes vulnerability. So to look more closely at how aging is discussed in Indian diasporic fiction, critical theory/scholarship and the

interviews conducted in this study allows for a more complex understanding of what it means to age as a migrant in the US, what it means to be “American” or “Indian,” and if it is possible to age gracefully (and/or transnationally) without tension in either the US or in India.

Section I: Fiction and Aging in the Diaspora

According to Anne Wyatt-Brown in her “Introduction” to *Aging and Gender in Literature*, “aging is a missing category in current literary theory” (1). Wyatt-Brown, along with others in this developing field of study find this to be problematic given that literary theory seems to cover most other aspects of life, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, etc. Literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the novel as being important for its “indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with the unfinished, still living contemporary reality” and that novels allow for the contestation of language and voices (Bakhtin, 7, 12). In this context then, to not see aging as an aspect of life experience limits our insight to our understanding of literature and the human condition (Wyatt-Brown, 1).

While aging has thus far been an aspect of literary theory and criticism that is widely overlooked, literary scholars have begun to see the significance of aging and have started to contribute to the field of ‘literary gerontology.’ Literary gerontologists attempt to question the notion that growing old implies a decline and to rather mark the diversity of growing old and how this can be experienced and narrated in many different ways. In *Grey Areas: An Anthology of Indian Fiction on Ageing*, Ira Raja describes the field of literary gerontology as focusing on “the problem of literary attitudes towards growing old, and particularly with negative stereotypes of ageing” (xiii). Raja continues that “gerontology has taken the so-called narrative turn, which uses the insights of literature as a means of understanding the dynamics of biological ageing”

and that Indian social gerontology “obtains interesting insights into the role that the ageing body plays in the national imaginary, when approached as *narrative*” (xv). Raja argues in this anthology that “like gender, race and ethnicity... age is an essentialized category of identity” and “under the scrutinizing gaze of literature, however, this same category shows up not as essential, homogenous, and ‘authentic’, but multiple, contested, and complex” (xv). But in this case, is the imaginary just national? Or is it transnational as well? How has the process of aging been represented in Indian diasporic fiction, and what might this suggest about a possible “transnational imaginary”?

Much like Raja, Hannah Zeilig suggests in her essay, “The Critical Use of Narrative and Literature in Gerontology” that much can be learned from looking at critical gerontology in conjunction with literary gerontology. She notes that “one of the impulses of critical gerontology is to go beyond accepted explanations of age and ageing to plumb the underlying processes that shape these explanations and thereby to elucidate social, cultural and individual experiences of ageing” and that this field seeks to explore “how age is experienced by an individual within a specific historical moment” (8). At the same time, literary scholars are slowly recognizing the importance of aging in fiction and are beginning to make significant contributions to gerontological theory. To that end many are starting to examine the impact of aging on and in literature. As such, fiction is potentially a window through which we can gauge notions of nation and family while also going further to illustrate how individuals adopt narrative in their everyday lives (Raja, xv). It also gives us a glimpse of the milieu and what seems to matter to people at a specific moment of time.

Contrary to much of the scholarship on migration and nostalgia, Sarah Lamb finds that older persons are not devoid of agency, rather they can be “significant and innovative agents of

social change” (x). In her book, *Aging and the Indian Diaspora: Cosmopolitan Families in India and Abroad*, Lamb explains that “many feel they would have liked to have retained much of what they imagine to be the past; but since the past is not attainable, they work creatively to carve out a new life and mode of aging in the present” (6). One such author who goes beyond writing about the more common aspects of diasporic living such as nostalgia, loss, love, marriage and generational conflict is Pulitzer Prize winning author, Jhumpa Lahiri. Natalie Friedman claims that “Lahiri, as part of this growing Asian American author group, is less interested in the pursuit of the American dream as it was traditionally rendered in older immigrant narratives than she is in focusing on what happens once that dream (in its varieties of incarnations) is achieved, not only by the generation of immigrants but also by its children” (112). Friedman argues that “Lahiri is part of a vanguard of young, contemporary ethnic American writers whose novels, short fiction and memoirs suggest that assimilation – cleaving to the hope of the “American Dream” – is no longer at the heart of the immigrant story” (112). She continues that “instead of shedding the trappings of the home culture and throwing himself headlong in the work of Americanizing, the protagonist of the contemporary immigrant novel – whether an immigrant or child born to immigrants – is more concerned with his or her dual identity as it manifests itself in America and in the shrinking global economy” (112). This is to say that according to Friedman, Lahiri’s fiction differs from what audiences have come to expect from Indian diasporic fiction. We see from Lahiri’s fiction that perhaps revised notions of the first generation migrant need to be considered and her depiction of several aging characters in her fiction indicates that aging can be experienced in multiple ways and by no means is it wholly negative or a representation of decline.

Lahiri's *The Namesake* portrays the strong family responsibilities that Indian culture has become known for. After nearly thirty years of marriage, when Ashoke dies, Ashima is left to make a plan for herself. The narrator explains, "Ashima has decided to spend six months of her life in India, six months in the States. It is a solitary, somewhat premature version of the future she and her husband had planned when he was alive" (275). The narrator continues, "True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere...for the first time since her flight to meet her husband in Cambridge, in the winter of 1967, she will make the journey entirely on her own. The prospect no longer terrifies her. She has learned to do things on her own..." (276). Friedman notes that "Ashima does not feel bound to stay in America, nor does she feel nostalgically driven to return to India, but rather, seeks to divide her time between the two countries" (113). Friedman states that "Lahiri's novel also suggests another possibility, one that she does not share with some of her contemporaries: that the immigrant or child of immigrant does not become disillusioned with America because America is not the endpoint of his or her travels. America becomes a stop on the voyage to discover a better life...and this voyage is no longer unidirectional, or even bidirectional, but is continuous and global" (114). She concludes that Ashima has become "part of the shifting ethnoscape of global sojourners, a true cosmopolitan traveler" (123).

I would argue, however, that *The Namesake* does more than show how migrants are not bound by place. Ashima's decision to travel to India and split her time suggests that she has more in mind for her life than to simply stay still. Ashima and Ashoke had already planned their future, to travel back and forth between India and the US. One might expect that in India, given the family structure and the joint family home that a woman of Ashima's circumstances would remain in her home with her son and daughter-in-law and their children. She would be the

matriarch of the family and she would maintain her role as head of the family. And yet, we see that Ashima does not want that, nor is this a feasible option because Gogol does not live in the same home. He has moved away for college and then a job. While Ashima is not ready to “grow old” as one might expect her to, we see that even Gogol is not entirely sure how to react to his mother’s plans for travel. The narrator describes Gogol’s concerns:

“It’s hard to believe that his mother is really going, that for months she will be so far. He wonders how his parents had done it, leaving their respective families behind, seeing them so seldom, dwelling unconnected, in a perpetual state of expectation, of longing. All those trips to Calcutta he’d once resented – how could they have been enough? They were not enough. Gogol knows now that his parents had lived their lives in America in spite of what was missing, with a stamina he fears he does not possess himself” (281).

