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# The Other One Percent

*Indians in America*

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Millbourne, Pennsylvania, and Loudon Valley, Virginia. These "Little Indias" were not necessarily or even usually pan-Indian in composition. There were "Little Ahmedabads" in Edison, New Jersey, and Schaumburg-Des Plaines, Illinois; and "Little Jullundurs" in Yuba City and Bakersfield, California. Was this a replication of Indian space?

In America, the competing metaphors of "salad bowl" and "melting pot" are often used to summarize its racial and immigrant diversity. It is possible to argue that these two metaphors could also be used in India, given its diversity of languages and faith identities, but they are not. One of the main reasons is that the language groups are largely contained within state boundaries in India. With the exceptions of Maharashtra and Karnataka (that include the relatively cosmopolitan cities of Mumbai and Bangalore), all the major Indian states are effectively monolingual—85 percent or more speak the same language. Therefore, if one of these metaphors is to be used for India, it should be "salad bowl." Did the Indian salad bowl turn into a melting pot in the United States? To some degree, yes, but Indian linguistic identities remained clearly identifiable in the American landscape.

When the "Little Indias" were not identifiable by language, they were often identifiable by occupation (and as a result, by education and income). There were clusters of well-to-do doctors in Hicksville and North Hempstead, on Long Island in New York State, and Bethesda, Maryland, and Sugar Land, Texas. And there were financiers in Manhattan and Jersey City, as well as far less well-to-do farmers in small cities dotting the Central Valley of California and taxi drivers in Queens, New York. And, of course, there were computer workers from coders to entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, central Texas, and northern Virginia. The mosaic of Indians in America was complex, its details and diversities and inequalities revealed only at close inspection.



## Becoming American

Assimilation in its many avatars—"segmented," "plural," "transculturation," "incorporation," "multicultural"—is the archetypal story of immigrants as they are drawn into the melting pot, or salad bowl, or other metaphors that describe American society. While these benign images of American society give little solace to those who were the original inhabitants or were dragged into the country by force, what constitutes "American" has always been contentious, masked by a perceived political, economic, and cultural hegemony of a white male Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) "establishment." Race, religion, and gender have long been the defining markers of what "American" means, as Irish and Italian, Catholics and Jews, Chinese and Mexican have all learned rather painfully. While the salience of these markers have altered, assimilation—whether a grudging acceptance or an embrace of the mainstream—was often a Hobson's choice if immigrants were to climb the rungs of the social ladder.

But what might have been viewed as a choice upon arrival becomes irreversible as the country of origin quietly slips from sight. The definition of "home" gradually and imperceptibly changes the longer the immigrant stays in his or her adopted country. Over time, for most who choose to stay, home is represented by the present—and future—place of residence instead of the country left behind. At the same time, the predominant culture has become less overpowering, as cumulative waves of immigrants from an ever-widening range of backgrounds have helped redefine what it means to be American.

In this chapter we use *assimilation* in a loose sense, as when an immigrant group's accents, foods and festivals, participation in civic and political life, and portrayal in both elite and popular cultures are taken in stride by the prototypical "mainstream"; and when immigrants are asked with decreasing frequency, "... but where are you *really* from?" The assimilation and acculturation of Indian Americans reflects the changes in both the immigrant's economic and social habitus and the society of which the individual is becoming part.

The assimilation patterns of the immigrants that came after 1965 have been somewhat different from those who came a century earlier, for several reasons.<sup>1</sup>

The new immigrants hail from cultures, races, and religions distinct and distant from the European mainstream; communications and transport allow them to keep in touch with the homeland on a real-time basis; the integration of markets means that many markers of a culture—food, music, media—can be sought and consumed almost as easily as if the immigrant had never left. But perhaps most of all, the United States of the twenty-first century is a much more diverse society, where old prejudices and intolerances are more muted, or at least less overt, than the blatant institutionalized racism of a century or more ago. The first wave of immigrants arrived after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a new period when race, while important, became a less critical factor in shaping economic outcomes for immigrants, while education, skills, and legal status mattered more.

Despite their professional success, however, the first wave of India-born immigrants paid a high emotional price. In many of the places where they settled, there were few other members of the community, and cultural markers, such as familiar foods or places of worship, were also absent. Communication with family in India was minimal, given India's dismal telephone system at the time. Parents struggled in an unfamiliar environment, not knowing how best to guide their children where Indians were unknown but race was not. Coming from a culture where family and community were so much a part of their daily lives, loneliness took its toll, especially among housewives who were left alone at home while their husbands were at work and their children were at school.<sup>2</sup> The children, especially those who had moved with their parents from India—the I.S. generation—had to adjust to a completely new system of schooling and face bewilderment from classmates who were familiar with only one kind of “Indian,” leading to nicknames such as “Pocahontas.” With few other Indian children around, the only way to alleviate the feeling of isolation was to try to blend in. However, the more the children assimilated in school, the greater the stress on their relationships with their parents (and other elders at home), who were fearful of their children losing their cultural heritage.

While Indian Americans gained professional access, many struggled to crack the putative “glass ceiling,” because while they were seen as hard working and industrious, they were also thought to lack “leadership material.” Even in the late 1990s, when an India-born candidate went to interview at a major Wall Street firm, her interviewer told her, “You have three strikes against you . . . How can I hire you? You are the wrong gender, wrong color, and wrong country.”<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, Indian-American immigrants had three distinct advantages over other immigrants that helped them succeed. First, their greater human capital, documented in chapters 2 and 3, provided higher incomes, which meant that they faced less overt racism in housing or in dealing with the government. Money “made white” simply by virtue of where they could afford to live.<sup>4</sup>

Second, they had better English-language skills than many other immigrants, a legacy of British colonialism. And third, they were predominantly from India's upper castes. Apart from the irony of a group whose status at the top of India's social hierarchy had placed it at the giving end of discrimination and was now finding itself at the receiving end (albeit in a much milder way), this group came to the United States equipped with a strong ballast of cultural capital, making them particularly suited to ascend the ladder of American society. When asked about her educational drive, Indra Nooyi, the CEO of PepsiCo, recalled: “[We were] programmed for that. The entire family focused on grades. When parents got together, they only compared the report cards of their kids. Anybody who got together would say, ‘so how is your child doing,’ ‘what rank?’”<sup>5</sup>

The “twice born” (as India's upper castes are termed) were also the “thrice selected,” first in India, and then in the United States by immigration officials, and subsequently by educational institutions and labor markets. Selection in India occurred through India's hyper-competitive elite system of higher education, of which the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Management, and the leading medical schools are the best known. In January 2003, CBS's *60 Minutes* somewhat hyperbolically put it: “The United States imports oil from Saudi Arabia, cars from Japan, TVs from South Korea and whiskey from Scotland. So what do we import from India? We import people, really smart people. And . . . the smartest, most successful, most influential Indians who've migrated to the U.S. seem to share a common credential: They're graduates of the Indian Institute of Technology, better known as IIT.”<sup>6</sup>

In 2014, three of the six Indian-American billionaires were alumni of an IIT. A study of venture capital-backed entrepreneurs in the United States in 2014 found that the first non-U.S. university to make the top-five list was the Indian Institutes of Technology, which ranked number four in terms of number of companies (264 founders started 205 companies) and number three in amount of money raised (\$3.15 billion).<sup>7</sup>

Under the Kanpur Indo-American program, IIT-Kanpur had received technical assistance from a consortium of nine leading U.S. universities from 1962 to 1972. A decade after its establishment, a fourth of IIT-Kanpur's undergraduates and a fifth of its master's students had gone abroad, mainly to the United States.<sup>8</sup> This points to the second selection mechanism: U.S. universities. Although most Indians who came in the first decade after 1965 were drawn from India's social elites, they were often from middle-class public-sector backgrounds with annual salaries rarely above a few thousand dollars. A sagging economy and severe foreign exchange constraints meant that getting a scholarship to a U.S. university was the surest ticket to a better future. With students from China not yet in competition, and U.S. universities still relatively well funded, research and teaching scholarships were available to well-qualified foreign students.<sup>9</sup>

While India had created a small number of excellent institutions of higher education, it was at the time a very poor country with a per capita income of barely \$111 in 1970. Higher education was heavily subsidized and foreign exchange regulations were so severe that students going abroad were allowed a maximum of a few hundred dollars (and often less). Selection by U.S. universities for graduate studies with financial aid was critical (prior to the 1990s, Indian students rarely came for an undergraduate degree). Romesh Wadhvani recalls that he left India in July 1969 "with \$300 (max allowed), travelled through Europe with 3 IIT friends for approximately 60 days at \$5/day, and arrived in Pittsburgh [to pursue graduate studies at Carnegie Mellon] with \$3.48."<sup>10</sup> In 2014, *Forbes* magazine estimated his net worth at \$2.5 billion.

In addition, as we explained in chapter 2, in the first decade after the 1965 Immigration Reform Act, it was relatively easy for well-qualified individuals to immigrate. Between 1966 and 1976, "among those immigrants who declared an occupation at their time of arrival, PTKs [professional, technical, and kindred workers] constituted an astonishing 82 percent among Indians, significantly higher than for the Filipinos (62 percent), Chinese (38 percent), or Koreans (52 percent)."<sup>11</sup>

In the rest of this chapter, we examine some of the key measures of assimilation, ranging from naturalization to civic and political participation and the factors shaping them. We further examine three intra-group differences in assimilation: gender differences; intergenerational differences (between the India-born first generation and the U.S.-born second generation); and the specific characteristics of those born in the Indian diaspora and emigrating from Asia, Africa, or Europe.

## Naturalization

A critical transition in an immigrant's life is the decision to naturalize and become a U.S. citizen. It signifies an irrevocable resolution of the migration decision, although the decision is perhaps less dichotomous in an era of dual citizenship. More than a mere legal rite of passage, it is a psychological adjustment to a new identity. Furthermore, it is a first step toward having a political voice by gaining the right to vote.

Studies on naturalization in the United States show that the longer the period of eligibility for naturalization, the more likely people are to exercise this option. Naturalization rates increase with the immigrant's level of education, duration in the United States, and proficiency in English. They are also higher when the prospect of returning to the country of origin is more difficult, for political, economic, or geographic reasons. Additionally, if the country of origin permits dual citizenship, the immigrant is likely to naturalize sooner. But the individual's own characteristics are also important determinants of naturalization rates.<sup>12</sup>

Relative to their share of those eligible for naturalization, less educated immigrants from geographically proximate, lower-income countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala are less likely to naturalize, as are more educated immigrants from industrialized countries such as Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom. On the other hand, more educated immigrants from geographically distant but lower-income countries such as Colombia, India, and Pakistan are more than twice as likely to naturalize relative to each country's proportion in the eligible pool. In 2011, those born in India were 2.8 percent of the naturalization-eligible population, but they made up 6.6 percent of all newly naturalized Americans that year.<sup>13</sup>

Factors influencing the increased naturalization rates of Indian Americans tend to be their higher levels of education, English proficiency, low income in their country of origin, and distance from their country of origin, while they are less affected by the presence of high political liberties and civil rights, since these are also available in India, at least to a considerable degree for the social groups from whom Indian immigrants are drawn. Historically, there were three main reasons immigrants came to the United States of their own volition: to seek freedom from religious persecution, from political oppression, and from economic hardship. Relative to immigrants from many other developing countries, fewer Indians emigrate primarily for religious and political reasons, with refugees and asylum seekers constituting less than 1 percent of all Indian immigrants.<sup>14</sup> Those emigrating to flee economic hardship are also a relatively small fraction since the vast majority hail from relatively better-off households in India. Instead, economic opportunities together with family reunification have been the biggest driving forces. In other words, "pull" factors have been far more important in the migration decision of Indian immigrants compared to "push" factors.

Until the end of the 1990s, the naturalization rates for Indian immigrants was about average, lower than those for migrants from the Philippines and Cuba but higher than those for Mexicans and Canadians (figure 4.1).<sup>15</sup> However, the rates of naturalization declined for immigrants who came after 1995 and were largely holders of H1-B work visas. Of the nearly 1 million H1-B visas issued between 2004 and 2012, about a half-million were issued to Indians (see figure 2.9). Along with dependents, these accounted for more than one-fourth of the Indian-American population in 2014. Given the extremely long waiting times to convert H1-B visas to permanent residency, or green cards (between five and ten years), and another minimum five-year wait to apply for citizenship, relatively few would have been eligible for naturalization at the time of this writing.

Another factor that affected the decision to naturalize was enactment of the 1996 welfare reform, which restricted the entitlements of noncitizens. This policy change increased the incentives to naturalize, but since the economically vulnerable were a smaller fraction of the Indian-American population relative

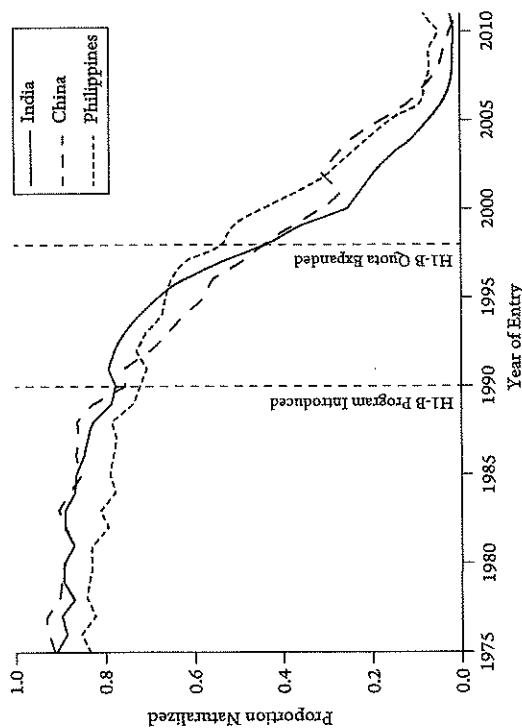


Figure 4.1 Proportion of Selected Asian Immigrants Who Were Naturalized, 1975–2010.  
Source: Compiled and Calculated from Department of Homeland Security data, 2014.

to most other immigrant groups, this had less impact on Indian immigrants than on the more vulnerable lower-income immigrants from other countries. Nonetheless, in the years from 2004 to 2013, nearly half a million Indians naturalized (487,162), about 7 percent of the total naturalizations in the decade and the second-highest from any one country after Mexico. These numbers exceeded the total number of naturalizations of Indians in the United States during the entire twentieth century.

## Civic Engagement

Writing in 1840 in his classic *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that “Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of dispositions are forever forming associations . . . of a thousand different types . . . Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention.”<sup>16</sup> In recent years, however, the alleged decline of civic engagement—and the role of immigration in this decline—has been much debated, particularly since Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* was published in 2000. Subsequently, a range of studies has shown that notwithstanding Putnam’s claims, civic engagement continues to be an important part of immigrant communities. As a form of collective action that entails working with others to solve community problems (beyond those related to personal or family interests),

civic engagement not only helps immigrants who have limited recourse to economic and political resources but also facilitates social integration and the practice of citizenship. Greater participation in community organizations helps develop civic skills that in turn lead to greater political engagement.

But what drives civic engagement and what forms does it take? There is strong evidence that for immigrants, organizing locally—that is, within a specific context—is crucial for the degree and form of civic engagement and associational life.<sup>17</sup> As we note later, associational life for Indian Americans varies from membership and participation in functional, nonethnic organizations to pan-Asian ones with a shared regional identity, while others join organizations that reflect India’s ethnic and religious diversity. Their purposes vary as well, from those seeking to preserve and celebrate cultural traditions, to those with social and economic networking goals, to others whose activities are transnational, linking to the country of origin.

