

**“Big Struggles”: Narratives of Immigration, Education, and Work among
Transnational Hindusⁱ**

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Observations of empirical data can be misleading. If we look, for example, at the Gupta family we would see that they have decisively established their lives here in the United States. Mr. Gupta arrived in this country from India in 1971 to pursue a master's degree in engineering and stayed to complete his Ph.D. During this time his parents arranged his marriage and he brought his new wife to live with him in Raleigh, North Carolina, where he was attending school. After he finished his degree he got a faculty position at a large state school in another state in the southeast. While he was teaching he and his wife had a daughter and a son, both American citizens. Eventually he and his wife became naturalized citizens, he got a job in the private sector, and the family moved to the Atlanta area. Both of the children excelled at school and attended Georgia's premier engineering university. In their mid-twenties, the Guptas' children are now starting high-status, well-paid careers. In many ways, the Guptas are living the typical American dream.ⁱⁱ

Yet, despite their success in American educational and occupational spheres, the Guptas socialize and gather for religious practices with other Hindu immigrants in the Atlanta area. Additionally, they visit relatives in India approximately every two to three years as work schedules allow. These visits provide an opportunity for the Guptas to bring gifts to family members and purchase items in India that are either unavailable or much more expensive in the United States. In traveling across the oceans to India, the Guptas remain tied to family there and ensure that they can live in the United States in a way that simulates life in India.

In many ways the Guptas and their community have transplanted and adapted their traditions to life in the United States. Yet their narratives tell a more complicated story in

which their connections to India run much deeper than what appears in their actions. In this paper I will examine the ways that the narratives the Guptas and members of their family and social networks tell about immigration, education, and work help create a community that is intimately connected despite the vast distances that separate its members. The elements of the community's narratives that contribute to members' overall experiences of being transnational are ambivalence, comparison, and intention within the context of work, family and *dharma*.ⁱⁱⁱ

I draw on narrative and performance studies in my analysis of the Guptas' and their community's discourse, understanding that narrative performances allow us to observe the interplay between structured cultural templates and individual expression. It is in these processes that individuals and communities partly engage in identity formation and finding a place in the world.^{iv} In this paper I pay particular attention to the ways community members use language to negotiate and express their experiences.^v

Mr. Gupta's Narrative

The following narrative Mr. Gupta told me demonstrates the three elements that help construct a transnational community and identity.

Well, after finishing school, uh, I came here for master's program basically, two year program. Then advisor talked to me into, into uh pursuing the, the uh the Ph.D. program. You know, my initial intention was to do two years and go back and he said "no, you are brightest, brightest students, we need you," something like that and "we have some research money, basically, and a project for you to work on." And that was pretty convincing to me and I said, "it'll take another, another three years or so." So I started doing Ph.D. program and then uh, uh it's one thing after another thing. After, after finishing my Ph.D. program I did apply to, to schools in India. And had a faculty job offer from there, the school I went to initially. And then I had applied over here too, uh, and I had a faculty position job over here too. So I had a choice to go there or, or stay here and it was a big struggle, you know, mine to decide whether should I go or here. Then I decide

maybe I just finished my school maybe I should uh work here like a year or two and get some more experience, you know, practical experience. How things are in professional life because I had been a student so far, you know, in the school. And beside, beside studies I was also taking part in the extracurricular activities there. I was the president of the international student body and came in touch with a lot of, lot of international students over there at campus. And I wanted to get some professional experience, you know. Uh, and after completing those uh years then I said maybe another year another year and things never...got materialized, you know. And we still think maybe after I retire now maybe I'll retire over there, you know go back over there. We'll never know until it happen...So it's like one thing after another thing, you know. It's not, didn't have any inten...initial intention basically then had children over here and children education then we stayed for children basically. All those kind of excuses you can say...You know one after another one.

This excerpt is from a spring 2000 interview I did with the Guptas soon after they agreed to participate in my study. I had known them for a year but had never heard their immigration stories. I arranged to meet them at their suburban Atlanta home on a Sunday afternoon and, after some initial conversation, I asked if I could tape a conversation about their lives. Sitting at the kitchen table for nearly an hour and a half, Mr. Gupta began describing his immigration and adjustment experiences after an initial prompting from me. Mrs. Gupta remained quiet for the most part during his turn, laughing at times and adding some information as the conversation turned to her in-laws' visit to the United States. After we finished this portion of the conversation I asked Mrs. Gupta to describe her experiences coming here. While her husband's description focused on his experiences as a student, Mrs. Gupta spoke much more about her religious practices and communities than about adjustments she made and experiences she had in first arriving here, reflecting both her own interests and her knowledge of my interests.

The entire conversation exhibited certain narrative elements that were common in shorter conversations with the Guptas as well as narratives other members of their community told me. First, speakers often express ambivalence over the decision to come

and/or stay in the United States. This ambivalence is expressed in several ways including, as Mr. Gupta does in the excerpt above, shifting from acknowledging his choice and agency in deciding to stay to portraying himself in a passive role in continuing his education and finally taking a job here. Second, immigrant narratives inevitably display some comparisons, including comparisons between their experiences and others' experiences, between India and the United States, and between the present and the past. In addition to internal comparisons within a narrative, each narrative can be compared externally to other narratives. Finally, narratives can also reveal speakers' intentions.

Ambivalence

Mr. Gupta's narrative portrays his decision to come and stay in the United States as a difficult one that requires a compromise that will either privilege family or work. If he never left Delhi or returned there after receiving one or both degrees, he would have more access to his large family, remaining an integral part of the extended family networks that exist there to this day. Eventually, however, he decides to stay for educational and occupational opportunities. There is only one moment in our excerpt in which Mr. Gupta admits that the decision was difficult; it was a "big struggle." His words and methods of conveying his story verbally enact this statement. Although at points in the extended interview Mr. Gupta may portray his immigration experience casually, his talk of a "big struggle" is indicative of the larger consequences of his decision.^{vi}

A few minutes before the excerpt above, Mr. Gupta says that his parents sacrificed their feelings so that he could pursue higher education here. The implication is that his

parents, and perhaps other family members, sacrificed something as well for Mr. Gupta to come here for his engineering degree. Family members on both sides – those who immigrate and those who stay behind – compromise their emotions and the intimacy of regular contact with close kin when a member of the family crosses the ocean. On the other hand, the lure of education and the job is strong enough to pull Mr. Gupta here and keep him here.

Mr. Gupta's discourse itself reveals ambivalence and a lack of certainty about his decision to stay here. His word choice combined with shifting from portraying himself as an active agent to a passive one and back again expresses some doubt about his choice. He has never fully committed to settling permanently in the United States. First, despite his "initial intention" of returning to India after two years Mr. Gupta was "talked...into" continuing for a doctorate. He had made a decision but his advisor's offer "was pretty convincing" and therefore, going against his initial plans, Mr. Gupta stays for the Ph.D. There are three reasons Mr. Gupta provides us for why he was convinced: his advisor told him he was a bright student, there was research money available, and there was a project that he could do for his degree. These are good reasons to keep him from returning to his family and so he is convinced to stay for the three years or so it will take him to complete this phase of his education.