Given this sense of strength that Gogol now recognizes in his mother as she journeys abroad, he also recognizes that her initial migration to the U.S. is beyond his imagination. In his mind, his parents would be positioned in one place as he grew old, and yet this is not the life Ashima had lived. She had learned to ‘dwell unconnected’ from her family in Calcutta, making her more independent and less reliant on children to take care of her. Lahiri does not depict aging, then, in a typical way. There is no decline, as one so often sees upon widowhood, but rather, Ashima is starting a new journey in her life, one that she has decided upon, and while she is certainly sad to leave one part of her life behind, she throws a party to celebrate her departure all the same. Here we see that renewal is celebrated and life does not end because one has children, rather Ashima is a subject with agency and desires of her own, regardless of the life-stage she is in.

What is taken for granted and/or missing from Lahiri's novel, however, are the practical and logistical arrangements that come with living in two places. For example, where will she live in India? As quoted earlier, she will be "without a home of her own," but what does this actually mean? Will she rent an apartment? Will she live with relatives? Where will this money come from? When she visits the US for the remaining six months of the year, since she has sold her home, who will she stay with, Gogol or Sonia? Or, will she have other arrangements for living in the US? Friedman suggests that the voyage is "continuous" and "no longer unidirectional," but is this mode of aging as depicted in *The Namesake* romanticized as well? Fiction here seems to leave out some of the more complicated details that would make Ashima's plan difficult to implement. Granted it may not be the job of fiction to address such details, it is important to note that the notion of being fluid and continuous, having multiple homes and being a global nomad in the context of the aging Indian migrant is more complicated than what Lahiri's writing suggests.

Lahiri takes this notion of the first generation migrant having agency even further in her 2008 short story "Unaccustomed Earth." This story is located in Seattle and is about Ruma, a second generation South Asian American, her husband, Adam and their son Akash. In "Unaccustomed Earth," Ruma's father comes to visit her while Adam is away on business, and spends some time with his daughter and his grandson. Ruma's mother has passed away and since then, her father has been traveling around the world. However, as she anticipates his visit, we see that she grows more and more concerned about what this visit might mean. Her assumption is that her father will want to be invited to live with her and Adam. We see Ruma reflecting on her aging father:

"she knew her father did not need taking care of, and yet this very fact caused her to feel *guilt*; in India, there would have been no

question of his not moving in with her. Her father had never mentioned the possibility, and after her mother's death it hadn't been feasible; their old apartment was too small. But in Seattle there were rooms to spare, rooms that stood empty and without purpose. Ruma feared her father would become a *responsibility*, an *added demand*... It would mean an end to the family she'd created on her own... still not offering him a place in *her home* made her feel worse" (6-7).

Though she has had no indication from her father that this is his plan, Ruma's thoughts on this are warranted based on her understanding of the Indian culture her parents came from. She has a sense of duty to her father, not to turn him away, but rather to invite him to live in Seattle. The notion that he is aging and she is obligated to take care of him is assumed on her part. However, this conflicts with the family life she has set up with Adam and Akash. It would change her immediate family life and her words already indicate that caring for her father would be an added burden that she is not sure she wants to take on. While Ruma's concerns indicate she is familiar with the concept of a multigenerational home, it is evident in the narrative that she considers her father separate from "the family she had created" (7). What she does not initially know though is that visiting Ruma and Akash is just one stop on her father's travel agenda. We learn that Ruma's father has been secretly traveling the world with a companion, an Indian widow he has met, and he has started his life anew, in his own way, and with his own purpose. While Ruma is dwelling on what to do with her aging father, her father has already made his decision and does not actually want to live with her.

In fact, Ruma's father, the first generation migrant figure, claims independence throughout the story, whether he "insisted on renting a car and following directions from the Internet" from the airport to Ruma's home upon visiting or telling her clearly that he "does not

want to be a burden” (11, 52). He is “desperate to leave” and “did not want to live in the margins of his daughter’s life, in the shadow of her marriage” (53)¹¹. He consoles Ruma and tells her, “But please understand, I prefer to stay on my own. I am too old now to make such a shift” (56). This suggests that he has been alone for a long time, not dependent on anyone, and to suddenly become dependent on someone would be too difficult. Hemlata explains these thoughts of Ruma’s father in her essay “Dichotomy and Dilemma: A Study of Father-Daughter Relationship in Jhumpa Lahiri’s ‘Unaccustomed Earth,’” when she writes “while staying in America, the Indians are shown to have an inclination towards Americanisation...the individualistic thinking of Ruma’s father and his sense of independence is obvious from this statement” (4). However, the narrator offers readers some insight into why Ruma’s father has moved on with his life to find a new partner and travel the world:

“...he pointed out that Ruma hadn’t been raised with that sense of duty. She led her own life, had made her own decisions, married an American boy. He didn’t expect her to take him in, and really, he couldn’t blame her. For what had he done, when his own father was dying, when his mother was left behind? By then Ruma and Romi were teenagers. There was no question of his moving the family back to India, and also no question of his eighty-year-old widowed mother moving to Pennsylvania. He had let his siblings look after her until she, too, eventually died” (29).

The notion of not being able to blame Ruma is important here. Blame alludes to notions of fault, and who is at fault here? Is there someone at fault? How did this situation come to be? And why, when Ruma’s father is exercising agency and living his life so fully, is Ruma so surprised? Likely because this decision to live independently is more complex than it initially seems. This

¹¹ It could also be suggested that Ruma’s father is carrying the taboo of living with a daughter.

excerpt suggests that since he did not take the responsibility of taking care of his mother and allowed his siblings to take the responsibility, that it would be unfair or unjustifiable to have such high expectations of his own daughter. As a first generation migrant, he chose not to care for his father as he was dying or his mother once she was widowed. His circumstances likely did not make this feasible and yet this was a choice that he made as a migrant, and this choice is a great cause of guilt.

According to Loretta Baldassar in her article, “Guilty Feelings and the Guilt Trip: Emotions and Motivation in Migration and Transnational Caregiving,” “the act of migration, by causing physical separation, absence and longing, places the migrant in a difficult moral bind, in particular concerning their obligations to care for aging parents” (2). She explains that “people appear to feel guilty when they hurt, neglect, or disappoint others and when they benefit unfairly vis-à-vis others or at others’ expense [and] communal relationships, based on expectations of mutual concern for each other’s welfare, are particularly relevant to causing guilt” (2). So to know that he felt there was “no question of his moving the family back to India, and also no question of his eighty-year-old widowed mother moving to Pennsylvania” suggests that he knew what he was doing and actively made a choice. It is this choice, the choice to abandon his mother and “let his siblings look after her until she, too, eventually died” that causes guilt for him, a fictional character, and for many migrants, and it is this choice too that prohibits the migrant to expect what he/she did not provide her/himself.

