

Negotiating Identity: Intergenerational Conversations
in a South Asian – Canadian Family

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Abstract

Negotiating Identity: Intergenerational Conversations in a South Asian – Canadian Family

Sonia Dhaliwal

This thesis investigates change over time within a diasporic community in Canada using oral history methodologies with four generations of a South Asian-Canadian family. Using a life story narrative style, the formative experiences of first-generation immigrant parents highlights their pre-migratory social worlds and kinship ties. Their experiences in re-creating cultural practices within the private sphere of their homes and re-establishing kinship networks to socialize their children with their heritage created strong ties to their cultural homeland. The experiences of later immigrant cohorts - the 1.5 generation - indicates how intra-generational experiences differed and influenced parenting practices with their children. By contextualising each generation within the broader history of the diaspora, the community's growth, and movement around Southern Ontario highlights the emergence of a South Asian ethnoburb. The ethnoburb served as a public sphere steeped in South Asian heritage, blending two cultural worlds, and replicating the diverse experiences of the South Asian diaspora. The ethnoburb also created space within the private sphere of the home to negotiate values between two distinct cultures. By shifting the analysis of agency from fixed points of conflict and reconceptualising notions of age, space, and gender, the granular social navigations indicate on-going negotiations within a transplanted community in Canada.

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Introduction

Growing up in an immigrant family I heard countless stories from my parents about their lives ‘back home’. My father loves to talk about his life in Punjab. The world he describes feels idyllic and effortless – very different from my structured and monotonous life in suburban Brampton. When I was ten years old, my parents took my brother and I on our first, and only, trip to India. This voyage was a rite of passage in many ways. For my parents, it meant years of saving were finally paying off. For my brother and I, it meant we would be the kid in class who was away on a trip. Long family trips ‘back home’ were quite common among the children at my elementary school. The neighbourhood had a large immigrant population – mostly from the Caribbean and South Asia. At any given moment throughout the school year, there was at least one person from class who was gone ‘back home’.

Up until this trip, my only impressions of India had come from stories recounted at family gatherings or from what I had seen in the South Asian films and television my parents watched. Walking out of the arrivals gate at the Delhi airport is one of the most vivid memories I have from my childhood. The sounds of people yelling over car horns, the crowd of people zig-zagging through traffic jams of Ambassador cars, and the distinct smell that can only really be described as the ‘India Smell,’ are as fresh in my mind today as they were then. In the few minutes it took for us to walk from the arrivals gate to our waiting car, all my excitement turned to anxiety – had I just walked onto the set of a Bollywood film? Why did all the cars look like they were from the 1950s? Why was everyone always yelling when they talked? The atmosphere was such a dramatic change from what I was used to. I had never felt more out of place in my life!

Despite the initial culture shock, I adjusted quickly to my stay in India. Playing an integral role in my early childhood, my grandmother had equipped me well by teaching me Punjabi so I could speak to my relatives, introduced me to the flavours of Punjabi food, and to know how to dress and behave in places of worship. Although I never completely fit in with my cousins in India – there were always slight mannerisms, customs, and the casual mix of Hindi and Punjabi I never quite got right – I was still able to develop memorable and meaningful relationships with my relatives. Though I have not been back to India since, I do not feel as though I am missing out on much. The neighbourhoods I grew up in helped recreate many of the sounds, smells, and spaces my family had left behind. What do stand out are the subtle differences that mark me as someone raised abroad. I have been immersed in a unique version of South Asian culture that arguably only exists outside of the sub-continent. As historian Judith Brown describes it, “becoming a diaspora is a long-term business of managing change and continuity, and of negotiating old and new senses of identity [...]”¹

Statistics have shown that Canadian immigration reforms from the late 1960s dramatically shifted migration trends. Since the 1980s the number of migrants arriving from Asia has risen so steadily that between 2011 and 2016 immigrants from Asia, specifically South Asia and Southeast Asia, made up over half the total number of immigrants settling in Canada.² Studies about ethnic immigrant communities often focus on how these communities are adjusting to their new cultural reality, particularly as cultural values and practices differ from the Eurocentric cultural framework of the Canadian mainstream. South Asian culture, in particular,

¹ Judith M. Brown, *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29.

² “Immigrant population by selected places of birth, admission category, and period of immigration,” Statistics Canada, last modified April 3rd, 2019. Accessed August 1st, 2020, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dv-vd/imm/index-eng.cfm>

values communal practices and places family at its core, often framed within a patriarchal structure.³ Members of a family have certain roles to fulfill depending on their position within the familial hierarchy, with gender and age playing a crucial role in how each role is performed.

My trip to India provided me with insight into the place and culture my parents had come from. However, my experience growing up within the transplanted cultural sphere of South Asia led me to wonder why I was feeling slightly out of place, despite my familiarity with the customs and traditions. I also wondered why my parents had decided to leave a place they still had strong ties with. Their standard response of ‘we struggled so you could have a better life’ seemed too rehearsed. I also wondered whether some of my older relatives, particularly my great-aunts and great-uncles, weaponized their ‘immigrant struggle’ to ensure their children, my second-generation aunts and uncles, never strayed too far from traditional South Asian values. This struggle was often framed by positioning the two cultures as a binary, whereby Canadian society was spoken of as one homogenous culture which clashed with South Asian, or more specifically, Punjabi, culture. Being the children of an earlier cohort that arrived and settled in Canada, my aunts and uncles were burdened with the task of creating a blueprint of how a good South Asian-Canadian youth should balance traditional South Asian values with (white) Canadian values. At the same time, my parents did not enforce the hard and fast rules according to which my aunts and uncles had been raised. Indeed, the neighbourhoods and social circles my aunts and uncles grew up in differed quite dramatically from my own. Whereas they had grown up largely within their parents’ social network and working-class neighbourhoods, I grew up creating my own social network in a middle-class suburb where most of the community was, and still is, South

³ Lina Samuel, “Mating, Dating and Marriage: Intergenerational Cultural Retention and the Construction of Diasporic Identities among South Asian Immigrants in Canada,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31, no. 1 (2010): 97-98.

Asian. Not only did I grow up surrounded by other South Asian - Canadians, but the internal diversity within the community introduced me to experiences outside the Punjabi-Canadian context, informing me of the long and complex migration journeys other South Asians undertook.

This thesis is a micro-historical study of four generations of a South Asian family that made Canada home in the decades after World War II. One of the recurring themes in the interdisciplinary scholarship on immigrant families are the intergenerational tensions between immigrant parents and their children who were born or raised in the country of immigration. It is a topic that has attracted the attention of historians, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, ethnographers, as well as social workers, whose work has informed my own reading of the life-stories of my family members.⁴ Yet in this rich body of literature, multi-generational works are rare, and studies that explore the webs of relationships between more than two generations of

⁴ Aziz Talbani and Parveen Hasanali. "Adolescent females between tradition and modernity: gender role socialization in South Asian immigrant culture," *Journal of Adolescence* 23 (2000); Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco. *Children of Immigration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001; Katy Gardner and Kanwal Mand, "'My Away is Here': Place, Emplacement and Mobility amongst British Bengali Children," *Journal of Ethnic Migration Studies* 38, no. 6 (2012); Lina Samuel, "Mating, Dating, and Marriage: Intergenerational Cultural Retention and Construction of Diasporic Identities among South Asian Immigrants in Canada," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31, no. 1 (2010); M. Gail Hickey, "We weren't allowed to date': Unpacking US South Asian Courtship Narrative," *South Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (July 2017); Mythili Rajiva, "South Asian Canadian Girls' Strategies of Racialized Belonging in Adolescence," *Girlhood Studies* 2, no. 2 (Winter 2009); Pavna Sodhi, "Bicultural Identity Formation of Second-Generation Indo-Canadians," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 40, no. 2 (2008); Pramila Aggarwal and Tania Das Gupta, "'Grandmothering at work' conversations with Sikh Punjabi grandmothers in Toronto," *South Asian Diaspora* 5, no. 1 (2012); Peggy Levitt, "Roots and Routes: Understanding the Lives of the Second Generation Transnationally," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 7 (August 2009); Purnima Sundar, "To 'Brown it Up' or to 'Bring Down the Brown': Identity and Strategy in Second-Generation, South Asian-Canadian Youth," *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 17, no. 3 (2008); Shobhita Jain, "Transmigrant women's agency and Indian diaspora," *South Asian Diaspora* 2, no. 2 (2010); Richard Wiscott and Karen Kopera-Frye. "Sharing of Culture: Adult Grandchildren's Perceptions of Intergenerational Relations," *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 51, no. 3 (2000), 5.

immigrants missing entirely.⁵ As this work contends, it is in the *longue durée* of relationships between four generations of an immigrant family that we can gain a deeper understanding of both what bound generations together and what divided them.

This study aims at examining relationships *between* and *within* generations, focusing particularly on the role of age, gender, and space during moments of tension. In exploring the experiences of four generations of my South Asian family, this study poses the following questions: From what kind of cultural world did the first generation come? Why did they leave their lives of comfort? How did they maintain links with their homeland, and how did they ensure the transmission of language, culture, and South Asian values to their children? In turning to the inter-and intra-generational relationships and the negotiations that took place between first and second generations, this study then asks: How did each generation conceptualize their identity? To what extent did the second-generation internalize South Asian and Canadian cultural values?

This thesis then shifts its critical gaze to the 1.5 five generation who arrived early in their adulthood. This later cohort was able to draw upon the economic assistance and social support provided by the earlier cohort of first generation immigrants. What was the experience of migration like for members of an in-between generation, such as my parents, who were just a few years older than my then adolescent aunts and uncles? How did my parents play witness to the parenting practices of earlier cohorts and how, in the process, did they forge their own sense of identity? Finally, this study turns to my own experience of growing up in an “ethnoburb”, a

⁵ For two studies examining intergenerational relations and disconnect in immigrant families, see Kara Somerville and Oral Robinson, “Keeping Up Appearances Within the Ethnic Community: A Disconnect between First and Second Generation South Asians’ Educational Aspirations,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 48, no.2 (2016) and Ramsay Liem, “Shame and Guilt among First- and Second-Generation Asian American and European Americans,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 28, no. 4 (1997).

physical and cultural space that came to assume much of the work of cultural transmission previously carried out by and within the domestic sphere.

The study most closely aligned with my own work is Amita Handa's investigation of the experiences of South Asian-Canadian youth growing up in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in the late 1990s. In turning to the intersection of race, gender, and class, Handa, a sociologist by training, interviewed second-generation South Asian girls in their late teens to learn more about the ways they negotiated South Asian and mainstream cultural values. Often, conflicts emerged when the young women pushed back against the demands of either culture, for instance when they chose to date despite South Asian cultural taboos against the practice, or when they attempted to integrate within mainstream white society and were forced to confront the casual racism of their white peers. By focusing on the experiences of young women, Handa provides helpful insight into how "South Asian cultural identity relies on particular definitions of womanhood in order to assert a distinct Eastern identity vis-à-vis the West."⁶ Handa notes that, despite culture being in a constant process of negotiation, her respondents relied on a fixed notion of 'South Asian' identity, largely rooted in "biological markers such as skin colour, or common ethnic markers, such as language, dress, and religion."⁷ These markers are used by the girls to establish the boundaries of their ethnic identity. This cultural understanding of "proper" South Asian womanhood stood in sharp contrast to the South Asian definition of a modern 'Canadian' woman who was independent and sexually liberated.⁸ The perceived differences between these two cultures, and a woman's position within it, became the crux of these young

⁶ Amita Handa, *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts: South Asian Girls Walk the Tightrope of Culture* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2003), 19.

⁷ *Ibid*, 22.

⁸ Purnima Sundar, "To "Brown it Up" or to "Bring Down the Brown": Identity and Strategy in Second-Generation, South Asian-Canadian Youth", *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 17, no. 3 (2008): 260-1.

women's negotiations as they developed their sense of self and cultural identity. Handa's work intricately recreates the peer networks and social spaces so important to her adolescent respondents, largely situated within the confines of school. Yet her analysis of the domestic sphere is organized almost exclusively around the trope of conflict; Handa's interviewees represented their parents as oppositional figures to rebel against.⁹

Instead of conceptualizing the agency of young people primarily as a form of resistance to adult impositions, this study embraces the concept of "social navigation" to examine the complex ways in which South Asian children experienced and navigated parental and cultural expectations.¹⁰ In her probing critique of what she terms the "agency trap", historian Mona Gleason has advocated for a more inclusive analytical framework that places children and youth within the complex and intricate web of familial and social relationships. Gleason encourages historians of childhood and youth to examine agency through a "*relational and contextual*" framework.¹¹ As Gleason suggests, by turning our attention to the "messier 'in between' of negotiated exchanges between and among children" that include both "intergenerational alliances" and "relationships outside the nuclear family," we can arrive at a more nuanced understanding of children and youth as historical actors.¹²

The ethnographic studies by Robert Orsi and Yen Le Espiritu provide a model of how to situate diasporic youth into webs of familial relationships and community dynamics. In *Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* anthropologist

⁹ Handa, *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts*, 23.

¹⁰ Henrik Vigh, "Motion squared: A second look at the concept of social navigation," *Anthropological Theory* 9, no.4 (February 2010): 419-38.

¹¹ Mona Gleason, "Avoiding the agency trap: caveats for historians of children, youth, and education," *History of Education*, 45, no. 4 (2016): 557. Author's emphasis.

¹² *Ibid*, 448.

Orsi recreates the cultural and physical spaces of the *domus* – the family home – as the dominant social space in which Italian migrants to New York City sought to socialize their Italian-American children.¹³ His work depicts the ways in which each member of the family performed their role, based on their gender and position within the family hierarchy. He also highlighted the interdependent relationships that existed between the generations, with children relying on parents for the knowledge they needed to help them navigate life in the *domus*, and parents relying on their children to navigate wider American society outside the *domus*. In turn, in *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities and Countries*, sociologist Espiritu highlights the experiences of a racialized diasporic community.¹⁴ Espiritu contextualises the cultural and migratory experiences of the community and employs a multi-generational oral history methodology. She dedicates a chapter to second-generation youth and examines how they navigated social spaces outside the home and with other Americans, some of whom also came from recently migrated communities. She then analyzes the internal dynamics within the Filipino diaspora in San Diego, focusing on how first-generation migrants recreated cultural practices and kinship networks. By including the first generation she helps the reader understand how cultural expectations were set and by whom. She incorporates second-generation interviews to describe the various ways these expectations impacted children raised in America, effectively providing a more nuanced portrayal of the cultural complexities in the lives of second-generation children of immigrants. Like Handa, both Orsi and Espiritu explore the intersections of gender, class, and race. Yet unlike Handa, Orsi and Espiritu incorporate the voices of the first generation into their

¹³ Robert A. Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003).

studies as well, offering a multi-vocal *and* multi-generational account of how migrants navigated parental expectations, cultural change, and gender roles.

In applying the analytical frameworks of Orsi and Espiritu's studies, this study explores three key themes in its analysis of one South Asian-Canadian experience – that of a Punjabi Sikh family. First, it places the first-generation within their social world prior to migration. The opening chapter of this thesis discusses the early lives of my great-aunts in, two exceptional Punjabi women who were part of the early cohort of South Asians immigrating after World War II. It examines the cultural world these women came from, how they were raised, and the lives they led prior to their migration. My great-aunts exemplify how women navigated their position as daughters and wives to push their lives into a trajectory of their own making, rather than living in a world dictated by their father or their husbands. Their early years in Canada are recounted in the following chapter, where their downward social mobility and immediate economic needs forced them to rely on friends as their immediate kinship network, and rally their familial kinship networks to provide transnational childcare for their young children. Their social networks effectively re-created a private sphere of knowledge exchange in which their children's early years were deeply entrenched within Punjabi ways of life. The formative memories of my second-generation aunts and uncles indicate how strongly they are tied to their cultural heritage through food, language, and extended stays in India.

Second, this study turns to the intergenerational negotiations between first- and second-generation immigrants. My aunts and uncles recount how they managed parental expectations as they began to create their own social networks. As children and adolescents, they framed their desires to participate in mainstream cultural activities, such as playing hockey or attending mixed-gendered events, as educational activities; for their parents deeply valued education as a means

to ensure their children's success in Canada and validate their own struggles as immigrants. In particular, my aunt Rani's recollection of her prom suggests that second-generation children were working together to push their parents' understanding of Canadian social markers as she, being the eldest sibling, ensured her younger siblings did not have to struggle in the same way. The moment at which my aunts and uncles were engaging in these early struggles is also when the 1.5 generation, my parents, were arriving in Canada. My parents benefitted from their relatives' guidance as they adjusted into their new surroundings. Yet they also witnessed some of the early points of tension that emerged between my great-aunts and their children. My second-generation aunts and uncles helped introduce elements of Canadian culture to my parents.

The final section provides an extended meditation on age, gender, and space as I reflect on my own experience as a child of the 1.5 generation raised in the South Asian domus. As my parents gained an economic foothold in Canada, they were able to move to the middle-class suburb of Brampton, which soon emerged as a hub for the South Asian community around the GTA. The 'ethnoburb' helped shift the burden of cultural transmission into a public cultural sphere and created a space within the home to explore elements of mainstream values. In this final section, my mother and I discuss our experiences with inter-generational cultural negotiations, focusing particularly on dating and marriage. My conversation with my mother indicates that later immigrants who had the benefit of an existing community were able to adapt their values to incorporate elements of mainstream society. Her experience suggests that, although core values still lie within traditional ideals, this later cohort were more willing to engage with certain elements of western traditions as well.

This work is also a deeply personal story of my family's experiences as recent immigrants to Canada. Relying on my pre-existing relationships with various relatives, I

interviewed individuals that arguably reflect four different generational experiences within the diaspora. That being said, my family represents only one South Asian experience – that of a Punjabi Sikh family. Considering the ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity that exists in South Asia, not every South Asian – Canadian family will have had the same trajectory as my family. This is worth noting considering my family resides in the Toronto area, which is host to the largest number of South Asians in Canada and has the widest spectrum of experiences within the community.

I first approached my paternal great-aunts, Dial and Amar, the younger sisters of my paternal grandmother. They represent the experiences of the early cohort of first-generation immigrants. They chose to do their interview together at Amar's home on a cool summer evening. Their storytelling was very animated and full of emotions, often encompassing grand hand gestures, anecdotes, and tangents. Their lives have been tightly intertwined, a bond amplified by the fact that their husbands were also very close and the two couples either lived near or with each other, raised their children together, and supported one another through family crises. Neither Dial nor Amar asked many questions about my project, simply assuming I was collecting our family history. While there is some truth to this (they are the few remaining members of their generation), my agenda lay in questioning their experience as immigrants. However, much of their interview focused on their life prior to migration – discussing at length where they had gone to school and mentioning long-gone relatives. They spoke in tandem and with an almost rehearsed rhythm. As Alessandro Portelli notes, both interviewer and interviewee bring their own agendas to the interview – mine to discuss their life as immigrants, and theirs to

discuss their life before immigration.¹⁵ By letting my great-aunts recount their early experiences, this study provides for a deeper understanding of their formative years, and the people who helped influence the trajectory of their lives – most notably their father. By engaging with their life-story – from childhood to grand-parenthood – and listening closely to their joint narrative, often re-told based on events and less through chronology, I was able to understand how they viewed themselves as successful immigrant women.

My great-aunts have five children between them, four of whom I spoke with. Dial's children are my aunts Rani, Gagan, and my uncle Karan. Amar has two sons, the youngest being my uncle Cooper. Mirroring the close bond between their mothers, my uncles Karan and Cooper chose to recount their narratives together. Their easiness in our relationship was reflected through the relaxed atmosphere of our interview. Asking if they could watch a baseball game in the background, they spoke comfortably and candidly about their experiences and their opinions of being the children of immigrants. Unlike their mothers' intertwined life-stories, Karan and Cooper's interview was very much a re-telling of two individual lives, suggesting that, despite the closeness of their mothers, their home environments still differed. Gagan's interview took place in her home, where she lives with her partner, their children, and her in-laws. This was a quieter and more intimate setting with just the two of us in conversation with one another and the faint sounds of her family in the background. Her story was focused very much on her own experiences, and it was not until after the recording stopped that her husband joined the conversation. My interview with Rani was done through a phone call as she now lives in California with her partner, their daughter, and her mother-in-law. Given the time difference, she

¹⁵ Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," in *Narrative and Genre* ed by Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge Studies in Memory and Narrative, 1998), 23-45.

was still in the middle of her workday, but took a moment to speak to me during her drive to a meeting. Resembling her mother's passionate style of storytelling, Rani coloured her stories with a lot of humour, despite discussing very intimate struggles.

Recollecting their intertwined lives, my great-aunts and their children were often describing the same events through differing perspectives. As Michael Frisch states, "memory is living history, the remembered past that exists in the present."¹⁶ Memories around these events differed slightly, informing how each individual interpreted the same events and the emotions they tied to them. These emotions were particularly strong among my second-generation aunts and uncles.¹⁷ The differing accounts around life events provided a multi-dimensional experience of this early cohort's social worlds and a glimpse into the pivotal role of gender.

To reflect a differing first-and-second generation experience, I interviewed my mother, Nina, on a late October evening through a phone call. This was arguably the most difficult of my interviews, as I struggled to negotiate my roles as both interviewer and daughter. My mother too was slightly hesitant, particularly in discussing some of our on-going negotiations, largely around the topic of dating and marriage. In our discussion, these tense subjects were often surrounded by memories of lighter topics or funny anecdotes from our shared lives. In this way, we were able to manage our emotions as we navigated difficult terrain and the nature of our discussion shifted from interviewer-interviewee to simply being a conversation between mother and daughter.¹⁸

¹⁶ Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990): xxiii.