## Indian-American Organizations

Community organizations are a form of collective action, and their numbers, size, and purposes are indicative of the concerns and cleavages in the community. We compiled data on Indian-American organizations from the Guidestar website database on 501(c) (3), (4), (6), and (7) status organizations using India-specific search terms, and we limited our search to organizations with at least \$1,000 in reported income in the last year. More details and data limitations can be found in the appendix (section 6). The database includes 966 organizations. This is a lower bound, since there are likely to be many Indian-American organizations that have either not formally incorporated or have incomes less than \$1000, or were missed by our search algorithms.

The organizations in the database were categorized based on the community that they target (figure 4.2). The broadest category was “South Asian,” and that group was only 7 percent of all organizations. The narrowest category was for caste communities. The database has twenty-four caste-based community organizations, just 2.5 percent of the total. The database also had four organizations that were specific to the Indo-Caribbean community.

Almost half of all Indian-American organizations were religious organizations. This contrasts with Mexican immigrants, whose primary membership organizations were hometown associations (although worker organizations and religious congregations were also important for Mexican immigrants). There were 481 religious organizations in the data set, three-fifths of which were Hindu organizations or Hindu temples, one-fourth related to the Sikh community, and 8 percent were Jain organizations. The percentage of Sikh and Jain organizations

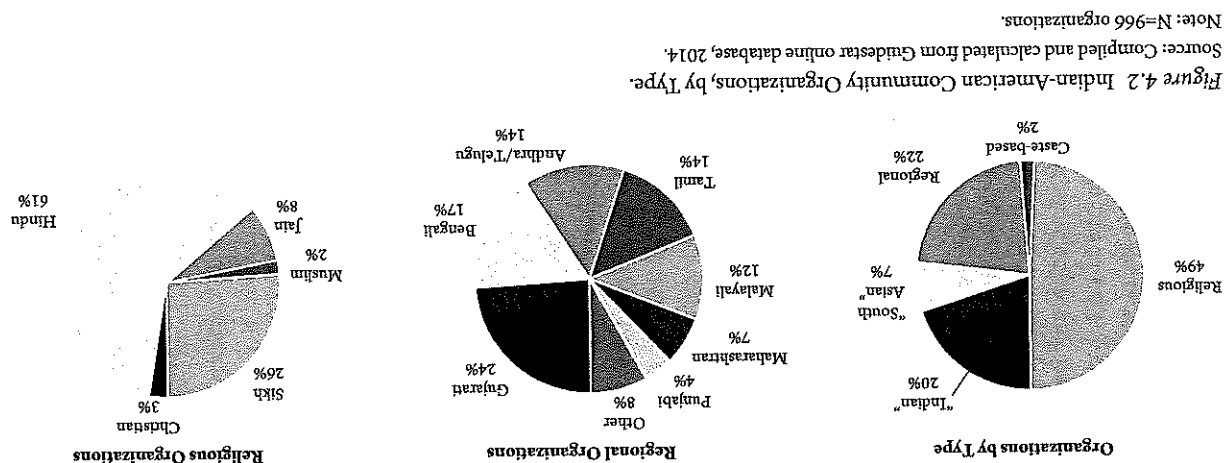
was disproportionate to their share of the population, both in India or among Indian-Americans. The number of Indian-American organizations for Christians and Muslims was small, at 3 percent and 2 percent, respectively. This is likely because Indian-American Christians and Muslims may join broader religious congregations in the United States that don't specifically serve immigrants from India.

The Gujarati community had the largest share of the regionally specific community organizations (figure 4.2). Twenty-four percent of the 211 regional community organizations were for the Gujarati community. Gujarati Americans also formed the largest number of caste associations in the United States—half of all caste-based organizations were for this community.

The geographical distribution of the civic organizations is given in figure 4.3. The size of the circle in figure 4.3 corresponds to the number of organizations registered in that Zip code. (Alaska has been excluded from the map because there were no Indian-American organizations there.) As expected, Indian-American organizations were in locations with large concentrations of the Indian-American population, with the top four states being California, New York, Texas, and New Jersey. Some states had a disproportionate share of wealthy organizations. For example, while Arizona had only fifteen organizations, three of them were in the top 10 percent of all organizations by income. Among cities, Houston and New York City had by far the largest number of organizations. However, in some metropolitan areas the Indian-American organizations were dispersed into different suburbs and towns. For instance, there were thirty-five organizations in Silicon Valley, including the India Community Center in Milpitas, California (launched in 2002), which was the largest Indian-American community facility in North America.<sup>18</sup>

The average annual income of the organizations was a little over a quarter of a million dollars. About one-fourth of the organizations had an income below \$30,000, while the average annual income of organizations in the top decile (90 organizations) was \$1.86 million, of which two-thirds were religious organizations. The largest 1 percent of organizations (nine) include five Hindu organizations, an Indian-American Muslim charity organization, Shraman South Asian Museum in Dallas, the American India Foundation (providing social services in India), and the India Community Center.

Aside from serving their specific communities, many of these organizations serve specific functions as professional associations, providing community services (such as immigration services, senior care, and support for domestic violence victims) and promoting Indian or South Asian arts. Others include sports organizations (four of which were for the Punjabi community), literary clubs, language schools, chambers of commerce, and organizations seeking to advance the community's political and civil rights. Occupational organizations tend to



be more encompassing and often incorporate a broader South Asia identity, such as the South Asia Journalists Association (SAJA) or the South Asia Bar Association (SABA). And despite its title, the Network of Indian Professionals (NetIP) states its "mission is to serve as the unequivocal voice for the South Asian Diaspora by developing and engaging a cohesive network of professionals to benefit the community."<sup>19</sup> These organizations serve as much of a social function as a means to network. The organization that exemplifies its networking potential—and serves as a marker of the community's success in the technology sector in Silicon Valley—is The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE), which we discuss in more detail in chapter 6.

It took several decades before these forms of collective action took root. In the early years, the catalyst to organize was often a sense of discrimination. Ironically, it was in a highly skilled white collar profession that the community felt the sting of racism to a degree that compelled it to organize. Many immigrant professionals from non-European countries faced varying degrees of prejudice at the time, and for the Indian-American community, this was manifested in the most successful and affluent group in the first wave of immigrants: physicians emigrating from India.

## Organizing Indian-American Physicians

Internationally trained physicians or international medical graduates (IMGs), as they are now often referred to, have been an important part of the American healthcare workforce since the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> In 2010, IMGs accounted for a fourth of all practicing physicians in the United States, and although a majority were foreign born, one-fifth were American citizens who received their medical degrees abroad (mainly in the Caribbean). The largest number of IMGs in the United States are from India. In August 2014, graduates from medical schools in India (nearly 150 different schools) accounted for 5.3 percent (48,086 physicians) of the 899,953 practicing physicians.<sup>21</sup> They were also more likely to be female compared to those trained in the United States: 41.6 percent of all India-educated physicians in the United States were female, compared to the 34.6 percent in the overall physician population.

Physicians trained in India and practicing in the United States are overrepresented as hospital staff (6.5 percent) and underrepresented in research (2.5 percent) and teaching (3.7 percent), as well as in administration (2.1 percent). They are most often found either in states with large Indian-American populations or in states with physician shortages; they constitute a significant portion of the physicians in New Jersey (9.3 percent), Illinois (8.5 percent), Michigan (7.9 percent), and North Dakota (7.9 percent).

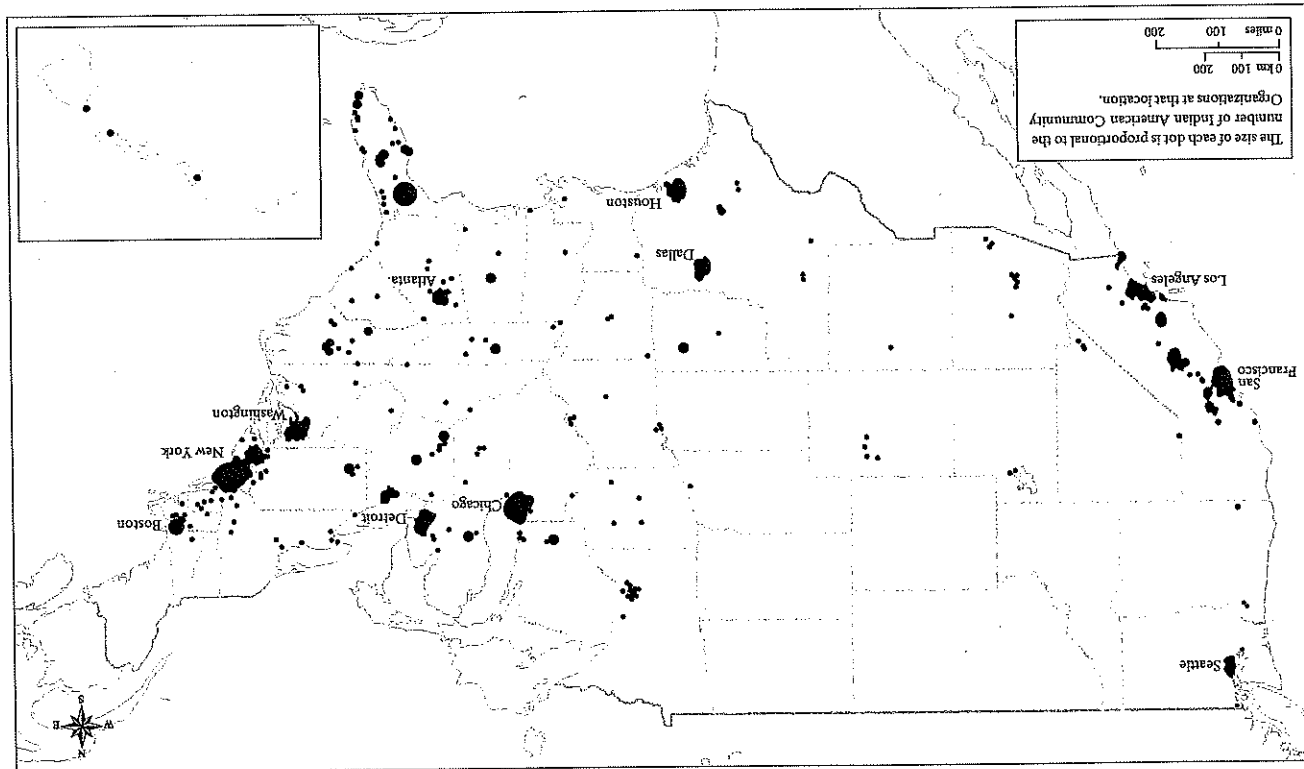


Figure 4.3 Geographical Distribution of Indian-American Community Organizations, 2014.

Source: Compiled and calculated from Guidestar online database, 2014.

Note: N = 966 organizations.

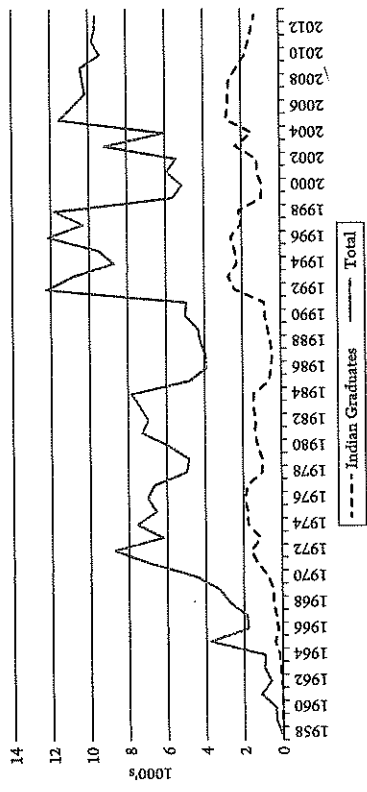


Figure 4.5 Indian Graduate and Total International Medical Graduates Certified to Take Medical Licensing Exam in the United States, 1958–2012.

Source: Compiled and calculated using data from the Educational Commission of Foreign Medical Graduates, 2014.

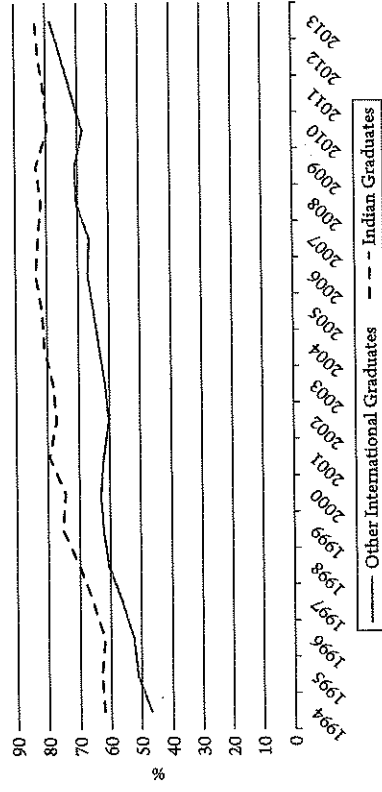


Figure 4.6 U.S. Medical Licensing Exam Step 1 Pass Rates, Indian and Other International Graduates, 1994–2013.

Source: Compiled and calculated using data from the Educational Commission of Foreign Medical Graduates, 2014.

An important factor for the large share of Indian medical graduates among IMGs is their consistently higher performance on the ECFMG certification exams compared to other IMG applicants. Since 1994, Indian graduates had a pass rate averaging 12.8 percent higher than non-Indian graduate doctors on Step 1, and 8.4 percent higher on Step 2 of the certification exam (see figure 4.6).

Over the last decade, four developments have shaped the landscape of IMGs and physicians of Indian origin in the United States. First, since the mid-2000s, there have been more Indian citizens than graduates of Indian medical schools receiving U.S. certification, implying that some Indian citizens are receiving their medical education outside India before applying for certification. Second, with an increasing number of U.S. citizens getting educated in medical schools

IMGs from India began to trickle into the United States for advanced training—and subsequently to practice and settle down—in the 1950s. In 1959, physicians from India accounted for 5.3 percent of that year's physician cohort. Their number was small (only 68), but at the time the training capacity of American medical schools was quite limited—fewer than 2,000 in 1961. Over the next two decades, medical training in the United States expanded rapidly, reaching 10,000 annually in 1972 and 20,000 in 1982, after which the number of graduates began to plateau. The share of Indian IMGs in the physician population of the United States rose steadily over two decades, from the early 1950s to the early 1970s. The share gradually declined over the next decade and a half, and then rose again in the early 2000s. Since then it has been steadily declining (figure 4.4).