Mr. Gupta glosses over the time and work that it took to pursue the Ph.D., referring to the process in one phrase: "So I started doing Ph.D. program." Before he tells us of the decision making process he went through at the end of the program he inserts, "it's one thing after another thing," a phrase that he repeats verbatim towards the end of the excerpt and paraphrases at the end of it. This phrase indicates a certain lack of agency –

that, despite all of his intentions and plans, outside factors keep detracting him from his goals. He, however, is not completely without responsibility for what happens to him. It is his “choice” and he will “decide” if he returns to India or stays in the United States. He says that it was “*mine* to decide whether I should go or [stay] here.” He has given himself options by applying for positions in both locations. He has the ability to make the decision because he has been offered employment in India and the United States.

He then portrays his decision as a temporary one. This is a major shift in his discourse. At the beginning of this conversation, Mr. Gupta says he came here solely to pursue “higher education”. This enabled him to convince his parents and possibly himself also. The adjustments he made to living in the United States were secondary to his education. Yet somehow his orientation changes because once he has successfully finished his higher education and is positioned to take a prestigious job back home he begins to think about experiencing life here before he returns.^{vii} He wants to know “[h]ow things are in professional life [in the United States] because [he] had been a student so far.” His coming here was just for getting his degree but his staying here is about more than that. He makes what seems to be a random statement about his participation in campus activities and being the president of the international student’s association. These facts would actually have no bearing on staying in the United States because he would not stay at this school. The job offer he eventually took was at a school several states away. So why does he mention his extracurricular activities? Perhaps it reveals that although he had come here intending to focus on his education, he also developed a life here outside of academics. During his years in school here, the United States had become more than an empty place that provided him an education. It

evolved into a place peopled with friends and other students with whom he had developed personal relationships. Although not as much of a pull as his family would be, having some sort of social connections here seem to have played some role in Mr. Gupta's decision to stay here. However, he never expresses this explicitly, concentrating his narrative on his professional development.

Mr. Gupta decides to remain in the United States for "a year or two" for the professional experience it would provide him. In his narrative, Mr. Gupta finishes those years and then simply never returns to live in India. His agency in remaining here for all of these years is particularly ambivalent, as he never refers to any decision to stay permanently. Instead, he thinks year after year that he will return but some external forces are keeping him here. He thinks that he'll return although there are unnamed reasons for staying. He tells us, "I said okay maybe another year another year." There are moments that he thinks of returning but then thinks he needs one more year of experience here. Additionally, there are external factors that "never...got materialized." We do not know what these factors are and who is supposed to arrange them but the way Mr. Gupta talks about it distances him from the fact that he **has** remained in the United States. He has no role in orchestrating the return back home. In fact, "materialize" has the quality of some sort of force that will magically appear. Mr. Gupta's fate has been placed in the hands of unseen forces.

Finally, Mr. Gupta repeats the phrase "it's...one thing after another thing" reinforcing his lack of agency in the decision to stay for as long as he and his family have. He indicates what some of these "things" are when he mentions that he and his wife had children and then had to stay for their education. Other than these reasons we do not

know why he stayed for so long. What his narrative tells us, by omitting these reasons, is that the details of the process are unimportant. Somehow they stayed. Additionally he mentions that these reasons were “excuses,” indicating that they were not particularly forceful but were useful circumstances to keep them in the United States. Despite his initial intentions and the pull of his family back home, Mr. Gupta has remained in the United States till now, not ever fully committing to staying here.^{viii}

Mr. Gupta portrays the initial decision to come here for his education as firmly his. His advisor, on the other hand, had to convince him to stay for his Ph.D. Finally, the decision to stay for work is undoubtedly his but he only decides to stay for a few more years to “get some professional experience.” He never owns the decision to stay in the United States for the more than twenty years he has stayed beyond that period.

The uncertainty Mr. Gupta expresses about his decision to stay in the United States helps to strengthen his identity as a transnational migrant. He never fully breaks from India because he was not completely convinced to stay here. If he was uncertain about staying and describes his experience of staying in such ambivalent terms, it follows that he still feels the pull of India, and particularly his family that has remained there. We are no longer describing migrants who leave their countries of origin to come here and attempt to recreate those countries in a new place. Mr. Gupta is a transnational migrant who remains connected to his country of origin no matter how long he has been here.^{ix}

Comparison

Another way that transmigrants remain connected to India is through comparison, both explicit and implicit. In the context of their discourses, any description of life in the

United States can be read in implicit comparison to India. Any discussion of visits to India can be read in implicit comparison to the United States and/or to their experiences in India before migration. The context in which members of this community live – having a vast physical and cultural distance from the land of their childhood – allows many of their narratives to be interpreted as comparisons with a remembered past or a remembered India. Interpreting these discourses as comparative can help us understand better how the narratives help to construct their identities as transnational.

In addition to the comparisons internal to discrete narratives, comparing different ways that members of the extended transnational community speak about immigration and settling abroad can help us understand the ways those in India and those living abroad co-construct the transnational experience, sometimes building on each other's narratives, sometimes contradicting other community narratives. The Guptas' conversation about their immigration experiences exist within a genre of immigration stories that they tell other immigrants and their relatives back home who contribute their own experiences to the larger story. Hearing each other's stories, they retell their own narratives in dialogue with each other. There is, therefore, also an implicit external comparison with the stories of other's as they tell their own. We can better understand their narratives intertextually.

Internal Comparison

There are several modes of comparison within the Guptas' ninety-minute conversation, excerpted above, which contribute to their transnational experiences. First the Guptas compare their experiences coming here with Mr. Gupta's parents' experience visiting the

United States. As part of that discussion of the visit, Mrs. Gupta talks about the lack of Indian programming on television at that time, comparing it to the present when the Guptas subscribe to four Indian channels, can rent DVDs of Bollywood movies, and can purchase locally nearly every food product they need for cooking proper Indian food. This comparison of the past and the present is the second mode of comparison in many of the immigration stories I have heard from people who immigrated at least twenty years ago. Finally, the immigration stories inevitably contain a comparison between life in India and life in the United States. The Guptas' immigration story contains all three modes of comparison.

After we had discussed his experiences coming here for about twenty minutes I asked if any family member other than one of his brothers had come to the United States. Mr. Gupta answered that his parents had come for a visit. The following is his and his wife's description of his parents' stay.