¹⁷ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: form and meaning in oral history* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

¹⁸ Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornet, "Memory and the Self," in *The Voices of the Past: Oral History 4th Edition* ed by Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 173-189.

The depth of my interviews reflects the personal relationships I share with my interviewees. While they were all very candid with their stories, they implicitly expected me to honour the trust they were placing in me and my research. Notably, most of my interviewees chose to remain anonymous.¹⁹ As Katherine Borland notes, “what do I as a listener make of [their] story?”²⁰ My interviewees tasked me with balancing between our familial relationships – grand-niece, niece, or daughter – and my role as oral historian. Therefore, when I choose to use their words, I maintained the casual tone of the conversations. In this way, I have tried to balance our personal relationships while still using their words to paint their experiences.

As this study holds, only by incorporating multi-generational perspectives into our analytical frame can we fully appreciate the nuances of inter-generational negotiations. In adopting this approach, this study portrays first-generation immigrant parents not only as gatekeepers of cultural authenticity, but also as modern young professionals who utilised their social networks to navigate their own course in life. Such a more granular approach also highlights the inter-dependent relationships between immigrant parents and children and serves as a reminder that we need to employ more fluid age categories; the experiences of the 1.5 generation differed in subtle but important ways from that of first- and second-generation immigrants. Finally, as this thesis contends, by the turn of the twenty-first century, the responsibility for cultural transmission was shifting from the private domestic sphere to the ethnoburbs. It was the ethnoburbs that allowed later generations of South Asian-Canadians to

¹⁹ In the framework of my consent form I provided my interviewees the option to remain anonymous. Nearly all chose to do so. I did not question their choice, nor did they provide any reasons for doing so. While it is hard to say for certain, one suggestion for this may be the on-going nature of their identity negotiation.

²⁰ Katherine Borland, “‘That’s Not What I Said’: Interpretive Conflict in Narrative Research,” in *The Oral History Reader 3rd Edition* ed by Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (London: Routledge Press, 2016), 416.

remain steeped in their cultural practices and retain their language, while simultaneously freeing parents of their burden as bearers of culture.

Chapter I: Life Back Home (1950s-1970s)

My *dadi*'s²¹ younger sisters, Dial and Amar, were among the first members of my family to immigrate to Canada. I grew up hearing only the good parts of their early experiences. Most of their stories made vague references to their struggles and tended to focus on happy memories, like the house parties they had or road trips they took to America to visit old college friends. The pictures in their homes also hinted at happy lives, with smiling faces and people dancing at basement parties. Their trendy 70s clothing - vibrant colours and loud prints - seemed to suggest they were doing well. As a child, I was amazed at how wild their early days had been and how much time and energy they had. It felt like such a contrast to my own parents, who always seemed to be working or content with falling asleep part way through that week's *Bollywood Freetime* movie on Sunday afternoons.

My great-aunts were part of the post-1945 wave of immigrants coming to Canada due to labour shortages, which had forced the Canadian government to re-evaluate colonial-era immigration laws. While my great-aunts benefited immensely from this lifting of restrictive, and often racist, policies towards non-European migrants, South Asian migration to Canada dates further back to the late nineteenth century. Migrant labourers, often men from rural backgrounds in northern India, had made their way to British Columbia as seasonal workers in the lumber and steel industries.²² Many of them were in search of opportunities to improve their economic circumstances, sending remittances back to their families in India.²³ As historian Archana Verma notes, the early migrant labourers in British Columbia often "owned land in Punjab and were

²¹ *Dadi* is the Punjabi word for paternal grandmother.

²² Sandeep K. Agrawal and Alex Lovell, "High-income Indian Immigrants in Canada," *South Asian Diaspora* 2, no. 2 (2010): 143.

²³ Archana B. Verma, *The Making of Little Punjab in Canada* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002), 81.

able to provide sufficiently for the daily existence of their families. If they aspired to improve their income, it was not for sheer survival or [...] personal advancement but for the sake of their larger kin group.”²⁴ However, racist sentiments towards Asian labourers led to anti-Asian immigration legislation. The 1908 amendment to Canada’s *Immigration Act* introduced the Continuous Journey Provision, which subtly targeted Asian migrants. This clause stipulated that migrants had to make one continuous journey from their country of origin to Canada.²⁵ Given the geographical distance and transportation of that time, one continuous journey from South Asia was nearly impossible. In effect, this clause made permanent immigration nearly impossible and almost completely stopped South Asian migration into Canada for nearly sixty years.²⁶

The phenomenon of migration was not unknown to the people of Punjab. With agriculture being the main industry many had moved within the region to take advantage of economic opportunities created through colonial policies that focused on land cultivation and extensive networks of canals and railroads.²⁷ However, by the early twentieth century people began to look outward to the British colonial world for better economic opportunities, thus leading to seasonal transnational journeys of Punjabi men to Canada’s west coast. What makes these early migration journeys so distinct from those of post-war migrants is that the decision to leave was a communal one, often made by elder men within the family network, and was undertaken almost exclusively by young working-age men.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid, 15.

²⁵ Erica Gagnon, Jan Raska, et al, “Continuous Journey Regulation, 1908,” Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/continuous-journey-regulation-1908>

²⁶ Agrawal and Lovell, “High-income Indian Immigrants in Canada,” 147.

²⁷ N.M. Khilani, *British Power in the Punjab 1839-1858* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1972), 210-213.

²⁸ Verma, *The Making of Little Punjab in Canada*, 14-18.

Prior to Canada's immigration reforms in 1967 more South Asians were immigrating to the United Kingdom (UK). Historian Rozina Visram has noted that South Asians had been migrating to Britain as far back as the eighteenth century when the East India Company began to establish its dominance in India. By the mid-nineteenth century, India had become a colony within the British colonial sphere. People of South Asian origin were sent across the empire as indentured labourers, while others were employed by British families as *ayahs* or worked as *lascars* on British merchant ships.²⁹ As the colonial infrastructure grew in India, more and more Indians began to travel to the UK for education, often to study law or medicine, or to write the civil service exam. Indian royalty would also travel to London, either as guests of the British crown or to "pay their 'respects' to the monarch."³⁰ As Visram describes it, this movement of people through colonial infrastructure was "a prelude to the post-independence migrations of [South] Asians to Britain."³¹

Building on Visram's work, geographer Ceri Peach found that the level of South Asian immigration to Britain reached new heights after the Second World War, largely due to similar labour shortages that were experienced in Canada. Nearly 112,000 South Asians lived in the UK in 1961, increasing to 516,000 by 1971, and ballooning to 1,480,000 in 1991, and increasing again to 2,027,000 by 2001.³² It is worth noting that the increase in numbers can also be attributed to regional conflicts in South Asia, such as Partition, which displaced millions of

²⁹ Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700-1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 1-10. An *ayah* is a nanny or lady's maid. A *lascar* is a sailor or sea merchant. For more on South Asian migration patterns see *South Asian Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity*, ed. by Colin Clarke, Cery Peach, and Steven Vertovec (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³⁰ Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, 10. For more on student migration to the UK see Sumita Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities: The England-returned* (London: Routledge, 2010).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Ceri Peach, "South Asian migration settlement in Great Britain 1951-2001," *Contemporary South Asia* 15, no. 2 (2006): 133-139. In his work, Ceri Peach uses the term *South Asian* to encompass immigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Indians and Pakistanis in 1947, and the split between East and West Pakistan, resulting in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.³³ Another factor that enabled South Asians to journey to the UK was the fact that some South Asians were already British citizens and had exposure to the English language, making the logistics of this particular pathway much simpler. Unlike Canada, the UK placed little to no restrictions on education or vocational skills, providing an opportunity for people from lower socio-economic classes to immigrate as well.³⁴ In addition, the UK had established six immigration offices in India, while Canada only had one.³⁵

By the 1960s the Canadian government began to reconsider its own immigration policies. In 1967, the Liberal government introduced what is now known as the points system. Through this new measure people could apply to immigrate to Canada so long as they had a certain level of education or skills qualification and met Canadian health standards.³⁶ This was the first time in Canadian history that racial preference was eliminated from immigration criteria and was solely based on merit. At the time of its implementation, these new criteria largely restricted South Asian immigration to individuals from middle- or upper-class backgrounds who had some form of post-secondary education or vocational training, as well as the financial capital to make the journey across the Atlantic Ocean. Over time, the South Asian diaspora began to grow, which has been reflected in Canadian statistics. Nearly 46,300 South Asians immigrated to Canada by 1971, 228,800 in 1991, and 892,800 in 2011.³⁷

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, 133.

³⁵ Subash Ramcharan, "South Asian Immigration: Current Status and Adaptation Modes" in *South Asians in the Canadian Mosaic*, ed by Rabindra N. Kanungo (Kala Bharati Foundation, 1984), 35.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "150 Years of Immigration in Canada," Statistics Canada, last modified May 17, 2018, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm>.

Like so many other young educated middle-class Indians, my great-aunts Dial and Amar reflected this trend of migration. The story of these two women highlights women's contribution to the immigrant narrative of 'a better life abroad'. Their story has been molded through decades of retelling, as they shared their experiences with family back home, and the younger generations growing up in Canada. It highlights the importance of transnational networks, and how experience was passed along these pathways. Their memories also speak to generational differences in India towards migration, particularly as attitudes towards non-European immigrants changed in the West.

Dial and Amar were born around 1942 and 1945, respectively, in a rural village called Jaspal Bangar, in the region of Punjab, in northern India. Their family was relatively well off for the time, having accumulated a large amount of land over several generations, and was not affected by the events of Partition. While the decision to split India into two independent nations, one in the form of India in its present state, the other as Pakistan, then comprised of East Pakistan and West Pakistan, is a long and complicated one, what is worth noting is the religious diversity that existed within this region. A diverse mix of predominantly Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus all had historic roots in Punjab, and the communities lived in relative harmony. The lines of partition were drawn largely along these religious grounds, with the Muslim majority districts going to West Pakistan, and the eastern districts to India.³⁸ As the colonial British government enacted this final act of governance, they undid centuries of communal harmony almost overnight.

Sonia: How was your life affected when Partition happened?

³⁸ Kirpal Singh, *The Partition of Punjab* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972), 33-34.

Dial: It really wasn't affected much because we were *desis*.³⁹ [...] But the village was scared.

Amar: We heard people were killed. [...] People had to flee on carts, almost half died en route.⁴⁰

Nearly two million people perished in the ensuing violence, and an estimated eight million were forced to relocate between independent India and West Pakistan.⁴¹ In avoiding the violence of Partition, Dial and Amar's early years were full of opportunities they felt did not exist for others around them.

Amar: Those who came from Pakistan endured more hardships. They moved from place to place [and] had no village at first. We stayed. [...] [We] felt it [Punjab] was like here [Canada]. Compared to those around us, anyway, our standard of living was much better.

Dial: A normal life, maybe a bit better than middle [class]. We were educated, married and moved to Canada. [...] We felt others were much poorer. We were fairly well off for the time."⁴²

As the nascent country was developing, alleviating poverty became one of the most pressing issues for the government. Literacy rates amongst the population, for both boys and girls, urban and rural, were meticulously calculated through a series of reports by the Education Committee throughout India's series of Five Year Plans.⁴³ After the underwhelming progress in literacy throughout the Second Five Year Plan (1956-1961), mandatory elementary education was implemented in the Third Five Year Plan (1961-1966), greatly benefiting Dial and Amar.⁴⁴

Amar: For education we went to an actual school, starting from first grade.

³⁹ *Desi* is a term broadly used to describe a person of South Asian origin. In the context of this interview, Dial used the term to describe those who were not forced to relocate when the region was partitioned between India and Pakistan in 1947.

⁴⁰ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal, July 21, 2018, Brampton, Ontario, Canada. Translated from Punjabi by Sonia Dhaliwal.

⁴¹ Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India: Women in Modern India* vol. 4, part 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 244; Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy 4th ed.* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 171.

⁴² Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translation by Sonia Dhaliwal.

⁴³ Sidheswar Saika, *History of Education in India* (Guahati: Mani Manik Prakash, 1968), 112-115.

⁴⁴ Stanley Wolper, *A New History of India*. 8th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 387.

Dial: There were government schools, primary schools. Then Khalsa school was founded. We studied in our village until tenth grade. Then [for] higher education [Amar] went to [Malerkotla] and I went to Ludhiana. Your grandmother was married at 18 at the *gurdwara* [Sikh place of worship]. She learned only how to read and right basic Punjabi from the *gurdwara*. Our brother went to tenth grade. Our eldest sisters also probably went to school at the *gurdwara*. [...] They raised us like boys.⁴⁵

With the post-Partition displacement breaking many kinship ties and cultural practices, particularly around marriage networks, a daughter's education took on greater meaning. In her micro-study of women's education among three generations of Punjabi women, Karuna Chanana notes how the turmoil of displacement left families with a strong desire to ensure their daughters' economic security through education. Her study highlights the slow progression in educational attainment between each generation, beginning with pre-Partition educational attainment in grand-mothers, post-Partition education attainment in mothers and their daughters.⁴⁶ It is worth noting however, that educating women did not always mean participation in the workforce, as women were still expected to remain largely within the private sphere of the home. Being the youngest of six children, with five daughters and one son in the family, Dial and Amar benefited greatly from their birth order. As each of their older sisters married and left for their husband's home, and the significant age gap between all the siblings, Dial and Amar's parents did not want an empty house. Their brother married while the women were still in school, and it was some time before any grandchildren arrived.⁴⁷ With their father being the patriarch of the household, he 'kept' his daughters in his home longer than would have been the norm at the time. This was

⁴⁵ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translation by Sonia Dhaliwal.

⁴⁶ Karuna Chanana, "Partition and Family Strategies: Gender-Education Linkages among Punjabi Women in Delhi," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 17 (April 1993): 25-34.

⁴⁷ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translation by Sonia Dhaliwal.

not entirely unusual, as younger daughters often did benefit through educational attainment as their father's position in the family slowly increased in influence.⁴⁸

As historian Michelle Maskiell notes, “college education influenced all patterns of adult social interaction [...] It coloured all aspects of marriage arrangements, from the age of the bride, to the choice of suitable husband, to their expectations for married life.”⁴⁹ Pursuing education meant Dial and Amar married at much later ages. While their sisters married in their mid-to-late teens, my great-aunts married in their late twenties. This provided several years toward the end of their education where they were able to work as educators, largely around the villages near their own (thus ensuring their female virtues). What is notable is that Dial and Amar's father had no interest in arranging marriages with men who had migrated abroad and were returning to India in search of a spouse. He did not want his children to migrate and endure the immigrant struggle and intentionally set out to arrange marriages into families where the prospects of migration were slim.

Dial: He didn't want us leaving. [...] He would say be a 'professor here, be a teacher here'.

Amar: His point was that if you are educated and working here your husbands should be too.

Dial: Why should you work labour jobs?

Amar: Why do you want to leave? If there was ever a *rishta* [proposal/relationship] that came around from Canada or England he would never go to see them.

Dial: Marriage was all arranged back then.

Sonia: How did he know this about [the] people who left?

Dial: That's what our question was to him! [*Laughs*]

⁴⁸ Michelle Maskiell, “Social Change and Social Control: College-Educated Punjabi Women 1913-1960,” *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no.1 (1985): 60.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 70.

Amar: [...] His company was always with educated people.

Dial: [...] He was only uneducated on paper, but he knew things.⁵⁰

Their father had lived through the era of independence and partition and clearly prized social stability. From his extended network of friends and acquaintances he was likely to have heard stories of the harsh lives of immigrants abroad. The circumstances around the arrangement of Dial's marriage indicate just how strongly against migration he was. Having already arranged Amar's marriage to a man with teaching qualifications, he arranged Dial's marriage with a man who had recently returned from a failed attempt at settling in America.⁵¹

Their father could not have predicted the West's change of sentiments towards racialized immigrants, or that his daughters had created their own network of informants who passed on information about their migration experiences. For him, education translated to a stable middle-class life in India. For his daughters it meant a keen awareness of India's struggles through a global lens. One could also argue that their education provided them with insight into new ideas and ways of life, further drawing them to idea of a Western way of life. Although Dial and Amar had lived sheltered and successful lives, they felt the constraints of their rural upbringing and wanted more.

Despite the opportunity to live comfortably in India, the pull of the West was strong, especially for Dial - an enthusiasm she shared with Amar's husband. This pushed them to inquire amongst their network of college friends on what life abroad was really like:

Sonia: How did [uncle] decide he wanted to come to Canada?

⁵⁰ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translation by Sonia Dhaliwal.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Amar: I don't know. He would always say he wanted to go to Canada. Even during his studies- he was still studying when we married- he would say that. He didn't like teaching.

Dial: Well, what happened was that it became a trend for people to leave.

Amar: No, it wasn't like that! [...] They would go to an agent and ask them to send [them] over. Like how students come today, back then it was as a visitor. We knew of a guy who had already come over. [Uncle] wrote him a letter saying he wanted to come over. [His friend] wrote back saying [...] "it's really difficult here, I miss my family. I heard you're married now and doing your B.Ed., and that your wife too has a government job. You'll be set in India."

But [my husband] thought this guy was just saying that to him. He kept saying, "no I'm leaving!" During my holidays he had taken the scooter to Ludhiana. He came back in a [taxi] car and informed his family that in a few days he was going to Canada. All the people in our home were stunned. We had just been married at the time, I too kept saying why are you leaving!⁵²

What becomes clear through Amar's retelling was the strong impact of transnational networks. The very resource their father had used to understand the plight of earlier migrants, and to subtly deter his children from leaving, became the same type of network his daughters and their husbands used to navigate a pathway towards migration. Whereas Amar was initially hesitant, her sister felt very differently:

Dial: But I was like, no go!

Amar: Yeah, she kept saying go! I would say no!

Dial: Well, my thinking was what are we ever going to get from being teachers [here in India]? [I said to my husband] you're a [city] planner, you should go! He kept saying to me we should ask [...] his friend [for information]. From what I could make out [this friend] was an engineer. He was a professor as well in India. He was [going] to America. [My husband] kept saying he was going to ask [this friend] about it, but I was like, he's leaving too! He's a professor and he's leaving! So, if a professor is leaving then that means there is something. So, I decided we were going.⁵³

Margaret Walton-Roberts, a geographer with a research focus on gender dynamics in migration patterns, suggests that "restrictive immigration policies of the early twentieth century

⁵² Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translation by Sonia Dhaliwal.

⁵³ Ibid.

creat[ed] a distinctively narrow geographical and social community, but also [...] reinforced gendered patriarchal norms of mobility by granting men the power to initiate the movement of women to Canada through marriage.”⁵⁴ As the circumstances of Dial and Amar’s migration to Canada suggest, women, too, did play an active role in their geographical movement, even if it was behind the scenes. While Amar’s husband was the first to initiate the formal process of migration, Dial was very vocal in expressing her own desires to leave India. Despite her husband’s reservations, and his initial failed attempt at settling in America, Dial felt there was strength in numbers and pushed her husband to follow in her brother-in-law’s footsteps.⁵⁵

Sociologist Shobhita Jain suggests that women were keenly aware of the societal constraints they faced but are also capable of navigating these limitations. She points out that “in most cases in North Indian families, a girl goes through various types of experience in the form of anticipatory socialization for her future adjustment in stable marriages.”⁵⁶ In essence, a girl is raised by her natal family to understand that she will eventually move to her husband’s village—she is raised to anticipate a form of migration. Jain goes on to suggest that this “anticipatory socialization” allows women to cope better with change, particularly the type of change that comes with migration. Both Dial and Amar experienced this after their marriages, as they left their home village of Jaspal Bhangar to live in their husbands’ villages with their families. Dial shows how a woman used anticipatory socialization to her advantage when she used her brother-in-law's decision to migrate to instigate her own.

⁵⁴ Margaret Walton Roberts, “Transnational geographies: Indian immigration to Canada,” *The Canadian Geographer* 47, no. 2 (2003): 240.

⁵⁵ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translation by Sonia Dhaliwal.

⁵⁶ Shobhita Jain, “Transmigrant women’s agency and Indian diaspora,” *South Asian Diaspora* 2, no. 2 (2010): 188.

Dial and Amar were well-educated women who had access to an international network through friendships. Dial comments that she and her younger sister were “raised [...] like boys” suggesting that perhaps she had an inherent sense of confidence and ability to provide for herself, largely through her educational opportunities. Despite Dial’s awareness that women rarely migrated on their own, she displayed enough confidence to challenge her husband’s reluctance by using her brother-in-law's decision. In a way, Dial also challenged her father’s decision. Although he had tried to use marriage as a means of securing his daughters’ lives in India, Dial, in turn, used marriage to instigate migration. Dial exemplifies how a woman understood her limitations, particularly those within her natal home, but, given her educational opportunities and access to a transnational network, managed to challenge these restrictions in her marital home, arguably a place where she felt somewhat equal to her partner.

As educated professionals, the sisters reflected a larger trend of what is sometimes referred to as ‘brain drain’, when young educated citizens of a less developed country leave for a more developed nation, either permanently or temporarily.⁵⁷ Their college friends described their new homes as being much more attractive, cleaner, and full of potential, albeit with warnings of great struggle ahead. This was something their father was clearly aware of and understood. When he learned of his daughters’ decisions to leave for Canada, he was less than enthusiastic.

Sonia: What did your dad say when you both decided to leave?

Dial: He was mad!