In 1970, the number of Indian physicians certified by the American Medical Association (AMA) crossed 1,000 for the first time; that year, 13.4 percent of all physicians certified to practice medicine were from India—the highest ever relative to the year's cohort. With the Vietnam War exacerbating the shortage of skilled workers in the medical profession, the U.S. government responded by welcoming IMGs. To practice medicine in the United States, graduates of foreign medical schools must be certified by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), which was established in 1956 to certify physicians trained outside the United States.<sup>22</sup> Since 1963, the share of those graduating from medical schools in India among all IMGs has varied between 10 and 27 percent. It increased during the 1960s and into the mid-1970s, and subsequently declined until the late 1980s, after which there was another increase that lasted until the mid-2000s (figure 4.5).<sup>23</sup>

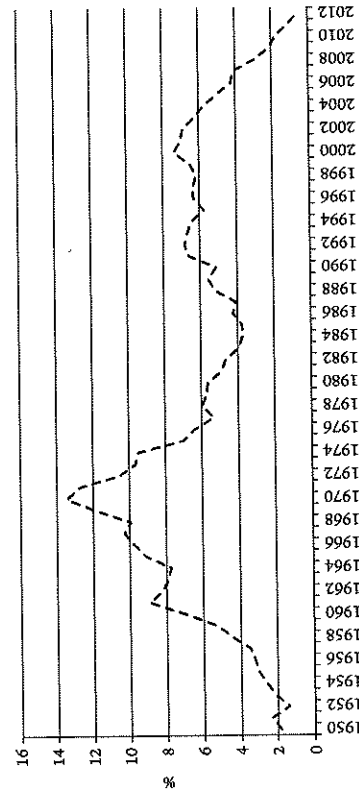


Figure 4.4 Practicing Physicians in the United States Who Are Indian Medical Graduates, 1950–2012.

Source: Compiled and calculated from the American Medical Association Physician Masterfile, 2014. Note: AMA is the source for the raw physician data; statistics, tables or tabulations were prepared by authors.

in the Caribbean, since 2009 this group emerged as the largest share of medical certifications granted to IMGs. Third, the numbers of Indian citizens receiving certification began declining since the early 2000s and in 2013 reached the levels of a half-century ago. This might change as the demand for IMGs is expected to increase in the United States after full implementation of the Affordable Care Act. An aging population, as well as capacity constraints on U.S. medical schools, may likewise increase demand in the future.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, there is an ongoing generational change led by the 1.5 and second-generation Indian Americans who have often followed in their parents' footsteps into this field. In one respect, however, they have gone further by building up a public persona, influencing the understanding of modern medicine, ranging from the physician-patient relationship to differences between healing and curing and health, and well-being more broadly. One trendsetter is Deepak Chopra, who immigrated to the United States in 1970 after getting his medical degree in India. Following a successful career in medicine, he positioned himself as a "New Age guru" in alternative or "holistic" medicine, advocating ideas about the mind-body relationship, combining principles from Ayurveda with mainstream medicine. Abraham Verghese, who also came to the United States for a medical residency after graduating in India, found that the only options available to him (as was the case with most IMGs) were the hospitals in lesser-known places.<sup>25</sup> But those formative experiences of caring for AIDS patients in Johnson City, Tennessee, were transformative and led to his first book, *My Own Country: A Doctor's Story*, as well as subsequent visibility as a novelist, writer, and commentator on contemporary medicine.

Another Indian-American physician in the public eye is Atul Gawande, born in Brooklyn, New York, to Indian immigrant doctor parents, who published his first book, *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science*, in 2002. His subsequent writings—*Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance* (which discusses three virtues that Gawande considers to be most important for success in medicine: diligence, doing right, and ingenuity); *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right* (which discusses the importance of organization and pre-planning, such as thorough checklists, in both medicine and the larger world); and *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*—have made him one of the most popular writer-physicians in this field. Others include Siddhartha Mukherjee, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer* and *The Gene: An Intimate History*, who came to the United States after high school in India; Sandeep Jauhar, author of *Intern: A Doctor's Initiation and Doctorhood: The Disillusionment of an American Physician*, who emigrated from India when he was a child; Sanjay Gupta, born in Michigan, a neurosurgeon and one of the most visible public faces reporting on medicine and health-related issues in his capacity as chief medical correspondent of CNN; and Paul Kalanithi (whose father, a cardiologist, had emigrated from India), whose posthumous *When*

*Breath Becomes Air* was a hauntingly poignant portrayal about learning how to die and how to live life. And in December 2014, Vivek Murthy—who moved to the United States at the age of three—became the nineteenth Surgeon General of the United States and the country's leading spokesman on matters of public health. His nomination had been hit by headwinds of opposition from the powerful National Rifle Association (NRA), but an important interest group—the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI)—used the techniques it had honed over the previous decades to lobby heavily on his behalf.

AAPI's success came after a protracted struggle. Although foreign medical graduates had to pass tough licensing exams and extra years of residency (irrespective of how many years of prior experience they had) before they were allowed to practice, their competence as physicians was still questioned by the medical establishment, who regarded them as having inferior clinical skills owing to substandard training in their nations of origin and poor language and communication skills to provide quality medical care. A study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health on the quality of health care provided by physicians, including IMGs, stated that "the degree to which the [I]MG was Americanized" predicted his performance.<sup>26</sup>

At the time there were no systematic studies comparing the performance of IMGs with those trained in U.S. medical schools. Later studies would find that patients of doctors who graduated from international medical schools and were not U.S. citizens at the time they entered medical school had lower mortality rates than patients cared for by doctors who graduated from U.S. medical schools or who were U.S. citizens and received their degrees abroad. The difference between non-U.S.-citizen and U.S.-citizen international graduates was striking, with the former's performance significantly better. But while IMGs who were U.S. citizens performed less well than non-U.S.-citizen IMGs on certifying, training, and specialty board examinations, they had less difficulty in entering the workforce in the United States.<sup>27</sup>

The stigma experienced by IMGs was especially pronounced in the initial years after 1965. A study on Korean immigrant physicians found that "[i]mmigrant status often carries with it connotations of functional defects, cultural differences, or other unsuitable attributes that result in discrimination."<sup>28</sup> Unsurprisingly, studies documented that IMGs tend to practice in physician-shortage areas characterized by high rates of infant mortality and below average physician-to-population ratio; they take care of more minority patients and accept more Medicare and Medicaid patients. In addition, IMGs have tended to work in primary care medical specialties that are less popular with U.S. medical graduates, such as internal medicine, pediatrics, psychiatry, and ob/gyn.<sup>29</sup> The multiple barriers in part reflect a political economy in which the native-born population turned to occupational licensing regulations as protectionist barriers

to skilled migrant labor competition. From 1973 to 2010, states with greater physician control over licensure requirements imposed more stringent requirements for migrant physician licensure, and as a consequence, received fewer new migrant physicians.<sup>30</sup>

Frustrated by this state of affairs, in late 1981 a small group of Indian immigrant physicians met at a suburban Detroit home and decided to establish a national organization to represent Indian physicians in the United States and to educate the American medical field and the broader public about what it considered "unfair, unjust, and untrue allegations."<sup>31</sup> Named the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI), it hosted its first convention in the summer of 1982 in Dearborn, Michigan, with the goal of ending what was seen to be a de facto stratification of the U.S. medical system—a two-tiered system that subordinated IMGs to U.S. medical graduates in the physician workforce hierarchy.

Indian IMGs blamed the American Medical Association (AMA) in particular for creating and sustaining a dual labor market. "Despite all these exams, the intention is not to create equality . . . AMA is one of the culprits. . . . The AMA was getting our membership dues but they were not addressing our concern."<sup>32</sup> But as one insightful analysis of their predicament put it, "Despite reaping the benefits of class, caste, and status in their home country, in the U.S. they were unable to escape their background in relation to their nationality, religion, language, and color, and so these products of an Indian caste-based society became, essentially, a lower caste of physicians in their new country of residence."<sup>33</sup>

Identity formation is not just the result of external categorizations but also agency exercised by the group in the face of bias. The initial steps toward collective action among Indian physicians were followed by overtures to other (mainly Asian) IMG ethnic organizations. AAPI was careful in not using the word *discrimination*, since it was conscious that, given the standing of the AMA, it had to try to bring about changes by working with the AMA and not by antagonizing it. However, the AMA proved unresponsive and a resolution introduced by some AAPI members in 1987 to form a section on foreign medical graduates (FMGs) received little support. AAPI was blamed for attempting to splinter the organization along ethnic lines.<sup>34</sup> The defeat in the AMA pushed AAPI's leadership to look for alternative strategies, including approaching the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and/or filing a class-action lawsuit against the AMA. In the end, however, in conjunction with other IMG communities, it took a more political route: seeking congressional intervention. In the process, AAPI's leadership became familiar with political processes and was the first major Indian-American organization to become politically engaged.

Indian physicians played a particularly important reputational role for the community in the early decades. While there were many engineers, their contacts were largely with other professionals in offices and factories. However,

many ordinary citizens first encountered Indian immigrants who were physicians, and at a time when occupations and race were closely interlinked, Indian physician immigrants helped break the mold. But Indian IMG physicians were not the only healthcare workers emigrating from India. Another significant healthcare occupation has been pharmacists, who organized themselves as the American Association of Indian Pharmaceutical Scientists (AAIPS) in 1988. In addition, Indian nurses—primarily from the Kerala Christian community—began to arrive in the United States in the 1970s. Among foreign nurses, those from Canada were the largest number in the United States until the 1970s, but since then nurses from the Philippines have dominated. In the 1980 Census, the share of nurses from India among foreign-educated nurses was 5 percent, behind the Philippines, Canada, and Jamaica. By 2010, the share from India was 7 percent, second after the Philippines.<sup>35</sup> Studies suggest that they have faced discrimination in job assignments and opportunities for promotion, with a combination of race and gender contributing to disempowering them.<sup>36</sup>

A somewhat similar story—of discrimination stoking collective action and civic engagement—led to the formation of another influential Indian-American civic organization. Many Indian immigrants of Gujarati origin who were forced to flee from East Africa in the late 1960s had an entrepreneurial background and entered the hospitality sector in the United States because of its relatively low entry barriers, the ability to employ family labor, its in-built housing situation, and steady cash flows. Since many of them had the last name Patel, their motels gained the sobriquet "patels." However, many of these properties were in the U.S. South, and banks and insurance companies there were disinclined to work with the hoteliers. Mounting frustration with the perceived discriminatory treatment led them to establish the Midsouth Indemnity Association, in Tennessee in 1985, which eventually changed its name to the Indo American Hospitality Association. Meanwhile, another group of hoteliers of Indian origin came together in Atlanta in 1989, with similar goals, and called themselves the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA). The two groups merged in 1994, and by the early 2000s, they had emerged as the largest membership-based Indian business organization in the United States. In 2013, AAHOA's 12,500 members owned more than 20,000 hotels, with nearly 2 million rooms and with a market value of \$130 billion, employing more than 600,000 full- and part-time workers. While we examine this story in greater detail in chapter 6, it is sufficient to note here that such groups combine two quintessential features of American political life: the ethnic lobby and the business lobby.

Many of these organizations are prone to internecine feuds. Nonetheless, they demonstrate that when facing discrimination, ethnicity can be a salient organizational resource even for skilled immigrants as they move to become part of mainstream civic institutions.<sup>37</sup> In turn, participation in civic organizations

tends to increase political participation through sharing of skills and connections and gaining exposure.

### Political Participation

On September 28, 2014, nearly 20,000 Indian Americans heard Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Madison Square Garden. The audience treated the Indian prime minister more like a rock star than a politician, and in quintessential American style, a crowd of demonstrators stood outside protesting. With a governor, three senators, and thirty-six representatives (one Republican and the rest Democratic) in attendance, the community-organized event was telling, less for U.S.-India relations or even India's relations with its diaspora (as emphasized by the Indian media) and more as an assertion of the place of Indian Americans in political life in America.<sup>38</sup> In constituencies with less than 0.5 percent Indian-American population, the members of Congress in attendance came to just 2.9 percent. In contrast, in constituencies where the percentage of the Indian-American population was greater than 0.5, the proportion of members in attendance jumped to 12.5 percent of Congress (figure 4.7). Popular commentary in India focused on Prime Minister Modi's popularity among the Indian diaspora

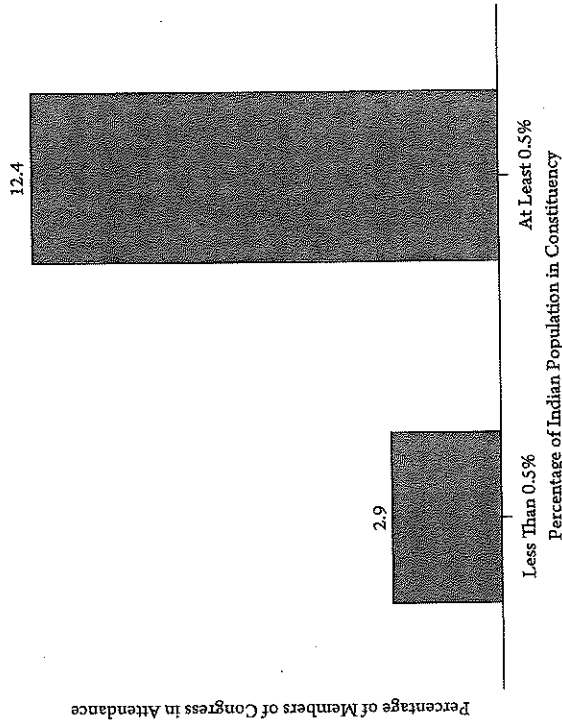


Figure 4.7 Members of Congress with Indian-American Constituents in Attendance at Indian Prime Minister Modi's Madison Square Garden Event in 2014.  
Source: Authors' calculations.

and the supposed strong support for his political party, but was oblivious to the other side of the coin. For the planners of the event, the audience was not India or Indian politics *per se* but a way to signal to American politicians that the community had finally "arrived" politically and needed to be taken seriously by them.

In reality, just two congressional districts (California's 17th District and New Jersey's 6th District) have an Indian-American population greater than 10 percent. Five congressional districts have an Indian-American population between 5 and 10 percent, and another sixteen have between 3 and 5 percent. But even these numbers exaggerate the electoral importance of Indian Americans as voters. In 2004, 49 percent of Indians in the United States were adult citizens and two-thirds of them voted, implying that just one-third of the total adult Indian-American population voted.<sup>39</sup> As discussed earlier, a little less than half of all Indian Americans were naturalized by 2012, and an even smaller fraction were registered and actually voted.

Naturalized citizens tend to vote less than the general population. The other benefits of citizenship are more immediate and tangible relative to those resulting from voting, which might explain why naturalized citizens vote less than other citizens. Broadly, naturalized citizens are statistically less likely than native-born citizens to register (by between one-third and one-half in recent years); and conditional on being registered to vote, naturalized citizens are statistically less likely than native-born citizens to vote (between one-fourth and two-fifths), with the effects being stronger in congressional elections than in presidential elections.

Studies suggest that there are differing effects of country of origin on naturalization and voting, respectively, indicating the distinct natures of these two political processes. An individual's level of political participation in the United States is associated with two key factors: socioeconomic resources, such as time, money, or experience; and rootedness, reflected through indicators such as older age, residential stability, and marriage.<sup>40</sup> While relatively modest socioeconomic indicators might explain lower participation by Latinos, the low turnout of Asian Americans at the polls has posed a bigger puzzle (indeed, Latinos register and vote at higher rates than Asians). Since Asian Americans have higher-than-average resources, and they appear to be strongly rooted, the group context of participation rather than individual-level processes might shed light on this puzzle. Explanations have ranged from community norms to avoid political involvement, experiences of discrimination in the United States, and a lack of political leadership.

