



Gender socialization and segmented assimilation of youths in Indian diaspora

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Abstract

The primary focus of this article is to understand the gender socialization and formation of hybrid identity among the youths of Indian diasporic community in the USA. It asks several questions such as; how does the home culture of immigrant community get implant in alien land and during the implantation process how home culture is, get affected by alien settings and environments and forms a hybrid form. As we know that, the first generation that was born and brought up in India, and the children (second generation) of these first generation who were born and brought up in the United States of America-ability (or inability) to balance two cultures that often preach diametrically opposed approaches of life so Second-generation Indians in the United States are expected by their parents to be "Americanized" in their professional and economic success, but at the same time to be "Indianized" in their social and cultural practices so this forms a segmented assimilation.

Keywords: Gender, family, diaspora, identity, socialization

Introduction

Indians who immigrated in the wake of 1965 immigration act were highly educated and technically skilled professionals who, in a relatively short period, found themselves in the middle and upper socio-economic levels of the American society. They were in fact, welcomed in the United States because of their professional skills or potential technical contributions. "Yet their social, civic, and political involvement in mainstream American society is not commensurate with their professional success. Most intend to remain in the United States permanently, yet in many ways; they have not broken their ties with India" (Agarwal 1991)^[1]. In addition, they established their "ideal imaginary India" in the forms of adopting Indian culture to fulfill their hunger of social and psychological gratification of Indianness.

Methodology

Secondary sources for data collection have been used on Indian diasporic community in the USA.

Gender Socialization

Many scholars claimed that Asian Indian immigrants have transplanted old-world gender ideologies and clearly dichotomized gender roles in their adopted country of residence (Agarwal 1991)^[1]. Other studies show that the first-generation women support the gender equality. Despite such findings regarding egalitarian gender beliefs among adult immigrant women, many second-generation women tend to complain about the restrictive role perceptions imposed on them. In her study of immigrants and their children, Agarwal (1991)^[1] states that although 'several women [first generation] said their immigration to the United States brought them independence and liberation from the institutional repression of women in India.... The second-generation India women feel that old-world gender roles are still rigidly being upheld for her' (p.52). This phenomenon can be explained that the gender-specific roles that daughters of immigrants are given in the preservation of Indian cultural identity.

Mani (1993)^[10] claims that the maintenance of traditions and identity have historically been placed on South Asian women's shoulders. As the keepers of South Asian culture and heritage in the U.S., the roles of second-generation daughters are, therefore, monitored more strictly than those of sons. In addition to this Dasgupta, points out that fears of cultural obliteration by 'Americanization' and exogamy have played a large role in imposing such construction on the female gender role. This gender imbalanced expectation is coming to head as the second-generation Asian Indian women approach adulthood.

The manifestation of this intergenerational conflict can be seen with the practice of dating. Some studies point out that Asian Indian parents resist integration by refusing to allow their children to date and mix freely with their non-Indian peers (Sharma 1984). This restriction is more pronounced for females than males (Menon 1989). Since 'The popular definition of a "good Indian girl" is one who does not date, is shy and delicate, and marries an Indian man of her parents' choosing (Agarwal 1991:52)^[1].

Rayaprol in her article 'Can You Talk Indian shifting notions of community and identity in Indian diaspora' claims that differential socialization of girls and boys is to a great extent responsible for the gendered perception of self-identity among the second-generation. In addition, the burdens of cultural practices of Indianness are on women than men. As it also seems clear by Lata Mani states:

..... Questions of tradition and modernity have, since the nineteenth century, been debated on the literal and figurative bodies of women. It thus comes, as no surprise that the burden of negotiating the new world is borne disproportionately by women, whose behaviour and desire, real or imagined, become litmus test for the South Asian community's anxieties or sense of well-being.... It is women who are called on to preserve the ways of the old country (Mani 1993:34-35, italic mine)^[10].

Since the community strongly believes that its very integrity as a group depends on sharing of same culture and this can be further enhanced only if second-generation becomes loyal to it, to practice and carry their parents' culture. In

addition, more important the women of the second-generation are expected, not only to carry their parents' culture but also to transfer it to coming generation. So, women are expected not only to remember the past but also to reproduce it. That is why the behaviour of the second generation, particularly of women, is closely monitored. 'Transgression from ideal notions of femininity, heterosexual chastity and faithfulness to 'the community' faces disapproval' (Rayaprol 2001:183-84)^[15].