Amar: Really mad when they [our husbands] first came [to Canada]!⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Tharaleith K. Oommen, "India: Brain drain or the migration of talent?" *International Migration/Migrations Internationales/Migraciones Internacionales* 27, no. 3 (1989): 413.

⁵⁸ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translation by Sonia Dhaliwal.

This reality is noted by social scientists Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco, whose work focus on the lives of immigrant children and children of immigrants in America. They suggest “middle-class immigrants often experience significant losses in prestige: they frequently find employment in positions far below their training and qualifications because of language difficulties, lack of connections or lack of certification in certain professions.”⁵⁹ This is evident in Dial and Amar’s immigration story as neither they, nor their husbands, ever gained employment in their respective professions.

By the mid-1970s the two couples had arrived in Canada and were beginning their lives as new immigrants. Dial landed in Thompson, Manitoba in 1974 and Amar in Toronto, Ontario in 1975, with her infant son. Both families eventually moved to Toronto with all four adults finding work in manual labour or customer service. They were able to purchase a shared home in the neighbourhood of Etobicoke in Toronto and started raising their families together. In these early years, both sisters had moments they regretted their decision, particularly as their families grew. However, as time went on and the community expanded, they settled into their new lives and focused on creating stable homes for their children.

⁵⁹ Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 83.

Chapter II: Laying the Foundations (1970s – 1980s)

Whenever I heard my great-aunts speak about their early years in Canada their narrative felt clichéd. A life of comfort abandoned for the sake of their children's futures; a sentiment repeated by my own parents. However, what became apparent through my conversation with them was that there were more layers to their story than they had implied. From the context through which they chose to migrate to the ways they navigated their early years as immigrants, Dial and Amar's story was far from the linear narrative they had curated through years of storytelling. Like many immigrants, they were forced to confront a new reality of downward social mobility and recreate kinship networks, all while facing the challenges of raising young children. In many ways, the ways in which my great-aunts chose to navigate their new landscape laid out a blueprint for later immigrants. From the ways they socialized their children in South Asian practices, to the neighbourhoods they lived in, Dial and Amar were part of a pioneering cohort of who helped shape the foundations of a Punjabi experience within the Canadian South Asian diaspora.

Reality set in very quickly for Dial and Amar. Their husbands had preceded them by a few months and worked in the mines of northern Manitoba until they had saved enough money to sponsor their wives. Dial arrived in October of 1974, and Amar six months later with her infant son. Upon arriving in Canada, they were immediately separated by nearly 3,000 kilometers between them. Amar's husband had decided to move to Toronto right before her arrival because "it was closer to India," and found work in a factory. Dial's husband, however, stayed in Thompson and found work as a grocery store manager. When discussing her arrival and first impressions of Canada, Dial's disappointment of her new reality alludes to the fact that

their husbands had to prioritize their immediate economic needs over any long-term plans that could have led to better employment and financial stability down the line:

Dial: Well, [my husband] had come to Toronto [where he] was selected into the police force, but a friend of his said “I can get you a job as a manager at a grocery store [in Manitoba]. [...] In the police force you’ll be working three shifts.”

So, he didn’t wait for the police, he knew he had to sponsor me. He returned back to Thompson and when I arrived, I hated it. I came in October. [...] Right behind [our building] it was like a jungle. All these trees with no leaves [and] so much snow! [...] When I looked out of the gallery I said to myself “Oh my god! Is this Canada? It’s nothing!” I said, “If my brother was here, and my dad was here, they would say to me, you were reigning [in India], but now you’re in a dump!”⁶⁰

In her book *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada*, historian Franca Iacovetta states that many immigrants were taken by surprise at the reality of Canada. She suggests that immigrants were misled or lied to through omission of what to expect upon arrival, sometimes even by immigration officers. Struggles with housing shortages, unemployment, and the true cost of living in Canada were only faced once immigrants had arrived. Iacovetta goes on to suggest that this made the transition into a new culture and society much more emotionally taxing as it left immigrants woefully unprepared for the types of adjustments they would need to make in order to rebuild their lives.⁶¹ While Dial does not explicitly mention any type of economic or housing struggles she does say that her initial expectations of Canada were shattered after her cold and isolating experience in Thompson. She hints that this period in her life was one of doubt and regret, and she felt her father’s words of ‘a life abroad is a life of hardship’ proved to be true.⁶²

⁶⁰ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translated by Sonia Dhaliwal.

⁶¹ Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 49.

⁶² Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translated by Sonia Dhaliwal.

Despite both couples having professional backgrounds, the reality of needing to survive hindered them from ever finding work equivalent to their professional backgrounds. Their new working-class lives were a stark contrast to the privileged middle-class lives they had left in India. Given that they had graduated from Indian institutions, the Canadian government required they obtain Canadian equivalencies – something that the two couples simply could not afford.⁶³ More importantly, as their families grew their priorities shifted, and their immediate needs outweighed any others.

Sunera Thobani, a sociologist whose research has analyzed the impact of Canadian immigration policy on racialized women, has suggested that the Canadian system was never constructed to ensure immigrants would be able to obtain the social status they had enjoyed in their countries of origin. She goes on to say that immigration reform only took away racist and sexist policies “in principle”, but not “in effect.”⁶⁴ She argues that the *Immigration Act* of 1976 reinforced racist policies through “unequal allocation of resources for immigrant recruitment and processing, which favoured “developed” countries with large white populations” and for allowing immigration officers “discretionary powers which allowed their subjective prejudices to influence their allocation of points” for those applying under the independent class under the new system.⁶⁵

Essentially, Thobani implies that South Asian immigrants were not as desirable as European immigrants, due in large part to India’s low economic development at the time. In particular, South Asian women applying under the independent class received less attention from

⁶³ Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Will Somerville, and Madeleine Sumption, *The Social Mobility of Immigrants and Their Children* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009), 4.

⁶⁴ Sunera Thobani, “Closing the Nation’s Doors to Immigrant Women: The Restructuring of Canadian Immigration Policy,” *Atlantis* 24, no. 2 (2000):16-26.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

immigration officers, purely based on the fact that patriarchal ideas around immigration prioritized men. These factors, combined with the fact that their professional qualifications were not recognized in Canada, and Canada's labour shortages, meant that immigrants from "third world countries [became] critical to providing "cheap labour" [...] for economic expansion."⁶⁶ This critique is reiterated by Mythili Rajiva, who states that South Asian "engineers, doctors, university professors and other professionals became part of the cliché about highly educated immigrants in Canada driving taxi cabs or running grocery stores because they could not find a job in their field."⁶⁷

This reality was not only obvious to my great-aunts, but also to their father, who so desperately had wanted his children to stay in India. However, my great-aunts were determined to leave, with Dial, especially, understanding the intricacies of the migration system. Despite being just as qualified as her husband, she had him take the lead in the official paperwork as he would have been more likely to be granted a visa, being viewed as the head of the family. She, in turn, followed under the family class visa, which essentially made her dependent on her husband. Despite knowing this, her decision was made with the express understanding that their generation would not be able to reach the same socio-economic class they left behind in India.

This decision was made easier by what Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco have called the immigrant "dual frame of reference". Focusing on the Latino-American experience, they describe this dual frame of reference as one where "the objective conditions of many immigrants may be difficult or even intolerable by the standards of native-born Americans.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 18.

⁶⁷ Mythili Rajiva, "Better Lives," 18.

But immigrants' dual frame of reference makes them optimistic about the future."⁶⁸ Although both Dial and Amar knew migration would mean years of financial insecurity, they did not dwell on these sentiments for too long. Instead, their narrative focused on how they managed to overcome their struggles through traditional markers of a middle-class life.

Within a few months of her arrival, Dial was expecting her first child. Realizing they needed more money and help with childcare they decided to leave Manitoba and join Amar and her husband in Toronto. Amar had been a stay-at-home parent for the first six months after her arrival while her husband worked in a factory. Living together allowed the couples to share childcare responsibilities, enabling both women to enter the workforce as manual labourers. More importantly, by sharing a one-bedroom apartment, the couples were able to pool their financial resources and purchase a house. The women describe this period of their lives as one of meticulous coordination:

Dial: Around the time I came she got a job. [...] She would take the day and I would take the night.

Amar: We did shift work. We had bought a house by then. [...] We were only in an apartment for about eight months.

Dial: On 30th June we arrived. By 25th December we had bought a house [together].⁶⁹

In her book *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto*, Iacovetta outlines the transition of rural peasants into urban industrial workers, and the diasporic Italian community that emerged in post-WWII Toronto. One aspect of their lives outlined by Iacovetta, and seen in many other immigrant communities, is the overwhelming amount of work they did.

⁶⁸ Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration*, 87.

⁶⁹ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translated by Sonia Dhaliwal.

She writes that “contemporary observers routinely commented that the newly arrived Italian immigrants were too preoccupied with work and their family life to show much interest in the world beyond their home and workplace.”⁷⁰ Iacovetta argues that immigrants were forced to prioritize work due to their precarious economic circumstances. Immigrant networks assisted newcomers in finding employment. Employers needed their immigrant employees to recommend good workers and newly arrived immigrants needed more seasoned immigrants to help them find work.⁷¹ Upon their arrival, Dial and Amar’s husbands had found work by tapping into their network of friends. In one touching remark, Dial noted that, while she worked in a factory, it was other immigrant women, notably Italian women, who helped her during her pregnancy, saying, “they understood what it was like.”⁷²

With all four adults finding work, the couple moved into a home in the suburban middle-class area of South Etobicoke in Toronto. In the stories I heard growing up, the ‘Waterbury House’ was a prominent character. They spoke of this home with great pride, fondly recalling its modest size and how they divided space amongst their growing families:

Amar: Upstairs we had three bedrooms. My sister-in-law [and her family] moved downstairs in the basement [after they arrived].

Dial: It was a two-bedroom basement. But we only had two bathrooms - one upstairs and one downstairs. We each had one room, kids included.⁷³

While on the surface this crowded arrangement would seem undesirable to most Canadian families, when factoring in their dual frame of reference, the two couples were doing quite well. One could argue that one of the things that made it easier for them to endure their hardships was

⁷⁰ Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1992), 124.

⁷¹ Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration*, 85.

⁷² Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translated by Sonia Dhaliwal.

⁷³ Ibid.

knowing they were not alone. They felt supported through their network of immigrant friends who were also living out similar experiences. Immigrant women had a keen understanding of their position within the migration framework and were actively contributing to the rebuilding process. Dial and Amar were able to contribute financially through their employment, and as they became more seasoned immigrants, the women opened their home to newly arrived friends and family.

By opening their home, Dial and Amar's families were re-establishing kinship networks like those they left behind. Historian Judith Brown notes the important role of family amongst South Asians, writing that, "[South Asian immigrants] came from societies which placed great importance on extended ties of family and kinship networks in a unique way."⁷⁴ Kinship networks had already played a large role with the very early South Asian migrants journeying to Canada, and even within the two women's lives. Their father had used his network to gain information on the experiences of those very early migrants and drew on his local networks to find suitable marriage matches for his children. However, Dial and Amar had created their own network through their college friends, and the friends of their husbands. This helped them gain information on how to obtain the documents needed to immigrate, and how to navigate their new cultural landscape. Once they had enough stability to provide for their own immediate needs, the Waterbury House became a point within the diasporic network for other immigrating families to pass through.

Anthropologist Norman Buchignani notes that the complex networks left behind were nearly impossible to recreate in their host country, however, immigrants engaged in a practice he

⁷⁴ Brown, *Global South Asians*, 75.

calls “temporary extension” where newcomers lived with their kin for a short while, particularly during high periods of immigration.⁷⁵ The women only casually mention this type of networking, specifically when Amar mentions her sister-in-law moving in with them. However, this type of kinship network played a pivotal role in helping the South Asian diaspora grow over the next few decades. By having immigrants who came under the independent class sponsor their extended family it changed the makeup of the community to include those who did not have the educational background or financial capital required under the points system.⁷⁶

Moreover, by recreating kinship networks the women ensured their children were introduced to others within their community. For their children, this often translated into a revolving cast of characters passing through their home, as Amar’s younger son, and Dial’s eldest daughter recount:

Cooper: [In] the beginning we all lived in one house in Etobicoke. It was literally five families there. My family, Karan’s [Dial’s son] family, my other cousin, and I believe a couple other families.⁷⁷

Rani: I think multiple other people would come in and out for a week, ten days, fifteen days, a month, who were new to Canada and our parents would just take in these people because, well, they had nowhere else to go.⁷⁸

Historian Milton Israel suggests that South Asian newcomers were caught between a need to adapt to their new society and their desire to recreate old ways of life, which would arguably have been difficult to do without the help of a larger community reinforcing old world

⁷⁵ Norman Buchignani, “Research on South Asians in Canada: Retrospect and Prospect,” in *South Asian Diaspora in Canada: Six Essays*, ed. Milton Israel (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1987), 118.

⁷⁶ Davika Khanna Narula, *South Asian Diaspora: Summer Blossoms in Winter Gardens* (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2005), 20-27.

⁷⁷ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal, July 28th, 2018, Brampton, Ontario, Canada. Names changed for privacy.

⁷⁸ Rani, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal, October 18th, 2018, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Name changed for privacy.

social constructs.⁷⁹ As Brown observes, by living within such close proximity to kin, be it through a shared home or neighbourhood; immigrants were able to “[reconstruct] a sense of home in daily life” often by recreating lifestyle patterns from ‘back home’.⁸⁰ Dial’s daughter, Rani, described some of the practices in which she was immersed:

Rani: [My] first language was Punjabi. [...] When I started kindergarten, I did not know English. And so, I [...] essentially learned English in kindergarten [...] And we ate Indian food every day.⁸¹

While on the surface Rani’s brief mention of such mundane aspects of life may feel insignificant, they were far from it. What she described was her parents imparting their cultural traditions to a generation being raised outside India.

These kinship networks helped impart a Punjabi sense of identity within a Canadian immigrant community. Migrants who had arrived in the early twentieth century were not welcomed by their host society, and thus, lived in insular communities that did not, or were not allowed, to engage with wider Canadian society. Those who arrived later were migrating after a great shift in mainstream sentiments regarding racialized immigrants in Canada. More importantly, the idea of multiculturalism helped many immigrant communities feel they could continue to keep their own traditional customs, albeit within the framework of Western society. As Handa notes, these immigrants were constructing an identity “outside the boundaries of nation-state,” an identity that was “in constant negotiation through the relationship between Canada/Canadian and “back home””.⁸²

⁷⁹ Milton Israel, “Introduction,” in *South Asian Diaspora in Canada: Six Essays*, ed. by Milton Israel (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1987), 9.

⁸⁰ Brown, *Global South Asians*, 80.

⁸¹ Rani, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

⁸² Handa, *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts*, 4.

Therefore, the environment that Cooper and Rani were exposed to through their parents' network, and the practices recreated in their home were part of a developing and uniquely diasporic experience that earlier migrants had not been allowed to foster. As Brown states, "[the] task of social construction is vital if the new place of residence is to become home at any deep emotional level."⁸³ While Cooper and Rani were immersed in a burgeoning diasporic environment, Dial's two other children, daughter Gagan and son Karan, were being raised within the uniquely diasporic kinship network of transnational parenting.

Although the families were managing to get by, the reality was that Dial and her husband were not able to fully care for all three of their children in their early years. The decision was taken to leave Gagan and Karan in India with their paternal grandparents. Gagan was left at three months old, and her brother, Karan, at six weeks old.

Sonia: So, was this how you managed childcare? By sending your kids to their grandparents?

Amar: Back then people sent their kids, just like that. [...] They were taken care of really well there. They had [domestic] servants in India.

Dial: Like, my mother would even say, leave the boy, you can't handle this many kids.

Amar: I mean, here you had to pay for a babysitter. How could we have managed after coming home from work?⁸⁴

For Gagan and Karan, their early years in India were blissful. Being the only children within a large family, their grandparents, aunts, and uncles all doted on them. They would inevitably part ways with their grandchildren, they still stepped into the role of primary caregivers and enabled their son and daughter-in-law to set up a stable home for all their children. In effect, Gagan and

⁸³ Brown, *Global South Asians*, 75.

⁸⁴ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translated by Sonia Dhaliwal.

Karan were enjoying all the benefits of a well-established middle-class family. Both recounted these years with great fondness.

Gagan: I know that my grandmother [...] was probably a maternal figure to me. [...] Like, we were the centre of her world. [...] Her entire life revolved around my brother and I.⁸⁵

Karan: I loved my grandma. She was probably my favourite person in this world. She was very, very protective of me and she always made sure I was happy. And yeah, I have only good experiences and good memories of my grandmother.⁸⁶

This type of transnational parenting was not unique to the South Asian community. As Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco note in their work, Latino, Haitian, and other Asian communities all engaged in some form of transnational parenting, drawing on their kinship networks for care-givers, often during the early years when parents attempted to establish lives in the United States.⁸⁷ Focusing on the female experience, sociologist Peggy Levitt suggests that “the downside of transnational motherhood is that care-giving at a distance is emotionally stressful for parents and children and also challenges prevailing Western norms of motherhood.”⁸⁸ Extended kin play a significant role in South Asian families with homes encompassing multiple generations and all family members taking an active role in caring for children. Despite the physical space between them, parents in the diaspora recreated these traditional links, in part due to their circumstances, but also to ensure their children were part of this extended world. In Dial’s instance, she did not feel as though she was missing out on her role as a mother, instead, she suggested it was her mother-in-law who was losing her role, not only as a grandmother, but also as a mother, as Dial was largely responsible for her son’s

⁸⁵ Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal, August 23rd, 2018, Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada. Name changed for privacy.

⁸⁶ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

⁸⁷ Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration*, 67-69.

⁸⁸ Peggy Levitt, “Roots and Routes: Understanding the Lives of the Second Generation Transnationally,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no.7 (August 2009): 1228.

migration. The fact that there were also other children in the Waterbury House, including her eldest child, Rani, may also have eased the burden of mothering from afar.

Overall, what was clear from Gagan's and Karan's interviews was how much they understood this process to simply be a part of their parents' journey as immigrants. Arguably, it may have been their elder sister Rani who experienced the most instability in her formative years. Given the modest size of her parents' home and the limited time they could spend away from work, Rani's crib was placed in the living room. This often meant that she was cared for by whichever adult was nearby:

Rani: Uncle, Cooper's dad, used to [drive a] taxi [in the] night shift. [...] So, Cooper's dad came home and he made noise and then [I] woke up. [...] They say he would shove a bottle in my mouth so I'd go back to sleep.⁸⁹

In the home environment Rani describes she was arguably the child missing out on the full attention of parental care as the responsibility was shared by multiple adults. As Dial and her husband were often working and, when they were home, parented not only their own child but also the other children in the home, Rani did not express strong emotional attachment to any one adult. Instead, she expressed strong ties with the other children in the home, particularly Amar's children.

After nearly six years in India, Gagan and Karan were brought back so they could begin their schooling in Canada. At this point, Amar and Dial's families had gained enough financial stability to be able to live on their own and stays from extended family were becoming few and far between. As Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco note, "immigrant children respond in a variety of ways to their separations from loved family members. [...] How

⁸⁹ Rani, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

the children experience the separation, their social conditions back home, and their perceptions of what is going on plays a critical role in their subsequent adaptations in the new land.”⁹⁰ Dial and her husband had made efforts to have their children visit for short periods prior to their permanent return, usually alongside with their grandmother. This was done so that they understood who their parents were and where home really was. Although they were leaving the loving and comforting arms of their grandparents, Gagan and Karan’s transition into their nuclear family went smoothly, with their grandmother visiting from time to time over the years.

However, this smooth transition did not apply to all aspects of their lives. Given the age difference between Gagan and Karan, Gagan had already begun her schooling in India. Although Karan made no mention of it, his sister did recall struggling in school early on:

Gagan: [...] I was integrated into a grade one class. Obviously that integration didn’t go well. Then for a six month – [or] eight-month period – I was bused to another school close by, because back in those days ESL programs didn’t exist in every school. So, I remember my brother and I, for about a year or so, [...] going to school then getting on a school bus to go to another school to participate in this ESL program. What I’m told – and again, I don’t remember too much – I picked up the language fairly quickly. [...] And then transitioned back into regular school probably in grade two.⁹¹

Dial also spent time one on one with her daughter to ensure she was able to keep up in her new environment.⁹² Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco would suggest that Gagan benefitted greatly from their mother’s position in her “social-hierarchy” in India⁹³. Given Dial’s background as a teacher, she was able to provide her daughter with the individual attention she needed, and may not have been receiving at school, in order to guarantee she would fully benefit from her Canadian education.

⁹⁰ Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration*, 67-68.

⁹¹ Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

⁹² Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translated by Sonia Dhaliwal.

⁹³ Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration*, 93-94.

Over the next few years, Dial and Amar's families were seemingly well on their way to establishing a lower-middle class life. All their children were attending local primary schools together, and the adults had relatively stable employment, albeit much below their qualifications. Both couples were also able to afford their own living spaces as Amar's family moved to the neighbouring suburb of Malton in the city of Mississauga. In the years since their arrival, the community had also grown. Other members of their family were beginning to arrive and helping to reinforce cultural practices. Throughout my interviews with both first and second-generations, these years were not marked by any tension or trouble. Overall, from the perspective of the immigrant parents, they had done well in re-creating kinship networks and social practices for their children. From the perspective of their children, they were existing in a world curated by their parents, while slowly beginning to create their own social networks through school.

In what was surely intended to be one final time, Dial and her husband drew on their network once more to move up the socio-economic ladder. By the mid 1980s Amar's family had moved to Malton. In turn, Dial's family ventured into new territory and bought a brand-new house in a then up and coming neighbourhood across town in North Etobicoke.

