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# Finding Home: Diasporic Community Building in a Rural U.S. Town

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FINDING HOME:  
DIASPORIC COMMUNITY BUILDING IN A RURAL U.S. TOWN

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
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Approved by:

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A substantial Indian immigrant population in the U.S. resides beyond the major metropolitan areas. Yet studies on Indian diaspora are focused on big cities, with relatively limited literature on diasporic communities in the smaller cities and towns. This study addresses this gap by understanding how the diasporic ‘Indian’ community in a small U.S. (rural-University) town makes sense of the Indian culture and forms a sense of community, without having the cultural resources of big cities. It explores the way gender, religion, age, race and ethnicity are negotiated in the creation of a ‘home away from home’, and the way cultural importation, negotiation and meaning-making happen in the creation of diasporic communities. The study uses a combination of semi-structured interviews and multi-sited ethnography. The findings suggest that the ‘Indian’ family members ‘have a stake’ in actively investing in community building through both formal and informal processes; both religious and secular tools and a certain re-imagination of the culture ‘back home’ are employed by the community to bind itself together; and that gender of the participants and the racial dynamics within the host society play a role in this process of community formation. However, despite the concerted efforts of the community members, lines of dissidence are active along gender, age, religious practices and ethnic/regional cultural identity of the individuals. Also, an elaborate process of mothers ‘doing culture’ for their children and the simultaneous prescription and proscription of certain activities and roles for the children, serve to suture the community together, just as they have the potential to act as fault lines within the community.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“Absolutely... [a] 100% gender divide exists within the Indian community here ... they are not comfortable with female community leaders even though they expect the groundwork of getting the community together to be done by women ...” Madhura K<sup>1</sup>*

Living in a small, rural U.S. town built on coal mining, Madhura K described the gendered character of building the local Indian diasporic community. Women do all of the day-to-day work that actually brings people together, she said, while men take on leadership positions, often in name only. As she noted “.... when the Pujas<sup>2</sup> were held in people’s houses who did all the donkey work?...the cooking, cleaning....women do all of the work...Also there is a Puja book...even though the women do a better job...they know the language better, write it better, design it better,...but the men always do that...Why? Because their names can be seen on it...and all invisible but tedious jobs will of course be done by the women.” A middle-aged Professor of Indian origin, she explained that “...the unofficial things that the women do... like frequently organizing informal gatherings and get togethers for the community people in their residences, arranging picnics and potlucks...and cooking for these or organizing dance and music shows to showcase Indian culture in formal events.... re-creating the Indian culture in this foreign space...and it is mostly the women who do this...” These sorts of practices are key to developing and maintaining the local diasporic ‘Indian’ community where Madhura K lives. Along with gender, in this study I explore several other factors and processes that serve to stitch the fabric of the diasporic society together. These include community celebrations and customary practices of both religious and secular nature, ethnic bonds, and a certain way of reimagining and honoring the

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<sup>1</sup>The names of the participants (both interview respondents and individuals referred to in the field notes) have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved in the study.

<sup>2</sup>Hindu religious rituals and ceremonies.

homeland. All these form “interaction rituals” (Collins 2004) that create feelings of in-group solidarity.

However, there are fault lines within the community too that this study explores. Gendered labor requirements create unique emotional demands on women within the community who have to carve out time from their already busy schedules to actively invest in recreating an Indian cultural space within the diasporic community. The burden of balancing work and family and doing gendered emotion work within the larger immigrant community lies disproportionately on them as women are expected to be more nurturing and believed to play more affective roles. They are considered to be “better at certain jobs, like providing emotional support and getting the community to bond together.”<sup>3</sup> This raises larger questions about the gendered nature of emotion work and of diasporic community building at large. Emotion work is a repeated, taxing, and under-acknowledged act that helps to maintain social relationships and cultural norms within work and familial spaces. And as Arlie Hochschild (1979, 1983, 1989) shows in her study of female flight attendants (1983), emotion work is gendered as it requires intimate emotions of one-self to be managed in service of others, especially so by women as they are expected to be naturally affective and altruistic. But emotion work and harnessing of emotional energy is also key to developing larger community relationships (Collins 2004, Gould 2009); and in this study, to carving out and maintaining a significant Indian enclave in an otherwise white town. Local ethnic identities and specific religious affiliations and social practices surrounding them also act as potential rifts within the community. In this rural community, with underlying racial tensions like in most other areas in the U.S., building a community becomes of utmost importance to the diaspora for the creation of a space they can call “home”. The men and women I interviewed

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<sup>3</sup>Quote- Dr. Sambit Saha, Assistant Professor of Physics and member of the Indian community in town. Data from my field notes from the New Student Welcome Picnic, organized by the Indian Association of Southern Illinois, September, 2016.

made it clear that the division of community-building labor is obviously segregated because women are “better at certain jobs, like providing emotional support and getting the community to bond together.” At the same time, the women take up the primary responsibility of socializing the children within the community into this diasporic culture by negotiating the children’s experience of Indian culture by ‘doing culture’ for them and by disciplining them according to the unspoken rules of the community. Social practices surrounding temple visits and what local Indian language and culture one inherits pepper the narrative as well.

The work required in building a diasporic ethnic community in a rural town is of a different nature than what might be required in the bigger urban areas as the smaller towns lack many of the professional resources that help in the community building in the larger cities. For e.g., Madhura K stated that counseling services that specifically help the second-generation immigrants (children) cope with cultural dissonance and identity crisis faced while having to simultaneously grow up in “two cultures” (Berry 2005) are only available in bigger cities like Chicago. In smaller rural areas, this lacuna is filled-in by the informal women’s labor that performs much of the same roles. In this context, through the study, I ask - How do smaller diasporic communities in the rural U.S. make sense of the culture from back home and form a sense of community, without having the cultural resources of big cities? Is creating a ‘home away from home’ for rural immigrant communities a gendered process involving the work of cultural importation, negotiation, and meaning making, in relation to the culture of both the homeland and the host land? Finally, what does this tell us about the process of diasporic community building, issues of immigration in relation to power and inequality as the diasporas try to engage in elaborate processes of community building to not only create a ‘second home’ but also to live their “American dream” and solidify their position within the American society? Also, what role does gender, religious affiliations,

ethnic identities and racial relations play in this process?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Immigrant identity formation and building a “home away from home”**

Literature on immigrant identity formation deals with the social-psychological processes immigrants are engaged in to facilitate the formation of diasporic communities and create a “home away from home” in the host countries. One of the most common tropes used to understand the immigrant experience is the trope of hybridity and immigrant’s distinctive identity formation. As Berry (2005) highlights, immigrants grow a hybrid culture as they learn to live in ‘two cultures’ and twin processes of conflict and negotiation occur during the process of acculturation of immigrant groups into the host culture. As individuals and collectivities engage in intercultural contact there is always a potential for conflict and the consequent need for negotiation in order to achieve outcomes that are adaptive for both cultures. Immigrant communities are either integrated and assimilated or separated and marginalized within the host communities.

Other scholars have criticized this rather simplistic and non-flexible concept highlighted by ‘acculturation’ theorists as ‘acculturation’ does not take into account the complex, multifaceted and often contradictory processes experienced by the immigrants and the complex process of negotiation with the host culture, that does not simply mean either being acculturated or remaining marginalized. Weinreich (2009) argues that immigrants often lose their distinctive identities and adopt the identity ascribed to them by the host community. He examines the processes of creation, sustenance and recreation of identity in contexts of alternative cultural norms that immigrant communities are faced with within the host society. Bhatia (2008) and Bhatia and Ram (2009) claim that not all immigrants undergo universal psychological processes of acculturation and adaptation. The authors use the examples of how members from the Indian diaspora had to re-examine their ethnic and racial identity in

the aftermath of 9/11 in the U.S., as a case in point to show how members from the otherwise 'integrated' Indian diaspora had to renegotiate their acculturation status and create new forms of cultural identity after the events of 9/11. Racial identity and tensions also assume paramount importance in understanding the macro-structural influences shaping the experiences of acculturation and assimilation among the diaspora.