Bhattacharya and Shibusawa write in their article, “Experiences of Aging Among Immigrants from India to the United States: Social Work Practice in a Global Context,” that “in Indian culture, the self is always viewed as nested in family and community contexts. Individual roles and responsibilities are described in terms of a larger family system and not from an

individualistic vantage point” (450). On the other hand, they also note that in the American diasporic context, “researchers have argued that assimilation became the model for immigrants to translate their aspirations and beliefs into reality” and that “this wave of Indian immigrants focused on raising their socioeconomic status within their diaspora community and in the mainstream American society” (449). Hemlata argues in “Dichotomy and Dilemma: A Study of Father-Daughter Relationship in Jhumpa Lahiri’s ‘Unaccustomed Earth,’” is very similar. She suggests that “while staying in America, the Indians are shown to have an inclination towards Americanisation. The individualistic thinking of Ruma’s father and his sense of independence is obvious from this statement” and that “as representative of the Indian patriarchy he wants to possess the central place for himself not stay at the margins” (4). What is this saying then? This seems to align the lack of family obligation or care or responsibility as a trait that is inherently American.

However, it does not seem that Ruma’s father simply adjusted to “mainstream American society” as Hemlata’s argument might suggest. The actions and thoughts of Ruma’s father indicate a far more complicated mindset that includes a sense of guilt or awareness that he did not fulfill his familial responsibility to his mother but also that he actually enjoys being free from burden himself. As he travels with his companion, he does not feel these stresses, these expectations, and he also knows that his daughter is being taken care of by her husband and no one is actually alone in this scenario, and no one is living “at the margins.”

Section II: Narratives of Aging in the Diaspora

As a counterpoint, “the complicating of a single or dominant theme through the addition of contrasting themes or forces,” to perspectives of aging that we see in fiction, the goal of this

section is to multiply and further complicate aging in the diaspora (Brown, 568). In this section, I analyze my participants' narratives regarding their plans for retirement, aging and care and the process of explaining both their expectations and preferences. During the structured interview, as noted in Chapter One, I asked each couple a very straightforward question in terms of their retirement. I asked them what their plans are for retirement and where they plan to live. For some, the responses were quick whereas for others, the responses came slower and shifted and changed as they attempted to explain, to justify. I focus on their individual words while also bringing to the surface what they seem to have internalized over the course of their time in the US. Given that this is uncharted territory, their responses to sensitive questions regarding their children reflects a tension between the assertion of their autonomy and their attempt to accept a potentially profound disappointment. By looking at their responses, we can gain a better understanding of what it might mean for a South Asian migrant to age in the US.

When conveying their plans for retirement, each couple shared very similar expectations and plans as well as the same (mis)understanding of their children. Some of the women seemed to have slightly softer, gentler responses whereas their husbands responded very firmly to the questions I asked. Here, one cannot overstate the point that the participants were caught off guard with this particular question. Though the questions were stated in a simple and concise manner, the implications of these questions alongside the deeper emotions that these questions aroused cannot be underestimated. Moreover, the questions prior to these questions in particular pertained to the past; they required a re-telling, a narration of their lives. This line of questioning, on the other hand, asked them to speculate, to offer an estimation of what they foresee the future to hold. So while I want to show how their responses indicate a certain thought process, I also do not intend to oversimplify or generalize the independence with which they spoke or the pain they

attempted to stifle and disguise as they answered me. That is, the participants cannot be categorized thematically; rather, my intention here is to explore the specific language each participant used when attempting to explain their thoughts on aging and how their concerns and/or fears might affect the way they plan. This section is divided according to the separate (and sometimes converging) themes that emerged from the interviews beginning with their plans followed by their concerns and continuing with their hopes.

The Plan:

At the time of the interview, none of my participants were retired. Given that they were all in good health and nearing retirement within the next five to seven years, however, they were able to indicate what they had in mind. For Anil and Lakshmi, the plan was in place.

Angy: So then as far as retirement is concerned, do you plan to stay in this house?

Anil: (A smile) That's a very lovely question. Right now, I can get on the chopper and clean the grass. But I think after a year or so it would be very difficult. Our best bet would be in a year or two to sell this property and get into a ranch type of condo...we can throw everything in the basement and we can have two bedrooms because that's plenty. As long as we have a dining area that's big for my entire family to sit down and eat, that's all we need. We did have plans to go to Florida or Arizona. The idea of retiring in Florida in 1975 was one thing but given the political demographics today I don't want to go...

Angy: What about India?

Anil: We may take a few trips just to see the school.

Lakshmi: Sometimes I feel like going back.

Anil: We used substantial amounts of money to build the school and build the house [in India]. The idea is that if something goes wrong, and our kids are spread all over the place, we now own a

place where we can go and have somebody take care of us. That option is there, but I think this is a minor option. It's there if we really want to. We have a choice. But we don't intend to go there and live for the whole year. You may go for a month maybe the colder months like January, February. But that's it. But we do have a place that we did not inherit, that is ours, that we built. That my kids can go to. This is something I did not have when I was a child. It's a big change. But full retirement in India, no.

Given that Anil indicated that in about a year or so, he anticipated he would not be able to care for his large home as well as he had done in the past, the plan to downsize would be the “best bet,” or in other words, the best option given the circumstances. It is important to note that the need for a large dining table is there because his children and grandchildren may visit for holidays, but the space he and Lakshmi need is fairly small, just a basement to throw their things into and two bedrooms, likely one for them and one extra bedroom should one of their children come.

Moving is an option, however. They are not grounded because as Anil notes, their children are “all over the place.” They have even built a home in India that is their own, where someone can take care of them, should they choose that option. There is not one plan; there are several plans from which they can choose. It should be noted though that they have contingency plans “if something goes wrong” – they acknowledge that they may not be able to stay with any of their children. They also acknowledge that they have freedom to do whatever suits them. Upon asking Mamta and Sanjay the same question as to where and how they would retire, Sanjay thought carefully for a moment before responding.

Angy: So what is your plan for when you retire? Where do you plan to live?

Mamta: (laughter) That's a big question.

Sanjay: I personally want to spend part of the time in India, and part of the time in the U.S.

Mamta: Yeah I am the same. I don't mind going back to India. But the kids are here, that's family, so I would like to spend time with them, and be in the U.S.

Like Anil and Lakshmi, Sanjay and Mamta feel that since their children are living in the United States, they should stay, but that they can be mobile and travel back and forth between India and the US. What is interesting here is that Sanjay and Mamta feel they need to be present for their children as their parents had been present for them. Their children have dispersed and though Sanjay and Mamta have the mobility to “disperse” as they had years before, they want to remain in place to some degree for the sake of seeing their children. It was the moment of laughter though that suggested the tone of the conversation had shifted. The pauses between thoughts were a bit longer and both Sanjay and Mamta were contemplative and slow to respond. As the interview proceeded, Sanjay wanted to elaborate.

Sanjay: Well, in the ideal world, while I'm young, I would like to set up a complete infrastructure in India so I can easily go back and forth and have a full set up in India and I can spend as much time there as I want to.