Dial: [W]e booked the house [in Rexdale]. [...] We got the house for \$200,000. [...] [We] had no idea there was a housing boom – but, right after selling [the Waterbury] house, whatever money we could gather from people, we did and we bought [the Rexdale] house for free. [S]ome [money] we made [from selling the Waterbury house]. Some we had, and the rest we borrowed [from friends]. But, we bought that house cash. We didn't want another mortgage at 20 percent!⁹⁴

From afar, these families were well on their way to 'making it'. However, as they outgrew the early stages, they faced growing pains that took place largely within the intimate sphere of family.

⁹⁴ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translated by Sonia Dhaliwal.

Chapter III: Growing Pains and a Growing Community (1980s – 1990s)

In the mid-to-late 1970s my great-aunts had five children between them. Four of their five children provided me with stories of their childhood and adolescence. They were very candid, often reflecting with humour and laughter. Through their narratives, they highlighted how their parents normalized South Asian practices in their lives through language, food, and music. Through this early socialization, my second-generation interviewees felt completely immersed in their South Asian heritage. However, as their social worlds expanded, so too did their opportunities to participate in Canadian society. At times, conflicts emerged over the extent to which they could participate in, and identify with, mainstream society. Many of these conflicts were never quite resolved, as the early death of my great-uncle forced Rani, Gagan, and Karan to take on much greater familial responsibilities. This moment of crisis also highlighted the degree to which my interviewees had internalized their parents' values and how intergenerational tensions could come to a head.

The young women interviewed by Handa, many of whom also grew up around Toronto, albeit slightly later than my aunts and uncles, discuss themes of gender, class, and race, many of which were also discussed by my aunts and uncles.⁹⁵ Handa focuses on how these young women were navigating between parental (cultural) expectations and their (mainstream) peer culture, in effect, walking a metaphorical tightrope between the two as they struggled to 'choose' between them. However, second-generation experiences were not always so dualistic and could take on more of a collaborative tone rather than conflictive. By expanding the frame of analysis outside of culture clash theory, second-generation youth are positioned within a web of interactions

⁹⁵ Handa, *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts*, 4.

between parents, peers, and mainstream culture. In this way, their strategic navigation between cultural worlds becomes more apparent.⁹⁶

By the mid-1980s the five children were attending school full time at a local public school. When asked about the other children at their school, Karan noted that the neighbourhood was diverse, but still “mostly white” when they lived in South Etobicoke.⁹⁷ By the end of the decade both families had saved up enough money to begin to move into their own homes, a feat no doubt made easier with the housing boom Toronto was experiencing at the time. Amar’s family moved out of the Waterbury House to nearby Malton in Mississauga and Dial’s family to the neighbourhood of Rexdale in North Etobicoke not long after. Once again, Dial and Amar were part of a larger trend whereby newer immigrant cohorts were filling in the largely working-class neighbourhoods as older immigrant cohorts were moving to more affluent middle-class suburbs. In this instance, and particularly in Dial’s case, South Asian immigrants were moving into neighbourhoods which Italian Canadians were leaving.

⁹⁶ Gleason, “Avoiding the agency trap,” 446-459.

⁹⁷ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.



Figure 1: Map depicting the North Etobicoke neighbourhood of Rexdale (orange) in relation to the Mississauga neighbourhood of Malton (purple). Image created through Google Maps.

As historian John Zucchi notes, Italian immigrants initially living in Toronto were slowly migrating out of the city's core; "by the early 1960s Italians had moved into Weston [in Etobicoke] and by the late 1970s [...] all the way out to Woodbridge [in Vaughn]."⁹⁸ He goes on to observe that, similar to American cities in the 1920s and 1930s, as older immigrant groups searched for better homes in new housing developments, post-war immigrant groups were taking up their place in the neighbourhoods they left behind.⁹⁹ This demographic shift is reflected in Statistics Canada data as well. Within the federal electoral district of North Etobicoke, where the neighbourhood of Rexdale is located, there were nearly 16, 880 South Asians in a total population of 115, 067 in 1996. These South Asians came largely from India, Pakistan,

⁹⁸ John Zucchi, "A History of Ethnic Enclaves in Canada," *Canada's Ethnic Group Series* Canadian Historical Association, no. 31 (2007), 15.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.¹⁰⁰ Diversity within the community is reflected in statistics on languages, specifically, figures on mother tongue and home language. Although Punjabi was the most common language, suggesting that this ethnic group was making up the majority of the community, other languages like Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, Urdu, Bengali, and Malayalam were also spoken, indicating the presence of other South Asian ethnicities making their way to Toronto. By 2016, the population of North Etobicoke had grown slightly to 118, 040 with the population of South Asians more than doubling to 34, 775.¹⁰¹

Malton experienced a similar growth in South Asian settlement. In 1996, the total population of Malton was 120,700, larger than that of North Etobicoke. At that time, there were 21,670 South Asians living in the area, predominately from India, followed by Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A similar linguistic landscape existed here, with Punjabi being the most prominent South Asian language by mother tongue or home language, followed by Urdu, Gujarati, Tamil, Hindi, Bengali, and Malayalam.¹⁰² Although the overall population declined to 118,240, the South Asian community had more than doubled to 48,945 by 2016.¹⁰³ It is worth noting that not all members of the South Asian community experienced this type of modest upward social mobility.

¹⁰⁰ Statistics Canada, "1996 Census of Population," Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 95F0180XDB96001. Last modified June 4th, 2019. Accessed from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/english/census96/data/profiles/Rp-eng.cfm?TABID=2&LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=35257&PRID=0&PTYPE=3&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=1996&THEME=34&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>. These figures were tallied by adding the figures for 'Total Immigrants by Selected Country' and 'Total Recent Immigrants by Selected Country of Birth' from the Federal Electoral District of Etobicoke North.

¹⁰¹ Statistics Canada, "Toronto, C, Ontario (table) Census Profile, 2016 Census," Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Released November 29th, 2017. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

¹⁰² Statistics Canada, "1996 Census of Population,". These figures were tallied by adding the figures for 'Total Immigrants by Selected Country' and 'Total Recent Immigrants by Selected Country of Birth' from the Federal Electoral District of Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

¹⁰³ Statistics Canada, "Mississauga, CY, Ontario (table) Census Profile, 2016 Census," Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Released November 29th, 2017. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

Geographer Sutama Ghosh argues that the social position and immigration circumstances of an individual played a large role in their ability to resettle in Canada. In her study of Sri Lankans living around Toronto, Ghosh notes that many immigrants from Sri Lanka are Tamil who came over either as refugee claimants or as family class migrants, often of a relative who initially came as a refugee. The vast majority arrived after the 1980s in order to flee ethnic violence and had a difficult time accessing and sustaining quality housing. Sri Lankan Tamils tend to live in inter-generational households, with multiple family units contributing to the housing costs of a single home. Although this is not uncommon in South Asian homes, in the circumstances of Sri Lankan immigrants even those arriving as refugees were expected to contribute financially from the outset of their arrival. The difficulty in finding affordable housing in Toronto also led to a form of segregation within the South Asian community; many Sri Lankan Tamils live in the eastern parts of Toronto, most notably Scarborough and Markham, while other South Asians tended to move west to Etobicoke, Malton, and later, Brampton.¹⁰⁴

Despite these differences, distinct South Asian cultural worlds have emerged that are slowly recreating social institutions from back home. Browsing through the pages of the *Canadian India Times*, an English language newspaper for Indian immigrants living across Canada, we gain a sense of the cultural conversations within Canada's South Asian communities. Much of the newspaper's coverage focused on issues such as employment, racism, and political news from India, while also including reviews of the latest Bollywood movies and Indian politics. Local advertisements in the newspapers hint at the emergence of ethnic businesses, such as grocery stores and travel agents, with locations predominately in Toronto. The paper also

¹⁰⁴ Sutama Ghosh, "How are Sri Lankan Tamils Doing in Toronto's Housing Markets? A Comparative Study of Refugee Claimants and Family Class Migrants," in *The Housing and Economic Experiences of Immigrants in US and Canadian Cities* ed by Carlos Teixeira and Wei Li (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 98-120.

carried public service announcements from Canadian government agencies to relay information on changes in rental laws or immigration procedures. Similarly, local media companies advertised programs showcasing South Asian content. For example, in an issue from December 11th, 1975 *Daison Multilingual Television* advertised a full-page announcement of a new weekly program called *Sounds of India*. This program would play music, film previews, and Indian news reviews on a weekly timeslot of Saturday at 10pm and again on Sunday at 7pm.¹⁰⁵ As Iacovetta notes in her study of Italian community organizations, “ethnic organizations were useful tools of integrating in that they cushioned the shock of migration” by providing vital and relevant information unique to the community's needs.¹⁰⁶ Tokunbo Ojo, a communications scholar who has researched ethnic media in Canada, suggests that ethnic media could also help foster a sense of community and fill in the gaps left by mainstream media and report on “community experiences and events.”¹⁰⁷

As the community was strengthening its foundation, it was able to recreate socio-cultural markers and institutions, such as language schools, religious [institutions], and training in arts, that would have existed back home.¹⁰⁸ The family homes of my narrators were steeped in Punjabi culture and customs, speaking to the ability of the first generation in transplanting their lives to Canada. However, immersion into so much *desi* culture was not necessarily embraced by the second generation, which was quite evident in the exasperated remark made by Cooper: “That’s all it was at our house. It was just Punjabi non-stop. Indian programs, movies [from]

¹⁰⁵ *Canadian India Times*, December 11, 1975, accessed via Simon Fraser University Ethnic Newspaper Special Collection <https://newspapers.lib.sfu.ca/cit-1726/page-11>. Issues of this paper are also available through the Multicultural Historical Society of Ontario.

¹⁰⁶ Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 62.

¹⁰⁷ Tokunbo Ojo, “Ethnic media in multicultural Canada,” *Journalism* 7, no.3 (2006): 9.

¹⁰⁸ Norman Buchignani, “Research on South Asians in Canada: Retrospect and Prospect.” in *South Asian Diaspora in Canada: Six Essays*, ed by Milton Israel (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1987), 123.

back then. [...] So, I grew up in it.”¹⁰⁹ Aside from immersing their children in cultural practices within the home, my second-generation interviewees were also engaged in the South Asian network outside their homes as well. All my aunts and uncles attended Punjabi language classes from elementary school through high school, typically held on weeknights or Saturday mornings at a local public school. Often, these classes were taught by someone whose only qualification seemed to be that they were part of the South Asian community. When I asked what their experience had been like, Karan provided me with some humorous insights:

Sonia: Who were your teachers? Do you remember?

Karan: Uh, you know what I do. [*laughs*]. [...] So, in junior school and middle school, there was a couple called the Nehra’s.¹¹⁰ And they were a husband and wife team that basically, I think this was their career, they just taught Punjabi school at various junior and middle schools to groups of kids. So, they were my teachers initially. I don’t think they were actually qualified as teachers. They had an interest in this. [...] And so, they used whatever tools they had. Whatever books they could get access to to try to teach us, like very rudimentary Punjabi.

And then in high school it was a teacher called Mr. Garcha.¹¹¹ [...] I think he did have a teaching background. [...] But he was very disinterested. Like [...] we went through the process- [...] to put everything in context and keep perspective- this wasn’t like institutional, intense classes. They were very, very laid back, laissez-faire kind of bare-basics-of-Punjabi type of classes.

[...] And to give you even more context, we probably shouldn’t say this because this is being recorded [*laughs*]. But, basically, on all of our tests, me and Cooper cheated because we didn’t actually know how to write paragraphs of Punjabi.¹¹²

Through his retelling Karan hints that his peers continued to be the children of his parents’ friends. Even though by the time Karan and Cooper were in middle school they technically lived in two separate cities; their parents ensured that the cousins went to Punjabi

¹⁰⁹ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

¹¹⁰ Names changed for privacy.

¹¹¹ Name changed for privacy.

¹¹² Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

school together. By having their children steeped in their ethnic world, my great-aunts displayed a firm desire to have their children raised within their cultural heritage. Language is a crucial tool in understanding culture, and often the first cultural tie to be lost.¹¹³ In effect, language was the bridge that enabled first generation parents to pass down cultural knowledge to their children. Although it seemed as though Karan and Cooper did not think much of their Punjabi school experience, it is worth taking a closer look at what could be considered the dual role of language schools. Although neither of my uncles say they learnt to read or write Punjabi, they are fluent in speaking it. Their parents may have understood that such a comprehensive understanding of Punjabi had very little value outside the home. However, for a few hours every week, my aunts and uncles had to converse in Punjabi with other children who looked like them, spoke like them, dressed like them, and smelled like them. In this regard, Punjabi school created a space where they never felt judged by their peers and these elements of their heritage were normalized. Moreover, although all my second-generation interviewees were highly critical of the quality of the curriculum, they unanimously expressed a strong desire for their own children to learn the language, clearly aware of the strong link language can provide in cultural immersion.

It is worth noting that passing down cultural practices was a conscious choice my great-aunts made. In her study of Punjabi Hindu families in Ontario, sociologist Saroj Chawla compared multiple families and the degree to which they passed down elements of their heritage, such as language, food, and family dynamics. Her research highlighted that no two families were alike and that the extent to which cultural traditions were passed down to the second-generation largely depended on who was living in the home. Chawla noted that homes where grandparents

¹¹³ Sonia Nieto, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education 4th Edition* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2004), 189.

were present tended to be more traditional, as grandparents often expected religious practices and familial dynamics to be replicated in the diaspora. Tensions in the home were also higher due to their presence, as parents may have resisted recreating these practices, daughters-in-law in particular, while grandchildren were not always receptive to their grandparents' way of life.¹¹⁴ None of my aunts and uncles grew up with grandparents living in their home. In his interview, Karan only mentioned his grandmother visiting for a few months on two occasions.¹¹⁵ In effect, the first generation was the curator of how and to what degree children would be socialized in certain cultural traditions.

As sociologist Kareen Reiger suggests, “generational and cultural links were crucial to managing both trauma and [...] social changes.”¹¹⁶ Dial and Amar may have felt more at ease navigating their host country through the safety of the community and raising their children in familiar practices. In addition, they may have recreated these cultural practices to ease their own transition and that of friends and family who passed through their home.

That being said, my interviewees did talk about the other activities they engaged in, those that would have been typical of any Canadian child – hockey for the boys and figure skating for the girls. Karan and Cooper both spoke at length about playing hockey growing up. In fact, sports seemed to be something they both bonded over, as they watched a baseball game on mute during our interview.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Saroj Chawla, “The Punjabi Hindu Family in Ontario: A Study in Adaptation,” *Polyphony* 12 (1990):72-76.

¹¹⁵ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

¹¹⁶ Kerreen Reiger, “Telling Families and Locating Identity: Narratives of Late Modern Life,” *Australian Historical Studies* 47, no. 1 (2016): 64.

¹¹⁷ Reflection Blog of Interview with Karan and Cooper, by Sonia Dhaliwal, July 28th, 2018, Brampton, Ontario, Canada. Names changed for privacy.

Cooper: It was literally finish school, if you had homework do the homework. [...] It was all about hockey. Friday night, Saturday night, Sunday night, it was just seven days a week hockey, hockey, hockey [...].

Sonia: And you just played on the street?

Cooper: It was on the streets, eventually moved up to tennis courts, eventually moved into arenas, [...] but that's as we got older.

Karan: [O]ur principal activities on a day to day basis was [...] just get home from school, try to finish our homework as quickly as possible, and get, like, that first opportunity to go outside. Because there would always [...be] something going on with the kids in the neighbourhood. Specifically, when we were in junior school and middle school, we'd probably be 20 kids in and around our neighbourhood. We went to the same school and every night we would come home, whether it was hockey or capture the flag, or something, or just, you know, trading hockey cards with each other, baseball cards. It was always that sort of thing. And then I would say from an organized perspective I – know my parents put me in ice hockey pretty young. So, I played ice hockey, I also played soccer, organized soccer. Um, and then like high school soccer, high school football - that kind of thing.¹¹⁸

My aunts talked about their involvement in school clubs and organizations more than any sports-based activities. Part of this could be attributed to their personalities, as both are much more academically inclined. In addition, their parents insisted on the importance of obtaining a good education. This was further underscored by Gagan when she stated that any type of extra-curricular activities they wanted to undertake was dependent on bringing home good grades.¹¹⁹ Their participation in Canadian society, in other words, was conditional on meeting their parents' expectations.

Gagan elaborated further about why she felt education was so central to her life. In her remarks, it becomes evident that education was keenly tied to class:

I think the [class] disparity and all of that started to become more clear in the high school that I went to. [...] The kids that were commuting in tended to make friends within themselves and the kids that were walking to school or having mom drop them off [...]

¹¹⁸ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

¹¹⁹ Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

likely socialized with each other. I'm sure the 'in' crowd was always sort of the typical sort of Caucasian local crowd.

[...] There [were] always parties at people's cottages in the summer and those were not things that were familiar to me. [...] I felt I fit in because, I think, kids were taught to have good manners, but, truly, now that I look at it in hindsight, I think I fit in with the people that were like me.

[...] I remember [...] one of the kids [...] a typical child you would expect to go to school at that school [...] said that I'm not allowed to go north of Eglinton. [...] And I think that was the first time [...] I truly saw that, wow, there's, like, a different system. I don't belong – even though these people have been very nice to me over the years, they truly don't see me as one of them. [...] It was two worlds. It was a very strange [environment].

[...] Somehow, [...] with whatever parenting style, technique, good or bad, they had, my parents managed to drill down that education is going to be your ticket to a better life. And I think somewhere along our individual journeys, all three of us [Rani, Gagan, and Karan] got that message.¹²⁰

For my aunts and uncles, high school proved to be an experience where their class and race was acutely felt. All the children took the local transit for forty-five minutes back into South Etobicoke to attend a high school their parents felt provided a safer environment and better education than their local high school. This high school had programs for enrichment and advanced placement, as opposed to their local school, which Karan described as “terrible” and infamous for crime and gang activity.¹²¹ However, my aunts and uncles were not the only ones making this journey, as many of their neighbourhood friends did the same, something they felt helped make their high school experience a bit easier.

In a way, the downward social mobility of their parents impacted my aunts and uncles much more than it did their parents. Although my great-aunts' early years were full of crowded

¹²⁰ Ibid. The area of Etobicoke, which is located on the west end of Toronto, is split into three smaller areas: North Etobicoke, Central Etobicoke, and The Lakeshore. In this instance, Gagan alludes to Eglinton Avenue as being the marker for both the geographical and socio-economic divider between the areas. The more working class, immigrant heavy, neighbourhood of North Etobicoke lies north of Eglinton Avenue West. The more affluent, less ethnically diverse, neighbourhoods of Central Etobicoke and The Lakeshore are located south of Eglinton Avenue West.

¹²¹ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

homes and hard work, they managed to achieve a hallmark of middle-class life through the purchases of their homes in suburban areas in and around Toronto. The first-generation tended to socialize in a crowd that came from similar backgrounds and were enduring similar struggles in their transplanted lives. However, they cushioned themselves from prejudice and discrimination by existing in an insular social world that upheld a middle-class mentality. This was quite evident throughout their interview as neither of my great-aunts ever mentioned the reality of the neighbourhoods they lived in or any racial prejudices they may have experienced. Yet nearly all their children did. Karan and Cooper made subtle references to the petty crime that occurred in their neighbourhood while Gagan explicitly commented on her experience as a brown girl in a predominantly white school stating that her male white peers understood not to ask out any of the brown girls.¹²² Moreover, for Rani and Gagan gender would have further shaped their experience, something that seemed to be implied through the setting of their narratives as most of their stories took place within a family or academic framework.

Although gender could have been a restrictive facet to Rani and Gagan's life experiences, social worker Purnima Sundar suggests that, for young South Asian women, the definition of a good South Asian woman (caring, maternal, family oriented) can be combined with elements of a good Canadian woman (strength, education, power), whereby they effectively reconceptualized what it means to be a good South Asian-Canadian woman.¹²³ In essence, instead of experiencing a "culture clash" that Handa discusses, these women were able to combine two ideas of a good woman and benefit from the opportunities provided by each. An example of this was provided by Gagan when she discussed how her father approached parenting:

¹²² Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

¹²³ Sundar, "To "Brown it Up" or to "Bring Down the Brown," 260-1.

Sonia: How exactly did your dad lay it out for you [...] in terms of ‘this is what [is]expected of you’?

Gagan: Hmm, well [*long pause*] I think, we talked to our parents a lot. [...] I think my dad was very careful and probably a bit more of a liberal than my mom. I would say my mom was always the more traditional parent. And, you know, he would say, “why do you need to speak to this boy?” and I would say, “well, because we need to talk about this project.” Was I maybe fibbing a bit at times? Possibly. Or, you know, “I want to go away to this leadership camp.” [He would ask,] “what’s it going to gain you?” [I would say] “I think it’s going to gain me this.” [He would respond,] “but you have to remember, if I’m trusting you to go, you can’t let me down, by, you know, running out with a boy a night.” Trust was huge. He’d say things like, “culture is really important to us because of this. We’re afraid to lose you guys to this [Canadian] culture.” And I think I bought into that. Whereas my mom probably had more of an authoritarian parenting style - “no because I said no!” And as a teenager you don’t respond well to that.¹²⁴

In her remarks, Gagan frames her mixed-gender interactions in relation to academics and her overnight trips as self-improvement. Her father created an environment where she could have a frank conversation with him to help bridge an understanding between generations as she framed her desire to participate in an overnight trip as educational, a value important to both her Canadian peers and her parents. Similarly, she highlights the gendered nature of parenting by suggesting her mother was less understanding of her desires. As in other migrant communities, such as those described by Orsi and Espiritu, South Asian mothers were also expected to act as cultural gatekeepers, closely monitoring their daughters’ interactions with mainstream Canadian culture. Handa also notes this as many of her interviewees viewed their mothers as the enforcer of cultural expectations.