The existence of the immigrant "double consciousness" and the intervening "third space", between the old and the new homes is also important. Smith and Leavy (2008) claims that hybridity as a category of analysis yields new meanings for diasporic identities and cultural formations by focusing on how it often disconnects people from assumed cultural and biological origins. Richards (2008) and Lowe (2003) claim that immigrant identity is an 'emergent phenomenon' as they both show how ethnicity among immigrant groups is rooted in ethnic communities that they rebuild in the United States and not in their cultures of origin. Hall (2003) argues that diasporic identities are processual ('being' and 'becoming') depending on our position.

Though building a 'new home' is never an easy process, the difficulties become compounded for low-skilled immigrants as was discussed by Bald (2003). As the global political-economic rhetoric shifted from "Imperialism to Free-Market Fundamentalism" (Bald et al. 2003) the form of flow of labor and capital and migration flows changed as we saw a greater movement of 'skilled' immigrants across newly-porous neo-liberal national borders, of course to serve the interests of capitalism. The huge increase in the numbers of Indian immigrants in the U.S. (mostly Indian doctors, engineers and skilled IT personnel) from the 1990s onwards is a case in point here (Ninian, 2012).

In the context of immigrant identity formation, gender and women's cultural agency emerges as a theme across a number of studies that focus on gender as a central category for understanding hybridity. Both Darling-Wolf (2008) and Vidal-Ortiz (2008) introduce women

as actors in cultural identity formation as they analyze the importance of a shift in the understanding of gender as an identity with multiple categories. In her study of poor Mexican migrant women in California, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2014) analyzes the gendered and racialized creation of immigrant spaces through the axis of migration, power, and inequality. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) also analyzes how changes in immigration laws significantly change models of patriarchal control, often leading to more egalitarian gender relationships, thus depicting how patriarchy as an institution is fluid and can be manipulated and negotiated within shifting geopolitical and economic contexts. She highlights how the nature of patriarchy changes as different genders “persuade” and “negotiate” with it as either reacting to the diminishing patriarchal control or by forming networks to subvert it.

#### **‘Home’ as ‘women’s domain’: Emotions and interaction rituals**

Hetero-patriarchal narratives of life have conventionally considered the home to be the woman’s sphere, whereas the world of work, outside the home is seen as the rightful territory for men. This narrow conceptualization of men’s and women’s roles has also been reflected in more traditional sociological theoretical formulations as in the work of the Functionalist sociologist, Talcott Parsons, who talked about ‘instrumental’ or breadwinning roles for men and ‘affective’ or care-giving roles for women. Marxist Feminists have questioned this alignment of femininity with domesticity, especially the idea that domestic work is not real ‘work’ because it is unpaid and is ‘labor of love’. They also argue that not only is household labor actual ‘work’, but it is also a form of reproductive labor employed in the service of capitalism for the purpose of recreating the proletariat. Margaret Benston and Peggy Morton (as quoted in Vogel 2013) and Heidi Hartmann (1981) argue that uncompensated reproductive labor, associated with the private sphere and performed mostly by women is unrecognized by the capitalist system but is in the best interest of both public and private institutions to exploit the labor of women as an inexpensive method of supporting

a work force and hence the capitalist machinery.

In my paper, I engage in a discussion of emotional labor, as a form of reproductive labor performed by women within the context of both paid service work and unpaid work within the family. Literature on emotional labor and emotion work highlights how the burden of balancing work and family and doing emotion work within the family lies disproportionately on the women. This also underscores the triple shift that women have to work that requires the balancing of paid work, housework and emotion work. Hochschild (1975, 1979, 1983, 1990) states that emotional labor is the process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfill the emotional requirements of a job. Workers are expected to regulate their emotions during interactions with customers, co-workers and superiors, based on the social and cultural norms available to them. Such cultural scripts often impose requirements on persons that are stressful and alienating. The related terms, emotion work or “emotion management” refers to “these same acts done in a private context”, such as within the private sphere of one's home or interactions with family and friends. While emotion work happens within the private sphere, emotional labor is emotion management within the workplace according to employer expectations. In this paper, I apply the category of emotional labor to the work of community building to demonstrate how women within the diasporic Indian community are expected to and perform active emotion work that helps in the process of community building and maintenance.

Rao (2017) indicates how during periods of unemployment, the emotional costs of unemployment and the sense of relative deprivation are borne disproportionately by women. Wives of unemployed men do emotion work with the aim of facilitating their husbands' success in the emotionally demanding white-collar job-search process. This emotion work by wives not just provides the much needed psychological support to the husband and the family in times of stress (often at the cost of concealing her own concerns and anxieties), it is also a

resource with potential economic benefits in the form of unemployed men's reemployment. In this paper, I demonstrate how similar processes are observed within the diasporic Indian community where the wives perform active emotion work in supporting their husbands when they are looking for a job, after the completion of a degree in the U.S.

I also employ the concept of "second shift" (Hochschild 1989; Wharton 1994) - the labor performed at home in addition to the paid work performed in the formal sector. The concept highlights the "leisure gap" between men and women and shows how women still take care of most of the household and childcare responsibilities despite their entrance into the labor market. In this paper, I employ the concept to show how within the diasporic Indian community, despite being involved in paid work, it is the women who shoulder most of the responsibility of doing the groundwork for community building. The work of community building thus involves emotional labor to be employed by women and forms a part of their "second shift", along with management of household chores. Overall, I also argue that in employing the concept of 'emotional labor' in analyzing diasporic community building processes, I address a gap in the 'emotional labor' literature and hence extend the literature. This is because this literature does not focus on how gendered emotional labor is exercised in community formation.

In addition to understanding emotion work performed by women within the diasporic Indian community, I also employ the concept of interaction rituals and the related concept of emotional rituals and emotional energy (Collins 2004, Gould 2009). Collins defines interaction rituals as "a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership" (p. 7). Everyday interactions that gradually become ritualized due to their regularity generate in-group solidarity and a micro-culture within that group. Collins proposes that successful rituals create symbols of group membership and pump up

individuals with emotional energy, while failed rituals drain emotional energy. I apply this concept to the context of diasporic community building and demonstrate how when interaction activities (e.g. through participation in traditional cultural activities like Indian festivals, dances etc.) within the diasporic community are routinized, they generate high emotional energy and hence often form a sense of group solidarity, consequently strengthening the feeling of a community.

### **Indian Diaspora in the U.S.**

Literature on the Indian diaspora in U.S. highlights how Indians form one of the largest diasporic communities in the U.S. Ninian (2012) highlights the more mechanistic aspects of community building engaged in by the Indians in the U.S. - e.g. forming the US-India Political Action Committee [USINPAC] in 2002 for representing Indian-American voices in American politics; the industry-wide Indian American groupings, including the Asian American Hotel Owners Association and the Association of American Physicians of Indian Origin. He also focuses on the political involvement and the experiences of racial and cultural discrimination of the Indian diaspora.

The literature also focuses on the symbolic aspects of identity formation and community building among the Indian diaspora. It highlights how within the diasporic Indian “hybrid identity” is constructed through paradoxical narratives of simultaneously ‘belonging’ to and ‘exclusion’ within the host society (Bhatia 2007, Jain 2011). The scholars underline the interplay of Indian culture, tradition and ‘Western’ modernity in the process of creation of a ‘new home’ for immigrants (Judge 2015). The Indian diaspora in the U.S. is a “transnational psychological space” (Bhatia, 2007, p. 222) wherein the immigrants must interpret/live/negotiate the identities labeled to them by their white neighbors and co-workers. The formation of the immigrant’s sense of “self” is context-specific as it depends on the social construction and the everyday experience of race, ethnicity, gender and class within

that particular diasporic and host population. “Self” remains a matter of the psyche, but identity is constructed by means of social acts and consciously strategic exercises that help this community negotiate their foreignness as they seek distinctiveness through “symbolic ethnicity” (Bhatia 2007, p. 222), cultural practices that demarcate and authenticate the group without racial stigma. Bhatia points out that due to a process of adaptive assimilation, where the immigrants are being simultaneously advantaged and undervalued in U.S. society, the immigrant’s “deliberative acts of agency” (p.3), conscious and strategic assertions, are played out daily in everyday cultural practices that justify, deny, deflect, accept, or resist conventional ideologies of racial demarcation through social interactional processes. Bhatia also points out to how the process of construction of the immigrant’s identity and the “self” is a “dialogical” process, where the individual creates and recreates the identities of her or his self through a dialogue, with multiple “I’s” being centered as they interact with multiple agencies and individuals whose identities may also change with context. The formation of this sense of “self” is thus processual and is flexible, multifaceted and agentive as there are constant negotiations with the dominant ethnic groups within the milieu of inequality and marginality, marked by racial and class hierarchies. This ‘self’ is flexible as this notion of identity is constantly changing depending on the immigrant’s interactions with the host community and it is agentive as this ‘self’ is not simply defined by the host community. Rather, their ‘Indianness’ interacts with the ‘foreignness’ to produce a hybrid self - the negotiated identity.