Mr. Gupta: Like a, like parents came over here and they hated this place basically, you know to tell you the truth. Means, uh in their opinion, like they came here, they had a ticket, return ticket for two months to stay over here. You know, we stay for two months, but after one month they went back because they say in terms of material worth there's no doubt this place may be at the top of the world basically you know in terms of material luxury and everything but social life is, is way different and I think problem, basically they had what I had when I came here first time. I was young so I had no problem adjusting myself, but for them at old age it's very hard for them to adjust. Cause they wanted, when they go to market they like to see crowd walking up and down the road just like in Chandni Chowk you see over there.^x Here when they go out they don't see nobody in the street walking. That was disappointing to them. They had nobody to talk to. Over there in the evening walk, when you're walking in the evening you say hello to somebody every ten yard, you know a lot of faces, you know in the evening time. They come to your house maybe talk or drink cup of tea basically. And that, that social life was gone, I mean didn't have it over here.

Mrs. Gupta: Transportation was the problem too. They could not go anywhere.

Mr. Gupta: Yeah without...

Mrs. Gupta: They were at home, you know, unless we take them somewhere...

JBS: Right.

Mrs. Gupta: ...or something. That was the, that was the...

Mr. Gupta: See over here when you go outside your house, it's, it's market out there walking distance basically, if your, had to go a little distance then you had some kind of transportation available, you know, rickshaws and all. All public transportations, bus service and other stuff. Over here, you know, you had to have own transportation and they couldn't drive over here so and we were at work so they were feeling bored at home. And TV program, they were different then the program they were used to see over there so they couldn't enjoy that either.

JBS: Uhuh.

Mrs. Gupta: Yeah, at that time the, the Indian satellite programs nothing was here...long time ago. Like fourteen years ago.

Mr. Guptas' parents' experiences are spoken about in sharp contrast to the younger Guptas' experiences. Mr. Gupta begins very strongly saying that his parents "hated this place." Although he does not specify to which place he refers, we can assume that he means this country. He is not referring to the house in which we sat during the conversation because the Guptas have only been in that location for the past six years. His parents visited another home the Guptas owned before. Yet because Mr. Gupta uses "this" we should interpret his use of the deictic term "this" to refer to a place that is common to his parents' visit and the location of our recorded conversation. Because both locations are in the Southern United States we could interpret "this" to mean the South, but I think it is more likely that Mr. Gupta is generalizing "this place" to be the United States and perhaps more specifically, the suburban United States.

Mr. Gupta understands the strength of using the word "hate" as he says, "to tell you the truth" at the end of his statement about his parents' reaction to the United States. Perhaps he thinks that I may be offended by this part of his narrative and he wants to make sure I understand that he is relaying factual information about his parents' feelings toward "this place." He also wants to be clear that this is their reaction and not his by saying "in their opinion." This experience is contrasted with his and, later in the

conversation, his wife's experiences of coming here. The younger Guptas may have had some difficulty adjusting to life here but the elder Guptas could not make the adjustment. They were so unhappy with their experiences in the United States that, despite their intention to stay for two months, they changed their plans and left early. He stresses that they had initially planned to stay for two months as he repeats that information twice. His parents cut their visit in half and "after one month they went back," dramatizing their hatred for the place.

After Mr. Gupta establishes his parents' hatred of the United States and decision to return early, he then tells us why they felt that way. He frames it as a dichotomy between the material comforts available here to the social life in India, which is lacking in the United States. In the midst of his comparison between him and his parents, Mr. Gupta introduces a comparison between India and the United States. Although it is framed as his parents' comparison, Mr. Gupta indicates that he sees the same differences, as he elaborates on the differences between social life here and there for the remainder of this segment of the conversation. He no longer frames the fact of social life in both locations from his parents' perspective but speaks as if what he is saying is objective truth. He includes his parents' evaluations of that truth (they "wanted" to see people in the street, it was "disappointing to them" that they did not, and they were "bored" because they had to stay at home) but in describing the differences he is making assertions from his own perspective. In describing social life in Delhi he explains that "[o]ver there in the evening walk, when you're walking in the evening you say hello to somebody every ten yard, you know a lot of faces, you know in the evening time. They come to your house maybe talk or drink cup of tea basically." In the United States, on the other hand, "[h]ere

when they go out they don't see nobody in the street walking.” These are facts about each site, which are different. It is how his parents react to these differences that distinguishes them from the younger generation. I will return to the comparison of India and the United States below, as it is a common element of immigration narratives and of the narratives that transnational migrants tell in general.

These differences impel the elder Guptas to leave the United States early. Mr. Gupta's assessment of this act is that they were unable to adjust to life here because “for them at old age it's very hard for them to adjust.” He (and perhaps others like him) was able to adjust because he was young. In this comparison of his parents' and his experiences Mr. Gupta is telling us about his perception of who may be a successful immigrant and who may not be able to adjust to society in the United States sufficiently to achieve a level of comfort. This comparison provides us with a window into how Mr. Gupta understands his own identity and experiences.

It is important to note, however, that it is only when discussing his parents' difficulties in the United States that Mr. Gupta really tells us that he had problems when he first arrived. He admits at the beginning of the conversation that he experienced a “cultural difference and social shock and other stuff, you know, which [he] had to cope with for a period of time” and “was kind of homesick in the beginning” but throughout the narrative he emphasizes his successes and downplays the difficulties. In the context of narrating his own experiences, Mr. Gupta favors his ability to adjust over the changes he had to make. When discussing his parents' visit, however, he tells us that his parents had the same problems he had upon his initial arrival. The difference between him and his parents, however, is that he was young and could adjust. His parents, on the other

hand, could not cope with the differences in social life here. Not everyone can do what the transmigrants do. Those older migrants who come here to join their children need special care or they will be isolated and “left behind.”^{xi} Despite their ability to adapt to life here, the transmigrants remain connected to the community back in India through visits and through the act of speaking about them, yet they are still somehow different from those back home. The comparisons transmigrants make in their narratives can help us to see how this community constitutes these connections and disconnections.

The comparisons that the transnational Hindu community makes between India and the United States is a constant theme in most of their verbal discourse. It is almost universal in their immigration stories as transmigrants describe the new experiences they encountered upon migration. There are several common comparisons that the community on both sides of the ocean frequently makes: India is more communal, the United States is more materialistic, India is too hot, people in India are corrupt, family members in the United States do not support each other the way they do in India, people get sick more in India, Indians face racial discrimination in the United States, and there are more good jobs available in the United States.

In our conversation about his immigration experience, Mr. Gupta focuses on the cultural and social differences that he found here. Those were the areas in which he needed to adjust even though he came here for “higher education.” When asked specifically about what kinds of changes he had to make, Mr. Gupta repeatedly mentions adjusting to the food. He talks briefly about his difficulty in understanding the southern accent and learning basic social interactions with the larger American community as well, but he (and later in the conversation his wife) talks at length about adjusting to eating the

food here in the United States. Food is a popular topic of conversation among Indians. People spend large amounts of time discussing what they eat, how they prepare it, what they ate at important functions, and what they will be preparing next. Having an excess of food is an important marker of economic status and those who have (and sometimes even those who do not have much) will insist that guests eat much more than necessary for mere sustenance or even satiation. Heart disease is rampant among the urban middle class as food is a constant presence even between meals and Indians expect if they are going to spend their money to eat out that the food include sauces rich in cream, oil, or butter.