But the first two explanations do not easily apply to immigrants from India, given India's strong electoral democracy and its attendant socialization effects on its emigrants, and the relatively lower levels of discrimination faced by the later immigrant cohorts. The relatively recent vintage of these groups is one

possible explanation. Since much of the U.S.-born Indian population is young, a significant majority is still not old enough to vote. The remaining are young voters who in general tend to vote less than older native-born voters. Altogether, the share of Indian-American voters is considerably less than even their small share in the population.

Recent work suggests that while resources and rootedness-based models explain the likelihood of political participation, factors such as political representation (the number of candidates from the group) and varying voting rules in different states also matter. An additional reason might be that Indian Americans are strongly partisan supporters of the Democratic Party (for reasons we discuss later), who are also concentrated in reliably blue states in the Northeast and along the West Coast. Unlike, for instance, Cuban Americans who are a swing vote in a swing state like Florida—and are hence courted strongly by both political parties—the votes of Indian Americans do not matter as much, and this realization may dampen voter turnout.

Since most Indian immigrants initially focused on bettering their economic prospects, political involvement was seen as extraneous to their primary goals. They had to learn a new political grammar, since the traditional form for transmitting partisan political preferences—parental socialization—was unavailable. Moreover, most Indians who migrated as adults did not come with the intention of permanent immigration. Their political consciousness gradually awakened as the realization grew that the United States was now “home.”

For India-born immigrants, the first structured lesson on U.S. politics and history occurred as they readied themselves for the naturalization process. Another standard source—multiple influences during schooling from peers and pedagogy—was also absent for the majority of Indian Americans who came as adults, although political knowledge imbibed through schooling and college education would influence the 1.5 and second generations, and sometimes reverse the inter-generational transmission of political beliefs from children to parents—a “trickle up” process, as it were.<sup>41</sup>

The standard forms of political participation in the United States range from the directly political—voting, contacting elected representatives, participating in campaigns, funding political parties and candidates, and running for election—to modes more civic in nature, such as attending protests, marches, or demonstrations; working with others to solve community problems; volunteering on local elected and appointed boards; or being active politically through voluntary associations. These multiple pathways to political participation have provided Indian Americans alternative avenues for gaining a political voice other than just through voting. As with other immigrant groups, growth in the Indian-American community, both demographically and financially, has led it to engage more deeply in American political life.

Political participation is not just about beliefs, but also about acting on them, thereby gaining experience in new settings. A traditional pathway to political activism for immigrants is involvement in local communities with a higher concentration of people with shared ethnicity. Owing to their different histories, Indian Americans have fewer spatially concentrated ethnic enclaves, those equivalents of the Chinatowns and Koreatowns. But where they do exist—places such as Edison, Iselin, and Plainsboro in New Jersey; Jackson Heights in Queens, New York; Cupertino, Sunnyvale, and Mountain View in California—they perform engage in local politics. However, in the absence of neighborhood-centered communities, the family “become[s] almost the sole locus for one’s experience of ‘Indianness’ in America. It is within the family that Indian immigrants and their children determine who they are and where they belong.”<sup>42</sup>

A study of an Indian ethnic economy in Chicago (along Gandhi Marg) argued that it represented a space “where Indian American identity has been reterritorialized as Indian Place: . . . a shared history of migration, consumption practices, linguistic affinity, and symbols rooted in an Indian homeland . . . . The India that is showcased on Gandhi Marg, however, is not static, but a dynamic, constantly changing representation of a homeland.”<sup>43</sup>

This economic rootedness enabled Indian merchants in the area to develop and situate political power within the ethnic economy. They formed the Devon North Town Business and Professional Association, a not-for-profit organization to serve as a liaison between the city of Chicago and the business community on Devon. Parades organized on India’s Independence Day gradually became a *de rigueur* for local politicians to attend, just as the St. Patrick’s Day parade had been for many decades. In 2004, Barack Obama, then candidate for U.S. senator, as well as his opponent, walked in the Indian Independence Day Parade, symbolizing the growing political influence of the community in that area.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, as immigrants were surging into the United States, political parties were the critical facilitators in political incorporation. A century later, their role has been substituted by community organizations, even though most do not have explicit political agendas. However, the manner of incorporation depends on political opportunity structures. In communities with a *de facto* one-party system and a powerful dominant party, marginal political players, such as immigrants, have difficulty breaking into politics, even if they have considerable resources and highly educated members.

The political incorporation of two Asian immigrant communities in Edison, New Jersey, exemplifies this argument. A greater level of civic participation of Indian-American immigrants resulted in their political incorporation, while Chinese immigrants who were less engaged remained marginalized. The differences in political incorporation were rooted in local processes of racialization. In the local context, the Chinese were seen as “successful but conformist model

minorities" and the Indians were labeled as "invaders and troublemakers."<sup>44</sup> The racialization of the Indian immigrants led to enhanced political activity and higher levels of political visibility of their organizations.

Politicizing stimuli occur at the individual as well as at the group level. As mentioned earlier, discrimination was the catalyst for organizing AAPJ and AAHOA, both eventually emerging as interest groups with the sort of fundraising capabilities that command the attention of politicians of both parties. But as is often the case, grass-roots activism came from younger members of the community who were angered by social injustice. In the mid-1980s, Indian and other South Asian immigrants were subjected to abuse and violent attacks in the New York City and Jersey City region, with groups like the "dotbusters" threatening violence to drive them out. This culminated in a brutal racial attack and murder of Citibank executive Navroze Mody. The apathy of public authorities in prosecuting and preventing further such crimes, and a community wary of getting involved and protesting, led a group of students at Columbia University to establish IYAR (Indian Youth Against Racism, later renamed as YAAR, meaning "friend" in Hindi) to create a greater awareness of civil rights in the community.<sup>45</sup> Activist groups like the South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAAALT) are part of the National Coalition of South Asian Organizations (NCSO), a network of forty-nine community-based organizations that focus on social justice; they serve the poorer and marginalized members of the community in areas ranging from housing to racism and discrimination, domestic violence and LGBT rights.<sup>46</sup> At the individual level, the second generation of Indian Americans is more activist oriented, an issue we discuss later.

## Funding and Lobbying

Socioeconomic status is a strong predictor of political participation. High socioeconomic status tends to lead individuals to develop a set of civic attitudes, increasing participation in both political and civic life. While it used to be argued that the essence of American democracy lay in Madison's vision of a vibrant pluralism, with faction countering faction, by the late twentieth century, this view had few takers. As Elmer Schattschneider, in his book *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realists View of Democracy in America* in 1960, wryly put it, "The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent."<sup>47</sup> But if participation in politics in the United States began to increasingly tilt in favor of the upper class and corporations—and more broadly toward the preferences of the economically advantaged—then groups with higher incomes, such as Indian Americans, were better placed to leverage these closer links between affluence and influence.<sup>48</sup> The banal reality of money and access

is well captured in Indian-American hotelier Sant Singh Chatwal, a fundraiser for the Democratic Party (especially the Clintons), who was quoted in a wiretap explaining, "Without [money] nobody will ever talk to you. That's the only way to buy them, get into the system."<sup>49</sup>

By the end of the 1990s, Indian Americans had become active participants in funding American domestic politics, with estimates of \$8 million in individual donations over the three election cycles leading up to 2002. We estimate subsequent contributions of at least \$11.1 million, \$18.3 million, and \$20.6 million in the 2004, 2008, and 2012 presidential election cycles, respectively (table 4.1). Another funding route has been through political action committees (PACs), where the contributions by Indian Americans are not especially noteworthy (figure 4.8). In all, the financial contributions made by Indian Americans to electoral politics in the United States appear to be about average.

In the United States, two approaches to ethnic politics have become particularly noteworthy: the ethnic vote bank and the ethnic lobby. An example of the ethnic vote bank is Tammany Hall, the Democratic Party organization that dominated New York City politics from the 1790s to the 1960s. The ethnic lobby, on the other hand, is exemplified by the Jewish community in the United States. Though demographically localized and nationally small in size, the Jewish community in the United States has long had a reputation for leveraging its economic clout and its organizational ability to galvanize support for issues related to concerns of the Jewish community, ranging from anti-Semitism, to the plight of Soviet Jews during the cold war, to support for Israel.

Table 4.1 Electoral Financial Contributions of Indian Americans

| Year |                 | Total Amount<br>(\$ million) | Mean (\$) | Median (\$) | No. of<br>Donors |
|------|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|------------------|
| 2004 | Indian American | 11.1                         | 1,270     | 500         | 8,703            |
|      | All Americans   | 2,156.5                      | 1,284     | 500         | 1,680,175        |
| 2008 | Indian American | 18.3                         | 1,586     | 500         | 11,513           |
|      | All Americans   | 3,007.0                      | 1,582     | 500         | 1,900,888        |
| 2012 | Indian American | 20.6                         | 1,744     | 500         | 11,817           |
|      | All Americans   | 4,019.9                      | 2,279     | 500         | 1,763,833        |

Note: The data are drawn from the FEC's individual contributions file, which contains each contribution of at least \$200 from an individual to a federal committee. If a donor made multiple donations, the donor average and median above is aggregated across all FEC-reported donations that a donor made in each election cycle.

Source: Compiled and calculated from the online Federal Election Commission (FEC) data, 2014.

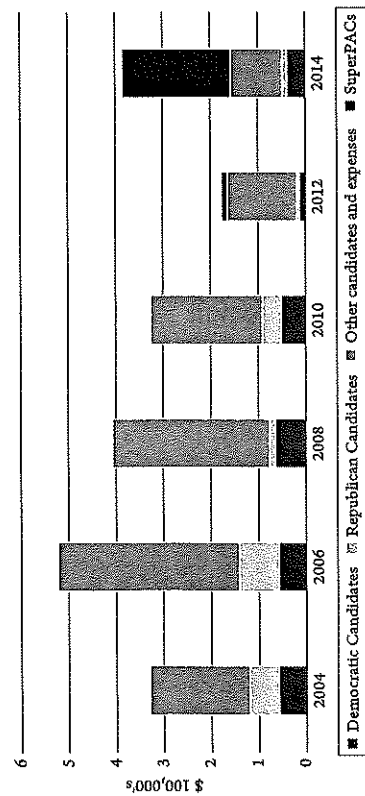


Figure 4.8 Donations Made by Indian Americans to Political Campaigns, 2004–2014.  
Source: Compiled and calculated using data available on [Opensecrets.org](http://Opensecrets.org), 2014.

Through ethnic lobbies, small demographic groups can exert considerable influence over U.S. foreign policy, since only a small fraction (surveys suggest around 5 percent) of the American public is active on issues of foreign policy, leaving space for motivated interest groups. The success of an ethnic lobby is based on the organizational strength of the community, its cohesiveness and electoral turnout, the force and framing of its message, and the degree to which political leaders are predisposed to engage with the lobby. Indian Americans have created an ethnic lobby by building upon these tenets, although its scope and clout are still fairly modest.

The earliest Indian lobby was formed around the issue of advocating for citizenship rights for East Indians, which was later followed by pro-independence advocacy. During the 1970s, groups such as the Association of Indians in America (AIA) and the National Association of Americans of Asian Indian Descent (NAAOID) successfully lobbied to add an “Asian Indian” category to the 1980 Census.<sup>50</sup> It was not until after the end of the cold war, in the 1990s, with a substantial Indian-American population, that Indian-American political strength began to coalesce.

In 1993, the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans was formed. The origins of the establishment of the India Caucus lay in growing attacks on small Indian businesses (especially grocery stores) in the 1980s. These stores were often located in poor neighborhoods and were important centers of cultural life for communities resident in those neighborhoods. As Indian owners moved in, they rarely recruited staff from the community nor tried to integrate in other ways, and resentments simmered over. The model of the India Caucus was the Black Caucus, and initially its goals were to address challenges facing the Indian-American community and, to a lesser extent, India–U.S. relations. Over time, however, its focus shifted primarily to the latter.<sup>51</sup>

As late as 2001, a paper on Indian-American political organization contended that the community was “seen, rich, but unheard.”<sup>52</sup> The change coincided with U.S. governmental interest in India. Though relations began to warm following the end of the cold war, the level of engagement between India and the United States was quite limited. The landmark March 2000 presidential visit by Bill Clinton to the subcontinent got little coverage in the American press. At a time when India was entering the global discourse as an emerging power, one congressional aide pithily summed up the general knowledge of most members of Congress on South Asia as follows: [they] “wouldn’t know India or Pakistan if they came up and bit them on the ass.”<sup>53</sup>

The roots of Indian-American political organization extend to ethnic, professional organizations such as AAPJ and AAHOA, which fostered ethnic activism along economic agendas, creating Indian-American solidarity across professional lines. These professional developments were accompanied by the rise of Indian-American news outlets, notably the well-regarded publication *India Abroad* (published since 1970 in New York), which was an important community forum on questions of Indian-American identity.<sup>54</sup> These were followed by groups that sought to engage the community in electoral politics, including the Indian American Forum for Political Education (IAFPE) established in 1982, the Indian-American Leadership Initiative (IALI) which has focused on developing leadership among Indian American Democrats, and the first major Indian-American political action committee, the U.S. India Political Action Committee (USINPAC), which like many other ethnic lobby organizations tried to model itself after the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the powerful pro-Israel lobby group of the Jewish community.

In the aftermath of 9/11, hate crimes against the Indian American community, and South Asians in general, increased sharply. Civil rights groups like SAALT and the Sikh Coalition lobbied to raise public awareness and political consciousness against the spate of racist attacks. After more than a decade of lobbying (and the killing of six worshippers at the Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, in August 2012), their efforts finally persuaded the FBI to start tracking hate crimes against Hindus and Sikhs (and Arabs) beginning in 2015.<sup>55</sup>

## Candidates and Voting Behavior: Indian-American Political Preferences

Though Dalip Singh Saund was elected to Congress in the 1950s, in the mid-1990s, after a long hiatus, Indian Americans began running for elected office at local, state, and national levels. In 2004, Piyush “Bobby” Jindal became the first person of Indian origin to be elected to the House of Representatives in

half a century. Ami Bera, a second-generation Indian American, was elected to the House in 2012 (and reelected in 2014) as a Democrat in a close election in which crucial financial support from Indian Americans pushed him over the top.

Two of the three Indian Americans elected to Congress have been Democrats (Rep. Dalip Singh Saund and Rep. Ami Bera) and one a Republican (Bobby Jindal, before he became Louisiana's governor). While most Indian-American state legislators have been Democrats, at the time of this writing the two most prominent Indian-American politicians on the national scene are Republicans: Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal and South Carolina Governor Nimrata "Nikki" Randhawa Haley, a remarkable achievement given how minuscule the Indian-American community is in these two states.

The political contributions of Indian Americans have been increasing at the level of state and local government. During the entire 1990s, three Indian Americans were elected to state legislatures. Kumar Barve was the first Indian American to be elected to a state legislature (Maryland) in the United States in 1991, eventually reaching the position of majority leader. The second, Nirmala Swamidoss McConigley, served in the Wyoming State Legislature from 1994 until 1996. McConigley, who was born in Madras, was also the first woman and first India-born person to serve in any state legislature. Satveer Chaudhary was elected in 1996 as a representative in the Minnesota House of Representatives, and in 2000, to the state's Senate, making him the first known person with Indian ancestry to be elected to a state Senate seat.