Second-generation Indians in the United States are expected by their parents to be "Americanized" in their professional and economic success, but at the same time to be "Indianized" in their social and cultural practices. Middle class Indians in United States expect both their sons and daughters equally to do well in their educational careers, but have traditional expectations from their boys and girls when it comes to dating, marriage and family life. Rayaprol claims that the girls of Indian community in the U.S faces 'double burden of patriarchy'. 'Patriarchy transmitted from the host culture of the parents combined with the patriarchy of American society imposes additional pressure on the socializations of girls' (Rayaprol 2001)^[15].

Studies on the gendered socialization also states that the second-generation men rarely wear Indian clothes and don't find any pressure to look Indian or act Indian. Similarly, in this way Rayaprol in her study finds that in an Indian Student Association function at the University of Pittsburgh, it is the women who participated in the fashion show, parading in traditional dress. Although second generation men liked to date and have sexual relations, there were expectations of virgin brides and women's sexuality was expected to be repressed. The construction of women who had sexual relations with their dates was that of a 'whore', but the same norms were not applied to men (Dasgupta and Dasgupta 1998).

Family Patterns

The first-generation immigrants who come from one world to live in a new one and, in the process, fuse together the old and new to create a new kind of family life. Here it is going to discuss that how at the new arrival's immigrants construct and reconstruct their family lives in an alien land. As immigrants come to an alien land, interplay starts between immigrant's cultural meanings and social practices that they bring with their home country and structural, economic and cultural forces of their new environment settings.

If a general idea exist that immigrants are becoming more like Americans, we also need to keep in mind that each group puts a unique stamp on family and kinship relations that stems from its special cultural and social background. As Nancy Foner argues that, the family is not simply a site where immigrants create and carry out agendas or strategies; nor is family relations and dynamics reducible to rational economic calculations. Rather family is seen as a place where there is a dynamic interplay between structure, culture, and agency- where creative culture building takes place in the context of external social and economic forces as well as immigrants' premigration cultural frameworks (Nancy 1997)^[11].

When a family move from one place to other place, in a new cultural setting, every member (men/women, old/young) wish to enhance their position in family by setting their own pattern of life. In the same way, Kibria says that members of the family, by virtue of their gender and generation, have

differing interests so that women (and men) and young people (and older people) often try to fashion family patterns in ways that improve their positions and further their aims (Kibria 1993)^[9].

The cultural understanding, meanings, symbol and values that they bring with them from their home society also influences the settings of new family. Nancy argues that Immigrants exactly do not reproduce their old cultural patterns when they move to a new land; but these patterns continue to have a powerful influence in shaping family values and norms as well as actual pattern of behavior that develops in the new settings (Nancy 1997)^[11]. It means that in a new setting the patterns of family are determined by the mixing of the old cultural pattern and the new cultural patterns; can say a hybrid cultural pattern emerges in a new land. Indeed, as Nazli Kibria (1993)^[9] observes, immigrants may walk a delicate tightrope as they challenge certain aspects of traditional family systems while they also try to retain others.

Discussion

Segmented Assimilation

Faced with new circumstances in the United States, many beliefs, values and cultural symbols as well as behavior patterns undergo change. While some former believes and social institutions persist apparently intact, they may change in the new environment. To say that immigrants change, however, it does not mean that they become fully assimilated into American culture. In fact, they themselves assimilated into selective sections. Indeed, the recently developed notion of "segmented assimilation" works here as an attempt to refine the assimilation concept into changing society. Segmented assimilation refers to the fact that immigrants assimilate to particular sectors of American society, with some becoming integrated in to the majority white middle class and others assimilating into the inner-city Underclass (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes 1995)^[14].

