The Cultural Identity of Second-Generation Indians in the US

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My research is based on the topic of second-generation Indo-American immigrants. The target was to check the status of Indo-American immigrants in the society of the US. I wanted to know about the elderly immigrants who came after immigrant law to strengthen their economic situation, their social interaction among their neighbors, the expectation of parent-child relationship in Indo culture, and the outcomes of the cultural impact on their families. I researched parenting beliefs in comparison with European Americans to check the similarities and also examined the acculturation lifestyle of Indo-American immigrant parents along with the psychological effect they cast on through their style. The culture of Indo-Americans approaches whether they prefer mixing or just adhering to only natal culture. Furthermore, I enhanced my analysis with the help of mother-adult-daughter relationships in Indo-Asian parents and second-generation daughters concerning different parameters and cultural variations. The perception of an adult daughter about the relationship with their mothers was analyzed across Mexican and European cultures.

Balgopal, Pallassana R. “Getting Old in the US: Dilemmas of Indo-Americans.”

Journal of Sociology and Welfare Vol. 26, Issue 1, March 1999

The study reviews the elder’s mindset and what they go through when they move out to the United States. They should try to continue to follow their values and be alienated and be with their group only or follow mainstream culture and values. The focus of my research is to check out the status of Indo- and Asian Americans in the U.S. Most Indo-Asian elders are living on the verge of individualism and collectivism. They have different social dilemmas and concerns regarding their identity, and they also feel disconnected most of the time in their social and kinship network.

Asian Americans and Indo-Americans are a diverse group with distinctive cultural values and beliefs concerning their elders. The expectations and concerns of both groups vary with the variation in the regional groups by American culture. Ethical values have changed so far in recent years whether it is Asian or in the group. For this purpose, the two groups from Asia were studied using an ethnographic

approach. Religious activities, social interaction, and health are the mainstream concerns of the elders.

The study of elderly concerns is based on the sectioning of groups into three units. One group comprised individuals before the 1960s and the second group had people after 1965. The third group of immigrants comprised people who came at an elderly age because they had no other option. I used the approach of interpretive interactionism for the analysis of elders' interaction with their families. To know the thoughts behind the elders' immigration, I conducted some personal interviews at their homes and talked to them about how and why questions regarding their immigration journey and their current state of mind.

Immigration is evident from the time of 1965 immigration policy liberalization. People came from all different backgrounds with varied and mixed cultures and values. There came a sudden rush in the arrival of immigrants after the emergence of liberalization for immigrants. People arrived at the middle age of 35 and contributed to the immense increase in the population of the elderly population of immigrants in the United States.

The aim of economic stability and pursuance of opportunities accustomed people to set up in society.

Older people are the ones who face a difficult time adjusting to the adaptive system of modern America. Being in the ambiance of enriched cultural values, I might get confused if I were at the level of the elders. The adaptive process is a hard thing to assimilate standing on the verge of two approaches. Old people who moved on to America had a mindset filled with the collective attitude that makes them dependent on their families and relatives for health and emotional support. The hard shift is to transition from collectivism to individualism.

The individualistic approach of modern Americans demands that elderly people adapt to contemporary values. There would be no dependence on the other, and you have to stand by yourself for yourself. This conflict, or turn, created a dilemma in elders and disfigured the family interaction as well.

The interaction of elders with their children and extended families turned out to be a coping process for them. For example, parents live independently, and children live independently, but they do visit them quite often. The elderly immigrants face isolation from other Indo-Americans due to the age gap and fewer social interactions.

According to Gulati (1995), the majority of Indo-American elders were brought up with a mindset of dependence on the family for support and omitting of independent culture. There is a responsibility on the shoulders of children for their elder or old parents to take care of them with love and positive thinking.

The Hindu culture is threaded with the codes of moral conduct and beliefs. Hinduism treats the Guardian as "dharma" and "karma" as the reward for every right or wrongdoing in parent and child

relationships. According to Ishwar (198) and Miles (1980),

“Dharma of the male figure is to be the protector, provider, and guardian for the whole family.”

According to Venkatraman (1996),

“Karma winds all the joys and hard trials in the current life to all the good and bad deeds in the past life.”

With age, the expectation of care and love also transforms among elders for their children. The elders look out for support both physically and emotionally (Pillai, 1985).

Religious activity participation is the second primary concern of the Indo-American elders. The dependence of elders on their children for transportation to the temples for the fulfillment of religious activities has driven them into a position of dilemma. For example, elders usually complained about their dependence on their sons. The temples are mostly located in particular metropolitan communities. Old people face problems in going to the temples as their children do not take them there or they do not pay attention to them.

The other dilemma is social isolation, leading to depression, fear of loneliness and a static lifestyle. Lack of communication, sharing of thoughts, and emotional disconnection due to the conflict of perceptions between elders and social neighborhood evolved.

A stagnant or immobile lifestyle, along with dependence on close people, contributed to the health hazards among the elderly people class. There has been an increased risk of ailments reported, such as high cholesterol, high BP, and diabetes in males. Female Americans are prone to arthritis and coronary diseases, which cut down the risk of such diseases. The contributing factor that I understood is the depressive and immobile lifestyle that these people adopt because of the distorted interaction among members of families.