Sanjay seems to suggest here that he wants a “complete infrastructure,” a foundation, or a base to which he can return, a place that he can set up as is own, where he can come and go at his own will. It would be in this “ideal world,” where he could travel back and forth, just as Anil had set up for himself and Mamta. This may imply, though, that his foundation no longer exists in India. What used to be home, the place that he would like to return to every so often does not have a place for him; he must build it himself. And this life that he and Mamta built in the US, this new foundation, is also not permanent; it can be left behind as well.

Upon asking Priya and Mohan their thoughts on retirement, it seemed they had given some thought to their plan as the other couples had. Yet, their plans involved the US as being foundational. For Priya and Mohan, the goal is to be self-sufficient in the place where they have built a home and a life.

Priya: We have to have our own friend circle, older assisted-living communities, so we can live amongst our types together. This is what we all talk about. Maybe we need to build communities so that we can all get together and talk together about the same things and yet not be a burden to our kids. We are trying to get our assets together so that we are not going to be in a situation where we are in a nursing home that's not up to our standards.

So while the plan may include some travel, some back and forth between the US and India, it is not stressed or emphasized as the main component of their plan. The goal for Priya and Mohan is to continue the building of their lives in the US, to stay within their community, their “types,” or in other words, other South Asian migrants experiencing the same aging and retirement process. What Priya indicates here is that the community they live in does not have resources for South Asian migrants specifically. In this particular community, there is a Hindu Temple where community members meet to celebrate holidays, perform religious rituals, or even sometimes for a yoga or English class. In the last year, this Hindu Temple has begun hosting four-hour meetings for Seniors and aging members of the community to discuss a number of issues that concern them, such as health, retirement, spirituality and cultural reproduction in the US. Priya suggests here that this is something her community needs to work on so that they can support one another and avoid simply ending up in a “nursing home that’s not up to [their] standards.” The idea here is that they would like to be the ones shaping their futures and determining where they live rather than leaving it in the hands of anyone else. When talking with Rakesh and Jaya, their goal was also to stay in their own town.

Rakesh: Perhaps part of the year here and the other part of the year somewhere warmer. But definitely here.

So for some, we see that it's not about retiring to India, to the actual home they lived in, but perhaps to a place they built of their own in India. But not permanently. The goal for each of them is to be mobile, fluid, and to have some sort of support system or "infrastructure" that they create for themselves, similar to the infrastructure they created for themselves in the US.

What is perhaps most interesting about this notion of "the plan" is that as a concept, it ends with an ellipsis. Not a single participant had indicated that they had actually spoken with any of their children about what they will do upon retirement. This seems to be common amongst migrants as discussed in Anna Hjalm's study, "Because We Know Our Limits': Elderly Parents' Views on Intergenerational Proximity and Intimacy." Hjalm found that "In an era of an ageing population, in which the family might be expected to take greater responsibility when its elderly become frail, the lack of prearrangements with adult children for more difficult times that may arise... is interesting and should be researched and discussed further. In the interviews only one respondent reported having talked to her kin about future arrangements, should she become frail and in need of more extensive assistance" (306). What this means is that migrants have planned to a certain extent, but not entirely. The agency with which they have devised a plan for their older years fades into a grey area should their health limit their ability to care for themselves. As stated earlier, having financial stability in the form of Social Security and retirement funds does allow these migrants a level of confidence that they will manage somehow, but at the same time, they have each indicated that likely one of their children will take care of them if necessary, essentially handing over some of the authority to their children once they can no longer care for themselves.

The Fear of Dependence or 'Dependence Anxiety':

The responses to the question regarding retirement resulted in an explanation of each couple's plans. However, the plans that each couple had in place, or hoped to live out, are based on a major concern. One significant, pressing notion that resonated throughout the interviews was their insistence on not being a "burden" on their children.

- Angy:* Has it ever crossed your mind to live with her kids?
- Anil:* No. No. I always tell her that you have to plan your retirement years. That you can live on your own.
- Lakshmi:* I am living free without anything. So are the kids. And if you blend the two, there is a generation gap. It would be hard.
- Anil:* Whenever we go to visit our children's house, they have all the love and yet we feel like a liability. We feel like a burden.
- Lakshmi:* They are trying their best for our comfort but we still feel it.
- Anil:* It's very difficult. There are certain Indian families that do plan that way. Anticipating the children, though, when you're in sad shape, that we will leave our problems to them...it's unfair. They will have their own problems.
- Lakshmi:* Why burden them?
- Anil:* Of course if something goes wrong when you are helpless or paralyzed then they will do it on their own.
- Lakshmi:* But I do not want to put burden on them.
- Anil:* The only action I've taken legally through power of attorney is at the moment my children think I should be terminated it should be done. There is no reason to continue. There is no reason to pass my problems onto somebody else.
- Lakshmi:* We would never prefer to live with our children. I want them to be free with their own lives and I want my life to be free my way. I don't want to hear anything from my children nor do my children want to hear anything from me. Amit says and jokes that "we will

put you in a nursing home” and I say trust me, you won’t get a chance.

This response from both Lakshmi and Anil emphasizes their anxiety toward being a problem in their children’s lives. The repetition of the word “burden” here is significant in that it also assumes that their children may feel that way should Lakshmi and Anil need their help in their later years. It also suggests that being in need of help or care creates a level of discomfort for them. This term assumes something unwanted is being placed on their children, something unwelcome. There is a line, it seems, when it comes to intimacy within the family, and the responsibilities of a family seems to be unidirectional, from parent to child but perhaps not vice versa. Lakshmi wants to be “living free” and she wants her children to “be free with their own lives” and we see that this notion of freedom is complex. What does freedom mean here? Why is there a need to be free from one another, and why is it considered a burden to take care of one’s parents in their older years? Interestingly, Jaya and Rakesh felt the same.

Angy: Would you ever want to live with your daughter?

Rakesh: No.

Jaya: God forbid we ever have to... (pauses and laughs) I hope we didn’t say that too fast.

Rakesh: So long as the mind and body are functioning and I can take care of myself, then no...I just think that if I can take care of myself, why should I be interrupting or interfering in somebody else’s life? Hopefully she will have children and a family and she will be pretty busy taking care of them, and with their jobs, so I do not want to add any more burden to her. If I can take care of myself, why wouldn’t I?

The idea here is that Jaya and Rakesh do not want to add to their daughter’s stress. They assume, or anticipate, that she will be quite busy in her own family and work life. What does this imply,

however? And why are there undertones of resentment and hostility in their answers? “Trust me, you won’t get a chance” suggests tension on Anil’s part while “God forbid we ever have to” suggests a dreading of the need for Jaya and Rakesh to live with their daughter. Their responses suggest that again, there is a line that divides them now that their children are married and living on their own. Additionally, there is the intention of taking care of oneself for as long as one can and not “interrupting or interfering in somebody else’s life.” This raises the issue of who this “someone else” is. How does this come to be, that parents feel that their children are outside of them, external to the personal?