A long line of scholars has recognized that the cultures of immigrant's groups differ both from the culture left behind by the home country and from American mainstream culture. As Thomas and Znaniecki, in their 1918-1920 study of Polish peasants in America, wrote the creation of a Polish American society which in structure and prevalent attitudes is neither Polish nor American, but constitutes a specific new product whose raw materials have been partly drawn from Polish traditions, partly from the new conditions in which the immigrants live, and partly from American social values as the immigrants sees and interprets them" (1996:108). Margaret Gibson argued that the end result of assimilation or acculturation among immigrants need not be the rejection of old traits and their replacement. Rather, "acculturation may be an additive process or one in which old and new traits are blended" (Gibson 1988:25)^[3].

Women in the new cultural settings gain more freedom because of greater financial independence as well as influenced by dominant American values extolling the idea of marital fidelity liberal views regarding female. A number of studies have shown that though immigrants 'bring their own versions of traditional' patriarchal codes to the United States" (Pessar 1996)^[13], their households become less patriarchal and more egalitarian here as women gain access to social and economy resources previously beyond their reach and as they participate more actively in public life (Kibria, 1993)^[9].

Gender and Segmented Assimilation

Why do the family and kinship patterns among immigrants change and develop in new form when they go to alien settings? The answer to this question is a very complicated one and need a detailed analysis of a combination of factors. Nancy Foner discusses about several factors, such as the role of premigration family values, customs traditions, beliefs and practices that affect the family lives in the new settings. Another one the demographic composition of the immigrant's group has also an impact; sex and age ratios in each group affect marriage and family patterns. For example, a markedly unbalanced sex ratio will encourage marriage outside the group or consign many to singlehood or search for spouses in the home country.

Kibria argues that the scarcity of Vietnamese women in the United States enhanced unmarried women's value in the "marriage market", giving them greater bargaining power in their relationships with men. The women were able to use the threat of leaving a relationship to push partners to meet their demands (1993:112-121). In other groups, a sizeable proportion of old people may ease the childcare burdens of working women (Orleck 1987). Still in other cases, the absence of immigrant's close kin in the new settings creates the need to improvise new arrangements, a reason why fictive kin are common in immigrant communities and why men sometimes find themselves filling in as helpmates to their wives in childcare and other household tasks (Nancy 1997)^[11].

Quite apart from socio-cultural factors, there are also economic factors. Now women have greater opportunities for wage employment and contribute a large share of the family income in the United States. In addition, in this way women are gaining authority in the household and increased leverage in relations with their spouses. For the same reason, decline in men's earning power can reduce their authority (Kibria 1993)^[9]. Scholars have noted that among certain groups, old people have suffered a decline in the status in the United States because, among other things, they no longer control valued resources such as land (Oxford 1993)^[12].

Immigrants are also inevitably influenced by dominant American cultural beliefs and values concerning marriage, family, and kinship that are disseminated by the mass media, schools and other intuitions. Some family members more enthusiastically embrace certain American values and norms than others do. Typically, women are more eager than men to endorse values that enhance women's position, just as young people generally support new norms that give them greater freedom which their parents may resist.

In general, American ideas about what kinds of dating and premarital sexual behavior are appropriate, as well as about romantic love and free marriage choice, provide ammunition for immigrant children who want to reject arranged marriages and close supervision of their relations with the opposite sex. Indeed, parents may modify their demands in the face of the new American values for fear of alienating their children altogether and creating a legacy of resentment (Yanagisako 1985)^[18]. Alternatively, serious conflict may develop when young people (or women), spurred on by changed expectations and expanded economic opportunities, are more assertive in challenging parental (or spousal) authority (Pessar 1995).

Difference in Cultural Orientation: Indian vs American Culture

With respect to family structure, Indians traditionally believe in generations of one family residing together in a joint family. The system is hierarchical based on seniority. The concept of western individualism and more equality in the family structure is foreign. Age is respected in the family structure, and elders are considered the leaders of the family. The Indian parent-child relationship, furthermore, is highly authoritarian. In her paper for an Indian-American conference on family and youth, Dr. Nalini Juthnai (1990) explained that in Indian culture, open expression of opposition is discouraged. Communication is not open if it is disrespectful. The wounds of physical abuse will heal, but the wounds caused by words will not heal is a well-known Indian saying. In the western culture, children are encouraged to be more why oriented. Questioning authority is seen as sign of independence and intellectual development. Juthnai argues that in American society "open communication with expression of anger is acceptable. Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is an opposite saying [compared to an Indian outlook].

