

# Recreating “Mini-India” in a Foreign Land: *Experiences of Asian Indian Immigrant Mothers*

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## Introduction

**The main purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of Asian Indian immigrant mothers in maintaining and promoting the Indian cultural values for themselves and their children.**

- ❑ Parenting in a host culture is an extremely challenging and stressful endeavor (Nesteruk & Marks, 2011).
- ❑ While acculturating to the host culture, not only do these parents have to maintain aspects of their heritage culture, but also mediate and bridge between the two cultures such that their children retain ethnic cultural imperatives; as well as blend within the larger host culture (Inman et al., 2007).
- ❑ Characteristic to many Indian households, grandparents are largely responsible for instilling values and moral teachings among the children (Tuli, 2012).
- ❑ However, upon immigration, parents become key agents in transmitting the heritage values and identity among their children, due to geographical separation and physical absence of extended kinship (Dasgupta, 1998).
- ❑ Ethnographic literature suggest that Asian Indian immigrant parents safeguard this goal by creating an “Authentic Indian” ethos in their homes and synthesizing their own versions of being “Indian” at home and being “American” while participating in the host culture (Ganapathy-Coleman, 2013).

## Methodology

**Participants:** Data for this qualitative study was collected from thirteen first-generation Asian Indian mothers, living in the state of New Jersey. The participants were between 33 to 45 years of age ( $M= 36.92$ ). The number of years that the participants had spent in the U.S., ranged from three to twenty-two years ( $M= 12.07$ ;  $SD= 5.97$ ). The participants identified themselves as Jains ( $n=8$ ) or as Hindus ( $n=5$ ). The educational qualification ranged from High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent ( $n=1$ ), Bachelor’s degree ( $n=5$ ) and master’s degree ( $n=7$ ). Seven were working ( $n=7$ ) in the U.S, while six were full time homemakers ( $n=6$ ).

**Recruitment:** Participants were largely recruited through a combination of snowballing and theoretical sampling techniques.

**Data Collection:** Data was collected between May 2016 and November 2017, using face-to-face, in-dept semi-structured interviews. All interviews were conducted in English and each typically lasted for about 60 minutes.

**Data Analysis:** Data was analyzed using Strauss and Corbin (1990) coding phases, namely: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

## Results

Participants’ esteem for recreating “mini India”, in a host culture, was captured in the following two themes: (a) preference for Indian Enclaves and Indian community resources and (b) adding Indian touches to their American homes

### Theme 1: Preference for Indian Enclaves and Indian Community Resources

One of the particularly salient themes to the present study was related to the participants’ strong need to live in or around Indian neighborhoods. The participants placed considerable importance on the need to have easy accessibility to and availability of Indian resources in the neighborhoods they lived in.

**Availability of Indian specific services and amenities.** One of the reasons for this geographical preference was that, towns and neighborhoods with a larger Asian Indian concentration tend to have a higher number of community resources like Indian grocery stores, restaurants, temples, etc. It is important to understand that these amenities, particularly the temples and grocery stores, were imperative for the participants as these enabled them to keep specific aspects of their “Indianness” alive in a foreign land.

**Sites for social opportunities and events.** Indian community centers became important sites for socializing with other Asian Indian friends and families. In addition, temples and the Indian community centers also became important social setting wherein the feelings of belongingness to ‘Indian’ community and identity as an ‘Asian Indian’ were further strengthened. Participants also felt that these social participations were important medium of familiarizing their children to the tenets of Indian culture.

## **Theme 2: Adding Indian Touches to their American Homes**

Most participants’ homes had some form of traditional Indian touch to them. Most participants brought traditional possessions from India, like wall hangings, or traditional Indian handicraft items and artifacts. Furthermore, these traditional arrangements and possessions were a part of the main-living space, such that it is easily visible to all. It could be said these were used as a medium for protecting as well as projecting aspects of the Indian culture. In a way, these possessions played a key role in anchoring the Indian identity of these immigrants in a foreign land.

### **Implications**

- ❑ Contributes to the literature on ethnic communities- helps us better understand some of the challenges that these families face in adapting to a new culture, that is significantly different from their native culture
- ❑ Beneficial for researchers and academicians- who are interested in exploring cross-cultural psychology, immigration-acculturation nexus, cross-cultural psychology and comparative family studies.
- ❑ Similar transnational dilemma and parenting strategies have been noted among members of other immigrant groups, coming from collectivist backgrounds, like Eastern European immigrants (Nesteruk & Marks, 2011), Asian American immigrants and African American families (Jambunathan et al., 2000). The similarities and differences in the experiences can be accessed for formulating policies for immigrants in the U.S.

### **Limitations**

- ❑ Limited sample size
- ❑ Participants shared similar demographic characteristics (socio-economic status and educational qualifications) as a result their experiences may not reflect the experiences of Asian Indian immigrants belonging to a different socio-economic group

### **Future Directions**

- ❑ Present research may be enriched by replicating this research on Asian Indian immigrants practicing Indian religions other than Jainism and Hinduism (E.g., Sikhs, Muslims, Christians).
- ❑ In future, similar study could also be conducted with Asian Indian immigrants belonging to a lower socio-economic status
- ❑ A similar study could be conducted to include the experiences of Asian Indian immigrant fathers as well.

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