Not surprisingly, the ethnicity of many Indian-American candidates has been an issue in their election campaigns. When Swati Dandekar was campaigning for state office in Iowa, her opponent stated in a campaign email that "[w]hile I was growing up in Iowa, learning and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, Swati was growing up in India, under the still existent caste system. How can that prepare her for leading Iowa or any other part of our great United States?"<sup>56</sup> Such concerns about the fitness of Indian Americans for political office have stretched back as far as Dalip Singh Saund's campaigns for public office in the 1950s.

Yet, in spite of the prevalence of such views, the number of Indian Americans running for public office has continued to increase. In 2010, shortly before the congressional mid-term elections, National Public Radio ran a feature entitled "South Asia Americans Discover Political Clout" and argued that the "trick for these candidates is to never let voters forget you are running to represent Sacramento, or Wichita . . . not Bangalore."<sup>57</sup>

In the 2014 elections, ten Indian Americans were elected to state legislatures: six men and four women—six Democrats and four Republicans. However, this constituted barely 0.14 percent of the total elected state legislators, and in Congress, it was approximately one in 535 (0.19 percent). There are other elected offices where Indian Americans have had modest success, however. For instance, Kamala Harris (whose mother is Indian and father is Jamaican)

was elected as the attorney general of California (and who, at the time of this writing, had declared her intention to run for the Senate in 2016); and Kshama Sawant, who immigrated after completing her undergraduate degree in India, was elected to the Seattle City Council on a Socialist ticket, becoming the first socialist to win a city-wide election in Seattle over nearly a century. Still, these are few and far between, and they are a stark contrast to the economic success of the community, underscoring the diverse patterns of immigrant groups in American politics. The Cubans, for instance, have been much more active than the equally numerous Salvadorans.

Two characteristics of Indian Americans—higher income and social conservativeness—should at first glance make the community lean toward the Republican Party. Calling it a "group of American superachievers," conservative columnist Jay Nordlinger asserted,

Republicans think—and hope—that this group is ripe for their party.

The thinking goes like this: "Indian Americans are entrepreneurial, hard-working, striving, traditionalist, family-oriented, religious, assimilationist, patriotic—what could be better?" And what are their "issues"?

Tax reform and regulation, particularly as they affect small businesses; free trade, which includes a robust defense of outsourcing; and perhaps more than anything else, tort reform. Indian-Americans are a community of doctors, not plaintiffs' attorneys, and their political activity has been fueled by a desire to rein in medical liability. . . . [M]any Indian Americans had nasty experiences with preferential policy back in their homeland. This community as a whole—to indulge in some (further) stereotyping—is exceptionally merit-minded.<sup>58</sup>

At the time that Nordlinger was writing, a nationally representative survey of the Indian-American population found that 46.4 percent identified themselves as Democrats, 8.7 percent as Republicans, 23.3 percent as independents, and the rest responded "don't know."<sup>59</sup> In the 2008 presidential elections, over 90 percent of Indian Americans reported voting for Barack Obama. In a 2012 nationally representative survey of Asian Americans, half of Indian Americans identified themselves as "Democrat," just 3 percent as "Republican," and the remainder as "Independent/Non-Partisan."<sup>60</sup> In the 2012 presidential election, 84 percent of the Indian-American population voted for President Barack Obama while just 14 percent voted for Mitt Romney, a level of partisan support higher than the Asian-American average and significantly higher than traditional Democratic Party bastions such as the Jewish and Latino communities.<sup>61</sup> And a Pew survey of the largest Asian-American groups in 2012 found that "Indian Americans are the most Democratic-leaning of the six U.S. Asian

groups. Nearly 65 percent of Indian Americans identify with or lean to the Democrats, while 18 percent identify with or lean to the Republicans.<sup>62</sup>

Historically, there were good reasons for Indian Americans to favor the Democrats. After all, it was the Democrats who were responsible for passage of the historic 1965 immigration law, which made it possible for them to come to the country in the first place. Subsequently, when President Nixon tilted U.S. policy toward Pakistan in 1971 during the India-Pakistan war that led to the creation of Bangladesh, it turned a generation of educated Indians who emigrated to the United States against the Republican party.<sup>63</sup> By the 1990s, however, incessant pressure on India by Democratic-led administrations on issues ranging from financial-sector liberalization, to human rights in Kashmir, to an insistence that India sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), led to disenchantment with the Democrats. Although President Clinton's historic visit to India in March 2000 was met with approval, it was Republican President George W. Bush who pushed through the historic U.S.-India nuclear agreement in 2005 that shattered long-held dogmas isolating India in the global nuclear order for over three decades (we discuss this in more detail in the last chapter). This breakthrough was heralded by the Indian-American community—and should have yielded domestic political benefits for the Republican Party, but, if anything, the opposite happened.

There appear to be three reasons Indian Americans do not support the Republican Party, despite a greater congruence with its more conservative economic message. The first is that the Democratic Party has, at least over the past half-century, had a more "big tent" approach toward racial minorities than have had Republicans. Second, the anti-immigrant message of the Republican Party, even though in principle aimed mainly at illegal immigrants (and hence, with less impact on Indian Americans), has led virtually all recent immigrant communities, whether Asian American (with the exception of Vietnamese American) or Latino, to be more supportive of the Democrats. Finally, there has been a growing unease in the community, whose members are Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Jain, of the influence of evangelical Christians in the Republican Party.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, one analysis finds that "religion appears to be one of the strongest factors driving Indian Americans' unexpected affiliation with the Democratic Party."<sup>65</sup> That may seem surprising, given that the most prominent Indian-American politicians—Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal and South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley—are from the Republican Party. But it is less so when one realizes that both converted to Christianity, and their faith has been an important part of their political campaigns. The counterfactual—that they could have been nominated by the Republican Party, let alone won, if they had not converted—strains credibility given the nature of the Republican Party base in Louisiana and South Carolina.

As this book was going to press, a representative survey of the political behavior and beliefs of the six main Asian-American groups in the United States (Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese) was released in May 2016. Responses from that survey, comparing Indian Americans with Chinese Americans as well as Asian Americans more broadly, is provided in table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Asian-American Voter Survey, Spring 2016

|                                                                                                                                                                                           | Indian | Chinese | Total |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|-------|
| In the last 12 months, have you (% answering Yes)                                                                                                                                         |        |         |       |
| - worked for a candidate, political party, or some other campaign organization?                                                                                                           | 5      | 18      | 8     |
| - contributed money to a candidate, political party, or some other campaign organization?                                                                                                 | 16     | 23      | 17    |
| - worked with others in your community to solve a problem?                                                                                                                                | 37     | 17      | 25    |
| - donated money to a religious organization?                                                                                                                                              | 56     | 42      | 55    |
| - donated money to any other charitable cause?                                                                                                                                            | 70     | 49      | 60    |
| % with a very favorable impression of:                                                                                                                                                    |        |         |       |
| - The Republican Party                                                                                                                                                                    | 6      | 6       | 8     |
| - The Democratic Party                                                                                                                                                                    | 31     | 22      | 27    |
| - Barack Obama                                                                                                                                                                            | 56     | 18      | 36    |
| % with a very favorable impression of Donald Trump                                                                                                                                        | 10     | 4       | 8     |
| % with a very unfavorable impression of Donald Trump                                                                                                                                      | 53     | 29      | 47    |
| Do you support or oppose banning people who are Muslim from entering the United States? (% Oppose)                                                                                        | 70     | 53      | 58    |
| Do you favor or oppose affirmative action programs designed to help blacks, women, and other minorities get better access to higher education? (% Favor)                                  | 68     | 41      | 64    |
| % Strongly or somewhat agree that undocumented immigrants should have the opportunity to eventually become U.S. citizens                                                                  | 59     | 45      | 58    |
| If a political candidate expressed strong anti-Muslim views, and you agreed with him or her on other issues, would you still vote for that candidate, or would you vote for someone else? |        |         |       |
| - Still vote for candidate                                                                                                                                                                | 24     | 47      | 35    |
| - Someone else                                                                                                                                                                            | 59     | 24      | 44    |

Source: Inclusion, Not Exclusion. Spring 2016 Asia American Voter Survey. At: AP/IA Vote/AAJ/C/AAPI Data.

Three findings of this survey are worth noting. One, it appears that despite coming from a country with robust electoral democratic politics, Indians do not seem to be more involved, on average, in the formal political process. Whether it comes to working on campaigns or contributing money, they are less engaged than the Chinese community. However, they are quite engaged—more than average and more than Chinese Americans—when it comes to a general sense of civic participation (working with the community, charity, etc.). Two, with regard to political preferences, the contrast in the community's support for Democrats (compared to Republicans) is stark. The favorable ratings of Obama were notably higher compared to other Asian Americans. And three, despite much simplistic and empirically untethered commentary about the community's alleged anti-Muslim and upper-caste prejudices, compared to other Asian Americans they are less inclined to support hot button issues such as banning Muslim immigrants, supporting candidates with anti-Muslim views, or supporting Trump. Furthermore, their views were also relatively pro-affirmative action and in favor of citizenship pathways for undocumented immigrants compared to other Asian Americans.

The coexistence of "prejudice" and moderation perhaps reflects the paradox of modern India itself. Since Muslims are a live political reality for Indians, as opposed to Chinese, it could be that Indians are careful about expressing political preferences on this issue; that is, they are just more attuned to "political correctness" and also have a more realistic live-and-let-lie attitude than others. Similarly, on affirmative action, while most Indian Americans are upper caste, they have also grown up in a milieu where they instinctively know that excluding others is inviting a political storm. Indians have a greater exposure to these issues than, for instance, Chinese Americans, which could result in more muted opinions. Another possibility is that Chinese Americans do actually think affirmative action reduces places for them (as evidenced by contentious debates on this issue in California).

### Intra-group Variation in Assimilation: Gender

Immigrants "carry" with them the cultural mores and behavioral norms of the country of their origin. This includes gender roles, which for immigrants from poor countries often means a subordinate status for women in the household and large gender gaps in education and labor force participation.<sup>66</sup> But the evidence suggests that on some gender-related indicators there is rapid assimilation with the second generation's fertility and education levels, as well as labor supply, converging toward those of native-born women.<sup>67</sup> However, this research assumes that those who emigrate have gender-related preferences (for instance,

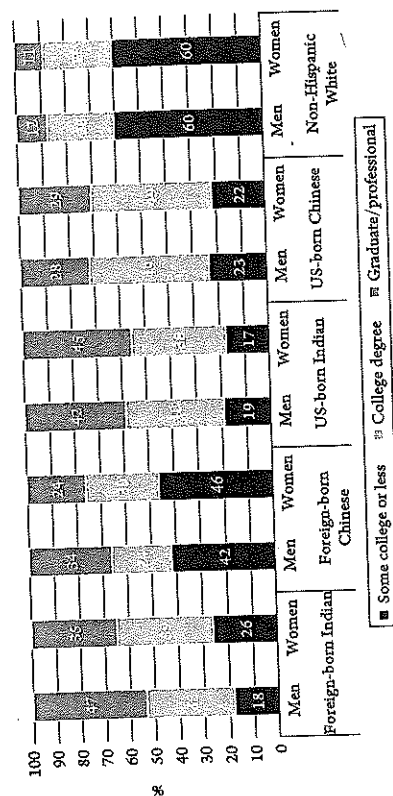


Figure 4.9 Educational Attainment of Indian Americans, Men and Women, Compared to Other Groups, 2007–2011.

Source: Compiled and calculated from ACS 2007–11.

on fertility and labor force participation) that reflect the national average in their country of origin. In the Indian-American case this is a strong assumption, given the significant selection of who emigrates.

As we have seen in chapter 2, the India-born Indian-American population has significantly higher education levels, for both men and women, than the non-Hispanic white population. However, as with other foreign-born Asian groups, Indian women have less education than their male counterparts. But by the second generation, this gap vanishes, in line with the national trends of higher college enrollment and completion for women compared to men.<sup>68</sup> U.S.-born Indian women have slightly more graduate or professional degrees than their male counterparts (figure 4.9), although the gender gap is small relative to the Hispanic or black community.<sup>69</sup> However, as with other groups in the United States, the education "advantage" for women has not resulted in equality in wages.

A report from the U.S. Department of Labor in 2014 found that Asian Indians have higher labor force participation rates and lower unemployment rates when compared to most other Asian groups and non-Hispanic whites.<sup>70</sup> However, while India-born women are highly qualified, their labor force participation rates are relatively low—indeed, the lowest rates of all subgroups compared, including black, white, Hispanic, and all other Asian populations. Figure 4.10 illustrates how labor force participation rates compare among non-Hispanic white, Indian, and Chinese communities in the American Community Survey data. Although the data do not control for age (and therefore also reflect retirees as nonparticipants), it is apparent that the India-born women—a fairly young cohort—have the lowest labor participation rates. Only about 59 percent of those with college

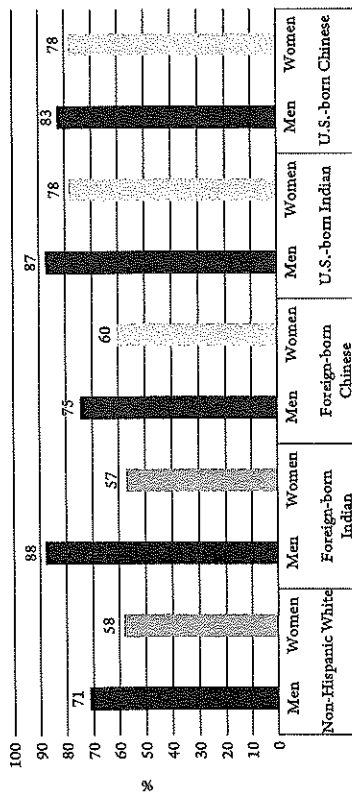


Figure 4.10 Participation in Labor Force, Men and Women, Indian Americans and Other Groups, 2007–2011 for 25+ Population.  
Source: Compiled and calculated from ACS 2007–11.

degrees and 68 percent of those with graduate degrees are in the labor force—significantly lower than other Asian populations, as well as non-Hispanic whites. However, by the second generation, U.S.-born Indian women have one of the highest labor force participation rates—even higher than white males. This is an apparent jump of over 20 percent in participation in one generation; however, it needs to be qualified, since the India-born figures come from different cohorts of immigrants. Nonetheless, there appears to be a considerable difference between the labor force participation of first- and second-generation Indian-American women, which may be either due to social norms (of the first generation) and greater assimilation (of the second)—or due to some other factor.

One reason many India-born women do not work is because they cannot work. As we have seen in chapter 2, a key driver of the post-1995 jump in the Indian-American population was the H1-B visa. Dependents of H1-B visa holders, who are disproportionately women and who move to the United States to follow their husbands, receive H-4 visas.<sup>71</sup> This visa does not allow them to have a Social Security number or to work in the country. The visa has been dubbed the “depression visa” and the “prisoner visa,” since the women, who are often highly qualified and have work experience, become depressed and frustrated in the traditional “housewife” role that U.S. immigration policy forces on them. Ironically, instead of escaping patriarchy by leaving, they find it reinforced, since they are completely dependent on their husbands.<sup>72</sup>

The ACS data also suggest that this nonparticipation in the labor force is not by choice. The labor force participation rate of naturalized Indian-American women above twenty-five years old is significantly higher than that for non-citizens (65.3 percent compared to 49 percent). Thus, a change in legal status results in a 16.3 percent increase in labor force participation (in the same

generation), while there is a 20 percent increase from one generation to the next.<sup>73</sup>

It is also possible that the presence of multiple generations in Indian-American households affects female labor force participation. Families with three or more generations in the household often have grandparents who may be able to provide free childcare, freeing the wife to work outside the home. The data from ACS do not support this hypothesis, however. Indian-American women (both India-born and U.S.-born) are actually less likely to work than the more generations there are in their households. This could be because traditional gender roles dominate in families practicing a “joint-family” system or because the additional generations have added to the workload of the women in the households (elder care, etc.).