The Indian culture maintains a more severe taboo on openness in pre-marital, male-female relationships. Dating is not an institution in India, as marriages are traditionally arranged by one's family. Any one especially a female, who acquires a reputation of dating many people may have difficulty marrying into a respectable family.

As we know that first generation born and brought up in Indian are much oriented to Indian's culture while the second generation born and brought up in the U.S. are much oriented to the West's culture and finally this came out as the different cultural orientation as opposed to each other.

'The hallmark of adolescence in American culture, for both boys and girls, has traditionally been defined as the process of separation from parents and family towards achieving a sense of individuality' (Erikson 1950)^[2]. American adolescents use this period of developments to experiment with changing vocational aspirations, socialize with new peer groups and explore romantic relationships. It is with the understanding that ultimately, their adolescents have increasing responsibility, not to the parents or the family, but for themselves. In contrast, within the South Asian cultural understanding, identity is already defined by the relationship that exists within the family and the larger cultural community. In traditional South Asian household, the shift from childhood to adulthood is not the business of separation or individualization. Rather, it is about the clarification of one's many roles within the family and the acceptance of greater responsibility for one's place within the structure (Gupta, 1999)^[5].

How then during time of transition, do young South Asian Americans and their parents balance the different cultural demands that face them? During adolescence, young South Asian Americans have increasing contact with the world outside of the family and experience greater influences from their peer culture as well as a greater desire to be accepted by their peers. Within certain context, such as school or while socializing with American friends, they experience pull to define themselves in terms that conform to American culture norms of dress, language, and attitudes. At the same time, these adolescents feel a powerful demand within the family to retain traditional South Asian behaviors and values.

South Asian parents hope that their offspring can function in the American culture as they do, that is by adopting appropriately American behaviors and attitudes within the workplace, but retaining a core sense of themselves as South Asians (Naidoo, Davis, 1988). However, the demands to act American without incorporating any American values and ideals are neither realistic nor feasible.

There are certain issues specially affect the development of girls. For example, when young girls in South Asia being adolescence, which coincides with the onset of puberty, they being undertaking adult responsibilities and roles. Starting from this point, girls give up the relative freedom they have enjoyed and begin to observe the restrictions in movement, dress, and behavior that typify the lives of women in South Asian culture. South Asian girls come into a world in which from the birth, their status is considered lower than that of boys. Boys are perceived to be the future caretaker of the parents in their old age and prized as such. Girls, on the other hand, are understood to be temporary members of their own family- their primary roles and responsibilities will be as wives, daughters-in-law, and mothers in the families that they are married into (Kakar 1979) ^[8]. Their modesty in speech and behavior must be beyond reproach and it is their duty to ensure that no hint of scandal is introduced by their actions. Among the behavior that can be deemed as immodest are taking too much, laughing loudly. Young girls are repeatedly reminded of their need to cultivate sharam (shame) in order to safeguard the good name of the family. Especially with regard to plans for a young girls' marital future, it is high praise of a girl and of her family that she be able to say, 'I have no opinion about the selection of my husband; I completely trust in the judgment of my parents' (Gupta 1999) ^[5].

Sudhir Kakar argues that young boys by the age of six are made to break from the comfort of maternal attention and closeness in order to learn how to take their place among men. (Kakar 1979) ^[8]. As Kakar argues that South Asian girls are not removed from the intimacy of female caregivers. Their lives remain within the matrix of female connectedness and it is under the tutelage of their mothers, aunts, and other female relatives that they prepare for the future roles that they will play in the husband's home.

Conclusion

The socialization in different cultural background creates inter-generational difference, rather to say inter-generational conflict. Because second generation are trained in segmented assimilation and they know how to make an adjustment between Indian culture and western culture, study shows the fact that second generations living in the western world Indian culture are well articulated and do not have identity crisis. The Indian culture maintains a more severe taboo on openness in pre-marital, male-female relationships. Dating is not an institution in India, as marriages are traditionally arranged by one's family. Any one especially a female, who acquires a reputation of dating many people may have difficulty marrying into a respectable family. As we know that first generation born and brought up in Indian are much oriented to Indian's culture while the second generation born and brought up in the U.S. are much oriented to the West's culture and finally this came out as the different cultural orientation as opposed to each other.

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