Contrastingly, Rangaswamy (2000) notes that the very identity of ‘diasporic’ community indicates that though these people have common roots, they are in a state of exile and she claims that this is appropriate to the study of Indians around the world since the central source or homeland, India, remains a defining aspect of their identity. This was also highlighted by Padmaja (2013, 2015) who focuses on how the “memories of the past from the

motherland” (Padmaja 2013, p. 25 & 29), the nostalgia of not only a “geographical physical place” but also about a constructed “psychological cultural space” (p. 25 & 29). Padmaja and Smith and Leavy (2008) highlight the creation of “a third space” to evade from the conflicting condition of choosing between the host culture and the home culture as the basis for the construction of the immigrants’ identity. This new identity, seeks to create an amalgamation of the two cultures, an immigrant “double consciousness and in the process is replete with examples of expressions of the “split self” of the immigrant with feelings of occupying an in-between space where one is neither an “insider” nor an “outsider. Jain (2011) investigates the migrants’ desires of accomplishing the “American Dream”, the avenues open to them for doing so and the consequences of failing to do so. This process of Americanization, - “one among a globalized set of processes representing how people negotiate being part of a collective” according to Jain, “reflect[s] the evolving cultural and material investments of different constituencies” (Jain 2011, p. 12). Jain claims that this narrative changes as well as mirrors cultural processes, and she demonstrates how aspects of (immigrant) identity, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and nationality are shaped by South Asians' accommodation of and opposition to the mainstream American culture.

While discussing how community formation happens among the diasporic Indians in the U.S., several scholars highlight the importance of religion (Kurien 2014; Rangaswamy 2000), ethnicity (Judge 2015; Kurien 2014) and political participation (Janardhan 2013; Kurien 2014; Judge 2015) among the Indian diaspora. Religion and ethnic ties play a central role in social, economic, and political processes surrounding migration. Kurien highlights how religion shapes migration patterns, remittance use, forms of political mobilization (particularly to combat racial profiling), reception and social incorporation of new immigrants into receiving societies and the process of community building itself. She claims that, religion can outline migration patterns by decisively influencing societal structures such

as the social location of groups within society, which in turn influences the major characteristics of groups and gives rise to differential state policies toward them. Religion plays a central role in the incorporation of immigrants not just through personal faith, religious institutions, and communities, but through the intersection of the religiously infused identities and concepts of secularism of the United States and home countries that can profoundly impact the political incorporation of immigrants and their mobilization patterns. Majority/minority religious status in the homeland can affect activism around homeland issues, while majority/minority religious status in the host countries can mould racial attitudes and self-identification in different ways.

In light of the above literature, the research questions that I seek to answer through this study are - What cultural processes does the Indian diasporic community specifically employ to create a sense of 'community', a 'home away from home'? How do the members of the Indian diasporic community negotiate the processes of cultural meaning-making, in relation to the culture of their home country? What role does gender, in connection with ethnicity, religion and race play in this work of recreating the Indian diasporic community and culture among the rural U.S. Indian diaspora?

## CHAPTER 3

### INDIAN DIASPORA IN THE RURAL U.S. TOWN

Indians are the second-largest immigrant group in the country after Mexicans, and ahead of those born in China, the Philippines, and Vietnam. According to the last census conducted in 2010, Indian Americans are amongst the fastest growing immigrant groups, increasing exponentially over the last few years, with the total headcount of 2,846,914 people. As of 2013, this accounted for 4.7 percent of the 41.3 million foreign-born population.<sup>4</sup>“A ‘recompilation’ of this census has put the total number of Indian immigrants at 3,183,063” (Ninian 2012). The population has grown exponentially since the 1970s, especially after President Johnson signed the INS Act of 1965, eliminating per-country immigration quotas and introducing immigration on the basis of professional experience and education. With the U.S. technology boom of the 1990s, the largest influx of Indians happened between 1995 and 2000, making Indians one of the largest ethnic groups legally immigrating to the United States. (Ninian, 2012)

Due to these reasons, the Indian diaspora in the U.S. has been the focus of a lot of government and academic attention on migration policy related studies, diaspora studies, studies on culture and so on. However, even a cursory glance at this literature is enough to suggest that a large part of this literature is concentrated on Indians living in the large metropolitan areas of United States - urban areas with robust ethnic enclaves. This is possibly caused by the fact that the largest of U.S. cities (Top three - greater New York City, Chicago, and San Jose metropolitan areas) have harbored the largest Indian immigrant population<sup>5</sup>.

However, a substantial Indian immigrant population also resides beyond the major metropolitan areas, but there is little research focused on them. Through this study, I address

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<sup>4</sup>(<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/indian-immigrants-united-states>).

<sup>5</sup>(Migration Policy Institute tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's pooled 2010-2014 American Community Surveys - <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-immigrant-population-state-and-county>).

this empirical gap in the literature by focusing on the process of diasporic Indian community formation in a small rural town in the American mid-west.

The town from where I draw the data for this paper is located in Jackson County in the Southern Illinois region. It is a small rural/university town with a total population of 30,069 people, within which 1.21% are Asian Indians.<sup>6</sup> 62% of the population is white.<sup>7</sup> According to a report published in a local newspaper, Daily Egyptian, Asian Indians are the largest international community here, with about 300 families in the Southern Illinois region. The Indian community in the region is a vibrant and growing community. It actively invests in cultivating and maintaining its immigrant identity by recreating Indian cultural, religious and social traditions and spaces. At the same time, it seeks to influence local affairs within the larger host society by actively participating in the affairs of the local community and in the local events. The Indians living in the region are largely comprised of professors and non-teaching employees at the local research university, physicians and mental health therapists, lawyers and local business owners.

The community seeks to maintain its Indian cultural identity by practicing Indian music, classical dance and art and organizing events on days of national importance in India like the Indian Independence Day and by seeking to pass onto their American-born children some of their cultural values from back home. It has also recreated “Indian” spaces in this white town by constructing a Hindu temple, opening two Indian restaurants that are also frequented by the locals in the region, thus popularizing the Indian cuisine and culture.

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<sup>6</sup><http://zipatlas.com/us/il/city-comparison/percentage-indian-population.htm>

<sup>7</sup><https://suburbanstats.org/population/illinois/how-many-people-live-in-carbondale>

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS

To answer my research questions about the process of Indian diasporic community building, I conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the Indian community in town and multi-sited ethnography at the various events conducted by the community. This allowed me to observe and understand how the Indians in the region constructed a sense of a 'home' in a 'foreign' land and how the process is gendered, racialized and ethnicized. Talking to people who were invested in the process of diasporic community building especially provided insight into the specific processes that individuals employ to negotiate their experience of community building and how individual identity markers shaped the process. At the same time, during my ethnographic visits, observing community members being actively engaged in the processes of community building by organizing Indian dance and music events, celebrating Indian religious and secular festivals, gathering together for picnics and organizing and taking their children to 'Sunday school' for Indian cultural education, I gained insight into the way the community members come together to ensure that their ethnic Indian identity remains alive amidst their 'American' lifestyles.

I conducted twenty in-depth, open-ended, interviews with Indian community members who were part of either the student population at the university or were family members residing in the region. Ten respondents were international graduate students from India studying at the local university, while the other ten were members of families living in the region. While not all of these family members were associated with the university, three were professors, two were non-teaching staff at the university, three were physicians, one was a counselor, and the last a research scientist working at a federal agency in the region. Studying both students and family members gave me an idea about the process of community building from multiple perspectives. Also, ten respondents were men with another ten being

women. Eighteen respondents had direct Indian origin and two were from the neighboring countries, Nepal and Pakistan but with roots in India. These two respondents played an extremely active part in the Indian community and considered themselves and were considered by others in the community to be integral to the local ethnic diasporic culture. Inclusion of their experiences added an interesting angle to the narrative of diasporic community building because they show how immigrants forge new identities as they live in host countries (Bhatia 2007; Richards 2008; Rangaswamy 2000; Hall 2003).