That being said, Gagan did highlight how her South Asian peers responded when parents were less than understanding. She stated that many of her South Asian peers engaged in behaviour their parents would not have approved of. Girls would wear make-up while at school but wiped it off before going home, whereas she felt that the trust she had with her parents

¹²⁴ Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

enabled her to get away with such behaviour. Despite her parents' disapproval, Gagan wore make up and made no effort to hide it, knowing it was better for their relationship if she was open about what she did. Interestingly, this type of trusting relationship seemed to be unique to Dial's home as Amar's son Cooper never commented on any sort of cultural gatekeeping. In contrast to my aunt's collaborative approach with her parents it was not the case in the homes of some of their friends' homes. Both Gagan and Karan mentioned the fact that, at times, their friends would temporarily live with them as they had very dysfunctional relationships with their parents.¹²⁵

Handa provided further insight into the youth experience by discussing their participation in the infamous day dances occurring around the time my aunts and uncles were in high school in the mid-to late 1990s. Attempting to capitalize on their desires to engage in mainstream youth culture, club organizers opened their space to South Asian youth during the day, helping them circumvent curfews and playing popular bhangra and Bollywood tracks. Handa outlines the development of the diasporic music scene, noting how it began in the UK in the 1980s and migrated to Canada in the early 1990s.¹²⁶ Similar to their parents, second-generation South Asians were creating their own social world – one that reflected their dual identity. As Handa suggests, the popularity of bhangra dance and music was a response to a “predominantly white aesthetic” as exemplified by second-generation British Asian musician Apache Indian.¹²⁷ Apache Indian sings in Punjabi, patois, and English, mixes reggae backbeats with South Asian instruments, like a *tabla* or *dhol*, and addresses topics relevant to his audience in songs like

¹²⁵ Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy; Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

¹²⁶ Handa, *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts*, 138.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 143.

‘Arranged Marriage’ and ‘Caste System’. This blend of black and brown culture seems to suggest that South Asian youth were attempting to carve out their own space, adjacent to mainstream white culture, by appropriating urban Black culture.¹²⁸ Finding common ground within the Black community was a phenomenon noted by Espiritu as well. The Filipino-Americans she interviewed felt that their Black peers, who often came from similar or lower socio-economic backgrounds, were much more accepting of their immigrant backgrounds than white Americans.¹²⁹ However, both Handa and Espiritu note that the youth they interviewed lacked awareness of the anti-Black racism that exists within their respective communities.¹³⁰

The day dances also replicated notions of South Asian femininity, suggesting the second-generation was internalizing some of the cultural sentiments of their parents. Bhangra music was dominated by young men, as was DJ-ing and club promotion. Although promoters tried to attract women to their clubs, Handa’s interviewees stated that participating in such a taboo activity brought along a strong stigma of a ‘loose woman.’ Tina, one of Handa’s interviewees expressed it in the following terms:

There are a lot of guys, like, if they see a girl – this is not every guy, some guys, you know, like the ones that want a long-term relationship – they'd never have a long-term relationship with someone that they met at a club ‘cause they think she’s like a slight.’¹³¹

Interestingly, none of my aunts and uncles spoke about the day dances in their interviews but opened up once the recording was over. Apart from Rani, informal conversations occurred after all my second-generation interviews. In the instance of Cooper and Karan, they confirmed the double-standard associated with the day dances, suggesting that punishment was harsher for

¹²⁸ Ibid, 150.

¹²⁹ Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 184-5.

¹³⁰ Handa, *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts*, 150-1 and Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 187.

¹³¹ Handa, *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts*, 145. Tina’s use of the word *slight* may be interpreted as ‘a loose woman.’

girls, with some being sent to India by their parents - presumably as punishment for becoming too Canadian.¹³² Gagan made it clear that she was not interested in some of the antics her South Asian peers engaged in, however, her partner, who had joined our post-interview conversation, stated girls often had to engage in a double life to a degree that boys never did.¹³³ What did become clear from each of our post-interview conversations, was the fact that my aunts and uncles never felt they were missing out. Part of this can be attributed to the basement parties their parents attended with their friends and family, many of whom would bring along their children around the same age as my aunts and uncles. Arguably, parents may have been attempting to re-create an experience they knew their children wanted to engage in but did so in a manner that would reinforce appropriate decorum through their presence.¹³⁴

However, parents were not always so understanding of their children's social circumstances. In Rani's interview she spoke about her experience with prom, and the compromises she had to make in order to attend:

So, for me prom was such a big deal! Like, [...if] I could go or not. [...] Cause it was at the Royal York downtown. I would be out 'till 10 or 11. [...] [Cooper's dad] and [another] uncle both drove taxis and they used to drive night shift. One drove all the *kuriyann* [girls] in one taxi. [...] Dropped us off, and the other, who was doing the night shift, would park in front of the Royal York and picked us all up. [...] Yeah! [*laughs*] That's how prom happened for me. And do you know what I wore to prom? I wore a *lehenga* [type of Indian dress]! Because my mom was not letting me buy a dress!¹³⁵

From her retelling, Rani made it clear that her parents, particularly her mother, failed to understand the importance of such a big social event. Prom is unlike any South Asian social

¹³² Reflection Blog of Interview with Karan and Cooper, by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

¹³³ Reflection Blog of Interview with Gagan, by Sonia Dhaliwal, August 24th, 2018, Brampton, Ontario, Canada. Name changed for privacy.

¹³⁴ Aziz Talbani and Parveen Hasanali, "Adolescent females between tradition and modernity: gender role socialization in South Asian immigrant culture, *Journal of Adolescence* 23, (2000): 620.

¹³⁵ Rani, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

customs. It is usually held in the evening, is a mixed-gender event, and might provide only casual supervision by teachers. For many teenagers, it constitutes a rite of passage to mark the transition between adolescence and impending adulthood. Rani went on to tell me that this was one moment she pushed back, drawing strength from her South Asian friends:

We did have each other's backs. [...] You know, our parents didn't really, like, get us, 'cause they were immigrants. [...] We all shared the same struggles. But if one Indian [went], then all the other girls were allowed to go to prom [...] – you couldn't go to prom if, like, the other Indian parents didn't let their kids go to prom.¹³⁶

Although Rani was permitted to attend prom, she had to do so on her parents' terms, adopting a strategy that sociologist Mythili Rajiva describes as accommodation, where “instead of openly resisting dominant [...] social practices, girls try to belong by maintaining a balance between white peer culture and their minority identities.”¹³⁷ As Rani was accommodating her parents by wearing a *lehenga*, a type of formal South Asian attire, she became ‘othered’ from her peers, ensuring that she was seen as a young South Asian woman, rather than a young Canadian woman. Moreover, her parents maintained a degree of surveillance by insisting that Rani have an uncle chaperone drop off and pick up. Still, the tone in which Rani recounted this memory expressed triumph. She was able to reflect on this experience with laughter and did not seem too upset. Rani is the eldest of Dial's children and would have been the first to expose her parents to Canadian youth culture. She arguably had the most difficult time in trying to get her parents to allow her to participate in prom. In our conversation, Rani added that she insisted her younger sister Gagan be allowed to wear a western style dress instead of a *lehenga* for her prom.

[For] Gagan and Karan it wasn't even a question [of going to prom]. [...] They had that battle with me. But then Gagan and Karan, I'm sure, had other battles that I wasn't

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Mythili Rajiva, “South Asian Canadian Girls' Strategies of Racialized Belonging in Adolescence,” *Girlhood Studies* 2, no.2 (Winter 2009): 76-77.

willing to fight that were then their first battles.¹³⁸

In their study of adolescent females in the South Asian community in Montreal, researchers Aziz Talbani and Parveen Hasanali, whose work focuses on education and Islamic studies, note that although many of their interviewees wished to see their parents' values in alignment with Western ideals, they understood that too much cultural change brought on too fast could result in conflicts within the family home.¹³⁹

Around the same time that my aunts and uncles were experiencing these growing pains, they were also dealing with a family crisis. After years of feeling unwell, Dial's husband, Gurnam, was diagnosed with cancer in the early 1990s. At the time, Rani, Gagan, and Karan were 14, 13, and 11 years old, respectively. His diagnosis prompted Amar's family to move from Malton to Rexdale in order to share the responsibilities of caring for a patient and raising children. For all my aunts and uncles, this diagnosis had a profound impact on their adolescence. For Rani, Gagan, and Karan it helped explain why they did not feel the need to rebel. As Rani reflected, "when most kids [who] were probably born and raised there [in South Etobicoke] in that culture were partying and doing stuff, I was helping my mom, because I was the eldest, and driving my dad to and from chemotherapy. And so, we had a lot of family support."¹⁴⁰ In Dial's interview she described in detail how much she began to rely on her family to get through this difficult time. The roles of mother and daughter also changed as Rani became her mother's equal, helping Dial understand what doctors were saying and providing emotional support:

Dial: [...] When the kids came from school, I said to Rani, this is what the doctor said. [...Rani] threw her book back and said let's go! [She] said to me, "Did you understand?" I

¹³⁸ Rani, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

¹³⁹ Talbani and Hasanali, "Adolescent females between tradition and modernity," 624.

¹⁴⁰ Rani, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

said, “Yes, I understood.” [...] We cried together, loudly, at home.¹⁴¹

Over the next few years, Dial and her husband made an effort to create fond memories for their family, taking trips to Europe, the United States, and Mexico when Gurnam’s health was good. This was unusual for a family from their socio-economic background, but my great-uncle was determined, and his children acknowledge the sacrifice their parents made to do this for them. Some of these family trips also served a dual purpose. Dial and Gurnam had college friends who had immigrated to the United States and had managed to achieve middle class lives, working as professionals in their fields. One of their American friends, who was a doctor, helped them understand the treatment process and served as a sort of consultant, even helping provide medical care that was available in the United States, but not in Canada.¹⁴² Their parents’ friends had an effect on the kids as well, particularly as they got glimpses into an upper-middle class world. From the perspective of my aunts and uncles, it provided an understanding for the high expectations set out by their parents, something Cooper and Karan describe as the following:

Sonia: How big of a role was education in your home?

Cooper: That’s all it was. It was all about education for us. That’s it.

Sonia: So, what was – what was the expectation from your family?

Cooper: Finish school, get a degree, get good jobs, do well. Become, you know, something good in life.

Sonia: What constituted as doing well?

Cooper: I think for our parents it was become a doctor or lawyer *[laughs]*.

[...]

Karan: [...] The way they saw it was that they only moved, not to improve their own lives, right? [...] They would posit to you that they only moved to give their kids better lives and better education. I think that’s partly true but I think [...] that’s myopic. I think

¹⁴¹ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translated from Punjabi by Sonia Dhaliwal.

¹⁴² Ibid.

they probably also moved selfishly to make their own lives better. But they did move. [...] And then there was a lot of guilt that came with [that]. Because the message from them was we wouldn't have come here [otherwise], which is a complete lie.¹⁴³

South Asian culture tends to be more collectivist than individualist, and, often the position of a family within the community is dependent on all members adhering to a certain code of conduct.¹⁴⁴ The guilt that Karan refers to could be a result of his parents' desire to ensure their family's status within the community by pushing their children to pursue professional careers. However, this does not always translate well within the new cultural context. In psychologist Ramsay Liem's study on feelings of shame among immigrant children, he interviewed thirty-one individuals from European and Asian backgrounds, ranging in age from eighteen to forty-nine years old, who were either post-secondary students or mid-career administrators at a university.¹⁴⁵ The Asian-American interviewees came from Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, and Vietnamese cultural origins and belonged to both the first and second generation. His interviewees were asked to recount situations in which they felt shame or guilt. Liem noted that European-Americans provided examples of events in which their emotions were described in a dyadic structure, whereby the individual feels these emotions directly in relation to the audience, which is wider society. Conversely, Asian-Americans framed their situations within a triadic structure, where the individual's actions brought about negative repercussions with a secondary individual, such as parents, who were ultimately judged by the audience, which is the ethnic community.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

¹⁴⁴ Talbani and Hasanali, "Adolescent females between tradition and modernity," 617.

¹⁴⁵ Ramsay Liem, "Shame and Guilt among First-And Second-Generation Asian American and European Americans," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 28, no. 4 (1997): 365-392.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 376-77.

Liem noticed that the second-generation interviewees differed from the other two groups as they often hinted at an internal negotiation in terms of how they framed their emotions. Nearly all of them chose to provide examples of situations described within a triadic structure. However, when asked to elaborate, they often responded by positioning themselves outside of the narrative, stating that the secondary person (parents) felt shame and judged by the community, even though they themselves did not feel shame. Liem suggests that the emotional experiences of the second-generation were in the process of “ongoing acculturation in which the outcome of a cultural crossing for [their] sense of self and emotional life is as yet unclear.”¹⁴⁷ The secondary individual Liem refers to were often the narrators’ parents who acted as cultural gate-keepers.

Similarly, Espiritu noted that her interviewees expressed these types of sentiments in regard to their parents’ arbitrary judgements about what constituted “authentic” ethnicity. Espiritu states that “children depend on their parents’ tutelage to craft and affirm their ethnic self and thus are particularly vulnerable to charges of cultural ignorance and/or betrayal.”¹⁴⁸ Handa, in turn, refers to these types of parental accusations as a challenge to children’s “cultural esteem.”¹⁴⁹ Such parental criticism essentially questioned whether children had learned the appropriate ways to behave or whether they understood the cultural expectations placed on them.¹⁵⁰ When Karan refers to guilt, he seemed to be suggesting that, in order for the community to validate his parents’ struggle in Canada, he and his siblings and cousins had to prove themselves by meeting high expectations. Failure to do so resulted in a considerable amount of guilt felt either by the individual or their parents.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 380.

¹⁴⁸ Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 175.

¹⁴⁹ Handa, *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts*, 75.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Whereas Karan pushed back against these feelings of guilt, his sisters seemed to have reframed parental expectations as their own. As Gagan reflected:

I think somewhere along the way it [success] became my issue. It was less about them. Like, I wanted to succeed for me. And I wondered, you know, at the time, if the school I went to played a role in that. Knowing that I truly didn't fit into this establishment. So, I think I had a higher internal locus. Yes, in the early days, when I was a kid, I studied because my parents told me to. Nothing beyond that. But after a while I think I recognized fairly early that I was somewhat of a Type A personality and I wanted to do well. I think those types of comments – a few of them stuck with me – ‘I’m not allowed to go north of Eglington.’ So, I said, you know, I’m going to be a part of that establishment.

So, was there pressure from them [parents]? Yes, that was definitely there and it was definitely an expectation. But somewhere it transferred onto me as a human being. Like, I felt like I needed to succeed because I felt like it was going to be my ticket out. I realized that Rexdale was not where I wanted to spend my life. I used that as a – what’s the word – as a metaphor. I didn't want to be *that* immigrant family that was still raising children on the imitations that my parents had. And I think the other thing that played a fairly large role in our lives was our parents’ friends. And a few of them were quite successful. They were physicians and stuff, mostly in the US. And I would see, when we were exposed to [them] on vacations, the difference in the lifestyle that they were able to have than we had. We didn’t have much. And I think it just became something personal. And I don’t know when that happened – it was probably somewhere in my latter high school years - that drive.¹⁵¹

Gender plays a large role in how one experiences the world, and girls are often judged more harshly than boys, something that was noted by all my interviewees. Parents expected their children to succeed academically; for educational success was linked to social mobility. My aunts felt strongly about following in the path to success laid out by their parents. It is difficult to ignore the fact that family circumstances played a large role. Around the time her father’s health took a downward turn, Gagan embraced her parents’ expectations as her own.

My great-uncle passed away in 1994, when Rani, Gagan, and Karan were 19, 18, and 16, respectively. Rani had resolved to pursue medicine, having been exposed to so much of it

¹⁵¹ Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

through her father's illness. She had completed two years of her undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto (U of T). Gagan followed her to U of T and had completed her first year with the intent of pursuing law school in the future. However, finances became tight, having only a single mother on a factory worker's income to support three children and herself. With the advice of their parents' American friends, an unusual decision was taken to send the girls to India for their higher education.

Rani: I was supposed to take the MCAT. Money became very tight and so, my mom was talking to her friends and family and had heard of kids going to India for medical school and so, she decided to send me and my sister to medical school in India because a) it was a sure thing that we would get in, right? And I was still in, I had only done two years of undergrad [...] and so had to do four years of undergrad and then apply to medical school, and it wasn't gonna be a sure thing. Plus, it was very expensive just to pay for my undergrad, and my mom didn't have money. So, um, India was cheaper for her, so we - me and my sister- got sent to India to do medical school.¹⁵²

Gagan: So, after high school I went to U of T for a year, just in the Arts & Science program. But then my dad had passed away. And like, you know, financially - My mom had some degree of financial freedom, in terms of she had a home that was paid off [...] but she had three kids that needed university education. They didn't, like, for my sister - my brother did work - but my sister and I they didn't really expect us to work because that just wasn't something they felt they wanted their daughters doing. So, there was this huge stress on my mom, to have two girls in university and my brother not far behind. I took OSAP loans that first year. But then, we had friends - their friends in the States - who were going to medical school [in India]. And we started looking into this. And the whole thing just snowballed - sent transcripts in, and blah, blah, blah.

And all of a sudden at the end of first year university, there was this real possibility of going to med school in India. [...] I had no idea what to do, because here was this sure thing, with a lot of gamble. Because I already knew I wouldn't be able to integrate into the system [in Canada]. [...] But then there was this path that was going to be four more years of an undergraduate degree, with some OSAP. And then if I were to write my LSAT, who knows? Who knows if I would get in? And I remember I visited my family doctor, who was a family friend, and I said to him, 'What do I do?' And he said to me, "You know, you're a bright girl, you're going to make it back into the [Canadian] system. Do it." And I just ran with that. So, [here] I was, completely off my path. And I knew my mom, she was going to get help with the tuition from my [paternal] grandparents - they were still alive at the time. And of course, she put in some investment. But, at the end of

¹⁵² Rani, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

the day, you're still coming out with a degree. So, I took the plunge.¹⁵³

Rani and Gagan went to medical school near Bangalore, Karnataka in southern India. For my aunts, this proved to be quite an adjustment and brought an element of culture shock with it. Although all my aunts and uncles had gone on trips to India with their parents, these visits did not feature prominently in any of their life stories. It is possible that for them, these few brief sojourns in India were unremarkable as they were already familiar with a lot of the cultural practices through their socialization in Canada. That being said, they had only been exposed to north Indian culture, which is quite different from south India.

Gagan: It was a small university town. There were two sects of people. There was the Indian students and then there was the international students. Our friends were about 50 or so international students. [...] What could I do in that town? That was the problem. You could watch a movie – there were no clubs. Alcohol was like – you're living in a very, very conservative society and it was a small university campus where, in some ways, it was actually worse than living at home because, you know, you go out to a restaurant and your profs would be sitting at a table across from you and there was no way that women – or even boys – they didn't even like the guys doing it – were going to be accepted if they were drinking.[...] Most of [the people] were Hindu and South Indian. [...] They became the majority and I became the minority.¹⁵⁴

In their research anthropologist Katy Gardner and sociologist Kanwal Mand investigated the positionality of second-generation British-Bangladeshi children living in Tower Hamlets in east London. They investigated how the socioeconomic position of second-generation children in London affected their interpretations of *desh* during family visits to Bangladesh. They suggest that, along with the physical space, children also experience return trips through the “social relationships and social practices that take place within them.”¹⁵⁵ Given how much exposure my aunts had to their Punjabi heritage, and the ties they would have created with their extended

¹⁵³ Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Katy Gardner and Kanwal Mand, “‘My Away is Here’: Place, Emplacement and Mobility amongst British Bengali Children, *Journal of Ethnic Migration Studies* 38, no. 6 (2012): 975.

relatives in Punjab, they may have viewed their trips to India simply as an extension of their parents' network. The language and social practices would not have seemed out of place for them, and certainly, given the social position of their family in India, they may have actually experienced upward social mobility. Quite possibly, the absence of these trips in our discussions could have suggested that these trips were not unsettling for them at all, and thus they did not view India, or its customs, as being foreign. Despite the cultural differences, Rani and Gagan understood that their position as Canadians was part of what enabled them to pursue post-secondary education in India:

Rani: Had you asked me then, [I would have said it was] the worst experience of my life, and all I did was complain. [...] But if you ask me today, I'm in my 40s, it was the best experience of my life 'cause it humbles you. [...] Growing up in a first world nation being immigrants, you know, being the kids of immigrant parents we thought we were poor [*laughs*] and had it really bad in Canada – which we did – like really, I remember when my dad was sick money was really tight. But then you go to India and you see the people there and you really realise that, you know we're truly not, by any means, should not be complaining of any condition. We live in a developed nation.¹⁵⁶

Gardner and Mand go on to say that postcolonial labour migration from East to West was associated with upward social mobility. Access to foreign places and foreign jobs meant that, due to unequal buying power, earnings made in the West translated to much more money in the East. For the British-Bangladeshi children who lived in working-class neighbourhoods and council housing, visits back home exposed them to a higher standard of living relative to their east London housing blocks.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, Rani's comments on India keeping her humble suggests that her dual frame of reference enabled her to see how she moved between classes given her economic position between India and Canada. She understood that what working-class meant in India was drastically different from what her working-class experience was like in Canada.