The elder immigrants give their young age and time to build and store for their future and family. They often think about going back to their homeland, but when they feel they usually get so late that they get shackled by their beliefs to be with their children no matter what. Their view is that every decision they make should be family-oriented as they are brought up with a culture of collectivism, not individualism, as reported by Hellweg (1987); the decision-making process should not be unilateral.

The Asian culture shares similar beliefs with the Indo-Americans. They emphasize the togetherness among family members and interdependence. According to Mui (1996), aging is a harmonious process, and elders are the assets of knowledge. They should not be isolated and rejected. This belief is similar to Indo-American cultural beliefs. The dependence on elders for care and support both financially and emotionally is identical in both Asian and Indo cultures; Korean culture mediates the dependent relationship between children and parents and considers it a shame to ask for support

from a side family. The elders are regarded as figures of immense respect and importance in the family unit, as reported by Cheung (1989), sharing a similar collectivism and interactive approach with Indo-American elders.

From the analysis of the three groups, elderly immigrants showed that they did not return home because of the urge for economic stability and social experience. The first group of the Indo-Americans shows better assimilation with modern American culture. The reason is the employment as the elders were all employed and ethical in social interaction. So they felt less isolated. The second group comprised people from the era after 1965. They felt somehow connected with the same ethnic group, which they got a chance to meet at social events. The third group comprised the most affected people, who reported signs of social isolation, disconnection, and stagnancy within the common belief of individualism.

Hinduism and Asian cultures emphasize keeping the norms and values intact. The majority of the elders from Indo-Americans and Asian-Americans in the interviews shared their disturbed emotions about losing the integrity of their rules and values and also about the reluctance to open up about the conflict publicly. Both cultures show similarities with each other but dissimilarity with the current Americanism. The dilemmas observed through exploratory research among the Indo-Americans in U.S. culture are quoted as follows:

“Uncertainty in coming home, social detachment, regrets of not returning to the homeland at a younger age, dependence accompanied with stagnant lifestyle and poor health, less coordination among fellow members, exploitation of religious practice by the irresponsible behavior of children, and deterioration of cultural norms” (Balgopal, 1999).

Farver, JoAnn M. XU, Yiyuan; Narang, Sonia; Lieber, Eli “Ethnic Identity, Acculturation, Parenting beliefs, and Adolescent Adjustment: A comparison of Asian Indian and European American Families.”

Child-rearing beliefs are associated with the well-being of adolescents. In this study, there will be a comparison of the kind of child-care of Euro-Americans and Indian-Americans regarding child rearing concerning parenting beliefs of mainstream Mexicans. It also concentrates on the variances among families by observing the adolescents of the family and seeing the alteration between them. The acculturation styles adopted by the Asian and European American families were explored.

For the study, a total of 360 Indo-Euro Americans were collected, with 180 Asian Indians and 180 European Americans. The Asian individuals were from their parents who immigrated after 1960 to America for education and financial stability. Their parents lived in America for approximately 11-43 years. One parent and one adolescent were assessed for different parameters such as demographic information, acculturation, ethnic identity and child-rearing beliefs. The assessment of the necessary information and childrearing beliefs was estimated through a questionnaire. The family conflict, anxiety, and depression in the second-generation adolescents were checked further through the checklist, trait inventory and self-descriptive quizzes. The results stated that more assimilated Indo-American adolescents have less conflict in comparison to less assimilated adolescents. At the same

time, Asian Indian adolescents without adjustment had more family conflicts, anxiety, and depression than European-American adolescents.

Indo-American parents who are encouraged to adapt to both cultural beliefs are more likely to succeed in child-rearing beliefs and have a positive influence on young adolescent psychology. The individuals from modern Asian Indian culture successfully blended within the cultural norms of the US. The assimilated acculturation format among Asian Indian immigrants is in approximation with the mainstream concept of child-rearing beliefs among Europeans. The effect of assimilated parenting culture is in the affirmative equation with adolescent psychology.

Child-rearing beliefs of the parents, family environment, and immigrant parents are associated with the impact on the psychological behavior of second-generation adolescents. Immigrant adolescents face a hard time adapting to the cultural norms of the new place. Here is a quote about the cultural adaptation difficulty:

"Immigrant Adolescents face the challenge of establishing a distinctive self-identity and an ethnic identity that is compatible with the beliefs of the natal culture and the American mainstream" (Zhou, 1997).

The role of parents through acculturation, child-rearing beliefs, along the ambiance of the family affects adolescent performance and psychology. Parents' level of adaptation to the new culture and natal culture determines family conflict, self-esteem and ethnic identity among immigrant adolescents. Asian Indian families were studied for acculturation format and its effect, as mentioned in the quote:

"When parents and children both share integrated acculturation style, there is less chance of family conflict, and the impact turns out to be positive on adolescent achievement, ethnic identity, self-esteem and good psychological state" (Farvar, Badha & Narang, 2002).