I first recruited respondents through emails, using the Indian Student Association listserv (emailing list) and through personal contact for the family members. The sample was purposive, and I used snowballing as a technique of participant recruitment. I use pseudonyms to protect individual identities and maintain confidentiality. Interviews lasted from 47 minutes to 4 hours and 2 minutes, with the average being approximately two hours long. The interviews took place in my office, at participants' work places, in their homes, or at my house. These places were most convenient to participants but also allowed the privacy and quiet atmosphere required to conduct and audio record interviews. All the interviews were audio-recorded. Eighteen of the twenty interviews have been transcribed and open-coded so far. Hence, the data for this paper is based on the codes and themes from those eighteen interviews that will be discussed in the 'Findings' section.

I conducted ethnographic observations at meetings, gatherings, events and rehearsals for cultural events conducted by the Indian Students Association and the Indian Association of Southern Illinois, as well as the Hindu Temple and Cultural Society, where many of the organizational events or their planning took place. While I did not originally plan to become a participant observer, community members perceived me as a cultural insider and asked me to participate by commenting on issues being discussed in the meetings, by performing at and/or helping to organize the different events. Being an insider helped me to get a close-up view of

the processes of community building in operation, especially in gaining knowledge about the gendered labor of community organization – something that might not be discernable to/ discussed with a cultural outsider.

Being an Indian woman who relocated to the U.S. for graduate study, though, may have shaped family member's responses towards me as they see students as transient, a more temporary member of the community who may not contribute to the process of community building for a long time. This means, their responses and hence my data might have been impacted by their perceptions of me as a student. Being of a particular ethnic sub-group (Bengali) within the larger Indian community, made my access to the Bengali respondents easier than respondents from other ethnic sub-groups as I already had a rapport established with some of them. However, to minimize selection bias, I tried to purposively limit the number of Bengali respondents in my sample and over-sample other ethnic sub-groups, to acquire a balanced ethnic composition of my sample. This also means that, I was combining my roles of the "insider" and the "outsider" to the Indian migrant community as my ethnic identity automatically might have put me in an ethnic sub-enclave within the larger Indian community. (Rangaswamy 2000)

To incorporate both expected and surprising themes emerging from the data in my findings, I have used both apriori and emergent coding. This allowed me to perceive the elaborate processes the community members engage in for recreating a "home away from home" and see how the processes are gendered, but also influenced by religion, ethnicity and race.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

Three major themes arose from the study that speaks to how the Indian diasporic community develops and maintains itself in this rural U.S. town and what processes are employed by the community members to build a 'home' in this foreign land: (1) An interaction of religion, ethnicity, student/family status and racial dynamics within the host society that influences the immigrant's sense of self and processes of community formation. (2) Gender emerges as the main channel through which the work of community building is organized in terms of who does what to keep the community together. The work of maintaining and 'doing culture' is achieved by 'doing gender'. (3) Socialization and child-rearing done in a specific way within the community emerges as the lynchpin of maintaining the distinctiveness and the Indian identity of the community. I unpack these themes and in turn discuss when and how gender, ethnicity, religion, age and race operate independently from each other and when they operate together. What emerges is a story about gender, religion, ethnicity, race, culture and the elaborate processes of building a diasporic community.

#### **Diasporic Identity and Community Formation Processes: Celebrating Community, Honoring Nation and Temple Practices**

Multiple factors influence the processes of diasporic community building. Among these the main factors that emerged through this study are student/family status of the respondent, religion and temple practices surrounding the Hindus within the community, ethnic identity of the respondent and race relations within the host community. These factors indicate the operation of certain processes that help in bringing the community members together into creating a 'home away from home.' These processes can be identified as – 1) community celebrations related to membership practices of the community members. These

refer to certain customary practices or interaction rituals (Collins 2014) engaged in by the community members that, as Collins describes, produces "...a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership" (p. 7). These everyday interactions and specific practices surrounding special community events gradually become ritualized and due to their recurrence generate in-group solidarity and a micro-culture within that group. 2) Narrative and imaginative practices related to reminiscing/talking about and honoring the nation/home country (India) that forms a central aspect of the respondent's identities. These practices also lend themselves to community building. 3) Religious identity of the members and the related temple practices of the Hindu members of the community that connote more social and less religion-based activities of suturing the community together. I elaborate these factors and processes below.

The Indian family members were more committed to the process of community building than students as they believed that they "have a greater stake" in the process. As Prachi, a middle-aged mental health therapist, put it, "*students come and go but we are here to stay*". Thus, the family members represent the more permanent members of the Indian diasporic community and hence take the process of creating a close-knit community, of building a 'home-away-from-home' more seriously. Students on the other hand, are a more fleeting population, as they move out of town after completion of their studies. Hence, the family members feel that the students are more "*casual*" (Prachi, respondent) when it comes to organizing and participating in events for the community. During my visits in the multiple field sites, the family members encouraged me to participate in community events. Several individuals during my field visits and six of the ten family members interviewed explicitly indicated their dissatisfaction at how students take most of the events casually, unlike family members who plan and practice for months to make the community events a success. It is important to note that all the participants who expressed this concern were women. I claim

that this indicates that women thought about the process of community formation more actively and this is because, as will be discussed later, women do most of the groundwork of community building. As Anindita (a middle-aged accountant) states - *“It is often difficult to co-organize community events with students. We need to plan for months, meet regularly, rehearse...but if students are involved in our dances, there are inevitable problems. They have a lot of other engagements and they know they will leave after a few years...Hence, they are not too bothered. But we will be staying here and hence it is very important that we keep our culture alive here through various events”*.

However, this does not indicate that students are not involved in the process of community building at all. In fact, as several participants had mentioned during the interviews, when the only Hindu temple was built in town back in 2013, students and family members had almost equal contribution as it was a big event for the community as it required a lot of effort. Despite differences in the “level of commitment”, similar cultural processes are employed by the family members and the students to build this sense of community, even though the family members might be doing it more consciously than the students. The community as a whole employs both religious and secular tools and a certain re-imagination of the culture ‘back home’, often a “psychological cultural space” (Padmaja 2013) to bind itself together; the “memories of the past from the motherland” (Padmaja 2013, p. 25 & 29) is a theme that often emerges in the data as both students and family members reminisce ‘India’ in a certain way. These practices refer to certain ways in which the nation is narrativized and the homeland is imagined and honored. For students and family members who have immigrated recently, this imagination of what India or Indian culture is, is based on a more contemporary notion of the country. Whereas, for older immigrants, as Anindita, who has lived in the U.S. for more than 26 year now, noted, *“India is frozen in time”*. Similarly, Ahmed (an elderly Professor of Physics, who has lived in the U.S. for 37 years now, noted,

*“When I go back home now I can’t recognize this space anymore...the reality does not match up to the image I like to spin in my mind...the image that my tiny village in India was when I left for my undergraduate studies to Canada”.*

Moreover, due to the nostalgia associated with the motherland, the data is replete with prominent references to the creation of specifically ‘Indian’ spaces being essential to making and keeping the community tight-knit. Respondents made references to visiting the Hindu Temple in town, though different respondents visited it with different frequencies and also at times for different stated purposes. Respondents, who have lived in the region longer than the others, narrated the story of the building of the temple – the Hindu Temple and Cultural Society of Southern Illinois (HTCSSI) in 2013 and the pivotal role that the student –family partnership played in the process of its building. As Prachi put it, the temple *“established a center for the community to better define itself and perhaps grow”*. As Prasanna Kumar, a fellow member of the Indian Community and visitor to the temple stated during one of my field visits to the temple, *“The temple here is a very good way to spread awareness to the general public as far as the Indian community is concerned and also to bring people together and get familiar with the culture”*. Rajiv Lal, committee member of the HTCSSI further added, *“The 4,000 square-foot temple, in 1209 E. Walnut St., not only gives hundreds of practicing Hindus a place to pray but also a place to come together.... Without the temple, families or individuals would drive to St. Louis or Nashville to worship, if willing to make the trip.... Or, they would meet in smaller groups in people’s homes. We used to have a monthly meeting at somebody’s house, but beyond that there was no cohesive unit. This basically brings everybody together”*. The temple thus forms a nerve-center for the community to come together and form bonds (Kurien 2014).