With their higher educational qualifications, it is not surprising that Indian-American women have a higher median individual income than do non-Hispanic white women. However, the median income gap in the India-born between men and women is large—over \$30,000 annually (figure 4.11). Owing to the large number of tech-sector immigrant workers, as well as their older average age,<sup>74</sup> the India-born have higher median individual income than the U.S.-born, but because of higher rates of female participation in the labor force, household median income of the U.S.-born is greater.

There have been fears whether the troublingly adverse (and increasing) gender ratios—the result of a strong cultural preference for sons in India, particularly in North-West India—are carried over by immigrants. Before we present the results, a word of caution. We have to be careful in interpreting population estimates, since these data are based on a sample from ACS and thus are subject to sampling variability, which is important considering the small sample sizes at specific ages. We have used two different methods to estimate population counts

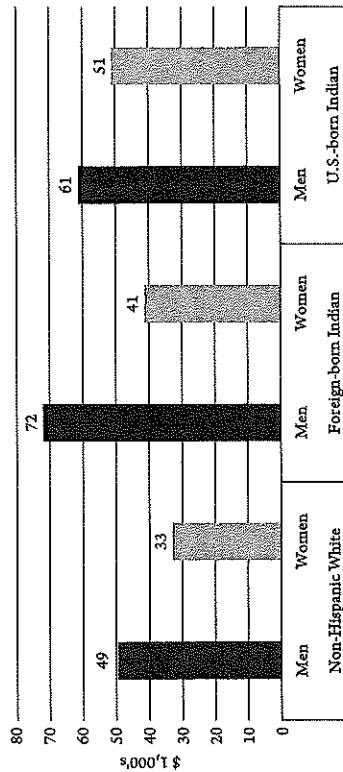


Figure 4.11 Median Individual Income by Race and Gender for Indian Americans and Non-Hispanic Whites, 2007–2011.

Source: Compiled and calculated from ACS 2007–11.

at each age: first, simply using sampling weights provided by ACS (method 1); and second, using statistical smoothing techniques, which assume that sampling weights are independent of gender after controlling for age (method 2). The results using both methods were comparable.

In examining the data, we found it necessary to keep two demographic realities in mind. First, the overall sex ratio in any population is usually skewed in the favor of women, owing to higher male mortality at older ages. Second, the natural sex ratio at birth skews the other way, ranging from about 102 to 106 boys born per 100 girls. As we see in table 4.3, the overall sex ratio among the Indian-born population in the United States was 112, while in the U.S.-born population it was 105, compared with 97 among non-Hispanic whites. However, given that the ratio among the India-born may simply reflect the gender selection in emigration (more males leave India), rather than a bias against the girl child per se, we present gender ratios at five-year age intervals (owing to sample size constraints). Taking the NHW (non-Hispanic white) ratio as the yardstick, there does not appear to be a preference for sons at birth (or in the age group 0-4) for U.S.-born Indians. The India-born group has sample sizes of less than 1,000 in that first age interval, so the results should be interpreted with caution. In the age group 5-9, the ratio appears more or less in the normal range.

However, a study based on data from the 2000 Census found a male-biased sex ratio for births to Indian, Korean, and Chinese Americans. The ratio of the oldest child was within the normal range; however, if there was no previous son in the family, then the ratios became increasingly adverse at higher birth orders. The third child of a woman had 50 percent higher odds of being male if the two previous children were female. That means that the ratio was 151 for third births to women who already had two daughters. The study found that these results were robust regardless of the citizenship status of the mother, suggesting that assimilation may not have a dampening effect on preference for sons

for Indian Americans.<sup>75</sup> The two findings are not necessarily contradictory. As we have noted earlier, since 2000 the composition of Indian immigrants has shifted considerably, with more coming from South India where son-preference is less marked than in North India. International immigration tends to systematically alter gender dynamics within the household. This may not necessarily be a positive outcome for women, as new opportunities can also come with new burdens.<sup>76</sup> There are many reasons immigration alters gender dynamics, ranging from nuclear families, to changes in employment opportunities available to women, to exposure to different norms of gender relations, especially greater sharing of household responsibilities between men and women.

In addition to juxtaposing these multiple roles, another challenge faced by immigrant women is the burden of expectations that they should be repositories of the culture of the home country. This means women have a harder time negotiating their life in a new culture, given that they are required to balance old and new ways of life. The influence of the outside culture often places more responsibility on Indian-American women to be the "main symbols of cultural continuity."<sup>77</sup> The expanded identity as "cultural custodians" can be empowering, but it can also be limiting in its conception of women as mothers and wives.<sup>78</sup>

These dilemmas suggest that perhaps the most transformative dimension of the female immigrant experience is in her sense of personal autonomy.<sup>79</sup> The increase in personal autonomy is most palpable among first-generation female immigrants, who experience the biggest change in their lives. The sources of this increased autonomy might include moving away from parents and, for married women, from in-laws; having more physical mobility as a result of fewer concerns about safety and more ease in personal travel; less direct interference from family members in making big and small decisions; fewer dress-code restrictions; fewer expectations regarding appropriate behavior for females; more financial independence (though this depends on whether the women are legally allowed to and can find work); and generally a more liberal culture.

Autonomy, however, has been a mixed blessing. In the early decades of immigration, when the community was small, leaving existing support networks in India meant psychological isolation. For second-generation women, on the other hand, the Indian provenance has been sometimes viewed as a source of diminished autonomy and increased cultural conflict. This is because they are more likely to use their American peers' lives as reference points, rather than the lives of women in India. A major factor triggering intergenerational conflict, especially for daughters, is dating. Indian-American parents police their daughters more than their sons, wanting them to conform to the values and expectations of traditional Indian culture.<sup>80</sup> One of these traditions, "arranged" marriages, has been another source of stress as Indian traditions clash with pervasive American ones. However, as attitudes toward arranged marriages among

Table 4.3 Sex Ratio among Indian Americans

| Age     | India-born |          | U.S.-born Indian |          | Non-Hispanic Whites |          |
|---------|------------|----------|------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
|         | Method 1   | Method 2 | Method 1         | Method 2 | Method 1            | Method 2 |
| 0 to 4  | 97         | 98       | 102              | 103      | 105                 | 105      |
| 5 to 9  | 102        | 101      | 100              | 102      | 105                 | 105      |
| Overall | 112        | 108      | 105              | 104      | 97                  | 97       |

Method 1: Based on sampling weights provided by American Community Survey.

Method 2: Statistical smoothing techniques which assume that sampling weights are independent of sex after controlling for age.

educated urban Indians (the principal source of immigration from India to the United States) have eased in recent years, these tensions are also perhaps less intense in more recent immigrant cohorts.

Several studies suggest that women play an important role in buttressing the myth of Asians as the "model minority"; they do so by upholding two key American values—family and hard work. To live up to the high standard of family values that the Indian-American community has set for itself, they must "deny . . . or make . . . invisible any issue that is perceived as eroding that image."<sup>81</sup> However, much of this analysis is based on unrepresentative small samples, and it is hard to say how valid the data are for the community at large. It is quite likely that actual gender outcomes are mediated by class, education, visa status, and employment options.

External factors like U.S. immigration policy also play a role in the gendered experience of Indian immigrants. The Immigration Marriage Fraud Act in 1986 exacerbated the problem by requiring that newlyweds enter on "conditional" visas until the legitimacy of their marriage could be proven through two years of living together. The unintended consequence of this law was that women who had followed their husbands to the United States were not able to leave an abusive husband without being deported. In 1990, this problem was recognized and an amendment was added that removed some of the obstacles that abused dependents faced in seeking protection from their abusers. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994 created a process by which women could self-petition for immigrant status and seek protection both from their abuser and from deportation. However, seeking protection is arduous and few women take that formal route. The isolation from their familial support system, as well as the unequal relationship as a visa dependent, inevitably skews the power relationship within immigrant families against women.<sup>82</sup>

The immigration experience also places new pressures on women and familial bonds that can lead to domestic abuse, owing to the uniquely vulnerable position of immigrant women and to the patriarchal culture they have often brought with them. The "theme of deep shame, failure, and disgrace is echoed repeatedly in the voices of battered South Asian women," who often face a host of barriers in accessing services, including legal and police protections, from their abusers, racial stereotyping, and language problems.<sup>83</sup> The literature on domestic violence in the Indian-American community emphasizes the "invisibility" of this problem, owing to an attempt by the community to hide issues that would tarnish its image as a "model minority." Data inadequacies make it difficult to gauge how the incidence of gender violence in the Indian-American community compares with that of other immigrant groups or to its incidence in India. Since the 1980s, a number of community-based organizations have sprung up to meet the needs of battered women from the subcontinent and provide culturally relevant services.<sup>84</sup>

## Intra-group Variation in Assimilation: The Second Generation

Assimilation and acculturation are intergenerational processes. Second-generation Americans usually outpace their immigrant parents in key socioeconomic indicators such as levels of education, English-language skills, and occupational status.<sup>85</sup> Studies have highlighted the different processes of acculturation that occur in the second generation of immigrant families: dissonant (when children assimilate faster than parents), consonant (when both generations adapt to the new culture at the same time), and selective (or "segmented") acculturation (when the acculturation process is incomplete and slow). Within this framework, through both dissonant and consonant acculturation, the immigrant group's native language and many (or even most) traditions are soon abandoned.<sup>86</sup>

Whether the second generation assimilates in some sort of straight-line fashion or in a segmented way has been the subject of much debate. The second generation has to inevitably find its ways between two competing forces—that of the parents' culture and social norms and the dominant societal culture. It could also potentially enjoy the "best of both worlds," accessing both cultural systems (those of the parents' ethnic group and those of American society). Unsurprisingly, the fortunes of the second generation depend on their parents' history: their educational and ethnic backgrounds, when they immigrated, where they settled, and the reason for their arrival (i.e., whether as students, family reunification, illegal, refugee, etc.). All of these factors affect the social mobility of the second generation.<sup>87</sup>

Our analysis of the second generation of Indian Americans is based on data from the ACS.<sup>88</sup> The median age of the first generation is significantly older than the second generation (39.5 compared to 13.4), and hence we focus on the 25+ age population for both generations.

Given the already high levels of education that Indian immigrants come with, it is not surprising to find that their children, the second generation, are also highly educated and more likely to have a college education. In the data, just 3.1 percent had only a high school diploma or less, compared to 7.9 percent of the first generation (figure 4.12).

First-generation Indian Americans had a slightly higher median individual income when compared to their second-generation counterparts. The data, however, are skewed because of more years of work experience in the first generation compared to the second generation (which is much younger, even among those who are more than 24 years old). Second-generation households, on the other hand, had a higher median household income than the first-generation households, likely because of greater female labor force participation rates.

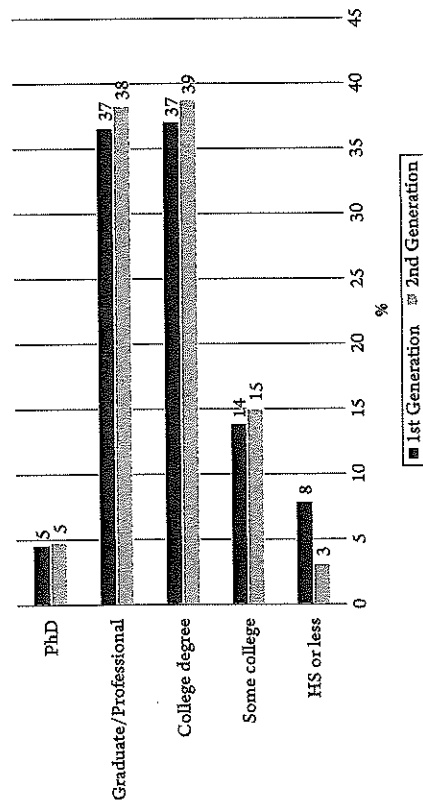


Figure 4.12 Educational Attainment of First- and Second-Generation Indian American Population, 2007–2011.

Source: Compiled and calculated from ACS 2007–11.

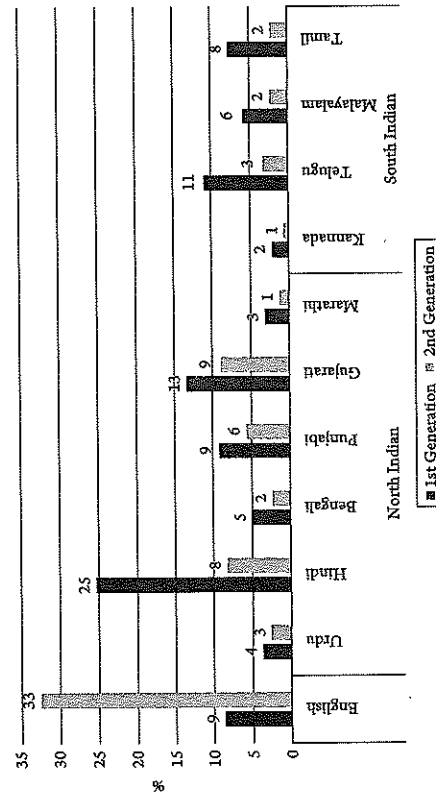


Figure 4.13 Languages Spoken at Home by First- and Second-Generation Indian Americans, 2007–2011.

Source: Compiled and calculated from ACS 2007–11.

Language has been known to play an important role in assimilation and has been found to be correlated with attitudes on a range of issues. While less than one-tenth of first-generation Indian-American households spoke English at home, a third of the second generation did, which is lower than what one might expect given the higher levels of English proficiency of the first generation. The linguistic assimilation seems highest among Hindi speakers and least among Gujarati speakers (figure 4.13).

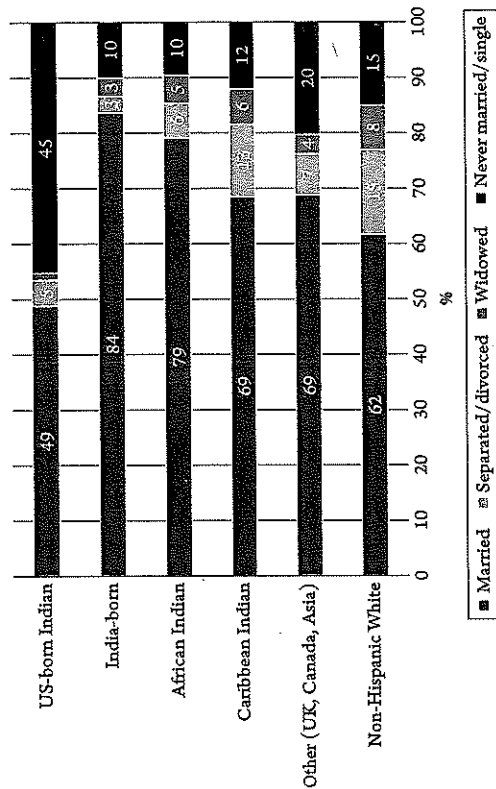


Figure 4.14 Marital Status of Selected Indian Americans and Non-Hispanic Whites, 2007–2011.