Vatuk discusses this as an American fear of dependency, and that it is “rooted in a deeply inculcated need for self-reliance and self-sufficiency, not only to retain the respect of others but, most important, to retain respect for oneself” (84). She continues that “Americans typically find it discomforting to know that someone else is taking care of their needs” (84). But why does this need to not be a burden imply a fear of dependency or a sort of Americanization? I would argue that the firmness in not wanting to be a burden could also suggest that many migrants want to remove the element of expectation and burden that was placed on them by their non-migrant parents who were left behind. Rakesh’s comment that his daughter will likely have a family of her own and will be busy taking care of them alludes to his experience with this very same dilemma. He perhaps does not want to be a burden on his own children because they will be busy in their own lives the same way he and Jaya were when the burden of caring for his parents was placed on him.

Priya and Mohan offer an explanation as to why they do not have expectations of their children to “keep them” once they are older.

Angy: Do you have any expectations of your kids for when you retire?

Priya: No. Because we don't want to be set up for disappointment. Even

my parents, they are old and alone... they are ailing, so which one of us are actually leaving our homes to go live with them and we know they are not coming here. It's not doable in this society. So we know we're not going to live with them... We're not expecting our children to one day come and say, come mom, come live with me.

Mohan: Our only expectation is that once we do retire, we like to be in a reasonable driving distance from our kids so that they are close by and we can go see them and they can come see us. The proximity is important.

Priya: Yes I mean we don't want to be dumped their nursing home with no one visiting us. Our expectations are that that if we really are ailing that we don't want to be dumped in a nursing home where no one visits us. We want to be self-sufficient.

Priya's desire to be "self-sufficient" however contradicts the idea of being placed in a nursing home given that being in a nursing home suggests they can no longer be self-sufficient. This notion of "disappointment" is something the participants seem to accept as a very plausible reality. There is an inherent fear in needing their children and potentially being let down the same way they feel they have let down their own parents. According to Priya, they feel it is not fair to expect anything of their own children when they did not fulfill that same "responsibility" toward their parents. Priya notes that she and her husband are aware that they are not willing or able to be displaced in order to care for their parents. So they will not expect what they cannot actually give themselves.

Mohan adds that they do have at least one expectation though, and that is that they expect to be in close proximity to their children so that they can at least visit one another. This is phrased as something that may not be a possibility given what their children want to which Priya follows up with one additional, significantly larger expectation that they do not want to be "dumped" in a nursing home if they "really are ailing." So what is the main concern then? Do

these responses suggest that the participants *want* to be taken care of, but they accept some sort of melancholic reality that they should not expect anything of their children? Or, do they suggest an assertion of autonomy and sustained independence? There is certain practicality in their expectations; there is a level of realistic thinking that seems to push the participants toward having their own independent plan rather than hoping that their kids will invite them to live in their homes only to be either potentially disappointed when they in fact do not ask, or when they begin to feel like a burden.

Mamta and Sanjay, when asked about living with any of their three daughters, responded with the anticipated answer of “no” (as they were the last couple to be interviewed). However, they were able to elaborate a bit more as to why.

Angy: Has it ever come across your minds to live with your kids?

Mamta: I don't know...

Sanjay: We haven't thought about it, but is unlikely at this point.

Mamta: We don't know - if we are capable of doing it all the way through, it depends. If we are physically and mentally able to care of ourselves...but likely we won't depend on anyone. But after that would depend on what the situation is. But I think our kids are open to that, they would take care of us. Not that we have talked about it, but we have made comments here and there and they have made comments as well. I don't feel...who knows. We haven't talked about it.

Angy: So is that different from the way it happens in the India?

Sanjay: Because of the profession, people move around - everyone is distributed all over. There, generations after generations live in the same home. We didn't have a family business [here], so all of our daughters distributed out and no one stayed with us.

Mamta: Yeah but your parents always stayed with somebody. And then they came to the U.S. and stayed with us.

Sanjay: The root cause is that we became more confident when we came

here. We knew we could live alone. In India, there is a mindset that you don't want to be alone.

Mamta: Also there is a stigma in India that, wow, your children are not living with you. There is a son in most families that would take on the responsibility. In our case we have all three daughters. We are not thinking that way nor are our daughters thinking that way. Because according to the family backgrounds in India, the girls would have gone to their husband's homes and the son would remain.

Sanjay: Yes this is true. This makes it less likely for us and our daughters - if we had a son, perhaps we would go live with our son.

Mamta: Yeah but I feel that the daughter would always take better care of her parents than the son though.

Sanjay: It depends on the circumstances. In our family, people separated based on profession. There was no intentional separation.

Mamta: You know, being with someone...what if we are sick and we need to be with family? Well, I think we would be fine with any of our daughters.

Angy: In having a place in India and in the US, what is the point?

Sanjay: To be independent and to be fluid.

Mamta: Yes, that is for sure – as long as we can do it, we would like to be on our own. But if we need to depend on somebody, then we know our girls would easily take care of us. I don't think that should be a problem.

The idea that there was no “intentional separation” alludes to a certain justification for why Sanjay feels his daughters should not be held accountable for himself and Mamta as they age. For professional purposes, his daughters “distributed out” and therefore proximity or the lack thereof, is justification for why they cannot be expected to take care of their parents and this could be a situation he can relate to. It is also a self-justification as to why he could not be physically present for his parents during the entirety of their elderly years. Sanjay's tone was

somewhat defensive in order to perhaps protect the image of his family as one unit regardless of the dispersal of his children. There also seemed to be a moment of tension when Mamta mentioned that Sanjay's parents had always stayed with someone (including Mamta and Sanjay) to which Sanjay quickly answered that the US has made them more confident in their capacity to live alone. Mamta for a moment seemed to question or at least reflect on how they did care for Sanjay's parents even in the U.S. However, Sanjay's quick follow-up to this conflict between being independent and dependent, living alone or with children, diffused the tension by reassuring perhaps the both of them that they could handle living alone and preferred it. They further justify their plan and their expectations by noting that they only have daughters, not sons, and therefore given that this may go against the grain or tradition, they must also make their own arrangements. It should be noted that Mamta responds that if they need to depend on one of their daughters, she doesn't *think* it should be a problem. This response indicates a lack of certainty. Even though Mamta knows her girls can easily take care of them, she *doesn't think* it should be a problem.

Moreover, there is a considerable emphasis that the participants want to be self-sufficient as long as they are mentally and physically capable of doing so. This notion of being "helpless" raises the question that should this situation occur, when they are not capable of taking care of themselves, or their mind and body, or their hands and feet, are not working in a way that allows them to be self-sufficient, what will happen? The participants offer this as a disclaimer, that their self-sufficiency is contingent on their ability to do things for themselves. But what takes place if that is not the case? What changes, which expectations change, once their minds and bodies no longer function as well? Their phrasing seems to suggest that there is a hope that they will not then be a burden, but that their children will cross back into the intimacy of "family" and take on

the responsibility of care. Many of the migrants' parents had passed away without the migrant providing physical care, with their parents being taken care of by siblings or other relatives, and as the migrants are aging themselves, they each feel that they at least don't want to be alone and helpless in their last stages.