The temple and/or the HTCSSI also forms the main location and the organizing force for the celebration of several Indian festivals (religious and/or secular) like the Diwali, Holi,

Navratri, Janmashtami, Shiv Ratri etc. These indicate social activities surrounding temple visits that help in bringing the community together. In addition to this, the families also organize other secular events like the Kite Festival, Dandiya/Garba Night etc. Days of national importance in India like the Indian Independence Day are also celebrated. All of these events play a prominent role in making the Indians in the region feel that “*home is close by*” as Deepa, a student, who now also enjoys family status as she is married and settled in town, noted. Participation in the temple activities, both religious and secular, often acted as “interaction rituals” (Collins 2004) that provided a sense of in-group solidarity by generating emotional energy through the routinization of everyday rituals.

However, even though both family and student members attested to the presence of the temple as an important cultural marker for the community, seven out of the ten students clearly indicate that they mostly go to the temple because there is “free Indian food” available. This did not come up in the interviews with any of the family members. This might further substantiate the family members’ idea of students being more ‘casual’ regarding matters important to the community.

Also, even though it is a temple and has obvious religious functions, it performs several secular functions like showcasing of Indian culture and bringing the Indian (read Hindu) community together. Here, I need to mention that all my respondents, except for one, were born Hindus, though five of them indicated that they are not practicing Hindus (“agnostic”, “atheist”, “paganist/polytheist”, “universal religion”, were the responses from those people, one did not comment). The only person in the sample born Muslim stated “none” as his religion. My results and the prominence given to the temple as being the life-node of the community may stem from the fact that majority of my participants are practicing Hindus (fourteen out of twenty people or 70%). Two respondents in the sample who are not Indians (the Nepali man, Satish and the Pakistani woman, Rita) are both Hindus by religion.

Following Kurien (2014) we can argue here that their common religious identification with the majority religion of the diasporic Indian community could be the reason as to why they are so well integrated in the Indian community, despite not being from India. Also, my ethnography did not reveal any Muslims, Christians or people of other religions who were Indian by nationality as being active members of the Indian diasporic community. As Kurien highlights, religious identification shapes the contexts of reception of the immigrant communities and plays an influential role both in the process of reception of immigrants within the existing diasporic community as well as in the process of community building. So, I argue that the results of this study in the context of religious identification and the social practices surrounding it might have looked very different if my sample was more diverse in terms of religion.

Along with religious and social practices surrounding religion, member's understanding and impressions about 'Indian' culture as a constructed "psychological cultural space" (Padmaja 2013) also seem to affect the process greatly. Elements of Indian culture that get highlighted again and again through both the interviews and the ethnographies are Indian food, clothes, 'Indian spaces' like Indian restaurants, temple, music and dance (film and folk), Bollywood films (especially prominent), festivals (religious and secular), cricket, news, especially political and economic news from "*back home*". These elements of 'Indian culture' seem to help the members 'stay connected' with India and it is these elements that they attempt to partially re-enact within the 'foreign' space to recreate the Indian culture (or their understanding of the Indian culture) and stay together as a community. All these practices act as successful rituals that create symbols of group membership and pump up individuals with emotional energy. As these interaction activities within the diasporic community are routinized, they generate high "emotional energy" and hence often form a sense of group unity, consequently bolstering the feeling of a community. (Collins 2004)

However, it is important to remember that all these factors and processes of community formation do not narrate a tale that is plainly monochromous, that only tells a story of solidarity and bonding. Both religious identification and ethnic identity of the members, which can bond the members together, can also have the potential to create differences among them.

**Ethnic and religious differences and their fracturing effects on the diasporic community.** – Along with religion, ethnicity, specifically the region within India one is from, also seems to be a factor in choosing whom to “*hang out with*” most frequently “*because it is more comfortable when you don’t have to talk in English constantly*” as Rohit, a student, noted. This process is however, more prominently stated by the students, than by the family members, for whom the process operates but is not talked about by everybody. This process is also aptly explained by another student participant, Raj (from Tamil Nadu, India) –

*“I lost intimate connection with the Indian community here after the only Tamil family in town left. I use to hang out with them a lot, go to their house quite frequently or go to St. Louis with them...they would invite me home for any festivals that they were celebrating and also just like that generally, especially whenever they cooked our traditional Tamil food.....I guess a major reason as to why I connected so well with them was because we are from the same region of India and so we understood each other’s customs, rituals, beliefs and most importantly language so well...It’s not been the same since they left, especially because now that I am one of the only two Tamil students on campus”.*

Another respondent, Deepa (from Maharashtra, India), also displayed similar emotions when she said, “*I feel bad around Ganapati festival the most...Last year I cooked a whole Maharashtraian course meal during Ganapati and then I had no one to share it with...me and my husband (she is married to a white American) got bored of eating that for days on end then....Yes there are a lot of Indians on campus whom I could have called, but*

*since only one student I know is Maharashtraian, I am not sure if others would have appreciated the meal, in the traditional sense”.*

This was also evident during the ethnographies when the Indian Student Association (ISA) committee members conducted a major part of the meetings in Telugu<sup>8</sup> since every single ISA committee member, (except the President, Rakesh), was either from Hyderabad or from a neighboring region in south India and thus understood and spoke the language.

Rakesh (originally from Rajasthan, living in Maharashtra) expressed his irritation at this fact when he stated, *“Everyone in the Committee is from the South (Southern part of India)...I am the only one from the West...East and the North are not even represented...I feel like an outsider in the meetings sometimes, even though I am the President...they keep on talking in Telugu and that is irritating at times....I want people like you who are not from the South (referring to me) to come up more and more and take charge and be the ISA Board members...we must do something to counteract this domination by the South in the Indian student community here”*. It can be concluded from the data that ethnicity, especially the region/state of India the participants, especially the students are from and their local language plays a major part in deciding which members among the Indian community to form close ties with.

For the family members, however, ethnicity played a more complicated role. Though most of the respondents from the families agreed that they were friendly with most people within the Indian community, irrespective of their ethnic identity, sometimes it did have an impact on who was part of the closed circle, the “closer group” – with whom they tend to interact on a regular basis, especially during the informal events like small gatherings at

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<sup>8</sup>Telugu is a Dravidian language native to South India. It is the primary language in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, and is also spoken by significant minorities in other southern states of India.

private residences. As Anindita expressed, *“Of course as the larger Indian community we know everyone....we are friendly with everyone. The big events involve everyone in the community. But not everyone is my FRIEND (respondent’s emphasis). Friendships happen with people who are like you, who understand your local culture, your language.....In private functions, we can’t call everyone....suppose we want to watch a Bengali movie together or listen to Tagore’s songs or want to eat Panta-bhaat<sup>9</sup> one day...the non-Bengalis just won’t get it....it’s not their fault but they cannot appreciate the things we do as their culture is so different from ours, despite both of us being from India”*.

The case of Satish from Nepal along with his wife, Sama, a Canadian of Indian origin, presents an interesting exception. The couple seemed to be ubiquitous in most formal events as well as in private, small-scale gatherings in people’s homes which were organized along ethnic lines. As Anindita put it, *“Yes, they are not Bengalis, in fact, not even Indians...but they know the Bengali language and customs and are they really nice people...hence they are always invited and the young couple always shows up”*. This again highlights the fact that for the migrants, identity formation is a variegated process and the immigrant identity is “an emergent phenomenon” (Richards 2008; Bhatia 2007), formed from multiple sources.

Moreover, three among the ten family members interviewed claimed that they were more ‘international’ than Indian or belonging to a specific ethnic sub-group. As Madhura K informed, *“I do not always like to hang out with people from my ethnic community, the Telugus...also not just within the Indian community itself...I feel it restricts me...If I am living in a different country, why should I not take that as an opportunity and expand my circle of friends and therefore my experiences in life? In fact, sometimes in the Indian, especially Telugu gatherings, I feel quite uneasy now as I often do not identify with their concerns...”*

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<sup>9</sup> A rice-based dish, prepared by soaking rice in water overnight. Traditionally served in the morning with salt, onion and chili. It is consumed in Bangladesh and the eastern Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar and Assam in India.