Source: Compiled and calculated from ACS 2007–11.

Two characteristics of Indian Americans stand out as regards their marital behavior. First, they have very high rates of marriage and low rates of divorce (figure 4.14). And second, among major Asian-American communities, Indian Americans—both men and women—had the highest rate of endogamy in both the first and second generations (table 4.4). Nonetheless, there was a noticeable increase in out-marriage in the second generation (among women more than men). However, among Asian Americans, Indian Americans are least likely to marry other Asian Americans who are not of Indian origin.

Historically, the second generation of immigrants does not necessarily climb the social ladder relative to the first. It may actually experience downward economic mobility resulting from a “reactive ethnicity” and a rejection of mainstream institutions.<sup>89</sup> This does not appear to have been the case with the Indian-American community, however. In part this could be because voluntary and higher-income immigrant groups are better able to “resist” mainstream American culture while not embracing an oppositional minority culture.<sup>90</sup> A study of a low-income Indian-American community—Punjabi agricultural immigrants—found that they did not have the same degree of “rejection” of mainstream institutions as some other lower-income immigrant communities.<sup>91</sup> This was corroborated by another study that observed that a move toward Hindutva, or “reactive ethnic” association within some sections of the Indian-American community, did not correspond to a move away from mainstream institutions.<sup>92</sup> This is not surprising. Immigrants strive for success through both mainstream American institutions and association with “ethnic” or religious associations that celebrate their unique identity.

Table 4.4 Marriage Patterns for Six Largest Asian-American Ethnic Groups (2011)

| Racial Categories | Gender | All Spouses (%) | USR + USR or FR (%) | USR + USR only (%) |
|-------------------|--------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Indian            | Men    | 92.5            | 76.9                | 62.4               |
|                   | Women  | 92.9            | 70.6                | 52.0               |
| Chinese           | Men    | 88.8            | 63.9                | 53.6               |
|                   | Women  | 79.9            | 52.4                | 46.1               |
| Filipino          | Men    | 85.1            | 54.2                | 42.1               |
|                   | Women  | 61.6            | 36.7                | 29.1               |
| Japanese          | Men    | 62.8            | 54.5                | 53.8               |
|                   | Women  | 44.4            | 48.9                | 49.3               |
| Korean            | Men    | 90.4            | 61.1                | 44.8               |
|                   | Women  | 68.1            | 35.4                | 24.1               |
| Vietnamese        | Men    | 92.6            | 71.0                | 59.0               |
|                   | Women  | 84.6            | 56.3                | 40.6               |

Notes: USR = U.S.-raised (1.5 generation or higher); FR = foreign-raised (first generation); "USR + USR or FR" = spouse 1 is USR while spouse 2 can be USR or FR; "USR + USR Only" = both spouses are USR

Source: C. N. Le. *Asian American History, Demographics, & Issues*.  
At [www.asian-nation.org/interracial2.shtml](http://www.asian-nation.org/interracial2.shtml).

A range of studies in the 1990s suggested that second-generation Indian immigrants, especially girls, lived "fractured" lives, trying to fit into two often-conflicting cultures, and were often constrained by Old World gender roles. The resulting inter-generational conflicts have been found to be correlated with higher depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem.<sup>93</sup> These characterizations have been changing because India itself has not been static, making the attitudes of more recent cohorts of immigrants less socially conservative.

Second-generation Indian Americans deviate noticeably from their parents' generation in their career choices. While 25.9 percent of the first generation (over 24 years of age) is in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) occupations, only 13.4 percent of the next generations is. The second generation is more likely to work in STEM-related occupations than directly in STEM (17.3 percent). As illustrated in table 4.5, the most popular occupations for the second generation are in the healthcare industry. Indeed, almost 20 percent of all second-generation Indian Americans are in the health field—more

Table 4.5 Occupations of First- and Second-Generation Indian Americans

| Occupation Categories                          | Non-Hispanic White | 1st Generation (India-born) | 2nd Generation (U.S.-born) | Generational difference |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Computer and Mathematical                      | 3                  | 24                          | 8                          | -17                     |
| Production                                     | 6                  | 3                           | 1                          | -2                      |
| Architecture and Engineering                   | 2                  | 6                           | 4                          | -2                      |
| Transportation and Material Moving             | 5                  | 3                           | 2                          | -2                      |
| Sales and Related                              | 11                 | 10                          | 9                          | -2                      |
| Education, Training, and Library               | 7                  | 5                           | 6                          | 1                       |
| Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media | 2                  | 1                           | 2                          | 1                       |
| Office and Administrative Support              | 14                 | 7                           | 8                          | 1                       |
| Business Operations Specialists                | 3                  | 3                           | 6                          | 2                       |
| Financial Specialists                          | 3                  | 3                           | 7                          | 3                       |
| Legal                                          | 2                  | 0                           | 5                          | 4                       |
| Healthcare Practitioners and Technical         | 6                  | 10                          | 19                         | 9                       |

Note: Occupation categories in which the generational difference was less than 1 were excluded from the table. All figures are percentages.

Source: Compiled and calculated from ACS 2007-11.

than double that of the first generation. Other popular industries for second-generation Indian Americans are finance (6.8 percent) and legal services (4.6 percent). The generational difference is greatest in computer and mathematical careers. There is a drop of over 16 percent in participation in that industry within one generation. Three examples illustrate the greater diversity in occupational choices of the second generation relative to the narrower choice set of

their parents, although that apparent choice set was distorted by the selection mechanism favoring IT workers.

One occupation that was rare in the first generation but more prevalent in the second, albeit at still low levels, is service in the U.S. military.<sup>94</sup> There are multiple pathways to integration, and one of those leads through military service. While there are no explicit data from the armed forces themselves, according to data from the 2013 PUMS, the India-born have virtually no presence in the armed forces (0.04 percent of the labor force, compared to 0.28 percent for all foreign-born). Although U.S.-born Indian Americans are an order of magnitude more likely to join the armed forces compared to the India-born, it is still half as likely as the general population (0.36 percent of the labor force compared with 0.68 percent). The low representation of first-generation immigrants is likely because most Indian immigrants are on average older and more educated, with better labor market prospects when they arrive in the United States, making a military career less attractive.

The reasons for joining the army stem more from a sense of service (duty) rather than need (jobs or immigration-related), although there are some who have benefited from the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) program that grants citizenship, and others who may have joined to avail medical school tuition benefits from the military. Many of those serving came from army or air force families in India, and hence there was already a military tradition in their families. Indeed, the so-called army brats from India—children of Indian army officers—have in general done quite well in the United States (children of enlisted men in the Indian armed forces rarely make it to the United States, another indication of the selectivity in emigration from India). There is a greater likelihood of Indian Americans to be in the officer corps—again reflecting their above-average educational attainments compared to the general U.S. population.

While the U.S. Army was the principal choice of service for the first generation (especially in the medical corps), the second generation has shown a preference for the Marines. The first and only Indian-American general, Brigadier General Balan Ayyar, served in the U.S. Air Force. There have been relatively few Indian-American women in the military. Sunita Williams was the first Indian-American female to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy and also the first Indian-American military officer to be selected as an astronaut. While Sikhs serve in disproportionately large numbers in the Indian army, they have faced major hurdles in joining the U.S. Army since the 1980s, when it banned the wearing of “conspicuous” articles of faith. Although in 2009 three service members were granted “waivers” to this policy—one of whom was awarded the Bronze Star and another the NATO medal—there was no official policy change, resulting in multiple legal challenges to nudge the Defense Department to allow Sikhs to

serve their country without being forced to compromise their religious beliefs. Finally, on March 31, 2016, the U.S. Army granted a permanent accommodation to Captain Simratpal Singh (who had filed a legal challenge) to continue to serve while retaining the articles of his Sikh faith.<sup>95</sup> For some time, the Air Force Academy was also seen as unwelcoming to other religious faiths.<sup>96</sup>

The contributions of Indian Americans to the U.S. military have been more indirect, with thousands of engineers employed through the principal defense contractors and in defense-related research and development. As relations between the United States and India began to warm, the United States has leveraged the presence of Indian-American personnel for training and liaison with the Indian military.

Another example of differences in the second generation comes from the activist community. By and large, the activism of the first generation was confined to issues of concern to the community. The second generation has been more comfortable in its American identity and its activism has also been less community specific. Bhairavi Desai's family had emigrated from Gujarat to Harrison, New Jersey, when she was six years old. Her father, who had been a lawyer in India, had trouble finding work and started a grocery store. She faced hostility and racist attacks in the neighborhood where she grew up. The experience politicized her, and soon after graduating college she began working with a South Asian community organization that provides social services to taxi drivers. She began to organize them into a union, and as executive director of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (a rare woman in an overwhelmingly male industry), she came to prominence in 1998 when she led a strike to protest new rules imposed by then New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

Urvashi Vaid saw herself as an outsider as a child because of her ethnicity, accent, and intellectual interests. Despite growing up in a socially conservative community where homosexuality was a taboo subject, in 1989 she became Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Surveys suggest that while more Indian Americans accept homosexuality than discourage it (49 percent versus 38 percent), the numbers are lower than those for the general U.S. population (56 percent versus 32 percent).<sup>97</sup>

The third example of occupational changes has been in the legal field. While barely 0.4 percent of the first generation was in this field, 4.6 percent of the second generation is—an order of magnitude increase. This is not surprising since among the professions the one that is most country-specific is law. Between 1990 and 2013/14, data from three elite law schools—Harvard, Stanford, and Yale—showed a tripling of Indian-American students (albeit still small in absolute numbers). While the consequences have been more visible in law firms, its longer-term impact is being felt in appointments as judges (Judge Sri Srinivasan on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit) and prosecutors

(U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara for the Southern District of New York), as well as staff positions in the executive and legislative branches of government (Vanita Gupta, U.S. Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice). These positions often serve as a launchpad for entry into elected office, and it is in this area that this occupational shift will most likely be felt in the long run.

An analysis of nationwide scholastic awards in high school and college, ranging from the Scripps National Spelling Bee to the Intel Science Talent Search, the Rhodes Scholarship or the Harry S. Truman Scholarship, shows the types of academic success of the second generation of Indian Americans (table 4.6). It is interesting to note the fields in which the community demonstrates talent and where it does not. For instance, in music, in the 2013 All-National Honor Ensemble, 45 percent of the musicians in orchestra and 13 percent in band were Asian Americans, but just 2 percent and 1 percent, respectively, were Indian American. They are similarly poorly represented in math competitions. In both areas children of immigrants from East Asia (especially of Chinese and Korean backgrounds) excel. Similarly, in athletics and team sports, while they may actively participate in high school, they are virtually absent at the college level and in professional sports, where communities such as African Americans excel.

Table 4.6 Indian-American Scholastic Achievements (High School and College)

|                             | 1985–1994 (%)   | 1995–2004 (%) | 2005–2014 (%) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Scripps Spelling Bee        | 20              | 30            | 81.8          |
| National Geographic Bee     | (Began in 1989) | 0             | 60            |
| Siemens Science Competition | (Began in 1999) | 5.3           | 11.4          |
| Gold Medal Winner           |                 |               |               |
| Intel Science Talent Search | 5               | 10            | 12            |
| (percent of Top Ten)        |                 |               |               |
| Mathcounts                  | 0               | 0             | 10            |
| U.S. Presidential Scholars  | 2.4             | 3.7           | 7.3           |
| Rhodes Scholars             | 2.2             | 4.7           | 7.2           |
| Truman Scholars             | 1.4             | 3.4           | 3.7           |
| Churchill Scholars          | 1               | 4.6           | 8.4           |
| Marshall Scholars           | NA              | 4.6           | 6.6           |

Sources: Authors' estimates.

There is a range of plausible reasons why talent in some communities gets directed into some channels and not into others, but in the case of second-generation Indian Americans, the pathways of the parents who immigrated to the United States is perhaps the most important factor in determining their choices.

## A Minority within a Minority: Indian Immigrants Born in the Diaspora

There has been a long history of migration from the Indian subcontinent. In the colonial era its onset can be traced back to the end of slavery in the British Empire, in the 1830s. In the nineteenth century, most migrants from the subcontinent went to South or Southeast Asia, and the rest to Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, with the vast majority going as indentured labor.

International migration from independent India was initially driven by the large demand for unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the United Kingdom following the end of the Second World War. Subsequently, two distinct streams of international migrants from India evolved from the late 1960s onward. One stream resulted from the economic boom that followed the sharp increase in oil prices in 1973, which created a large demand for less skilled labor in the Middle East. However, because the policies of the Middle East countries have made permanent settlement extremely rare, Indian migration to this region has been inherently temporary. The onset of the second stream followed the liberalization of restrictive “white only” immigration laws in Anglo-Saxon countries (especially Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States), resulting in higher-skilled migrants moving to these countries.

About one-tenth of the Indian-American sample in ACS consisted of people of Indian origin who were born neither in India nor in the United States. About one-third of the born-elsewhere group were born in Bangladesh and Pakistan. The others were mostly born in South America and the Caribbean (especially Guyana and Trinidad), Africa, and other parts of Asia (see chapter 2). Unlike their India-born counterparts who are more likely to have emigrated directly from India to the United States, this population may have spent much of their lives elsewhere. This group exemplifies the complexities of global migration today, where national origin, race, and ancestry are less coterminous. While simplified classifications can be analytically hazardous, this group self-reports race as “Indian” (in the U.S. Census) and place of birth that is neither India nor the United States. In analyzing the characteristics of this subgroup, we focus on those age twenty-five and older.

For nearly half of this population, English was the primary language spoken at home—more than even the second generation of Indian Americans. Of the

Indian languages, Hindi and Gujarati were the most commonly spoken by this population (10.7 percent and 11.3 percent, respectively). Relative to the dominant Indian-American population, this group had a larger female population (54.6 percent of the Caribbean Indians and 52.2 percent among those born in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Asia). This group was also less likely to be married and more likely to live in multi-generational homes and be naturalized U.S. citizens.

People of Indian origin who have immigrated to the United States from Africa are the most similar to the India-born group, perhaps because their move from India to East Africa, in particular, had been only a couple of generations earlier. They had a high rate of marriage and low rate of divorce or separation (79.1 percent and 6.2 percent, respectively; see figure 4.14).<sup>98</sup> Like their India-born counterparts, they sometimes lived in multi-generational homes (13.2 percent with three or more generations). They had the lowest female labor force participation rate of all diasporic-Indian groups. They were the oldest group, with an average age of 47.7 years, and had been in the United States longer than any other Indian-American group, with an average of 21.9 years. Many members of this group are likely to have arrived in the United States after they were pushed out of East Africa in the late 1960s–early 1970s.

Caribbeans of Indian origin who settled in the United States were also an older population who had been in the country for an average of 21.5 years. As a group, their characteristics least resembled the India-born population. Their ancestors had left India primarily between 1838 and 1917, and they had weaker direct links to contemporary India and Indian culture than had their African-Indian counterparts. They often lived with other Caribbean Americans in places such as New York City (with 62 percent living in the Northeast). They had a divorce or separation rate similar to the non-Hispanic white population (13.1 percent). Although nearly three-fourths were naturalized citizens, they were the poorest Indian-American group.