In the Guptas' verbal discourse, food is an important marker of difference between India and the United States. The two main differences are the way food is prepared and eating a vegetarian diet versus a diet that includes meat. At the beginning of our conversation I asked Mr. Gupta to describe his experience coming to the United States for the first time. After explaining that he came for an engineering degree he says there was "a cultural difference and social shock and other stuff, you know, which I had to cope with for a period of time. You know, the food was different over here and basically the system was different over here and I had no knowledge about that." He does not elaborate here by what he means by the different food but a few conversational turns later I asked him if he found anything here that alleviated his homesickness. He then explains that he was living with other Indian students and "by staying with them and then cooking our own Indian meal at home, you know, we were living, living off campus so we had our own kitchen" he was able to adjust. He then adds, "[s]o basically could enjoy the same, same kind of food and same kind of atmosphere a little bit." In talking about his

adjustment to life in the United States, Mr. Gupta mentions food and cooking several times. Because they had a kitchen they were able to have their “own Indian meal[s]” and living with other Indians enabled him to have the same “food” and “atmosphere” that he was used to in India.^{xii}

Thus, Mr. Gupta was able to find the Indian food he enjoyed but he also admits that he had to adjust to the food that was regularly available. In answering my question about what kinds of adjustments he had to make in coming here, Mr. Gupta answers that he had to adjust to the food. Not only is the food prepared in a different way than Indian food but Mr. Gupta had to adjust to the lack of vegetarian food options here as well. Later in the conversation he explains that he had been a vegetarian before coming here.^{xiii} He says that when they went out to eat about a month after his arrival, however, he tried eating meat. Although it was difficult at first, Mr. Gupta explains that he eventually developed a taste for it. This was good because he used to travel for work and he says, “eating would have been a problem if I had not developed a taste for the meat.” He also explained that he had given up eating beef three years earlier but still eats chicken on occasion when he travels.

Mrs. Gupta, however, has remained a vegetarian although it was particularly difficult to eat at restaurants when she first arrived in the southern United States in the 1970s. During her narrative, when explaining how her family felt about her coming here, she says:

They were very, very much worried that how I’m going to, you know, adjust over here and uh what kind of food we will get here and all that. They were worried about it. And uh uh and main part was that America people eat meat and all that you know they were really devout at what they, everyone is still surprised that we are here for so long like twenty-five years and I don’t eat meat. Everyone is

surprised that, people in India, some people they start eating meat even though they didn't eat meat before. They're surprised.

Her family understands the United States to be a place where people eat meat and their main concern was that she would have to compromise a strong value that they held at the time.^{xiv} Despite changes in India and obstacles in the United States, Mrs. Gupta has not compromised those values, but has remained a vegetarian.

She supports her implicit claims that food is an important aspect of her Hindu identity by explaining how they taught their and other members of their community's children not to eat beef. At the time they were living in a small, southern university town and she had begun a regular *puja* there for the small Hindu community that lived there. They would do a children's program during these meetings to teach the next generation "about the Indian culture." She explains:

we asked children how many children they do eat beef. And almost everyone raised their hand...So then we told them why in India you're not supposed to eat beef because it's a cow meat and cow is just like your mother and you will not, you know, explain to them. And I think every child they said, "OK we promise that after today we will not eat beef"...They still don't eat it... They kept their promise.

Notice that she says "*in India* you're not supposed to eat beef" and does not say that it is something Hindus do not do.^{xv} These children have been eating beef because they are living in the United States and that is something people are assumed to do here. They do not, however, in India, and although the children are living in the United States, once their parents are able to explain to them how things are done in India and why (the "cow is just like your mother") they do what people do in India. Again, despite the pressures the children may feel to eat beef, they too have at least been able to refrain from compromising that important aspect of their identities.^{xvi}

Retaining an Indian identity in the United States is so important that, Mrs. Gupta once told me, the people who have immigrated here are actually more often vegetarian and more religious than their counterparts in India. This is the way they can remain Indian despite living far from their country of origin. People in India do not need to take so much care in preserving an Indian identity because no matter what they do, simply by living in India they are Indian. Mrs. Gupta, as an Indian living abroad, has to make an extra effort to remain Indian.

From the very beginning of her immigration narrative, Mrs. Gupta equates India with religious practice. When she married her husband he had already established relationships with other Indians here. She explains, “I came here after I got married. And by that time he had, you know, friends, and we had one more, you know, like elderly Indian family there so I used to we used to go to her home, you know, for any religious activity or thing. So I really didn’t miss much but then we moved from Raleigh to another state.” Because he had friends *and* because there were religious activities, she “didn’t miss much.” Later we return to her experiences when she first came and she repeats that there was an older couple who organized regular religious events. She says she “didn’t miss that much” when she first came because she would go to the religious or cultural programs this couple organized.

It was when they moved to a small town without any religious activities that she implies she missed what she had in India. Mrs. Gupta, however, focuses more on the almost seamless transition from life in India to life in the United States. She only mentions an adjustment period of six months when I directly ask her if she had an adjustment period; it is not part of her narrative performance. She never elaborates on

what kinds of adjustments she had to make beyond missing her family. Even after this adjustment period, she says, she still misses her family. She never really tells us how she had to adjust. As long as there were other Indians and religious activities, she did not really miss India. When she moved to this smaller city, she tells us, she initiated community *pujas* because nobody else was doing it.

Although Mrs. Gupta characterizes her adjustments as minor by glossing over the specific adjustments she had to make, there were still differences between India and the United States that required some action on her part. This brings us back to the differences the Guptas encountered in the realm of food. She often describes the problems she encountered trying to make Indian food with American ingredients. In this conversation she spoke about how the rice available here was not the Basmati rice she ate in India. Additionally, “the whole wheat flour over here is like red color, it’s hard to roll it, it comes back, that was a big problem.” Making *roti* (flat, griddle-cooked bread) was a struggle with the American ingredients available to her at that time. She never explains directly but an important aspect of the context of this conversation is that *roti* is the staple of her family’s diet. It is significant if making *roti* is difficult.

Mr. Gupta adds to the conversation at this point and introduces a story about a visit they took to India “ten, twelve, fifteen years ago.” He says that his wife must have told somebody about the lack of Basmati rice available here because somebody in their family sent them back to the United States with about ten five-pound bags of rice.^{xvii}

Unfortunately, when the Guptas went through customs they had to throw the bags out.

Mrs. Gupta explains, “I don’t think they had any insect but any grain if you used to bring [grain, customs officials] used to throw it.” Even though Mrs. Gupta was able to engage

in her religious practices and keep her vegetarian values sometimes the differences between India and the United States are insurmountable. The raw ingredients with which she wanted to cook were not available here and when she tried to bring some back herself she failed.