¹⁵⁶ Rani, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

¹⁵⁷ Gardner and Mand, "My Away is Here," 977-978.

Moreover, her access to foreign capital enabled her to move up the socio-economic ladder while she studied in India, whereas her brief experience at university in Canada would have been cost prohibitive and resulted in a considerable amount of debt.

Unlike my aunts, my uncles Cooper and Karan did not go to India after they finished high school. Despite the high expectations, Cooper did not pursue any of the acceptable profession parents chose for their children. When I asked how it affected his relationship with his parents, he made the following comment:

I didn't want to do that stuff. It wasn't for me. What I really wanted to do was just, you know...I'm different – I think me and Karan are opposites in that way because I was just like whatever makes me happy. I just want to enjoy life, we get one chance at it. I'm gonna do something that makes me happy. And I went a different way. [...] It didn't taint my relationship with my family, that's the thing. [...] I had a really good relationship with my father. I have a good relationship with my mom, I mean, obviously we still bump heads and everything, but I understand Karan's situation and mine it's just the opposite.¹⁵⁸

Cooper's comments reveal a family dynamic very different from that of Karan's family. Even though the lives of the two families had been closely entwined ever since their early years in Canada, Cooper's parents were much more open to their son exploring a career beyond medical school. Amar and her husband's openness in allowing their children to make their own way in life helped foster a much more positive relationship between them and their children in adulthood. However, it should be noted that, as close as the two families were, Cooper did not experience losing his father at a young age. The tragedy of losing a parent early had a significant impact on Karan and his relationship with his mother. Much to her dismay, Karan opted to pursue law school and complete his post-secondary education in Canada:

¹⁵⁸ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

Sonia: Did that ever cause tensions in your home? Like if somebody didn't want to do that [medical school]?

Karan: [...] I had no interest in being a doctor, I actually wanted to be a lawyer when I was younger. [...] But for my mom that was a massive issue. We didn't talk for probably a year, maybe two.

Sonia: But you lived together?

Karan: But we lived together, yeah [*laughs*]. And we would, it was bare minimum conversation. [...] When my sisters went to India to go get their medical degrees [...] she thought her life would be much easier. She thought she could stop working in the factory, if I would just go to India, because she would just move over with us. And then all three of her kids would be there, she wouldn't have to work here, we could rent the house here and live over there.

And I had no interest in doing that. And I just told her I'm not doing it. And that caused – one because I didn't want to be a doctor, but two because it would make her life easier then. It caused a material, material issue in our relationship to the point where we'd talk only minimally for, like, years.¹⁵⁹

In their paper “Keeping up Appearances Within the Ethnic Community: A Disconnect between First and Second Generation South Asians’ Educational Aspirations” sociologists Kara Somerville and Oral Robinson interviewed second-generation South-Asian Canadians pursuing their post-secondary education to understand their motivations for educational attainment, and whether it brought any pressure from parents, or caused intergenerational tension.¹⁶⁰ Through their interviews they found that many felt pressured to pursue careers in medicine, law, accounting, or engineering. They felt their parents’- imposed careers focused more on “high social statuses even at the cost of those [careers] that provide[d] intrinsic rewards and which align[ed] with their [children’s interests].¹⁶¹ This was evident in Gagan and Karan’s stories. Both wanted to pursue law, however, despite outward perceptions of law being a prestigious

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Kara Somerville and Oral Robinson, “Keeping Up Appearances Within the Ethnic Community: A Disconnect between First and Second Generation South Asians’ Educational Aspirations,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 48, no. 2 (2016): 99-117.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 107-109.

profession, their mother wished to see her children become doctors. Only Gagan relented and followed through with her mother's wishes. While their mother's desires were pushed in part by the family's loss of a patriarch, Karan and Cooper suggested that having children with a career in medicine brought with it the greatest social cachet from the community. Thus, their parents had external and internal factors in pushing for this narrative of success. The authors also note that children's success justified parents' choices in pursuing the immigrant life, which was noted by Karan in his comment on why parents had left India.

Somerville and Robinson also note that these parental pressures and comparisons lead to competition between children, which echoes some of Gagan's comments in her interview:

Sonia: In terms of education, were you able to sort of navigate that for yourself or did you parents have a lot of influence over what you could pursue and your career?

Gagan: I think we were, like, basically the generation of immigrants – and I'd say it's probably true for the community – every single one of us – we're gonna go to med school. Okay fine, you can go to engineering school. Alright, we'll accept law school. Or you can be an accountant, or a dentist, because that's still some form of medicine. So, I grew up in that. That was what they were all gunning for. I think the one thing that they didn't do well was helping us preserve relationships with, like, those extended friends they had. Because, then it became – they were competitive with each other. So, I feel like I've lost touch with many of those [people]. They probably got sick of my mother bragging about how wonderful her kids were.

Sonia: So, parents got competitive?

Gagan: Mhmm. Yes, yes, not the children. Because I think we all often rarely saw each other. [...] So, I knew I had to do one of those things.¹⁶²

Somerville and Robinson suggest that parents' proud proclamations of their children's educational and professional achievements presented a way to exert control over their children and to avoid becoming the subject of gossip generated through communal surveillance. This type

¹⁶² Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

of control clearly began to affect the relationships my second-generation interviewees had with their parents and their peers. It is worth noting that much of this tension occurred after the passing of my great-uncle Gurnam, perhaps prompting my great-aunt Dial to double down on her efforts to ensure she had raised respectable children. Similar to patriarchal policing of women's sexuality, the task of imparting cultural practices and decorum falls on mothers. In an effort to show the community that her children had been raised well, Dial put an immense amount of pressure on her children to pursue a professional path that would solidify her reputation as a "good mother". By contrast, her sister Amar seemed more willing to accept her children's choices; Amar's position of a "good mother" may have been more secure as her husband was still alive. Although the transfer of cultural customs often falls onto women, the presence of a man, who is viewed as the head of the house and whose opinions are more valued than a woman's, may have meant that Amar faced less criticism from the community; for her husband was similarly supportive of his children's decisions.

If Rani and Gagan's educational pathways were shaped by their family's gendered expectations, so, too, were Karan's. The fact that he continued to live at home meant he was faced with the day-to-day reality that money was tight:

I remember she used to make \$1,500 a month. And, you know, that used to get allocated to paying more for the girls' education. And then also to pay some bills, and I remember we used to have to literally [...] ration on like [...] \$30 a week on groceries.¹⁶³

Unlike his sisters, whose education was underwritten by their paternal grandparents, Karan was expected to work and to contribute to the household expenses. This inevitably led to him relying heavily on his peer group and falling out of his parents', particularly his mother's, social sphere:

¹⁶³ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

I would say I became very independent. You know, I think with my dad passing on and my relationship with my mom kind of deteriorating because I refused to go to India [laughs] you know, I relied on my group of friends quite a bit.¹⁶⁴

As Orsi states, “the struggle between generations, therefore, was a most intimate one, not easily avoided by rebellion or departure. It took place within the well-maintained confines of the domus, as well as deep within the individual consciences and psyches of the second generation.”¹⁶⁵ Having transplanted so much of their cultural world my great-aunts instilled a deep understanding of their cultural heritage within their children. However, despite all of their parents’ efforts, my second-generation interviewees seemed determined to navigate their life paths on their own terms, be it by internalizing their parents’ values as their own, veering slightly to an alternative path of success, or by simply choosing their own. What became evident was that once my aunts and uncles were reaching a stage where parental influence conflicted with their desires, conflicts became heightened and could have very long-lasting effects on relationships.

For my interviewees, their education and professional careers seemed to be the first point at which the outcome of these conflicts really shaped the rest of their lives. As they completed their education and settled into their careers, Rani and Gagan as doctors, Karan as a lawyer, and Cooper pursuing his interests, the next step proscribed by their culture was for them to settle down with families of their own. Once again, as the first cohort of second-generation children to navigate parental expectations, they would help create the playbook that future cohorts would be expected to follow.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street*, 112.

Chapter IV: Diaspora Solidified (1990s-2000s)

The first twelve years of my life were spent living near Dial and Amar's homes in Rexdale. I have fond memories of walking over with my grandmother on hot summer evenings and being offered a cool glass of iced tea. When I think back to this period of my early life my memories are often set in local parks, soccer fields, riding my bike, and playing foursquare with my friends at school. For much of this period, I did not see my aunts and uncles often as they were off at university. However, stories of their success and hard work were regular topics discussed between my great-aunts and grandmother, and eventually relayed to my parents. These discussions left a strong impact on me as I came to see how much value my family placed on education, specifically in law and medicine.

As a child, I did not yet grasp the intergenerational tensions playing out between parents and children within the first cohort of South Asian Canadian families. In this section, I investigate how migration experiences differed between cohorts who arrived in the late 1980s and 1990s, how the community matured over time, how subsequent generations grew up in ethnoburbs, and how intergenerational tensions took on different meanings during these periods. In effect, I argue that the ethnoburb became a tool for cultural transmission in the public sphere of the community while differing parenting practices created room for intergenerational negotiation in the private sphere of the family home.

In her article "Aspiration, reunification and gender transformation in Jat Sikh marriages from India to Canada", anthropologist Nicola Mooney, whose work is based on social and cultural studies of Punjabi families, discussed two major forms of migration journeys common in

Punjabi families like mine.¹⁶⁶ The first method she discusses was the practice of South Asian families based in Canada adopting nieces or nephews from close family in India, once again, highlighting the importance of transnational kinship networks in migration.¹⁶⁷ My father's pathway to Canada came through this route as his sister had been adopted and sponsored by Dial in the mid-1980s. In fact, this aunt was present with Dial and Rani when they received news of my great-uncle's diagnosis. By the late 1980s my aunt had helped sponsor my father, his younger brother, and my paternal grandmother. In their early years, my father, uncle, aunt, and her husband worked in various manufacturing jobs to save up money to purchase a home of their own. This first home, a modest three-bedroom house with a funky green-carpeted basement, was a joint purchase where all five of them lived. In late 1990, my father and uncle returned to India to marry suitable partners. This is the second method of migration Mooney discusses, the practice of diasporic families arranging marriages with families still in India.¹⁶⁸ My grandparents arranged the marriage of my mother and father and a few months after their marriage my mother took her first ever flight and came to Canada.

Given my great-uncle's illness, the home purchased by my father and his siblings was close to Dial and Amar's homes. In my interview with Karan and Cooper, they remembered my parents as regular fixtures in their lives, often bringing over meals and taking them to their extracurricular activities. On a deeper level, Dial recounted with great emotion the fact that my father was present on the night my great-uncle passed.¹⁶⁹ As beneficial as it was for Dial to have her extended family present during this difficult period, it was also beneficial for my own

¹⁶⁶ Nicola Mooney, "Aspiration, reunification and gender transformation in Jat Sikh marriages from India to Canada" *Global Networks* 6, no. 4 (2006): 389-403.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 391.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁹ Dial and Amar, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Translated by Sonia Dhaliwal.

parents. In my interview with my mother, Nina, she mentioned that my great-uncle provided a lot of practical guidance in their early years:

Sonia: Did you live close [to family] so you could visit easily?

Nina: Yeah. [...] Relatives would guide us. We needed guidance from them even to file taxes. Then [Gurnam] Uncle got sick and he was home, so we would help out.¹⁷⁰

In her article “The 1.5 Generation: Thinking about Child Survivors and the Holocaust” Susan Rubin Suleiman, a literary academic, “discusses how shared experiences amongst child survivors helped create an in-between generation” – the first generation being adults who survived the Holocaust and the second being their children.¹⁷¹ As she elaborates, “[w]hat all of the attempts to define a historical generation have in common is the concept of shared or collective experience, which in turn influences [...] collective behavior and attitudes.”¹⁷² While my parents’ immigration story has similarities with the stories of my great aunts, there are a number of differences as well.

The first difference was their motives for immigrating. My parents’ decision to immigrate was motivated largely by circumstances in India, something my mother explained with some hesitation:

[*Switching between Punjabi and some English*] There [were] political disturbances. There was a corrupt system there and you had no value. Not guaranteed to gain employment if you are a graduate. Some people did some [did not]. Plus, everyone was middle class and wanted better income. But my reason was that at the time, [in] 91 or 90,

¹⁷⁰ Nina, interview by Sonia Dhaliwal, October 28, 2018, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Translated from Punjabi by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

¹⁷¹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, “The 1.5 Generation: Thinking About Child Survivors and the Holocaust,” *American Imago*, 59 no. 2 (2002): 277-295.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 280.

political disturbances were rampant, especially in Punjab.¹⁷³

The 1980s saw many Punjabi Sikhs seeking refuge abroad from the aftermath of Operation Blue Star and the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Sikh separatists living in the Punjab region of India sought a homeland of their own called Khalistan, similar to the Muslim state of Pakistan.¹⁷⁴ The Sikh demand came too late during independence negotiations with the British and it was Punjabi Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus who faced much of the violence of Partition when the region was split between West Pakistan and India, leaving millions of people as refugees overnight and a legacy of trauma.¹⁷⁵

Separatist sentiments became a new reality for independent India, with tensions between Sikh separatists and the Indian government coming to heads in the mid-1980s. Operation Blue Star was a government backed military attack at the Harmandir Sahib (the Golden Temple), the holiest site of Sikh worship, on the basis that the temple was harbouring militant Sikh terrorists. This led to the retaliatory assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31st, 1984. The result of this was months of sectarian violence and years of political tensions.¹⁷⁶

When my parents discuss their lives in India, there are always passing mentions of curfews and *lutteray* [bandits]. For my mother, her life was heavily sheltered, no doubt in part due to her gender, but also due to the unstable circumstances of Punjab. Her early life revolved around helping on the family farm and going to school. It followed a monotonous cycle of waking up early; milking cattle; being taken to school by my grandfather; and finally coming

¹⁷³ Nina, interview by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

¹⁷⁴ Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 435-439.

¹⁷⁵ Gaana Jayagopalan, "Orality and the Archive: Teaching the Partition of India through Oral Histories," *Radical Teacher*, 105 (2016): 45-46.

¹⁷⁶ Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 438.

home and completing more household tasks and her school work. The picture she painted suggested a heavily monitored life where she and her siblings were constantly under the watchful gaze of their parents or extended family. In her interview, my mother did not linger on this period of her life – she felt there was nothing important about it. For her, this was a typical rural life for that time.

The second difference in my parents' story is the process through which they migrated. With earlier cohorts of migrants, one member of the family, often the men, applied for immigration through the points system. However, as the community began to settle into their new lives, they welcomed their extended family through the basis of family reunification, creating greater socio-economic diversity in the make-up of the community. Having little formal education, my father would not have been able to immigrate through the points system. For him, family reunification became the basis for his migration. Although my mother did complete most of her post-secondary education, it was stalled due to political circumstances and, ultimately, she left India a few credits short of qualifying as a teacher. That being said, like the earlier cohort, women still seemed to immigrate more on a spousal basis, as was the case with my mother.¹⁷⁷

My parents were in their early 20s when they began their lives in Canada. They were not that much older than my aunts Rani and Gagan, and my uncles Karan and Cooper, who were all teenagers when my parents became fixtures in their lives. Through their interactions at family gatherings, the infamous basement parties, and support through my great-uncle's illness, my parents became privy to what life for Canadian children was like. My father became indoctrinated in the cult of *Hockey Night in Canada* and my mother began to diversify her cooking repertoire, albeit ever so slightly. My mother described her first impressions of Canada

¹⁷⁷ Thobani, "Closing the Nation's Doors to Immigrant Women," 19.

as such:

Sonia: What were your first impressions in your first few months?

Nina: [It was my] first experience with snow. [I] thought it was cold, got sick a lot [very] easily. [I was] not used to this level of cold. Didn't go out much, was not working [then].

[...]

Didn't feel completely in another community. Just had more types of people. Neighbourhood was pretty mix, so [we were] not the only Punjabi family. Had relatives who had immigrated before [and were] already established here.¹⁷⁸

My mother did not experience the intense feelings of isolation my great-aunts had described. Similar to my paternal family, my maternal family also included several family members who had already migrated to Canada. My maternal grandfather, the eldest of six, had three siblings who left for Canada in the late 1960s. At first, they had lived in Montreal but, eventually, they made their way to Toronto. By the time my mother came to Canada, her aunt and uncles, who had visited India a few times when she was young, had followed the same path as Dial and Amar and settled in Malton with their children, who were only a few years younger than Rani, Gagan, Cooper and Karan. In effect, my parents had family and a support network to rely on for guidance to transition into a new life.

As Suleiman remarks in her article on the 1.5 generation, “[we] might try out the idea in speaking about the members of the 1.5 generation, looking for clusters.”¹⁷⁹ My parents can be seen as a 1.5-generation cluster, or cohort, arriving after the community had settled into their new home. Their sense of identity is grounded within the diaspora. For my mother, this diasporic identity has meant incorporating practices that are the best of both cultures – arguably, a

¹⁷⁸ Nina, interview by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

¹⁷⁹ Suleiman, “The 1.5 Generation,” 289.

distinctly South Asian-Canadian culture.¹⁸⁰ Equally as important is that this 1.5 cohort was privy to parenting practices within the diaspora, witnessing first-hand how their predecessors were raising their children and how their children responded and navigated two cultural worlds. For my parents, this exposure provided them with some insight on what to expect when raising their own children.

As their families grew, the 1.5-generation also benefitted from having grandparents present within the home, as opposed to the previous generation, which relied on grandparents still living in India. In stark contrast to my aunts and uncles, none of my cousins, nor I or my brother, were sent away to India. Instead, my paternal grandmother immigrated along with her adult children and lived in the same home. A few years after I was born, my maternal grandparents also made their way to Canada and lived on the same street as my family. I have many happy memories of riding my tricycle a few doors down from our house to the townhouse complex they lived in. My *nani* would be waiting by the gates as my *dadi* walked not too far behind me.¹⁸¹

Pramila Aggarwal, a professor in community development, and Tania Das Gupta, a professor in sociology, studied the lives of Sikh grandmothers around the Toronto area through a series of informal interviews in their article “Grandmothering at work: conversations with Sikh Punjabi grandmothers in Toronto.”¹⁸² All of the grandmothers they interviewed lived in Rexdale, Malton, or the suburb of Brampton and had been sponsored by their adult children. The authors found that, overall, grandparents faced “displacement and devaluation” through their

¹⁸⁰ Nina, interview by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

¹⁸¹ *Nani* is maternal grandmother. *Dadi* is paternal grandmother.

¹⁸² Pramila Aggarwal and Tania Das Gupta, “Grandmothering at work” conversations with Sikh Punjabi grandmothers in Toronto,” *South Asian Diaspora* 5, no.1 (2012): 77-90.

migration.¹⁸³ Similar to earlier transnational grandparents, those who came to Canada often provided free childcare. Transplanted into unfamiliar places, they had to re-establish themselves within the confines of their new circumstances. The authors note that “the sense of neighbourhood [...] Punjabi grandmothers would have enjoyed in their villages [was] absent in the urban spaces in Canada [...]”¹⁸⁴ In addition, family dynamics changed drastically, whereby grandparents became economically dependent on their adult children. Unlike in India, where mothers/mothers-in-law/grandmothers had more influence within the family structure, migration abroad meant they fell to a more “subsidiary, assistive role in relation to [their] daughter-in-law/daughter.”¹⁸⁵

These grandmothers played a crucial role in transmitting cultural practices and values to their grandchildren. Aggarwal and Das Gupta state that grandmothers were “important transmitters of the home culture and values around health, respect for elders, education and hardwork.”¹⁸⁶ One of the ways through which grandmothers performed these acts was through the food they cooked for their grandchildren. Kuljeet, one of the grandmother’s interviewed in the article, made the following comment:

I teach my grandchildren to eat our food (*roti with subjhi*), speak in our language (*Punjabi*), teach them good manners – saying ‘*ji*’ (mark of respect when talking to adults), learn prayers, how to bow in deference (*muttha tkena*) in front of Guru Granth sahib, greet relatives politely and respectfully (*paeri payna*). How else are they going to learn? Who will teach them all these things – their parents? They have no time. And schools here don’t teach this.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Ibid, 78.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 87.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 86.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 84.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

The activities outlined by Kuljeet represent many of the lessons my grandmother taught my cousins and I. Unlike her younger sisters Dial and Amar, my grandmother does not speak English. She was a constant figure in my formative years and given the amount of time I spent with her, Punjabi was the first language I learned. My grandmother also took us to our local *gurdwara* (Sikh place of worship), marching her six grandchildren ahead of her so she could keep an eye on any troublemaking. My first Punjabi lessons were at this very gurdwara, where my grandmother would drop us off in our makeshift classroom that doubled as a storage room while she helped prepare *langar* (communal meal prepared by volunteers) for the evening and caught up with all the other grandmothers. She would encourage my cousins and I to participate in *seva* (selfless communal service) at the temple, assigning us the task of pouring water or handing out roti. In essence, the local gurdwara became my grandmother's new neighbourhood and the place in which she engaged us in cultural activities. Her presence there meant that my family was often present at larger events and holidays, such as Vaisakhi and Diwali. Our attendance at such cultural events ensured I had an understanding of significant religious and cultural festivals. It generated a lot of excitement for any new Punjabi clothing I received and helped foster my friendships with other Punjabi children from the neighbourhood, many of whom attended the same school as me.