Madhura K's feelings were supported by Dolly, now an Assistant Professor in her mid-thirties when she said, *“Within the community, let's put it this way, I provide the perfect demography - I'm a mom to an 8 year-old son and a wife to a professor here, so I was expected to behave and dress up in a certain way. But my identity is more intellectual and international and I was more of a research scholar, that took precedence over my identity as a wife of a professor, which was both disarming and non-identifying for a lot of Indian and specifically Bengali women who are here....Of course there have been moments of interactions, I must say, one of my best friends here, she is an intellectual, she is a professor and she is married to an American guy, she's also Indian, and at the same time international. I fall into the zone where I'm Indian but I'm more at ease with my girlfriends who are African American and I regularly interact with them, so I do not do that with Indians or Bengalis, of course I do that with that one friend. I do not have very many, married or unmarried, Indian girlfriends, who I regularly go out with...”*

Another interesting exception is presented by a male student, Anustup, who kept on indicating that more than an 'Indian community', he believes he is a member of a “South Asian community”. As Anustup states, *“Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis...oh and also Sri Lankans....we form the South Asian community here. I identify more with that community...and among that mostly with Bangladeshis...probably because being a Bengali from India, I speak the same language as Bangladeshis and we share many similar cultural traditions...I also speak Hindi decently well and can identify with Pakistanis as well...In fact, I think I have had more Pakistani and Bangladeshi roommates than Indian roommates.”*

Anustup's views are especially captivating as he attempts to carve out a trans-ethnic and trans-national “South Asian” identity. Yet, he feels, he connects well with people from Bangladesh due to shared language and customs. This further proves how diasporic identities are processual (Hall 2003, Lowe 2003) and are “an emergent phenomenon” (Richards 2008;

Bhatia 2007), carved out of ties that are formed both in the host society and out of pre-existing ties from the country of origin.

However, just as religion and ethnicity are seen to be an integrating force in acting as a glue that brings the community together, it is also a potential source of fracturing of solidarity within the community. In case of religion, this fracturing is not only between Hindus and non-Hindus but between the “more ritualistic” and the “less ritualistic” among the Hindus. As Madhura K, put it, *“I just felt like it (building the temple) created sub-groups in the community and it has splintered the community.... No, not just in terms of religion, even within a religion, even among the Hindus.....The more ritualistic versus non-ritualistic. So what has happened is that I have told you that mechanism that we had, every third Sunday everybody would gather at someone’s place...that just went away..... So now only the more like hardcore, ahh I would say people who are very ritualistic...that group is now in the temple and everybody else is no longer there... Yeah, it’s no longer personal..... it was very personal in the past... somebody would host it in their house and there would be like say on a low turn-out it would be eighty-five people coming... otherwise it may be a hundred and thirty....But now you go to the temple....Last Sunday, or the weekend before there were like maybe 25-30 people....so it’s just a sub-group now that is doing all the events....”*.

The ethnic sub-enclaves formed within the larger community also simultaneously promote small group bonding and solidarity within the ethnic sub-group but at the same time divide people within the larger Indian community into smaller groups. Thus, ethnic identity also has the potential to be both a factor of solidarity and fracturing within the community.

It is however important to note here that the consciousness of these ethnic sub-identities often take a back seat when the community members are faced with negative racial dynamics within the host society. Some of the respondents also spoke about their personal experiences of having faced racial micro-aggressions as members of the diasporic

community. Satish, the physician from Nepal stated his experience of racism in his workplace – *“So, people were talking about politics, ...and I just gave my opinion... they were talking about George W. Bush and Obama...Something about America's image in the world and I just gave my two cents saying, honestly, the way George W. Bush did things I think he became the number one reason why people around the world hated America. This one doctor flew into a complete rage and went out of control saying, how dare you say that about MY President...Interesting thing as he wasn't even president at that point. Obama was, right? But regardless, he's like how dare you say that about my president? Get out of this country! You hate America, get out! I'm like, I never said I hate America. I just talked about people's perception but okay.... All right, I bit my tongue and I let it go..... But then when this happened the other Indian and Pakistani doctors supported me and tried to calm the doctor down”*.

Indu, a middle-aged female pediatrician, highlighted some forms of racial micro-aggressions that the community members face. She stated –*“Some people here think that all Indians are the same. They completely homogenize us even though people from different parts of India are so different. We all have to bear the brunt of jokes about our curries, and saris and accents when we speak English.”*

Another male student, Ritwik stated his personal experience– *“So my friend and I went to this shrimp festival happening right outside the town a few months back. We met an elderly man there who seemed really nice...he was very jovial...He chatted with us for a long time as we were eating and drinking beer...He sat with us and chatted...and before leaving he said – Welcome to America, just don't blow it up! We both were shocked....Then we realized that my friend had a beard like Muslims do....he must have mistaken us for Pakis...Pakistanis...”* An analysis of these racial micro-aggressions drives home the point that the immigrant's sense of self is shaped by the labels that are attached to the community by

the members of the host society (Bhatia 2007) and the immigrants have to negotiate with these labels to carve out an identity that lies somewhere in between the ascribed identity and the felt sense of identity of the immigrant. This falls in line with what Smith (2008) refers to as the immigrant “double consciousness” and the intervening “third space” of immigrant identity. Overall, as the data indicates, despite the concerted efforts of the community members, lines of dissidence are active along the lines of student/family status, religious practices and ethnic/regional cultural identity of the individuals and also around gender, which I will touch upon in the next section of the paper. These intersectional identities play the contradictory role of both facilitating and impeding diasporic community formation.

### **Who Does What? Emotional Labor, “Doing Gender” and “Doing Culture”**

The Diwali Night is largest annual community event for the Indians in town. It celebrates the festival of lights and is an evening of music and dance where the members of the community get together, enjoy the performances by community members and Indian food. Men play a major role in organizing such ‘official’ events, which also include Holi or the festival of colors, the Indian Independence Day, the India Night and most of the official temple functions. These are large events that attract almost the entire Indian community and are funded by the community through individual sponsorships and some by selling tickets. The ethnography into these events show that these official roles include planning of the events, handling the finances, contacting different vendors for food, decoration and so on.

However, along with these ‘official events’, there seems to be a plethora of informal events that also keep the community together. Frequent (mostly weekly) informal gatherings and get togethers happen around watching Bollywood/Indian regional films at private residences. Also such gatherings happen around watching the ‘unofficial National sport’ of India, cricket, together at private residences. These get togethers help the members to know each other more personally as they involve a smaller number of people and always involve

food (often through potlucks). The food shared is almost always “*some form of Indian food and not American pizzas*”, as Rita indicated during one of my conversations with her while conducting my ethnographies. Having picnics (small private ones as well as large ones involving families and students), potlucks, cook outs also seem to be a prominent feature.

Organizing and participating in events showcasing Indian culture (mostly Indian music and dance), with a strong focus on charity also came up majorly during the ethnographies. For example, strong links seem to exist between the Indian community and the ‘Hospice of Southern Illinois’, a not-for-profit organization working to provide care for the elderly. The community members regularly perform Indian dances in the events organized by Hospice for fundraising. As Prachi put it, “*this is our chance to give back to the American community that has welcomed us and we have great fun and develop a great community spirit in the process...what more could we ask for!*”

A probe into who is more involved in these ‘informal’/‘unofficial’ events, shows that women seem to play a major role in organizing the “unofficial” events. They are the ones who participate actively in these events and also do majority of the groundwork for these events. Gender is thus central to the process of community building among diasporic communities as it dictates who does what in keeping the community together.