This portion of the Guptas' joint immigration narrative compares the past and the present in two ways. First, they explicitly say that the customs officials "used to throw it." After this statement Mrs. Gupta explains that they do not do that anymore. She says presently, travelers can bring grains into the United States and are now only restricted from bringing meat and plants. The difficulty the Guptas faced in the past over trying to bring Basmati rice back from India is no longer a problem because of this change in the customs policy. Secondly, there is no longer a need to carry one's own rice back from India as the proliferation of Indian grocery stores across the country has made those items available here in the United States. There is a difference between the United States of the past and that of the present.

At the end of the description of the elder Guptas' visit, Mrs. Gupta also mentions the differences between then and now. One of the difficulties her in-laws faced was that the television programs here were different. She explains that this would not be a problem now with Indian satellite channels. She says, "at that time the, the Indian satellite programs nothing was here...long time ago. Like fourteen years ago." Talking about the differences in the availability of Indian entertainment is a common theme for the Guptas. Not only were the satellite channels not available previously, but when the Guptas first came there were no Indian movie theaters. One evening about two years ago as Mrs. Gupta and I were watching an Indian movie award show on one of their Indian satellite

channels she explained that not too long ago, before they had any Indian movies available here, people would rent a hall and use a folding screen to watch Indian movies.

Additionally, the movies that were available for these screenings were usually at least two years old. Implied in this narrative is that today there are Indian movie theaters that show movies at the same time they are running in India.

This is an apt example of what David Harvey calls the “time-space compression” that characterizes postmodern culture (1989: vii). Not only were the migrants separated from India by distance but they experienced cultural forms (such as Bollywood movies) at different times than their Indian counterparts did. These days, with Indian movie theaters, DVDs, and Indian satellite television, immigrants such as the Guptas can more easily live their lives across nations. They did this before these services were available, but it took an effort they no longer need to make. Listening to narratives such as this one about the Guptas’ immigration experiences can help us see how the Guptas experience changes over time in ways that other forms of data cannot. Compared to the past, immigrants these days have an easier experience. They can shop at Indian grocery stores and watch the latest movies. Earlier migrants such as the Guptas, while they generally downplay their struggles in adjusting to life here in the United States, did have to make an effort to stay connected to India. This effort reveals how important it is for the Guptas to remain Indian.

External Comparison

Comparing the Guptas’ immigration narrative with narratives of other members of their transnational community can also reveal important information about how the community

is participating in creating a transnational experience intertextually. They tell their stories of immigration in dialogue with other immigrants and with their family back in India. Because the community is interconnected other stories are part of the context of an individual's storytelling. By comparing different narratives we can see where the Guptas' falls along a spectrum of immigration stories. Mr. Gupta's story, for example, differs from the stories of women in his community who immigrated to the United States as nurses. The ambivalence he expresses is in stark contrast to the stories of women who decide to come here. There is also a difference between women who come here for their own jobs and women who come here to be with their husbands. Women's transnational experiences differ from the multitudes of men who came here as engineers or in another profession. Additionally, the perspectives of family members who remained in India sometimes contradict the stories that immigrants tell. By examining their narratives we can see a fuller picture of how migration is experienced by members of the transnational community who never left.

Women who immigrate here for work often have a different experience than their male counterparts. The narratives they tell may be less ambivalent because for some of them, their choice to work in the United States instead of India may have been easier than their male counterparts'. Although women have entered the Indian professional work force in the past two decades in record numbers, women workers still experience discrimination in the workplace and sometimes a lack of support for what they are doing at home.^{xviii} Twenty-eight years ago Mrs. Bali, a nurse, found that she suffered from a lack of respect as a nurse in India. She describes her first experience working as a nurse:

So I could not find a job in this Punjab state. There was no job at that time. So I got a job at Haryana, another state. So I was there and started working as a staff

nurse. I worked there six months and that's how oh, God, what did I do? I don't like what I do. People don't respect you, I mean the job itself was fine but the people, they look at you, you know, and there's no respect at all. So I said I do not want to do this. So I left the job and came home.^{xix}

She enjoyed the work she had to do as a nurse, but she could not handle the way that she was treated in her job in India. She explains that after she left that job she went for further training as a nurse and then decided to apply for jobs abroad. She did not want to go to a place such as Canada or England where there were other Indians, saying, "I just didn't want to go, there were no Indians there. I just wanted to get away from Indians!" She does not elaborate but, given the context, we can speculate that she wanted to get away from them because she did not like the way they treated her as a nurse.

She first applied for jobs in Australia but the government there stipulated she would not be able to bring her husband or any family with her. She was single at that time, but she says this condition made the possibility of working in Australia not an "option." Instead, she pursued employment and a visa from the United States. She describes this process as if she had no hesitation about such a major move at the time. She says:

[H]e asked me just a few questions and said "here, you have the visa." I was happy, and I said "Oh, gosh, I'm" ...I was just...I didn't think "where am I going to live," "what am I going to do," "how I'm going to survive." I said "I've got the visa. I have to go. I have to go and I have to study." My main thing was I'm going to study and get a visa and study hard.

This sounds very much like Mr. Gupta's description of his immigration experience when he explains that his "sole purpose was to get the education here." Although they both characterize their immigration experiences by the educational and occupational opportunities the United States represented to them, Mr. Gupta's narrative expresses an ambivalence that Mrs. Bali's does not. She continues her chronology by describing how she came and stayed here as an active participant in her career and her education. Her

sentences usually begin with “I” and remain in the active voice, unlike Mr. Gupta’s shift between active and passive voices.

Perhaps Mrs. Bali did not feel the same pull back in India that Mr. Gupta seemed to feel. It is not that she did not experience any difficulty in adjusting to life here, however. She explains that “the first year was very hard” and she experienced “culture shock.” She does not indicate that the decision to come and stay here was a difficult one in the same way that Mr. Gupta does in his narrative. She characterizes her decision as inevitable – she did not enjoy working in India, she wanted to get away from Indians, and she pursued her education, visa, and employment. She does not speak about missing her family or wanting to return to India. It is also possible that she describes her immigration experience this way because most of her family is now living in the United States. She still returns to India to visit her husband’s family and her guru, but her two brothers, two sisters, and mother all live within ten minutes of her home and have been here since the 1980s. India no longer represents immediate family for her the way that it does for the Guptas. She is connected less directly and, therefore, neither recognizes nor expresses the decision as a “big struggle” the way that Mr. Gupta does.

This difference is not merely dependent on gender differences, however. Mrs. Bali’s circumstance is different than many of those of the other women in her community here in Atlanta. While there are a few other women in her circle who came here as nurses on their own work visas, the majority of Indian women who immigrate come here on family visas to join their husbands.^{xx} In this respect the Guptas are more typical – he came here for an advanced degree, brought his wife here after their marriage, and ended up staying here for his job. Mrs. Gupta characterizes her immigration in a very different way than

her husband and Mrs. Bali do. She never speaks about having a choice to come here or to stay in India. When asked how she came to the United States she simply says, “I came here after I got married,” and then describes what the community was like when she arrived. This matter-of-fact statement is representative of the way she talks about coming to the United States. She never talks about a desire to come here nor about choosing to come here. It is likely that this is a result of the circumstances surrounding her immigration. She married her husband, not because he was studying in the United States but because they were a good match. Mr. Gupta also explains in his narrative that he did not intend to stay so it is possible that Mrs. Gupta came here thinking that her experience in the United States would be temporary.