When analysing the nature of grandparent-grandchild roles in various ethnic communities, psychologists Richard Wiscott and Karen Kopera-Frye highlight that, on the whole, grandchildren viewed their relationships with grandparents positively. As previously noted, grandparents played a crucial role in cultural transmission and family history. They also noted that within minority communities, interactions between these family members often

involved cultural activities.¹⁸⁸ Once again, the gendered nature of cultural transmission is evident in the data collected by Wiscott and Kopera-Frye; grandmothers and granddaughters from minority groups were reported to have the most meaningful interactions and highest levels of cultural transmission of any group.¹⁸⁹ This was evident in my own relationship with my grandmother. Although all my cousins and I were immersed in Punjabi aspects of life equally, much of my alone time with her was spent preparing food or helping her care for any younger cousins. In this way, the gendered aspects of equal immersion, but unequal participation, become evident through day to day interactions.

Whereas grandparents were instrumental in the early years of their grandchildren's lives, their influence lessened as children become more independent and engaged within their host society. The grandmothers interviewed by Aggarwal and Das Gupta noted that as their grandchildren aged, they began to participate less and less in activities with their grandmothers.

Satinder: My two grandsons (ages 11 and 13) would rather have chocolate and cake with their friends – even Punjabi friends. They don't like the smell of ghee, they say. It was different when they were little.¹⁹⁰

Grandmothers also found themselves with little to do once grandchildren were grown, as one grandmother noted:

Unknown: All day I am alone. I don't like watching TV. [...] After I do all the housework, there is still a lot of time. I feel *vaila* (useless or having nothing to do).¹⁹¹

My own grandmother's experience echoed these sentiments. As my cousins and I grew older her trips to India became longer and longer and have led to her semi-permanently moving to India,

¹⁸⁸ Richard Wiscott and Karen Kopera-Frye, "Sharing of Culture: Adult Grandchildren's Perceptions of Intergenerational Relations," *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 51, no. 3 (2000): 199-215.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 203.

¹⁹⁰ Aggarwal and Das Gupta, "Grandmothering at work," 85.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 87.

returning to Canada only for brief periods during the summer. For her, it is more comforting to be around familiar people in a place where she understands the customs and the language. With the arrival of great-grandchildren and other grand-nieces and nephews, she feels there is more for her to do in India than in Canada. Coincidentally, the point at which my grandmother's role in my life decreased was around the same period my family moved to Brampton.

Brampton is a suburban city located west of Toronto. It is part of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and is relatively close to the Toronto neighbourhood of Rexdale and the Mississauga neighbourhood of Malton. In the western end of Toronto, Rexdale and Malton had sizable pockets of South Asian communities, whereas the eastern part of Toronto was host to many Sri Lankans. Approximately 48.18% of Brampton residents identified as a visible minority in the 2011 census out of a total population of 523,906.¹⁹² This number increased to 73.12% of Brampton residents identifying as a visible minority in the 2016 census from a total population of 593,638.¹⁹³ Using data from Statistics Canada, the city reports that the majority of visible minorities identify primarily as South Asian (261,705) followed by Black (82,175) and Filipino (20,100).¹⁹⁴

In their article "The Good, the Bad, and the Suburban: Tracing North American Theoretical Debates about Ethnic Enclaves, Ethnic Suburbs, and Housing preference," geographers Virpal Kataure and Margaret Walton-Roberts highlight how Brampton became host

¹⁹² Statistics Canada, "Focus on Geography Series, 2011 Census," Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-310-XWE2011004. Last updated October 24, 2012, accessed via <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-csd-eng.cfm?LANG=Eng&GK=CSD&GC=3521010>

¹⁹³ Statistics Canada, "Brampton, CY [Census subdivision], Ontario and Ontario [Province] (table). Census Profile," Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Released November 29, 2017, accessed via <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

¹⁹⁴ "Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity," City of Brampton, last modified 2019, <https://geohub.brampton.ca/pages/profile-diversity>

to such a large pocket of South Asian Canadians. They note that between the years of 2006 and 2011 the city grew by 20.8%, the highest population growth seen anywhere in the country.¹⁹⁵ Using the criteria of immigration volume, sustained immigration, and residential concentration, they define Brampton as an ethnic enclave, or “a residential [area] where a single ethnic group is prominent.”¹⁹⁶ Yet Brampton might more accurately be considered an ethnic suburb, or ethnoburb, a term first coined by geographer Wei Li in her study of Chinese settlement in Los Angeles.¹⁹⁷ While it has already been established that many South Asians immigrating through chain migration lived with relatives, thus creating clusters, or enclaves, of the community, Li suggests that the “marker of [ethnoburbs] can be recognised as suburban ethnic clusters of residential areas and [business] districts in large metropolitan areas. The local context of the ethnoburb is [characterized] by both vibrant ethnic economies, due to the presence of large numbers of ethnic [people] and strong ties to the globalising [economy], revealing their role as outposts in the emerging international economic system.”¹⁹⁸ Geographers Robert Murdie and Carlos Teixeira suggest that, within the Canadian context, immigrants arriving in the 1970s and onward settled mostly in the outer suburban areas of the city due in large part to the older communities moving to suburban cities, and the availability of affordable housing, something that was becoming increasingly difficult to find closer to the core of Toronto.¹⁹⁹ As newer immigrant cohorts arrived in the 1980s and onward, they benefited greatly from having strong

¹⁹⁵ Virpal Kataure and Margaret Walton-Roberts, “The Good, the Bad, and the Suburban: Tracing North American Theoretical Debates about Ethnic Enclaves, Ethnic Suburbs, and Housing preference,” in *The Housing and Economic Experiences of Immigrants in US and Canadian Cities* ed. Carlos Teixeira and Wei Li (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015): 159.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 152.

¹⁹⁷ Wei Li, “Anatomy of a New Ethnic Settlement: The Chinese *Ethnoburb* in Los Angeles,” *Urban Studies* 35, no. 3 (1998): 479-501.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 482.

¹⁹⁹ Robert A. Murdie and Carlos Teixeira, “Towards a Comfortable Neighbourhood and Appropriate Housing: Immigrant Experiences in Toronto,” in *The World in a City* ed by Paul Anisef and C. Michael Lanphier (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 139.

social networks. With the emergence of newer, more affordable, suburban developments, many moved out of Toronto and into the surrounding suburban cities, such as Brampton.²⁰⁰ Jobs also shifted as “the locus of manufacturing activity and routine office functions [...] shifted to the suburbs, while executive jobs in the financial sector have remained in the central city.”²⁰¹

Whereas older members of the community had settled into areas like Rexdale and Malton, many of the newer immigrants moved further out, eventually leaving the formal boundaries of Toronto altogether. These suburbs provided all the markers of upward social mobility along with flourishing businesses selling the goods, the clothing, and the flavours of ‘back home.’ Arguably, Brampton has become the South Asian hub of the GTA – a bonafide ethnoburb.

In Brampton the community’s presence is inscribed into the physical spaces in the city. When driving into Brampton from Rexdale along Highway 427, one of the first indicators of a South Asian presence is the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan *mandir* (Hindu place of worship) Although technically located in Etobicoke, it is easily accessible to residents in Brampton. This temple, in particular, is most iconic for the traditional Indian architecture used on the outer façade of the temple. The building also houses a cultural centre with items brought over from India. The carvings displayed both inside and outside the façade are reminiscent of Hindu iconography found in mandirs in India. Similarly, more recent gurdwaras and many of the mosques in Brampton mimic the Mughal architecture found in India. Examples of this are the Gurdwara Dasmesh Darbar and the Masjid Mubarak, both of which have white rectangular buildings with arched windows and large onion-domed roofs.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 157.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 161.



Figure 2: Haveli of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir located in the neighbourhood of Etobicoke in Toronto, ON. Accessed August 1st, 2020. <https://www.baps.org/Global-Network/North-America/Toronto/Media-Gallery.aspx>



Figure 3: Exterior of the Gurdwara Dasmesh Darbar located in the neighbourhood of Springdale in Brampton ON. Accessed August 1st, 2020. <http://www.gurdwaradasmeshdarbar.com/>



Figure 4: Exterior of the Masjid Mubarak located in the neighbourhood of Heart Lake in Brampton ON. Accessed August 1st, 2020. <https://images.app.goo.gl/rdv5JUVO5L2L3asB8>

The numerous businesses catering to the community's needs also denote the South Asian presence. Many of the strip plazas have South Asian grocery stores, restaurants, and clothing shops. Office buildings are occupied by South Asian accountants, insurance brokers, and real estate agents, while big grocery chains are capitalizing by changing the names of their stores to incorporate familiar languages, the prime example being FreshCo becoming *Chalo!* FreshCo.²⁰² Even the city itself has begun to recognize the community's presence. In 2017 the construction of a brand new public library was tethered to a new park called Komagata Maru Park.²⁰³ The local hospital's emergency room was inaugurated as Guru Nanak Emergency Services after the

²⁰² *Chalo* means 'let's go/let's go to' in various South Asian dialects such as Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi.

²⁰³ News Review Media P.W., "Brampton comes together to celebrate the official opening of Komagata Maru Park," Peel Region Review, last modified June 25, 2019, <https://peelregionreview.com/brampton-comes-together-to-celebrate-the-official-opening-of-komagata-maru-park/>

Sikh community helped raise funds for its construction.²⁰⁴ Beginning in 2020, the city itself will host a fireworks display on Diwali, similar to those held on Victoria Day and Canada Day.²⁰⁵

By contrast, the community's presence in the older neighbourhoods of Rexdale and Malton is subdued. The gurdwara my grandmother took me to was first located in a small warehouse near other commercial warehouses, and eventually moved to a larger building that used to be the local Canadian Tire. The gurdwaras in Malton still bear the visual scars of old warehouses to which the community has added extensions after repurposing the buildings. Many of the South Asian-owned businesses are concentrated in a few main intersections, notably Albion Road and Islington Avenue in Rexdale and Airport Road and Derry Road in Malton.

In her article "Every Object Tells a Story," professor of art and literature, Kate Pahl, suggests that objects in immigrant homes were curated by individuals and served as tangible markers of journeys of migration. The stories around the objects also changed over time, and through generations, thereby shaping how children interpreted the cultural worlds those objects represented, particularly as memories around objects were recontextualized to represent the present more so than the past.²⁰⁶ By applying this analysis to physical markers within the ethnoburb, the community has transposed many of its religious architectural markers to immigrant neighbourhoods. Billboards advertising cultural events are often bright and animated and increasingly written only in languages of the community they cater to. In many ways, these objects tell of a cultural world left behind. They replicate the visual markers of the physical

²⁰⁴ William Osler Health System Media Releases Archive, "Osler recognizes Sikh community for generous support of Brampton Civic Hospital," last modified 2012, <https://www.williamoslerhs.ca/about-osler/news-media/media-releases/2012-media-releases/osler-recognizes-sikh-community-for-generous-support-of-brampton-civic-hospital>

²⁰⁵ Rajpreet Sahota, "Brampton to host first-ever Diwali fireworks display next year," in *Brampton*, last modified October 7th, 2019, <https://www.inbrampton.com/brampton-to-host-first-ever-diwali-fireworks-display-next-year>

²⁰⁶ Kate Pahl, "Every Object Tells a Story," *Home Cultures: Journal of Architecture, Design and Domestic Space* 9, no. 3 (2012): 303-327.

spaces found in South Asia. This was the world in which much of my adolescence played out. By the time I entered high school my family had firmly settled in Brampton, with my older, and some newer, relatives following along. Between 2005 and 2010, coinciding with the on-going housing boom, nearly all my extended family, including Dial and Amar, had made their way to Brampton.

As my family migrated out of Toronto, my aunts and uncles slowly began to come back into my life. This time, they were much older, and their return was cause for celebration. They had been successful in fulfilling their parents' wishes of becoming respectable professionals and it was time for them to take the step of settling down. Their weddings were highlights of my adolescence. My cousins and I were getting together multiple nights a week and it almost always meant getting new clothes to wear. Only much later would I learn of the parental discontent they had faced when deciding on their marriage partners and their determination that, when it came to settling down into their own families, they would be in charge.

In the interviews I conducted with my aunts and uncles, they all stated, either explicitly or implicitly, that they did not date, at least not in the way that Western society understands it. They understood that if you dated, it was always with serious intentions. To date someone from outside of the community – a community that was narrowly defined by their parents as a specific subset of South Asian – would have caused strife at home. Gender very much shaped how members of the second generation were able to navigate this stage of their lives. Both of my aunts had arranged marriages. However, in resisting the heavy parental involvement that had been typical for their parents' generation, both my aunts claimed the right of having the ultimate say. My uncles had rather more leeway in pushing back against the strict criteria their parents had established.

My aunt Gagan was the first to marry. On a visit home from medical school, Gagan's mother suggested she meet someone. Gagan admitted that her initial response was to the tune of, "yeah, no..." and that she really had no interest in wanting to settle down yet. However, she went along with it to placate her mother. Their initial meeting was over dinner at the home of her mother's friend. As Gagan puts it, their first meeting was very traditional and closely monitored by the hosting family. Much to her surprise she and her now husband got on well and she told her mother she wanted to see him again. To Gagan this meant getting to know him without the presence of chaperones; for her mother it meant putting a formal title to the relationship by announcing an engagement. Gagan stated she was not happy with the pace of the relationship, but she understood what her mother's terms were and did not feel it was "worth a fight."

Gagan went on to explain that if she had looked for someone herself it might have been difficult to meet the kind of person she desired:

Gagan: By then I was invested into the process of also wanting somebody like myself. Like I already knew by then that I wasn't going to be with a white guy. Too different. So, I felt like I already knew. I also wanted somebody successful. [...] I think the thing that we could have debated, had I met somebody on my own, was another type of Indian. But I knew that I was going to stick to the continent of India. I myself am very traditional. Maybe it was my upbringing, maybe it was spending so much of my life in India? [...] So yes, [my mother] was definitely only going to ever present me with those options, but I don't think I was too closed to those options.

Sonia: Did anybody in your peer group date?

Gagan: Yeah many of them did. [...] I think people did break that mould if they wanted to. I'm not convinced I wanted to.²⁰⁷

While her mother's matchmaking had been successful, Gagan was sure to mention that, despite the formal engagement, if she had not felt that this partnership was going to work in the long-term, she would have ended it. She noted that this had been the case with her sister, Rani, and

²⁰⁷ Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

that their mother would have understood. However, in Rani's interview, she presented a very different outcome to a rejected proposal, which created a period of difficulty in the mother-daughter relationship.

“So, you know, here I am trying to study for medical licencing exams and my mom, every weekend has someone for me to meet that she thinks would be the perfect husband. And, actually, Sonia, I got engaged to one of these perfect people – according to my mom. He was a Rhodes Scholar; he was a cardiologist [...] what more could I want? But I was not in love with him Sonia! And so, I kind of got forced [and] guilted and I ended up getting *roked* (engaged).”²⁰⁸

While her mother viewed her former fiancé as the perfect candidate, her perspective had more to do with appearances and less to do with emotions. Rani did not want to pursue the relationship further. From her retelling, she hinted that her mother did not understand why she wanted to end her engagement with such a good candidate:

“One day [I] cried to my uncle and I said I don't like him. I don't want to marry him. And my uncle said, okay, fine we'll tell your mom. So, I broke off my engagement. Then I was in real trouble. Then I was like living on house arrest. Like, all I was allowed [to do was] eat [and] study for my exam, because my mom hated me, 'cause I was the worst kid in the world 'cause I had broken off an engagement.”²⁰⁹

By having to formalize the relationship with an engagement, this meant that there was some public knowledge amongst the community that Rani was off the market, so to speak. Though she did not say as much, for her mother, Rani's failure to follow through with the arrangement may have meant she had to face questions from her social network. Considering how much value the first-generation put on their social standing within the community, this would have placed her mother into a difficult and awkward position, given her status as a widow. Having a keen understanding of gender dynamics herself, Rani employed the help of her uncle, a male relative, to ensure that her voice was heard. In this situation, it became clear that Rani prioritized her own

²⁰⁸ Rani, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

happiness over keeping up appearances for the community. Conversely, Rani's mother viewed the community's perception of the marriage match as a reflection of her ability to marry her children well, particularly given the scrutiny she endured as a single mother.

After the initial setback, Rani opted to take matters into her own hands. Enlisting the help of her peers, she created an online profile for herself on a popular South Asian matrimonial website:

“Cooper's wife at the time put me on Shadi.com, which was, like, internet was very new okay, back then. [*Laughs*] Like, [it was] online dating slash marriage service. And surprisingly, much to my surprise- I thought it was the most humiliating, most embarrassing thing ever- I did meet my current husband on that website.”²¹⁰

By opting to become much more proactive in selecting a partner, Rani was able to ensure that she found someone with whom she had an emotional connection. By using a specifically South Asian network Rani was able to reconceptualize how she dated through a parental-approved platform. By speaking only to other South Asians, she was able to ensure the cultural criteria of her mother's requirements were met while at the same time she was able to pursue candidates on her own terms.

Although both of my aunts played the role of a “good Indian daughter” very well, a closer analysis reveals a much more complex picture. In the case of Gagan her initial dismissal of agreeing to pursue an arranged marriage seemed to catch her by surprise, particularly when she found herself connecting very well with her now husband. At the same time, it highlighted just how much of her parents' values she had internalized and the importance she put on finding someone like herself. Conversely, Rani's failed engagement highlighted how relationships became tested when she chose to express her will and ended her engagement. Intergenerational

²¹⁰ Ibid.

negotiations did not always pan out so smoothly and compromises were not always accepted by parents.

In sociologist Lina Samuel's article "Mating, Dating and Marriage: Intergenerational Cultural Retention and Construction of Diasporic Identities among South Asian Immigrants in Canada,"²¹¹ she points out similar sentiments among second-generation Malayalee women, whose families had immigrated from Kerala in south India. Her research involved forty interviews with first- and second-generation women who discussed their feelings around choosing life partners. All but two of the first-generation women had come to Canada as independents between 1965 and 1977. They had trained as nurses in India and worked for one or two years, often in New Delhi, before migrating on their own to Canada. With pressure growing from their families back home, all but one of the women married in traditional arranged marriages with men chosen by their families. Like my great-aunts, these women were well-educated and belonged to middle-class families. They all felt a strong sense of duty towards their families and harboured little to no resentment about the pressure their family put on them. In fact, one of the women, Matilda, stated, "Responsibility to family is key. [...] I respected my parents."

The strong sense of duty did not necessarily transmit to the second-generation women Samuel interviewed. Samuel describes how these women felt constrained by the strong patriarchal notions of femininity and the double standard that often vilified a woman for dating outside her community (often men from other ethnic communities), pre-marital sex, or divorce. These women felt that, given the patriarchal culture they were raised in, Malayalee men often

²¹¹ Samuel, "Mating, Dating and Marriage," 95-110.

expected their wives to adhere to traditional gender roles where women are not always an equal partner. As Samuel notes, the way second-generation daughters behaved indicated the degree to which a family had assimilated into their host culture. Feeling caught in the middle, these women used lying as a means to navigate their own way, suggesting that the second generation was not fully assimilated into either culture. One second-generation woman seemed to exemplify exactly how these scenarios played out. Sybil, who, despite having a boyfriend, did not actively resist her parents' search in finding a suitable Malayalee match for her, stating, "it was pretty much to get them [parents] off my back." Sybil understood that any introduction to a potential partner outside the community had to be done when things became serious, stating: "I will introduce him when I know that this [is] going to be for good."²¹²

Sons, too, had to navigate an emotionally charged terrain when deciding upon the choice of a life partner. My uncle Cooper married first and chose someone who fell outside his parents' criteria. Like Rani, Cooper also met his former partner online, though he was upfront about having no interest in an arranged marriage:

Cooper: They tried [arranged marriage] with me. I didn't have any of it. Like, I'd go meet the girl, but it wasn't for me.

[...]

Sonia: How did you meet [your partner]?

Cooper: We met online, me and her. And then I went over there – she's from BC- I went and visited her there, she came here. And then we just did the long-distance relationship.

[...]

Sonia: So how did you ultimately tell your parents?

Cooper: Mine didn't go well because [she] was not Jatt [Sikh]. She was half-half. Hindu and Jatt [Sikh]. My parents had a big issue with that. They were like, no, why can't you find someone who's Jatt? And I go, look I'm not into that. I mean, you can't control who

²¹² Ibid, 104.

you fall for, at the end of the day. And I go listen, she's still Indian, she's half Jatt [laughs] I don't know what else you guys want? But, it took a while. It actually took almost a year before they were okay with it.²¹³

It was clear that the first-generation had troubles adapting and broadening their own idea of an acceptable partner for their children. Their children, in turn, began calling out what they viewed as outdated ideas about choosing a partner. As Karan remarked:

Not only did you look for brown girls, but you looked for a brown girl of your own type of brown. So Punjabi, someone who's Sikh, someone who's Jatt Sikh, which is the type of Sikh we are. So, your ethnicity, and your background, your ethnic background, your immigrant background [...] it probably cut down the universe of people that you could date by 95%!'²¹⁴

Karan's tone was one of frustrated laughter when he spoke – likely stemming from the experience he had around his own marriage. He stated that, given the tense relationship he already had with his mother, there was never any discussion around him having an arranged marriage, as he felt he was “far too independent to actually be put back in the mould.” What makes Karan's circumstances stand out is that it clearly indicated the intergenerational power struggle that was at play. As he stated, his partner, “is exactly the type of Sikh we are.” She comes from a similar immigrant background and was the “holy grail” of what parents wanted, the right kind of Indian and a doctor. Although he did not mention it in his interview, given our pre-existing relationship, I am aware that Karan and his partner grew up knowing each other. Their parents were part of the same social network through friendships dating back to their college days. He went on to say:

[...] There was some other political issues in the family from which she came and those political issues turned [...] me marrying her into a four to five-year long mess. [...] You

²¹³ Karan and Cooper, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Names changed for privacy.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

know, my mom wasn't happy, her parents weren't happy, and it was a complete and utter disaster.²¹⁵

Karan's experience highlighted just how far parents were willing to go in interfering with their children's independence. He went on to say the following:

[...] it was only a disaster because our parents didn't give us the autonomy to choose our partner because of their culture.