The work of diasporic community building is especially organized consistent with conventional gender ideologies and roles. Even though both men and women participate actively in the work of community building, different kinds of work are expected of them. As indicated earlier, men play a major role in organizing the “official”/formal events and are often the decision-makers. Women, on the other hand, are actively involved in either taking care of the ‘cultural aspect’ of those formal events (e.g. organizing dance and music shows that showcase Indian culture) and/or play major roles in organizing the “unofficial”/“informal” events like picnics, potlucks, cookouts, informal gatherings and get

togethers in private residences. These are more frequent than the “official events” and hence require more continuous work. Also, the work of organizing “cultural events” seems in line with the notion that women seem to be “doing culture” as they seem to bear the responsibility of transmitting the culture from “back home” to the next generation (I return to this theme later) and also of letting the host community know about Indian culture. This seems to be in tandem with conventional gender ideologies that consider women to be the bearers and transmitters of the group’s culture. Additionally, organizing the small get-togethers, picnics, cook-outs requires a constant employment of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) and forms the “second shift” or “triple shift” for women (Hochschild 1989) along with managing paid work and household chores. It is these small, informal but frequent events that seemed to be the instrument that brought “*members within the small close group*” closer. As Anindita pointed out, “*Unlike in the larger events like India Night, Diwali...the major celebrations, in these small get-togethers we really get to know one another, form bonds...exchange stories, share our sadness, nostalgia for home...these are really important...what keeps the community together....what keeps the people within the community who matter to us, the friends together...*”. Such informal gatherings are almost always planned, organized and executed by the women, though men also participate in them. Women put in a lot of emotion work both in organizing and participating in these frequent informal events as a lot of emotional exchange happens in these events, as the previous quote from Anindita, points out. It is through such informal events that the community gets crystallized.

Although women seem to be doing a major part of the ground work in bringing the community together, traditionally almost all the top positions within the ISA, IASI, HTCSSI have been held by men. The leadership roles are thus ascribed to the men. When they are held by women (like the newly elected IASI committed that has more women than women), it is often because the men were not “available” or “interested” in occupying them. As Madhura

K put it - *“the decisions are taken by men but the actual work done by women”*.

Thus, according to some of my participants, a clear gender divide exists within the community in terms of who does what work for community building. The divide has real economic consequences too – women, doing the time-consuming, arduous groundwork (*“donkey work”*, according to Madhura K) of community building frees up time for men to engage in economic pursuits. A research project manager in her early forties, Debarati, pointed out: *“...all men have full-time jobs, whereas their wives may not...and men by the time they go back home after eight or ten hours on the job, they don't really feel the need to contribute as much time because their spouses have done it...you don't contribute individually but as a family...”*

Additionally, there is more stress on work by women in community organization. My ethnography revealed this time and again. For e.g. during the welcome picnics organized by the Indian families for the incoming students to the University each year, Assistant Professor of Physics, Dr. Sambit Saha informed the new crop of students – *“This is small community and we are always there to help...We know you are far away from home, so please do seek help whenever you feel the need...But, I am always very busy, so contact my wife...she will be of more help than I would be....she is anyways better at these things than I am”*. It is important to note here that his wife was a really busy mental-health therapist/counselor whom I had interviewed (Prachi). Hondagneu-Sotelo (2014) highlights how the creation of immigrant spaces in Southern California is a gendered and racialized process. The following quote from Madhura K unambiguously explains the stark gender divide in the work involved in community building within the Indian community -

*“Absolutely....100% gender divide exists within the Indian community...they are not comfortable with female community leaders even though they expect the groundwork of getting the community together to be done by women...even when they built the temple, they*

*sent the invitation out only to the husbands..and I spoke up you know...I said when the Pujas<sup>10</sup> were held in people's houses who did all the donkey work?...the cooking, cleaning...and then you don't include us in the email..that's utter nonsense...women do all of the work...Also there is a Puja book...and some persons think that they know better...even though the women do a better job...they know the language better, write it better, design it better...but the men always do that...Why? Because their names can be seen on it...and all invisible but tedious jobs will of course be done by the women...*” This quote highlights how maintaining the diasporic community operates along a clear gender-based division of labor and hence the process as Hondagneu-Sotelo (2014) highlights is clearly gendered.

A slightly more moderate view was expressed Debarati as she commented on how the roles of men and women in the community are “*different but equal*”. She noted, “*Women are at an advantage as lot of women in the Indian community here do not have eight hour jobs...so they are at home and can devote more time to doing work for the community....and men by the time they go back after six or eight hours, they don't really feel the need to contribute as much because their spouses have done it...you don't contribute individually but as a family...*” This marks almost a contrasting view from the critical view employed by Madhura K but highlights the orthodox gender ideology of men being the bread-winners and women being the care-givers.

Another instance of emotional labor performed by women/wives within the diasporic Indian community can be observed under conditions of economic duress – during times of unemployment or when their husbands are in the process of looking for a job after completion of a degree. Married Indian men, even when they are students, tend to bring their wives to the U.S. more than married women bringing their husbands, which also seem to fall in line with orthodox gender ideologies. However, after the completion of studies, many of

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<sup>10</sup>Hindu religious rituals and ceremonies.

these “non-resident aliens”<sup>11</sup> go through a period of economic insecurity when they are looking for a job. During these times, elaborate psychological means are employed by the wives of these men to help them secure employment and provide emotional support and boost confidence. As Meghna, a married woman in her early thirties whose husband was looking for a job at the time of the interview, stated, *“I provide emotional support by always being there when he needs me emotionally...I try to soothe his fears of not finding a job before his OPT term expires.”* Such processes are highlighted in the literature too (Rao 2017). Further, the data shows that even if wives (who are on dependent visas and hence unable to secure work) manage to secure employment (mostly through extra-legal means) and the husbands are not earning, there is only moderate sharing of household labor. The women still have to take the ‘double burden’ or perform the ‘second shift’ (Hochschild, 1989). As Meghna added, *“I often find it extremely difficult to manage everything...my work, the home and the added stress of him not having an income now...but I don’t always ask him to share housework with me as he is already so stressed.”* So, despite the constrained economic circumstances caused by immigration coupled with (temporary) unemployment, patriarchal values and notions of housework and the structures of patriarchy remains intact even though it might be negotiated with. Similar processes are highlighted in the literature by Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992, 2014).

### **Child-rearing and socialization**

Another significant finding of the study indicates a conscious effort invested by family members, especially mothers, to ensure that the children (those of Indian origin, born or living for a long while in the US), despite staying away from ‘home’, *“learn about their roots”*. This is achieved by insisting that the children can speak and at times even read the *“mother tongue”* at home, are exposed to Indian religions and festivals, food, dance, music and so on. As one of my participants, Prachi, indicated twice during my ethnography, there is

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<sup>11</sup>Official term indicating the status of legal immigrants who are non-U.S. citizens.

also an effort on behalf of some mothers, including herself to ensure that “*the children are exposed to India not just through Bollywood*”. So the mothers, as primary bearers and transmitters of culture, stress on exposing the kids to Indian folk songs and dances too and thus to a certain notion of ‘India’. So a clear and consistent effort by the mothers to negotiate their children’s experience of Indian culture can be witnessed within the community. In other words, we can say that the mothers can be seen as ‘doing culture’ for their children as they are simultaneously “doing gender” for themselves, by acting according to their prescribed gender role of being bearers and transmitters of culture and thus of the community. As Darling-Wolf (2008) and Vidal-Ortiz (2008) point out, women are actors in cultural identity formation for communities and my study points out that one way of doing this is by negotiating the experience of the parent culture for the children. The mothers actively mediate their children’s experience of both the Indian and American cultures to ensure that they have the “right values” as Indian- Americans. In the process, they play out their gendered role of mothering.

This process of mothers ‘doing culture’ for their children also involves an elaborate process of the community prescribing and proscribing certain activities and roles for the children within the community, and mothers acting as the agents of the community to ensure that the children abide by these. They are involved in the simultaneous process of disciplining of the child and engaging in emotion work towards their children to ensure that these (often unspoken) rules of the community are communicated to and followed by the children. Thus, by transmitting and upholding such norms of the community, women engage in cultural reproduction that serves the community by protecting its distinctive traditions. Women are agents in cultural identity preservation for communities (Darling-Wolf and Vidal-Ortiz 2008) and here the women do that by transferring the norms of the parent culture to the future community members. An example of this can be the dating rules for children within the

community.