She did come in a very different way than Mrs. Bali did, however, and this emerges in a comparison of their immigration narratives. Mrs. Bali is active in her choosing to come here. Mrs. Gupta is terse when describing how she came to the United States and chooses to focus her narrative on what life was like once she did come. Later in the conversation I ask how Mrs. Gupta and her family felt about her coming here and she says, “They were very, very much worried that how I’m going to, you know, adjust over here and uh what kind of food we will get here and all that. They were worried about it.” She provides no positive impetus for her coming here and she does not mention the educational or occupational opportunities available for her here. As a married woman her *dharma* was to go where her husband was living. Her family’s concerns about her adjusting to life and the food that she would be able to eat here were secondary to the fact that it was her duty to come.

This perspective is echoed when Tayiji, Mr. Gupta's sister-in-law, narrated the circumstances surrounding her daughter's marriage to a man who lives in Australia.^{xxi} Tayiji and Tauji, her husband and one of Mr. Gupta's older brothers, arranged their eldest daughter's marriage about ten years ago. Tayiji had been telling me that she started going to a morning lesson on the *Bhagavad Gita* shortly after her daughter's marriage. I knew that her daughter lived in Australia but I did not know if her husband had been living there before the wedding or if they had moved there together. I asked Tayiji if her husband had already been living there and she said yes. She said, "[my daughter's] husband was there...His family was also there – mother, father, and brother were there." I mentioned that Australia was quite far and she said, "they are an Aggarwal family, they are also our religion. We did it in our own religion."^{xxii} I asked her to clarify what she meant and she said, "we are Hindu...Hindu...these days everyone is living outside [India]. Therefore, we thought that all the weddings are there." She makes two important points in this statement. First, a man's family and religion were the most important criteria in selecting a husband for her daughter. Second, there are so many people living abroad they thought it was inevitable that their children would marry and settle outside India.^{xxiii}

Although Tayiji is straightforward in her reasoning for why they married their daughter to a man living in Australia, she admits it was difficult to let her daughter go so far away. In the conversation leading up to her narrative of her daughter's marriage Tayiji explains that it was hard for her to let go of her daughter, but that her sadness over her daughter's absence led her to find a new religious path that has given her much happiness and comfort. Her narration of arranging her daughter's marriage seems to

ignore the difficulties she and her daughter faced with this separation.^{xxiv} It suggests, however, the fact that her daughter married a man from Australia was unimportant in their selection process. Yes, there were consequences of this choice, but his family, job, and religious traditions were the factors in making their decision.^{xxv}

Although the circumstances surrounding Mrs. Gupta's marriage to her husband over thirty years ago were quite different, Tayiji's discussion of her daughter's marriage can illuminate Mrs. Gupta's narrative. Perhaps her future husband's location at the time was irrelevant because what mattered most of all was that he had good job prospects, was from a good family, and came from the same religious background. If he happens to be living abroad then adjustments will have to be made. Unlike Mr. Gupta's ambivalence toward moving abroad and Mrs. Bali's certainty of her decision, a woman who leaves everything she knows in India to be with her new husband seems to have little choice and impetus for the move, at least according to Mrs. Gupta's narrative.

Each variation in the immigration process, including the ways that a transmigrants constructs agency or lack thereof, impacts the process of creating a transnational experience. On one end of the spectrum, Mrs. Bali fully participates in deciding and acting upon the immigration process. On the other end, Mrs. Gupta does not even reference that she had a choice in the process and Tayiji suggests that perhaps her family may not have considered her potential husband's location. Somewhere in between the two, Mr. Gupta expresses ambivalence about his agency in finally deciding to stay here.

Comparing Mr. Gupta's narrative of his immigration with the perspective of one of his family members who remained in India can also tell us about how members of the Guptas' family and community co-construct the community's transnational experiences.

I spoke with Chacha, Mr. Gupta's youngest brother about his experiences of his two brothers leaving for the United States. His narrative differs greatly from Mr. Gupta's and provides a different perspective than Tayiji's whose own daughter left. Chacha describes his two brothers leaving as having little effect on him or the rest of the family.^{xxvi} After initiating our conversation by asking him to tell me what he remembered about his first brother leaving for the United States, he said, "Nothing. When he had completed his Engineering degree, that's it. After that he went to America. He went to America for further studies."^{xxvii} This older brother went for the same reason that Mr. Gupta went; he went to obtain a Master's degree in engineering. Chacha frames the way the older brother left the same way that Mr. Gupta does. Mr. Gupta repeats that he went for "higher education" several times in his narrative and Chacha repeats "further studies" five times in his version, code-switching between Hindi and English. They both firmly establish the impetus behind leaving India as the desire for both brothers to continue their engineering studies.

Chacha's narrative differs from Mr. Gupta's, however. Chacha says that his brother's departure was nothing special, telling me, "We did not see this as anything unusual. In fact, we were happy that he went abroad for further studies."^{xxviii} I pushed him a little more, asking about his parents' experiences of their son's emigration from India. He says that in his opinion his parents would have been happy that they had a son leaving for further studies. When I ask how they felt about Mr. Gupta leaving for the United States he says the entire family was happy for him as well. He explains, "Because we are six brothers...so two of the six brothers had gone abroad so the entire family was happy." According to Chacha, as two of several brothers, his brothers' emigration did not have

much of an impact on him. He presents a different perspective than Tayiji or even his own brother because his relationship to his brothers is different than a parent's relationship to a child. He cannot even imagine the impact the immigration would have had on his parents in the same way that Mr. Gupta does.

Mr. Gupta, on the other hand, recognizes as a transmigrant that his parents would have had "mixed feelings" about his coming to the United States. He says:

[My parents] had a mixed, mixed feeling though. Mixed in the sense uh, uh, for, for parents you're always like a kid. In Indian culture, basically, no matter how much you grow, you're still their child basically. They still treat you like a kid basically, like a child. And if you go away from them, you know, like other side of the earth, you know, it's not in their, in their liking basically. They don't want you to go far away.

He presents the separation from his parents as the reason for their dislike of his move.

However, because his purpose for coming here was to study engineering they "let [him] go." In this version it makes no difference how many other children his parents have.

They would have difficulty letting any one of their children move so far away from them.

The question here is not which brother is correct in his assessment of the elder Guptas' feelings about their sons' emigration. The two brothers' perspectives as expressed in their narratives of the same event demonstrate the multiple ways that members of this transnational community construct what it means to live lives across nations. Mr. Gupta is fully invested in such an existence while Chacha, his youngest brother, is minimally involved. There is no doubt that moving to the United States had a huge impact on Mr. Gupta's life. Chacha, however, minimizes the move's impact on him and his family.^{xxix}

Both brothers acknowledge the migration, but Mr. Gupta's narrative reflects his active participation in remaining connected to India and his family. Through his narrative of immigration he is able to construct his experience as a transnational one. By comparing

his narrative to his brother's we can see more completely how invested Mr. Gupta is in these connections.