Diasporic-Indian immigrant communities in the United States had significantly lower education levels when compared to their India-born counterparts. Whereas 78.3 percent of India-born Indian Americans had at least a college degree, only 50.3 percent of diasporic Indians did (although this was still higher than the 39.8 percent of non-Hispanic whites who had college degrees). Approximately 16.5 percent of all diasporic Indians in the United States had a high school degree or less. Most of those with a high school diploma or less were from the Caribbean-Indian group, which had lower education levels (table 4.7).

Caribbean Indians were also the only group of Indian origin that had a lower median individual and household income (\$32,866) than non-Hispanic whites. They were also almost twice as likely as whites to receive food stamps. The Caribbean-Indian population was also much less likely to participate in STEM

Table 4.7 Summary of ACS Data on Various Indian-American Groups

|                                           | Mean years<br>Naturalized<br>citizens (%) | Male<br>LFP (%) | Female<br>LFP (%) | Female<br>Education: Graduate/<br>Professional (%) | Education: Less<br>than HS (%) | Female<br>Education: Graduate/<br>Professional (%) | Female<br>LFP (%) | Female<br>LFP (%) | Female<br>LFP (%) | Female<br>LFP (%) |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Diasporic<br>Other (UK, Canada, Asia)     | 56.0                                      | 85.3            | 66.2              | 52.2                                               | 7.7                            | 54.6                                               | 66.8              | 78.7              | 72.6              | 22                |
| Indian (non-<br>U.S., non-<br>India born) |                                           |                 |                   |                                                    |                                |                                                    |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Caribbean Indian                          | 72.6                                      | 84.3            | 64.5              | 49.9                                               | 25.0                           | 9.4                                                | 23.6              | 7.7               | 54.6              | 66.8              |
| African Indian                            | 71.7                                      | 82.7            | 66.2              | 47.3                                               | 25.0                           | 9.4                                                | 23.6              | 7.7               | 54.6              | 66.8              |
| Total Diasporic Indian                    | 65.0                                      | 82.7            | 66.2              | 47.3                                               | 25.0                           | 9.4                                                | 23.6              | 7.7               | 54.6              | 66.8              |
| India-born                                | 48.1                                      | 87.8            | 57.1              | 47.2                                               | 41.2                           | 7.9                                                | 41.2              | 47.2              | 57.1              | 87.8              |
| 2nd Generation                            | 87.4                                      | 78.3            | 78.3              | 47.5                                               | 43.1                           | 3.1                                                | 43.1              | 47.5              | 78.3              | 87.4              |
| Non-Hispanic White                        | 71.4                                      | 58.2            | 51.7              | 51.7                                               | 11.8                           | 9.2                                                | 11.8              | 51.7              | 58.2              | 71.4              |

Note: LFP = Labor force participation

Source: Compiled and calculated from ACS 2007–11.

professions (only 3.7 percent had STEM jobs). In economic terms, this group was quite dissimilar from the other Indian-American groups and more similar to the Caribbean-American community. In terms of cultural identity, Warikoo explains that second-generation Caribbean-Indian youths navigate their complex identity by selective association with either their religious, national, ethnic, or ancestral identity.<sup>99</sup> Since many Caribbean Indians live in spatially concentrated geographies (especially in and around New York City), they are also able to maintain a unique "Indo-Caribbean" culture in their community.

While other diasporic-Indian groups in the United States were more likely to work in STEM fields than the Caribbean and the non-Hispanic white populations, they were still significantly less likely to work in this industry than were the India-born group. Few in this group were likely to be on H-1B visas or were recruited to work specifically in the technology sector. The occupational sectors that the diasporic-Indian populations work in tend to mirror the non-Hispanic white population in its diversity. They do, however, have a much higher participation rate in the healthcare sector than non-Hispanic whites (10.1 percent, compared to 6.1 percent) and were almost twice as likely as the India-born and second-generation Indian Americans to work in administrative or office work jobs, with 12.9 percent (the largest share) working in those occupations.

## Race and Identity

More than a century ago, when Indians first began coming to the United States, their racial identity posed a conundrum. That conundrum persists, albeit in less virulent ways, having taken many twists and turns from Hindoo to Asian to South Asian to Asian Indian to Indian American; from "ABCDs" (American-Born Confused Desis), to "dotheads," to "model minority."

On January 2015, in an address to the Henry Jackson Society in London, Governor Bobby Jindal emphatically declared, "I do not believe in hyphenated Americans. . . . My parents came in search of the American Dream, and they caught it. To them, America was not so much a place, it was an idea. My dad and mom told my brother and me that we came to America to be Americans. Not Indian-Americans, simply Americans."<sup>100</sup> This transubstantiation was perhaps necessary for the governor's political ambitions, just as a month earlier Miss America 2014, Nina Davuluri, emphasized, "The fact that I am rooted in Indian culture helped me win [the] Miss America pageant."<sup>101</sup> She said this while visiting India, and like Governor Jindal, she too probably had her audience in mind. When she won the pageant, her perceived identity earned her a barrage of racist comments suggesting she was a foreigner, Miss 7-Eleven, an Arab, and even a terrorist with ties to Al Qaeda. Meanwhile, a debate erupted in India suggesting

that her dark complexion meant that she was unlikely to win a beauty pageant in India, a society obsessed with fairness as a standard of beauty.

Race and identity involve both ascription and agency within a specific context of reception, often in unanticipated ways. Since 1980, the U.S. Census has categorized Indians as "Asian Indian," a subset of the "Asian" racial category, suggesting that Indians are officially Asian. It is well known that racial categories are not innate but constructed. The U.S. government's Office of Management and Budget, which issued "Directive 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting," has a pointed caveat: "The categories in this classification are social-political constructs and should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature." Hence there is no categorical logic why West Asia is always excluded from any construction of "Asian American," and it is unsurprising that Indians and other South Asians fit uneasily into that category as well. They are "a part, yet apart, admitted, but not acknowledged" among Asian Americans, for whom the most apt characterization might be "ambiguously nonwhite."<sup>102</sup>

Generally, when immigrants arrive they are more likely to identify with their national-origin group, but as they adjust to life in the United States, they become more likely to identify pan-ethnically. A study based on the 1990 Census data found that more assimilated Indian Americans were more likely to identify as white or black as opposed to Asian, suggesting that for Indian Americans, exposure to the U.S. racial system may actually suppress pan-ethnic identification.<sup>103</sup>

More integrated Indian immigrants—who have longer experience with American racial boundaries—appeared less likely to identify pan-ethnically, rather than more, perhaps stemming from a racialization process that includes learning that Indians are considered racially different from other Asians. However, more recent survey data suggest that, despite their outsider status among immigrants from Asia, Indian Americans generally do not have markedly lower rates of pan-ethnic identification compared to more traditional groups from East Asia: in the 2008 National Asian American Survey (NAAS), 33 percent of Indian respondents identified as "Asian" or "Asian American," compared to 37 percent of Chinese respondents and 30 percent of Filipino respondents.

The more interesting question perhaps is not whether Indian Americans are more or less "pan-ethnic" compared to these other groups, but whether Indian immigrants choose a pan-ethnic identification for reasons that are distinct from other Asian subgroups.<sup>104</sup> While "model minority" experiences may be shared across Asian ethnic groups, discrimination based on post-9/11 racial profiling has impacted the racialization and politicization of Indian Americans as they also have become targets of anti-Muslim/anti-Arab discrimination, irrespective of their actual religious beliefs. Incidents of violence against South Asian minority communities surged after 9/11. Investigative reports have documented that

Muslims bore the brunt of violence, and the killing of six people at a Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, in 2012 was a tragic reminder of the racialization of religion and violence in the United States.<sup>105</sup> Pan-ethnic identities emerge out of shared histories and struggles that define who is and who is not a member of the group, and are not just convenient racial or political labels, or based on myths of shared racial or geographic origins. It has been suggested that the lukewarm response of pan-ethnic Asian organizations in defending South Asian hate-crime victims after 9/11, likely attenuated pan-Asian ethnic identification among Indian Americans.<sup>106</sup> While this experience led some to activate a South Asian identity in solidarity, for others the association of Pakistan with South Asia and its embroilment in terrorism was a reason to decouple from that identity.

The evidence regarding the degree of discrimination against Indian Americans is mixed. Wong et al. found that Indians (both foreign and native born) report higher levels of race- and immigrant-based discrimination than any other major Asian group, suggesting that Indians experience racial discrimination in different ways and/or at a higher frequency than other Asian subgroups.<sup>107</sup> Brettell found that Indian respondents are more likely to report individual experiences of discrimination than they are to say that Indians as a group are discriminated against, which she posits may be driven by Indians' high socioeconomic status.<sup>108</sup> However, these claims are not supported by the Pew survey of Asian Americans, which found that the percentage of Indian Americans reporting that discrimination against their group is "a major problem" was 10 percent—considerably below that reported by Koreans (24 percent), Chinese (16 percent), and Vietnamese (13 percent), but more than that reported by Filipino and Japanese (8 and 6 percent, respectively).<sup>109</sup> Similarly, when asked whether they had personally experienced discrimination in the past year, 18 percent of Indian Americans answered affirmatively—slightly less than did Chinese, Koreans, and Filipinos. Data from the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, a government agency that tracks illegal discrimination, found that between 2006 and 2010, 16,101 complaints were filed in the state, but just 74 were by Indian Americans.<sup>110</sup>

An interesting aspect of the construction of identity is the term "South Asian." In multiple surveys, Indian Americans identify themselves in different ways, but few do so as South Asian. A small section of academics and activist groups, however, are as committed to the term as the population in question appears not to be. In 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court heard an affirmative action case: *Fisher v. University of Texas*.<sup>111</sup> Three Indian-American groups joined an amicus brief opposing race-conscious admissions policies at the University of Texas at Austin. They argued that "Asian Americans are the new Jews," because policies to promote diversity through race-conscious admissions in college admissions in effect discriminated against them, drawing a parallel with past discriminatory

policies that excluded Jews from many universities. Conversely, several South Asian organizations signed on to an amicus brief in *Fisher* supporting race-conscious policies, arguing that "Asian-Americans continue to face racial discrimination and benefit from race-conscious policies, which help to break down racial stereotypes by facilitating interactions between students of diverse groups." The three organizations that signed on to the anti-affirmative action brief all emphasized "Indian" identity, while those that supported race-conscious policies preferred the "South Asian" designation.

## Conclusion

Identity issues facing the Indian-American community are not just about being a particular category of hyphenated American. Living as an Indian American is to experience both the "Indian" and the "American" complexities of the identity—everything in between. In the intermixing of two societies that are among the world's most heterogeneous, the cleavages of caste and class, region and religion are carried over from one society to the other—where they encounter the new variable of race.

As DiPietro and Bursik argue, while many contemporary "race/ethnicity-oriented social scientists have questioned the relevance of the specific country of origin in the contemporary United States, suggesting that a focus on global, pan-ethnic categories is now substantively warranted," the empirical reality is rather different.<sup>112</sup> A majority of Hispanics (51 percent) identify themselves by their family's country of origin, while just 24 percent say they prefer a pan-ethnic label.<sup>113</sup> Based on a representative survey carried out in 2012, less than one-fifth (19 percent) of people of Asian origin living in the United States appear to view themselves as Asian American. A majority (62 percent) described themselves by their country of origin, while just 14 percent most often simply call themselves American (the percentage doubles among U.S.-born Asians). The data for U.S. residents of Indian origin is pretty similar: 20 percent describe themselves as Asian American or Asian, 61 percent describe themselves as Indian or Indian American, while 17 percent say they most often simply call themselves American.<sup>114</sup>

But identity is of course not just about what an individual wants it to be; it is also about how society, governments, and, yes, even academics perceive it to suit their specific agendas. When emigrants left Italy in the late-nineteenth century, their loyalties were particularist, rooted in the regions that constitute Italy. "Many became 'Italian' only when they left home; when they returned, neighbors called them 'germanesi' or 'americani'."<sup>115</sup> The nature of the boundary and the context—temporal, spatial, occupational—shapes the nature of the

identity. It does not matter whether academics and activists insist on the moniker "South Asian" or whether others see them as "Asian." The fact is that whether it is a Rajat Gupta or Fareed Zakaria or a Satya Nadella, or the character of Apu in "The Simpsons" or of Raj in "The Big Bang Theory," or Kal Penn's Kumar in "Harold and Kumar," in popular discourse they are all (for now at least) seen to be largely either Indian Americans or Americans of Indian origin, and not as solely "American," as Bobby Jindal insists they are. While the community's subregional or ethnic identities within India or supranational "South Asian" or "Asian" identities or religious identities undoubtedly exist, not least in the self-construction by individual members of the community, this is not (at least as yet) the case either with self-identification as reported in surveys or in the popular discourse within their country of adoption.

But this self-identification is hardly static. On the one hand, even among descendants of European immigrants, "symbolic ethnic" identification continues to be surprisingly resilient, perhaps because ethnic identities allow people to navigate contradictory American values of choice, individuality, and community.<sup>116</sup> However, recent empirical evidence suggests that ethnic attrition can be quite rapid over generations—more in some than others. By the second generation, overall rates of ethnic identification drop to below 84 percent for Chinese, Koreans, and Filipinos; 76 percent for Indians; and 68 percent for Japanese. For third-generation Asian children, the corresponding rates vary from 48 percent to 66 percent, but are just 36 percent for Indians.<sup>117</sup> Whether the former or the latter trend prevails is likely to be shaped as much by domestic trends within the United States as by the patterns of future immigration from India.



## Entrepreneurship by The Numbers

Earlier chapters have detailed the historical and geographical patterns of the presence of Indian Americans in their new country, as well as the processes of adapting and making new lives. A classic view of immigrant socioeconomic mobility includes making a transition from marginal to mainstream occupations, also encapsulating shifts from ethnic enterprise to well-paid, high-status professions. Of course, some entrepreneurs, immigrants or not, have always become very wealthy in ways that pursuing professional occupations does not typically support, but even those newly rich may have struggled for social status.

The Indian-American case is somewhat different from past immigrant stories, though, because of who came and when. As has been laid out in the preceding chapters, this was and is, on the whole, an exceptionally educated population, and it came at a time (and partly because) of a major technological change in the U.S. economy, the information technology boom.<sup>1</sup> These circumstances have given the entrepreneurial activities of Indian Americans a special place in their story, accelerating their rise in an America that has itself been undergoing rapid economic change. For example, of eighty-one U.S. startup companies valued at \$1 billion or more, but not publicly traded as of January 1, 2016, just over half (44) had at least one immigrant founder. Of sixty-one such immigrant founders or co-founders, fourteen were of Indian origin.<sup>2</sup>

Entrepreneurship has iconic status in the United States. It more than simply signifies jobs or wealth; it has a deep cultural resonance, since it reflects the individualism that has been the hallmark of this country's self-image. Entrepreneurship is a pathway to assimilation, one that (as this chapter and the next will show) Indian Americans have trodden especially well. Indeed, the importance of enterprise is a longstanding aspect of thought and action in America. Writing as long ago as the first half of the nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville opined, "It may be said that, in the United States, there is no limit to the inventiveness of man to discover the ways of increasing wealth and to satisfy the public's needs. The most enlightened inhabitants of each district constantly use their knowledge to make new discoveries to increase the general prosperity, which, when