Child-rearing beliefs in Asian Americans are all-centric and more focused on the authoritative parenting style. Indo-Americans focus on controlling their child with command in comparison to Euro-American families. Family conflict happens to be a major issue in immigrant families. Parents do not want to see their children getting into the Western norms of independence and authority over their personal lives. Here is the proof from the paper:

"Family conflicts surround parents' rejection of mainstream American views regarding dating and marriages" (Dsgupta, 1996).

The results of the findings showed that child-rearing beliefs have a secure connection with adolescent psychological outcomes. Indo-American immigrant parents showed more training and shaming, which resulted in anxiety and depression in the adolescent. The commanding attitude in parenting poorly affects the mental state of the child, whereas the parents who adjust to the cultural forms are more likely to be on familiar ground and positively influence their child. Family conflict also happens with

the marginalized acculturation style rather than the adapted style in some Indo-Americans.

Asian Indian culture integration with the host culture is the best-adapting strategy that most Indo-American parents prefer. They do not remove their cultural elements, but they weave the host cultural elements with their natal culture. According to the Patel-Amin & power (2002)..

"Indo-American parents use a combination of natural and modern adopt practices depending on the situation as the best method for acculturations style" (Farver et al., 2007).

Rastogi, Mudita and Wampler, Karen S. "Adult Daughters' Perceptions of the Mother-Daughter Relationship: A Cross-Cultural Comparison. Journal of Family Relations Vol. 48, No. 3, July 1999. Page 327-336.

The cultural study was conducted through a comparative cross-sectional survey on mother-and-daughter relationships among various cultural groups such as Asian American, Indian-American, and Mexican American. In the U.S., the exploratory study checks out the parallels and changes among European- and Indo-American adult daughters.

The relationship is examined from three perspectives such as reliability, closeness, and collectivism. The primary instrumentation used for the analysis was the MAD mother-adult-daughter questionnaire to assess the three parameters. The interviews about the kind of relationship with the mother were taken to validate the information given in the survey.

The impact of culture on mother-daughter varies with region. The element of closeness and dependency is famous in the mother-daughter relationship among Asian-American and Mexican American families. The daughters are related and close with their mothers in Asian-American families. The closeness between both women leads to attachment in the relationship. According to Collins and Reed (1990),

"Closeness in mother and daughter relationship is an underlying aspect of attachment."

The element of closeness came out higher in Asian-American and Mexican–American families than the actual value.

The Indo-Asian mother-daughter relationship showed a high score for closeness and love. The relationship analysis resulted in high core values for the Indo-American mother-daughter relationship perspective as given:

"Trust, love, friendship, discussion of beliefs, honesty with each other and showing respect to each other" (Rustogi, 1999).

The Indo-American's second-generation daughters value their relationship with their mothers and seek closeness, intimacy, attachment, and dependency, while the European-American's cultural values consider dependency inappropriate. Here is the proof,

“Anglo view closeness and intimacy as undesirable, but it is preferred and desired by the Mexican and Indo-American families” (Spiegal, 1982).

My observation of the three interviews unfolded the impact of cultural values on second-generation Indo-American lives. The young people face difficulty coming to a new environment with modern culture. They get settled into the norms and values with advanced thinking, but the role of immigrant parents who are committed to their cultural values face a hard time in adjustment.

Throughout the research on the perspective of young Indo-American immigrants, I came to know the mindset of the lifestyle and adjustability. The young generation of Indian culture is living life with their Indian families with Indian cultural values, but when they socialize in the community, they have to go for an assimilation approach.

The majority of first-generation parents from Indo culture are clear about their cultural values, and they do not want to mingle with American values. This attitude of authoritative parenting has led to the emergence of depression, anxiety and low self-esteem among young adolescents of the second generation.

From the research and interview of the Indo-elders group, the upper-class Indians who are employed successfully in their families and social circles consider assimilation the best acculturation style. The second generation of such families also finds adaptation to be useful and less exhausting regarding settlement and expansion of social circle along with combined Indo-American cultural norms.

The other side of the observation from the discussion of elders from Indian families turned around family conflicts, fear of isolation and lack of interaction between child and parent. The reason for such a tense relationship is directly linked to the parent’s expectation of the child to fully embrace the Indian cultural values and negate the Americanized values. The second generation faces pressure and does not want to put themselves in the position of choosing. It resulted in less interaction and a lack of time and care for their parents from children.

The last point that I tried to explore in Indian families is the young daughter’s perceptions about the nature and extent of the relationship with their mother. This includes the impact of cultural values and how much they affect Indo-American families. Closeness, intimacy, reliance, and dependency are desirable elements in a mother-adolescent-daughter relationship because the parents have brought up the daughters with rich cultural values, and they share a bond where they can give space and build trust to talk about anything in their relationship. Culture has not impacted this kind of relationship as of now. On the other hand, the American mother-daughter relationship preferred independence over dependence in such ties.

The Indo American culture origins based on collectivism, a decision process based on the whole family, and expecting support from the family. While the Americanized culture is the opposite, it equips the second generation to move out of their cultural box and go with the advanced process of assimilation and mingling as a thriving cultural approach.