Understanding the implicit and explicit as well as the internal and external comparisons provide a fuller understanding of the process by which the community creates transnational experiences. Some members are more involved in the process than others. Some may focus on the great impact transmigration has made in their lives while some may focus on the many ways life has not changed. The multiple perspectives of other immigrants help us understand Mr. Gupta's narrative better. His narrative is shaped by the circumstances surrounding his immigration as well as the narratives of his fellow immigrants as well as his family back home. This, in turn, influences his own transnational experience.

Intention

Finally, the Guptas' immigration narrative performances express their intentions, something that only verbal discourse can fully express. Alessandro Portelli, an oral historian, explains that, "[o]ral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did" (1991: 50). If we examine Mr. Gupta's actions without paying attention to his narrative performances, we see a man who came here, earned his engineering degrees, moved through a series of jobs, established a family, and became a naturalized citizen. He visits family in India about once every two to three years, hosts visits from family living overseas on occasion, and communicates with those in India regularly over the phone and the internet. His actions establish his life in the United States even as he continues his connections with his family in India and abroad. Perhaps his actions are enough to identify him as a man living his life across nations.

His narrative performances, however, help reshape his transnational experiences. At the end of our original excerpt, he tells us what he did but he also tells us what he *wanted* to do. According to his speech, he never expected to stay in the United States. Things happened that kept him and his family here but he never intended to stay. He even expresses his thought that he may move back there after he retires. He not only visits with his family members across the oceans on occasion, he hopes someday, or at least thinks, that there is a possibility he will return. Paired with his expressions of having little agency in staying here, Mr. Gupta presents himself as a person who has never emotionally severed his connections to his homeland and his family that lives there.

His verbal discourse reinforces and modifies what it means for him to be transnational. Not only do his actions enable him to live transnationally, but his narrative performances contribute to this experience. His verbal discourse reveals a man who never meant to stay in the United States without returning to India. This places his transnational existence in a new perspective. If he never intended to stay and still believes that he may return, he has kept living in India as a possibility in his heart. He is living his life as if he may return there. He is living transnationally in more ways than one.

Conclusions

The community's immigration narratives demonstrate several ways that the Guptas and other members of their community help create their own transnational experiences through verbal discourse. Three features of these narratives in particular – ambivalence, comparison, and intention – work together to help these immigrants and their families describe and construct their experiences as transnational. Taking Mr. Gupta's immigration narrative, for example, we can look at the ways he constructs his agency in deciding to immigrate and remain in the United States. He first presents himself as an active participant in deciding to obtain an engineering degree. Once he arrives, however, he becomes less and less active in the choice to stay. This expresses an ambivalence on his part about staying here for as long as he did and indicates that his connections to India have never really been severed in his mind. Mr. Gupta's expression of his intentions and thoughts about returning to India reinforce the idea that in some ways Mr. Gupta does not

see himself as fully settled in the United States. His connections to India may run deeper than what appears on the surface.

Immigration narratives such as Mr. Gupta's above help to define immigrants as transnational migrants because they are able to express the ambivalence of the immigration experience, demonstrating the pull immigrants felt in both directions and can still recall. Additionally, the narrative performance provides a window into Mr. Gupta's intentions of returning although he has not returned to this day. By intending to return, whether the family returns or not, the family remains engaged with India in a way they may not if they feel their immigration to the United States is final. Although physical activities such as the movement of people within the community across the oceans is one aspect of creating an experience of transnational migration, the narratives the community members tell can reveal the multiple ways that they envision themselves as transnational. In addition to the visits back to India, the hosting of relatives from across the oceans, the communication between them and the movement of goods and money, these transmigrants envision themselves through their narrative performances as tied to two countries – they never fully break with their country of origin and they create roots (especially through children and community) here.

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ⁱ I use the term transnational to refer to the ways that members of the international middle class Hindu community literally live their lives "across nations." That is, "transnational" reformulates the ideology that immigrants move to a new country and adapt to life in that country with few connections to those people and places they left behind. Instead, transmigrants continue to live their lives in both places through travel, remittances, and communication across nations. I argue that narratives are an important way these communities construct their lives as transnational.

ⁱⁱ As immigrants from South Asia, the Guptas are part of a unique immigrant population, which has benefited from the United States' post-1965 immigration preferences for members of underrepresented professions. In the 1970s well-educated immigrants from South Asia arrived in the United States, particularly filling positions as nurses, doctors, and engineers. Unlike previous generations of unskilled, uneducated immigrants, this new wave of migrants entered the United States and attained middle class status within the first generation.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more information on *dharma* see Saunders 2002.

^{iv} For more on narrative and/or performance as emergent, see Bauman, Booth, Briggs, Goodwin & Duranti, Hymes, Jakobson, Mankekar, Portelli, Gold & Raheja, and Schieffelin.

^v My analysis is informed by sociolinguistic theory and discourse analysis as expressed in Bakhtin, Fairclough, Hoijer, and Mannheim & Tedlock.

^{vi} I find it particularly interesting that the first time in this interview that Mr. Gupta actually refers to his physical immigration after my initial request for information about how he came to the United States, he says that he came for graduate school and "just bought a ticket, jumped in the plane and came over here." He elaborates on this initial, very casual description of coming to the United States for the first time later in

the interview as I ask him more specific questions. I find it unlikely that this was not an emotional event fraught with the doubt, fear, and exhaustion that often accompany international travel (particularly when traveling to the other side of the globe). The jet lag of crossing nine and a half time zones is disorienting in itself. When paired with the stress of traveling for approximately twenty-four hours, changing planes in foreign countries, and arriving for the first time in a completely different environment almost anybody would be unsettled. The fact that he describes this experience in such mundane terms indicates that he has reinterpreted the experience over the years. Although this initial description is nonchalant, he provides verbal cues throughout the interview including the excerpt in question that indicate that the decision to come here was actually a monumental event in his life.

^{vii} He says that he has an offer for a faculty position from his undergraduate institution, “the school [he] went to initially.” Mr. Gupta received his Bachelor’s degree from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi, a prestigious engineering school known throughout India. Over the years it has become something of a family performance as Mr. Gupta is always referring to IIT with pride as the best engineering school, often stating it is more difficult to get into than his children’s undergraduate institution. Mr. Gupta made one particularly paradigmatic comment about IIT when the family was in Huntsville, Alabama for his niece’s wedding in May 2002. His nephew and his wife were staying in one room of a suite with Mr. Gupta’s brother and sister-in-law. They had accidentally locked the adjoining door and had closed the safety bolt on the door that led to the hotel hallway. Although we were able to use the key to unlock the door the closed safety bolt made it impossible to open the door fully. The incident had drawn a large crowd, as we were all dressed up to go to the groom’s parents’ house for a pre-wedding ceremony and party. We had planned to arrive together as we were bringing presents to the groom’s house as the bride’s family. Mr. Gupta’s nephew’s wife insisted on opening her door because there was a special gift in the room that her parents had sent for the bride and groom that she wanted to show the groom’s family. After about twenty minutes the hotel provided a tool that was supposed to open the bolt from the outside but the staff did not know how to use it. Several of the men in our party (many of them engineers) tried to use the device but failed to unhook the bolt. Finally, in a dramatic moment, Mr. Gupta took his turn and slid the device in and eventually was able to use it to open the bolt. We had all been anxious about leaving and were relieved when he was able to open the door. He told the crowd that he had been able to open the door because he had been a student at IIT. We all laughed.