The various responses from the participants beg several additional questions. What are the responsibilities of their children? Why do they consider themselves to be a potential burden? Is it an unreasonable expectation to expect they can live with their children? Do they feel abandoned? Do they feel as though they abandoned their parents in their old age? Do they feel guilty themselves as children who did not take care of their parents? Was it a burden on them having migrated to know they were not able to care for their parents? Is this their *karma* for not fulfilling their *dharma*?

Upon analysis of my participants' responses, it became fairly clear that if their children were to invite their parents to live with them upon retirement, then it is likely that my participants would not decline, but they would wait until they could no longer manage themselves. They indicated that they would like to travel, to be independent, to enjoy their lives without children or the burden of work, to continue living rather than planning to die, but that should they need their children due to health concerns or the "unexpected," then it would be nice, maybe even expected, that their children offer to take care of them.

Vatuk's findings validate this uncertainty or hesitation to expect from one's children given that upon growing older in their joint family homes in India, her participants "anticipated that under these circumstances it was possible, and even likely, that the younger generation would begin to feel their presence a burden, no longer show them respect, and perhaps even neglect or mistreat them" (68). Vatuk continues that "although cultural ideals maintain that they

ought to do so, experience has demonstrated that they (the children) frequently do not [carry out reciprocal obligations]” and “in the long-term reciprocity of intergenerational relations in India, at issue is whether the adult children will indeed live up to their part of the exchange” (84). The implication here is that these ideals are not necessarily being followed on a large scale anymore in India even. So while, according to Lamb’s participants, “America is the land of material prosperity” whereas “India is the land of intimacy and time,” the intimacy and time assumed to be a characteristic of Indian family life is being questioned by Indians living in India themselves. Vatuk notes that “to accept such aid from adult sons and their wives is a pleasure and a source of pride” but it is no longer a guarantee (84).

But rather, there seems to be overwhelming levels of guilt, expectation and obligation both in India and abroad based on this ideal intimacy. Loretta Baldassar writes in her study titled, “Transnational Families and Aged Care: The Mobility of Care and the Migrancy of Ageing” that “a more common set of experiences revolve around a sense of disappointment at the absence of the migrant, contributing to the view that family relations are not what they should be and that family roles are not adequately fulfilled. A feeling of guilt about the perceived inability to meet family obligations, often described as the result of physical absence (‘not being there’), is the most frequently articulated cause of anxiety for both migrants and parents” (282). She continues that “while seldom overtly expressed in this manner, this guilt could be explained as resulting from the view that their family roles are not matching up to the imagined ‘ideal’” (282). But is the intimacy really lost in time and translation? Or could it be that intimacy is being acted out in different ways?

Studies on Japanese migration have found that intimacy may be increased as a result of migration. Izuharu and Shibata suggest “in recent years, ‘intimacy at a distance’ with family in

Japan can be achieved due to shortened travel times, discounted airfares, telephone calls and e-mails. The situation that prevailed in the 1990s was, therefore, very different from their initial experiences of isolation in Britain in the early 1970s. Psychological distances have indeed been shortened as a result of globalization” (160). Moreover, there is also the act of sending remittances back to one’s family. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2011), “*economic remittances* refer to ‘monies earned or acquired by migrants that are transmitted back to their country of origin’” (Martone, et al, 445). In the article titled, “The Impact of Remittances on Transnational Families,” authors reported that “international remittances ‘exceed US \$100 billion per year’ and that in 2001, India alone received \$9,119 million (Martone, et al, 446). Martone, et al suggest that “viewing reciprocity within the transnational family dynamic is key to understanding communication and remittances” and that “sending remittances, for example, can be a migrant’s expression of gratitude for providing support or entrance into the United States” (451).

Remittances can be seen as a way of maintaining intimacy, of ensuring that one’s family is taken care of regardless of space and distance. In fact, Thai and Thai suggest in their article, “The Dual Roles of Transnational Daughters and Transnational Wives: Monetary Intentions, Expectations and Dilemmas” that “between adult children and elderly parents, the transfer of money is not simply a gift. *It is a currency of care*. Even the smallest amount of money symbolizes a large filial contribution to the well-being of a family” (224). By providing monetary support, by attending to the needs of the migrants’ parents, intimacy is maintained from a distance and the migrants remain an essential part of how the family functions both in India, and in the US.

Certainly in these migrants' thirty or forty years in the US, they have focused their lives on maintaining a balance between their parents who remained in India and their burgeoning families in the US. Sending money back home, visiting often, inviting their parents and relatives to visit the US, were ways of maintaining ties. As the migrant ages, however, the need to send remittances may decrease. Parents have passed away, relatives have dispersed, and the focus is on how the migrant will age in the era of the transnational family. Baldassar notes that "there is a tendency to view old age as a uniform stage in the life-course, characterized by increasing dependence, with no consideration for the elderly as active members in (transnational) networks that mobilize kin and community resources" (278). What I found was that most participants felt that if they could bear the initial act of migrating to the US, filled with all of its hardships, financial, social, cultural and emotional, and if they had to learn to be independent and charter new territories with no models to replicate, then it would be difficult if not impossible, to learn how to be dependent at the age of retirement. These participants pride themselves on their agency, their courage to do the undone, and they insist on doing things their own ways. So, while much of the past and current scholarship focuses on how first generation migrants are stuck in imaginary homelands, the participants of my study are in fact agents of social change. And while fiction, film and scholarship often focus on the second-generation as paving the path for a healthy blend and negotiation of South Asian and American values, we must give credit to the generation that is breaking ground now and this credit can be given in the form of restructuring and redefining how we conceptualize the first generation migrant.

With this being said, while there seems to be evidence supporting the participants' agency in developing a plan for their continued independence, to what extent does this agency reach? The research here also suggests that the "fluidity" of the plan may not be just a mark of

agency, but also a mark of circumstance. In addition, I would argue that some migrants do in fact have intimacy in their families because only an intimate bond can allow for the unspoken. With intimacy in this context comes an understanding and trust between migrant and child that should the need arise, the migrant will be cared for, but that until then, the migrant will take care of him/herself. This intimacy is also reinforced by the parental generation making active changes in the expectations for and of their children. While research alongside the participants' personal experiences indicate that "the extent to which an older person is able to experience the desired state of comfort, ease, and contentment – *aram* (peace) – in this time of life is said to be directly linked to the kind of *seva* (care) provided by his children and to the spirit in which they provide it," it seems that migrants may reach the desired state of *aram* by not placing the pressure on their children that was placed on them by their parents.