Dating “among the kids” is not encouraged by the community as dating as a practice is often considered ‘too American’ and it is believed that it does not form a part of the Indian culture. The idea is that the children will marry partners that their parents choose for them, ideally from within the Indian community, so that the ‘purity’ of the community can be maintained. As Madhura K indicated “... *children are finding it hard to find partners, something that has been totally ignored by the community...so there are many many children not settling down...both girls and boys ...as that mechanism by which you find a partner from the local community, that channel...was never attended to....dating, both within and outside the community is discouraged...they are expected to focus on studies and kept isolated from this world of dating, especially if they are girls... because you are encouraged to focus on school work and things like that....but somehow the expectation is that the children will not marry outside the community...that’s actively discouraged even though people may not say it openly always...*” This indicates that just because the immigrants may be drawn to an ‘American Dream’ they do not simply accommodate but also oppose aspects of the American culture that they feel are non-conducive to their own sense of Indian culture (Jain 2011). Moreover, even if some of the children/young adults are allowed to date, being members of the non-white community, they do not find partners easily. Madhura K added that, “*My son told me that in high school they find out that they are more Indian than they thought,*” *...people are not running to them to date as dating happens by racial lines in high school and the local community will not receive you so easily...it IS always by racial lines...*” As Bhatia (2007) points out, immigrants must interpret/live/negotiate the identities labeled to them by their white neighbors and co-workers. Here, the label of being an “Indian guy” slowly dawned upon the adolescent. Also, we see that in the context of dating, race, national and immigrant identity and gender and sex (e.g. separate dating rules for boys and girls

within the community) come together to decide whether or not and who can they date. As Madhura K added, *“they are concerned about dating especially if they are girls. There’s a little bit more emphasis on that than if they are boys. So, yes gender definitely plays a role here...”* Thus gender of the individual and racial dynamics within the host society also play a role in this process of community formation and who becomes a part of the community and how.

Mothers have the primary responsibility of enforcing these dating rules on the children, especially on girls. Fathers, on the other hand, serve as observers, gatekeepers of the community; whereas mothers are the active agents ensuring that this happens through a combination of enforcing discipline on the children and through emotion work. An example of enforcing discipline as Mitali, a middle-aged university official stated is mothers saying to the children -*“No, you can’t do that if you want to stay in this house”* and of emotion work is *“sitting with the kids and explaining to them why it is important to maintain these rules.”* She added that *“somehow we feel it’s more comfortable if I do this talking rather than my husband as I am more connected to my children...I think I know them better than my husband does.”* Here, once again we notice that socialization of the second-generation immigrants into the rules of the community and by extension the Indian culture is seen as the primary responsibility of the mothers. So the mothers by “doing gender”, also “do culture”. It is also an extension of the emotion work that the women do for the upkeep of the community. (Hochschild 1979, 1983)

Moreover, dating is particularly important as it represents a perceived threat to the values of family and community as it is looked at as an “American imposition” on Indian values. As Dr. Madhura K, pointed out, *“dating is considered by the community to be one of the most important things that separates us from Americans.”* She adds, *“I know of facilitation sessions that are organized to address this problem that our children face, in*

*larger cities ...very recently we are trying to do something similar but we do not have the resources that they have in big urban areas...so in smaller communities like this such processes are less successful.*” This represents a simultaneous effort to ‘belong in’ and to ‘be different’ from the host community that is characteristic of diasporic, hybrid identities as highlighted in the literature (Jain 2011). This discussion around dating can be used to exemplify what Weinreich (2009) talks about in the context of the processes of creation, sustenance and recreation of identity in contexts of alternative cultural norms that immigrant communities are faced with in the host societies. Dating among teenagers is a cultural norm and an expectation in the U.S. society but not necessarily so in societies in India. Hence, it represents a bone of contention within the diasporic Indian community as the children, who grow up within the host society seek to embrace it as the cultural norm. However, the norms of their parent community contradict this existing norm of the host community. Twin processes of conflict and negotiation occur during this process of acculturation of especially the second-generation immigrant groups into the host culture (Berry 2005).

These processes often serve to suture the community together, just as they have the potential to act as fault lines within the community. Lines of dissidence can also be seen among the parents and children/teenagers due to the stress placed by the community on academic and professional achievement. Anindita explicated this by saying, *“we try very hard to maintain our model minority status with our trophy children”*. As a result of this, low achievers, children who struggle academically are made invisible, forgotten by the community. As Madhura K pointed out, *“...So if a child is successful they will make a big deal about it but the other child is almost invisible and I think that’s wrong....”* Following Jain (2011), it can be argued that such immigrant children represent the failure of the “American Dream”. They are threats to the legitimate existence of the immigrant community within the host society. The fear is that being failures, they cannot prove why they are

‘needed’ in the host society in the first place, if they cannot contribute to it. Hence, there is a clear differential treatment towards such children within the community- an issue that came up strongly in interviews with women and mothers who have raised kids who have not been high achievers and have struggled academically. Also, in none of the interviews with the male members any of these problems that the children/adolescents go through as members of the Indian community came up – these came up only in my interviews with the women/mothers. This also supports the fact that it is women who are primarily in charge of raising successful kids within the community and hence this concern comes up through their interviews again and again. This further indicates that even though the “American Dream” is measured in terms of economic success and seldom linked to the emotion work and the work of community building that women are engaged in, it appears that for the Indian immigrants the success of the “American Dream” depends on these very efforts put in by the women.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Indian family members ‘have a stake’ in actively investing in community building through both formal and informal processes; both religious and secular tools and a certain re-imagination of the culture ‘back home’ are employed by the community to bind itself together; and racial dynamics within the host society play a role in this process of community formation. Elaborate community celebrations and membership practices, certain ways of relating to and honoring the homeland and social activities surrounding temple visits all become ‘interaction rituals’ (Collins 2004) that connote the processes of diasporic community formation. However, despite the concerted efforts of the community members, lines of dissidence are active along gender, age, religious practices and ethnic/regional cultural identity of the individuals. These intersectional identities play the contradictory role of both facilitating and impeding diasporic community formation. Also, a process of mothers having to ‘do culture’ for their children and the simultaneous prescription and proscription of certain activities and roles for the children within the community, often serve to suture the community together, just as they have the potential to act as fault lines within the community.

An elaborate process of cultural importation, meaning-making and negotiation within immigrant communities goes into the process of building a ‘home away from home’ and gender, race, ethnicity, religion and race relations in the host society play a major role in the process. Women are expected to and more often than not perform the emotion work in community building—they invest emotional labor in the day to day acts of tapping into the cultural memory, keeping in touch with community members, raising children in ways that the community prefers/prescribes, to ensure that the community is stitched together. On an average, they are more hands-on in the process of community building. Also, more emotional labor is expected of and invested by them, during the process.

This study raises larger questions about the connections between gender and immigration and immigrant community formation. It demonstrates how communities are structured along unequal gender relationships and how rearing and socializing the next generation of community members in a certain way perpetuates those relationships. It also highlights how for immigrants the “American Dream” may be approximated via cultural production through women’s gendered and emotion work. And doing this cultural work is accomplished by women while doing gender in a way that relies and reifies women’s roles as good Indian wives and mothers and bearers of the community values.

Having a sample with religious diversity may help us better investigate the key role that religion plays in the process of diasporic community formation. My sample lacked religious diversity and hence might have provided me with limited data on how different religious affiliations may cause immigrant community members to have differential experiences of being in a “home away from home”. Further studies with more diverse samples are required to assess that. Also, even in diasporas, as in host societies, there are “...some people who don’t care for a community...they do not show up or participate in any of the events,” as Vaishali, a thirty-five year old home-maker observed during one of my ethnographic visits to the temple. Having such people in the sample can add an important dimension to what it means to be *apart* from the diasporic community, especially in a small rural, white U.S. town.

Findings from this study can serve as a starting point for further research that explores the gendered, racialized, religious and ethnic aspects on community building among diasporas. This is especially significant in the current socio-political milieu in the U.S. when anti-immigrant sentiments and xenophobic attitudes are employed in the government/official discourses and by the public and immigration and immigrant communities are at the hotbed of politically charged discussions. Understanding immigrant community formation and how

it is impacted by the host community and how it in turn affects the host community, are essential in formulating successful immigration policies that are integrative in nature, especially in diverse societies like the U.S.

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