^{viii} I could argue that his naturalization as a citizen of the United States represents a full commitment. This, however, provides us an important example of what narratives can show us that observation or discussion of “facts” can overlook. On the surface Mr. Gupta may appear to have made a final decision to stay in the United States but his narrative performance shows us his understanding that he never made a full decision to stay here permanently.

^{ix} For more on transnationalism see Appadurai, Foner, Glick Schiller, Guarnizo & Smith, Gupta, Gupta & Ferguson, Mahler, Pessar, and Portes.

^x Mr. Gupta grew up in one of the most densely populated areas of Delhi. Four generations of Guptas have lived in an approximately one hundred year old home that can only be accessed by a narrow lane from Old Delhi’s cycle market, about a half a kilometer from Shah Jahan’s Red Fort. The area is usually filled with shoppers, residents and local business people and it is so crowded it is often impossible to walk side by side with a companion.

^{xi} There are several women of the younger generation in Atlanta who have helped older ladies in the community (often widows who have come to the United States to live with their children and assist as caregivers to their grandchildren) organize a regular meeting to sing *bhajans*, Hindu devotional songs. Because most of these older women do not drive, the community is dispersed throughout the periphery of the metropolitan area, and public transportation is limited, they rely on their children to drive them around suburban Atlanta.

^{xii} Later in the conversation Mr. Gupta explains that one of his roommates knew how to cook. Mr. Gupta does not really cook and I have only seen him make tea occasionally and simple *parathas* (an Indian bread fried on a griddle) one time when Mrs. Gupta was away in India.

^{xiii} His siblings and their families back in India have all remained vegetarians.

^{xiv} Mausi, her older sister in Delhi, does eat meat on occasion now. Her mother, on the other hand, is still a vegetarian. In my casual observations it seems to be fairly common for some in Mrs. Gupta’s generation and in younger generations to begin eating meat on occasion. It seems safe to assume, for example, that Mausi was a vegetarian while she still lived in her natal home. Once she married a man who ate meat she

may have begun to eat meat on occasion. Bhabhi, her daughter-in-law, grew up in a strict vegetarian home in a small city several hours from Delhi. When she married into the family she continued to be vegetarian but at some point over the three years that she has been married she began to eat meat on occasion just as her mother-in-law had done a generation ago.

^{xv} As many from the majority Hindu culture do, Mrs. Gupta conflates India with Hindu. She does this at other moments during this same conversation.

^{xvi} There is a common view among the community that the immigrants of thirty years ago still equate “India” with the India they left at that time. Members of the second generation frequently complain that not only do their parents expect them to adhere to the values of India, but expect them to adhere to the values of the India of the past. Mrs. Gupta admits that India has changed, referring above to the more common practice of eating meat there. She is aware of these changes as one night at dinner she explained that people in India think that those people living in the United States drink and go to nightclubs all the time. She said that people in India are actually doing those things. She had heard of a Miss India USA who had visited Bombay and reported that she was shocked at what some of the people her age were doing – going out late and doing drugs. Mrs. Gupta then qualified this characterization and said that it was mostly children of rich people who did that but that people did bad things there just as they did here.

^{xvii} He never specifies who this is. He just says “they.”

^{xviii} For example, Bhabhi, Mrs. Gupta’s nephew’s twenty-four year old wife, told me how she had been working at a Delhi bank for several months and even though she had received a promotion, she had to quit her job because her in-laws wanted her to spend more time doing household work.

^{xix} This excerpt is from the beginning of a two-hour long taped conversation that Mrs. Bali and I had one June evening in 2002. She had invited me over to spend the night and we decided to take an early evening walk up Stone Mountain, a granite mountain not far from her Atlanta suburb. I recorded the conversation that we had as we drove there and hiked up and down the mountain. This excerpt is from the very beginning of the conversation after I had asked her to describe her experiences coming to the United States. She starts by telling me about how she had always wanted to be a nurse, indicating that her profession is inextricably linked to her immigration experience. In fact, the first third of her narrative is a description and chronology of her career and the education she pursued for career advancement. At the time, there was a shortage of nurses in the United States and many immigrants came from India to fill positions here (Williams 1988).

^{xx} See Williams 1988.

^{xxi} This conversation with Tayiji occurred in her North Delhi home on Saturday, March 15, 2003. About an hour trip from my home in South Delhi, I had taken the bus up there for the day, arriving at noon and chatting with her, her husband, their son and her sister’s husband who was visiting from Mumbai. After lunch the men had gone into the sitting room to watch cricket and Tayiji and I sat on her bed in the bedroom and I recorded part of her life history. The narrative and our conversation was in Hindi. “Tayiji” literally means father’s older brother’s wife and is the kinship term by which I addressed her.

^{xxii} Aggarwal is a common surname among *baniyas*, the Guptas’ *jati*, or subcaste.

^{xxiii} Their younger daughter is actually married to a man from Delhi.

^{xxiv} It is common for a mother to feel loss at being separated from her daughter, but we can assume that this feeling is intensified when the daughter is moving overseas (see, for example, Kakar).

^{xxv} Tayiji also mentions that her daughter’s husband was an engineer. Engineering seems to be the occupation of choice for the Guptas. Mr. Gupta and his brother who lives in the United States are both engineers. Tayiji’s son is an engineer working in Delhi and the youngest of the Gupta cousins is also planning a career in engineering.

^{xxvi} Chacha is the youngest of the eight Gupta siblings and the only one remaining in the family’s Chandni Chowk home. He lives there with his wife and two children. I recorded this conversation in Hindi with him in his sitting room on the afternoon of Sunday, February 16, 2003. “Chacha” literally means father’s younger brother and is the kinship term by which I address him.

^{xxvii} This reluctance to admit that there was anything special or that anything really happened is typical for Chacha. He is not much of a storyteller and, although I found myself frustrated with his brief answers, I realized upon reviewing his narratives he was saying something important about the way he sees his brothers’ immigration experiences.

^{xxviii} Here Chacha uses Hindi to express “further studies.”

^{xxix} Later in his narrative, Chacha explains that he is still deeply connected to his two brothers who live in the United States. In fact, he characterizes their relationship as unchanged by the distances they have to cross to remain connected.