In looking back at Chapter Two and how the participants of my study conceptualize and locate home, the conflicts that come with citing the US as home in the context of aging cannot be underestimated. This was the most profound part of the interview process because for the first time in the interviews, the participants had to look ahead to the future. Hindsight was more comfortable than foresight. For the majority of the interviews, the participants were able to tell stories, to look back at their lives and narrate their life stories. However, in talking about what was yet to come, we were on unfamiliar territory. There is an uncertainty that comes with aging in the US, and in wanting independence and freedom for themselves, and in wanting happiness for their children, it could be suggested that aging in the US is a foreign idea. Aging in the US, as opposed to the way they may have watched their elders age when they were children growing up in India, might be a vulnerable area that brings about some nostalgia for the homeland that once was.

And yet in constituting the US as their home, for better or worse, we see that with their faith in their children, there is an expression of intimacy. They care so much for their children, even more so based on their own experiences of being in that “moral dilemma” that they want to save their children from having to bear the burden of taking care of them. Not only do they want their children to be happy, but they want them to be free. And they take comfort in knowing deep within that even though they have a plan for their retirement, should their hands and feet no longer work, they will get the *seva* from their children that they hope for.

IN CONCLUSION: A SELF-REFLECTION

It became apparent during the interview stage of this study, and consistently thereafter, that there is more work to do and that this project lends itself to future research. For the purposes of this dissertation, I had to create limits to my analysis and focus on specific ideas. However, there is a wealth of information left in the interviews pertaining to tradition, memory, and community that I plan to explore in the future. As Friedman states, “A retrospective and prospective look at the exploding fields of migration, diaspora and border studies is inevitably filled with omissions and gaps. The sheer scope and interdisciplinarity of the fields makes a mockery of any attempt at mastery” (18). Indeed I have found that in writing this dissertation, I see that there are many more questions to ask. Because this dissertation focuses entirely on an economically and socially homogenous group in the US (despite diverse origins and experiences in India and in the US), I suggest the need for a future study involving participants from differing class positions as well as from other religious backgrounds who have migrated from India to the US. What effect would this have on the way I have conceived this project? What discursive systems have mediated the experiences of migrants from different class locations and religions, and to what degree are those experiences different? It would also be useful to counterpoint this study by collecting the narratives of the second generation as well. Given that this research suggests that migrants change over time, and that concepts like home, happiness and aging, are constantly shifting and transforming over time, it would be interesting to explore how the second generation, now likely in their early 30s to mid to late 40s, think about their lives and their parents. What I have found so far is that the questions continue to build upon one another and that the meaningfulness of this study has already exceeded my initial expectations.

When I began this project years ago, I really had no idea what I would discover. At the time, early in my graduate career, I had so many ideas of what it meant to be a South Asian American female, and a daughter of first generation migrants, that I felt I had more answers than I had questions. I discovered through qualitative research, through reading, through listening, through counterpoint, that I was wrong. I was not wrong to have a sense of who I was and who I was trying to be, but I was wrong to think I had all of the answers. This project has taught me that one's experience can serve as *a* counterpoint, but not *the* counterpoint. This inquiry is just the beginning of a series of questions that I hope to pursue in the future. This dissertation brought together many texts and included long passages from the participants of my study in an effort to better understand the complex nature how South Asian migrants are represented in fiction and scholarship, and how the participants in my study chose to represent themselves. At times, the narratives complemented the scholarship, at times they contradicted it, but at all times, the purpose of collecting the narratives was to counterpoint. It is from counterpointing that I have learned that there is beauty and something profound in adding to the complexity. While the participants in my study told their life stories over the course of several conversations, I did my best to reorganize and narrate their stories in a way that honors their journeys. In a way, in interpreting and narrating and shaping their stories, I, too, serve as a counterpoint, adding yet another layer to the complexity of this project.

Abdi Kusow, in "Beyond Indigenous Authenticity: Reflections on the Insider/Outsider Debate in Immigration Research" states that "based on a National Survey of Immigration Scholars, [it has been reported] that almost half (48 percent) of immigration scholars in the United States are themselves of immigrant stock" and that "53 percent of researchers applying for dissertation grants to the National Science Research Council planned to study their own

ethnic immigrant communities” (591). Certainly I am not alone in my desire to study the community I belong to, and yet this presented many challenges. It was a constant effort to separate myself, though quite often, the participants wanted to include me, stating “Angy, you know how it is” or attempting to relate to my parents whom they knew well, or attempting to relate my experiences to those of their children’s, perhaps as a way to show that we are not so different from one another, or perhaps in a way to reconcile and negotiate their responses when they were unsure. At times I had to remind myself that though it felt almost comforting to hear their stories, to eat Indian food as we chatted, to know that they had challenges, to understand them more deeply, that this was also a project in which I had to remain as objective as possible.

I was aware throughout this process that the participants in my study were thinking about how to represent themselves in their responses, deciding what story they wanted to tell, and at the same time, I was thinking about how they saw me – as a researcher, as the daughter of their friend, as a member of the second generation. Anna Mansson McGuinty writes that “Narration is not only an attempted retelling of previous experiences but also something that does something to the participants; it generates thoughts and new experiences, it is part of an ongoing identity-making, not only for the interviewee but also for the interviewer (37). I could see this happening with my participants. As they spoke, they developed a greater understanding of their stories, and of their lives, and what initially began as a quest to find out more about their experiences, I found that this project transformed into presenting their life narratives. And there is a fluidity in a life looked at retrospectively.

In doing this, I was also aware that my experience during this process was important as it was mediated by the fiction I had read, both the *ladki-lit* and the generational fiction, and the films I had seen such as *Bend it Like Beckham* and *The Namesake*. It was my task to re-present

how I interpreted South Asians were being represented in fiction and how the participants of my study were attempting to represent their experiences and life stages. It was complex, to say the least, and critical at all times to read closely.

And yet, at times, it was still difficult. In their gestures, in their pauses, in their tones (sometimes energetic, other times contemplative), in their reformulations, in their distant glances away, in their voices, and in their eyes, I could see and feel the journeys the participants of my study had traveled. It was with great admiration that I found myself listening as they told their stories, and it occurred to me that as a researcher, I am in a position of privilege – I get to hear their stories and then re-tell their stories. And through this research, their stories get to be told. And what stories there have been. From Lakshmi recalling her love letters and how Anil took her to a dairy farm so that she could see the cows she missed seeing in India, to Rakesh saying that he did not need to meet anyone else after seeing Jaya for the first time, I am in awe of how far these first generation migrants have traveled, and it has been an honor to hear their stories of pursuing graduate degrees, getting married, raising children and learning how to be parents, and most recently, figuring out how one ages.

A story, whether represented in fiction or in oral narratives, can serve as an introduction to an idea or a group of people we are not familiar with and how those elements are portrayed can have a profound impact on our perception of groups of people, of cultures, of communities. In hearing the stories of my participants, and getting to know my participants on a much deeper level, I was able to see the value in challenging one's preconceived notions. For so long, I was only seeing my positionality, my experience. And what a trap that is. The brilliance and beauty that can come from listening to stories cannot be denied because in getting to know another's

story, we can learn compassion. This research taught me that much can be learned when one listens. It is through this project that I learned to listen.

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- Ph.D. in English: University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2018
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DISSERTATION

Dissertation Title: “Experience as Counterpoint: A Qualitative Study on Home, Happiness & Aging Amongst First-Generation South Asian Migrants in the U.S.”

Committee:

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

- **English 152: Communication Skills, Milwaukee Area Technical College**
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- **English 202: English II, Milwaukee Area Technical College**
- **English 340: Workplace Communications, Milwaukee Area Technical College**
- **GenStudies 204: Seminar in College Success**
- **English 103: English Literature - Civilization and Worldviews, Concordia Univ, 2012-2015**
This course provides practice and experience in reading the three primary genres of literature: fiction, poetry, and drama. The purpose of this course is to enable the student to enjoy and appreciate a wide spectrum of literature, with an understanding of how best to undertake various types of critical analyses of a text. Texts include *Hamlet*, *A Doll’s House*, an array of notable poems, *Persepolis*, *MAUS*, and short stories such as Kate Chopin’s “Story of an Hour,” Jhumpa Lahiri’s “Third and Final Continent,” and Amy Tan’s “Two Kinds.”
- **English 104: Introduction to Writing, Concordia University Wisconsin, 2012-2015**
This is an introductory reading and writing course for college freshman geared toward reading comprehension, interpretive writing and research writing. The course, based on a course reader, is designed around several readings challenging the students to consider the world around them in new ways and to then articulate their thoughts in writing. The second part of the course is based on an independent research paper through which the students learn rhetorical analysis, critical thinking skills, and innovative thought.
- **English as a Second Language Instructor, Living Word High School/CUW, 2013-14**
This teaching assignment was a bridge program between Living Word High School and Concordia University Wisconsin and was geared toward helping new international high school seniors from Vietnam and China learn English in order to prepare them for college. We worked on grammar, sentence structure, essay-writing, interpretation, critical thinking, speech and presentations, listening and conversation skills. Each student succeeded in this year-long course, graduating with high scores and began attending U.S. universities in Fall, 2014.
- **English 215: Introduction to English Studies, UW-Milwaukee, 2011**
This is a reading and writing intensive introduction to diverse texts and ideas that challenges students to think critically in a cultural and global framework. We read texts from different genres, an array of time periods and diverse places in order to challenge the notions and goals of

English literature and English Studies. We explored, questioned, challenged and reflected upon the diverse ways of creating meaning and knowledge and the various methods of reading texts.

- **English 102: College Writing and Research, UW-Milwaukee, 2008-2013**
This course is designed to introduce students to the conventions and practices of academic research writing while also looking at the different disciplines and fields of study that have varying sets of practices and conventions. This course is structured around critical thinking, analysis, and interpretation of scholarly texts in order to produce a text that contributes insight in an academic field.
- **English 101: Introduction to College Writing, UW-Milwaukee, 2008-2013**
This course introduced students to college-level reading and writing practices through a sequence of writing assignments that integrates critical reading, writing, and reflection. This course built on what students already knew about reading and writing, and it invited them to develop more complicated composing strategies for responding to their own concerns and the concerns of others.
- **Greater University Tutoring Services Study Skills Tutor, UW-Madison, 2006-2007**
Worked one-on-one with students in hour-long appointments to help them improve their study habits and develop their own personalized learning style. Helped students learn how to learn and focused on academic issues not specific to any single course or subject such as note taking, time management, and exam preparation.
- **Academic Development Writing Tutor, Carnegie Mellon University, 2005-2006**
I was a key member of the tutoring team aimed at helping those with English as a Second Language as well as students with technical and science-based focus who were unable to structure their essays and reports successfully. I promoted and encouraged effective and concise writing that complied with the assignment and delivered the student's message.

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- **Research Assistant to Professor Kumkum Sangari, UW – Milwaukee, 2009-2016**
I researched, gathered and reviewed literature for several research projects as well as prepare teaching materials for various graduate seminars. I was responsible for maintaining organization and distribution of course materials on a weekly basis as well. I have also organized several seminars from visiting professors and coordinated their visits as well as the design and publication of events. Most notably, I was the lead organizer in the “Arab and American” lecture series at UWM in 2013/2014.
- **Professional Development Editor, Milwaukee, WI, 2011-2016**
I assisted in planning, developing and editing personal statements for graduate programs, resumes for job applications and graduate seminar essays. I have a strong reputation with graduate students for yielding outstanding results.
- **Research Assistant to Dr. Stephanie Batiste: Carnegie Mellon University, 2005-2006**
Black Folk Culture in the work of Zora Neale Hurston: I performed archival research on Voodoo culture and the representation of Black Folk Culture in Hurston's anthropological research as well as her fiction.
- **Research/Development toward Writing Center at Carnegie Mellon University, 2005-2006**
I promoted the development of a Writing Center at Carnegie Mellon University by performing research on the value and success of writing centers as well as proposing various plans for how a writing center could function at CMU. I collaborated with Academic Development/Intercultural Communication Center program directors in order to initiate a movement for the English Department to pursue a writing center.
- **Technical Editor, K. Singh & Associates, Inc., Wauwatosa, WI, 2006-2016**
Serve as technical editor on job proposals and reports for engineering firm and composed cover letters, client letters and correspondence. The mission has been to implement effective

communication in the business environment and mentor those with moderate experience in the English language.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS:

National Women's Studies Association, Milwaukee, November, 2015

- Paper Presentation on Happiness and Killjoys in the South Asian Diaspora

Fifth Interdisciplinary Conference on Aging & Society, Washington DC, November, 2015

- Paper Presentation on "Aging and Care in the Transnational Family"

Third Aging and Society: An Interdisciplinary Conference, Chicago, IL, November, 2013

- Paper Presentation on "Negotiating Aging, Retirement and Care: A Qualitative Study on First Generation South Asians in the United States"

National Women's Studies Association, Illinois, June 2007

- Paper Presentation on "Female Agency as Represented in South Asian Diasporic Film"

South Asian Literary Association, Philadelphia, PA, December, 2006

- Paper Presentation on "Diasporic Film and Negotiation of Tradition and Cultural Transmission"

Modern Language Association, Philadelphia, PA, December 2006

Comparative Postcolonialities and Cultural Studies Works, Pittsburgh, PA, October 2005 and May 2006

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS:

Modern Language Association

Aging & Society

National Women's Studies Association

South Asian Literary Association

American Studies Associations

AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS:

UWM Women's Studies Scholarship, Spring 2014

James A. Sappenfield Award Recipient, Spring 2008

Commencement Speaker for Carnegie Mellon University's Department of English, 2006

Raymond Williams Fellowship in Cultural Studies, 2005-06

TD Investments "Student of the Year" Scholarship, 2005-06

Dean's Honor List at both University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Carnegie Mellon University

Carnegie Mellon Scholarship for Graduate Study, 2005-06

UW-Milwaukee Student Recognition, Spring 2005

LANGUAGE FLUENCY: English, Hindi, Spanish