[...]

First and foremost, they felt entitled to have a say in their kids' chosen partners. [Second] if they – if that partner threatened their security from a financial perspective and from a being taken care of perspective, or if that chosen partner threatened their reputation, they were gonna make a complete mess for the child and for the partner. And I would say that's basically what happened in my case and in Cooper's case [*laughs*].²¹⁶

According to Karan, his frustrations stemmed from their parents' inability of allowing their children the autonomy to create their own kind of life.

The four scenarios which my aunts and uncles presented highlighted just how tense familial relationships could become. In the case of Gagan, her experience was very positive, arguably due to the fact that, from her mother's perspective, she was performing her role as a daughter well by meeting her partner through an arranged marriage. From Gagan's perspective, she found no reason to push back as she was happy with her partner. Rani's experience brought to light how differing priorities could lead to problems, despite operating within an arranged marriage framework. Her mother prioritized outward appearances whereas Rani prioritized emotional connection. Rani's story also highlighted how gender impacted each generation – with her mother knowing she faced scrutiny from the community as a single parent and Rani strategically enlisting an elder male relative to project her voice. Cooper and Karan presented

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

two sides of the same coin, particularly in terms of how their parents reacted. Cooper strayed the farthest from parental expectations while Karan exercised his right to choose his partner – a seemingly perfect candidate. Yet when they presented their choice to their parents, they faced severe push back.

The loss of parental influence, and, effectively, cultural influence, was one that many immigrant communities confronted at some point. As Orsi noted, familial struggles were often intimate, taking place within the private sphere of the home and within the emotional relationship between parent and child.²¹⁷ These intimate struggles also assumed the role of public performances in which immigrant parents and children were meant to uphold community values. Outwardly, my aunts and uncles had played their roles well. As children of an earlier immigrant cohort, they had laid out a blueprint for later generations of immigrant children to follow, indicating that they had internalized many of the cultural values their parents, and the community, taught them.

As the community itself evolved and immigrant neighbourhood matured into ethnoburbs that helped cement the South Asian presence in Canada, later cohorts of South Asian migrants had a very different experiences when it came to maintaining cultural identity. My parents did not face the same initial struggles as my great-aunts and great-uncles had and were able to move up the socio-economic ladder much more smoothly. Having the advantage of a strong community, one that helped provide a spectrum of South Asian experiences, also made their work of cultural transmission much easier. In effect, the ethnoburb became a tool that could

²¹⁷ Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street*, 112.

impart cultural values through physical markers and help create a world in which youth could partake in mainstream activities within an acceptable cultural framework.

Reflecting on my interviews with my aunts and uncles, I gained the impression that they had been socialized mostly within the social world of their parents and had to negotiate the degree to which they could participate in mainstream culture. For me, this was not the case. Many of my friends, often also second-generation, were friends *I made* at school. They came from various South Asian communities ranging from the same as mine, Punjabi, or those whose families had come from the West Indies, migrants twice over through the legacy of indentured labour. My friends came from Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim backgrounds and spoke different languages, and despite coming from a similar heritage, everyday cultural practices could differ, the most obvious example being the way religion is practiced between Muslims and Hindus coming from the South Asian continent and those from the West Indies. However, despite all these differences we all shared the same communal cultural values where family was essential.

My aunts and uncles lacked a degree of freedom that my peers and I craved upon reaching adolescence. I had the freedom to attend my friends' birthday parties or go to the movies with them, sans chaperone. We would make plans to go shopping at the mall and I never had to negotiate extra-curricular activities, like playing soccer in our local league – it was just a given that I could participate. I was able to participate in the hallmarks of mainstream cultural practices – birthday parties, movies, recreational sports – while existing in a community that reinforced my heritage. The local movie theatre in our neighborhood played the latest Bollywood films alongside mainstream Hollywood movies. The local shopping mall had big chain stores that sold Western style clothing along with independent shops selling South Asian clothing – all under one roof. Having my adolescence play out within the ethnoburb, I did not feel torn

between my heritage culture and mainstream culture in the way that my aunts and uncles had. My worlds co-existed in one place and I was able to fully participate in both without having to choose to which I wanted to belong.

In my interview with my mother, Nina, I asked how she felt about this co-existence:

[We've] had to change ourselves a bit and we say, yes, kids are not 100% Indian and [they] cannot be 100% Canadian. You guys will be in the middle of two cultures. So, pick whatever is the best in two cultures, right? The cultural values we have [... and] the rest, we say, grow up with the awareness here because you guys are living here, not in India.²¹⁸

In his analysis of family dynamics of Italian Harlem in the early twentieth century, Orsi notes how much of the dread of existing within the *domus* was rooted in the fear of its imminent collapse. This, in turn, resulted in enormous pressure for its inhabitants to adhere to the Italian way of life. The *domus* would collapse if the first generation were to fail to transmit their values to their children or the second generation proved incapable of maintaining them. Yet, as Orsi goes on to note, “the *domus* did not collapse, nor did it ever seem close to doing so in the history of Italian Harlem; so we must consider whether the persistent sense of its fragility was not the expression of deep conflict within the ambivalence toward the *domus* itself. Perhaps the fear that it *might* lose its power was the articulation of a subliminal hope that it *would*.”²¹⁹

The pressure to adhere to a certain way of life does not exist in the same way within the ethnoburb. Part of this can be attributed to the diversity within the South Asian community, both in everyday cultural practices and geographical diversity. For example, not every Punjabi family is the same as mine. Some Punjabi families are Hindu or Muslim. Some came from India, while others are from Pakistan. Other South Asian families had migration journeys involving a great

²¹⁸ Nina, interview by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

²¹⁹ Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street*, 108.

deal of trauma, either prior to migration, such as those from Sri Lanka, or lengthy multiple migration journeys, such as those from the West Indies. Arguably, the multitude of individual experiences makes it difficult to recreate a singular traditional way of life at a micro level. What has remained consistent are the macro elements of cultural practices, such as language, clothing, foodways, and religion. With broader elements of cultural norms reinforced through the ethnoburbs, individual families can afford to subscribe to cultural practices to varying degrees.

Through our conversation, it became clear to me that my parents had adapted their parenting practices to reflect the bicultural experiences they knew their children would have. In her article “Bicultural Identity Formation of Second Generation Indo-Canadians,” psychotherapist and researcher Pavna Sodhi outlines how children of immigrants can sometimes feel caught up between individualistic Western culture and communal Eastern cultures – as was evident through the experiences of my aunts and uncles.²²⁰ She notes that conflict often occurs during the adolescent phase of childhood, as familial influence decreases temporarily.²²¹ The increase in familial conflict during this particular period of development can be attributed to what M. Gail Hickey, a researcher with a strong focus on education and immigrant communities, suggests is a lack of the adolescent period in South Asian culture.²²² She notes that in many Western cultures, the adolescent stage has a strong “emphasis on individual identity development, opportunities to try out different personas, consideration of possible career choices, and informal socialization with multiple potential marriage partners.”²²³ In South Asian

²²⁰ Pavna Sodhi, “Bicultural Identity Formation of Second-Generation Indo-Canadians” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 40, no. 2 (2008): 190-191.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

²²² M. Gail Hickey, “‘We weren’t allowed to date’: Unpacking US South Asian Courtship Narrative,” *South Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (July 2017): 371.

²²³ *Ibid.*

worldviews however, one transitions from being a child, under the watchful eye of the family and community, to being an adult after the process of marriage. There is little room to allow for individual growth as one is often expected to play a certain role within the family structure.

This is evident through the lives of my great-aunts and my parents. My great-aunts' early years were marked by playing the role of daughters, learning household tasks, and working on developing their education under the guardianship of their father. It was he who chose when and with whom they would enter their adulthood, transitioning into the role of wives and eventually as mothers. Given the circumstances my great-aunts encountered post-migration, their immediate needs of building a new life outweighed any individual needs. My parents' lives in India followed a similar trajectory. When I asked my mother to describe her early years, she simply framed it as a list of things she did: helped on her family's farm, did household chores with my *nani*, went to school with her siblings. When she went off to college and entered what could have been considered her adolescent stage, albeit a delayed adolescence, circumstances around her did not allow for much independence and she soon left her life in India for a new one in Canada. Because she and my father were able to benefit from the resources their relatives provided, my parents did not struggle as much as my great-aunts had in their early years. They were also able to benefit from witnessing my aunts and uncles growing up precisely at the very moment they were entering their adolescence. For my parents, having the benefit of a pre-existing family network and the ability to witness adolescence, helped them understand how they might need to adapt their parenting practices.

In Sodhi's article she suggests that the boundaries denoting the stages of development are not as clear cut for South Asian children as markers denoting each stage differ from those in Western culture. She critiques Jean Phinney's model of ethnic identity development, in which he

suggests three stages of ethnic identity formation: unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, and achieved ethnic identity.²²⁴ In the first stage one's identity is influenced by one's surroundings through things like language and food. The values that are imparted on to a person at this stage are largely unchallenged. A shift into the second stage can occur after a significant event, which may or may not have caused a degree of trauma, resulting in an individual questioning their earlier values. After a period of searching, largely during the period of adolescence, an individual may return to their childhood values with a new appreciation, but often after internalizing some degree of mainstream values – the achieved ethnic identity stage.²²⁵ Sodhi continues her analysis by suggesting that ethnic identity is constantly negotiated through multiple life events *after* one's adolescence is actualized, particularly within the bicultural identity framework.²²⁶

Applying this notion to the generational experiences of my interviewees, the earlier cohort of first-generation South Asians, such as my great-aunts, may have stayed in the unexamined ethnic identity. These individuals came from a culture that did not have an adolescent period and had strongly internalized their cultural values prior to the point of migration. This cohort existed within their own social networks and rarely, if ever, creating meaningful and sustained relationships with the mainstream community. My great-aunts, for example, did not forge close friendships with individuals from outside their pre-existing social circle. They continued to maintain strong ties with their college friends and encouraged their children to socialize with the children of these friends, while prioritizing South Asian cultural

²²⁴ Jean Phinney, "States of Ethnic Identity," *Journal of Early Adolescence* vol. 9 (1989): 34-49.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Parna Sodhi, "Bicultural Identity Formation of Second-Generation Indo-Canadians" *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 40, no. 2 (2008): 4. Emphasis my own.

values over mainstream cultural practices. This caused a great deal of struggle when they were confronted with their children's desire to express their own aspirations and navigate their lives on their own terms. This is evident through the conflict that arose over the choice of professional careers and marriage partners.

Unlike my great-aunts, my parents seemed to exhibit traits of identity search, one that is not based on conflict and rejection, but on-going observations and negotiations. Once my parents had arrived in Canada, they enjoyed far greater economic security than my great-aunts had. My parents benefited from engaging with my aunts and uncles and participating in activities that were part of the new mainstream culture – *Hockey Night in Canada* and cooking new types of food being a few examples. My mother's experiences between two cultures have helped her understand how her children might be caught between two worlds, and to help bridge that gap by adapting her values. This was clear when she and I discussed her opinions on her children dating:

Sonia: What is your opinion [on your kids dating] now that [we] are a little bit older[?]

Nina: The way I think, first of all, you should be settled down economically.

Sonia: Before we start dating?

Nina: Yes.

Sonia: Okay.

Nina: And – like job is first priority. After all, you have to get married and start your own life. Then you can think about dating. Plus when you are dating, consider your cultural values too. [...] I don't mind if you do dating, but think about your cultural values. Like will you be able to make adjustments [with them]? These things keep in mind.

Sonia: In the past when we've talked about dating your idea [...] and my idea of dating are very different, right? Because to you it's serious inquiries only.

Nina: [*Laughs*] Yeah.²²⁷

Though my mother clearly prioritizes South Asian sentiments about choosing a partner, she understands that the process of how her children will go about it will occur within the Western framework of dating. She is aware that her children are engaging in this practice, however, her warnings of ‘serious inquiries only’ suggests that, for her, the purpose is marriage as the ultimate goal. Dating for the purposes of exploring what one may desire in a partner is not something she approves of as she feels this should already be clear based on how one is raised. That being said, when asked what kind of partner she hopes her children will choose she stated the following:

Sonia: What kind of person do you expect me and [my brother] to bring home?

[...]

Nina: Number one [they] should be understanding and respectful of others. The rest if they’re from the same culture, then it’s just a little easier.

[...]

I wouldn’t have too many hard and fast rules. I will be a little bit flexible, but our respect and understating and accountability – these conditions will always apply.²²⁸

While my mother still prefers her children being with someone South Asian, it is notable that she prioritized her children having an emotional connection with their partners over superficial aspects, like their profession or their subset of South Asian. In this way, she is giving less thought to the community’s perception of who her children end up with and providing room for her children to choose who they wish to be with, albeit within the broader values that she hopes her children have internalized. For my mother, the bicultural ethnic identity she has achieved still

²²⁷ Nina, interview by Sonia Dhaliwal, October 28, 2018, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Translated from Punjabi by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

²²⁸ Ibid.

leans strongly toward South Asian values. However, her awareness of mainstream values allows her to adapt her understanding of cultural values, arguably softening some of the intergenerational tensions that occurred between my great-aunts and their children.

My second-generation interviewees, myself included, are still negotiating the degree to which we identify with either South Asian or mainstream culture. Notably, for my interviewees from the earlier cohort, the point of conflict often arose when an unfavourable event occurred, such as Karan choosing law over medicine, Rani breaking off her first engagement, or Cooper choosing a partner from a different South Asian background. When there was no pushback from the second-generation, there was no tension. My mother's willingness to be flexible has arguably only been tested once when I chose not to pursue a professional avenue that falls within the 'acceptable' spectrum of law or medicine. While there was some hesitation from her at first, she still provided me with the room to pursue a path I chose and ultimately has been very supportive. Whether the same understanding will exist when her children choose to bring any prospective partners home is something that remains to be seen.

My aunts and uncles, all of whom are now settled into their own families, have demonstrated a strong desire for their children to maintain some links to their South Asian heritage. All of them have expressed a wish for their children to learn Punjabi, to visit India and see where their grandparents grew up, and to absorb South Asian culture through food and clothing. That said, their sentiments in parenting reflect Western notions of allowing their children to be individuals first, which was often expressed through comments like, "they can be whatever they want to be," or "they can be with whomever they choose." Clearly, while the second generation has been socialized into their cultural heritage, the framework in which they

are raising their families suggests that perhaps the third-generation may be less inclined to lean towards their South Asian heritage, and be more immersed into mainstream Canadian culture.

Conclusion

My parents keep in regular touch with my great-aunts. Phone calls between them are frequent, particularly as we have found ourselves shut into our homes during the current global pandemic. I chat with them sometimes and we briefly share tips about our backyard gardens. I do not keep up with my aunts and uncles as frequently, largely due to busy lives and distance. Whenever we do see each other it feels as though we pick up where we left off. At the end of my interviews with them we had informal off-the-record conversations about ‘my project’ as their partners or children would join us. They discussed how they intended to parent differently, saying they would be much more understanding with their children than their parents had been. However, they still felt strongly about wanting their children to be intimately familiar with the language, food, music, film, and clothes of India. It struck me that they were choosing to immerse their children into their cultural heritage largely through South Asian popular culture.

Film, in particular, has changed to cater to diasporic audiences. As all my interviewees noted, they grew up watching a lot of South Asian film and television, which is something they still do. Bollywood, the mainstream Indian film industry, has produced films that demonstrates its awareness of a global audience and sets films in the diaspora with Non-Resident Indian (NRI) characters who are still “Indian at heart”.²²⁹ Gagan, especially, showed just how ingrained her cultural beliefs were in South Asian values by voicing that she strongly hoped her children would end up with someone South Asian – though she did not specify what kind of South Asian.²³⁰ Though she still believes firmly in maintaining broader cultural ties, she is also aware

²²⁹ Jigna Desai, “Bollywood abroad: South Asian diasporic cosmopolitanism and Indian cinema,” in *New cosmopolitanisms: South Asians in the US* ed by Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 115-137.

²³⁰ Gagan, interviewed by Sonia Dhaliwal. Name changed for privacy.

that micro-factors like caste or religion are of little significance to her children raised outside India, hinting that they will have a greater degree of autonomy in choosing their life-partners.

This thesis has examined how intergenerational relationships impact the ways in which second-generation South Asian-Canadians maneuver social spaces within their web of relationships. Through their adolescence, and later in early adulthood, my second-generation interviewees were keenly aware of the boundaries established by their parents and built strategic alliances, either with their peers or other adults, to help navigate parental edicts and expectations. They also demonstrated the depths to which they had internalized their cultural heritage, largely because of the high degree of immersion in South Asian language and culture during their formative years. The inclusion of first-generation voices makes it possible to recast parents from gatekeepers of cultural authenticity to individuals who had similarly pushed boundaries to steer the course of their lives. In examining the experiences of immigrant parents, we gain a greater understanding of the cultural world they left behind and the various cultural practices they chose to recreate in their new homeland. As children grew older and began to develop their own social networks, the initial points of tension began to simmer under the surface of these parent-child relationships, with children showing an inclination of blending their two cultural worlds.

The experiences of first-generation South Asian immigrants, who arrived in the post-war era, differed from those of later arrivals. As we have seen, the 1.5 generation witnessed the early growing pains of their second-generation relatives and foresaw the difficulties that could arise from rigidly policing the boundaries between South Asian and Canadian cultures. Over time, as the diaspora matured and migrants achieved upward social mobility, much of the ethnic socialization that earlier immigrant cohorts had carried out within their homes was passed onto the public sphere of the ethnoburb. With the solidification of the ethnoburb that recreated the

cultural markers the South Asian community valued most, such as language, food, and religion, the children of the 1.5 generation benefitted from a space beyond the private sphere of the home to experiment with the blending of two cultural worlds. Arguably, my brother and I had a greater degree of autonomy than earlier cohorts of second-generation youth as we were growing up.

By focusing on intergenerational dialogue, we can arrive at a more complex and nuanced understanding of the internal dynamics of immigrant families and at a deeper appreciation of gendered experiences. According to my aunts and uncles, the greatest and most prolonged conflicts with their parents took place throughout their adulthood. It was the choice of career paths and marriage partners that emerged as the focal points of tension. My aunts were often operating within acceptable frameworks of South Asian tenets, though willing to push boundaries, most notably in breaking off an engagement when a genuine emotional connection was lacking. My uncles' experiences highlight the resistance that can come when a child attempts to stray even slightly from the prescribed path. Although my uncle Karan's values are still rooted largely in a South Asian frame of reference, the resistance he faced from his mother when he rejected a career in medicine and refused to agree to an arranged marriage pointed to the change in power dynamics that was truly at stake during points of tension.

Similar points of friction were discussed in my interview with my mother, Nina, a member of the 1.5 generation. Having insight into the experiences of my aunts and uncles, she showed a greater degree of awareness in understanding that intergenerational negotiations required constant adjustments from both parents and children. Although her own beliefs are rooted largely within traditional values, she recognized that her children had grown up in a different social world. She was aware that her children were creating their own social networks

with other South Asians and understood that the deeper values she desired to pass onto her children were maintained through their immersion in the ethnoburb.

In looking beyond the surface of points of tension within the lives of diasporic youth, and positioning individuals within their network of relationships and incorporating multi-generational voices, a more holistic portrayal of how second-generation children navigated their cultural worlds emerges. In reconceptualising age, we can shift the analysis past points of tension to more intricate on-going intergenerational negotiations that so drastically shaped their experiences. In examining cultural practices, the differing social spheres between first-generation and the later 1.5 generation indicate how traditions were initially recreated within the private sphere of the home, but eventually shifted to the public sphere through the ethnoburb. Finally, the impact of gender once again highlights the unique set of challenges and circumstances my aunts and uncles had to navigate. In doing so, the change over time within a transplanted community suggests that points of tension are not fixed. Instead, they are constant negotiations and navigations within complex webs of relationships between and within generations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Certificate of Ethics 2018-2019



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Sonia Dhaliwal
Department: Faculty of Arts and Science \ History
Agency: N/A
Title of Project: Negotiating Identity: Cultural Identity Formation in
Second Generation South Asian-Canadians
Certification Number: 30009795
Valid From: July 10, 2018 To: July 09, 2019

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. Pfaus".

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 2 – Certificate of Ethics 2019-2020



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Sonia Dhaliwal
Department: Faculty of Arts and Science\History
Agency: N/A
Title of Project: Negotiating Identity: Cultural Identity Formation in
Second Generation South Asian-Canadians
Certification Number: 30009795

Valid From: July 08, 2019 To: July 07, 2020

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard DeMont".

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 3 – Certificate of Ethics 2020-2021



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Sonia Dhaliwal
Department: Faculty of Arts and Science\History
Agency: N/A
Title of Project: Negotiating Identity: Cultural Identity Formation in
Second Generation South Asian-Canadians
Certification Number: 30009795

Valid From: July 07, 2020 To: July 06, 2021

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard DeMont".

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee