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**MOTHERS' WORK IN SCHOOLING CHILDREN:  
PERSPECTIVES FROM IMMIGRANT  
ASIAN-INDIAN MOTHERS**

A Thesis in  
Curriculum and Instruction

By  
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## **Abstract**

The task of educating children to meet the demands of the twenty-first century has become a huge challenge for parents and teachers in the United States. For many immigrant parents who for better economic opportunities come “voluntarily” (Ogbu, 1991a) to the United States, their children’s schooling becomes of primary importance to them. In the case of immigrant parents from non-western countries, e.g. from Asia, many of whom are viewed as “minorities” in the United States, cultural differences between themselves and mostly white American school personnel often create stress and anxiety for parents as they become concerned about their children’s schooling.

For many immigrant mothers, unfamiliarity with the American educational system may raise concerns about the effectiveness of their role as mothers, causing them to worry about their “mothering for schooling” (Griffith, 1995; Griffith & Smith, 2005) work and about how to help their children adjust between culturally divergent home and school environments. As an immigrant, minority Asian-Indian mother, and early childhood educator, I can personally relate to such a transitional and cultural dilemma.

In the United States, public schools and other educational institutions have not been adequately prepared to provide culturally responsive environments to accommodate parents and children of divergent backgrounds. Unsettling tensions about “public” schooling continue to persist between mostly white American educators and parents of non-mainstream cultural groups. In a country of innumerable minority and immigrant cultures, strategic considerations regarding “culturally responsive teaching” (Gay, 2000) practices within public schools have been rather slow. In addition, many schools have not been able to adequately involve immigrant minority parents to negotiate cultural

differences between their home and their children's school. Even definitions and meanings of childhood as understood in majority schools create barriers and limitations for alternative expressions, thus enforcing a code of silence among immigrant, minority children and parents.

Following the implementation of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, several professionals from India began to migrate to the United States. However, despite their good English language skills, many Asian-Indian immigrants found their social interaction patterns different from the mainstream white American cultural norms.

Regarding children's schooling, Asian-Indian immigrant parents, including the mothers of this study often find themselves unprepared, not so much with the academic aspects of schooling, but more with the social aspects of white American schools. Many mothers may find themselves spending more time and energy teaching their children about ethnic pride, cultural heritage, language, food, family structure etc.

There are not enough studies focusing on immigrant minority women, and even less on those pertaining to immigrant Asian-Indian women, who are the focus of this study. Despite the fact they are considered to be part of a 'model minority' immigrant group, adequate attention has not been bestowed upon their mothering for schooling work.

Based on my own experiences as a voluntary immigrant, minority Asian-Indian mother, the frustration of keeping up with one's own cultural and family goals, while simultaneously staying connected to unfamiliar white American schools, can be very taxing on the mothers. More so, in cases when the mothers find that their children's

schooling experience and educational success largely rests upon their work as primary care givers.

Using a feminist lens, supported by focus group and follow up interviews, this study examines and analyzes Asian-Indian mothers' everyday challenges of schooling children as they navigate themselves between culturally divergent contexts; their home, children's white American school and communities at large. In addition, this study also highlights Asian-Indian mothers' creative responses to their everyday social, emotional and cultural tensions in schooling children, which are greatly shaped by their gender, culture, social-class and immigrant minority status. More importantly, my collaborations as an insider within this group, and some previous pilot research study that I have done, forms an important background context for this dissertation.

This qualitatively designed study is geared to be subjective in nature, facilitating interpretation of the multiple realities of immigrant Asian Indian women's mothering for schooling experiences, while allowing me, the researcher to be part of the emerging study. Feminist interview research as a method of investigation has provided strategies to theorize the lived reality and highlight the emerging thoughts, ideas and behaviors, which shaped Asian-Indian women's mothering for schooling process.

Exploring Asian-Indian women's mothering for schooling experiences from a feminist perspective helps developing understanding of their everyday mothering for schooling work lives, alongside addresses issues of gender, culture social class and immigrant status. In addition, feminist theoretical explorations while highlighting women's oppression, seeks to analyze and create awareness about the conditions that shape women's lives.

This study is not meant for comparing immigrant minority Asian-Indian mothers with other women belonging to minority or majority groups. Instead, it is designed to facilitate mothers to share their stories and in the process bring to the forefront mothers' often taken for granted voices, vulnerabilities, strengths, weakness as well as experiential and situated knowledge. Last but not least, the ultimate purpose of this study is to create understanding about Asian-Indian mothers and their work in schooling children.

Focus group interviews and follow-up interviews served as data generating method for use within this qualitative design. It involved two groups, one consisting of six mothers and the other consisting of four mothers. Mothers in both the groups were familiar with each other as well as the subject matter. The group participation which defines focus-group interviews is a highly efficient data collection procedure, and helped in gathering more information in a short period of time. Focus group interviews were followed by additional one on one in-depth interview, in which two mothers from each group were selected to participate. The four mothers were selected for follow-up interviews because of the choices they made in response to their mothering for schooling work and for the kind of changes they made for themselves.

I was drawn to this method of inquiry, because of its interpretive qualities, that emphasized the process, rather than the product. Although attention was directed to the strengths and weaknesses of a life experiences, unlike the nature of developmental theories, issues of incorporating validity and reliability were less emphasized. Since issues of subjectivity and reflexivity are on going, fragmented and interrupted, this study does not focus on the "fixed" truths.

All of the mothers who participated in the focus group interviews were married and resided in a small rural campus town in Mid-Atlantic section of the United States of America. Mothers who participated in this study came from two-parent, Hindu, middle and upper middle class families in India, except for one mother who hails from Sri Lanka but in every sense like a South Indian woman. They come from diverse families, from different parts of India. Besides English they speak multiple languages, representing many states in India. They are part of a growing Asian-Indian community consisting of nearly hundred families, spanning a wide age range, from senior citizens to small babies. The community has been spread out, families live in several areas of town and majority of their children attended their local community public schools. Majority of the adults in the community, mostly spouses, are associated with the local university as professionals, in academic, administrative and research capacities.

Each focus group interview was divided into four phases. *Phase one* was centered on Asian-Indian mothers' childhood and early schooling experiences in India. *Phase two* was centered on their mothering for schooling experiences. In *Phase three*, mothers focused on the future. Finally, in *Phase four*, mothers made their concluding remarks and reiterated their mothering for schooling beliefs and opinions. However, the boundaries between the four phases were fluid, in the sense they did impose any restrictions or limitations in mothers' participation. In other words, the boundaries between the four phases were loose, and in many ways proved to be quite purposeful in extrapolating the mothering for schooling phenomena. Fluid boundaries were beneficial to everyone in sharing their stories, for the participants as well as for me, the researcher,

and helped us stay focused, without getting sidetracked from the research topic. Many of these stories are presented in this thesis.

By narrating their stories, mothers of this study, were able to interpret their mothering for schooling experiences and transmit their ideas based on those experiences. Being voluntary immigrants meant rethinking their mothering for schooling agenda as well as redefining their ethnic understandings of mothering, schooling and mothering for schooling work. As first generation immigrants and educated women, who had their early and elementary education in their country of origin; unfamiliarity with the American educational system raised concerns about schooling rituals, teaching/learning philosophies, and organizational priorities prevalent among American public schools in their local community.

Unlike mainstream white American mothers, whose culture in general parallels with that of the public schools, first generation immigrants many who came as adults, found themselves faced with misunderstanding and confusion about their children's schooling. While trying to get adjusted to new social and cultural environments, many mothers also worried about the impositions of the school culture on their mothering work as well as on their children's personality development. Hence the frustration of keeping up with one's own cultural and family goals, while simultaneously staying connected to unfamiliar white American schools, made their work very taxing. In addition, differences in terms of their color, ethnicity, language, food, religion, values beliefs and family structure etc. forced them to overcome cultural barriers and also negotiate cultural differences.



Mothers found that their perceptions about schools and schooling as experienced in the past were very different, quite unlike their perceptions about American public schools and schooling rituals. In order to adequately respond to their present mothering for schooling experiences, they found themselves reflecting on their past schooling experiences to make sense of their present experiences. They used their past experiences as a resource to sustain themselves with their everyday challenges of mothering work. Through retrospection mothers negotiated the past with the present and even reinvented the wheel. The study revealed mothers became learners again, to find that their mothering for schooling work is subject to time, space and circumstance. Hence, they used their past experiences as a resource, to integrate their past with their present and future lives in America.

Mothers' stories revealed that contextual and cultural differences between home and school compelled them to formulate their mothering for schooling work as a mediated process. Mothers found themselves doing supplementary mothering for schooling work, to make up for the deficits created within culturally defined environments, like their children's American schools, as well as their Indian homes. In addition, it also meant, mothers investing more time and physical energy, extending themselves beyond their homes, into schools, local communities, mainstream community as well as their own ethnic community.

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**Mothers' work in schooling their children:  
Perspectives from immigrant, minority Asian-Indian women**

**Chapter 1**

**Introduction**

Beginning with statement of the problem, purpose of the study, terms, research questions and significance of the study are introduced in this chapter.

**Statement of the Problem**

The task of educating children to meet the demands of the twenty-first century has become a huge challenge for parents and teachers in the United States. For many immigrant parents who come to the United States for better economic opportunities, their children's schooling becomes of primary importance to them. Their child's (children's) school serves as a significant and primary domain outside their homes that is representative of the mainstream society. However, not all schools and teacher education programs are able to implement their academic programs with "a multicultural vision" (Lin, 2005, pg. 237), as a result of which schooling children in American public schools and preschools can be quite burdensome for immigrant parents.

In the case of "voluntary" (Ogbu, 1991a) immigrant parents from non-western countries, e.g. from Asia, many of whom are viewed as "minorities" in the United States, cultural differences between themselves and mostly white American school personnel

often create stress and anxiety for parents as they become concerned about their children's "adjustment and well being" (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003, pg. 2). Especially in the case of mothers, who often serve as primary caregivers, as minority women, many of them may find their "mothering for schooling" (Griffith, 1995; Griffith & Smith, 2005) work to be very demanding and exhausting. Differences in terms of their color, ethnicity, language, food, religion, values beliefs and family structure etc. sometimes lead to conflicts and misunderstandings between their children's school teachers and themselves.

Preparation for children's schooling process at home and elsewhere can become burdensome, as it may have to include learning to overcome cultural barriers as well as negotiate cultural differences between those contexts. As immigrant minority mothers, it may become incumbent upon them, to execute their "mothering for schooling" work and teach their young children about ethnic pride, cultural heritage, language, food etc., and in the process help them participate successfully in educational and social environments. As an immigrant Asian-Indian mother I can bear witness to such a challenge.

In the United States, public schools and other educational institutions have not been adequately prepared to provide culturally responsive environments to accommodate parents and children of divergent backgrounds. Unsettling tensions about "public" schooling continue to persist between mostly white American educators and parents of non-mainstream cultural groups. In a country of innumerable minority and immigrant cultures, strategic considerations regarding "culturally responsive teaching" (Gay, 2000) practices within public schools have been rather slow. In addition, many schools have not been able to adequately involve immigrant minority parents to negotiate cultural

differences between their home and their children's school. Even definitions and meanings of childhood as understood in majority schools create barriers and limitations for alternative expressions, thus enforcing a code of silence among immigrant, minority children and parents.

Contextual changes impede immigrant parents' and children's adaptation processes, requiring them to change their cultural ways of thinking and living. For example, first generation immigrants from Asia and Latin America, many of them who come as adults, find themselves faced with a cultural dilemma and "identity confusion" (Arnett, 2002, p.774). For many immigrant mothers too, fulfilling their mothering and child rearing duties while trying to get adjusted to new social and cultural environments can lead to unwanted stress and anxiety.

For many mothers, unfamiliarity with the American educational system may raise concerns about the effectiveness of their own role as mothers, causing them to worry about their children's adjustment process between two culturally divergent environments--home and school. Mothers may also worry about the impositions of the school culture on their children's personality development. Moreover, children's vulnerability may adversely affect mothers' educative role, many of whom bear the burden of teaching children what they supposedly missed in school.

Following the implementation of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, several professionals from India began to migrate to the United States. However, despite their good English language skills, many Asian-Indian immigrants found their social interaction patterns different from the mainstream white American cultural norms (Ramisetty-Mikler, 1993).

Regarding children's schooling, Asian-Indian immigrant parents often find themselves unprepared, not so much with the academic aspects of schooling, but more with the social aspects of white American school. As an immigrant, minority Asian-Indian mother myself, and early childhood educator, I can relate personally to such a transitional and cultural dilemma.

These and others impending issues pertaining to Asian-Indian minority mothers' work in schooling children will be explored in this dissertation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is centered on immigrant, minority Asian-Indian families, living in a small rural town in the Mid-Atlantic section of the United States. Specifically, this study focused on Asian-Indian women and their work as mothers in schooling young children. Based on my own experiences as a voluntary immigrant, minority Asian-Indian mother, the frustration of keeping up with one's own cultural and family goals, while simultaneously staying connected with unfamiliar white American schools, can be very taxing on the mothers. More so, in cases when the mothers find that their children's schooling experience and educational success largely rests upon their work as primary care givers.

Using a feminist lens, supported by focus group and follow up interviews, this study examines and analyzes Asian-Indian mothers everyday challenges of schooling children as they navigate themselves between culturally divergent contexts; their home, children's white American school and communities at large. In addition, this study also highlights Asian-Indian mothers' creative responses to their everyday social, emotional

and cultural tensions in schooling children, which are greatly shaped by their gender, culture, social-class and immigrant minority status.

This study is not meant for comparing immigrant minority Asian-Indian mothers with other women belonging to minority or majority groups. Instead, it is designed to carry over their “voices of engagement, responsibility, investment, involvement, and first-hand knowledge” (Ayers, 1989, p.2), from their homes into the academic world and communities at large. Last but not least, the ultimate purpose of this study is to create understanding about Asian-Indian mothers, while celebrating “the particular, the uncommon and the unpredictable” (Ayers, 1989, p. 4).

My collaborations as an insider within this group, and some previous pilot research study that I have done, forms an important background context for this dissertation.

### **Explanation of Terms and Phrases as understood in this Study**

- “*Culture* consists of the beliefs, behaviors, norms, attitudes, social arrangements, and forms of expression that form a describable pattern in the lives of members of a community or institution” (LeCompte & Schensel, 1999, p. 21).

Sonia Nieto’s (1995) definition of *Culture* also applies to this study.

According to her, “*Culture* can be understood as the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and world view created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class,

and/or religion, and how these are transformed by those who share them”  
(p.138).

- The term *Asian-Indian* is an ethnic category formulated by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1980, to represent immigrants arriving from the South Asian country India. The term Asian-Indian is specifically used in the U. S. to differentiate them from Native Americans, who are also known as Indians.
- The term *Mothering* as formulated by (Griffith & Smith, 1990) has been used within the context of this study. It refers to “a work process involving time, effort, and the use and management of family resources within definite material conditions” (Griffith & Smith, 1990, p. 3).
- *Schooling* is a “formalized and restrictive process of cultural transmission” (Pai, 1990, pg. 38), as well as a highly institutionalized and bureaucratized process.
- The concept of *Mothering for Schooling*, formulated by Canadian sociologist and feminist educator Allison Griffith, served as a significant point of departure and has been used within the context of this study. Griffith (1995) used *Mothering for Schooling* to include “the relationship between mothering work in the family and the social organization of schooling” (p.1). For the current study, the concept *Mothering for Schooling*, needed to be elaborated to further include the following:
  - A process of preparation for schooling children, where Asian-Indian mothers do “extra work” to negotiate contextual and cultural differences, as they navigate themselves between divergent cultural

enclaves, such as home, children's school and the community at large.

- It is a process of negotiation between cultural adaptation and cultural loyalty, which includes mothers' strengths and weaknesses, as well as their creative responses to everyday challenges of schooling children.
- It involves both learning and teaching, and is greatly influenced by who we are, as women, our immigrant status, particularly as first generation Asian-Indian women, family priorities, our own past and present schooling experiences.

### **Research Questions**

1. How did Asian-Indian mothers make sense about schooling children?
2. As first generation immigrant women, how did Asian-Indian mothers prepare themselves for their mothering for schooling work? What did they do?
3. What aspects of their mothering for schooling work experience did they find to be challenging?
4. How did they cope and respond to those challenges?
5. How did issues such as gender, culture, social economic status shape and influence Asian-Indian mothers' mothering for schooling work?

## **Significance of the Study**

Understanding immigrants from India represents an important challenge to social scientists, educators and American society at large. The present study will create awareness about the dynamic role of immigrant Asian-Indian mothers in young children's schooling. It will help to elaborate and expand the problem of cultural dilemmas among immigrant families and draw attention to their everyday tensions. It will also highlight their creative responses to those tensions as they try to provide the best educational opportunities for their children. In addition, this study will raise awareness about mothering amidst two or more cultures.

For early childhood/elementary teachers and teacher educators, this study will highlight how Asian-Indian mothers struggle between cultural adaptation and cultural loyalty. It will help them better interpret how Asian-Indian mothers' fulfill their obligations towards their families and community schools, particularly within two or more different cultural environments. It will provide opportunities to improve their practice and find ways to accommodate the cultural values of the Asian-Indian and other immigrant minority families.

For institutes of higher learning, this study will benefit those who are proponents of cross-cultural research, feminist perspectives and women's studies. In addition, it will help school-curriculum planners, school board members to develop sensitivity towards immigrant minority cultural groups.

In terms of improving diversity policies, this study will signify the importance of culturally responsive teaching and learning practices, intercultural communication, revision of student-teaching philosophies and teacher preparation goals. More



importantly, it will draw attention to alternate ways of schooling children, as well as the emergence of native culture schools.

Last but not least, it will benefit other immigrant minority Asian-Indian mothers, immigrant Asian Indian children; those born in India as well as those born in the United States. Discovering other people's stories many will feel less odd or isolated.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

In this chapter, literature pertaining to immigrant minority families in relation to their children's schooling is presented. Social and cultural issues about schooling as well as challenges faced by parents, particularly immigrant minority mothers are explored. Attention is focused on mothering and mothering for schooling issues, specifically, with regards to Asian-Indian women/mothers.

The United States as a land of opportunities and continues to attract wide eyed attention from people all over the world. In fact, for immigrant families who voluntarily come to the United States "immigration" is an investment in itself, as well as a resource worthy of exploration (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003).

Many research studies (Caplan, Choy & Whitmore, 1991; Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003; Gibson & Bhachu, 1991; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Pong, 2003; Zhou & Bankston, 1998) indicate immigrants arrive in the United States to avail economic and educational benefits, for themselves and their children. In the case of immigrants with school age children, their "immigrant" status and "optimism" (Kao & Tienda, 1995) has resulted in many of them relying and having high expectations regarding educational institutions i.e. American public schools and preschool programs. In fact, for many of them their children's future success depends on the American schooling process.

At the present time, a large number of school districts across the country consist of immigrant children (M. Suarez-Orozco, 2000). Researchers, Suárez-Orozco &

Suárez-Orozco, (2001), have explored the relationship between immigrant children and education, and state “For immigrant children, schooling also serves as the primary point of sustained and close contact with a crucial institution of the society their parents chose to join” (pg. 345). However, there are several unexplored areas about immigrant families that could be carefully examined. For example, studies about immigrant mothers’ roles and investments in their children’ growth and development, as well as effects of those assumed investment on the mothers.

Very few researchers have made efforts to understand the challenges of “female migration” (Berger, 2004, pg. xvi). There are not enough studies focusing on the “fluid entities” (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; pg. 549) of immigrant minority women entering the United States, and even less on those pertaining to immigrant Asian-Indian women (Gupta, 1998), who are the focus of this study. Studies focusing on how immigrant women cope with their “hybrid ways of life, (which) resemble neither those in the place of origin nor the place of destination” (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997, p. 549) have not been adequately explored either.

### **Immigration, Social and Cultural Issues of Schooling**

Immigrants, those who come voluntarily to the United States, share certain commonality with mainstream American society, but on many levels are uniquely different from them (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003). Immigrants come from a variety of linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. Consequently, as “outsiders” many immigrant families encounter unexpected situations for which they are least prepared.

In the case of immigrant parents and children, following the implementation of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, it is estimated one in five American children belong to families where at least one parent was born outside the United States. Apparently, these numbers pertaining to immigrant parents are likely to increase over the next several years (Hernandez & Charney, 1998).

Based on their preliminary findings of a five year longitudinal study following four hundred children from five different countries such as, China, Mexico, Central America, Dominican Republic and Haiti, educators and researchers Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) revealed “The future character of American society and economy will be intimately related to the adaptation of the children of today’s immigrants”(p.3).

Until not too long ago, immigration studies in the United States were either centered on European immigrants or on involuntary (Ogbu, 1991a) African migration. Lately, the trend has shifted. During the past several years, immigrants entering the United States are mostly “people of color”, arriving from countries in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (C. Suarez-Orozco, 2000). According to U. S. Census three-fourths of the total immigrant population for the year 2001 consists of Latin American and Asian immigrant population.

However, comparatively, little research has been conducted on Asian immigration, and even less on immigrants from S. Asia such as India. Studies about Asian-Indian immigrants are few and far between, (Asher 1999; Dasgupta 1989; Gibson & Ogbu 1991; Helweg & Helweg 1990; Khandelwal 2001; Rangaswamy 2000; Rayaprol 1998; Saran 1987-89; Segal 1991; Sircar 2001).

In the last decade several researchers (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003; Gibson, 1989; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; C. Saurez-Orozco 2000; M. Suarez-Orozco 2000; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 2001), have studied immigration, education and family related issues and have expressed thoughts about the effects of immigration on the lives of immigrant minority families and children.

In the case of immigrant minority (Ogbu, 1991a) parents and children's schooling, besides adapting and coping with their new found status, they are faced with the added responsibility of dealing with culturally divergent and unfamiliar schools that many of their children attend (Spindler & Spindler, 1994). Moreover, adequate attention in the research literature has not been given towards immigrant mothers, who often serve as primary care givers. Many of mothers find themselves forced to rethink their role and family priorities, especially with regards to their children's schooling

“Schools are typically the first setting of sustained contact with the new culture for newcomer children” (C. Suarez-Orozco, 2001; pg. 579). All parents, whether they are white Americans, voluntary or involuntary immigrant minorities, are interested in their children's educational pursuits and want to help them succeed (Dauber & Epstein, 1989; Phelan, Cao & Davidson, 1992). However, in the case of many immigrant minority parents, despite their optimism and faith in the American educational system, they are not able to fully participate in their children's schooling process (Concha-Delgado, 1993). Although many of them recognize the importance of engaging themselves in their children's scholastic achievements (Epstein, 1995), they feel limited in their understandings of American public schools. Hence exploring the necessary resources for

successful schooling as well as “bridging the distances” (Valdes, 1996) between their culturally diverse selves and white American teachers poses a bigger challenge for many parents.

It is estimated that in the United States immigrant children population has advanced at a very fast rate (Landale & Oropesa, 1995). At the present time, almost three million children born elsewhere, and 11 million children are born in the U.S. to parents who were “foreign-born” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). In addition, research studies pertaining to immigrant families and trends, and minority children’s education have also revealed significant links between their homes and community schools, as well as to the multiple ways schools influence minority children’s and their parents’ lives (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Gibson, 1991a, b; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Landale & Oropesa, 1995; Mehra, 2003).

Educational endeavors within the United States, for the most part continue to be centered on mainstream white cultural norms. Hence, irrespective of their diverse social and cultural backgrounds, many immigrant and minority children are expected to conform accordingly. As anthropologists and educators, Spindler & Spindler (1993) mention,

“The problem in America and in American schools seems to be that in order to establish some kind of identity, mainstream American culture poses itself as dominant, supreme, moral, ‘right,’ to be observed, and to be taught at all costs to everyone” (pg. 43).

The influence of family and parental support plays a significant role in children’s educational experience (Chavkin, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1993; Lareau, 1989). Parents and teachers are considered to be partners in children’s schooling process (Epstein,

1992a). However, not all parents share equal partnership, “the link between home and school that has remained standard for white middle-class families has not been the case for all children” (Chavkin, 1993, pg. 4).

In the case of immigrant minority families and children, schools and educational institutions operating within the United States, have not been able to provide culturally responsive environments to accommodate divergent views. Many parents often find themselves to be disillusioned and excluded from the “sacred mainstream”, thus making their schooling responsibilities and experience both challenging and frustrating. Consequently, many immigrant parents find themselves to be less secure and less confident of their role in schooling children (Caplan et al., 1991). Limited by commonalities between themselves and main stream American educators some of them even fear that their children will be pressured to conform to the majority school culture as a price for educational success (Gibson & Bhachu, 1991). In the case of immigrant mothers, many of them find themselves struggling to make sense of their role in their children’s schooling. To the extent, the mothers are expected to serve as “the agent of the school in the home” (Griffith & Smith, 1990; p. 17).

Early childhood education researchers, Janice Hale’s (1992) study about African-American early childhood education program, and Shirley Kessler’s (1992) theoretical explorations about the of the social context of the early childhood curriculum, lend relevance to immigrant mothers’ formulations of mothering and schooling priorities. They also shed light on the social aspects of public schooling and as well as to its far reaching affects on mothers’ role constructions, as well as their children’s personality development.

In a 1992 study about African-American early childhood education program, feminist theorist and early childhood education researcher Janice E. Hale, questioned whether it would be possible for African-American children to make positive strides in their educational pursuits without “recognizing their culture” (p. 205) and concluded that bi-cultural children like the African-Americans can succeed in their educational endeavors, provided they gain full understanding of the “codes of power” (Delpit, 1988) that permeate within predominantly white schools and educational institutions. With reference to African-American children, she suggested early childhood programs and facilities should opt for the promotion of ethnic continuity instead of intervention.

Feminist theorist and early childhood education researcher Shirley Kessler too, in her efforts to finding ways to help minority families and children alluded to the social context of early childhood curriculum, and suggested looking into “the structural and socio-cultural influences...and the way such factors impact on what is prescribed as developmentally appropriate practices” (Kessler, 1992; p.39). She even alerted educators about the political aspects of early childhood curriculum and emphasized its importance. In addition, she directed attention toward state policies on the curriculum and suggested, educators need to inform themselves and keep themselves updated about state policies. She alluded to African-American literacy theorist, Lisa Delpit’s (1988) argument and mentioned,

“Appropriate education for minority children can only be determined by members of the social groups to which they belong, and that well-meaning white liberals, who tend to emphasize informal, play-oriented practices for young children, are doing children of color a disservice. Members of non-dominant cultures want their children to learn the ‘discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes...(codes of the dominant culture)...so they can succeed’ (p. 83)...the ‘codes of power’ (p.90) they need to enter institutions created by mainstream culture” (p.39).



At a time when children in many technically advanced countries “are envisioned as consumers first, and future citizens in a democracy a distant second or third” (Weiler, 1999, pg. 336) education lends relevance to understanding and developing critical perspectives about some of the atrocities prevalent in the world today. It provides courage, to challenge the human mind and spirit, to problematize and transform our daily life experiences and aim for a better tomorrow---where children and adults will be honored and protected, irrespective of race, class or gender, and provided with basic necessities such as clean air, water and food. In addition, it may be helpful to be reminded of a very poignant message by philosopher Hannah Arendt (1961), when she wrote,

“Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from the ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable” (pg. 196) .

Schools and educational institutions in the United States have not been able to adequately promote or renegotiate cultural diversity. Despite the “browning of America” (Davidson & Phelan, 1993; pg. 1) communications between families and schools have been rather slow and limited; particularly between school officials and immigrant, minority families.

Providing a historical perspective on immigration and its effects on minority children’s schooling, educator and researcher Chavkin (1993) mentioned,

“Immigration resulted in a new task for education---to educate and transform foreigners into Americans. Because of the differences in culture, teachers and

immigrant parents often viewed each other with wariness or distrust. Gradually education moved farther away from the home; professionalism for teachers meant that education was a job for trained specialists and not for amateurs such as poorly educated parents” (pg. 4).

Many researchers have also highlighted that schools can benefit from the vast knowledge base provided by students’ families (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992).

However, efforts in understanding “distinct forms” of family involvement (Epstein, 1995) have not been sufficiently encouraged or explored, either by school officials or institutes of higher learning. Consequently, many ethnically diverse parents find themselves questioning the culturally sensitivity of “developmentally appropriate practices” (Hyun, 1995).

Educational challenges stem from various factors such as cultural differences between the two groups, an immigrant group’s history, as well as schooling practices institutionalized according mainstream white American cultural norms (Davidson & Phelan, 1993). Many public schools as well as early childhood programs have failed to “adequately and equitably reach all children particularly those from poor and ethnically different families” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993; p. 139). Moreover, researchers in higher educational institutions as well as public school authorities have not fully geared themselves to understand how immigrant families make sense of their relationship with those involved within their children’s schools.

For many immigrant parents, opportunities to show and exemplify their strengths and capabilities are rather scare, particularly those who are concerned about their children’s schooling and educational needs. As theorist Delgado-Gaitan (1993) who

specializes in exploring immigrant minority families educational concerns and other related issues mentioned,

“Strategies of parental involvement have historically been based on deficit conceptions of cultures and families, and have thus been aimed at remedying perceived family deficiencies---opportunities to build upon familial cultural strengths for most part have gone untapped” (p. 139)

Cultural assumptions about schooling more often impede than guide parents’ and teachers’ interaction with one another. In the case of many immigrant minority parents, taken for granted, diverse cultural assumptions about schooling affect their engagement and participation in their children’s schools. In addition, educators’ efforts in taking initiatives to create awareness, more importantly in understanding the contributing factors that govern such cultural assumptions have not been properly considered or fully explored.

In the case of immigrants from South Asia, especially first generation immigrants, along with their customs and traditions they bring with them varying ideas about children’s schooling and educational priorities. Although many of them come to the United States, from countries that share a legacy of British colonialism, and are well versed in the English Language (Sandhu, 1997), their beliefs and ideas about the purpose of schooling, parents’ role in children’s schooling tend to be different than many white American parents and school teachers.

“Cultural and ethnic traditions influence the developing child” (Slonim, 1991; pg. 3). Culture and ethnicity play a significant role in immigrant children’s social and personality development. Hence understanding the impact of culture on immigrant children becomes an important proposition for teachers and other school officials.

“The culture in which we were raised strongly affects our attitudes, beliefs, values, and, in turn, our behavior” (Slonim, 1991; pg. 5). Cultural differences can also cause communication barriers between minority parents and majority white American teachers. The case is made that the values, attitudes, and behaviors taught at home are the basis for how children learn to learn (Neito, 1995).

Despite the fact that communication with parents is considered to be the cornerstone of “developmentally appropriate practices” many parents, particularly ethnically diverse parents find themselves raising doubts about early childhood policy makers and curriculum developers regarding cultural sensitivity of those practices (Hyun, 1995). More so, when they fear their children may acquire values that are in conflict with their own (Gibson, 1989).

Efforts in establishing mutual understanding between educators and minority parents to negotiate emerging cultural differences have been rather slow and far between. Statistics show that many traditional white, middle class families have found ways to be involved with their children’s schooling (Chavkin, 1993). One of the reasons being, the beneficial perception of parental involvement in the educational process is a by-product of main-stream culture prevalent in American schools today (Shoho, 1994).

Cultural differences between immigrant minority homes and white American school generate interaction difficulties in the classrooms that many of the children participate. Studies of African-American, Mexican-American, and Native-Hawaiian, and Native-American communities have documented differences between school children’s interaction styles at home and in the classroom, and demonstrated how such verbal and

non-verbal communication styles can lead to different and often conflicting expectations with the classrooms (Delgado-Gaitan 1987; Heath 1982,) to name a few.

### **Immigrant Women and Children's Schooling**

The term “immigrant woman”, according to Canadian researcher Ng (1986) creates an “image of woman who is visibly different (e.g. from a different ethnic or cultural background); who cannot speak English properly; who does not behave appropriately in public situations; and who occupies a certain position in occupational hierarchy....the term also implies a certain class relation” (p. 13).

Sociologist Dorothea Schneider has meticulously chronicled the history about women immigrants to the United States. According to Schneider (2003), historical data pertaining to immigration and immigrants entering the United States were mostly centered on male experiences. Early nineteenth and twentieth century historical accounts focused more on “his” stories. Women were either excluded or mentioned during a crisis. In her article Schneider alluded to woman historian Donna Gabaccia who wrote, “Most histories of immigrants in the United States, begin as experiences of migratory men disguised as genderless humans” (1992, p.2). Apparently, even pioneer historians such as Oscar Handlin, did not think it was important to include women in his historical explorations. Fortunately, it was only after the emergence of pioneer women like Jane Adams and Lillian Wald, during the early part of the twentieth century, that women immigrants began to receive support and attention, most from other women.

Often times, many women immigrants who are married, just follow their immigrant spouses, voluntarily or otherwise, many others come bearing their children's

“future prospects” (Berger 2004, pg. xvi) in mind, and a few women come for better educational opportunities and stay on in the United States to become immigrants.

Studies pertaining to immigrant minorities, specifically in areas of elementary and secondary education, have focused on the family as a whole unit (Delgado-Gaitan 1992; Gibson, 1989; Mehra 1998). Although, they have addressed issues pertaining to the role of mothers and fathers, they have not drawn attention to the gendered lives of mothers, or taken into consideration issues pertaining to mothers’ unpaid work within the private confines of their homes, particularly from their own perspectives.

Children’s vulnerability adversely affects parents, especially the mothers who often take the role of primary caregivers. In the United States, children from diverse backgrounds are expected to accept standards of behavior at school which are quite different from those that govern them at home (Gibson, 1989). As their children’s first teachers, many of the mothers know what is best for their children, but may not be able to translate that knowledge to the children who are in entirely new educational contexts--- American schools. Having not attended school in the U.S.A., they have inadequate understanding about the social aspects of American schooling (Pai, 1991). According to educational theorist Pai (1991), immigrants from Asian countries are culturally conditioned to be polite, passive and obedient. Their belief in relying on will power makes it difficult for them to ask for help. Other barriers that could be included are, economic survival, control of participatory structures, uncertainty about responsibility for failure, (Fruchter, 1984).

## **Feminist Perspectives about Mothering**

Historically, feminism has evolved around issues about women and women's experiences. According to early childhood educator and researcher Lisa Goldstein, (1998) "Feminism is about women making themselves heard, claiming what is theirs, taking care of themselves" (pg. 56). Although feminism is not primarily about children, they play a significant role in the lives of women.

"Biology has inextricably linked women and children" (Goldstein, 1998; pg. 53). Developing understanding of women's lives whether as mothers or teachers, requires looking into daily experiences and examining ways in which they are represented within the boundaries of private and public spheres (Stanley & Wise, 1989). Feminist theorists through their in-depth analysis while highlighting women's oppression, have also created awareness about the conditions, which shape women's and children's lives.

The fact that only women can give birth to children has greatly shaped the evolution and history of the experience of being woman. Firestone, (1970) asserts that women's ability to reproduce has been biologically linked to their oppression. Evidently, over time and across cultures, the fact that women carry and give birth to children, has made them responsible to become primary caregivers (Freedman, 1992), and "limited their potential for advancement, their education, the parameters and possibilities of their lives (Goldstein, 1998).

Historically, in the United States, women had to prove themselves to be good mothers and good housewives in order to attain respect and recognition. In seventeenth century, Europe Enlightenment thinkers suggested that women should be educated to become better mothers (Lerner, 1993). Until the nineteenth century women were

constrained within the private sphere and education was suggested only to enhance their abilities to become “good” wives and mothers (Goldstein, 1998). Apparently women are consistently devalued, “a disturbing phenomenon that is visible cross-culturally” (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974).

Apparently, such understandings of women and their role are indicative that even the notion of mothering has always been a contested terrain in the U. S. (Glen 1994). “Mothering roles link women indelibly; to biological processes and private home spheres” (Ortner 1974, p.36). Historically in keeping with the patriarchal assumptions, in the mainstream white culture, perceptions of mothering have always centered on biological representations of women, thus assigning woman parenting responsibilities of care and nurturance.

Also, since many mothers initiate their children’s schooling process within their home environments, mothering is not limited to women’s homes but extends beyond, to include their children’s school as well. However, although the population has diversified in the last few years, especially in the public schools, alternative interpretations of mothering have either remained unnoticed or unrecognized.

From the standpoint of women who are mothers, mothering may be defined as “a work process involving time, effort, and the use and management of family resources within definite material conditions” (Griffith & Smith, 1990; p.3), and is inclusive of the daily activities pertaining to young children’s schooling.

Mothering practices vary from one cultural group to another. Whether Indian or American, mothering issues cause great controversy. Glen (1994) proposed to look at



mothering as a historically and culturally variable relationship, and alludes to Jagger's (1983) definition of mothering "in which one individual nurturers and cares for another".

Feminist writers have tried to shift the biological emphasis of mothering into the social. The most influential of feminist theorist was Nancy Chodrow. According to Chodorow (1978),

"The reproduction of women's mothering is the basis for the reproduction of women's location and responsibilities in the domestic sphere....They thus contribute to the perpetuation of their own social roles and position in the hierarchy of gender" (pg. 208-9).

Contrary to Chodorow's (1978) theorizing of mothering through instinct centered on psychoanalytical object relations theory, Sara Ruddick (1980) on the hand focused on the philosophical dimensions of mothering and emphasized the practice of mothering, as in preserving life through fostered growth, free of conflict. Apparently although both Chodrow (1978) and Ruddick (1980) denounce mother's responsibility for primary care giving, the idea of mothering as a maternal responsibility seems to prevail universally.

Unfortunately in a patriarchal society, women's experiences of mothering are used against them for oppressive purposes and to create gender barriers and gender inequalities between men and women, as well as between adults and children, and have been extended to public institutions such as schools and other educational, social and judicial institutions. Mothering is a social and cultural process and "presents a special challenge to immigrant women" (Berger, 2004; pg. 21). Although alternative patterns of mothering existed in the U. S. they were not acknowledged as they were not representative of white "mothering" patterns, even when many African American women were involved in "mothering" white children.

When slavery was abolished, alternate patterns of mothering were overlooked. To the extent that African American women and other minority women, those women “who were excluded from the dominant cult of domesticity” (Glen 1994; pg. 5) disapproved and challenged the generalized white definitions of mothering. Instead, they opted for their own definitions of diverse mothering central to their lives.

Migration can create hurdles for married women and mothers, “the burden may tilt disproportionately onto the shoulders of women who may be overloaded by the responsibility of performing too many roles” (Berger 2004; pg. 21). Apparently mothering is centered on political controversy and is constructed differently by women of different races.

Social class issues too were very much part of the mothering phenomenon in the United States. To the extent that, immigration laws were implemented based on social class; thus forcing undocumented poor Latina mothers to choose between legal status of residency and public benefits for their children (Chang, as cited in Glen 1994).

Last but not least, cultural disjuncture between minority mothers and majority white schools can sometimes adversely force them to choose between their own mothering practices with those perceived by the majority white American school culture in schooling young children (Pai 1990; Neito 1995; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey 2000).

### **Feminist Perspectives of Mothering for Schooling**

Education and feminism share common bonds in empowering all people---men, women, adults and children, and remain united in advocating “full expressions of human

potential” (Gaskell & McLaren, 1987). Feminist scholarship is slowly being recognized for pursuing research endeavors that help rethink and reevaluate existing theories and principles of education. Drawing attention to women’s social, cultural and emotional experiences and “ways of knowing” (Belenky, et al., 1986), feminist scholars have been able to create understanding about the connectedness between women and children (Arendt 1961; Chodorow 1978; David 1980; Noddings 1984).

Canadian Sociologist Alison Griffith (1995) explored the relationship between mothering work in the family and the social organization of schooling and mentioned that women’s lives are shaped and enmeshed in their children’s schooling experiences. Feminist sociologists Alison Griffith and Dorothy Smith (Griffith 1995; Griffith & Smith, 1990; Griffith & Smith, 2005; Smith, 1986; 1988; 1998; Smith & Griffith, 1990) have explored mothering for schooling issues extensively.

Feminist scholarship is slowly being recognized for pursuing research endeavors that help rethink and reevaluate existing theories and principles of education. Drawing attention to women’s social, cultural and emotional experiences and “ways of knowing” (Belenky, et al., 1986), feminist scholars have been able to create understanding about the connectedness between women and children (Arendt 1961; Chodorow 1978; David 1989; Noddings 1984).

From a feminist perspective historical data in the American educational system reveals that women have been victims of social restraints and gender inequality (Beatty 1995; Goldstein, 1998; Lerner; 1975). Especially within the fields of early childhood and elementary education which consists of teachers who are mostly women, despite

close association between teachers and children a “hidden agenda” divides them (Goldstein, 1998).

The earliest traditions upon which American Education was formulated, was predominantly male (Goldstein 1998). Even in the field of early childhood education, the process of care and early years of schooling are oriented towards an essentialist perspective of gender. Essentialist perspectives of gender focus on questions of “causality and origin, claiming gender exists prior to the social meanings it generates” (Britzman, 1993; p.31). The essentialist view thus links biology with common sense (Biklen & Pollard, 1993), thus dividing males from females, alongside taking for granted women’s nurturing qualities as innate and natural.

Consequently, essentialists tend to ignore the fact that the social meanings assigned to women, for being women are grossly subordinated, undermining their feminine qualities, while men based on their naturally assigned gender seek entitlement to make important decisions---even regarding women, just because they are men (Britzman, 1993). More importantly, Griffith (1995) alludes to David (1989) and mentions that “schooling is implicated in the ongoing inequality of women—it is an integral part of the family-school nexus” (p.4).

Institutional research and social policies centered on essentialist understanding of gender tend to overlook the social meanings and cultural contexts that account for gender divisions relative to men and women. Consequently, males seek representation within institutions of power; setting standards and cultural conventions in the decision making process, while women get assigned to daily “maintenance” processes, of caring, teaching and mothering. For women who are mothers, Hatch (1995) revealed “the disciplinary

power is concealed in the language of natural and good mothering, creating a disciplinary identity to all mothers” (p.14).

Fortunately within the United States such a stance created motivation behind feminist interest in gender equity that started with great enthusiasm in the 1970’s and emerged from the frustration with the position of adult women in society (Gaskell& McLaren 1987; Tyack & Hansot 1990).

Biklen (1993) further alludes to the limitations of the parental involvement literature as it does not take into consideration the gender inequities or draws attention to parents’ strengths, experiential knowledge or innovative genius. Biklen (1993) in accordance with David (1989) finds it highly problematic when the term “parent” is commonly used and substituted for “mother” thus drawing attention to functional responsibilities alone, while overlooking gender variability and social positioning between mothers and fathers. Besides, gender inequities also permeate within schools and other educational institutions as well.

Biklen (1995), is of the opinion that, “the social construction of gender puts women, as teachers and as mothers, at odds with one another” (p. 129). In addition, Lightfoot (1977) argues that “mothers and teachers are caught in a struggle that reflects the devaluation of both roles in this society” (p. 404).

More importantly, in terms of power, for all women and children, it means being marginalized subjectively; while confronting historical forces and resisting the enforced code of “institutionalized patriarchal discourse” (Britzman, 1989; pg. 18). However, early childhood education researcher Lisa Goldstein (1998) is of the opinion that, “Feminist education cannot afford to ignore children” (pg. 57).

In terms of mothering and schooling, Smith (1986) mentioned, that “the work of mothering done by women in the home is consequential for the school as well as to the child. It is consequential for the school *through* the child” (p. 10). In addition, Griffith & Smith’s (1990) study on mothering revealed that “mothering work coordinates the uncoordinated spheres of schooling and the labor market”. In other words, mothering comprises of a specific work process, activities geared towards the child and institutional relations in which the family is embedded i.e. the process of mandatory public schooling. It requires joint participation of both families and schools.

A study conducted by Griffith and Smith (1987) pertaining to a group of Canadian women, revealed that notions of mothering are seldom explored in terms of work organization, or in association with corresponding social demands that shape those experiences. Interviews revealed mothers felt compelled to take responsibility for large areas of educational work in young children schooling. Some mothers, who could not match the schools perceptions of their role, were displeased about schools’ expectations of them.

Although, mothers work actively within their homes and elsewhere, to stay coordinated with their children’s school activities, the basis of their activity participation varies from one social group to another, subject to ethnicity, class and culture. Griffith & Smith (1990) in their study pertaining to “Mothering, Schooling and Social Class”, mentioned that “women’s everyday world is organized and given shape by determinations and relations which extend beyond it” (p. 5).

Apparently, gender subordination coupled with unpaid and unacknowledged work, forces many mothers to participate in contexts that they cannot choose or control

for e.g. schools, to some extent even their homes. Griffith & Smith's (1990) and Griffith (1995) focus was limited to white women, representing majority cultural groups.

### **Immigrant Asian-Indian Women & their Children's Schooling**

I shall begin with some general information about Asian Indian immigrants in the United States. There are over one million Asian-Indian immigrants living in the United States, and the numbers keep growing every year. They are a diverse group of people, speaking multiple languages, following different religions, and eating different foods. Their points of departure are not just limited to India, but expand globally, from countries such as England, Canada, South Africa, Tanzania, Fiji, Guyana, and Trinidad (Rangaswamy, 2000).

Apparently, according to the laws of the past, in the early 1900's the United States government did not allow married women from India or China to join their spouses who worked in the United States. Asian-Indian men who came to the United States during the period of time were mostly from the state of Punjab in Western India. They came to Western United States, mostly to California and Washington, as well as Canada to work in the farms and orchards located in those areas. Harsh and selective immigration practices left them estranged and distanced from their wives. Ultimately, similarities between Punjabi and Mexican cultures, particularly in terms of food habits, led them to develop relations with Mexican women and establish Mexican-Hindu families (Leonard, 2000). However, since many of the Mexican women were Catholics, they raised their children to be Catholics. Ultimately, Catholic religion and Spanish language led many of the make choices suitable to their lived circumstances (Leonard, 1997). Unfortunately,

that phase of “Indian” immigration is less known and discussed by researchers, or Asian-Indian immigrants themselves. Most Asian-Indians relate to Asian-Indian immigrant history as starting from the year 1965, when many highly educated professionals came to the United States.

Asian-Indian immigrant women who came to the United States, following their marriage, (after the Immigration Act of 1965 was passed), have not garnered much attention. In fact, they became “invisible”, a minority within a minority (Mazumdar, 1997). Despite their cultural conflicts, they have remained loyal to their families, even changed themselves, not so much in their attire, but changed their ways of thinking, to accommodate their family’s needs within the realm of the dominant white American culture. When it comes to their children’s educational success, mothers, particularly first generation mothers, do not leave any stones unturned. In other words, it is on their fragile shoulders that the navigation and implementation of the “model minority” label rests.

Sociologists have labeled Asian immigrants including Asian-Indian immigrants as “model minority”. Researchers think that the label has been assigned to them because of the value they bestow upon educational achievement, strong family support, and willingness to sacrifice and respect authority (Segal, 1991).

Unlike the Koreans, Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, Asian Indian immigrant populations are spread across the United States. While some states like New York, New Jersey, California, Illinois and Texas, have large Asian-Indian immigrant populations, other states do not Asian-Indians can be found in small towns as well, particularly in places where there are universities and research laboratories. However



women feel isolated in small towns from their “home” culture. The states with the highest number of Asian-Indian immigrants reside, are California, New York, New Jersey, Texas and Illinois, mostly in urban areas (Helweg & Helweg, 1990).

Despite the high numbers of Asian-Indian immigrants in some areas across the United States, not much is known about the lived experiences of immigrant Asian-Indian women. Apparently, many of them along with other women from South Asia, i.e. Bangladesh and Pakistan have been “relegated to the margins” (Das-Dasgupta, 1998). Thus their psychologically stressed and gendered lives have received very little attention. It is only recently, not too long ago that many South Asian women, young and old took upon themselves the challenge and chronicled some of their life stories and published them.

The book entitled “A Patch work Shawl: Chronicles of South Asian Women in America” published in the year 1998, is one such book. As immigrant women from S. Asia, many of them through their writing, delved into their past to make sense of their present. Living between two worlds, neither here nor there, they tried to energize their divided lives through forbearance, as well as resistance. In addition, many of the women expressed their frustration by shedding light into the “reconstruction of immigrant patriarchy in a new world”, its effects on South Asian women’s lived experiences in the United States (including Asian-Indian women. As editor Shamita Das-Dasgupta mentions in the introductory chapter of the book, (it) “piece(s) together our experiences, experiences that bridge two worlds, the one left behind and the one newly adopted” (p.12). In other words, many of these women are caught between living the “model

minority” myth, while resisting the same, all of which greatly affects their children lives as well.

Despite their relatively higher educational and occupational status, Asian-Indian immigrants face subtle and not so subtle forms of discrimination (Saran, 1989). As a consequence, even the most successful immigrants from India continue to feel a certain amount of ambivalence about their decision to immigrate to the United States.

Research studies indicate that Asian Indian children do well in school (Gibson 1989; Helweg & Helweg, 1990). However there are hardly any studies in elementary or early childhood education, that have made efforts to study the familial roles of Asian Indian women as mothers to ascertain the reasons behind their children’s educational success. Nor are there any new studies on what Asian-Indian mothers think about their roles in terms of cultural differences between the Asian Indian and American cultures. Studies pertaining to Asian-Indian families with children were (Asher 2001; Gibson 1987; Jambunathan & Counselman 2002; Mehra 1998; Mody 2002; Patel, Power & Bhavnagri 1997; Segal 1991).

Jambunathan & Counselman’s (2002) study was centered on Asian Indian mothers, where they compared the parenting attitudes of Asian-Indian mothers living in the United States with those living in India. Another study “Mothering in a foreign land” (Tummala-Narra, 2004; p.167) was centered on mothers’ own identity formation and transformation. In addition, there was only one study Mody (2002) that explored early childhood issues centered exclusively on young, immigrant, Asian-Indian children. The purpose of Mody’s (2002) study was to explore Asian-Indian children’s cultural identities through play and story while they were attending public school kindergarten.

As an American woman married to an Indian, researcher Susan Laird Mody, lived and taught several years in India, and returned to America. Being away from the U. S. for many years, she had trouble “fitting in” and reclaim her American identity. Apparently having personally experienced the cultural identity dilemma, she set to explore the identity issues of young Asian-Indian children living in New Jersey.

Although, a few scholars have researched the pre-1965 Asian-Indian population, they mostly concentrated on the political or economic activities of predominantly male immigrants. Except for a few essays and taped interviews, women immigrants from India have remained “a minority within a minority” (Mazumdar, 1997). They have either been “relegated to the margins” or have not drawn much attention to be studied (Gupta 1998).

Changes inside their families have not been examined. Particularly, in the case of Asian Indian immigrant mothers, their mothering practices relative to children’s schooling have not been examined either. Many mothers find themselves having to acquire a dual perspective, where parents or children “do not simply shed old values for new ones, but selectively shift, modify, retain or alter their values and practices” (Patel, Power & Bhavnagri, 1996), to integrate and accommodate home and school cultures.

Ng’s (1986) definition regarding immigrant woma(e)n does not fully explain the images of many Asian-Indian women, especially those who came to the United States after the Immigration Act of 1965 was passed. Many of these women are college educated and came to the United States as dependents, following their professionally trained spouses after marriage (Dasgupta, 1989).

However, their fluency in the English Language, does not quite prepare them to deal with the competing cultural demands between their homes and schools. In fact, “the

unique social conditions force them to re-examine the traditional gender roles in the context of newly adopted mainstream American culture” (Sandhu, 1997).

Majority of these women come to the United States as dependents following their husbands, and are faced with cultural ambiguity and stress regarding their gendered role and “paradoxical existence”. As Sircar (2000) mentioned in her study about Asian Indian immigrant women,

“The paradox is very real for transplanted first generation Asian Indian women in the U.S. who essentially live between two worlds. The products of India’s centuries old patriarchal culture, they are circumscribed to a bicultural existence (p12)”.

How do these women bridge the cultural gap between their two world---“back home” and life experiences in the U.S.? In the land of opportunity which holds great promise, how can they get passed the hurdles of “restrictive old customs” and achieve “a certain degree of emancipation...and relatively greater self-determination” (Sircar, 2000; p12).

Asian Indian women’s immigration experiences tend to differ from Asian Indian immigrant males (Dasgupta, 1989). While there are some scholarly works on the Asian-Indian immigrants from the early 1900s, little has been written on their social history. Dasgupta (1989) in her sociological study concluded that as immigrants, Asian-Indian women/mothers/wives tend to benefit less than their immediate family members i.e. husband and children, from their immigrant experience.

I think Asian-Indian immigrant women, especially those who make a profession of housekeeping and caring for their American born children, and those who work as professionals outside their home, trying to be mothers and professionals, all of these

women are the unsung and unheralded members of the over one million and more Asian-Indian immigrant population. As Freire (1998) mentioned, “one can know only to the extent that one “problematizes” the natural cultural and historical reality in which s/he is immersed” (p. ix).

Despite their children’s growing success and educational achievement which some time make the television news headlines (for e.g. National Spelling Bee Competitions were won by several Asian-Indian children in the past several years), not enough efforts have been made by scholastic organizations to explore and understand the rationale behind their mothers’ roles that more often than not through undefined devotion, dedication and creative genius pave the way of their children’s success.

Women according to Carol Gilligan (1982) speak from a situation using contextual reasoning. As a consequence, it becomes important to create awareness about the realities of the life experiences of Indian mothers, who live in the United States. Particularly it is important to draw attention to their notions of displacement and cultural disjuncture, which many of them experience when they come to the U.S. For teachers and educators it is important to learn about the trials and tribulations of Indian mothers as they formulate their role and what they expect for themselves in reference to their children’s schooling in a “foreign” country, especially when many of them came to the U.S. as adult women, and spend their childhood in India centered on shared roles of mothering and caring.

Sociologist Sircar ( 2000) conducted a study pertaining to Asian-Indian women living in Texas, to explore issues of gender in relation to their work roles, and mentioned that Asian Indian women “constitute an underclass whose subaltern worldview and life

experiences historically have been either marginalized or totally excluded from formal scholarship” (Sircar 2000; p10).

Unfortunately the few studies that have focused on immigrant women’s experiences have been diverted towards highlighting negative images, labeling immigrant women as either “backward, ignorant and degraded” (Sircar 2000, p11). Few Asian Indian women came to the United States before 1965. Although there were more women among the post-1965 immigrants, it was dominated by males especially between the 35-49 age groups. 74 percent of the women who immigrated between 1980—1990 were married and came primarily as spouses. Out of which 45 percent of women had attained at least a bachelors or a higher educational qualification and, therefore, may have been able to apply through one of the preference categories for professional and skilled workers (Gupta, 1998).

Regarding issues of identity, and subjectivity, very few research studies have focused on Indian women’s mothering experiences here in the United States. Our lives here in the United States cannot be explained in plain logical terms. As to how we make sense of our personal and public boundaries is a tenacious struggle, enmeshed in conflict and contradiction. Unfortunately Indian women who question and interrogate traditional norms and include issues of mothering are labeled as “westernized” or branded as being unfaithful to culture and community. Das-Dasgupta (1998) alludes to Third World feminism theorist Uma Narayan, who is of the opinion that “despite accusations of ‘westernization’, we are sisters, the wives, the daughters of those who dismiss us” (pg. 10). In addition, contesting mainstream Western culture, while formulating mothering roles and expectations leaves little room for diverse consciousness, and runs the risk to

choose between being Indian or being American. In other words, following immigration to the United States, many Asian Indian men and women are challenged by the cultural differences and core value orientations between the majority white culture and Asian-Indian culture, thus requiring parents, particularly mothers of school going children to rethink family traditions, gender roles and life priorities as they prepare them for schooling.

Apparently, immigration experiences between Asian Indian men and women differ. In addition, according to Das-Dasgupta (1998) the terms and conditions of what constitutes an Asian-Indian immigrant family is being dictated by male centered ideologies, and is grossly affecting the social and emotional roles of Asian-Indian immigrant women and children. Hence it becomes important to explore how the experience of immigration itself has affected the gendered and cultural sense of self, their familial roles of Asian Indian immigrant women. In other words, how can an Asian Indian immigrant woman resolve her gender dilemma, as well as cultural dilemma, and meet the demands of mothering relative to her children's schooling, when she has only partial knowledge and very little help?

It is apparent that images of Indian immigrant women go beyond the "good" daughter and the "all enduring mother" (Das-Dasgupta, 1998; pg. 2). Within this context, it is important to know their gendered and cultural history, which are subsumed together as one, thus creating a pull and tug as to not allow to any resolution about either gender or culture but to stay in process while problematizing issues about their ethnic identity, community and family expectations.

Education for women thus becomes a status symbol, without quite changing other attitudes and behavior levels like sex, marriage, family and the woman's role as a home-maker (Verma, 1993). Coming from a communal culture, where many decisions are made by the elder members of the family or the male members, many Asian Indian immigrant women lack experience in the decision making process. To some extent there are "double standards of morality," mixing tradition with modernity in attitudes and behaviors (Verma 1993), followed by different rules for sons and daughters.

Feminist theorists Sangari and Vaid (1990) from India speak of "Indian" womanhood as, "often a part of an asserted or desired, not an actual, cultural continuity" (pg.17). Regarding issues of their gender, Sangari (1991) emphasizes further by saying,

"Female-ness is not an essential quality. It is constantly made, and redistributed; one has to be able to see the formation of female-ness in each and every form at a given moment or in later interpretations, and see what it is composed of, what its social correlates are, what its ideological potentials are, what its freedoms may be" (pg.57).

In the case of immigrant women from India, depending upon the interpretations of "femaleness" and representation of Indian "womanhood", the content of mothering expectations faces the problem of either being undermined or overtly exaggerated, when they become permanent residents of the United States. With a history of British colonialism behind them, which is difficult to let go, women from India are faced with the difficult task of finding location to articulate their subjectivity, more so when the constructs of what constitutes "ideal" female behavior falls in the hands of the Indian male, whom they follow to make their "homes" in this "foreign" country. When they arrive to live in a country which values individualism and self-expression, the fragile



national identities of Indian women becomes threatened once again, by insignificance and scrutiny.

Regarding issues of language, although, colonialism and post-colonialism have resulted in the adaptation of the English language, as one of the languages of communication, over the years majority immigrant women from India have not been able to take full advantage of their English language skills. In the name of cultural preservation, many of immigrant women from India hesitate to speak for themselves. Living in a “new environment” which may demand negotiation of cultural differences, including ethnicity, class and gender, many Indian women, especially those who are not professionals and depend on their husbands financially and emotionally, may fear being labeled as “culturally-disloyal” thus requiring them to relinquish their agency or voice to define themselves or their mothering roles and expectations. In other words, she is assigned a problematic role (Narayan, 1997)

Narayan (1997) reiterates this fact further,

“Just as the British women were considered to have a significant role in preserving Englishmen and English culture in the colonies, women of Indian origin are assigned a significant and peculiar role in maintaining Indian identity in England and in other immigrant Indian communities” (pg.175).

According to Narayan (1997) gender plays a powerful role in immigrant communities, thus distinguishing between acceptable forms of “assimilation” into the dominant culture, alongside bearing in mind not to “fail” one’s cultural identity. Many Indian women, who come to the United States, experience loneliness and feel out of place. They tend to feel isolated from their Indian culture as well as the American culture (Sue, 1973).

Theorizing about Indian immigrant women is a challenge in itself, in addition if we add other issues to the already complicated equation---her mothering role and expectations pertaining to her children's schooling then it adds fuel to the fire. Compared to most women in Asian cultures, Indian mothers are fluent in speaking English. However, notions of family honor, shame and pride seem to get in the way of finding solutions to their problems, even the ones pertaining to cultural disjuncture between home and school cultures and school's expectation of their mothering roles.

Unlike American culture, Indian culture fosters dependency (Segal, 1991) and interdependency, allowing woman to be defined in relational terms. First, she is defined as daughter in relation to her parents, then as a wife in relation to her husband, later as a mother in relation to her child(ren). Narayan (1997) mentions that even (Indian) feminists, when they try to create awareness about the gendered ways in which Indian communities create "cultural identity", they (Indian feminists) bear the burden of being accused of "aping" Western values and creating opposition in ideas of feminism and "preservation of cultural identity."

Consequently, for Indian women who immigrate to the United States questions about who they are become left behind in the back-burner, unless the women take the risk to correct the male-defined contradictory caricatures of their misconceived selves. Unfortunately, under such circumstances, women from India are left with fewer choices in finding solutions to their recurring problems, whether it pertains to their sense of identity or mothering role.

Recreating images in support of immigrant Indian women, especially in formulating discussions about their mothering for schooling role expectation or carrying

out their mothering role, calls into critically questioning and challenging patriarchal authority. It requires them to assert and claim one's individual identity, often leading to vulnerability and despair, more so, when they wish to retain some aspects of their ethnic culture, and be respected for it, as "a legitimate members of the cultural context they inhabit in the West, and not as a mere representative of a foreign culture somewhere else" (Narayan, 1997; pg.183).

Within the context of the mainstream public sphere, it relates to the inability to see members of the Indian immigrant communities as full-fledged participants in Western political contexts. For in the eyes of the dominant white culture, like all other groups Indian immigrants to the United States, immigrant women from India are expected to feel grateful for having granted entry into the United States. When Indian wives, who follow their husbands come to this automated and economically privileged society called the United States, they lose their entitlement to emotional support, may even become shame-ridden subjects. Only after living outside of their native country, do they realize its immense value in terms of cultural location and "belonging". The feelings of frustration that go along with drudgeries of daily life are undermined as a state of clarity cannot be reached for it to be considered a major problem.

Reaching a state of clarity regarding issues of identity and subjectivity remains to be a very big challenge, not only for immigrant women, but also stand as a theoretical impediment for Third World feminists as well. In reference to the Indian community in the United States, Lata Mani (1991) describes the complexity of the feminist struggle and argues,

"Questions of tradition and modernity have since the nineteenth century been debated on the literal and figurative bodies of women. The burden

of negotiating the new world is borne disproportionately by women, whose behaviors and desires, real or imagined become the litmus test for the South Asian(Indian) community's anxiety or sense of well-being. Women are called on to preserve the ways of the old country. They are expected to maintain their distinctiveness." (pg. 177)

Speaking of family and community draws attention to notions of "home". If the psychological feeling of "home" is created through imagined safety, free from isolation, then women from India cannot claim "no place as home" (Das-Dasgupta, 1998; pg. 2). For immigrant women from India, assumptions of home as fixed and permanent remain challenged making them rethink their assumptions of family attachments. In addition, Das-Dasgupta (1998) mentions that the tension of going (to India) and staying in the U.S., claiming and rejecting, not belonging in either of the two countries "continuously sways definitions of home" (p. 3). As to who these immigrant Indian women are, becomes even more complicated, thus requiring more attention and understanding.

A "home" for immigrants, can be more than just a private space. South Asian scholar Jasbir K. Puar (1994) explored the notion of "home" and explained, "An oversimplified understanding of home as birthplace and not home as displace(ment) mocked the tensions I was feeling with my 'Americanness' and the strong emotions I had about India".

Regarding notions of community, immigrant women from India, are very diverse and have difficulty being part of a monolithic community. More over, ideas about what constitutes "community" lean more towards the Indian male bourgeoisie, thus denying conflict from opposing gender. Hence, the popular image of community is maintained privately as well as publicly.

In describing community, Martin & Mohanty (1986) state that community is a product of struggle, requiring constant reevaluation and interpretation. I think such a thought raises hope for immigrant women from India, to re-map and renegotiate their private and public spheres so that they can simultaneously construct and deconstruct their mothering role and expectations while adhering to two cultural interpretations of mothering and schooling between the Indian home and the American school and in the process resolve some issues pertaining to cultural disjuncture. It could also help in breaking away from their inordinate dependence on their extended family “back home” in India, as well as here in the United States. Following Anannya Bhattacharya’s (1998) suggestion,

“We need to examine the private spaces constructed by the Indian immigrant community. It is in this space that the immigrant bourgeoisie guards what it perceives to be nation’s cultural essence against contamination by dominant Western values. It is here that the immigrant bourgeoisie steadies itself in the face of changes in a foreign country. This private space appears to be defined at two levels: the domestic sphere of the family, and the extended “family of Indians” which is separate and distinct from other communities. It is in these spaces that the immigrant bourgeoisie recognizes the woman; in the private individual and the private sector it recognizes the man. Thus, we may note the different deployment of the idea of the private by the bourgeoisie in various contexts” (pg.178-9).

Bhattacharya (1998) refers to B. Anderson’s (1991) “Imagined Communities” and mentions that the private space of the family is fundamental to one’s sense of nation, and both family and nation are intimately and sacredly tied to one’s distant past. Hence for immigrant Indian women to occupy a space outside their private spheres, read heterosexual patriarchal family, they run the risk of displacement from their past and their present “new” nation in which they do not and cannot fully belong. I think of it as the double-whammy situation.

In a research study pertaining to acculturation problems, among a group of Asian Indian immigrant families living in the United States, Asian Indian sociologist Uma Segal (1991) focused attention on the their “cultural mores and values” (pg. 233) to highlight intergenerational conflicts between parents and youth. She identified five norms drawing attention to individual expectations, gender and family hierarchy, family obligations, educational goals and notions of family pride and shame.

It is apparent Asian Indian women experience immigration in various aspects of their lives. Their experiences span different generational, religious and regional points of view, and their status as single, married and divorced women, as mothers, homemakers or professional women, adds additional layers to their lives as immigrants (Gupta 1998). “It is only since the 1970’s that concern for a gendered perspective has emerged in the writings of Indian and Western scholars of the Indian culture and society” (Sircar 2000, p.10).

“Women speak for change” ( Weiler, 1988) In an effort to influence and direct children’s schooling relative to the social forces in the educational system, Asian Indian women may have to rethink issues of gender, culture and interactions between the two, as they prevail in both Asian Indian and white mainstream cultures and in the interest of themselves and their children seek opportunities to speak about some of their shortcomings, say what they have been “forbidden to name” (Foucault, 1980; p. 27), and in the process create changes in their lives and in the lives of the children. However, such tasks are easier said than done, especially when it comes to their children’s schooling. It is left to none other but the Asian-Indian Mother to take on responsibility.

For many immigrant Asian-Indian women who are mothers, living up to expectations while mothering and schooling children in a culturally conflicting society is undoubtedly an everyday challenge, something that has not been explored. Such a cultural dilemma provides ample justification to analyze the mothering for schooling phenomenon further. As an immigrant Asian-Indian mother having experienced first hand the everyday challenges of mothering and schooling children amidst culturally divergent contexts of home and school compelled me to pursue this issue further.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

Exploring Asian-Indian women's mothering for schooling experiences from a feminist perspective helps in addressing issues of gender, culture social class and immigrant status. Feminist theory while highlighting women's oppression, seeks to analyze and create awareness about the conditions, which shape women's lives. Developing understanding of women's lives required looking into their daily experiences and examining ways in which they are represented within their contextual boundaries (Stanley & Wise, 1982).

Tyson (1998) observed that in order to reveal the "intersections and digressions of lived experiences, cultural knowledge, and academic ways of knowing", it is important that "we not only look at theories, methodologies, and epistemologies, but that we endeavor to uplift as we inquire" (p. 22). In other words, the process of sharing narratives will not only help in transforming shared realities, but will help the researcher to be transformed as well. In addition, unlike theories, paradigms, and methods that under gird mainstream theoretical research, theorizing about Asian-Indian women and their definitions of feminism can be a very big challenge, especially if one is not grounded in their gendered ways of knowing, (they) always risk being questioned (Willis & Merchant, 2001).

The role of language within the realm of this study was intended to provide support and help in discovering and understanding the meaning of the mothering for schooling phenomenon. Through the "power of narration" and story "it calls upon the



reader to engage in the meaning making and interpretation process” (Thompson 1998, p.538).

In order to conduct this study, I drew upon feminist sociologist Alison Griffith’s (1995) concept of mothering for schooling to strengthen my research agenda. In addition, Third World feminism—feminist theories that are centered on minority women from developing countries like India, helped in examining the lives of immigrant Asian-Indian mothers and created a space for critically questioning and challenging both Asian Indian culture, as well as mainstream white American school culture.

The study is exploratory as not much has been written about the topic being studied. It is well suited for a qualitative design, focusing on the process with the researcher being the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher is also a participant observer. According to Creswall (1996), in a qualitative study, one does not begin with a theory to test or verify.

For the qualitative researcher, the only reality is that constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation. This study differs from a quantitative research study, because the language is distinctly personal, as well as informal, and based on immigrant Asian Indian mothers’ perceptions of mothering for schooling. Also, the language emphasized discovering and understanding the meaning of the context bound information pertaining to the phenomenon, thus allowing the researcher to report her values and biases.

The study is geared to be subjective in nature; the qualitative design created possibilities for interpreting the multiple realities of immigrant Asian Indian women’s mothering for schooling experiences, while allowing me, the researcher to be part of the

emerging study. Interviews as a method of investigation have provided strategies to theorize the lived reality and highlight the emerging thoughts, ideas and behaviors, which shaped Asian-Indian women's mothering for schooling process.

Feminist Interview Research which is rooted in theories of feminism (Reinharz 1992), helped in understanding the lives and activities of Asian-Indian women, from their own point of view, as they conceptualized and shaped their mothering for schooling work to suit two culturally competing contexts. As a researcher and participant observer, Feminist Interview Research not only guided me in conducting women to women interviews, but also helped me in developing my own ideas. Listening to mothers during the focus group interviews, helped me realize the importance of my study, and also validated the choice of my questions.

To shed light on the interpretive nature of this study, I included the concept of "story" to convey the importance of narration. According to qualitative researcher Seidman (1991),

"Stories are a way of knowing...telling stories is essentially a meaning making process...it is a process of selecting, constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them... Individuals' consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues, because social and educational issues are abstractions based on concrete experience of people" (p.1).

In addition, Seidman (1991) alluded to Vygotsky (1987), and mentioned, "Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness" (p.1).

By narrating their stories, mothers were able to interpret their mothering for schooling experiences and transmit their ideas based on those experiences. As qualitative

researcher Monica Colombo (2003) mentioned “the most important means with which individuals give meaning to an experience consists in inserting it in a narrative structure” (Colombo 2003, p.2).

### **Type of Design**

Focus group interviews and follow-up interviews served as data generating methods for use within this qualitative design. I decided on using focus-group interviews and follow-up interviews as data collection tool because they involved small groups of people, who were familiar with each other as well as the subject matter. In addition, focus group interviews involved mothers taking turns to talk and listen to one another.

Patton (1990) stated the object of conducting focus-group interviews, was “to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others” (p. 335). Patton (1990) also indicated that focus group interviews work best when the groups are small, not exceeding eight participants. He also suggested having homogeneous groups can be helpful as well. Apparently, group participation which defines focus-group interviews is a highly efficient data collection procedure, and helps the researcher can gather more information in a short period of time. Secondly, according to Patton(1990) “focus group interviews also provide some quality controls on data collection in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other that weed out false or extreme views” (pp. 335-6).

The down side, of conducting focus group interviews as stated by Patton (1990) did not affect this study, because only four major questions were asked, and they focused

on mothers' past, present, future lives and their concluding remarks about mothering for schooling work. As far as group participation was concerned, interview followed smoothly, except for a small period of time when one of the mothers in *Group 1* took more time than others to talk about her early schooling experiences. Also, since participants in both groups were well versed in the English language and were familiar with the researcher, interviewing the women was a real pleasure. However, mothers were aware of the importance of the study and took their participation very seriously. Mothers appeared to be genuinely interested in the mothering for schooling issues, and were knowledgeable enough to articulate their thoughts clearly. Focus group interviews were followed by additional in depth follow-up interviews, but limited to four mothers.

I was drawn to this method of inquiry, because of its interpretive qualities, that emphasized the process, rather than the product. Although attention was directed to the strengths or weaknesses of a life experiences, unlike the nature of developmental theories, issues of incorporating validity and reliability were less emphasized. Since issues of subjectivity and reflexivity are on going, fragmented and interrupted, this study does not focus on the "fixed" truths.

Due to overwhelming responses the proposed plan of conducting case study interviews had to be abandoned. However, since "sufficient" data was collected during the focus group interviews and the follow up interviews, abandoning the case study interviews did not jeopardize the outcome of the study, i.e. the mothering for schooling phenomenon.

The follow-up interviews with four mothers helped in evaluating individualized (Asian Indian immigrant mothers) outcomes and generated particularly useful

information. Their primary foci were the four Asian-Indian mothers, their experiences and the mothering for schooling situations. They helped in creating understanding of the mothers, their children, the local school(s), the situation and the resulting interactions.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This study was conducted after approval was granted by the Office for Research Protections. Ten immigrant Asian Indian mothers were chosen to participate in this study. The criteria for selection included mothers whose young children are currently enrolled in the local schools, as well as those mothers whose children attended local schools in the past.

The procedure began with a telephone call to local immigrant Asian-Indian mothers to participate in a Focus group interview. Since I personally know all the prospective participants the phone call served as a courtesy call. Following positive responses from the mothers, consent forms and personal data sheets, were sent contents of which were clearly defined following rules and regulations established by the Office for Research Protections. The invitation letter included the purpose of the study, and drew attention to their invaluable contribution to the research. Consent Forms included description of mothers' specific role and process of participation, benefits, risks if any, and actual time spent in the research study. It also included informed request to use pseudonyms to protect privacy of the participants, as well as permission to audio-tape their conversations during interviews. Personal data sheet filled in by the participants provided information regarding their educational qualifications, languages spoken, number of children and years spent in the United States. All the information collected

through the three documents---invitation letter, informed consent form and personal data sheet helped in setting the stage for Focus group interviews.

Members of the **focus group** were invited to my home to participate in interviews. Interviews created opportunities for interaction, including interpersonal contact between me the researcher, and participants and drew attention to the culturally constructed mothering for schooling process. Although, many mothers were bilingual, interviews were conducted in the English language and were audio taped.

I began the **focus group interview** conversation with the following prompt, “when I was growing up in India my childhood experiences of schooling were.... I observed the mothers closely, who actually contributed information and those who tried to restrain themselves.

After the first thirty minutes of the hour, I continued the conversation with the second prompt...mothering for schooling experience for Asian-Indian mothers is very.....thus moving ahead from past to the present. Similarly after thirty minutes, the mothers were given the third prompt...in future to be successful in the mothering for schooling process, it is important to do.... I looked for emerging themes, issues and experiences that were both consistent and non-consistent between the two groups of mothers as they shared their experiences of the past, present and made suggestions for the future. Following the last prompt, thirty minutes were devoted for mothers to make their concluding remarks. The emerging themes from the conversations were further reviewed in the four follow-up interviews.

For the **follow-up interviews** I met four mothers, they were Asha and Nina from *Group 1* and Daya and Leela from *Group 2* at their respective homes, for a one on one interview lasting between sixty to ninety minutes. Follow-up interviews were audio taped as well.

Follow-up interview conversations gave each of the four mothers an opportunity to say things that they would not have chosen to do in a group setting, and to contribute specific information of their choice that they think was critically important and pertained to their work of schooling children. In addition, it allowed me, the researcher to learn about their various schooling activities, inside and outside their homes, issues about their gender role construction, cultural understanding of schooling children, and social class issues.

Each mother spoke in depth about their mothering for schooling work, specifically, focusing on strategies that they have implemented in rethinking their mothering for schooling role. In this phase of the data collection procedures, participants of follow-up interviews also shared their thoughts, feelings and ideas, those that they benefited from, as well as those by which they felt troubled and emotionally disturbed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

At the end of the data collection period, my goal as a researcher was to recapture the disjuncture between the home and school cultures and draw attention to the challenge that many Asian-Indian mothers are faced with on a daily basis. More importantly, how the mothers negotiate the changes, and teach their children to do the same, without fully comprising their home culture, or totally ignoring the school culture.

The research protocol included instructions to the interviewer, some general

questions, e.g. their schedule or their children's schedule or activities. Last but not least, particular attention was paid to the ethical issues such as the rights, needs, values and desires of the informants. Data collection for this study lasted fifteen weeks.

### **Methods for Data Verification**

During the data analysis phase, efforts were made to describe the study. Descriptions included addressing questions about the purpose of the study, nature of context, people and activities, as well as the effects of those activities on the people who participated in the study. Data collected through “mothering for schooling stories” were interpreted to highlight and unfold the nature of their mothering for schooling work.

Efforts were made to interpret mothers’ stories about their mothering and schooling work experiences and to explain the lives of immigrant Asian-Indian mothers, outcomes of mothering for schooling work, positive and negative effects of those work experiences, as well as mothers responses to those experiences. Since the stories were collected in person, through focus group interviews and follow up interviews, and were articulated by the mothers themselves, they helped in establishing the credibility of this study. In addition, as a participant-observer and researcher helped me establish the significance of mothering for schooling work and Asian Indian mothers’ mothering for schooling role formulations. Data analysis was also supported by the manner data collection procedures were organized. Dividing the data collection procedures into three phases---past, present and future, helped in focusing mothers’ past schooling experiences, present mothering for schooling experiences, and the integration of the mothers’ past and



present experiences in shaping their future lives. Also, mothering for schooling stories shared by the mother brought to the forefront mothers' voices, vulnerabilities, strengths, weakness as well as experiential and situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991) often taken for granted.

Stories articulated through mothers' individual voices, describing their mothering for schooling experiences not only helped with the data collection and data analysis process, but also set the stage for interpretation in explaining related issues such as contextual and cultural differences between mothers' Indian homes and their white American schools, cultural differences between home and school, as well as issues about gender, social class and immigration status.

To find convergence among the sources of information, multiple data sources were used to verify the internal validity. Multiple data sources generated through literature review, focus group, and follow-up interviews and the researcher's own life experiences as an immigrant Asian-Indian mother have helped reduce the risk about biases and limitation of this study.

Internal Validity was verified by triangulation of data method source (focus group and individual follow-up interviews) as well as multiple informant sources (having two focus groups and four follow-up cases). External Validity was verified by thick descriptions provided by the informants. More than fifteen weeks were devoted to data verification and analysis.

## **The Researcher's Role**

The role of the researcher in this study was that of instrument and analyst. As a participant observer and interviewer, with an added advantage of being an insider (LeCompte & Schensel, 1999) and an active member in the local Asian-Indian community, I sort the cooperation and participation of the Asian-Indian mothers without any risk.

Since qualitative research is interpretive in nature, the biases, values and judgment of the researcher had explicitly known in the research report. In fact, it was considerably a useful and positive step towards gaining entry into the research site. Also, it created space for ethical issues that arose during the process of gathering research data. In addition, conducting this study from a feminist perspective proved to be a useful endeavor. Theorizing gender and family from a feminist perspective Fox & Murry (2000) shed light on the role of the researcher and mentioned,

“Feminists acknowledged that their orientations, actions, interpretations, biases, and interests will become integral to the research process and its outcomes, and they seek to understand how it happens as it is happening during the process of the research.” (p. 1161)

Being an Asian-Indian mother and educator, who has/had lived in the United States for several years, I am/was very familiar with the mothering for schooling dilemma and who had/has struggled and continues to struggle to make sense of its complexity. Also, over the past many years I had met several Indian mothers, who had voiced their opinions regarding the same issues, without finding any reasonable solutions. I had/have been very intrigued and frustrated by the problem of balancing home and school cultures. I began addressing this issue, by joining a cross-generational women's group. All

members of the cross-generational focus group have been living in the United States since 1985.

Also, in an attempt to ease the tension of cultural adaptation and cultural loyalty, I had been very involved within the local Indian community in organizing cultural and social events, and in the process trying to create awareness for unity in diversity within predominant American community at large. As a graduate student, I have been involved in similar activities within the university community, with the hope of easing this tension of cultural struggle.

In the next few sections background information pertaining to Asian-Indian mothers are presented. Mothers participated in two focus group interviews and shared information about their mothering for schooling work. The background information in tabular form is presented at the end of this chapter.

### **Focus Group Interviews**

My initial plan of including ten Asian-Indian mothers in one **focus group** had to be changed and the group had to be divided into two, because it was impossible to get all ten participants at the same time. With great difficulty I managed to get seven participants for *Group 1*, and three participants for *Group 2*. Participants in *Group 1* included Asha, Hima, Jyoti, Leela, Meena, Nina, Sheela and I, the participant/observer.

Participants in *Group 2* included Daya, Leela, Reema and Maya. Due to extenuating circumstances Leela, of *Group 1* had to leave after a brief stay and could not complete the interview process. She later joined *Group 2*, picked up where she left off,

participated in the conversations and completed her interview. In other words, Leela started as a *Group 1* member and finished her interview as a *Group 2* member.

Mothers/participants of *Groups 1 and 2* have been living in the local community for over eight years, except for Maya who moved to the area from upstate New York, a couple of years prior to interview. During the time of the interviews all of them were leading hectic lives; busy taking care of their families. Hima, Jyoti, Meena, and Sheela of *Group 1* and Reema of *Group 2* used to be actively involved in their young children's schooling in the past, while Asha, and Nina of *Group 1* and Leela, and Maya were presently engaged in their young children's schooling process during the time of interviews. Besides, some of the mothers were working; one participant---Leela was working, going to school, and taking care of her family.

Each focus group interview was divided into four phases. *Phase one*, highlighting the past, was centered on Asian-Indian mothers' childhood and early schooling experiences in India. *Phase two* highlighting the present, was centered on their mothering for schooling experiences. In *Phase three*, mothers focused on the future. Based on their divergent mothering for schooling experiences, the mothers provided some suggestions for the future, for immigrant Asian-Indian mothers as well as main stream American mothers and teachers. Finally, in *Phase four*, mothers made their concluding remarks and reiterated their mothering for schooling beliefs and opinions. However, the boundaries between the four phases were fluid, in the sense they did impose any restrictions or limitations in mothers' participation. In other words, the boundaries between the four phases were loose, in many ways proved to be quite purposeful in extrapolating the mothering for schooling phenomena. Fluid boundaries

were beneficial to everyone, for the participants as well as for me, the researcher, and helped us stay focused, without getting sidetracked from the research topic. The interview process began with a brief summary of my study and lasted for 120 minutes.

### **Follow-Up Interviews**

Following focus group interviews four Asian-Indian mothers, Asha and Nina from *Group 1* and Leela and Daya from *Group 2* were selected to participate in an in-depth, one-on-one follow-up study interviews. All four mothers had participated in the focus group interviews. They were selected for follow-up interviews because of the choices they made in response to their mothering for schooling work and for the kind of changes they made for themselves. All four mothers, Asha and Nina from *Group 1* and Daya and Leela from *Group 2*, shared something in common regarding their mothering for schooling work. All four mothers were selected because their children were participating in early childhood educational settings. In addition, they were selected because along with their children, the four mothers participated in the local Indian Culture School details of which are presented in the appendix. The interviews were conducted at the participants' homes and lasted between sixty to ninety minutes. In the next section I shall present information about the two focus groups.

### **Group 1**

*Group 1* consisting of six (seven) mothers, Asha, Hima, Jyoti, Meena, Neena, Sheela and Leela (Leela left after phase one) met at my house, one sunny afternoon,

during the summer of 2003. Among the members of *Group 1*, Sheela can be considered to be the oldest member as she has been residing in the area since 1981. Meena on the other hand, had the oldest children. She arrived in the year 1982, Jyoti in 1984, Hima in 1986, Nina in 1992, and lastly Asha arrived in 1996. Among *Group 1* members Asha and Nina were the only two mothers who had children attending early childhood education programs, for the rest of the mothers, like Meena, she had long passed that stage of her life. Hima, Jyoti, and Sheela had at least one child (children) attending public schools. Asha is the youngest member of *Group 1*, during the time of the interview she was the only mother who had a child attending preschool.

The participants arrived within a short interval of fifteen minutes. Many of them seemed alert and ready to get started. The setting was relaxed, but not casual. We sat in the formal dining area. The oval table which seats eight members was ideal, as all of us we were able to see each other, and savor one another's expressions, gesticulations and mannerisms. I had three audio recorders set up, one in the middle, and one each on either ends of the table.

There were no formal introductions, as we had known each other for several years and have maintained good relationships. English was the language of choice for conducting the interviews, although most of the participants including myself were bilingual and trilingual. Besides, all the participants were well versed in written and spoken English. Leela who later joined *Group 2* started the *Phase one* conversations, followed by Sheela, Asha, Nina, Meena, Hima, and Jyoti.

## **Group 2**

Two weeks after *Group 1* interviews, the whole process was repeated again with *Group 2*. Things went very smoothly with *Group 2*, primarily because it was a smaller group than *Group 1*, and also because the experience gained from *Group 1* interviews, helped me get better organized. In addition, I had also gained confidence as researcher and participant/observer. *Group 2* interviews lasted ninety minutes. However there was one event which was not part of the plan. I had an unexpected guest; accompanying Daya was her seven year old daughter. I requested the little girl to sit in the family room, not too far from the interview site. I helped her to keep herself occupied. I gave her some books to read, and set up the DVD player for her to watch a children's film. She did not bother any one and was very well behaved. During the course of the interview, while the mothers were busy conversing, I checked on her twice, to let her know that all the mothers were busy "working", and appreciated her help and cooperation.

Regarding *Group 2*, Leela came to the local area, in the year 1987, Reema arrived in 1988, Daya in 1989. Maya moved in the year 2001; however she has been living in the United States since 1989. During the time of the focus group interview Daya and Maya had children attending preschool programs. Unlike the other children who attended (ing) public schools, Daya had a daughter attending Charter school.

Maya's older son was in elementary school. Leela's younger son was in elementary school and her older son was in middle school. Lastly, Reema's daughter was in high school and her son was in middle school. It is important to note the expanse of

time covered in the two focus group interviews and follow-up interviews---ranging from 1982 to 2003.

In *Group 2*, Daya started the focus group conversations, followed by Maya and Reema. Leela who due to extenuating circumstances had to leave *Group 1* at the end of *Phase one* joined *Group 2* at the beginning of *Phase two* of the focus group interviews. Of course, I served as the facilitator, making sure the data collection procedures were being implemented as planned. With the passage of time conversations among members of *Group one* as well as *Group two* progressed smoothly. Also, the open-ended questions asked during the focus group interviews set the stage for the mothers to relax and participate in the conversation. Mothers were very respectful of one another, and took turns to speak. Some mothers had more stories to tell than the others, but these mothers were not restricted in anyway because the group felt the stories enriched the conversation of the focus group. Their stories also paved the way for group discussion, exchange of thoughts and ideas that mothers perceived to be salient and integral part of the mothering for schooling phenomena. The discussions brought to light a range of emotions---joy, sorrow, frustration, discomfort, anxiety and laughter. It was apparent mothers were interested in their group participation. All the mothers spoke in English, quite comfortably with an Indian accent. The conversations, intermittently interjection with the phrase, “you know” as if they needed reassurance and validation about their thoughts and speech genres.

While many of the ladies spoke extemporaneously, Hima of *Group 1*, came “prepared”, she had written down some pointers on a piece of paper, facts about her early schooling and mothering experiences she wanted to share among the group members.



Her preparedness led her to contribute more than the other mothers of her group.

However, it did not change the dynamics of her group or the discussion. At an opportune moment, I called on the next participant to continue the conversation.

As a researcher I was nervous during the first day of focus group interviews. I was concerned whether the discussions would go smoothly given that I knew all the participants prior to the focus group interviews and discussions. As a participant-researcher who was also as an “insider” I wanted to be an impartial “data- collector” and facilitator. In addition, it was important for me that I continue my friendships with the mothers after the interviews are over. Being an active member of the local Asian-Indian community I did not want to jeopardize those relationships and social networks. Fortunately the interviews and discussions transpired as planned; I was very impressed with the mothers’ participation. At the end of *Group1* focus group interviews I was relieved as well as pleased to learn that my proposed data collection strategies were implemented as planned.

### **Local Asian-Indian Community**

All of the mothers who participated in the focus group interviews resided in a small rural campus town in Mid-Atlantic section of the United States of America. They come from diverse families. Besides English they spoke multiple languages, representing many states in India. They are part of a growing Asian-Indian community consisting of nearly hundred families, spanning a wide age range, from senior citizens to small babies. Some of the families have been living in this campus town for nearly forty years, and can

be deservedly called “the elders” of the Asian-Indian community. Especially the elder women, their “Life in Local Community-Stories” coupled with their unmatched wisdom and astuteness, have provided support and encouragement, especially to younger mothers.

The community has been spread out, families live in several areas of town and majority of their children attended their local community public schools. Majority of the adults in the community, mostly spouses are associated with the local university as professionals, in academic, administrative and research capacities.

Many Asian-Indian community members get together once every year, to celebrate “Diwali” or the festival of lights. They also meet in small groups, depending on their personal interests. Social gatherings usually consist of entire families, i.e. parents and children. Parents rarely leave their children home with a baby sitter and go out for a meal, unless they have close family relatives like grand parents watching them.

Every month, on alternate Sundays many Asian-Indian families with young children attend, “Story Hour”, something similar to Sunday School, where for several years, a local Asian-Indian community member has been steadfastly pursuing his “story-telling” skills, telling young children and adults stories from the ancient Hindu epics such as the “Ramayana” and “Mahabharata”. Most of the mothers who have participated in this study, at some time or other have been part of the “Story Hour” group.

Besides, “Story Hour” many young children also participate in the local Indian Culture School, run by one of the local Indian mother with the help of several mothers who attend the school. The school meets twice a month on Sunday mornings. Classes

last for two hours, where children learn about the geography, history, art, literature and cultural heritage of India. It is not a religious school. Class time is divided between instruction and hands on activities. At the end of each class period, children are free to borrow and take home story books about India. It is apparent the mothers have their work cut out for them. Not to mention the children. During the week they are busy attending their “American” school, while during the weekends there are engaged in learning about their ethnic culture, customs and traditions. I am hopeful that my efforts in exploring Asian-Indian mothers’ mothering for schooling experiences will be well received by my reading audience.

Mothers who participated in this study came from two-parent, Hindu, middle and upper middle class families in India. Except for Daya, who hails from Sri Lanka but in every sense like a South Indian woman, (*i.e. from the state of Tamil Nadu*). She follows South Indian traditions and visits Tamil Nadu. Her mother tongue is Tamil. Daya is as much an Indian as she is a Sri Lankan, and shares similar religious and cultural background. In other words, she and her family are an integral part of the Asian-Indian community.

Most of the mothers attended English medium schools in India, with strong national and regional language emphasis. Besides English, all the mothers except Daya had to learn Hindi and the state language. For some mothers, family circumstances required them to move from place to place, forcing them to switch schools as well as to learn new regional languages as mandated in almost all schools in India. When I refer to schools in India, I am always referring to only those types of schools that the mothers in this study attended.

Except for Asha and Leela, majority of the mothers attended private, English medium, Catholic missionary schools. Also, in India many Catholic schools are known to be expensive, charging high school fees, enforcing strict dress codes. However, many middle class and educated parents prefer to send their children to Catholic schools because of their advanced English curriculum standards. In addition, school administrators are particular about discipline and orderly conduct, and expect their students to strictly adhere all rules and regulations. In fact, in many of their “convents” as they are commonly referred to, students who follow the Catholic faith are taught Catechism as a subject, and the non Catholics are taught Moral Science and Instruction.

The data collection process which were linear in character---focusing on past, present and future were devised to facilitate and support mothers with their responses regarding perceptions about mothering and schooling. Consequently, mothers constructed their mothering and schooling stories sea-sawing between their past and present lives.

Methodologically such a time-centered strategy proved doubly effective and beneficial, for the participants as well as me, the researcher. The generative power of the compartmentalized research strategy i.e. past, present and future; created opportunities for the participants to reflect into their past lives and make connections with their present lives. In addition, the transitional nature of the data collection strategy also set the stage for data analysis. Through stories data about ways mothers made connections from childhood to motherhood was gathered and served as cornerstone of data analysis. Also, the flexible nature of the data collection strategies also allowed mothers to compare and

contrast the school contexts, in India and the local, as well as schooling rituals in both places, all of which helped in analyzing their mothering for schooling experiences.

More importantly, as a researcher interested in feminist perspectives of early childhood education, immigrant/ minority families/schooling issues, I think learning about mothers' early schooling experiences and schooling rituals in India and Sri Lanka was an important part of this study and significant to understanding immigrant Asian-Indian mothers' work process in schooling children amidst cultural divergent enclaves--- between their Indian home and white American schools. It was important to create opportunities for mothers to reflect on their past, because in many ways it sheds light on their present and provided a sense of who they were as women, as mothers, as minorities and particularly as Asian-Indian immigrants who were educated and maintain a middle-class socio-economic status.

**Table 1 Focus Group 1: Background Information of Asian-Indian Mothers**

Name of Mother	Year of entry to USA	Status at the time of arrival	Year of entry to Central PA	Education Qualifications	Mother Tongue	Languages learned in India
Asha	1994	Dependant Spouse	1996	Bachelor's	Hindi	English, Hindi, Telugu, Marathi & Gujarati
Hima	1986	Dependant Spouse	1986	Master's	Hindi	English, Hindi, Kannada
Jyoti	1981	Dependant Spouse	1984	Bachelor's/ Grad. Student	Telugu	English, Hindi, Telugu, Bengali
Meena	1978	Dependant Spouse	1982	Master's	Kannada	English, Kannada
Nina	1992	Professional	1992	Ph. D.	Tamil	English, Tamil, Kannada
Sheela	1981	Dependant Spouse	1981	Bachelor's	Hindi	English, Hindi

**Table 2 Focus Group 2: Background Information of Asian-Indian**

Name of Mother	Year of entry to USA	Status at the time of arrival	Year of entry to Central PA	Education Qualifications	Mother Tongue	Languages learned in India
Daya	1989	Student	1995	Ph. D.	Tamil	English, Tamil
Leela	1987	Dependant Spouse	1988	Master's	Tamil	English, Tamil, Marathi
Reema	1988	Dependant Spouse	1988	Bachelor's	Telugu	English, Hindi, Telugu
Maya	1989	Dependant Spouse	2001	Master's	Kannada	English, Hindi, Tamil & Kannada

**Table 3 Focus Group 1: Information pertaining to Asian-Indian Mothers' Schooling Work**

Name of Mother	Two parent family (Yes/No)	Primary care giver (Yes/No/Both Parents)	No. of children	No. of US born children	Gender and Ages		Child(ren) attended/ing Pre-School in Central PA	Child(ren) attended/attending Public Elementary School	Child(ren) attend(ed) Indian Culture School	Language of Communication at home by child(ren)
					Boys	Girls				
Asha	Yes	Both Parents	Two	Two	Two 9 yrs and 4yrs	-	Younger Son is attending preschool	Elder Son is attending Public Elementary School	Both Sons are presently attending	English and Hindi, one Son prefers to speak in English
Hima	Yes	Yes	Two	Two	Two 16yrs and 12yrs	-	Both Daughters attended preschool	Both Daughters attended Public Elementary School	One Daughter attended	English and Hindi, one Daughter prefers to speak in English
Jyoti	Yes	Yes	Two	One	One 24yrs	One 16yrs	Son and Daughter attended preschool	Son and Daughter attended Public Elementary School	Son attended	English
Meena	Yes	Both Parents	Two	One	One 28yrs	One 20yrs	Son and Daughter attended preschool	Son and Daughter attended Public Elementary School	-	English and Kannada
Nina	Yes	Yes	Two	One	Two 12yrs and 7yrs	-	Both Daughters attended preschool	Older Daughter attended Public Elementary School, Younger Daughter is attending Public Elementary School	Older Daughter attended, Younger Daughter is presently attending	English
Sheela	Yes	Yes	Two	Two	One 17yrs	One 11yrs	Son and Daughter attended preschool	Son and Daughter attended Public Elementary School	-	English and Hindi, Son prefers to speak in English

**Table 3 Focus Group 1: Mothering for Schooling Work (continued)**

Name of Mother	Are you Employed	Involvement in Extracurricular activities	Involvement in Cultural activities	School Volunteer (Yes/No)	Language(s) spoken with children at home	Visits to India
Asha	Self-employed	Children's violin lessons, Kumon Math and Reading, Boys Scouts, Swimming	Sunday Story Hour, Culture School, Festivals	Yes	English and Hindi	Once in two years
Hima	Not presently	Children's piano lessons, Tap and jazz dance, and Gymnastics,	Indian Classical and Folk dance, Festivals	No	English and Hindi	Once in two-three years
Jyoti	Yes	Children's swimming, piano lessons, softball, basketball, Girls Scouts,	Sunday Story Hour, Culture School, Festivals	Yes	English	Once in two years
Meena	No	Girls' Brownies, Cub Scouts, Violin	Sunday Story Hour, Visits to Temples, Festivals	Yes	English and Kannada	Once in three-four years
Nina	Yes	Children's swimming, gym, violin, flute and dance	Sunday Story Hour, Culture School, Classical Indian Music (Vocal)	Yes	English	Once in three years
Sheela	Yes/ Part-time	Children's tennis, swimming, Geog. Bee, Spell. Bee	Classical Indian Dance, Hindi Lessons, Festivals	Yes	English and Hindi	Once in two years



**Table 4 Focus Group 2: Information pertaining to Asian-Indian Mothers' Schooling Work**

Name of Mother	Two parent family (Yes/No)	Primary care giver (Yes/No/Both Parents)	No. of children	No. of US born children	Gender and Ages		Child/ren attended/ing in Pre-School in Central PA	Child/ren attended/ing Elementary School in Central PA	Child(ren) attend(ed) Indian Culture School	Language of communication at home by Child(ren)
					Boys	Girls				
Daya	Yes	Yes	Two	Two	One 7yrs	One 5yrs	Daughter attended, Son is presently attending	Daughter is attending a Charter School	Son and Daughter are presently attending	Daughter speaks in English and Tamil, Son prefers to speak in English
Leela	Yes	Yes	Two	Two	Two 14yrs and 7yrs	-	Both Sons attended	One Son is attending Public Elementary School	One Son is presently attending	English and Tamil, Younger Son prefers English
Reema	Yes	Yes	Two	One	One 16yrs	One 11yrs	Daughter and Son attended	Daughter and Son attended Public Elementary School	-	Daughter speaks in English and Telugu, Son prefers to speak in English
Maya	Yes	Yes	Two	Two	Two 11yrs and 6yrs	-	Younger Son attended	Both Sons are attending Public Elem. School	Both Sons attended	English and Kannada, Younger Son prefers English

**Table 4 Focus Group 2: Mothering for Schooling Work (continued)**

Name of Mother	Are you Employed	Involvement in Extracurricular activities	Involvement in Cultural activities	School Volunteer (Yes/No)	Language(s) spoken with children at home	Visits to India
Daya	On extended leave from work	Children are taking Piano lessons	Sunday Story Hour, Festivals, Classical South Indian Music lessons (Vocal)	Yes	English and Tamil	Once in ten years. Most of the family lives in U.S. and Canada
Leela	On leave/attending University	Children are taking violin lessons, scouts, swimming, baseball, soccer, basketball	Sunday Story Hour, L teaches them classical South Indian Music (Vocal), Festivals	Yes	English and Tamil	Once a year
Reema	Not presently	Children's sports activities, Children are taking music lessons	Singing Devotional Songs and Hymns, Yoga Festivals	Yes	English and Telugu	Once in three years
Maya	No	Children are taking music lessons, tennis, dance classes, Math Classes, German Classes, and athletics	Sunday Story Hour, Festivals, Visits to temples	Yes	English and Kannada	Once in two years

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Interpretation**

#### **Asian-Indian Mothers' Past Schooling Experiences**

In this chapter, mothers' past schooling experiences and background information pertaining to the schooling culture in India are presented. Efforts have been made to illustrate how their past schooling experiences in India have played a role in their personality development, ways of thinking and meaning making process of their mothering for schooling work. Several stories highlighting individual mothers' voices have been included, primarily to maintain effectiveness and authenticity to those stories, while limiting the scope of "potential error in communicating the thought of others (mothers)" (Reinharz, 1992, p.9)

The findings also highlight mothers' thoughts and perceptions about children's schooling, basic differences in schooling practices between the schools that the mothers' attended and the local schools that their children were attending at the time of interviews. Information about types of schools in India, role of parents in English language schools, middle class families and schooling in India, and schooling rituals in India are also presented.

Mothers' childhood and early schooling experiences brought to the forefront a host of feelings, of joy, wonder, self-doubt and loss. They shared their early childhood stories with child-like enthusiasm. Answers built from information obtained from the two focus group interviews, follow-up interviews, discussions and emerging themes that transpired from the interviews are presented.

### **Asian-Indian Mothers' understandings about children's schooling**

Asian-Indian mothers' understanding of schooling young children in a rural town in the Mid-Atlantic section of the United States was initially revealed in *Phase one* and *two* of focus group interviews when mothers reflected upon their early schooling years. Mothers' compared and contrasted their schooling experiences with their children's schooling experiences.

The interview process created opportunities for them to connect their past early childhood lives in India, with their present immigrant lives in a rural town in the Mid-Atlantic section of United States. Retrospections about early schooling experiences helped in drawing attention to differences in schooling practices between the two contexts---schools in India and schools in their rural town

Secondly, since all the women involved in this study came to their present location as adults, it was important for all of them to understand and familiarize themselves with the local school system. In addition, since all of them were schooled in India, and within its vicinity (Daya was schooled in Sri Lanka) they differed in their understanding about young children's schooling, i.e. daily rituals of schooling, at home, in the school and community at large.

Listening to the mothers share their mothering for schooling stories it was evident that they were often frustrated and confused. Mothers felt compelled to make some mental adjustments, even change their ways of thinking. Their mothering for schooling

work required them to change in order to make sense of the local school system and divergent schooling practices.

Apparently mothers had to become learners again to carry out their mothering for schooling duties, even, “reinvent the wheel” as Reema said. Consequently mothers were left with little choice, but to re-think and revert back to what they knew best---to their own childhood and past schooling experiences. Their past experiences in India proved to be their most valuable resources, part of their social and culture capital.

In fact, mothers were quite proud of their schooling process and educational qualifications that they had earned in India. Particularly, they were quite appreciative of the academic standards and the knowledge they acquired while being schooled in India. As well as the time and efforts their own parents, extended family members and teachers put into their educational endeavors. Hence in many ways their past experiences were resourceful in providing a base line about what teaching/learning and child-rearing practices mothers in this study needed to include or discard to make sense of their mothering for schooling work.

As a point of departure, focus group interviews and subsequent conversations began on a nostalgic note. Mothers reflected on their early years in India. Reflections about childhood drew attention to the rituals of schooling in India, parent’s and teacher’s roles, curriculum and instruction within schools, role of their parents and other related educational practices. However, as time progressed, mothers began to compare and contrast schools between the two contexts---India and their present location, as well as their own schooling experiences with that of their children. In addition, mothers also highlighted everyday schooling challenges.

As immigrant women who were well versed in English language skills, mothers in both *Focus Groups one and two* shared some common schooling experiences. All of them seemed familiar with “teacher-centered” and “content-oriented” schools. Having attended schools in India, majority of the mothers seemed familiar, starting from grade one, with large classrooms, a barrage of tests, corporal punishments, uniforms, heavy book bags, and the mandatory three language policy.

They recollected their school-life as spending long hours doing homework, higher math standards, preparing for tests, memorizing notes, competing against other students, learning two or more languages, taking home report cards, getting tensed about their grades and class ranking, as they were displayed for public scrutiny on class and school bulletin board.

As time progressed, conversations among mothers moved back and forth, between two contexts, India and their present location in the United States. The boundaries between phases *one* and *two* shifted and sometimes overlapped. In addition, although conversations were centered on childhood and early schooling stories, they were not limited by them. Many of the mothers found themselves negotiating the past with the present, and also, assessing what was good about their own schooling experience. Mothers also reflected upon family ties and some of the cultural trends that existed and continue to exist among many middle and upper middle class families in India.

Mothers’ stories drew attention to the significance and value bestowed upon education within their families and among many middle and upper middle class families in India. Their conversations also revealed their philosophical views about education;

revering learning as a spiritual enactment of knowledge acquisition, made possible through utmost diligence, humility, and sense of duty.

Below are a few stories about ten mothers' early schooling experiences in India, and are presented as part of their profiles. Some stories were humorous, others were not. They include a broad spectrum of themes, from general to specific, people, places and things, all of which lend support to who these ten were and how their personalities developed after they moved to the United States, as women, as mothers, as minorities, and as Asian-Indian immigrants from the middle-income socio-economic group. They include stories about self-exploration and discovery, trial and error, reward and punishment to name a few. Listening to the mothers' stories it was quite apparent that they have become subjects of their own historical past as well as their present circumstances. And, despite the contextual changes from India to their local communities, the lessons and "situated knowledge(s)" (Haraway, 1991) from the past, to some extent have been instrumental in making sense of their children's schooling experiences as well as in shaping their mothering for schooling agenda.

Knowing the ten mothers is important to make sense of the crux of the mothering for schooling phenomena. The profiles of ten immigrant Asian-Indian mothers are an important part of this research study. The profiles highlight salient features of their past lives in India as well in their lived experiences in the local community. They are aimed at understanding about how each mother constructed and organized her mothering for schooling work process. The profiles are presented in random order.

## Asha

Asha of *Group one* went to the same school from grade one to ten, a school that was funded by the federal government mostly to serve children whose parent(s) are employed in the Defense Services. She was the only mother who mentioned that in her school, sports and academics were given equal importance. Besides, she was the only mother who talked about parent-teacher conferences as being part of the schooling agenda.

Although Asha hails from North India, she grew up in the state of Andhra Pradesh, in South India. Her mother tongue is Hindi and she had to learn the regional language Telugu. Asha's pleasant demeanor is depictive of her stable personality. She said:

“My dad was in the Navy so fortunately we did not have to travel too much and change stations, and...and my early childhood development was in Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh...so he wanted us to go to a school which would be consistent, the curriculum was consistent even if we moved and I went to Central School. And, the curriculum throughout India is the same in all Central schools. And, the advantage of being in Central school is also that we get students of all different cultures in schools. So we were exposed a lot to all different cultures and enjoyed, all different culture foods and education. And we had all languages, and we had science and math and all those regular classes. And I think my experience was very good and we had lot of fun in school too...

I went to the same school from first through tenth. And then I moved to another school, which again was a Central school for eleventh and twelfth. And as a child, we just enjoyed school a lot; we had sports, balance of sports and education the school provided to us”.

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Listening to Asha share her thoughts in the focus-group interview and the follow-up interview was a worthwhile experience for me. I noticed that the way she conducted herself was quite indicative of her “military” upbringing. She was alert, organized,



punctual and at the same time quite accommodating. Of course, as a mother her first priority were her children and their schooling and non-academic activities. She strongly believes that children must do extra academic work in reading and Math, at home everyday. She also got help and support from her husband.

### **Nina**

Nina of *Group one* is soft spoken and philosophical. Her thoughts and ideas were indicative of her past life experiences in India, including her love for music and desire for embracing diversity. She was the only mother who alluded to early childhood education as the most important phase of a person's education. In addition, she was the only mother who mentioned the word "love" in reference to her children, and her role as a mother.

As she mentioned, she too had a positive early schooling experience as well. As a child, Nina attended a Catholic school run by Italian nuns, and was very impressed with their teachings and charitable endeavors. Nina shared fond memories of her teachers and school and in the process highlighted her social economic status, cultural differences between her home and school as well. She said:

"I went to a convent run by Christian nuns, they were from Rome, and they were extremely kind and very, very, very, very nice to talk to and my early experience I feel was really nice in the sense I felt they were like God. They went to the slums, cleaned the slums in Bangalore, and every Sunday they had preschool for poor people, and all along I felt they were I learned observing these nuns... And the second thing was...if I went to the slum, my mom would scream at me, she would say 'why are you going to that dirty place?, you are going to catch some disease'...

The other thing was, the religious tolerance, because, they never enforced Christianity... They did separate classes for other kids, but, they did have a Moral Science class, which I think was really very nice. Because, they said general things which all religions were saying, you know, be good, be friendly, and you know be kind, and have some noble ideas in your life... And there were Hindu teachers, side by side with the Christian nuns. And they both, and they were all getting along so well, at least as students I never felt there was any differences in their opinions. And so, it all seemed so rosy to me". (She laughs a lot).

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003).

Nina was very excited to share a story; which made her the singing sensation of her third grade class. One of her teachers, on learning about her musical talent, asked her to sing a devotional song in praise of the Hindu Goddess of Learning---Saraswathi. For Nina, who supposedly was a shy child, and continues to be a little shy, her teacher's persuasion to sing was a big ego boost for her. Her first "public" singing performance in her third grade classroom led her to explore her singing talent further and become an accomplished singer.

Nina was as both impressed and awe struck with her teacher, who despite being a Catholic Nun was well versed in classical South-Indian music, something she did not expect by any stretch of imagination. Nina shared her third grade story with much excitement and child like animation, and felt ever grateful to her teacher, who was a "foreign" nun. She said:

"One incident I distinctly remember. I started learning Carnatic music fairly early. And, in third grade my teacher, (an Italian nun) my teacher came in and said, Can you sing Vara Veena? Do you know the swaram and sahitya? And, that was the first time I was, like, singing in front of the class, and till then I never thought I could perform in front of these sixty students. And, so I sang the swaram part and the sahitya part. (With a surprised look on her face she spoke about her teacher) She knew everything, it is something, something on Goddess Saraswati, but she knew everything, and she said, 'You have such a nice voice'. That gave me such confidence, I felt that was the first time, I felt somebody appreciated something of me. So that was one thing I remember, distinctly remember that happened in third grade".

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

In addition, Nina compared schools in India and with those located in the local community and highlighted differences, particularly those that pertain to class size, class rank, discipline issues, role of the parents etc. She said:

“The other thing is, parents coming and meeting the teachers, because it used to be such a big class, they (teachers) couldn’t meet all the parents except, the troubled kids you know, a few, five, six maybe...And they (parents) wouldn’t know what you are doing in school, unless you are really bad then you get called (by the principal)...And the competition was so much you know...because everything would start with the ranking, everybody knows where you stand, so you had to do well”.

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

### **Meena**

Meena of *Group one* seemed like a level-headed person. In many ways she was like any South Indian immigrant, but in some respects quite open-minded, embracing changes in her life as they come. She was married young and came with a child to the local community. In fact, during the time of the interview, she was just getting used to the idea of becoming a mother-in-law to her white American daughter-in-law. .

Unlike Nina, Meena did not speak positively about her Catholic school experience, particularly about their “Mother’s Day” celebrations, a common practice in many Catholic schools in India. In many Catholic schools, the nun who carries out the duties of a school principal and serves as a head of the school is known as Mother. The rest of the nuns are known as Sisters. Once a year, the students and staff of the convent celebrate Mother’s Day and honor the principal nun for her service and dedication to the school.

Apparently, as a child, Meena was not too fond of Mother's Day. It seems on Mother's Day, she would make up a story and skip school. She was bothered, because the nuns would request students to contribute money for the occasion. Or ask students to take flowers to school, a very common practice in most of the Catholic schools in India. She said, "We were forced to bring it, so sometimes we used to skip school that day. We would make-up stories...that was a bad thing".

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Meena reported her early schooling experiences to be "traumatic". She talked about her schools, especially about the high Math standards. She recalled it as being "vigorous studying all the time...lots of homework". She was expected to memorize, as they say back in India--- learn "by heart". However, she did not complain about memorization, instead, supported it and said:

"Everything was like by heart, you know, we had to do recitation, multiplication tables ...But, I think Math is very good in India...multiplication tables and all that we had to like memorize all of those... It helps to learn the language more fluently, pronunciation becomes more clear".

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

She mentioned that her teachers were strict, and some were good. She viewed teachers being strict as a positive sign, indicative of encouragement, making students become more motivated, learn more, and achieve higher. She said, "The way they make you write and read, you cannot stray away..." She added "One bad thing, teachers used to play favorites, good kids would always get preferential treatment, and the kids would get jealous". (Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

She touched upon parents' professional commitments and its effects on young children's schooling experiences. Fathers' and/or Mothers' job transfers, from one city to another can sometime result in their children facing social and academic constraints, forcing them to adapt quickly to changing school environments. Meena also alluded to differences between North and South India, often leading to generalization about the people in those regions, their identities, language differences etc. As a young school girl, she felt "traumatized" changing schools and learning different languages in India.

She said:

"My experience was somewhat traumatic, some where good, because he used to travel, every three years my father used to get transferred, so I started my schooling in Bombay and ended up in Madras, and so you know couple of experiences where, because we were moving to a different place, is always for a young child is kind of scary. But you know, the teachers were nice and you know, once I started getting used to it, then again we had to move.

So, we had like three or four different schools and most of my schooling was o.k. but I had to learn different languages, like Hindi, Tamil, I went to Calcutta I never learnt Bengali, but we didn't stay long enough to finish the learning. So, then the only thing I remember was I had a very good time in high school. I had very good buddies and all that. So, it been a long time ago, I can't remember any of the incidents. I can't tell you all, but, teachers were very good and helpful and all that. Only thing is, learning a different language makes a difference, when you don't know the language. So, it makes you kind of shy. Then, other than that studies were o.k. It was good...

But you know in India, there are so many things, North and South, there is so much difference, you know, when you travel if you are a different part of the country, then people tend to like you know, in Calcutta, people tend to put you as a Madrasi. They don't know which part you are coming from, they say you are a Madrasi...

You know it was kind of disheartening, but other than that I developed good friendships and schooling was o.k. Participated in all the religious festivals there"...

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

As evidenced in the focus group conversations, it was quite apparent that Meena had learned to become flexible and accommodating at a very young age and continued to follow that trend even during her adult years, as a wife and a mother. She always did what she was “supposed” to do.

### **Jyoti**

Similar to Meena, Jyoti also of *Group one* had changed several schools before entering fourth grade. In fact, as a child growing up in India, she was moved so much that for sometime she had to be home schooled or tutored. She said:

“Mine was totally different from everybody else, because until the age of nine, I probably switched seven schools, including home schooling, in my grandmother’s village. I don’t ever remember doing my homework, or study for a test. And I just don’t know how I went from one class to another. Including my tutor that my grandmother had, he totally gave up on me...this girl I don’t think anybody can help (Laughs).

I would be sleeping, and I would just, you know disappear from the house, because I didn’t want him to come and teach me. So...until fourth grade, I was transferring from one school to another for some reason or other, family reasons, and totally different cities, different languages and different friends and...Hindi of course, then Tamil, Bengali. I was in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and basically that is what the schooling was, and after fourth grade, I kind of settled down. And, but even then I was never a motivated student...I am talking from...maybe three years, from preschool to fourth grade”.

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

As an only child of her parents, Jyoti lost her father at a very young age, and was jointly raised by her widowed mother and members of her extended family.

Consequently, Jyoti learned to adjust and adapt quickly to changing circumstances from a very young age. In fact, Jyoti shies away from either talking about herself or her children. As she voiced: “It is just personal, I guess it is just me...I have always been

shy...may be the circumstances I grew up in or the things I went through in childhood”.  
(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

In fact, Jyoti is more “action-oriented”. Her actions speak louder than her words. She works quietly, and contributes a great deal of her time and energy towards helping non-profit organizations, particularly those that focus on issues of literacy, women’s and children’s empowerment in developing countries such as India. However, as an immigrant mother, she did not shy away from sharing her acquired “experiential” wisdom and provided some “good” suggestions for future mothers and teachers.

### **Sheela**

Unlike Jyoti, Sheela of *Group one* was not shy about talking about herself. She had vivid memories of her childhood and early schooling experiences. Sheela spent her childhood in the city of Kanpur in Northern India. Her mother tongue is Hindi. She is outspoken, exudes confidence and is a “no nonsense” kind of a person.

Sheela left India in 1981 and came directly to Central Pennsylvania to join her husband after marriage. She, her husband and two American born children have continued to live in the same area. At the time of the focus group interviews her daughter was 17 years old, and a freshman in college. Her son was 11 years old, and was in middle school.

She shared several “stories” about her early schooling experiences in India. Sheela had vivid memories of her childhood and early schooling experiences. As a child she attended a private Catholic school run by German nuns and shared stories about incidents that took place within the classroom, as well as outside. She said, “My school

experiences were pretty nice”. Based on her observations Sheela is of the opinion that despite bigger class sizes, schools in India are more disciplined. She touched upon teacher-student relationships. Comparing schools between the two contexts---India and the United States, she stated:

“We have more respect for teachers there. And, we just feel like...you know there is a different kind of relationship there, between teacher and students, here it is more, they want to be your friend. But, there a teacher is a teacher and a student is a student. And, we had to pay attention, we had to do well”.

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Reminiscing about her early schooling years in India, she remembers her teachers as being very strict, often using corporal punishment to rectify mistakes committed by students, alongside gaining support from parents. She said:

“I remember...in India, they used to hit you on the knuckles, if they hear that you did something, with the ruler...I still remember that...My younger brother used to get into trouble all the time...And the parents also side the teachers, when the kids do something wrong, the don't side with the kids...they side with the teachers, o.k. you must have done this wrong ”.

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

She also talked humorously about those students who always tried to be in the good books of the teacher, students who were cautious about staying out of trouble with the teachers. She said, “There were a few suck ups in every class...they would carry the teacher’s book”. (Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Sheela shared happy memories about her school lunch hour. All the ladies in *Group 1* in unison cheered to listen to her “lunch hour” story. Sheela shared some of her “lunch hour” memories and said:

“I remember, because we used to live very close to the school, so our servant used to bring lunch, hot lunch from home, every day to school. So all four of us, we were four of us, brothers and sisters, plus my cousins were there...so when there



was any festival, because my buaa's (Hindi word meaning aunt)sons, they would eat with us then, my mother used to send food for everybody. And for a festival, he used to bring food in this big thing, all Puris (fried wheat bread)...for my cousins and everybody, and then we would all sit there and eat. You could just sit about anywhere...Plus in India you know, there are what you call peons and stuff in the fields with the kids and they keep an eye on the kids. Here they would say for extra man power, we can't afford it".

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

As a child Sheela liked the Catholic school that she attended. However she expressed discontent about the school's holiday policies. Particularly, Sheela talked about festivals and school closures. Regarding school closure, Sheela mentioned that in Catholic schools, Christian festivals were given first priority over Hindu festivals. She drew attention to school closures, and said:

"We had long holidays during Christmas and Easter, but for Holi, Diwali (both Hindu festivals), Holi wasn't a day off for a long time...Rakhi (Northern Indian festival) was never a day off, later they started to do all the Indian holidays. Even Muslim holidays were observed, but some of the Hindu holidays were not observed. And I felt that there was not much religious tolerance by these nuns as should have been...but their...for Easter we would get eight to ten days off, Christmas we had the whole month off...but when it came to Holi, Diwali, it wasn't the same thing. We were lucky to get one or two days".

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

### **Hima**

Like Mothers Nina, Jyoti, Meena, and Sheela, Hima of *Group one* too, went to a Christian missionary school. Like Meena, she too was moved from place to place because of her father's transferable job. She had to change many schools. However, unlike Meena who felt "traumatized" during the early schooling years, Hima did not make an issue of moving from place to place. Apparently, despite the changing school environments, her sociable and talkative nature helped her to get easily adjusted. On the other hand, moving all the time made her parents and even her become aware early on

about the value of good schooling, as well as the difficulty of getting admitted into reputable schools. She mentioned school was tough in India. However, while some things remained constant, no matter which school she went to, she had to get adjusted to various locations, regional languages and schooling structures.

Apparently, as a young girl, Hima loved going to school. Like Meena and Nina she talked about homework and class ranks, punishments, rote learning and highlighted some differences in schooling practices between India and their local community public schools. She even made some comparison, between her daughter's schooling experiences and her own. She said:

“I can tell you, because we changed so often, I knew how difficult admissions into good schools were...and then parents also tend to value the education that much. Because every time you are having to work hard, admitting the children in the good school and of course lot of home work...And again, rankings were public, you know, so that was in a way for me it was good, because my ranks were good so that kind of built my self-esteem...

Every year we had a sports event, where all the parents were invited...we had so much school-work, home work, there was no time for extra-curricular activities...And teacher student ratio was high, we had one teacher and there would be at least thirty students in class...and I think that's why they resorted to punishment so much, and if somebody is misbehaving, you know, one ruler--- Khut, so...for what ever reason, and they covered a lot of syllabus...We had to memorize a lot, all the poetries, we were constantly standing and reciting poetries...

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Hima then spoke about some basic differences between schools in India and those in the United States. She later realized that unlike in India where teachers have greater authority, in American public elementary schools teachers are not authorized to hold students back after school, or delay them from going home. In addition, in India, parents often support teachers and encourage them to be strict about their children's learning

skills and classroom behavior. In other words, parents don't think badly of teachers if they punish students for bad classroom behavior.

Hima talked about her early schooling years in India, and drew attention to the differences in schooling culture, between schools in India, and those located in her local community, and what constitute a discipline issue within those schools. In India, it is not uncommon for school going students to get punished if they do not cooperate with the teacher. She shared an interesting story specifically pertaining to school discipline and teacher authority. She mentioned as a child she was very sociable and enjoyed talking in class, until one day, when her mother paid her a surprise visit.

Hima said:

“I was very talkative as a young child, always talking in class. So...you know, the teacher tried to tell me but I wouldn't listen to her. Thing were o.k. very cozy, very nice. I loved my preschool. Until my mother came along one day for a surprise visit; and she met the teacher...And I of course, I was turned around from my bench as I was talking to the girl behind me. So the teacher told her, this is how she is, you know she is always talking. So my mom said, you know, 'you should really you know, give her a nice wacking'. And after that, she(teacher) would come after me with a ruler and hit me”.

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Apparently Hima's mother was not pleased with her and to Hima's surprise instructed the teacher to punish her for inappropriate behavior. As a child, Hima was very upset with her mother, because her mother favored the teacher and not her. Interestingly, several years later, in an entirely different context---the local community, Hima did exactly what her mother did. She emulated her mother's behavior while responding to a similar situation. However, this time her object of attention was her own daughter, and pertained to her “inappropriate” behavior in her second grade classroom.

When Hima learned from her daughter's teacher that S(her daughter) was getting distracted easily in class and hence was unable to finish her classroom assignments,

Hima's immediate response was that she should be penalized. She said:

“I remember telling the teacher once, ‘if S(her daughter) doesn't behave, you know, you should ask her to finish it, and if she doesn't finish her class assignments, if she is busy talking, why don't you ask her to stay back after school, and finish it, that will fix her (She laughs). The teacher was shocked! I think here it is a big step to do that. And coming from a parent you know...’”  
(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Undoubtedly, some habits die hard. Hima's responded to the situation and to the teacher almost similarly; just like what her mother did when she was in a similar situation several years ago. Like her mother, Hima got very upset with her daughter. And, in an effort to help the teacher rectify the problem, Hima suggested that she could hold her daughter back after school was over, and not allow her to go home until she finished her assignment. Apparently, her daughter's teacher was shocked to hear Hima's suggestion, more so, because it was coming from a student's parent.

Secondly, reflecting on her past schooling experiences, Hima mentioned in India parents and children, particularly in middle class families take education and schooling very seriously “we always had something to worry about”. In many ways, worrying about school, mostly about academics, is part of the schooling culture for parents and students, in fact a social expectation.

Comparing schools between India and with schools in the local community Hima shared her thoughts about subject emphasis, classroom instruction, and ways the school curriculum was organized in the local public schools. Unlike in India, where students have as many note books as subject textbooks, to work on, she was not prepared to see

her daughters bring home, “too many loose papers”. Hima was used to the curriculum being divided into specific subjects, e.g. history, geography, science, etc., and not divided into units as they do in the local schools in her town, where teachers coordinate several subjects together to teach about a particular topic.

In India, parents of schooling-going children buy all the assigned textbooks required for their child’s grade. Hence students are used to the idea of subject-teaching, where teachers focus on content of a required text book(s). Instruction is centered on a particular chapter from a prescribed text- book(s) during a class period, expecting parents to revise the same with their kids at home. Hence, parents get a sense of what their child is being taught in school, because they have the text book and note book as reference material.

### **Leela**

Leela started in *Group one* but due to extended circumstances had to shift to group two. Leela grew up in Mumbai, in the state of Maharashtra in Western India. She lived in a joint family, with her parents and grandparents. Leela’s childhood stories were centered on her grandparents, language and music education. Her parents although involved in her life, played a secondary role, at least until her grandparents were around. Even during the one on one follow up interview in which she participated, she spent a great deal of time talking about her grandparents. Being the first grandchild, Leela was doted by both her grandparents. Apparently she seemed to have been deeply influenced by their teachings. Leela mentioned she learned a great deal interacting with her

grandparents and feels deeply indebted to them for their “life” lessons, and as a woman, mother and teacher tries to follow their teachings.

She said:

“My grandparents were the eldest in their families. So, all their brothers and sisters, and all looked up on them, for advice and stuff like that...they had so much experience taking care of family problems and everything...”

(Follow-up Interview, January, 10, 2004)

Leela’s grandfather took charge of her, which included not just her schooling, but her music education as well. He was very keen that she should learn South Indian Classical Music and become a good singer. Leela said:

Before my grandfather died, he had a major role to play in my life; because he basically was...I was attached to him. I mean, I used to do everything with him... He used to be the one, who used to help me with my homework, take me school, take me to parks, and then, for music, he used to help me practice and teach and everything...

I mean in our family music is something, which is not a separate issue. It is just a part of our lives. So, he put me in the music school and he took decisions, basically for me. For everything like...because I was the only grandchild at home, and my Dad is the only son, so he took total responsibility, my Dad was very busy with his work and stuff, establishing his profession...But after my grandfather died, this was just before I got married, he died. He didn’t stay...he didn’t live to see me get married, but, after that my grandmother was another very strong supportive person in my life...”

(Follow-up Interview, January, 10, 2004)

As mentioned earlier, Leela’s grandfather was actively involved in her schooling and music education process and guided her to be a good student. Initially he admitted her into a Marathi language school where the medium of instruction was Marathi. As a child, Leela had no problems reading and writing Marathi, she did well in school. As a South Indian living in Mumbai, it was not hard for Leela to become bilingual. She spoke Tamil with family members; and the state language Marathi with friends and neighbors.

Similar to Meena of *Group one*, Leela shared an interesting story about her “language” education that pertains to her mother tongue Tamil. However, unlike Meena, Leela’s language dilemma had little to do with her, but more with her grandfather’s involvement in her schooling, which also included making decisions about her elementary education and scholastic endeavors.

As Leela got comfortable in her Marathi school, she began speaking more and more in Marathi. In other words, in terms of language preference and frequency, much to her grand father’s annoyance she chose Marathi over her mother tongue Tamil. Upon observing her preference for speaking in Marathi, Leela’s grandfather got concerned that she would forget her mother tongue. Hence he made her switch schools---from Marathi language school to a bilingual school, where both Tamil and English languages would be emphasized.

Leela had no problem with English, but she did not know how to read and write in Tamil. She was faced with a mammoth task, because in order to start sixth grade in the fall, she had to learn and master four grade levels of Tamil language lessons, all within a period of two months, i.e. during her summer break. Obviously, it took only one summer and one significant guru/guide/grandfather, to change direction of Leela’s entire life, an experience which she seemed to have cherished even during the present time.

Leela spoke extensively and said:

“I think I had a good school experience. I had the opportunity of being in two different schools, because of the language. Aa, I was in a Marathi speaking school first, and then I was transferred to another school, but the medium of language (instruction) was always English. But then, the people who were coming there were different, so, that made a difference, that made a culture difference. Then, I had to shift to another school.

But, other than that, I think, pretty much the whole schooling experience was pretty good. I think it had an impact at home, being in a different school, kind of in a Marathi school. I talked more Marathi at home, and that made a difference in my house. So, that's the reason they (grand parents and parents, particularly her grandfather) wanted me to go to a South-Indian school. Where, I can mingle with people of my own culture. So, that was the reason... I switched schools from Marathi school to a Tamil school, then when I came to the Tamil school, one of the subjects was, well of course, so I had to catch up all the five years of Tamil which I had lost. So I had this tutor come. That summer was awful, most horrible summer, because this tutor used to come, and he taught me the whole five years of Tamil in that time, in two months!...

Ya, one summer! Then I was caught up when I started sixth grade, that year. Of course, he was there for me the whole year to help out, in case I had a problem, but he did a wonderful job. And, I don't know how I got through that summer. Five years of Tamil course work, I mean, five school year books I had to go through. And, it is not an easy subject to write and read you know. Composition and, it is very hard. I don't know how I did it. But I did it, that is something which is I think very important for me. Now, when I think back about it, it is an achievement. On my part, and his part (the tutor) to deal with me... the priorities are different there (in India)".

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

More importantly, Leela's language dilemma is indicative of some of the identity and affiliation issues associated with one's state and language origins within India. It sheds light on the heterogeneity existing amongst the many states of India, in terms of languages, customs, food-habits, cultural beliefs and familial priorities. In addition, despite border-crossing between states, it is not uncommon to see families from different state-origins maintaining their language, customs, and food-habits etc

In the case of Leela, although her family was residing in Mumbai, in the state of Maharashtra, they may not be considered as Maharashtrians, but as Tamilians, residing in the state of Maharashtra. Since they were originally from the Southern state of Tamilnadu, they spoke Tamil at home and have been part of the Tamil community of Mumbai. Consequently, in India, one's place of residence has little to do with one's affiliation to region, state or language.



In general, as Leela said, “the priorities are different there (India)”. The people in India, mostly from middle income groups, often necessitated by job opportunities, travel across state borders, irrespective of regions---North, South, East or West,. Parents and children adapt to various changes, living and language conditions. However, their emotional ties and loyalties towards their “native” regions and states remain quite strong.

In many families, especially the elders, they try to instill the value of “native” language and culture among the younger members. In addition, for many adults, their association and affiliation towards mother tongue and “native” state become more important and of greater significance than their affiliation to the country as a whole. To the extent that even when they emigrate to far away places like America, they bring with them those ideas of affiliations, and continue to lean more towards their “native” state(s), people, food and language(s), than towards India, the country as a whole.

Listening to Leela’s “language” story, it was evident she really loved and respected her grandfather very much. She had faith in him and never seemed to have doubted or second-guessed his decisions regarding her educational needs and development. In fact, she felt deeply indebted to her grandfather for instilling the love for mother tongue. In hindsight, she felt her grandfather helped her realize early on, the value of hard work and perseverance.

Secondly, since Leela’s grandfather was fully engaged in her schooling, her parents were not involved as much. However, Leela did allude to her parents’ role and participation, or lack thereof, more importantly to draw attention to some basic differences in classroom structures and schooling practices within schools in India and

the local public elementary schools. Taking into consideration the large class sizes in her school she said:

“My parents never had parent conferences, we never had conferences. My Mom and Dad probably didn’t know who my teacher was...may be now it is different, but when we were growing up we never had conferences, my mom did not know who my teacher was, may be my Dad knew, because once in a while he used to come (to school) in to pay the fees or what ever ...that’s about it, the parents didn’t know who the teacher was, teachers didn’t know all the parents. I mean how can they keep up?

We had sixty kids in one class...there were six sections, sixty kids each, and one teacher (for each class). And in the Marathi school I was going, the A class would be for all the distinction kids. So they were all separated like that. And the E section would be all the really, really dumb kids...that was not a very positive thing.

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Apparently Leela learned very early in life that hard work can make things possible, even those things that seem impossible in the very beginning. She works very hard and as a mother aspires to be the best role model to her children. She said, “You should practice what you preach”.

### **Daya**

Unfortunately, for Daya of focus *Group two* however, her early “schooling” situation was quite contrary to any of the other mothers. Daya who comes from a large family stated that her parents were least involved in her early schooling. As the youngest child in her family, she recalled her early schooling experience as being stressful. Apparently, when she became a mother, memories from her early schooling experience led her to prepare herself in advance for her own children’s early schooling experience. It was interesting to hear about her family.

The excerpt below is indicative of her “traumatic” early childhood educational experience which ultimately led her to take her educational endeavors into her own hands. Also, like her parents, Daya did not want to repeat the same “mistakes” and decided to prepare herself in advance for her own children’s early schooling experience. In addition, unlike some of the other focus group members like Hima who didn’t know what to expect regarding their children, Daya prepared herself in advance. She visited preschool programs, and along with her children got “ready” for their home-school transition. She highlighted some basic structural, curriculum and instructional differences between early childhood programs in countries like Sri Lanka, India, and the United States. She said:

“My school...I started schools only when I was six old, for some reason my parents didn’t think it was important for me to go to kindergarten, I don’t know why, it was very traumatic. I went to school; there were thirty kids in the school and one teacher...quite rigorous, teacher stands in the front of the class, even then, and right away they just assumed that I already went to kindergarten. They assumed I knew how to write one to hundred and knew my alphabets, and you know my Tamil alphabets and the whole thing and...I think compared to the transition I had from home to school; I think my kids have a much smoother transition, because we already you know prepared them from year three or year two, telling them you know the alphabets and the numbers, that, when I grew up, we just probably self taught at home, I don’t think our parents put that much emphasis on our education at that small...(age). They probably told us stories and taught us some songs and they were concerned actually about, academic quarrels or that...when you are five and four, so that I thought that was a big difference from...

They were not, they were not, we used to play and, they used to tell stories and sing songs. I learned basically from my brothers and sisters...I come from a large family, that’s probably why, I was like the youngest, and by the time I came around, (laughs) it was a big shock to me, to go to school. I was...it was pretty traumatic I think, the first couple of years, trying to catch up. I remember, writing, learning one to hundred in two days. (Laughs again) So, it was all accelerated learning for me. When I come home, it is a different world, it is just play and (laughs) play with friends, play with neighbors and with, social life kind of, you know with other kids...

I think for my kids here, growing up here, things are much more structured. From the time my daughter was one year, I was reading to her, she had CD programs, for ABC's and numbers and everything from the time she was two and a half, you know, so her admission to school was very smooth...

Learning here is much more integrated, you know, they have toys to learn and they have other things, and other objects to learn from, not just writing and reading books...even if they (children) came in not knowing how to read and write, they can still survive and learn. But there, it is just, basically sit down and write numbers and letters and learn like that."

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Daya compared her children's present schooling experiences in the local Charter school with her past experiences in Sri Lanka, and highlighted some basic differences between the two. She mentioned, that her children were learning "in a different way, quite unconsciously". Apparently, unlike her who had a hard time at school, because she skipped kindergarten and went straight to first grade, Daya's children comparatively made a slower transition from home to school. They first started their schooling experiences by attending a Montessori program. And, unlike her, where she had to learn to write her numbers, before she knew how to count them, her children on the other hand, learned to count "unconsciously" through "measuring, transferring stuff" etc.

### **Reema**

Unlike Daya whose early schooling stories were centered on parental involvement (or lack of) and accelerated learning, Reema's schooling stories on the other hand, were centered not so much on her personal self or in her academic development, but instead she talked about her mother and her mothering priorities. Apparently, Reema's mother focused more on her children's cultural development than academic progress.

Like Leela, Reema of focus *Group 2*, also shared a “language story”; but from a completely different perspective. Reema hails from the state of Andhra Pradesh, which is in South India, and her mother tongue is Telugu. However, she grew up in Delhi, which is in North India and started school at the age of six.

Like Leela, who spoke fondly about her grandmother, Reema reminisced about her mother with great affection. Reflecting on her early schooling years, Reema shared stories about her mother. She said:

“My mother, she not like...she didn’t do any Ph. D or anything, she had basic education...I have lot of siblings, three brothers and three sisters. And my mother was very affectionate, always busy but very affectionate, very attentive to kids, catering to kids...she was not totally into educating kids or something like that, she is not like that, she would just teach us, about culture, about good habits, about those things rather than, you know, academics, like the one we are doing these days to our kids, like what we are teaching, you know, what our kids should be, how they should be, and we know their goals, we set the goals for them...but, my mother was never like that, she was always caring, just like any mother should be...

And my mother, she always used to be worried about the fact...even in India we have these things, you know, different languages and all and so because of that, my mother got worried about us not knowing Telugu which is our mother tongue. And so, they put us in a school, there was just one Telugu school, in the whole of New Delhi. They, some how searched for the Telugu school and then put us in that school. And the school was pretty good, I mean culturally very good...since that was the first school ever introduced in North India, we were not exposed to a lot of other stuff, but we were exposed to cultural things. I really enjoyed my school”.

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Apparently, being fully aware of the cultural differences between North and South India Reema’s mother was concerned that her South Indian children will succumb to the pervading North Indian culture and in the process compromise their own Andhra culture. Reema’s mother wanted her children to maintain the South Indian language, customs and traditions.

In addition, just as immigrant Asian-Indian parents are concerned about mainstream white American cultural influences on their children, Reema's mother had similar concerns, that too, while she was still living within India. As a child, growing up in New Delhi, Reema's parents, especially her mother was very concerned about her Telugu language skills. Reema's mother was worried that she and her siblings would inevitably become influenced by the prevailing North Indian culture; languages etc, and in the process neglect their own "home" language---Telugu.

Consequently, growing up in New Delhi, Reema and her siblings, attended the one and only Telugu language school, and managed to learn about their "home" state Andhra Pradesh, language, and culture. Reema's "language story" is indicative of the diversity of mothering for schooling practices in India, as well as the complexity of Indian Education System, not to mention the extent of school choice made available to students to meet their diverse needs and priorities.

Reema also shed light on some facets that are uniquely different and specific to the schooling procedures in urban India. For example, in India, seeing school children dressed in uniforms, and carrying a heavy book bag, with tons of note books and text books, even in the early grades is a very common sight. In fact, from a very young age, school kids get accustomed to carrying a heavy book bag. Students are expected to buy all their books, and stationary supplies. Schools do not provide any thing, not even lockers. In addition, children often carry their water, snacks and meals from home as well. As Reema said, "We used to carry lots of book, like luggage, even first to third grade. And here kids don't even carry any books. That way you know, they are lucky".

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Listening to Reema share her schooling stories, an important “language issue” dawned on me. It is about speech genres, style of expression, specific to people, who can speak, read and write in more than one language, people who are bilingual or multilingual; as often the case with many people living in India and many Asian-Indian immigrants living in the United States. As a matter of convenience, they may choose to think in one language, and articulate the same thoughts in another language, depending on their company of people.

Even though it was later revealed that was not the case with Reema, initially listening to her, I got the impression that she was “code switching”, in quick succession mentally translating words from one language to another. It seemed, even though she was speaking in English, she was thinking in her vernacular Telugu. Primarily because of the specific words she chose to describe student-teacher relationships and interactions within many Indian schools.

Below is an excerpt between Mothers Daya, Leela, Reema and Maya and me, which sheds light on some of the above mentioned speech patterns between a group of bilingual and multilingual women, particularly Reema. It pertains to student –teacher relationships and related factors pertaining to some schools in India.

Reema: We used to fear our teachers you know. And we used to love them, but we used to have a lot of respect for them, ya...we used to really fear, and out of fear comes respect, I guess.

Daya: (Interjects by saying) How can you respect if you fear?

Reema: I am not sure if that is really good factor or not, I don't think it is good at that age. You know, you should not fear.

Sudha: Are you sure, you mean respect but you are using the word fear, or are you just fearful?

Reema: Maybe it comes with respect also, like, you keep a distance, basically, you are not like, you don't consider them as your buddies or you know, your friends, as our kids do, with their teachers. They love their teachers, and we also love, but in a...we keep a distance with the teacher. We don't just go and hug them, and so on...

Maya: Corporal punishment is a major factor.

Sudha: Ya!

Reema: But not at that age, though not at that age...(She pauses for a moment to think).

Maya: Oh, ya! it is there alright...

Sudha: It has come up, see one of things I noticed is we are all bilingual and trilingual you know, I speak five languages, I can write four. Sometimes, you know, unconsciously we translate, when we speak in English, we think in our mother tongue, or we think in a language that is comfortable to us...

Reema: No, not necessarily...

Sudha: Sometimes, we, sometimes there is an inter change of words, so I just want to be absolutely sure, you know, you mean fear or respect. You know, when you say...You are following Y, what I am saying?

Maya: There were a few teachers we feared with our lives...

Daya: Oh, ya...

Maya: And, respect was more out of fear, like keep out of her way, or don't get in her bad book...

Sudha: O.K.

Reema: Right, sometimes you know, although the fears are not real, but because of culturally, cultural thing, we already know the consequences like if something goes wrong, may be, maybe...she will hit. Because, you know, we have seen them hitting, some older kid or something, that happened actually...

(Focus Group Interview, July 3, 2003)

At this juncture, I think it is important to mention that what initially started as a discussion about speech genres and styles of expression among a group of English



speaking, bilingual and multilingual women, transpired into a discussion about student-teacher interactions and issues of corporal punishment prevalent within some Indian schools.

However, I would like to add that the above mentioned excerpt is subsumed in “taken for granted” cultural underpinnings, i.e. cultural perceptions about teachers relative to notions of shame, family honor etc, which in general are social expectations within the Indian cultural society( mostly, among middle and upper middle class, educated families). Even parents, particularly mothers, are quite conscious about family honor and constantly remind their children not to be disobedient in school, or disrespectful towards their teacher, lest their respectful status be compromised among their friends, neighbors and extended family members.

Secondly, sometimes second-language or mother-tongue interchanges when expressed in English can be misleading, and possibly create communication problems. For example, if the listener happens to be a monolingual English speaking person, whose language protocols as well as ways of addressing people are culturally different from the “native” (in this case Indian) speaker, then chances are they may misunderstand the bilingual/ multilingual speakers.

In other words, each language comes with its own set of speech patterns, language protocols and cultural conventions. And if the conversation is between monolingual and bi/multilingual speakers, then attention must be paid to the language protocols practiced by each speaker. Speakers and listeners must become aware that the syntax, semantics and mode of expression vary between different languages and different language speaking groups. More importantly, within a multicultural society like the United States,

attention to such details become necessary for students, teachers, and other officials within schools, social and public organizations to keep the communication channels open irrespective of race, class, gender or religion.

Next, Reema compared and contrasted schooling practices between schools in urban India and the local community. She focused on school dress code, i.e. school uniforms. Referring to her daughter and the neighborhood school that she attended, she said:

“It is really interesting, the uniform culture. I think we should have uniforms. You know, although there is no defined term called uniform here, they are doing the same thing. You know, they buy the expensive stuff, just because you know, their best friend is having that. So it boils down to the same thing...She would follow and dress up, just like her other friends, buy from the same store, same stuff. I mean it doesn't make sense. I wish they had a uniform you know, then everybody will be happy”.

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Asha too commented about uniforms. Even she suggested that every school district within the United States must have a dress code, i.e. School Uniforms. She was of the opinion that school uniforms help in formalizing the academic environment and creates pathways for minimizing social and disciplinary problems within the schools.

### **Maya**

Maya from group two is a South-Indian, from the state of Karnataka. However, she grew up in a very small town, in the state of Bihar, which is located in the eastern part of India. Maya chose to speak less about her childhood and more about her role as a mother. As a child, she started preschool very early; attended a Montessori school, and later switched to a “highly structured” Catholic school run by nuns. Apparently as a child she actively participated in performing arts, such singing, dancing and stage plays. She

was the only mother among the two focus groups who focused on extra-curricular activities than academics. She said:

“I went to pre-preschool, if they have anything like that. We used to live in a very small town, much like this. Small place, which revolved round by father’s factory, so, they had all these people who had returned from England, with all these English ideas, trying to teach us...So I came with more...British system of pre-schooling, where singing and dancing were part of the education curriculum. So almost till the day I left for college, I have taken part in every single music program, dance program, drama and my debating role and things like that...”

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

In the next section I shall present information pertaining to schooling processes in India and the local schools as perceived by the mothers. As mentioned earlier, mothers began to compare and contrast between the two contexts---India and the schools that their children attended locally. Reflections about their early schooling experiences brought to the forefront the divergent schooling practices between schools in India and local schools. The challenge of learning multiple Indian languages at a very young age was shared by a few mothers in *Groups 1 and 2*. I shall highlight some of the issues that transpired from the conversations and stories shared by the mothers in *Group 1* and *Group 2*.

### **Basic differences in schooling rituals and practices between India and local schools**

Mothers shared several stories in the **focus group** as well as in the **follow-up** interviews that drew attention to some basic differences between schools in India and the United States. More importantly, mothers’ stories indicated their emphasis about knowledge acquisition and rigor. Stories shared by the mothers touched upon various aspects of schooling and included teachers’ (mostly from English medium and private

missionary Christian schools) and parents' roles and responsibilities, (mostly from middle class and educated families, like the participants in this study) their expectations about students and children, differences in schooling priorities and practices between the two contexts, and other related structural and academic issues that are relevant to this study.

Unlike in the United States, where public schooling is linked to the assessed value of one's home, neighborhood, school taxes etc., in India it is quite the contrary. Also, unlike in the United States, where it is customary for every child in a given township to attend his/her school in their immediate neighborhood, in India there are no such stipulations. Property value of one's house is not linked or assessed according to the quality of the schools. In India, schools are not supported by local communities. Schooling and housing are two separate issues, and are not linked together.

### **Types of Schools in India**

In India, type of schools vary and cater to a range of economic levels, from Language schools, English-Medium school (English is the language of instruction in those schools), state funded schools, federally funded schools, and many more irrespective of region or state. Also, unlike the school systems in regions of the United States, where children either attend, public schools, Charter school, privately operated religious schools or are "home" schooled, in India, many of the English-Medium schools continue to be run by private organizations.

In addition, many schools run by Christian missionaries, are not restricted to Christians only. Students from all religious denominations are free to enter the school and receive an education. Catholic students usually are required to participate in Catechism classes and attend Mass, according to the i.e. the Christian religious calendar.

However, Christian missionary and other Catholic schools' academic calendar is slightly different from the other schools. Unlike the other schools, students attending Christian missionary schools have longer breaks for Christmas and Easter, and fewer days for summer and other ethnic festivals. In fact, sometimes school remain open during some of the Hindu festive days. Sheela took issue for such deliberate administrative decisions by the school administrators.

In India, most private and missionary schools are “gated communities”. Except students, teachers and school personnel, entry into the school premises is strictly monitored at the entrance by security guards. Others, including parents may be permitted to enter inside the school premises during designated times or during family emergencies.

One of the major differences between schools in India and United States is the dress code, i.e. school uniforms. In India, in most of the schools students are required to wear school uniforms. In many Catholic and other missionary schools, they have a separate dress code for Physical Education. Students are required to strictly adhere to the dress code.

### **Role of Parents in English Language Schools**

Also, the concept of “parental involvement” in children’s education and schooling is an accepted and assumed fact among many middle class families in India. In fact, their

entire life family life and purpose is centered on their children's education. Parents work long hours and invest their time and money into their children's education. Foreseeing the tough competition among students, and difficulty of getting admission into reputable academic institutions, many parents are inclined to think ahead into the future, and hence constantly encourage their children to perform above grade, and not leave anything to chance. Starting from kindergarten, parents want their children to work hard, invest as much time as possible into their studies, and through sheer perseverance and diligence achieve academic success.

Parents in middle class and educated families, commonly place great value on children's education, and hence do not hesitate to invest time and money for improving children's schooling and learning opportunities. In major towns and metropolitan cities, it is not uncommon to see many students spending long hours commuting back and forth to school each day. Even small school children travel by trains and buses to far away places, leaving home very early in the morning and returning late in the evening, tired and exhausted. If the children are young, parents drop them and pick them up at school. Also, in big cities, if children are in a half day program, it is not unusual to see parents usually mothers, to stay back in school to combat time and traffic constraints. They wait until dismissal time, and take their child/ren home again.

Mothers as well as children are constantly challenged by their schooling duties and obligations. For mothers, just as mothering for schooling work is geared towards children's educational success, similarly children too are expected to reciprocate the same. With much humility, children are expected to show parents their appreciation by studying hard and availing the learning opportunities. Under such circumstances

“studying” becomes a child’s work. Hence mothers as well as children have their work cut out for them and it is important for each of them to honor and fulfill their responsibilities with courage and dignity.

Compared to parents in the U. S. who volunteer and help out in the classrooms, school library and in the office, Indian parents are rarely seen in school, except before and after school hours. In addition, due to the large class sizes, parents do not have easy access or as much contact with their child’s (ren)’ teacher as most mothers do in U. S. schools. Parents are occasionally allowed to go into the classrooms or meet with the teacher during class hours. Also, they are required to check with the school authorities in the principal’s office for permission to speak with their child’s teacher. Parents are permitted to meet with the teacher during designated times and in designated areas of the school. Hence, parents constantly remind their children, to be attentive in class, behave properly and be in the “good books” of the teacher.

### **Middle Class Families and Schooling in India**

As mentioned earlier, many middle class and educated parents perceive education to be an asset. Hence, they start teaching their children early on, when they are still very young. Unlike many middle class American parents, who as part of their child-rearing activities spend time reading to their young children, mostly for pleasure, but also to help them develop verbal skills and love for reading, many Indian, middle class educated mothers and fathers, although they read to their children, it is usually done as part of the teaching/learning process. Parents teach children to read and write alphabets and numbers even before they start school. In other words, parent/child reading activities are

centered more on knowledge acquisition than just for pleasure or “fun” as it is commonly known in America.

Among many middle class families, parents not only want their children to do well in school, but they want them to be the best in their class. Mothers in particular, constantly monitor children’s educational progress, making it their first priority and everything else secondary, i.e. extra-curricular activities such as sports, music, even play.

Unlike American parents, who from a very young age encourage children to play sports and develop their athletic ability, Indian parents on the other hand, want their children to develop their math, reading and language skills before diverting their attention to leisure and recreation activities such as sports. Indian parents don’t mind if their children play, provided they finish their homework, particularly during school days.

### **Schooling Rituals in India**

Starting from kindergarten, children attending schools in India get a lot of homework, almost in every subject, thus leaving them with very little time to play. In other words, for schooling children, homework takes precedence over play, making play and leisure activities to be almost treated like well-deserved rewards, to be earned by completing homework assigned. Also, the fact that there is plenty of “school choice”, parents often aspire and aim to send their children to reputable schools.

In India, compared to parents of school-going children in the U. S. who can volunteer and help out in the classrooms, school library and in the office, Indian parents are rarely seen in school, except before and after school hours. They also do not have as



much contact with their child's (ren)' teacher as most U. S. mothers do. Parents are not allowed to go into the classrooms or meet with the teacher during class hours. Also, they are required to check with the school authorities in the principal's office for permission to speak with their child's teacher. Parents can meet with the teacher during designated times and in designated areas of the school.

Unlike in the American public schools where lunch hour varies from one grade to another, in many private schools in India however, all students have one common lunch hour, irrespective of grades. In India, students usually bring their food and water from home. Sometimes they may have helpers or family members bring over their food to school during the lunch hour. Secondly, in most schools in India, students spend their lunch hour outside the classrooms. Sometimes students are issued passes, granting them permission to walk home for lunch if they happen to live near the school. Also, unlike schools in the U.S., in many schools in India, students spend their lunch hour under the watchful eyes of school guards or "durwans", who are employed by the school authorities to safeguard the students.

In the next chapter results pertaining to the core theme of this thesis, i.e. immigrant Asian-Indian mothers' roles in schooling young children are presented.

## Chapter 5

### Mothering for Schooling

This chapter focuses on significant features of the “mothering for schooling”. Findings are based on discussions among mothers in *Group 1*, as well as among mothers of *Group 2*. Selected data from follow-up interviews are also presented.

As mentioned earlier, focus group interviews and follow-up interviews created opportunities for mothers to discuss what they deemed as important issues pertaining to mothering for schooling work. Issues associated with mothering for schooling work did come up in *phase one* of focus group interviews; however, they were essentially discussed during phase two of the focus group conversations. In addition, in depth discussions continued during the follow-up, one-on-one interviews, in which Asha and Nina from *Group 1* and Daya and Leela from *Group 2* participated.

Conversations centered on mothering for schooling work drew attention to mothers’ understanding or lack thereof, about local public schools, academic and social aspects of schooling their children in the local schools, every day trials and tribulations, mental, physical, and emotional investments, and adjustments in fulfilling their maternal role and obligations. In addition, conversations also highlighted mothers’ responses and pathways of finding solutions to their everyday mothering and schooling dilemmas. How they dealt with the situation(s), energized themselves, sought accommodation or resolution in terms of their gender, immigrant status, and social-class standards were also included.

Once again, mothers compared and contrasted between the two contexts (Indian and American schools) and put things into perspective. Mothers articulated their views and interpretations about mothering and school-related issues, especially those that they had difficulty comprehending. Some of the mothers interviewed believed it was not wise to compare, the two contexts---India and their present location in the United States. However, they felt they did not have a choice, but to compare and contrast the two contexts to assess their knowledge about American schools in general and schooling practices in particular, important to gather information necessary for their mothering for schooling work. In other words, contextual differences between India, and local community led mothers to simultaneously deconstruct and reconstruct.

Mothers talked about their family goals, attitudes and beliefs about mothering, as well as issues pertaining to children's schooling and educational priorities. In addition, Asian-Indian mothers drew attention to cultural differences between their homes and the schools that their children attended, as well as shared their views about mothering style differences between themselves and what they perceived to be as mainstream American mothers.

As educated women, Asian-Indian mothers wanted to apply their own fool-proof, time tested knowledge acquired from their past experiences, towards their children's schooling as well as towards learning the local contexts. As beneficiaries of the Indian educational system, mothers valued those learning and teaching strategies, and believed that if they applied some of those strategies towards their children learning, it would benefit them. In fact, they encouraged their children to embrace them and reap the benefits as well.

Mothers had high expectation from their children. However, despite the fact they provided their children with undivided attention and communicated well with them, a few mothers mentioned that their children complained about meeting their expectations. However, mothers took along their stride. Leela mentioned that she expected her children to do well in school, and encouraged them by setting good examples as well as through positive reinforcement. She said,

It is always...if you want a good efficient, I mean response; you have to have high expectations. If you have high expectations...it is like somebody said, shoot for the moon, even if you miss, you will fall in the stars, you know, that's even better, like you know, you are in the stars. Unless you have a higher expectations...and from an Indian standpoint, Asian standpoint, or whatever, our kids doing well here, they might feel, the teachers might feel that they are doing excellent you know, every time you go there, you get a report saying, oh, your son is doing so well, he is doing this, this, this...but when you look at your...what you were doing at that age, you still feel that, they can do much more, with all the resources available here, and all the facilities they have here, we think we can push them to do a little bit more, not to the extent that, you know, they are tired, or...frustrated or anything like that...you have to, you have to draw a line somewhere. You know your kids better than anybody else. So, you have to...

Sudha: So would you say that as a big...as a cultural difference between the mainstream or...or the expectations from the teachers and you as an Indian parent? Would you see that as a cultural difference, and...?

Leela: Somewhat, somewhat, but I have seen other parents here, you know who are Americans, they also feel the same way. They are pushy, they want the children to achieve more, they have high expectations. There are similar parents like our...like what we believe in. So, you can...can't just generalize it. But most of the Indians...parents who have migrated from India to come here, they are all well educated to begin with. They come here to do higher education. So, they know the value of education and they probably...many of them, like S...especially S...you know, I can say for him, they have gone through very hard...life when they were in India. And they have saved so much money to come here, and they appreciate the value of education and value of money. So...that makes a lot of difference...If you come the hard way you learn it.

(Follow-up Interview, January, 10, 2004)

In the case of Sheela, she alluded to her son and said,

It is challenging, it is not easy, plus you have to keep your kids in the right path, make sure they are not going to get into drugs, and smoking and sex, things like that... So, I think the main reason our kids are doing well, and will do well, is that we are so involved. Plus, we give our hundred percent attention to our kids. For I think, most, not just Indian mothers, most Asian mothers, I feel, we give a lot of value to education and to family life. You know, we really stress on that, that you know, family life is important, education is important, we don't let our kids slide in anything...

it defines our role, because we are...we really discipline our kids, if their grade are not good, this and that, you know, we say this is not acceptable... That's what R (her son) always says, 'that's the problem with Indian parents, kids always have to get an A'. (Everybody laughs when Sheela imitates her son). That's how he puts it.

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June, 20, 2003)

For many immigrant parents from India, culture becomes an important factor once children become part of the family nexus. Consequently, dealing with cultural differences between themselves and the mainstream Americans becomes a daily phenomenon, more so, when their children begin schooling in culturally divergent and unfamiliar environments.

In the case of immigrant Asian-Indian first time mothers, the advent of their children's schooling can be a mixed blessing, i.e. a joyous celebration as well a cross-cultural challenge. As immigrant Asian-Indian mothers and primary caregivers, sending their child to an "American" school can be exciting. Alongside it may also raise concerns about unfamiliar environments, social and cultural differences between their Asian-Indian homes and mostly white American schools. Consequently, children's schooling may compel mothers to develop a dual perspective and think in "bicultural" terms---Indian and American. In addition, mothers may even be forced to re-think issues such as language; food, ethnicity and religion, relationships all of which stand to serve as defining elements and integral to their mothering and schooling work.

As for the women in this study, since their children's educational success rested on their fragile shoulders they felt compelled to become learners again. However as mothers belonging to the middle class, they were ambitious for their children, and aspired that their children take advantage of all the learning opportunities and become better than them, socially, economically and culturally. They hoped their children would seek the best of both worlds---Asian-Indian as well as American.

Since, most of the mothers associated with this study were educated women, they tried to explore pathways and gather pertinent information about schools and schooling processes in the local area. Since their children's schooling and education success was of primary importance to them, they did not hesitate to extend themselves, and did everything they possible could.

As newcomers, mothers talked to older Asian-Indian mothers about their mothering for schooling experiences, those who came before them, been there, done that. When ever opportunities arose, they talked to teachers, friends and neighbors. They even talked to one another and learned that similarities and subtle differences existed between elementary schools within the same community; despite the fact all the schools were part of the same district.

Mothers learned that the local community, student population as well as the location of school was significant in defining the "culture" of the school. To the extent that even changing schools within the same district can lead to unwanted anxieties for mothers and children, as in the case of Reema and her daughter. Reema and her daughter went through a period of unpleasantness, when the family moved within town, which also meant that the children had to switch schools. Reema said that her daughter

was unhappy with the move, and initially had a very difficult time getting adjusted to the “different” school population. Apparently, as the only Asian-Indian girl in her school she was often teased about her school lunch.

### **Mothers’ understanding of important terms in this study**

It is important first of all to present mothers’ interpretation and in depth understanding of the terms such as “mother”, “mothering”, “mothering for schooling”, “schooling” and “culture”, four critical issues that stand to serve as adjoining posts in laying the foundation for this study. These explorations were only possible during the follow-up conversation, when I met one-on-one with the mothers at their respective homes.

Asha interpreted the term “mother” as follows,

“Mother is somebody who is caring, loving, and always there for the children, whether it is at night, day, morning, evening...mother is somebody who...when children open their eyes and they see her. They close their eyes and she is the last person they see, at least till they are little”.

(Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

On a personal note, as a mother she thinks she is “A combination of everything, Indian, American...a mother who is struggling to bring up her children in this country”.

(Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

Asha interpreted the term “mothering” as a life long endeavor. She spoke with great sincerity and said,

“It is just a continuation of what a mother is...nurturing and caring for the rest of their(children’s) lives...you are always there for them...they are family...mothers never stop mothering... mothers are influential in shaping children’s personality. I see so much of my mother in me”.

(Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

Asha believes she became a better person after becoming a mother. She thinks the first ten years of a child’s life are important, and require mother’s presence and attention. She interpreted “mothering for schooling” as,

“Reinforcing at home what children learn at school, teaching something extra, dealing with the situations of school at home...so mothering for schooling goes hand in hand...it is always a continuous process...it is also about (mothers) going and volunteering in school”.

(Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

When Asha started talking about “Indian culture” and “American culture” I asked her how she would interpret the term “culture”. She said,

“Culture is basically is what has been instilled in us when we were in India...it is a way of thinking, but unfortunately the fear that I have, is that we were born and brought up in India, we had strong cultural values. Slowly these kids do not have the same values as we did back home. There is some lost”.

(Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

As for Nina her maternal role is of prime importance to her and everything else including her career is secondary. Apparently, as a mother she constantly questions herself, whether she is doing the “right” thing, particularly from the child’s perspective. She said,

“I feel the mother’s role is so important that, especially if you have daughters, you become the role model and you have to set a good example”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)



She derives great pleasure in being a mother, and mentioned that her mothering abilities come to her “naturally”. She mentioned that her own mother has been the most influential person in her life.

When asked how she would interpret the term “mother” she said,

“It is such an important term, and the role of that person in shaping the family is...so...crucial. Aa...there are so many manifestations of the role of the mother, supportive, encouraging, keeping the harmony in the family. She sets the tone...how happy the entire family is...she is like a pillar of support, and like getting everybody and everything together...like multifaceted”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

As an Asian-Indian woman and mother located in central Pennsylvania, she saw herself as somebody different from mainstream American woman and mother, and hence had her share of concerns. Nina further elaborated her concerns and mentioned,

“Concerns meaning, how my kids are going to be accepted by the majority of the American people who are not colored. I don’t want them to feel...anyway inferior. So, I am always concerned that they will not be accepted by other kids”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

As a primary caregiver, she wanted to raise her daughters to be confident, be proud of their culture, and do well academically and socially, and hence felt obligated to do her best for her children. Nina interpreted the term “mothering” as,

Mothering is all about love...love is so powerful...The mother’s love, nobody else can give that kind of...what you say...unconditional love”. Nina alluded that a mother was a child’s first teacher, and her teaching begins from day one---birth of a child, and perhaps never ends. Nina stressed the importance of her role in laying the foundation for her daughters’ “character development.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

Nina interpreted “mothering for schooling” as spending “quality time” with her daughters, as well as participating in school, family and community related activities.

“QT” or quality time is the buzz word in her family. In her family, dinner is followed by “QT” everyday. It involved one on one interaction between parent and child, with either mother or father and included teaching/learning, homework, talking about school, playing, reading, even fun activities like building puzzles, painting or coloring. According to Nina, “QT” lasted for an hour to forty five minutes, during which time neither parent take any phone calls, but remain focused on one child, it could be younger or older daughter. They take turns to switch, as well, so that both the girls get a chance to spend time with mother as well as father.

Nina tries hard to keep her cultural heritage and ethnicity alive. She considered her home to be a cultural environment---An Asian Indian home, and culturally different from her daughters’ American school. When asked how she would interpret the term “culture”, she said “Culture is something...it is closely knit with tradition, something...like prayer, and like music and of course, clothing and food”.

Below is an excerpt of a conversation between Daya and myself, which highlights her views about the role of mother and mothering work.

Daya: Mother, mother is somebody the children can depend on anytime. And, who will provide basic needs, like food, shelter, comfort, also teacher. Mother is a teacher too.

Sudha: So, mother is a teacher?

Daya: Ya...I think they can learn from mother, a lot of important things from mother and father and the school, I think values and everything like that.

Sudha: So, what is your understanding of the term “Mothering”?

Daya: Mothering, telling them right from wrong, try to keep them on track, and making sure they are developing well, now a days...well that is a subjective term. Because what is well for you may not be well for somebody else, but at least in your views you want them to be, trying to achieve the goals you want. Sometimes in subtle ways, sometimes in very obvious ways, you know. My

husband is very...I think is a person who doesn't push at all. He will be fine with either one. But, I think I am the person who pushes in one direction. Sometimes I feel like maybe I shouldn't do this. But, I feel, what is the other option here? If I don't push, you know, they may not go where we want them to go.

Sudha: So, do you see yourself as a leader or, or do you see yourself as a guide?

Daya: Leader, I would say. My husband is probably more on the guide side, he is not very attached to the end goal, I am. I see myself do that, I wish I was more a guide than a leader. But I guess I don't want...I mean the stakes are high you know, so I think I should play safe as possible, so may be that's why I push it. If they were to grow up in an environment I was growing up, I would be very different, I think. I would think that I needed to slow down.

Sudha: One reason you are a leader here, is because of the... you are (they) are growing up in an environment which you, is very different from where you grew up. Western environment...

Daya: Right, right, right. Western, and there are so many ideas put into them, by their friends, their programs and everything that are contrary to what we believe in. And, I think, I read this study that they are only going to listen to you till they are twelve years old. So at least up till then, you know, I am trying to preach in a way to them. I guess in a way, I would say I am preacher too. (She laughs) However much they may resent it.

Sudha: Oh, o.k. it is interesting...

Daya: I try to preach to them, in the car, or anywhere...

Sudha: So, what is your understanding about "schooling"? You know, when they say schooling...

Daya: Schooling, I would say mainly to provide an academic environment for them.

Sudha: So, schooling is as you know, your understanding of schooling is an academic environment?

Daya: Academic environment, they also grow, I mean their personality also grows in, you know, they spend quite a bit of time with their teachers and fortunately I mean the teachers here, are really excellent. So, we don't have to really worry about that aspect. As far as their peers it is a different issue totally...

Sudha: So, then what would you say, you know, based on what you just said, your first and foremost priority, as far as your children are concerned? You know, of course, you mentioned education.

Daya: Education is first, and also you want them to behave well, and you know, and not get into trouble, and have good citizenship. And have all social values and...religious values.

Sudha: Ya, as you said, you know being a good person is itself, needs...some devotion to God. So, what is your understanding of the term “culture”?

Daya: That’s a very, very vast...WORD.

Sudha: O.k., ya, ya, mean how like, if you were to define...tell your child that you know, a person who is you know...just you know...how would you think about it, how you understand it, and how you apply it, you know, so...because there is more than one answer for that...

Daya: I think I would define it as, I think at the finest level, I would say trying to discern between what is very good for their development, versus what is bad. And the ways to achieve it, you know, in the East we have different ways of achieving, but I would say, somebody’s you know, laud into our culturally...so I would say, they would have some good taste for their own music, and their own spirit, you know...their selection of friends...and their thinking basically too. You know, what level are they thinking, is it like a monetary level, is it like a spiritual level...what kind of mind set.

Sudha: So, in many ways, are you saying that culture can be defined in many ways, and...go in different ways, and different aspects...?

Daya: Ya...but I think a cultured person will be very similar, because you know, whether they grow up in entirely different cultures, but if we bring cultured people to together, then I think they will have a lot of similarities.

Sudha: Mm...aha...o.k.

Daya: The end result might be the same as the means of it. You see...

Sudha: Ya, ya, that makes perfect sense. Do you think culture plays a role in your work as a mother, in preparing yourself, as well as for the schooling process?

Daya: In my work place, I mean, work as a mother, or work as work?

Sudha: As a mother...

Daya: Work as work, I think culture is...at least down played more or less at work. usually...

Sudha: So, as a mother...like

Daya: As a mother a...

Sudha: How you implement your ideas as a mother and you know, does culture play a role, especially regarding your work regarding your children's schooling?

Daya: Ya...I would say yes, not...like my neighbor...she is American, and she spends a lot of time with her kids. She has taken time off work and you know, so...culturally...I mean if you take American culture and if I am comparing her with me...and I think she also has put a lot of effort, into...like taking the kids out for... good music, programs, play...you know, certainly important things. Then, I try to do it in my own way, using Eastern methods, eastern music and you know, history, based on religion and so. Ya, I think that way I would achieve that is different from what my neighbor who is American...

Sudha: Do you think there is also a culture in how you mother, your children, the mothering processes...?

Daya: I think we tend to be more protective, we tend to prolong motherhood. You know, we think motherhood even extends even after their marriage. So that's different, and we try to nurture all our views on them. Where it is good or bad, we don't question.

Sudha: You were saying your friend also, she does a lot of stuff, and she is American. So, can you give an example that can differentiate...

Daya: I guess we focus more on religion and they don't. And they don't go to church or anything. I would say, I talk a lot about...I have to talk a lot more about...you know, Sri Lanka, cultural background, how people do, their dressing, their clothes and everything different. So, I have to introduce all that to them, they don't have all that kind of problem, so, we are basically swimming against the tide here. So we have to put in much more effort.

Sudha: So you think you are putting more effort...

Daya: Much more effort, for she is just going with the flow. She doesn't have to put in much more extra effort, because it is all over...we are swimming against the tide, basically all the time.

(Follow-Up Interview, December 3, 2003)

It is apparent from Daya's conversation that mothering work was a full time job.

Even under "normal" circumstances the nature of mothering work is unsettling and shrouded with ambivalence. Furthermore, when cultural differences come into play, then

in mothering work can be prolonged and unending, both as a mechanism towards self-preservation as well as a protective umbrella against cultural invasion. In fact, Mother Daya mentions that the circumstances of mothering often lead immigrant women and mothers to prolong their motherhood. They draw as much emotional support from their children, as their children do from them. Keeping up with the emotional exchanges is a big part of the daily grind. However, it helps everyone in the family move forward with their respective lives. In the next section, mothers' views about schooling children in the local community will be presented.

It was interesting to learn how some of the mothers interpreted their understanding of "schooling". Asha of *Group 1* interpreted "schooling" as, "A process of learning different things...whether it is socializing, whether it is games, whether it is focusing on science, math or social studies." (Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

On the other hand, Nina, who belonged to *Group 1* as well, took a more elaborate approach. She interpreted "schooling" to be:

"Schooling I think gives opportunity for improving thinking, it is more for the brain...exercise for the brain. Of course, there is respect and friendship and love exchanged between friends, teachers and students. But it is more for the brain than the heart".

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

In addition, her interpretation of "schooling" included not just the process but the context as well. She considers her home to be another context for schooling. She said, "At home it (schooling) is more for the heart than for the brain...the home too is a place for schooling---a place for practical schooling, that which is not available in the books". (Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

Nina modestly noted, “Home was a type of school where kids can learn “unknowingly” by observing mother’s and father’s activities and their individual reactions to certain situations occurring within the home”. (Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

Daya who belonged to *Group 2*, and who sends her daughter to a Charter School, understood schooling more in terms of children’s personality growth and peer interactions. She said:

“Schooling, I would say mainly to provide an academic environment... they also grow, I mean their personality also grows in, you know, they spend quite a bit of time with their teachers and fortunately I mean the teachers here, are really excellent. So, we don’t have to really worry about that aspect. As far as their peers it is a different issue totally...

(Follow-Up Interview, July 3, 2003)

Although most of mothers expressed their schooling years to be challenging, none of them showed any remorse or regret. They seemed proud of their learning opportunities, and felt it was a worthwhile effort. However, they did reveal that their parents, teachers, and family elders expected them to work hard, compete with their fellow classmates and enhance their academic skills with each academic year. Hima of Group 1 said: “Schooling was something to worry about” (Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003).

### **Mothering for Schooling in a Local Community**

All the mothers of *Groups one and two* found their mothering for schooling work to be very challenging, as it was limited not just to their homes, but extended beyond, into the schools and communities---American as well as Asian-Indian communities.

Their mothering work was not just limited to their children's care and nurturance, but also included children's academic work, recreational, social and cultural activities, Indian as well as American.

However, as immigrant women from India, mothering for schooling experiences were not the same for all the participants in this study. They varied depending upon their own personalities, childhood experiences, time of arrival to their present locations, family priorities and whether they had sons or/and daughters. As Hima of group one mentioned regarding her experience, she said:

“Yes, it has always been a constant struggle and I never feel that I put in enough time or have been able to put in enough time because being here also I'm learning the system, you know, and how to live in this country. You know, like we have so much more work and no help. You know, and being the first to be here, you know, you don't have that support system that works, that you can depend on and rely on that you have in India. So, as a result I have less time for my children. You know, and, so it is like an uphill task to try to balance the two cultures given the limitations, you know...”

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Daya who shared similar customs and traditions as the other mothers, felt stressed as well. Interestingly, her mothering work was conducted in (reverse mode). Since she came to the U. S. as a student, and spent several years teaching undergraduate students, she was well aware of some of the social aspects of college life, the ups and down, irrespective whether the students were Asian-Indian or white American. Apparently, she was impressed with a few Asian-Indian students, the way they conducted themselves inside and outside the classroom. However she was appalled to see other Asian-Indian young men and women, behave very inappropriately. Hence, according to her, she was aware what could happen in the future. She did not want her daughter to go on that path. In many ways, it seemed as if her mothering for schooling work construction was



centered on what could happen. In other words, she was using her past observational knowledge to prepare herself and her daughter for the future.

In fact, during the time of the interview Daya was on extended leave from her job at a higher learning institution. She had difficulty balancing her mothering work and her academic work. Daya described mothering for schooling work as, “Exhausting! It is round the clock job” (Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003).

On the other hand, Asha of *Group 1* chose to compare herself and other Asian-Indian immigrant mothers in the local community and with mothers in India, to make her point. She painstakingly explained and talked about the everyday mothering for schooling challenges as well as the ensuing social implications on Asian-Indian adults and children. As an immigrant mother fully engaged in mothering for schooling work she said:

“We have to work extra, extra, hard here, compared to what our friends back home in India. I am sure they have to work hard in different areas for their children, but I think it is just a lot thinking and working hard on our behalf, taking care of the house, the children as well as outside work, if you are working...kind of like, we are in a triangle, we are always, always, just pressurized with this work...we are never relaxed”.

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Asha elaborated on the concept of “triangle” as: “Doing the home work, taking care of family, your children...outside you know, if you are working outside...” (Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

Assuming everybody works hard I asked her what was so different about her, and why she had to talk about the “triangle”. She replied:

“Everybody does that, but somehow we have this pressure of that, we...I don’t think, no matter how much we say this, we are always going to be second-class

citizens in this country, we are not going to be the same as white Americans. We have to work little more harder, than what these white Americans have to, and I think, that's the reason why we have this pressure...you have to stand out...my husband and I are always talking about it, all the time at home, not just my husband and I, but I think all Indians...who ever moves from outside, has to prove a point...they call us different, they look at us differently, and there is no doubt about it, because we are different. We are not part of Americans. There is always going to be that difference, no matter how much we deny, And, I think that's another reason why we want to stand out, and in a positive way and not negative".  
(Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

However unlike the other mothers Leela's viewpoint was optimistic and rational. As an immigrant mother, she viewed mothering and schooling within the realm of opportunity(ies), to learn, explore new things and expand one's horizons. It was not just limited to her children but also included her own interests and pastimes. Comparing two contexts, India and the local community, Leela highlighted some advantages and disadvantages and said:

"In India, in India raising children is very different...issue all together, because schooling...everything is different. You don't have opportunities like this, and then mostly it is like pressure on the children to study well, send them to coaching classes, and they don't have time for anything else...

I think this place has got so much of opportunities, that as a mother you should take advantage of all that, and help your children get there...I mean there are so many other things that the kids are able to do, like they can get better in sports, they can enroll and stuff, in school, they can do other after school activities, I mean all those things are...you are able to give your children. I mean you have to work towards it; you have to make the time to make them do it. There is so much available that, you have fit that in your daily schedule, and make sure that you are able to give that to your kids... and expose them to other interesting things and you know, education field or what ever...You have to work towards it, you have to. You just sit back and nothing is going to come to you. You have to work more... I mean by, giving them opportunities to you know, explore and...you have make the time.

You are just too busy too...you know running around with your kids, from one thing to the other. If you like that, for some that you can do. I don't think people can do it for ever. For some time, when you have your..."  
(Follow-Up Interview, January 10, 2004)

Overall the mothers were pleased with the schools. However, despite their English language skills, as immigrant “outsiders” who were schooled elsewhere, they had their work cut out for them. Contextual and cultural differences between India and the local community often led mothers to get confused and stressed. Lived circumstances required mothers to change their ways of thinking and become learners again. It required them to rethink and reassess their understandings about their role as woman, wife and mother. Mothers had to learn to become “insiders”. They had to learn about the divergent schooling “rituals” in general, as well as those that pertained to “mothering for schooling” work, in particular.

First and foremost, as immigrant minority women who were also mothers they had to learn to be physically, mentally and emotionally self-reliant and not depend on anyone beyond their nuclear family. More importantly, as women and daughters, they had to let go their family support system and social networks. Being far away from their “home” and “motherland”, mothers had to make many “personal” adjustments without quite compromising cultural expectations of wife and mother. Mothers had to change to carry out their mothering responsibilities inside and outside their homes, elsewhere and survive in this “foreign” country.

Public schools are an extension of the community and township in Mid-Atlantic United States. Mothers not only had to learn about the academic and social aspects of schooling, but it was incumbent upon them to adapt to the mainstream community as well. Mothers adapted by dressing in “American” clothes; they learned to prepare “American” food. In addition, they also learned about American festivals and traditions,

majority of them even celebrated them, e.g. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Halloween etc. In fact, Nina who believed in the positive aspects of diversity mentioned that she encouraged her daughters to participate in Easter Egg Hunts. Her husband and she participated as well.

Mothers felt they cannot afford to sit back and complain. Since their children's schooling and educational success was their first priority, they felt they had very little choice but to "actively" participate in their children's schooling. As in-coming first generation immigrants, and as a person responsible for their children's educational endeavors, mothers had to "sensitize" themselves to the culture of schooling within the local community. Many mothers mentioned that it required them to speak up, become aggressive and make necessary decisions. It was up to them, to take an initiative and learn.

As Leela said:

"Things which are applicable in India are not applicable here, like here you have to be a little aggressive. You can't give in to everything, you can't be so polite and you can't be so nice...if you have to get things done, you have to be little aggressive, it is not the same back in India. It's different, so you have to adjust and accommodate those...those attributes or what ever".

(Follow-Up Interview, January 10, 2004)

However, having extended her mothering for schooling work into an actual classroom, Leela was able to gain experience on both sides of the spectrum. She was able to develop a dual perspective. As an immigrant Asian-Indian mother, and substitute teacher, she presented a realistic picture and said:

"It's just that, you are in a situation where you are the minority... You know, you have to live with the risk, it's your choice, and nobody brought you here. We shouldn't like you said, we can't sit at home and complain. You have to get up

and do something about it. And, more people coming out and helping out in schools, they (teachers) love it, they just love it. I mean, they are always looking for volunteers to come and help... There are thirty, thirty-five kids in the class, maybe one or two parents sincerely come every week, on a weekly basis. I mean, and I am not saying the other people are not, coming for something else, but even if they are at home, they just don't want to show up... And some parents are not even worried about their children's conference time. They say, I don't want to come, I don't want to talk. That's it...

If you keep on saying that at home, the children are listening to that, and that's what is going to stick in their heads, saying that we are different...

We should be looking at the similarities and not the differences right now, you know, when we are trying to be a part of the whole... We have moved from a different country. And, when I get a chance to be in the classroom as a teacher, you know, that's all going to add up to the, you know, to the stereotypes... I am hoping to be there in a positive role... I would like to like to see more people getting involved. You know, being visible..."

(Focus Group Interview, July3, 2003)

Many mothers tried to volunteer in their children's schools, classrooms, school libraries, some of them even volunteered to go on field trips. Whenever opportunities arose, mothers visited schools and talked about India, its customs, traditions, language and culture etc. However, the general consensus among the mothers was that the school teachers, mainstream families and children had very little knowledge and interest in knowing about India. When questioned if the local teachers (from the schools that their children attended) showed any interest in their Indian culture? In unison, *Group 1* mothers replied, "No".

Mothers felt they needed to become aggressive, if they needed something they had to ask for it. As Leela said:

"You can't be nice and polite. Complaining will set a bad example on the children. Be the best role model, reinvent the wheel, it is challenging not easy. Become school volunteers, spend time in their children's school and learn through observation and participation".

(Follow-Up Interview, January 10, 2004)

More importantly mothers were trying to avail every possible learning opportunity that they thought would benefit their children. In addition, as immigrant mothers, they realized that being involved in their children's schooling on a daily basis was not just limited to their homes, but extended into the schools, as well as the communities---Indian and American. It required them to take on added responsibilities. Hence each and every one of the mothers had their share of concerns, some more than the others, depending upon their personalities, family priorities, their understanding of the social and cultural differences between home and school, age and sex of their child(ren), as well the location of the school. As Hima said:

“Another thing is that, the schools here, I don't know the system. Again, it is a learning experience for me also, and I don't have, I don't even know what to ask. You know, what to ask parents you know, most of the friends here, they also don't know, everybody is learning the system. And you constantly think, you go back in your old days and think that it's going to be like this, but then you realize it's not, and by the time you figure it out, next class, your kid is in the next grade you know.

Aa... then I never know how the child is doing, I go in the parent-teacher conferences, I go ask the teachers, 'Oh, your child is doing fine, and everything is fine', and this and that, aaa... you know some times they don't do their class assignments on time, but it is nothing very concrete you know, I don't know what to focus on, as far as my child is concerned. It's not very specific you know...

So, even schools, as I said, I talked to the teacher, and I'm not so sure which subject they (her daughters) need attention, because they don't have these subject wise, everything is o.k., and everything is fine, nothing to worry about. That's not how we were brought up, we always had something to worry about you know (laughs), 'your kid is not doing o.k. good in this, you need to focus on that, and make them do some additional work'.

I would ask the teacher you know, "Do you have any suggestions for books that I could teach my kids from?" and, it would be very hard, you know to get that kind of guidance from the...(the teacher)... Ya, like a text book, you know, so that I know what they are learning in school and I could, when they come back home

this chapter they have done and I could reinforce. They just come back with loose sheets of paper and you don't know what they have done and where they are going... It takes a few years to learn that, and by that time your kid is in fourth grade you know".

Some of the issues discussed as part of the mothering for schooling agenda may be classified under two strands---1) Mother's views about academic aspects of schooling, such as academic standards, homework, teaching styles and strategies, classrooms etc., and 2) Mothers views about social aspects of schooling, such as language issues, ethnic identity issues, school lunches, peer interactions, school- talk, sex education to name a few. Viewing these two strands together would provide a sense how mothers perceived their children's schooling needs. Mothers also addressed issues of gender and social class standards and provided suggestions for future mothers and teachers.

### **Meeting Children's needs**

It was apparent from the mothers' stories all the work that they put into their mothering for schooling work, was worthwhile, because it resulted in them having a healthy mother-child relationship with their children. For mothers, meeting their children's needs was their first priority and everything else was secondary. They were happy to be able to provide for their children a comfortable lifestyle.

However they were also worried about the cultural aspects of child rearing, as well as the mainstream community's influences on their children. Maya of *Focus Group 2* interview, made a compelling statement that lends relevance to the above mentioned mothering and cultural dilemma. Maya said:

“Kids make all the difference...Culturally is, something I wanted to say, until we had kids, we barely interacted with the Indian community. I mean, I am being very honest for your talk. We were happy with our selves. I was going to school, and he was trying to be you know, get tenure, so, we were absolutely caught up with work.

Then we had our kid, and the first time we were allowed (able) to go, we took him straight to the temple and every single Sunday I have taken him to the temple... So, culturally, if you don't put in the effort, nothing is going to happen. It...they will grow up to be extremely confused kids and...”

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

It is important to stress that this study focuses only on mothers. Issues pertaining to fathers although important have not been included in this study. However, it is clear from the discussions with the mothers, that they were amply supported by their husbands in their mothering for schooling endeavors, some more than the others depending on their family priorities and mutual understanding. Exploring fathers' roles was not intended to be part of this research process, and hence is beyond the scope of this study. However, it was important to include Maya's comment about fathers. In fact, as a primary caregiver and teacher in her family, which included teaching her children to be culturally responsive in various aspects of their everyday life, she made a wise remark and said:

“Both, both parents, unless and until they (the children) see the parents at...you may do the job as a mother, and unless the father is backing up the mother constantly, the whole family is going to chaos and ruin”.

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

### **Mothers' views about social aspects of schooling children**

In this section I shall first begin with mothers' beliefs and attitudes about child rearing and sending children to day care, and then proceed with identity, language and food issues to name a few, as well as mainstream cultural influences on their children.



As primary caregivers, many mothers felt morally obligated to fulfill their duty as mothers as well as maintain a strong and stable family unit so that their children can feel secure. Mothers were not strong proponents of daycare for children. Most of them believed in staying home and caring for their kids, particularly during the formative years.

In fact, Nina was not in favor of sending her children to daycare. As a research scientist with a Ph.D. in biological sciences, she worked from her home when her children were little. On the other hand, Hima who was overwhelmed with her mothering for schooling work shared some of the positive aspects of sending children to daycare.

Below is an excerpt of a discussion between some of the group one members, which is reflective of their understandings and attitudes about a mother's role and its consequential affects on children's development and well being. Discussions also included mother's attitudes about children day care outside the home.

Nina: I don't believe in daycare. I think the best quality attention a child can get is, from mother or father. Nobody can give that love. So, being loved and being...that security nobody else can give I think..."

Sudha: So your role as a mother is your first priority...

Nina: Yes...yes (Emphatically)...that comes, then, other things become very easy. Once your goal is to be a good mother then other things like even if there are differences, we can sort it out, even if I am not so happy with my job, I can, I, I, I don't think it is a big deal you know. At the most, what best can I do even I go out of, out of the local area and work, at best I can be a scientist you know, in a company. I might earn twice, but this time that I would spend with my kids, I will never get back (She said these words with great confidence, as if she is very sure about it).

Meena: Always, children are grown and gone...

Nina: Ya...

Sheela: Kids come first, once you are a mother that's your first job...

Nina: I think that's that's...

Sheela: That's the way I look at it too, after that, everything else is secondary.

N: Ya, ya...

Sudha: So what about kid's education, kids come first?

Sheela: Definitely...

Sudha: Kids schooling, how would you grade that?

Sheela: What ever happens to them, you know...

Meena: The best thing parents can do is give good education, give good moral values, and good care and that will stay with them as long as they live. And they will become good parents for their kids. Set a good example...

Nina: Ya, ya...

Meena: That's the difference between American kids and the Indian kids...

Sheela: And the first three, four years and five years I feel are so formative in a child's life, that is if they go to daycare, I am not saying that if kids go to daycare they are bad kids or anything. But that...

Asha: Security is less..."

Sheela: That security, you know, they just know, they are so loved and so well taken care of, that security gives them so much self-confidence for their rest of their lives...

Meena: They won't get into any bad habits, like drugs and all that you know...

Sheela: I think, feel the first three, four years if we can afford to, we should all stay home, or work in such a way that if kids have to go to a baby sitter like, minimum, may be a few hours a week or whatever...

Hima: I have just one point in favor of daycare centers. Of course, you know, I do agree with everybody who had spoken. Aaa...I mean as long as it is used in balance you know, you shouldn't on daycare. But, if you don't use it all what happens is, most of the time, these are working moms, most of the kids are going to the daycare, so even if you are at home with him, he has nobody his own age to play with. As a result, you know, you basically have to start finding moms who

are home and making appointments and hitch highways, it is not very feasible you know, and that is a very important part of development... When we were growing up, we never were, lacking for friends. We would just go behind the house, next door and ...

Nina: But how much is the social necessity there for preschoolers to you know,....

Hima: By the time they are three years old, and kindergarten starts very late, it starts at five, you know, so between three and five is what we are thinking you know, that's the age. And if you can send just for a couple of hours to a daycare center, they play and come back home, you know, I did that for my younger child, because I felt I'll go crazy looking for you know, kids to play with you know. And, finding moms who were free...

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Besides members of *Group 1*, even Leela of *Group 2* in her follow-up interview mentioned she was also not in favor of sending her children to a daycare. She said:

“After I finished my Masters, I got pregnant with N(her second son)... Then ...again I took a break again, like for two or three years, I was home with him, and...one thing which I really am happy that I did was, I didn't go to school or do anything by leaving my kids in the daycare and stuff. I was dead against that... I mean if we are going have children, I want to be there for them, and they need me. And, I don't believe in putting them in daycare. I mean...

You miss so... much. And they need you. I mean, for people who can afford to have that kind of luxury, I think I would have not made myself, you know, be in that category. It is not that I have to go and earn money, or I have to go and do this right now, leaving my child I mean, in the daycare. I did not believe that. I wanted to spend time...since I love children, like I mean...without I mean...even to go to a party, leaving him in the babysitter's house, I was guilty. I felt guilty. R(her older son)...never used to stay well with any babysitter. He used to cry and...I didn't like that. So, he was with me all the time...

I feel that staying home with the children helped out. You know, you are there for the children all the time and you are doing things with them, you play with them, you teach them, you sing with them, mother specially, I mean they are more open to me, because I spend more time with them”.

(Follow-up Interview, January, 10, 2004)

From daycare the conversation shifted to a related topics---child rearing, volunteering and differences in school climate even though they happen to fall under the same district. Mothers reflected back to their own childhood in India, compared and

contrasted between their cultural ways of childrearing and mothering practices with their perceived understanding of mainstream white American child rearing norms and articulated their views. Below is an excerpt led by Meena and involved Mothers Sheela, Hima, and Asha. The conversation sheds light on their cultural ways of mothering and childrearing.

Meena: Another cultural difference I found is, the parents (she was referring to mainstream parents) try to compensate with gifts you know, for every occasion they give a gift to the child instead of their time...

Asha: Many parents do that...

Meena: It is really....something we never had in India, you know our parents used to sit and talk and tell stories, but we never here anything like this you know, every occasion they find they give gifts...

Sheela: Ya, Holi and Diwali (festivals) we used to get new clothes and special things...

Asha: That's why we never got these things; we never took these things for granted...

Meena: I think that spoils the kids also, because they expect the, you know with gifts every time. We want this, they become more materialistic, instead of fundamental values you have to install in them. So that's the...

Sheela: Ya, Plus another thing here they feel that it is good if the child becomes independent, like two, three years old, they start dressing themselves, they start feeding themselves. We feel pride in dressing our kids, and feeding them. We don't feel like, oh, I am making him or her, a baby. I just felt as a mother, it was my job to baby them. What's wrong to baby

Hima: The flip side is we may be overprotecting them...

Sheela: Overprotecting, that's true, we overdo it, but, I feel I rather overdo it...

Meena: Even now, my daughter (who is in college) asks me, 'Mom, why do you cling to me that much', (laughs)? I say I am not clinging, just asking where you are going, let me know where you are at all times. So that I know where you are...

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Maya mentioned that she volunteered in her children's school. She was pleased with her experiences, and talked about her interactions with the kindergarten teacher and things she learned.

She said:

“The kindergarten teacher, was excited to, even though she herself had a help, and she had only fifteen kids, she loved it every time I went there, in the beginning, they, I think I was the first Indian she had actually...she had met, an Arabic woman, and the Arabic woman came in a full, you know, the full head dress and all of that...And, then when I came around, we talked when the kids were in music class, the more she realized, we may be something different culturally, you know, among ourselves...”

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

In reference to her children's “sense-making” of their culture, Maya alluded to her two sons' changing personalities and play habits. She said,

“The second one (her younger son) culturally could care two hoots about the whole thing. But suddenly, in the last six months, I have noticed, he is getting more Indian, than my first one (her older son).

And, my first one, who did Bhangra (North-Indian folk dance) and always dressed appropriately, who asked his mother to come to school wearing a salwar kameez for Diwali (Indian festival of lights), I have done Diwali every single year in his old school, for almost four years. Now he feels uncomfortable listening to an Indian song with the windows rolled down in the car.

The second one, is an Indian soldier, he doesn't want to be an American soldier. I don't know why. What has suddenly turned this around? It is amazing to see the same environment, same parents, who have produced the same two kids, are mentally so different, the first one could care two hoots about anybody in the beginning, and now, he loves, he loves when P( his Sri Lankan, Tamil friend) comes over, but with P, and they both are the same age, pretty much, he is a little younger, they don't play American soldiers, I was sitting there and saying, this is America and this is Iraq, and he goes, no,...no this is India, and that is Pakistan.

And, my husband is very liberal, so we never talk about another country like that. But, how does he know these things? You know, of course, we watch movies, but to that extent, and now he wants to go to the temple camp. So, now next year, we are signing him up even though he is so young, but he still wants to stay by himself for a week. He wants to see what it is about. So, culturally, if you don't

put in the effort, nothing is going to happen. It...they will grow up to be extremely confused kids and..."

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Maya and Reema shared some interesting stories when their children switched school within the same district. Both the mothers learned that the school's location and the community it serves play a critical role in creating a social environment that is conducive to its students and their families. Apparently, Maya having participated in both the schools, one located in the far end of town, and the other located near a university setting, sensed some differences in her experiences within the two schools. She mentioned that the education part was quite similar; however, the social interaction patterns between teacher and students in the school located in the far end of town were very different from the school located near the university setting; particularly in ways teachers responded to new students. On some levels Maya and her son were not happy with the school located in the rural part of town.

Reema too went through a period of "anxious moments" when she relocated from an apartment to a house. Consequently, changing residence required her children to switch schools as well. Although, the move was within the same town, the school population in the "new" school was different--mostly white, as opposed to the "old" school which consisted of many children from Asian and variety of national backgrounds. Many of the students were bilingual and did not share the same cultural background or religion as their teachers.

According to Reema her daughter was happy in her "old" school, and had problems adjusting and "fitting in" to her "new" school. Reema shared her thoughts and concerns and said:

“B (her daughter) really enjoyed going to F, because of the international gathering and all, the kids, like, all the international students used to be in F, and for some reason, I don’t know how, all the internationals used to go to that particular, because of the location or what, they used to go there, and... B like, mostly, there used to be Asian mostly, and Asian kids some how they bond together a lot, because emotionally you know, their emotional level is more or less the same, compared to white kids, I have to say this, because, especially, like, white kids most of the time, you know, I would say most of the time, they are insensitive, they, they use certain words to hurt, you know, kids feelings and all, but, B really enjoyed F, but after, like after her fourth grade, when she moved to H, for some reason, it took her some time to get adjusted, because, in H, they had all white kids, majority, and B was, and B was maybe the only one, you know, in the whole entire school who was an Asian, Asian kid. And, although B is really outgoing and all, but, it took some time for her to, you know, to get adjusted to the new school, mainly because, kids were not, may be they did not accept her in the beginning. So, it took a while for her to get adjusted, even though she is outgoing and all. But, I really had to make, make sure that, you know, that she got used to that, and I had to talk to the teachers and all, and so culturally there was a lot of difference, but now she is, she is fine, because she is adapted to, all this, you know local...”

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Hearing Maya and Reema it was apparent that school location and the community it serves play a critical role in establishing the social environment within the school. In addition, the social development patterns of each child who attends his/her community’s school exemplify the ways they were reared by their parents at home, which also include issues such as language, religion, food, family life etc. Hence, when Reema’s daughter moved from her “old international school” to an “all white school”, she had trouble getting adjusted and fitting in, into an all white school. Reema’s daughter had to develop different social skills to accommodate herself into the “new” school.

Hima and Nina of *Group 1* eluded to language issues and its effects on their mothering work and well as their children’s identity development. Hima said:

In the beginning I did try to teach them some Hindi, and in the beginning they were you know, as they moved on to regular schools, they were more and more into English. And...

Sudha: When you say beginning, you know, how far, are you going back?

Hima: Pre-school...preschool I mean they were more exposed to the home atmosphere, so they were, they could speak more fluent Hindi, but at the same time I didn't want to keep it totally Hindi at home because that would you know, that would I felt that would hinder their adjustment once they would step out the home and go to preschool. So, we kept a balance, I mean we had a mixed language at home. So..."

Sudha, "Mixed language, Can you define that?"

Hima: Hindi and English both you know, we would speak in both the languages at home. And, I don't know if it was for the good or worse. But, as a result, I am still struggling with the mother tongue you know. May be it was good they had a better adjustment once they started going to preschool and school you know, so its, its, I don't know whether I judged it correct whether, like some families I see when the kids come home they are totally into their mother tongue. But that's not how it is in my house. It's more and more, the children still hear, you know. So that has always been a struggle and I never know whether it was for better or worse. But, I have never tried to impose on my children, not that, even if I try to impose I don't know if they are going to listen. (Laughs)

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

As for Nina she was not too pleased because the language of communication within her home was English. Since she and her husband come from different parts of India, and their mother tongues are different, she speaks Tamil and he speaks Marathi, and neither could learn the other person's mother tongue, they decided to regretfully "settle" with English as a language of communication within their family.

Mothering for schooling conversations also included ethnic identity issues. Mothers discussed how the school environment affected their children's sense of self which included the color of their skin, their food, and their play habits. According to Mothers Asha, Daya, Hima, Meena, Nina, there were moments when many of their "American" born children came home faced with doubt and anxiety about their ethnicity and other related issues.



Nina shared an interesting story about her younger daughter who was in second grade. Below is an excerpt about a conversation/discussion amongst mothers including me, which focused on various aspects of ethnic identity formations. The conversation started with Nina. She said:

S (her daughter) came home last week...

Sudha: She is in which grade?

Nina: She is going to second grade, She said, (laughs) 'my skin is very dark and you are not born in America and you are fairer than me, how come?' I said it is o.k. you know, some people have dark skin, and some people have brown and some people have white, but she said, 'I think I like white skin' and then I said, Why S(her daughter), why do you want to have white skin? And she said, 'aaa ...just because, I think it is nice', and...I had to go through this elaborate lecture, you know have to be blind to this, color of your skin, you have to be proud of yourself, you are so beautiful...blah, blah, blah, blah and then, I don't know if I convinced her, but I did my best to...get her out of that shell and I spoke to H (husband), and he said, 'it is fine', she is just thinking about something, she is going to get over it...

Sheela: (Mother) I never took many things seriously, you know sometimes we over do it...

Meena: That's a very good point, because my daughter is dark too, so we also went through the same thing...

Nina: Did you do anything?

Meena: No...we just never talked about it that much. I used to tell her you are good looking, you are doing well, you are doing very well, you know, you are very friendly, social and all that stuff, just reinforce the positive things in them, don't talk about the negative, like in...I mean being black is not a negative thing, but, of course, in this cultural, you know varied society, they know, you're dark and white and much more...

Nina: I am wondering if she had any...

Meena: Traumatic experience?

Nina: Any, any experience, whether it was through body language, that she felt that black, being brown is inferior, I don't know...

Sheela: Another thing is, she is six, seven years old, this is just the age, they start noticing more, you know, I think it is just...

Jyoti: I think that's the age when girls start questioning things...

Sheela: Ya, especially girls, they are so particular...

Nina: About appearance right!

Meena: Even T (son) used to say, why, all of his friends were very fair, they used to keep their hands close together, 'mine is brown you're is white. But, I mean they didn't think about that you know, he is inferior, he is superior and all that, they were just different...

Nina: And she drew this picture of herself, Daaaaaaaaaaaaark brown, you know, I said, there is a better shade, she said, no, no, no...It is not bad, but...

Sheela: But her in her eyes...

Nina: In her eyes she is like that...

Hima: May be she is aware of that...

Asha: I had noticed that with my son too, he...when ever we have school gathering and we have potluck, he never wants me to make any Indian dish. And the, there are people who love pulaos and you know other vegetables. One day I made it without talking to him, and I took it there, and he was just so scared that this is my cub scouts meeting and you are bringing pulao there! And, with all these spices in that, 'Why mom!' and I said, no A---, you watch people will like it, you know, and sure enough people liked it, and when they were giving me the comments, I made sure he heard them, that you know, it's not a bad thing, if you make Indian food and take it somewhere. And then there was, but then I am sure he didn't get convinced because there was another party, next picnic. Then I said, what should I make. He said, 'I know you will make the best thing in this world'. That is strawberry shortcake with American flag on it. (Everybody laughed loudly) And he made me make that..."

Sudha: You know my son used to tell me you know, please...don't wear a saree and come, those days I used to wear only sarees. He used to say, 'Mom please, wear pants and come'. I said, my pants are all so, you know they don't fit me properly..."

Sheela: Oh ya, that they all do...

Meena: T--- (son) used to be more particular, K---(daughter)is not like that, but...

Hima: Once in the fitting room in J C Penny I tried on one of the dresses, like, and then the denim jacket on, and then D---(daughter) said, 'Now you look like a normal Mom'... (Everybody laughed loudly)

Meena: I think it is the cultural difference that makes them, they want to fit in, with the rest of the crowd, so they think of themselves as American, so naturally...

Jyoti: They outgrow it...

Meena: They'll out grow it...

Jyoti: And then, in high school and all they...

Hima: So ya, that's why maybe you know, I felt that, may be I should go with the flow. When they are ready for it, then they will, till then, when they are not ready for it, you know, don't impose too much. You know, that you should speak, and you should write and you should dress this way..."

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

At this point, it is important to add that focus group conversations/discussions not only created opportunities for mothers to bring their issues and concerns to the table, but they also helped younger mothers to gather support and assurances from the older mothers, especially from those who went through similar experiences in the past. More importantly, focus group interviews as a data collection tool served as a wonderful forum for mothers as well as the researcher.

Participating in focus groups, mothers were able to talk about their strengths as well as their shortcomings without being overly burdened by them. As mothers, the ten immigrant Asian-Indian women could raise issues that were important to them, alongside gain insights and better understanding or sometimes even find solutions to their problem. Mothers had opportunities to talk about cross-cultural issues, especially regarding child

rearing, as well as their children's peer interactions in school, and how they together affected their role as mothers and mothering work.

Regarding cross-cultural issues, mothers drew attention to how their children functioned at home as well as in school. Children were aware of the divergent cultures between home and school and were smart enough to realize that rules that applied at home could not be applied within the school environment. As Daya of *Group 2* and I talked, she said:

Daya: Yesterday I was feeding P...(son)and S...(daughter)said, she also wants to be fed. I said, nobody thinks you are a kid, you are eight years old. She said, 'Amma, but we are different, you know, she expects to be mothered, and nurtured more, in a way I think, they think that is how it is, you know...

Sudha: We foster like...dependency...

Daya: Ya...dependency a lot more, and she thinks it is fine...for her to sleep with us, especially she will never say that to her friends. You know, they learn that...and we never leave them with a baby sitter and go anywhere. Never, when my Mom was, even when my mother was here, my husband was very particular, if the kids are home we have to be home with them. But, whereas with their kids, they leave them with babysitters a lot, so, she expects to be at home with her all the time, one or the other, and things like that. Or, but during the day time she will have a baby sitter, but in the night...we never go out alone. She...we don't ever leave them alone, so she expects that too. That if we are going out, then she is coming with us. You know, that kind of thing, so she expects a little more I think that a lot of other kids.

Sudha: Do you think your children notice the difference between, you know, so that you feel you have a, a...there is a home culture and a school culture...do you feel it?

Daya: Ya, ya, ya...I would say, they would some way try to keep them apart, you know, I don't know whether that is good or bad, but that's survival. That's how they survive. They do different things in school and when they come home, they know it is different. They learn to survive like that.

Sudha: So how do you...as part of your mothering process how do you teach them to negotiate? Can you give an example, there are cultural differences between home and school, you know, with one example you can...

Daya: A...I guess sometimes she doesn't do something at school, she would say, oh, it is o.k. you know, the teacher doesn't mind. At that time we will force her, and so she knows at home we are little bit more strict than the teacher.

Sudha: So that it self is a cultural difference between home and school?

Daya: Ya....between home and school...

(Follow-Up Interview, December 3, 2003)

Talking further about cultural differences between home and school Daya raised concerns about classroom conversations between her daughter's peers. Apparently, as part of "what is happening in school" conversations, her daughter comes home and relates to her mother what she heard in school. Daya is of the opinion in school, conversation between peers are indicative of socialization processes of mainstream cultural groups and contrary to her family goals and beliefs. She seemed stressed and added:

"And my mom's boyfriend, I mean she is young, and she hears all the time, like my mom's boyfriend is like, it is quite o.k. for them to say that, but with S if she says that, I will be upset with her... You know, I don't even want her to say something like that...(At home) She also has to learn what to say, what not to say..."

Sudha: So there is a social, you know the social environment and the social mores of the school are different and that's where, is it o.k. to say, that's where you have to invent your...

Daya: Ya, I guess, that's where the anxieties lie. Not with the academics; or whether they are going to succeed, even if they do average, or you know..."

Maya: Our average, which is way above their mean.

Daya: Ya, ya, we will not probably worry about it as much, but I think socially I do feel very anxious, you know, it is all an unknown. That's probably what we fear, we don't know when..."

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Speaking of school culture, Leela of *Group 2*, who at the time of the focus-group interview was studying for teaching certification, talked about classroom instruction in the local schools and preschools. As an Asian-Indian mother/student, who was schooled in India as well in the United States, based on her observations and experiences in the local schools, she drew attention to some basic pedagogical differences between schools in India and the local schools. She took issue about the extent of choices students were given in preschools and early elementary classrooms. She had difficulty aligning herself with such forms of classroom instruction.

Leaning towards her own Indian values and personal beliefs, Leela stated that children were too young to make informed choices for themselves when they are in preschool and early elementary grades. More so, because it pertains to their educational growth and development, both of which are serious issues to consider with regards to a child's future academic endeavors. As for her two sons, both of them are expected to take their academic responsibilities seriously, as well as pursue their musical talent to the best of their abilities. Leela said:

I believed in the Montessori training, which was very academic and structured, which is what, I think is necessary for most of the kids here, that would take away so many problems, you know, if some things were structured and not given too many choices. Choice is something, which I really; I am still coming to grips with. Because, kids can get away with anything, because they have a choice, that's not acceptable to me, and that's not acceptable to, acceptable as family also. So, there comes the Indian values and...

Sudha: Can you elaborate on that, whatever you said now?

L: If somebody doesn't want to do something in class, period, I mean, I don't have do it, ya, I don't have do it, because I don't want to do it. And, sometimes they can get away with it. But, most of the times not, but, still, even that little percentage; I don't think the children are ready to make a choice. Like, you can give them two similar choices, and they can choose. But, it's not similar, from what I see".

Sudha: Class assignments you are talking about?

Leela: Sometimes, sometimes, but, it will be different when I teach, I hope, I am hoping that because, you know, being from a different culture, and our values are different and you know, school is, what is school for, it is not for just coming and playing and having fun, I mean you can have fun, but there are different ways of getting there. But...

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Apparently, music has been and is a big part of Leela's family life, and all her family members collectively continue to pursue their musical talents. Besides, teaching her children Classical South Indian music is part of her mothering work. She also teaches music to other young Asian-Indian children as well. Regarding the role of music in her life, Leela said:

That is something like we had ...we didn't get a choice when we were growing up. And I think, it has done good to us. And, that is something, it is like a hobby, you know. You are just helping your children developing a hobby. And, I think my kids have music in their blood, so even if had not, asked them to do, they would have probably done something, because they get opportunities in school, they have a choice of doing something, what they want to do...

Sudha: For, you too, it is such a big part of your life.

Leela: Yes, it is. And I really enjoy it, now more so because, I can go to concerts and really enjoy myself. And, if I have a problem, I just put some music on and, relax. That's my relaxation. And now teaching music is part of me also, because that is another way I am, spending time with the children. And, I am doing a good job with the you know, with especially the children who are coming to me right now, they are all very little, four, five year olds, it is very hard for them in so many different ways. Like, attention span, language difference, and...I have to come up with ideas and change and adapt my lessons, to fit their needs on an individual basis. And, that is a challenge for me. And I really enjoy it, because the kids, the interactions between us, its makes the class...it makes it so nice, that I look forward for them to come back again next week. And, I think it is a very rewarding experience. It is just like teaching the kids at school. It is just...it is an extended version, and it is different.

Sudha: So, you are kind of, your...your...this training of becoming a teacher and your love for music, and...

Leela: Everything I think, it is like a pieces of a puzzle, putting together, and I feel it is coming...and I think, I must have told you this before, I didn't know, I would be a good teacher, for music especially. But more and more, I taught, I feel that I really...I am able to get across to them. I am able to get them to do what I want them to do. And, it is the way you can, you have to, handle those kids. And I think I am doing a good job. So, I have confidence in my ability right now.

Sudha: I think the more you teach, you know, teaching is something, you know, you see the results in the other person. So, that it gives you lot of...

Leela: Also, I feel very comfortable teaching the younger kids, more than a little older ones; I don't know why. But, I am very comfortable with, first, second, and even third graders. If I have a choice, I will probably go with that because, that is my favorite age. So...I really have fun.

Sudha: So you are also, not only incorporating language, but you know, and music into your...you know, mothering, and...so how much...you also teach music to your children, right?

Leela: N...(her younger son)

Sudha: To N..., so that is also, one kind...of mothering chore, that another kind of mothering chore, that you have...you are doing with your children, that's a...so do you think it has, molded your personality also, like...music itself has given you a lot of confidence and emotional strength, stamina. Would you say that it has helped you cope as an immigrant? Living here, and...you know...

Leela: I think, I think, the whole think...like coming here to this country, and doing so much, you know, going to school, going back to school and, you know, all the things I have been doing, has boosted my confidence up. I don't think I would have had this opportunity in India. I don't know how I would have been. I would probably been a housewife, which I am o.k. with, to begin with, I wanted to be a housewife. So...

Sudha: But, also...as you said, you have, you know, you have a very supportive...your husband also shares the same interest; you know...that is also.

Leela: Yes, yes, I would give most of the credit to him.

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)



## **Mothers' views about academic aspects of schooling children**

Mothers in both the focus groups were appreciative of the local schools, teachers and administrative personnel. However, there were a few issues that many of the mothers were concerned about. Most of the mothers felt the elementary programs in the schools that their children attended had lower academic standards, especially Math curriculum.

Mothers were surprised their kids did not have much homework, and even if they had they would finish it in within a short period of time. Mothers also mentioned that their kids did not bring home many textbooks and notebooks. Meena alluded to Math standards and also talked homework and tracking issues. As Meena stated:

“Math was little bit you know, little bit lesser standard than what we expected in India... Plus you know, the students and teachers don't like the (brighter) students to go ahead, because if they are in one class, as we have worked in libraries and we want to use flash cards, and when K (her daughter) was in preschool, I mean in first grade, there was one child who asked for division or some multiplication flash cards, and the teacher won't let...you know, have it. Plus, they were not teaching that in that grade. And that boy was very brilliant and he wanted to get it, but she said “No we are not teaching that, you are not gonna have it”. And he said, ‘My dad will teach me,’ she said, ‘no you cannot have it’...Because they are not teaching that in here. So, that is one thing I...

The homework part they didn't stress that much, as much as we used to do in India...And, then, and parents used to complain if we get homework on weekends. I knew parents who used to complain that. Oh, we have soccer today and football today, you know and he has to sit at home and do home work. I, I, couldn't understand that, because we were totally...”

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

Compared to her daughters, Hima was taught differently in India, as she said,

“Here teaching is more application oriented and not content oriented”. (Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

During parent teacher conferences Hima was not prepared or satisfied to hear her daughters' teachers say “Oh, she is doing fine, everything is o.k.”... As a typical

educated Asian-Indian, first generation mother, she was looking for evidence justifying the teacher's comments. In addition, having been schooled in India, Hima was used to taking subject tests, grades with specific numbers, and class ranks. She wondered about her daughters' class ranks. More importantly, like her mother, and as many mothers of young school going children often do in India, she wanted to repeat the same mothering/teaching practices at home and follow through what was being done in her daughters' classes. Also as a mother, she felt obligated to help her daughter improve her academically skills and advance further.

Below is an excerpt of a discussion between Hima, Meena, Asha, Leela, Sheela and myself which highlight these mother' perception about important academic issues.

Hima: I'm not so sure which subject they need attention, because they don't have these subject wise, everything is o.k., and everything is fine, nothing to worry about. That's not how we were brought up, we always had something to worry about you know (laughs), "your kid is not doing o.k. good in this, you need to focus on that, and make them do some additional work. I would ask the teacher you know, 'Do you have any suggestions for books that I could teach my kids from?' and, it would be very hard, you know that kind of guidance from...

Meena: They used to give a list of books to read...

Asha: Ya!

Hima: No, no, books to read, like you know...I said you know like...o.k. like you know...

Sudha: Like books to teach...!

Hima: Ya, like a text book, you know, so that I know what they are learning in school and I could, when they come back home this chapter they have done and I could reinforce. They just come back with loose sheets of paper and you don't know what they have done and where they are going...

Nina: The advantage is it gives them independence of thinking. They, they kind of figure out how to do, themselves, instead of spoon fed and in the long run when they go to college it does help to think for themselves...

Hima: (Nods her head in agreement) Ya, ya, right, right...

Sheela: If I do remember, I think girls are better at that than boys, I can already see the difference between T (daughter) and R (son).

Asha: Plus, I can also add that it depends very strongly on the teacher. We have been very fortunate with A---, for his Montessori school teacher as well as his school (elementary) teacher. He went to first grade and he was, well very, very ahead of all other kids. He knew everything in reading and math. There is no way any body could teach him anything at that time in first grade, which...and obviously teacher will not teach him one on one. And we did go and push it, you, and I think, even in this school system you have to go and ask. In American philosophy that is what I have learned..."

Leela: Exactly

A: Unless you ask, it is not going to be given to you.

Hima: You have learnt very fast

Asha: Ya, we have.

Hima: It takes a few years to learn that, and by the time your kid is in fourth grade you know.

Asha: And let me tell you my experience, what we did. We went to the school and we told them, we are not satisfied with what you are doing, and why don't you push him to the next grade level for math? They said, they will not move him to another class until he is in third grade. We said no, you have to do it now, or else get a teacher from another school and get him a special education here, you know, and they got a special teacher who came and assessed him, from the school district, math enrichment teacher—Miss S...Y, who came and tested him, tested his level and wanted to see whether he was at that level to be able to be go to another class.

The reason that they do not move children under third grade; is because of social reasons

Meena: Right

Asha: They are very scared that the child will not do well socially. But then each child is different. Each child takes pressure differently. And they found out A(her older son) could do that. And, A--- was going to first grade to second grade class math. And now in second grade, there was a special group found where then all these three sections of class in second grade. There was a group of children who were brought together, and there was a special teacher coming from Penn State, who was focusing on math class, at certain time of the day working

with these children. So, I think even in this school system if we push it we can achieve it”.

Hima: So, you have to be an aggressive parent.

In unison the ladies said “You have to be...”

Asha: You have to be very aggressive

Hima: What about parents who just come? You know, and they don’t know

Sheela: You have to be aggressive, because I remember...

Hima: So you lose a few years, just learning the system...

Asha: You do.

Hima: And that is why you know, that could be one of the concluding remarks, you know, when we come to that. The teachers, you should provide additional information to minority parents, you know, because they don’t have that advantage of knowing, like you know my, my daughters’ parents, know all the people, the American parents know what the system is, and they don’t even have to ask, you know.

And, as a parent I feel o.k. my, my daughter should automatically, may be the teacher will put her in the advanced level or what you know, but here you know, you have to ask you know, they don’t want to push the kid also, unless the child...parent asks. And, most of us don’t know that we can ask”.

Sheela: See, you can ask, T (her daughter) also, it was the same thing done, because she was also so bored. So we had the same way, the enrichment teacher come and work with these kids. And now, it has become pretty regular in most schools, they take some of these kids out of class and work with the enrichment teacher who are ahead of the class...”

Hima: Lot of, lot of the mothers are very shy, you know, they are afraid to ask you know, so the teacher should provide that information that you can ask...

(Focus Group 1 Interview, June 24, 2003)

It is apparent from these conversations that the mothers had a lot of learning to do.

More importantly they had some unlearning to do as well. Hima who came prepared

highlighted aspects of classroom cultures that reflected what mothers had to unlearn.

Comparing her schools with those of her two daughters, she was of the opinion that, teachers in local schools were not very strict and did not penalize students for forgetting things at home. She mentioned unlike her schools in India, where teachers were very strict about returning library books on time, and particular about students carrying all their school supplies from home, teachers in her daughter's school did not take students to task if they failed to do so.

In fact, Hima was upset with her daughter for not taking her student responsibilities seriously. She brought up this issue during the focus group conversations which sparked a healthy discussion where besides, teachers' roles, school supplies and student responsibilities many other issues were discussed, including students' choices, extra home work, parents' and teachers' roles and academic standards.

Hima: No, one more, one more point, I wanted to mention, I don't know if anyone noticed, is that when my kid comes home and they forget to return their library book, no Mommy my teacher said it is o.k. if I forget, you know. And, I feel that you know, that it is o.k. they kind of get the message that they are always forgetting their library book at home, because it is o.k., but,

Meena: You mean here?

Hima : Ya, when I was growing up, I mean, it was not o.k. to forget even a pencil at home, or an eraser, and there would be severe punishment If you forgot it more than two or three times. So, staying back from school, you know, threats like that you know...

Leela: The priorities, the priorities are different there.

Sheela: And the parents also side with the teachers, when the kids do something wrong, they don't side with the kids.....they side with the teachers, o.k. you must have done this wrong

Meena: (was trying to get in a word) "Right, right, And the more homework you get... (Interrupted by Leela)

Leela: And here, I feel the children have more liberty to talk what they want, (Interrupted by Sheela, "and teachers are afraid of the parents") and there are too

many choices available to the kids which I don't think should be....I mean you can give them good choices but then, not doing something is not a choice. But here, they do have that choice". (Interrupted by Meena).

Meena: Oh yes, they have it! They don't do home work". (Interrupted by Leela)

Leela: I don't like to do it, a first grader can come and tell me, I don't have to do this, because I don't want to. You can't make me. That kind of an attitude we never had, when we grew up. (Interrupted by Nina)

(Focus-Group Interview, June24, 2003)

Although mothers in both focus groups had concerns about social and academic aspects of their children's schooling, and public school educational policies, they were appreciative of teachers. As Asha and Sheela stated:

Asha: "My philosophy is that what ever the school in doing it is wonderful. They are doing just...they cannot just focus on reading and math, they are focusing on general knowledge, there are so many other activities in school which is so much more important, geography, and science, and general knowledge, learning about different things in this world, and my philosophy is little bit of push on math and reading at home is just, half an hour a day is not going to harm them, in fact, benefits them tremendously".

Sheela----, "I feel exactly the same way, because when I used to volunteer when T(daughter) was in you know in preschool or in younger grades I used to see some of the kids as even as high as second grade, they did, they could not read even the easy books which was amazing to me, because T--- was reading by the time she was four, four and half years old. She could read all the easy books, and then you know, by the time she went to kindergarten she could read quite a bit. Plus she was doing Hindi. She knew all the Hindi alphabets, D(husband), had already started her on Hindi home work since she was three years old, so she was doing it in both languages, she knew all the alphabets, she knew all the numbers in two languages, because we can, as soon as a child is old enough D---, was teaching her harmonium. She used to take out Bhajans. And we felt, as soon as they are ready like two, three years old we start working with them. But here the philosophy is, you have a child, he either goes to daycare or maybe plays outside, parents really don't work with the child and they just wait for the child to start school and then the teachers are supposed to take care of everything. But, now the new studies are coming out, that kids who are taught in preschool do much better in elementary school, because they have a better foundation. I mean, right now, preschool hardly does anything here, it is more like a play time. But, with T-----, I used to use beads, teach her to count, add, subtract. I remember getting her m and m's, something like that you know, they would enjoy, and she was so

well prepared when she went kindergarten and like when she was in second grade, almost I talked to her math teacher, I said “what are you teaching?” These things she did when she was five years old. Because I thought they were doing anything. And this was my first child, I thought the school was way below our standards in India. I was very shocked at the Math curriculum in second grade. I said, she did when she was five years old, what are you teaching here? So, she said, “Oh! That’s the way we do it, she is in the highest math group, this...I said, that’s not good enough. It is not challenging. She comes home and she goes through her homework in like five minutes. There is hardly any homework, if there was and I just didn’t feel that the school systems here measure up to the rest of the world, when it comes to elementary education, they are too easy and they don’t teach enough. I know they focus on lots of other things which are important too and...I just felt even if we work or whatever, we still spend a lot more time with the kids than people here. Here they put it on the school more”.

(Focus-Group Interview, June 24, 2003)

Maya did not waste any time, and began comparing the two contexts---schools in India, and the local schools. Initially, she talked in general about teaching practices within U.S. schools. Based on her observations, she said:

Here teaching is geared to the average, median kid, it is neither geared for the gifted, nor for the worst...Again all of that boils down to money available to the school, because they cant do this in the summer and push the mediocre ones up, so the brighter ones suffer”.

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Maya was happy with her son’s school and was pleased to see what he was learning. Observing her older son in his fifth grade class room, and looking at the kind of Art lessons he was being taught in his school, Maya touched upon the topic of subject emphasis such as Art within elementary schools and its cumulative effects on the social development of the child. She spoke extensively about the Art curriculum in her son’s class.

Comparing the Art Education, Social Studies and Math curriculum in her son’s school with that of her nephew’s school in Bangalore, India, she commented about the remarkable difference between the two curriculums. In other words, in India, school

curriculums were centered more on core subjects such as Math, English and Sciences and less on Art and Drawing lessons, and unlike in the United States the emphasis is not on social support and value of identity. Maya said:

“It (school) is wonderful in the U. S. I think they (children in the U.S. schools) are much more prepared to meet the world, than an Indian kid in India...even like the amount of knowledge G(her older son) has for a ten year old kid, is vastly different from the amount of knowledge his second cousin (similar in age) has in Bangalore (India)...G cannot match him in Math, in English, in Geography and all, there is no way, that kid is probably doing seventh or eighth grade equivalent level of English, Math and Geography. But, he has no clue about anything else in the world, except going to school and coming home. G knows who the maestros are in painting, he knows...the schools offer like, it is not a painting or you know, Art class in India is something you should flat paint and probably go home. Here, he did actually study, you know about the painters, he actually knows, even I did not know so much about painting...He actually wants to go to the Monet garden, where Monet actually sat and painted. I don't know these, minute details that these children are offered...they do know a lot, I mean this whole conversation is based upon elementary school education...

It is pleasure to go to each class and see how much more the world opens up, because no amount of research is going to tell you, I can see your kids, and hope my kids get up to that level, and do as well at least...but even now the amount of information this boy has...but when he is doing that Civil War, its not just, you know, you go to school and learn...but the Civil War was, they (teachers) actually took them to Gettysburg, and they actually made briefs, perfectly, they made mountains, they made soldiers, they made the water tank...and so all of them learnt...I feel the learning here (in CPA) is very vast compared to very narrow...

He (her son) doesn't match anywhere in mathematical ability and geographical ability...last time when I did go to India; they were shocked at the Math. He couldn't do the equivalent fourth grade Math that my cousin's son was starting on. He had no clue what they were doing...

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Following her detailed description about classroom observation, Maya shifted her attention to Asian-Indian parents and generalized about their family goals. Comparing one Asian-Indian immigrant family to another, she also alluded to my family, and articulated what she perceived to be the purpose of my research endeavor. She said:



You know, we push our kids to do x number of things. And, America offers them to widen their knowledge. We are constantly amazed at what these kids come home with. Even first graders, we think oh, he is cutting flowers in school. But in that cutting, like she said, he is counting the number of petals, which I would not have thought of...So very creative, it is wonderful, and I personally like it...

And then eventually almost all Asian parents push them into medicine, pretty much into medicine. It is only now I feel we are bifurcating into, may be we need some lawyers too, so lawyers are good you know, now that we are facing the brunt of this you know, the narrow mindedness, if you like to say...like you said, (referring to me, the researcher) your son started questioning you in college.

We have not faced those problems yet, so we tell them you have to be proud, but our sons are more Indian because your sons were less Indian at that point, which is why you suffered, which is why you are doing this thesis to begin with.

(Focus Group 2 Interview, July 3, 2003)

Maya's comments about Asian-Indian families are well founded.

### **Survival Strategies---Mothers and their role models**

As women and as mothers, majority of them mentioned that they were greatly influenced by their own mothers and emulated what they had learned from them.

Alongside, they were a few mothers, who spoke fondly of other significant adults in their lives. Their stories about their mothers and significant adults were reflective in their ideas about child rearing as well as in their mothering for schooling work.

As mentioned earlier Nina spoke with great admiration about her teacher---An Italian Nun from Rome. Apparently, as a young third grader, Nina was amazed to learn that her teacher, who despite being a "foreigner" was knowledgeable about classical South Indian music. As a mother who thinks teaching music to her daughters is part of her mothering work, she feels deeply indebted to her Italian teacher. In addition, Leela too, spoke extensively about her paternal grandparents and their significant presence in

her life---from childhood to motherhood. Asha and Daya mentioned that they were greatly influenced by their fathers. In fact, Asha made an important commitment to herself---Never to disappoint her father.

Stories about their “personal” selves were revealed in the follow-up interviews in which Asha and Nina of *Group 1* and Daya and Leela of *Group 2* participated.

As a woman and a mother, Leela was deeply influenced by her grandmother. She considered her grandmother to be the person responsible for grooming her to be a good wife and mother. However, compared to her stories about her grandfather, where she took on the role of a child, Leela’s expressions changed when she talked about her grandmother. Her expressions were more feminine like, with much emotion, exuding a sense of caring and nurturance.

Leela mentioned that she had long conversations with her grandmother and considered to be her role model. With great pride she mentioned that she has acquired some of her grandmother’s traits. She thinks her personality is similar to her grandmother; she is loving, patient and a very emotional person. In addition, she mentioned that she has her grandma’s “touch” in her cooking style. Apparently, her grandmother also taught her about developing good human relationships. She said,

“I had a very special bond with my grandmother, and I enjoyed her...my grandmother was very loving, very caring, and she was the most patient, most affectionate person in the whole world for me...My mom never had that much patience and stuff like that...my grandmother was somebody like, I would just put on a pedestal and worship...

After my grandfather died, this was just before I got married, he died. He didn’t stay...he didn’t live to see me get married, but, after that my grandmother was another very strong supportive person in my life, and of course my parents were always there with me, but some how I had a very, very, special bond with my

grandmother, and I enjoyed her...after my marriage also, for the...for about fourteen years or so. She passed away in 2000.

My kids were also very lucky to have...have an opportunity, we used to go back (to Mumbai) every year and have good times with her... my grandmother used to advise me so much about Life in general. And how to behave with people, how to...how not to be selfish...how to be giving... and every house has problems, right!...She used to share that with me, advise me, as to how I should be you know...Problem solve...and how I should behave in my in-laws' house. I never have any problems today, touch wood, till today I don't have any problems with my in-laws and, I have always stood up to her expectations, or even more than what she expected. So, I mean I have...

I have a lot of things I can remember about what we did and, it's been always very positive. She's been always such a...very...what kind of...A very good role model, yes. She taught me how to cook. She cooked very well, and I am fortunate that I have little bit of her touch...in my cooking, and I feel very good about it and, I think I have taken all the good things from everybody and I am trying to put that in my life...

(Follow-up Interview, January, 10, 2004)

### **General Observations on Gender, Culture and Social Class**

In this study, besides the ten immigrant Asian-Indian mothers, one cannot ignore the omnipresence of three major factors that under gird the mothering for schooling phenomenon---gender, culture and social class, all of which have significantly influenced the daily lives of these women and their families. However, degrees to which each of these factors have influenced participants and shaped the saliency of this study have been rather varied, depending upon time, context and circumstance.

More importantly, within the realm of this study it is necessary to consider issues of gender, culture and social class, not as separate mileposts, but rather as intersecting crossroads. Consequently it becomes necessary to bear in mind that any discussions involving any one factor, it could be either gender, culture, or social class, invariably sets

the tone for the remaining two factors as well. Gender, culture and social class are interdependent factors; they define as well as influence one another. In addition, the highpoint of these intersecting factors are---they mediate and set the tone for these the ten immigrant Asian-Indian women who have participated in this study. They influence their meaning making process as well as their personal interpretations of their mothering for schooling work experiences. And, collectively they illuminate and shape the future lives of these immigrant women and their children.

From the get go this study rested heavily on notions of culture. Cultural constructs have expressed in various forms, in terms of mothering, schooling, child-rearing, values and beliefs, educational and family priorities. Cultural constructs have also been evidenced in terms of cross-cultural differences. For example, mothers' perceptions and understanding about family/school priorities, notions about teaching/learning, not to mention the contextual differences---mothering and schooling cultures in India versus the Mid-Atlantic section of the United States.

Issues of gender were most evident when mothers were talking about their daughters, as in the case of Sheela of *Group 1* and Daya of *Group 2*. In *Group 1* as part of the ongoing focus group conversation, the topic of sex-education came up. Mothers differed in their opinions about sex-education. While some mothers believed in “preserving the innocence” of their children, other mothers chose to be upfront and believed in preparing their children early on. Of course, mothers' opinion varied because of their children's gender as well as their play habits.

Sheela shared an interesting “play” story about her daughter when she was six years. Sheela's daughter T and her friend (neighbor's daughter) were pretending to be

pregnant mommies and undergoing labor pains. Apparently, Sheela's neighbor had just had a baby. Sheela believed her daughter and her friend's pretend play episode transpired because of that incident. Since the two girls were playing in her house, she had a chance to see her daughter and her friend pretending to be mothers in labor and ultimately led her to have the "sex-talk" with her daughter, who was six years old at that time.

A couple of mothers like Hima and Jyoti who did not face such situations, felt it important to preserve the innocence of children, and not provide them with unwanted information, particularly when they were young, still in elementary grades. However, Hima mentioned that as a precautionary measure, she did not believe in sending her two daughters for "sleepovers" outside her home. Also, she was not comfortable talking about "sex" with her daughters. She felt the school officials were more prepared and qualified to talk about "sex-education". Meena too felt the same, and seconded Hima's opinion. Jyoti on the other hand, had a close friend (a white American woman) who was a Health Educator, and she relied on her friend to educate her daughter about sex-education.

Daya of *Group 2* who closely monitored her daughter and chose to send her to a Charter school, was not too thrilled when the teachers in her school chose to teach about human body in third grade. Daya felt it was not appropriate and felt it was too early for her daughter to learn about the reproductive organs of a woman. Apparently, the Charter School chose to teach about the human body as a response to classroom conversation between students.

It is evident from the above mentioned facts, the middle-class mind set of the mothers. They were very particular about the social proprieties and are very cautious

about preserving their “good-name” and social status. More importantly, they do not want themselves or their family members to become objects of ridicule. Hence they are very conscious of the over all development of their children, as well as their present and future lives. They were conscious about making mistakes, and constantly alert themselves from getting into unfavorable situations.

From their stories it was apparent that mothering for schooling work was procedural and maintenance work, requiring round the clock commitment. Mothers worked both inside and outside their homes, in the schools as well as in the community to fulfill their mothering tasks. Mothering for schooling work included volunteering at school, e.g. in the school library, classrooms and lunch-rooms, going on field trip and driving kids around for sports, and music lessons. As well as participating in fund raisers, book fairs, parent-teacher conferences, back to school nights, and PTAs.

For many Asian-Indian mothers, their homes served as important places of work. At home, mothers did most of the schooling work that was needed to prepare themselves and their children. It involved planning, examining, execution, learning and teaching. However, for mothers to become productive in their schooling work, all other family maintenance activities such as cooking, cleaning, socializing had to be organized as well. At home, mothering for schooling work was not just limited to preparing children for schooling, but also includes nurturing young minds with love and support, communicating with them as well as maintaining family cohesiveness. Since all the activities were connected, it was not uncommon for mothers to find themselves responsible not only for maintaining and caring for a stable family, but for the smooth functioning of the school as well. Hence, mothering for schooling work is non-stop,

round the clock work. More so, when mothers try to become the best role models for their children.

### **Summary**

The following questions were addressed in the discussions above: (1) How Asian-Indian mothers prepared themselves for their mothering for schooling work? (2) What did they do? (3) What aspects of their mothering for schooling work experience did they find to be challenging? (4) How did issues such as gender, culture, social economic status shape and influence Asian-Indian mothers' mothering for schooling work? These issues and others are further discussed in the concluding chapter 6.

## Chapter 6

### Discussion, Integration and Conclusions

The questions posed in chapter 1, literature review, methodology and data collection procedures used for formulating this study have served as important guideposts in seeking an understanding about the mothering for schooling phenomena. Questions directed attention to immigrant Asian-Indian mothers, their understanding about children's schooling, preparation of mothering for schooling work, challenges, coping mechanisms and responses to challenges, particularly in relation to factors such as gender, culture, social class status, all of which seemed to have played a role to a variation of degrees in their mothering for schooling work. In addition, the questions were helpful in making connections with mothers' past schooling experiences in India, with their children's present schooling experiences. In fact, they were the same questions I had asked as a mother while formulating my mothering for schooling agenda. In this chapter efforts were made to draw attention to how mothers integrated their past and present worlds and sustained themselves to keep up with their mothering for schooling work.

As a minority mother, immigrant, early childhood worker and educator, my mothering experiences have served as a point of departure for this study. As a dependant Indian wife and daughter-in-law, having traveled several times, back and forth between India and United States, before settling down in the present rural location to raise my two sons, I had my work cut out for me. In addition, as an Asian-Indian mother/researcher, who had come to the United States as an adult and schooled elsewhere, gathering background information about the American public school system seemed necessary for



me. It was important to understand, why public schools were organized the way they were, what was the rationale behind the schooling rituals and educational system in general, all of which have played a critical role in the lives of these mothers and their schooling experiences.

“Some feminist researchers start with their own experience... Yet intend to study other people’s experience, but in the process recognize that they are part of the group and use this identification to deepen the study” (Reinharz, 1992, p.235). Feminist social science researcher Reinharz’s (1992) views about people’s experiences, lend relevance to my mothering experiences.

As a mother having schooled two boys in the local public schools, I had acquired a basic sense of the public school system. However, information gathered through personal experiences did not provide a strong foundation to conduct this study. I had to learn more. There were aspects of school organization and rituals that did not match my mothering for schooling ways of thinking or experiences.

For example, I could not understand why my next door neighbor’s son got bussed and my son did not, even though both of them were attending the same school. The houses are adjacent to each other and there is no natural or physical boundary between them. My house was supposedly the cut off line for busing students to middle school. Also, some students (including my two sons) in our area were eligible for being bussed to elementary and high school but not to the middle school. Initially, such mileage-centered, schooling and bussing decisions relative to children’s education seemed incomprehensible. Experiencing the limitations first hand, I was compelled to explore and learn about public schooling processes. It was important to comprehend, that besides

reading and writing, extraneous issues such as bussing played a critical role in school functioning. Also, it meant only “selected” families could avail bussing facilities, even though every family in the neighborhood paid school and property taxes to support the school system. In addition, my mothering for schooling experiences required rethinking of family priorities, conforming to “other’s” ideas about my children’s schooling and educational needs. In fact, it also made me question the location of my home.

Coming from India, where “home” was always associated with familial ties and emotional bonding, particularly for married daughters who lived with their husband far, far away, I always associated home with a sense of permanency, a comfortable recluse, but never imagined it would be an issue for bussing for my children to school.

My mothering for schooling experience made me rethink about the meaning of “home.” In relation to public schooling it is just a cartographical space of logistical significance, and not about families or relationships. I realized school organization can be influential in defining parents’ roles, compelling them to commit to certain obligatory duties, while holding them responsible in fulfilling those duties (Griffith 2005). At least, in my case I had to drive my son to school, which I did not object. I was lucky I knew how to drive. (Not all immigrant minority women/mothers know how to drive cars, particularly those who come from developing countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, etc., which further exasperates the problem). However, it meant additional mothering for schooling commitments and responsibilities on my part. More importantly, under such realistic circumstances, learning and understanding the history of American public schools, was warranted. Similar paths were followed to understand other issues about mothering, such as early childhood education and female immigration.

In addition, it is also meant redefining my role as a mother with the realm of schooling and included my gender, culture, social class, and immigrant status.

### **Importance of Reflections in Mothering for Schooling**

Retrospections about early schooling experiences helped mothers of this study establish connections between with their past schooling experiences in India and Sri Lanka, with that of their children's present schooling experiences, and in which they also participated. Reflective practices created opportunities for mothers to compare and contrast their personal early schooling experiences with their children's present schooling experiences. Reflective practices helped mothers make sense about their mothering for schooling work amidst divergent contextual and cultural differences between their Indian homes and American schools.

Comparisons between the past and present experiences included contextual, cultural differences, differences in institutional (school) organizations, language issues, schooling rituals (uniform, discipline, corporal punishment, school lunch, holiday schedules), curriculum and instructional issues (academic standards, math curriculum, teaching styles, home work policies), parental and teacher role, differences in school choice between the schools that the mothers attended and the schools that their children attended etc.

Comparisons between the their past schooling experiences in India and Sri Lanka, with their children's present schooling experiences, opened creative pathways for mothers to explore the benefits and deficits of their past experiences and use them as resources towards their mothering for schooling lives. Comparing their past experiences

with their children's present experiences gave mothers a chance to question and reassess their presumed understanding about schools in general and American public schools in particular.

Indulging in retrospection helped mothers make decisions, whether to include or exclude information from the past into their mothering for schooling agenda. More importantly, meeting the demands of two culturally divergent, but equally important social organizations---their Indian home and their children's American school meant, mothers had to stay connected with both contexts, while fulfilling roles of mother and school partner with equal skill and dexterity.

“School is a big part of a child's life” stated Asha from *Group 1*. Consequently doing schooling related work is a big part of a mother's life. It is an understood fact that teachers and school personnel expect mothers to prepare their children well for schooling. They expect mothers to send children who are “ready” for school; children who are healthy, clean, well mannered and willing to learn.

### **Connecting Past and Present in Mothering for Schooling**

It is ironic that the mothering discourse emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, just around the time the public school systems were started (Smith 2004). As she mentioned,

“Books, women's magazines, public health nurses, and eventually courses in colleges and universities were telling women with children that they were responsible for practically everything that might conceivably happen to their children in the future, and particularly that everything that could go wrong in school was due to their imperfections as mothers” (p.2).

For mothers in this study their stories centered on contextual differences between schools in India and the local community public schools. Their stories revealed that their children's schooling opportunities within the local community were limited to a few select schools, quite unlike the kind of schools that each of the mothers attended. However, as much as mothers were aware of the limited schooling options in their local community, they were also fully acquainted with the corresponding demands of schooling in India. They were glad their children were not part of the tough admission process that they dreaded so much while attending schools in India. However, they could not shrug off their "normalized" attitudes (i.e. based on cultural norms) about schooling that easily, more so when they were convinced that they benefited from those experiences. In India, as Leela said, parents prepare children long before they enter schools. In fact, having been schooled in India all the mothers in this study prepared their children in advance for schooling, their children knew how to read and write by the time they entered schools

Schools in India were "content-based", mothers prepared the children in advance, teaching them letters and numbers at home, before they entered schools. All the mothers felt their schooling experiences were tough. They had to work very hard, learn several languages, adhere to rules and regulations or suffer the consequences.

For example, as Hima mentioned earlier, unlike many parents in the United States, in India, parents and children are socialized to take schooling seriously, even worry about schooling. In India, students worrying about their studies, is viewed positively as a sign of commitment to learning and a valued cultural expectation.

For Hima, her mothering for schooling experiences had a false start; they did not match her expectations. Hima had to rethink her understandings about her role, what she can expect from the school and what the school expected of her and her children. She realized she had to accommodate her perceptions about the functions of school and schooling with that her everyday actualities of schooling, and unless she had knowledge about those primary understandings, she would not be able to formulate her mothering role or her mothering for schooling agenda.

Mothers were glad that their children did not have to go through the same tough school admission experiences as they did, and could get admitted easily into the local schools, just based on their age and place of residence. In the process, mothers also realized that definitions of school readiness varied between schools that they attended and the local public schools that their children were attending. In India, school readiness meant participating in content based written and oral exams, where students were tested in Math, English, and regional languages. Mothers and children had to prepare days in advance to meet with their impending challenge.

Interestingly, since mothers in this study were able to speak in English fluently; they were able to help their children with the admission process. However, mothers realized being acquainted with English although helpful, did not facilitate in making sense of some of the schooling rituals. For example, mothers did not understand why students did not wear uniforms, why they did not get much homework, why they sent home loose work papers, instead of text and note books, and why students got report cards, with letter grades instead of numerical scores, why students were not ranked, aspects of schooling which mothers were used to in India.

Mothers' missed understanding about local public schools was partly due to how schools were organized. Firstly, unlike their parents in India, whose place of residence had little to do with the type of school, or the location of school that they attended, mothers learned that schools were extensions of the local community, which meant that they not only had to limit themselves in their school choice but they also had to make compromises with their choice of residence location. In order to gain access to a "good" school, they had to live in a "good" neighborhood, in a nice home and pay, relatively higher property taxes.

For immigrant mothers, like the women in the study, who came to the United States, for better educational opportunities, meeting their children's educational needs under such residency requirements can make mothering for schooling not just an issue of children's educational advancement, but more of a civic commitment to society. In other words, schools as public institutions can be instrumental in establishing eligibility criteria, as to who can and cannot avail their learning opportunities, thus taking away the "public" in public schooling.

### **Cultural Differences and Mothering for Schooling**

Immigration and ethnic-culture intersect and connect in different ways for different immigrant minority groups, and is subject to the time of their arrival into the United States, and their country of origin (Schneider 2004). As immigrant minorities, mothers placed great value in their cultural origins, and were very proud of it. It was important for them to maintain certain habits of ethnic living, not just for themselves, but they wanted their children to embrace some of their traditions, especially the ones that

pertain to education and learning. Hindu culture places great value in education and the activity of learning. Learning enlightens a child's mind; parents encourage children to worship their text books as well as Saraswathi, who is the Goddess of learning.

According to the Hindu culture, texts are valuable sources of knowledge; there is power in the "word".

For mothers in this study, shifting contexts from India to United States played a significant role in their mothering for schooling work. Social and cultural issues pertaining to their homes as well as their children's schools led mothers to adopt cultural adjustment strategies such as "accommodation without assimilation" (Gibson 1989) where mothers through trial and errors explored ways to move forward with their mothering for schooling work.

However, their biggest challenge was centered on living in the present. As immigrants, they were fully aware about why they came to America. They did not lose sight of their past lives in India, and remembered how hard it was for them to get here. They knew what their future goals were, but it was the "present" timeframe that bothered them the most. It was within that window of time that mothers' cultural conflicts unfolded. They included issues about food, language, values, beliefs, clothing, living habits, socialization patterns etc. And, through their children schooling experiences, school environments begin to play a predominate role in their definitions of home environments and mothering for schooling work.

Schools and school activities affected all aspects of their family lives, directly and indirectly. Griffith (1995) explored the "relationship between mothering work in the family and the social organization of schooling". According to her women's lives are



shaped and enmeshed in their children's schooling experiences. Griffith & Smith's (1990) study revealed that mothers through their unpaid, yet coordinated work significantly contribute towards the smooth functioning of schools and labor market. Although, mothers work actively within their homes and elsewhere, to stay coordinated with their children's school activities, the basis of their activity participation varies from one social group to another, subject to ethnicity, class and culture. Griffith (1995) and Griffith & Smith's (1990) focus was limited to white women, representing majority cultural groups.

As first generation immigrants, mothers in this study found themselves becoming selective about the school culture entering into their home cultural environment. Depending on each mother's perceptions about their role, their understanding of the school culture, mothers either resisted or welcomed school culture's entry into their home environment. For example, regarding issues of mother tongue, many mothers on various levels, depending on their children and family circumstance, resisted the school language---English taking over the place of the vernacular home language. However, mothers tried to make amends, by becoming learners.

Mothers in this study did not leave anything to chance and got fully involved in their children's schooling. Mothers learned to cook American food, wear American clothes, talk American, and celebrate American festivals, while simultaneously maintaining their Indian lifestyles, so as to create a balance between Indian and American cultures. More importantly, since all the work is carried out as mothering work, their meaningful activities, although purposeful in intent, do not catch the attention of school officials. They either get overlooked as "this is what mothers are supposed to do,

because they are mothers” or get undermined by school administrators and teachers, because they do not understand the cultural nature of mothering and mothering for schooling work.

Approaches to minority mothers’ involvement in children’s schooling have not been adequately studied by education policy decision makers and school administrators. As has been revealed in this study, school teachers and administrators acquiring “cultural sensitivity” training plays an important role in understanding immigrant mothers’ schooling work. The developmentally and psychologically centered public school education mind set tends to focus on the “lack” i.e. what is missing in mothering work. In the case of minority, immigrant mothers of this study, such specific criteria as revealed in this study creates oversights about the cultural knowledge that many immigrant mothers bring with them from their countries of origin. Under such tenuous circumstances, mothers’ culturally-centered mothering practices get grossly undermined, forcing them to question their child rearing and schooling practices, the very same practices that seemed to have worked for them in their country of origin. In hindsight, immigrant mothers find themselves questioning their own mothers, persons they relied on emotionally relied for guidance and counseling.

Contradictory mindsets about definitions of schooling and mothering, and between mothers and school administrators cause great anxiety for immigrant mothers in their schooling work. Constrained by in depth understanding of diversity issues by school administrators and policy makers, probabilities of immigrant women’s mothering work becoming discounted weigh higher than being valued.

Schools have not kept up with the changing and diverse population. Despite the fact that many immigrant minority families support schools substantially through their property and school taxes, as consumers they do not benefit fully from their investment. In fact, Meena of *Group 1* raised that issue in relation to the building structures. She mentioned the school buildings that her children attended were old and moldy, and affected their health, upon which she had to pay extra attention to their health, nurse them and prepare them for school. As an informed mother and citizen, she questioned the school health and building policy.

As evidenced from this study, immigrant mothers as primary caregivers may have to take on extra responsibilities, doing the work of the school at home, without getting any credit for it. Power differentials between schools and immigrant minority homes reveal school organizations comparatively have greater power in the policy decision making matters and do not always take into consideration what minority mothers and fathers view as important schooling issues. Hence in adjusting this power differentials befall on the minority mother. Also, the perception about the role of the parent/mother and the extension of their involvement is also constructed by the school organization.

As educated women, mothers were frustrated, for they could not fully utilize their education as a human strategy of survival (Serpell, 1997), nor could they fully relate to the kind of schooling experiences their children were having. Regarding their children's schools, as evidenced in the previous chapters mothers had problems relating to curriculum and instructional approaches in public school education. Lack of understanding about practical and conceptual differences, such as institutional rules and

regulations, school rituals, bussing policies, lunch policies, left them unprepared in handling academic, social and cultural aspects of schooling.

It took mothers some time to get adjusted to teaching practices within schools, which many of them believed was geared towards “analytic learning” as Hima pointed out, and not content learning as focused in schools in India.

All of mothers in this study exuded a typical Indian cultural characteristics--- fear of failure, and hence were very keen to learn and do things “right” for their children, for themselves, and even by what they think that the school expects from them as mothers. Mothers felt they had no other choice but to accept the reality of public schooling and reality of living as immigrant minorities in the United States and learn to accommodate not so much for themselves but for their children. As immigrant mothers, they felt obligated to support and “scaffold’ their children.

Mothers were worried, and felt compelled to rethink, relearn, and reorganize their ideas about mothering, schooling and mothering for schooling. However, they did not sit back, they took the matter into their own hands, and decided to do find solutions, In fact, by constantly reorganizing and reassessing their mothering for schooling work they not only helped their children, but helped their children’s schools directly and indirectly.

Mothers became learners and visited schools. As educated women and as Indians they valued education and its purpose, and hence had several unanswered questions. Some of the questions were based on their cultural beliefs of schooling and learning, and others had to do with their role as mothers, and their understanding of the role of teachers in schooling children.

Mothers spent time in the classrooms, and school libraries, went on field trips, participated “in” school activities as much as possible. And, despite their education, and English language skills they felt stressed. Some mothers like Sheela, Maya, Meena, and Jyoti dealt with their mothering issues as they came along, while others felt stressed. In the case of Nina and Hima they were not happy to do go to schools, even though they did, they felt they had to do, for the sake of their children.

For instance, Nina felt intimidated, she was shy, peace loving, worried going to school and volunteering. She was concerned about her Indian accent. As an immigrant minority mother, she worried whether her daughters will be treated “equally” by her white American peers in school. She shared a story about her younger daughter coming home from school having concerns about her skin color. Nina wondered and worried about the kind of images her daughter was carrying in her head, and had a long talk with her and convinced her that she was beautiful, and that color did not matter because she loved her very much.

In addition, Nina, unlike herself, wanted her American born daughter to be confident and she tried to incorporate a few American ways of living into her mothering work. She believed in promoting diversity, she celebrated Thanksgiving Holiday, Christmas, and even participated in the Easter Egg Hunt. She wished she was a soccer Mom. Despite having a Ph.D. she gave up her promising scientist career because she valued mothering and her role as mother as more important than her professional role as a research scientist, particularly during the early years of schooling. Her mothering for schooling revealed that she was more confident about her role as a research scientist than her role as an Asian/Indian mother.

Mothers' ideas about schooling did not always coincide with what they believed as ideas of teachers and school officials. As immigrants, and as minorities, mothers felt there were aspects of schooling that were beyond their control; they ranged from academic issues to social issues. They could not fully apply their cultural values and ways of thinking to their children's schooling processes, neither could they fully accept what they perceived to be the schooling culture.

Sociologist Smith (1986) in her extensive research pertaining to women's work as mothers, mentioned, that "the work of mothering done by women in the home is consequential for the school as well as to the child" (p. 10). Mothering for schooling work left many of the mothers in this study with a lingering sense of uneasiness, neither were they pleased with their various "examinations" and cultural explorations. As "outsiders" who were schooled elsewhere, they were not familiar with the taken for granted schooling rituals that many mainstream "insiders"—teachers and American parents seemed to know. However, they did not have the luxury of feeling relaxed or confident. Unacquainted with the majority school culture in fact, led them to become learners and researchers, and conceptualize a mothering for schooling framework, where they did not have to "simply shed old values for new ones, but selectively shift, modify, retain or alter their values and practices" (Patel, Power & Bhavnagri, 1996 ). Mothers had no other choice but to explore uncharted territories---local schools in their community.

## **Mothering for Schooling is a Process of Mediation**

Mothers' stories illustrate that mothering for schooling is a process of mediation, where mothers were required to do supplementary work and make up for the "deficits" created within the schools, home and community. This mediated supplementary work can be further classified as complementary work and contradictory work.

Complementary work may be defined as mothers' doing the same kind of work as the teachers in schools, and contradictory work may be defined as mothers undoing what they may perceive to be unfavorable school influences which are contrary to their social and cultural beliefs and detrimental to their children's growth and development. In other words, mothers may reinforce at home what is being taught in school, provide additional information to what already has been taught in school, or they may even disagree with their child's teacher or contest the same if they think what is being taught at school is contrary to their beliefs and goals as mothers. This work process may involve mother's beliefs, their relationship with their children, family priorities, past experiences, future goals, their understanding of school's guidelines, teachers' beliefs and philosophy, curriculum, instruction, language and cultural differences, Asian-Indian mothers do all of the above.

This mediated work process is situated in the "present" every day timeframe, and is not just limited to their home, but may include home, school and communities, American and Indian communities. Mothers may be involved in this work process in various capacities, as learners, teachers, friend, guidance counselors, school and community volunteers.

The supplementary work may vary from one mother to another depending on their how they make sense of it. In fact, all the mothers in this study did supplementary work to a variation of degrees. Secondly, supplementary work may also be revealed in the many changes mothers made in their mothering for schooling work as well as in their responses to everyday challenges of mothering. However, I shall focus on the four mothers who participated in the focus group as well as the follow-up interviews. Priorities and issues of consideration varied among the four mothers, depending on their past schooling experiences, value judgments, family relationships, their understanding of their role in schooling children, school and community influences on their mothering for schooling work. I shall begin by focusing on Asha.

### **Asha's Supplementary Mothering for Schooling Work**

During the time of the focus-group interview and follow-up interview, Asha was fully immersed in her sons' schooling and other recreational activities. She had a very hectic schedule and also gets help from her husband. When asked to share her thoughts about her personal self, she said, "It is very difficult to think about Asha the person, because you always think about Asha the mother now". However, she mentioned,

"I have very strong Indian values, my husband is very flexible in his values. And he is changed into more American, than I am. So, we have a combination of both values, but yet since the mother's role in a child's life is more than a father's my children have little more Indian values. We negotiate about it all the time".

(Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

Asha mentioned she was married young; and following marriage became part of a joint family. She mentioned that she had been greatly influenced by her husband and considered her mother-in-law to be the most influential person in her life. Apparently,



Asha tries to please others, and over the years, has changed tremendously. During the time of the interview she was in the process of making changes for her self and had just finished her Kumon training, and had opened her Kumon School, and stated, “I sit down and think about myself a little more...ever since I started Kumon...I feel I can accomplish something, what I felt before marriage”.

As a mother Asha was very curious about her children’s daily school activities and strongly believed that children must do “extra academic work” at home everyday. She believed mothers are the most influential teachers. Every day she personally prepares and supervises her children’s, after school “home” work which is not just limited to the academic year, but also include parts of summer break. Based on her own life experiences in India, Mother A shared her opinion,

“In America, reading is emphasized more than Math, but Math is something I am concerned about, and that’s the advantage I got from being educated in India. We were pushed a lot; here they are not pushed at all. I would like to come somewhere in between, give them a little push, not too much, half hour every day, just doing one worksheet a day.”

(Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

As an immigrant Asian- Indian mother, she likes the local school system, because students are not pressured to achieve academically, as they are expected to do in India. However, her perceived understanding about the role of mainstream white American parents reflected differences between them and Asian-Indian parents. She said,

“I think being an immigrant mother coming from South Asia, our philosophy and thinking is something different than what it is for parents living here, particularly regarding teaching kids at home. Parents, who have grown up here, believe in the philosophy which is here in the schools, that is children should not be given any pressure, no homework, not extra pressure of education, sports is fine, and music is fine”.

Besides, Asha thinks the local schools have their own share of strengths and weaknesses. She shared some personal experiences in dealing with school officials and mentioned that sometimes, parents have to be a little aggressive, particularly if they are not satisfied with their child's/ children's progress or have concerns. She mentioned,

“You have to be an aggressive parent...even in this school system you have to go and ask...that is what I have learned...unless you ask, it is not going to be given to you...they are very scared that the child will not do well socially...so, I think in this school system if we (parents) push it we can achieve it...you have to be very aggressive”.

(Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

Asha mentioned that every day, both her sons are expected to talk about their “school” day. In fact, Asha mentioned that her older son is expected to share his “school stories” twice daily. First, as soon as he comes home from school, he is expected to talk to her about his day in school, and again in evening, he is expected to repeat the same when her husband returns home from work.

Besides, their schooling, Asha is involved in her children's music program, boys scouts, sports and Culture School and Kumon School. She has an undergraduate degree from India. She is self employed, and conducts Kumon (An educational program started and made popular, by a Japanese school teacher named Yoshi Kumon to enhance children's Math and Reading skills) classes in the town where she resides.

Her reasons for starting Kumon classes in her town were two fold. Firstly, it would provide an opportunity for her children to enhance their Math and Reading skills. Secondly, the flexible hours would allow her to work and simultaneously spend time with her kids. Lastly, it would help her to develop her personal skill as well as provide

exposure, in getting to know diverse families and children in town. She perceives her involvement with Kumon to be an extension of her “mothering for schooling” work.

As a first generation, Asian-Indian mother, alluded to the importance of culture, and culture clash in relation to her within the school and mainstream white community. She shared her concerns and stated,

“Because of both the cultures (Indian and American ways of thinking) being together, there are lots of things they (her children) are picking from American culture...so, I feel the cultural values that were instilled in us were stronger than what is being instilled in our kids...culture is basically values that have been instilled in us when were in India...it is a way of thinking, but unfortunately the fear that I have, is that were born and brought up in India, we had strong values. Slowly these kids do not have the same values as we did back home. There is some lost...I try to use all those processes that were used there (India), good ones, because bad one is there is a lot of pressure there. I don’t like to give them pressure, so...but yet, I like to give them homework at home...”

When asked how her children reacted to “home” work. She alluded to her older son, and said, that he got teased by his friends in the neighborhood. She said,

“He is being laughed at sometimes...when in summer when everybody is playing outside, and he is finishing his homework before he goes out. You know he is teased”.

(Follow-Up Interview, December 10, 2003)

Apparently, Asha and her husband talk to their children about their family priorities, by telling them, “This is what we do in our home...and that is what people function in their house, both are fine”.

As a first generation, immigrant Asian-Indian mother, Asha thinks that it is important for her children to learn about her native land---India. Asha ranks the Culture School high on her list of priorities. When asked why she sent her children to the Culture School, she said,

“They got to know and learn about Indian. They learn about our culture, because we are so far off from India, they don’t get a chance to learn about Indian culture except in their homes, Also, they get to interact with their Indian friends, and that is special, interaction with Indian children”.

(Follow-up Interview, December 10, 2003)

On alternate Sundays, she and her husband take their children to “Story Hour” which is an Asian-Indian community gathering, where a group of Indian families get together and listen to stories from ancient Indian epics, “The Ramayana” and “The Mahabharata”. It is similar to Sunday school, but it not just limited to kids, but open to adults as well.

After the birth of her second child, Asha along with another Asian-Indian friend started a play group, just for Indian mothers and toddlers. She felt it was important for young mothers and their children to meet regularly, socialize, build friendships, not just for the sake of the children, but for the mothers themselves, and in the process gather support for one another. Within the Asian-Indian community, Asha and her friend’s play group was considered to be a novel idea, something that did not exist when I was raising my children. Apparently, the younger mothers learned from our oversights and mistakes, and made sure that their child care responsibilities did not limit them or confine them to their homes. The younger mothers were smart, they not only wanted their children to play, but felt they deserved to have some fun as well. Apparently, the play group is going strong and getting bigger, it is almost like a close knit community within the larger Asian-Indian community.

Asha, despite her challenging everyday realities and mothering for schooling work, did not feel defeated or upset. Rather she seemed optimistic about her supplementary work; because she felt her efforts would lend support and benefit her

children. In fact, during the time of the follow-up interview, she was trying to reorganize her schedule to help her son take swimming lessons. To reiterate her sense of commitment towards her family, and challenges of mothering for schooling work, Asha spoke positively and said,

“I think these (Asian-Indian) children are getting the benefits of both schools. Us, with our (Indian) experiences, enforcing that here, in this country, what we learned back home in India, and then, our children getting all these experiences from American society staying here...my conclusion is that our children...if we try harder, as all of us are doing, little bit harder you know, than normal American parents are doing, we can benefit from both societies, cultures of both the societies”.

(Follow-up Interview, December 10, 2003)

In the mean time, Asha thinks she is still in the learning stage, and is fortunate to gain from the collective wisdom of older Asian-Indian mothers, who came before her, and had participated in their children’s schooling. She felt she was lucky to have a better start than the previous generation of women. In fact, based on their experiences she was able to prepare better for her mothering for schooling work, and also take initiatives to establish support systems like the play group, as well as the Kumon School. However, having lived in other parts of the United States, she was very pleased of her present location, and felt the place was good for raising children. She said, “I am happy staying here, I think this the best place to bring up children”.

Asha even had a few suggestions for teachers, school administrators, and future Asian-Indian mothers and their American born children. Regarding schools, she suggested that every district could benefit from a dress code---School Uniforms. She thinks school uniforms help in setting a more formal tone to the academic environment and in the process minimize social and discipline problems within schools.

### **Nina's Supplementary Mothering for Schooling Work**

Nina, mother of two girls, came to the United States in 1992 as a research scientist. She has a Ph. D in biological sciences. As a person, Nina is very soft spoken, even calm. She talked about three things that were important to her and became part of her supplementary mothering for schooling work. First, of course, were her two daughters, second, she was involved in non-profit organizations. It was important for her the poor and sick people in India and the United States, and set a good example for her daughters, so that they can grow up to be compassionate adults. Her supplementary work choices reflect her early schooling experiences in India. Third, she loved music, and spent time learning and teaching music. She described herself as,

“I think as a person I want to be a good mother...I think I am a kind person... I think I am not pushy enough...I think I am not so...ambitious...Aa...I think I am good with children...and interacting with my own kids and my kids friends gives me lot of happiness...I really look forward to being with kids... I feel the mother's role is so important that, especially if you have daughters, you become the role model and you have to set a good example”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

For Nina her maternal role is of prime importance to her and everything else including her career was secondary. Apparently, as a mother she constantly questioned herself, wondering whether she was doing the “right” thing, particularly from the child's perspective. She was the only mother, who shared her mothering experiences primarily from her children's perspectives. She derived great pleasure in being a mother, and mentioned that her mothering abilities came to her “naturally”. She mentioned that her own mother has been the most influential person in her life.

As a Asian-Indian mother, Nina admitted to being challenged by the situated-ness of her mothering work, requiring her to constantly negotiate divergent cultures enclaves--between home, school, and Indian/American communities. She felt she was required to elevate her level of commitment, mental, physical and emotional investment towards her mothering work.

Nina's supplementary mothering for schooling work extended and included two play groups. She joined the first play group when her younger daughter was a toddler. It was a university sponsored play group, meant for helping international students and their families. Nina took her younger daughter to that play group until she was five years old. The play group included Moms and kids from all different countries, as well white American mothers and children. They met twice a week on campus.

Day one was spent socializing with other Moms and children, making crafts, learning and participating in international festivals and local celebrations. She remembered celebrating Christmas and Hanukah with the other members, and making appropriate crafts for each festival. Day two was spent at the University gym on campus, where Moms and kids would exercise, play with balls and do activities together. Nina met a lot of people through the program. She said, "It was a nice forum to overcome your inhibitions".

Through the university sponsored play group, Nina was able to gather some support for herself and her younger daughter, who was too young to even go to preschool. She met several international as well as white American mothers, who were in similar situations as she was, facing similar problems, raising their children by themselves, while their spouses attended classes at the university. Nina stated that the

play group has helped her as a mother, more importantly it has as helped her overcome her shyness to some extent. She was glad to meet white American mothers who took an interest to learn about other cultures. Nina appreciated their interest in the play group by saying, “It was a place where I guess it made me feel...it is o.k. to be different, it is o.k. to come from a different culture, it is still good, it is still something that is acceptable”.

The second play group Nina belonged to consisted of only Asian-Indian mothers and their young children. It essentially started by her friend Asha. The mothers and their young children meet every Tuesday afternoon. Unlike the university play group, the Indian play group known as the “Indus Play Group” is totally focused on Indian issues, food, customs, festivals etc. Nina joined the Indus Play Group when her younger daughter was five years old. She said,

“In some ways it may be even better than growing up in India”. She compared her daughter’s play opportunities with her nieces and nephews who live in India, and said, “They have one or two close friends, but it is not like here, you get exposed to ten other kids who are about the same age. And at this age, the more experiences the child has the better it is for her personality. And in that aspect the play group setting is really good”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

In addition, Nina mentioned that joining a play group consisting of Indian mothers and their children was doubly beneficial to both parties. When mothers and kids see others who look like them, talk like them, and dress like them, it helps them create strong bonds and develop a sense of community.

Living in the local community, required Nina to rethink her mothering for schooling role, particularly regarding diversity issues. She said, “I think it has made a big difference”. Growing up in India, where all social activities were either associated with



family or majority Hindu religion; Nina said she paid little attention to other religions and cultures, “back home”.

However, after moving to the present location and being exposed to different cultures and religions, she expressed the importance of instilling the value of religious tolerance in kids. Her association with her daughters’ schools, local university, international students and families made her become more aware and accepting of all religions and cultures. As a foreigner living in the United States, she said,

“You want to be accepted by other cultures, and if you want that to happen, then you have to learn to do that yourself...I think that is another important aspect for overall development. And that teaches the kids that you have to have religious tolerance... celebrating Christmas is as important as celebrating Hanukah or...there are lots of things we can learn from other religions. And it is important in this day of war and religious fanaticism to encourage our kids to have tolerance. I think it is really important”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

Nina’s supplementary mothering for schooling work included celebrating various festivals and practicing diversity at home. Her family, besides celebrating Indian festivals, made special efforts to celebrate some of the American festivals. More importantly, to emphasize a sense of religious tolerance in their children, Nina and her husband took their children egg hunting, during Easter, which is not a Hindu festival. Nina celebrated Thanksgiving with family and friends. Nina mentioned that they go to church, not to attend religious services, but to attend concerts, especially when her daughters sing in the choir, or play the violin.

Focus group and follow-up interviews revealed that as part of her mothering and schooling work, Nina spends time emphasizing the acceptance of all religions and cultures, she divides her time focusing on issues pertaining to her “mother land” India

and Indian culture. Nina, like Asha, Daya and Leela sends her daughters to the local Indian culture school to familiarize themselves with the history, geography, art, architecture, literature and culture of India. She and her husband also help in running the school and strongly believe in the importance of the school, particularly with regards to Asian-Indian children's identity development.

As a first generation immigrant, Nina did supplementary work, by spending time talking to her daughters about India. She wanted her daughters to understand how Indians think, and not be confused by it. Coming from the world's largest democracy, she wanted her daughters to learn about its great leaders, develop a sense of pride and be comfortable with their Indian origin.

However, as a professional and a parent whose children were being schooled in the United States, Nina spoke about the benefits of living in the United States. She was glad she was raising her daughters in the United States and not in India. Highlighting the downside of Indian school systems and schooling rituals, she mentioned unlike in the United States, education and schooling are very stressful enterprises for children and youth growing up in India. Indian kids are pressured by parents and teachers to become high achievers with successful professional careers. Reflecting back on her own childhood and youth, Nina talked about the tough competition among students, requiring them to work extremely hard in order to get into reputable schools and colleges. It was not enough to be good student; one was expected to be the best student. Nina added, "I want my kids to grow up in this country because the competition is so less...even if you are not so bright professional, even if you earn less, you can afford a lot of comforts".

Comparing her children with her nieces and nephews who are being raised in India, Nina mentioned “Parents expect a lot from their children...that is the drawback...they have to be top in the class, otherwise there will be put down by their parents”. Nina continued by saying “Kids should be free to choose what they enjoy doing...because if they enjoy what they do, they can shine in any area”. Nina’s comments reflect her own accomplishments. She had opportunities to pursue her educational goals in India itself, which were further followed by her choice and decisions about her marriage. Just as she had many options to learn and pursue her interests, she wanted her daughters to have similar opportunities, may be even more than her.

She said she wouldn’t mind if her daughters did not get their Ph.Ds and instead became music teachers. Her rationale was, living in America, her daughters and others like them were in a position to make career choices of their liking, and not necessarily become doctors and engineers as most Indian parents expect from their children.

Comparing the two contexts, India and the United States, Nina alluded to the living conditions, and mentioned, that parents in India and in the United States parents want their children to be educated and live comfortable lives. However, things that are deemed minimum comforts in the U.S. are considered as luxuries among middle class families in India. Even as music teachers her daughters will be able to lead comfortable lives in America. However, Nina reiterated that both her daughters were doing well academically and she has been quite happy with their scholastic achievements.

In addition, as an immigrant Asian-Indian mother, having lived in India, and being aware of the everyday challenges and living conditions, Nina spoke of the high standard of living in America, which subsequently provided her with privileges and

opportunities to make informed choices, regarding her profession and mothering work.

She said,

“Basically you get more time to do all the things...you have more peace of mind to think about mothering...quality time, (unlike in India) you don't have to worry about basic necessities like water, electricity, books or comfortable school, not crowded... you don't have to worry about getting admission...basic necessities are so well provided by the system that you have peace of mind and the time, to think about a career...and how much time you want to spend time with them (children)... We have contributed our skills and expertise to this country, and what we get back in return are the comforts”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

Nina was satisfied with the local school system, at least with the academic aspects. She was pleased with the teachers and was talked about the three way partnership program, between parent-teacher and child. She mentioned that in her daughter's school parent-teacher conferences include the child as well. At the beginning of each academic year, parents-teacher and student get together and set up goals for that particular year and then work towards achieving those goals through out the year. Nina was very happy with the partnership, and also talked about how such a partnership was helping her younger daughter with her math skills.

Since both her daughters were doing well academically, she focused more the social aspects of schooling, and on what she understood to be school's expectations of her role and involvement as a mother. As the conversation progressed, Nina spoke about the effects of mothering for schooling work on her. She specifically focused on herself as a mother and on the kind of mothering for schooling activities which she considered as difficult to fulfill.

Nina and her husband are from two different states in India and hence do not share a common mother tongue. Her mother tongue is a dialect, a mixture of two South

Indian languages, Tamil and Kannada. Her husband's mother tongue is Marathi. Since neither Nina nor her husband, speak the same mother tongue, they opted to speak to their children in English. Nina was not too thrilled about the decision, and regrets her children not knowing her mother tongue or her husband's mother tongue, but felt it could not be helped. Nina and her husband communicate with their children in English as well.

Even though Nina was well versed in spoken and written English, Nina was worried and sensitive about her English accent, and wondered whether she would be socially accepted in schools. Afraid of being embarrassed, she holds her self back. She talked about her hesitation to volunteer in her daughters' schools, and wished she would be more involved in school activities and PTO meetings. She said,

“I have an inhibition to go to such activities...the way I speak English is different from the way the Americans speak English, and if I am not understood the first time I speak...I feel a bit sensitive...it is the second time when I speak they understand... Oh! What can I do about my accent? So that people can understand me the first time... I should overcome that and say, o.k. they are also people like me, may be my accent is different but that should not prevent me from you know, going in and vocalizing my ideas and mingling with them. I should, I should overcome that social barrier”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

The extra effort required in resolving her “accent” dilemma, led her to invest less time volunteering in school. Her logic was,

“instead of spending the same two hours there (her daughters' schools) fighting (struggling) to be understood, you know, the natural course of reaction is---stay home. Right! But now I realize it is important to go to these PTO meetings and understand the teachers and whatever is required”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

Nina's language explorations led her to talk specifically about the social environment within schools, particularly the style of communication among peers. She said,

“The way of speaking, it is little brash in school. For what ever reason, the kids are little bit...the way they speak...language wise I think there is no difference, but attitude wise there is a difference I think”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

She said when her daughters come home from school, she and her husband try hard to get them out of

“I don't care attitude...the body language, the communication style, and the perspective they have of elderly people. And the tolerance they have for some thing that doesn't look cool. Little actions like...from friends, and from kids who are not friends...social environment is where...my kid is absorbing things and trying to mimic things”

Nina continued by saying,

“Both H (her husband) and I are very patient people, we have infinite patience...whenever I don't care attitude manifests at home...that's when the mother's role or father's role comes in and you have to correct. That's when we try to explain”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

It is apparent Nina makes great efforts to instill cultural pride in her daughters. She wants her daughters to be proud of Indian food, clothing, and style of dressing. She wants them to embrace Indian ethnicity in a positive way, and not become embarrassed by it, particularly when they are among their American friends.

Through her supplementary mothering for schooling work, Nina tries hard to keep her cultural heritage and ethnicity alive. She considered her home to be a cultural environment---An Asian Indian home, and culturally different from her daughters'

American school. Nina's definition and interpretations of culture were interesting. She defined culture as, "Culture is something...it is closely knit with tradition, something...like prayer, and like music and of course, clothing and food".

Nina tries to supplement her mothering for schooling work by inculcating a sense of ethnicity. She applies her supplemental efforts in promoting diversity, interestingly she decided to focus on Indian food. Sometimes she would pack Indian food for her daughters' school lunch. Occasionally, she would also pack Indian snacks and sweets to be shared among their American friends in school. Apparently, much to Nina's disappointment, many of her daughters' American friends like only a few Indian sweets and savories. Consequently, Nina's daughters wanted to take to school only those Indian snacks that their American friends liked, and avoid the rest, even the ones they liked eating at home.

As mentioned earlier music is a big part of Nina's household. According to Nina,

"Music is soothing not only for the heart, but for the mind and soul. It is good therapy, kids will go through a lot of emotional crisis and lots of ups and downs at adolescence, and if they have music in them, they have something to go back to, and contemplate. I think music is that power".

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

Hence her supplementary mothering work includes teaching South Indian classical music to her daughters and other children from the local Asian-Indian community. In terms of suggestion for the future, Nina is of the opinion that schools must offer music lessons, much earlier, either in kindergarten or first grade. She believed that music helps in building a person's confidence. Nina believed that music has the

power to bring people together; especially among children it helps them develop a sense of community irrespective of race, class or gender.

Like the other mothers in this study, Nina too considered her mothering for schooling work to be challenging. She viewed it as an on going negotiation process and admitted to have been affected by it on a personal level. She said,

“It is hard because you have to be a role model...you always have to set rules for yourself”. When you say, (to her daughters) you have to keep your room clean, you have to show them by keeping the house clean. I always have to think, am I setting a good example. And for exercise also I am really bad at exercising, but I want my kids to stay healthy and exercise, so I force myself to a routine, telling them, o.k. I did this what have you done”?

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

In addition, Nina admitted that her supplementary mothering for schooling work and the choices she had to make had a lot to do with her gender and cultural upbringing.

Being a woman and a mother, she said,

“I have given my career a second priority. I think I made the choice willingly because if both of us (she and her husband) are career oriented then, it will definitely reflect on the kids. I wanted to be home when they came back from school. I wanted to make sure they ate well, did their homework well, making sure they know their responsibilities”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

Nina didn't think there was enough time for her to successfully fulfill her mothering responsibilities and do justice to a full time career. However it was equally important for her, particularly during her daughters' formative years, the first eight-ten years.

“It is the culture (Indian) I think! We are always taught that the role of the mother is important. And it is true, it may seem old fashioned but, it very true that the role of the mother in the formative years is extremely important, and I take that job very seriously”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)



At the same time, she did not give up on her career. In fact Nina reiterated with great confidence,

“If I make my mind today, that I want to build on my career, it’s under my control, it’s my choice, it is not something that is forced on me... I think, I myself I’m learning and growing with the kids. Mothering for schooling experience has certainly giving me more discipline in my life. I think I have to have self control”.

(Follow-Up Interview, October 20, 2003)

Asian American education theorist Pai (1990) has pointed out, education and schooling are cultural processes. However, many immigrants in the past and I think still continue to do so, “erroneously equate(d) education with schooling” (pg. 52). Many of them do not realize education and schooling differ on some basic and fundamental levels. Despite being a cultural process, education is not as formalized as schooling; it need not take place in a formal setting. Schooling, on the other hand, is more formalized and restrictive process of cultural transmission (Pai 1990, pg. 38), a point of contention for many immigrant minority parents, especially those who were schooled elsewhere and unfamiliar with rituals of schooling in American public institutions. Hence gaining an “insider” perspective of American public schools can be an arduous struggle for immigrant minority mothers, who often serve as primary caregivers for their school-going children

As in the case of Daya, cultural differences between her home and school as well as community made her feel as if she was “swimming against the tide”.

### **Daya's Supplementary Mothering for Schooling Work**

She was one of mothers, who had the most concerns. Which I believe, to some extent had to do with her own experiences as a graduate student as well her own childhood experiences in Sri Lanka. As an immigrant minority woman, who spent many years in the United States before becoming a mother, her stories indicated that she was exposed to the social life choices that many college bound adults embrace and participate, Americans as well as Asian-Indians. She condoned them, and worried that her daughter might become like one of them, even when she was in second-third grade in a Charter school. However, she also mentioned about her exposure to “well-behaved” American Indian students as well as, students whom she admired because they led culturally balanced life, respecting their own Indian/home culture as well as mainstream white American community culture. Daya hoped her daughter would grow up to be like one of them. Hence, having had those experiences Daya constructed her mothering for schooling agenda on a “fast-forward” mode. She was preparing herself and her daughter with the “prevention is better than cure” mind set. During the time of the focus and follow-up interview she was on a long leave of absence from her professional commitments and found that she could not balance her profession and family. As a woman, she felt she could not balance her predominately male-defined work life with her female-centered family life.

Like many Indian and Sri Lankan women she felt she would rather rely on her sense of “frugality” than succumb to her professional career, at least temporarily. She was exhausted and worried about her daughter's schooling. She felt she had reasons to worry. Especially, when her daughter came home and shared “what is going on in school

stories”. The story had to do with her friend’s mother and the mothers’ boyfriend. Daya felt it was culturally inappropriate for her daughter to be listening to such stories. Although her daughter’s friend shared information pertaining to her family, and the information can be considered to be second-hand, Daya felt it was inappropriate for her daughter to be exposed to such socially defined relational information at such a young age. The timing of her daughter being exposed to what Daya considered as developmentally and culturally inappropriate information while she was in second grade, appalled her. In fact, she was very protective of her daughter and did not think it would be wise to send her to public school, instead she chose to send her to a Charter school. She spends several hours in her daughters’ school, helping them in several capacities, as a volunteer mother, teacher, and even helps with school administration.

Daya’s mothering for schooling stories and her supplementary work drew attention to understandings of gender hierarchies in India and Sri Lanka, gender hierarchies that also define and dictate issues about gender- expectations as well. Gender issues were revealed when Daya participated in the follow-up interviews, which created opportunities for an in-depth understanding of her supplementary mothering for schooling work.

For example, Daya mentioned, growing up in Sri Lanka, parents and elder members in her family, made her become aware about the existing gender divisions and gender hierarchies within educated middle class Sri Lankan families in general and her own family in particular. Apparently, based on gender-centered practices within her family, as girls and young women, she and her sister had to take care of their brothers, help them, make tea for them, while “the boys” stayed up late studying for exams, etc.

According to the follow –up conversations, Daya revealed that her parents were more focused on her brothers’ education goals, than her or her sister’s education goals. More so, her brothers being boys, their education was more important, than her sister’s and her educational goals, because they were girls. Daya also mentioned that she and her sister, out of their own initiative earned their Ph. D. degrees, implicating that her parents spend less time worrying about girls’ education. Daya’s past experiences have shaped her mothering, and mothering for schooling life. To the extent, through out the focus group interviews and the follow up interviews, she focused mostly on her daughter’s schooling and less on son. She was more concerned about her daughter, because she was a girl, and her son was not. Daya was concerned that her daughter may develop misconceptions that may deter her from moving forward from her educational goals.

It was interesting to learn about Daya’s other reason for doing her Ph. D in Chemistry, which reflected not only her cultural understanding about knowledge acquisition and learning, it also reflected the middle class mentality that we all seem to adhere. She said, did her Ph. D. because it seemed like logical future goal, and would create job opportunities for her, even allow her travel abroad. However, she mentioned she does not enjoy Chemistry as much as she enjoys Eastern Philosophy. She said, studying Chemistry had to do with her professional commitments, and that Eastern Philosophy was her passion. During the time of the follow-up interview, she said, she had moved far away from her “personal” self, and she wanted to reclaim it. As far as her profession was concerned, she was in the “been there, done that” mode, she wanted to focus more on her children as well, more so because of the kind of experiences she had in past, in Sri Lanka and Western United States. Her experiences as a daughter and as a

single graduate student life in the United States were instrumental in her make decisions about her life choices, for herself and her family. And, with the help of her husband, Daya decided to take time off from her professional duties. However, she did not waste any time.

Daya extended her supplementary mothering for schooling work to include her daughter's school. She formulated her supplementary for schooling work to include extended hours of volunteering in her daughter's Charter School. Apparently, parents who send their children to Charter School are required to devote a minimum of thirty-six hours of volunteer work each year. Daya, spends more than the minimum requirement of thirty-six hours. She and her husband share administrative duties, teaching duties as well, sometimes she pays keen attention to the curriculum as well. She and her husband regularly attend school meetings and if she thinks the teaching or content is not age-appropriate or culturally appropriate, she tries to bring her concerns to the attention of the school administrator. For example, on the day of the follow-up interview, she was not pleased because when she stopped by the Charter School, she found the children in her daughter's class were being taught about parts of the human body. Daya was upset to witness the lesson on human body; she felt her daughter was not ready to learn about male and female reproductive organs. Apparently, the lesson on the human body came about following a class discussion amongst second grade students.

Daya like Asha and Nina sends her children to Indian Culture School. She is actively involved with the school as well. She teaches and helps with the library books. She and her husband also go to "Story Hour" as well. She also spends time at home talking to her children about Hindu religion. In addition, her children take lesson in

western music, as well as South Indian Vocal Music lessons, from none other than Leela, who is also part of this study. It is apparent Daya has a hectic schedule. Her children besides attending schools have extra-curricular activities scheduled every day of the week.

Speaking of Leela, brings us to the last of the four supplementary work stories.

### **Leela's Supplementary Mothering for Schooling Work**

Leela is a mother of two boys; both of them were born after she moved to her present location. Leela has a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education. She worked as a paraprofessional in one of the local elementary schools and was more informed about the local schools and schooling culture. It was interesting to hear Leela share her mothering for schooling experiences, because she could switch positions, there were instances she spoke as an immigrant Asian-Indian mother, and during other times she spoke as a person who was as she said, "in the system" representing the local school. And unlike some of the other mothers of this study, who hesitated to question teachers and school authorities, Leela reiterated, "if you want something, (from the school) you ask for it...if you sit back nothing is going to happen". Having worked in the local schools, Leela had more knowledge about the schools than the other mothers. However, she did not give up on her culturally defined beliefs about schooling and learning, instead, she tried to apply them in what she perceived to be as "school-deficit areas".

As an immigrant Asian-Indian mother, she was fully aware about the school culture, as well as the cultural differences between her home and school, and tried to compensate the differences through her mothering for schooling work process. She followed a basic rule, she said,

“Just take the good things from my culture; and this culture (school culture, and mainstream white American community culture) and try to put it all together, and have a good priority and value system... you have to have good discipline. And, here so much of...so much of resources are available, like you take advantage of all that, and give the kids what ever you can. I mean, especially for me, I have the experience of being a mother, I am little bit older, and I am coming from a different culture, so I have a different aspect and, traveled around a little bit, and all those things add to your knowledge.

(Follow-Up Interview, January 10, 2004)

Leela’s mothering for schooling work was never ending. Her day to day activities personify the term “hectic” beyond definition. Although she was willing to participate in this study, she had very little time to spare to participate in the interviews. As a result of which, she started with *Group 1*, but had to leave at the end of phase one. She later continued with *Group 2* and finished the group interview. And, because of her busy schedule she was the last person to be interviewed in the follow-up interview.

During the time of the focus group and follow-up interview, she was playing multiple roles. She was not only a primary caregiver, but she was also a student attending university, studying for her teaching certification, a wife and a music teacher, where she taught music to Asian Indian children. Leela survived because she had a very supportive husband. Leela has high expectations for herself and her children. From the beginning, despite her innumerable activities, she has taken a strong lead in her children’s schooling and started teaching, letters, numbers, songs etc. long before they entered schools. Her family goals and child rearing attitudes were in some respects were same as the other mothers of this study, and in other ways were different from the other mothers. Leela was more focused on preparing her children to become good citizens. She said,

“We have to make them good citizens, or good people, I mean education and everything will come, but you have to have a good character build up”.

Living in the United States, Leela was very aware of the everyday practicalities as well as learning opportunities. She strongly believed in taking advantage of the various learning opportunities made available in the United States and constantly encouraged her children to do the same. Hence, everybody in her family was involved in various activities. However, despite her busy schedule, Leela always made time for her children and strived to be a good role model. But unlike, Nina and her family, she did not allocate one-on-one time with her children. Firstly, because of their busy schedule, and secondly, her kids knew she would be available for them, when ever they needed her. Apparently, she spoke to her children during dinner time, and while driving them to different activities.

Leela’s early schooling and mothering for schooling stories exemplify her sense of purpose. She has clear understanding of her goals, for herself as well as her children, and she consistently works towards them. As a mother, teacher, student, daughter and daughter-in-law, she is focused and tries to fulfill her responsibilities to the best of her ability. Her notions of practicality can be best assessed from her thoughts she shared during the follow-up interview, when she said,

“When I became a citizen, its all inside, it is all in paper right, I mean it doesn’t matter, you are living in this country, you have come to this country, so might as well take up the citizenship...you know, you are serving for this country, so...I mean it is going to be advantageous for you also...I feel that it doesn’t matter who...where you are born or what citizenship you have, you have to be a good person, on humanitarian grounds, that’s what it is...I still feel that it is good to have the Indian background, and the Indian foundation, the cultural foundation, I feel that we are lucky we can have both.



You know, when I am in India...when I am here I try to be as normal as the people around us. Like you celebrate Christmas around, you know. When you are in India you celebrate festivals, they celebrate, and be like them. In India I don't go and wear jeans, and you know, shirt and pant and walk around. You be an Indian when you are amongst Indians. But when you are here, I mean, I always feel that you should be, you should go with the flow kind of. Here in America if you are in an Indian function, go dressed as an Indian. Talk to them like you would be talking in your own...whatever. Don't, don't be...don't stand out as a different person. Just mingle with everybody..."

(Follow-Up Interview, January 10, 2004)

Leela is very close to her children and enjoys being a mother. Her supplementary mothering for schooling work included teaching her children the importance and value of hard work, time and money. Apparently, when ever she asks her children to do something, she gives them a logical reason as to why they should it and explains to them the purpose behind it. She shared a story about money and expenditure, and mentioned that Asian-Indian kids growing up in the United States do not fully understand the value of money. She said,

"Our kids, you know, the kids growing up here, they don't have as much of value for money. So, they keep complaining about I don't have this, I don't have this...so for us especially, when we go back to India, it is such a...it is such a eye opener for these kids, that they see so much of poverty around, and every time I talk to them about it, I remind them, can you think of some kid in India, not having a day's meal. And you are talking about this toy you don't have. Think about all the things you have. Can you relate to that child's life? So, then they mellow down a little bit. They have got the understanding now, they have some kind of perception of what life could be at the other end, you know. So, we just have to be thankful for what we have, and not complain, that we don't have this, we don't have this, let's think about it as, the cup is half full and not half empty, that kind of...that kind of an attitude to build up, you know, so that they are happy with what they have. It is not bad to aim for things higher or more, it is o.k. But then be contented with what you have right now, and not...and don't waste your life complaining about what you don't have, instead of enjoying, and still aim for some thing else. That's what we are trying to...children get exposed to so many things about...in school. They talk about...but academics. But we have to keep pushing like...I ask him to do extra things at home, and he is like, sometimes he is not wanting to do it... it is just that you keep, you be consistent at home as to what you are doing, and what your priorities and values are... you instill in them, saying that there is nothing wrong in working hard".

(Follow-Up Interview, January 10, 2004)

Leela's supplementary work shed light on her family priorities and they included teaching her children about the value of learning their mother tongue Tamil, value about saving money and practicing frugality. Leela's perceived understanding of mainstream white American cultural practices indicate, that many white American spend more money, sometimes unnecessarily. Regarding home language issues and supplementary work, Leela tried to apply contradictory work strategies and tried to help her children learning her mother tongue. She said,

“Language is a challenge, exactly, specially with the kids, everyday challenge. We tell them that Americans don't have a second language. They all talk English everywhere. We are fortunate that, you know, it is always an advantage to know a second language. So, you are fortunate you can talk in a different language, and when you go to India, you can speak to your grandparents, even though they know English, it is always better to learn a new language. So, we...we have always, at home...specially I think it was, sometimes it was...sometimes it becomes a little bit edgy because...you can't keep telling them to talk and switch and all that...so I let go, but S(her husband) doesn't...Because of the...because they are so...used to English outside, it is very difficult for them to come home and switch it, to a different language, it is easy for them to talk in English, because that is what they are exposed to, the whole day...even from the beginning, I never spoke to my kids in English, before. Just before going to school, may be I just taught R(her older son) a few words so that he will be able to get along. But totally it was Tamil all the time. But, N(her younger son) was different, because by the time R was older, and he used to talk to him in English, and all his friends used to come home, so...we are still having trouble with N...talking Tamil. He can understand very well, but he still doesn't want to talk. But, we make sure that we don't reply back, to him, if he talks in English. So, he has to revert back to...

(Follow-Up Interview, January 10, 2004)

Referring to her past life experiences in India, Leela tried to highlight the differing living conditions between the two contexts---India and present location, and help her children understand the benefits of living in the United States. Using examples

from her own life experiences, Leela tried to justify her mothering for schooling chores, as well as to remind her children about all the learning opportunities made available to them through their schools and communities. She did not want her children to take things for granted, instead move ahead and take advantage all learning opportunities, not just limit themselves to academics, but include sports, music education as well. She said,

“We still feel that, you know, when we grew up in India, we don’t grow up with all the amenities and facilities, we have...our kids have here. Even though we give them all those things here, we make sure we talk about it, and say that, this is all a luxury, and you know, you shouldn’t...just because you can afford it, you shouldn’t go...wasting the money, or just you know, watering down or what ever. You should be...able to like...the saving mentality that people don’t have here, that’s what I feel, the American families...their priorities are just...even if they don’t have the money, they take a loan and...that is something which we cannot handle. Because, we are not brought up like that, we don’t have that...we have to save. The saving mentality is there, and we would want to instill that value of saving...Because our parents were like that, they are still like that. I mean they are...they...they don’t spend unnecessarily, but they spend for the right things. And especially education and anything related to that, you don’t even look at that the dollar amount or the price value on that...it is all priceless...Any amount, yes, for anything like that. I mean just for going out and having, coolly going to a movie every weekend...and going out to eat and all those things...all those are luxuries. I mean, you can live without it too. I mean once in a while it is o.k. But, just because you can afford it today doesn’t mean that you have to go and do that right now. And, make your children get used to that. I mean they will have their own life, when they grow a little older, but then when you have instilled some of these values that will eventually rub on them a little bit at least. Even if they don’t do exactly what you are doing, I am saying what we are doing is right. But, that’s how we think is the right thing to do...

(Follow-Up Interview, January 10, 2004)

Music is a big part of Leela’s life. She is a trained and accomplished classical singer, and every week, despite her busy schedule tries to practices diligently. She teaches music to young Asian-Indian children, which also includes her younger son. Leela mentioned that she really enjoys teaching South Indian Carnatic Vocal Music, and is very happy to see her students responding positively.

Leela is also involved in the local Indian Culture School. She teaches music and volunteers in the class. Occasionally, she also teaches lessons. During alternate Sundays she and her family attend “Story Hour”. As an immigrant living in the United States, Leela’s mothering for schooling stories can be considered to be true representations of creative possibilities. Leela’s achievements truly exemplify fulfillment of the American dream. Of course, she worked extremely hard to achieve them. Highlighting the positive aspects of living and learning in the United States, Leela felt very blessed and was appreciative about the various learning opportunities made available to her. As an adult, woman, and immigrant she said,

“I think here in this country, it is fortunate that you...anybody can go back to, at anytime, to go and do what ever they want. That’s one thing that I have seen in India, after a certain age, you can’t do certain things, because you are done with. You cannot go back to college; nobody goes back as a returning adult, there are no opportunities. People don’t value that, and...there is a taboo of something like a right and a wrong. Here everything is accepted, in a very polished way. Even if you are wrong, they accept it in a different way, they...the reaction to something which is wrong, is totally different than what you would get in India. That’s one thing that I really appreciate about this culture.

No, I mean, everything blends in to something, you know, even for example in the classroom, you ask a question, and somebody gives a totally wrong answer, you don’t tell that child you are wrong. You give the child a feed back in a positive way, saying that, well that could be an answer for something else...may be you are talking about this, but you blatantly don’t tell the child, that was wrong. Even if you, if you ask a question that two plus two, and he says five, you come back with a different question so that the answer fits that, and the child feels good. That is something I really appreciate here, I mean you make the child feel good, and boost the child’s confidence about coming across, and not putting the child down.

(Follow-Up Interview, January 10, 2004)

Leela’s supplementary mothering for schooling work serves as a perfect example of cultural integration, establishing connections between her past experiences in India, and her present experiences in the United States. Her work as a paraprofessional, and her

participation in the local public school helped her tremendously in gaining understanding about the nature of schooling children in American public schools. Going to school every day she became aware about American school life, from the teachers' perspective as well as from the students' perspective. In addition, as an immigrant mother she also learned from her own mothering for schooling experiences. Being familiar with the school environment she was not as intimidated by the contextual and cultural differences between her home and school, like Hima and Nina did. As a future teacher, she mentioned she would try to apply some of her culturally valued teaching and learning strategies, strategies acquired in India that proved to be beneficial, into her teaching practices. Leela was very excited about her future, was looking forward to having her own elementary classroom.

It is apparent from Asha, Nina, Daya and Leela's supplementary mothering for schooling work stories that mothering within the realm of "newly adopted mainstream American culture" (Sandhu, 1997) meant mothers had to invest more time and energy to stay connected with their children's schools as well as with the local communities, American and Asian-Indian communities. Mothers' stories also revealed that they had to construct their individual mothering for schooling frameworks, suitable to their immigrant status, cultural understanding of "inside and outside" cultures as well as their goals for the future. Hence for many of the mothers in this study, their mothering for schooling work was an outcome of necessity.

Feminist scholars have strived to emphasize and direct attention to the everyday lives of women, and the work that they do, as mothers, wives, professionals and women. Even activities that are normally considered "mundane.", e.g. housekeeping, caring for

family members, preparing children for schooling, etc., feminist scholars understand their connectedness to women's lives, and value their relevancy to study them in depth (Fox & Murry, 2000; Griffith & Smith, 2005; Ribbens 1994,).

As evidenced from the previous chapters, theorizing from a feminist perspective, besides enhancing intellectual scholarship, enhances social and cultural sensibility in understanding mother-child relationships, family-school connections as well as “dynamics of inequality and power” (Fox & Murry, 2000, p. 1162). For example, in this study, being Asian-Indian, and sharing a middle class upbringing, mothers exemplified, their cultural norms, i.e. value for family, children, and education. They valued their past life in India, admired their parents, and wanted to follow their parents and elderly members of their families. They believed that the decisions their parents made for them had their share of advantages and disadvantages. As children, mothers benefited from being dependant on their parents, perceived dependency as support, and wanted to do the same for their children. However, as immigrant mothers, they could not depend on anybody, but themselves. Unlike their mothers, they had to rely on their spouses and children.

The mothers who participated in this study were quite fortunate; their stories revealed that their spouses and children were supportive of their mothering for schooling work. Based on my observations of several years, that is not always the case. Many Asian-Indian husbands despite living in the United States for several years, continue to maintain and practice their male-centered traditions established in India, even when over the years many of the traditions have changed in Indian itself. For example, as head of the family and household many Asian-Indian husbands make decisions for their wives,

sometimes without taking into consideration the contextual conditions, and differences between India and the United States. Sometimes their decisions affect Asian-Indian women's role constructions, and may include their mothering for schooling work and child-rearing activities. Hence, it is important to bear in mind, although many immigrant Asian-Indian women commit themselves to their mothering role and mothering for schooling work, and make it their first priority, they are not always in a position to make decisions for themselves or their children.

Mothering under such tenuous conditions can sometimes lead mothers relying on their children more than relying on their spouses for emotional support, and also relying on their children's teacher to help them do their mothering for schooling work. Hence, for mothers to work under such conditions means that their mothering work is not just limited to rethinking their understanding about mothering and schooling, it is about rethink their understanding about family relationships, rethinking definitions of "wife" and "husband". In order to rethink spousal relationships, one is forced to question culturally-defined, male-centered decisions of the past, which over the years have remained sedimented in one's psyche, (usually the male psyche), and have become "normalized" and interpreted as cultural traditions.

On many levels immigrant Asian-Indian men, as providers of their families are also not spared. They work as professionals in predominantly white American, institutions are equally challenging. Just as mothers overextend themselves to become the best role models in their mothering for schooling work, as fathers, many of the Asian-Indian men, overextend themselves and accommodate themselves in their work place to prove their professional expertise. However, as much as they change and accommodate

themselves in the work place, many of them choose not to change in their homes. Instead, maintain their culturally defined male life style, and habits. Hence, it is important to remember that the work that each family member performs affects the other members, positively and negatively. In other words, mothering for schooling work, is not limited to the mothers, it affects everyone, and what children and fathers do in the school and work place affects the mother.

It is important to remember this study is not about assigning blame on any one, not mothers, fathers, children, teachers, school administrators, or employers, but to shed light on the conditions of mothering, and mothering for schooling work amidst culturally divergent enclaves---the Asian-Indian home, the American School, mainstream white American community, and Asian-Indian community. As Asha of *Group 1* said, there is pressure of living up to the standards set by the Asian-Indian community. For Asian-Indian mothers, “living up” to high expectations and standards not set by them, can make their mothering for schooling work, physically exhausting and depressing, and in the process silence them from speaking “out” of their miseries. Regarding their children’s schooling the mothers of this study realized and decided not to be caught up in social priorities. They realized their lived experiences required them to be “aggressive” to pursue their family goals and mothering work. Hence all the mothers made changes suitable to their children and their families.

Historically too, within the United States, studies centered on gender differences (Weis & Fine, 1993), revealed divisions between public and private spheres (Landes, 1998) grossly affect women and undermine their capabilities. They also define the primacy of work, placing less value on women and the work that they do (Griffith &



Smith 2005). For example relational and caring work (Noddings, 1984) that most often women do through prolonged activities such as mothering, teaching, nursing are grossly undermined as well. Drawing an example from women's history in the United States, feminist theorist Adrienne Rich (1979) claimed,

“the entire history of women's struggle for self-determination has been muffled in silence over and over...one of the ways in which women's work and thinking has been made to seem sporadic, errant, orphaned of any tradition of its own” (p.11)

However, mothers like Asha, Daya, Nina and Leela, proved themselves to be change agents. They integrated their past lives in India and Sri Lanka, with their present lives in the local white American community, to prepare for the future. They integrated their past schooling and family experiences in India and Sri Lanka with their present mothering for schooling experiences to shape the future of their children's educational goals.

Mothers' reflections about their childhood and schooling experiences revealed their assumptions and their ways of looking at the world (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992). Mothers used their knowledge from the past to problematize (Freire, 1998) their present social and cultural dilemmas, and used that accumulative knowledge towards planning a future that would be beneficial to their children.

Mothers' reflections about their past lives, also revealed mothers were subjects of their own gendered histories, which included their regionally defined Hindu culture, regional language, social class, and immigrant status. Their mothering for schooling experiences involved each of these concepts, and the order of their priority changed with each day, each schooling and mothering event, and family circumstances. Sometimes

concepts comprising mothering for schooling work had to be included collectively, and sometimes selectively, choosing one over the other.

Fortunately, mothers in this study were self-assured about their past lives in India and Sri Lanka, optimistic about the future, but it was living within the intersections of the present that they found to be most unnerving. But what remained constant through out this is amply described by *Group 1* members, Sheela, and seconded by Asha. Sheela said, “children come first”, and Asha added by saying “Once a mother, always a mother, mothering is life long”, however feminized it may be.

Regarding the women of this study, focus group interviews, follow-up interviews conversations and personal stories indicate that mothering for schooling was an evolving meaning making process. Mothers were spending long periods of time on “stuff invisible generally as work” thus establishing the fact that “work” done at home as house work “really is work” (Smith 2004, p.1). Mothers were not spared from doing mothering work. Even during weekends mothers did not give themselves a break; instead, drove their children to participate in different activities that focused on their ethnic culture. They included music, dance, and Hindi language lessons. On alternate Sundays, many of mothers along with their children attended “Story Hour” where their children learned about ancient Hindu epics.

There is no room for complacency in mothering work, according to the mothers of this study. Mothering, and mothering for schooling has been an act of love, as well an act of resistance. Like Mahatma Gandhi, they exemplified non-violent, nurturing activism, fighting ignorance through learning and teaching, learning from their past experiences, learning through participation in schools and community, learning from others including

their children, as well as teaching others besides their children. And, they did it with grace and dignity, just as their mothers taught them in India.

It is apparent mothering is an on going, lived experience, and its purpose is to create possibilities, action-centered possibilities, within the realm of uncertainty. Mothering according to this study is about preparing for the future, laying strong family and professional foundations for their children. It is also about the looming omnipresence of uncertainty which tends to eclipse every aspect of the mothering work. Feelings of uncertainty may expose mothers to vulnerabilities, to societal impositions and pressures, impositions that can cause mental and emotional anguish, often forcing them to make decisions which may not be of their choosing and in the process jeopardize their health and well being.

Feelings of uncertainty coupled by gender hierarchies i.e. fathers and husbands exercising culturally defined powers of authority, (which has not been the case in this study, but can be considered to be an Indian cultural norm) making decisions for wife and children about mothering and schooling, even when the “work” was done by the mothers and children, and not by them.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Findings of this study accord with the views of sociologist Schneider (2004), who painstakingly chronicled the effects of immigration on women immigrants. In her study, she “recognized” and alluded to kind of “pressures” immigrant women from India are faced with, many of which were not the same as Asian-Indian men’s immigrant experiences, and highlighted their particular characteristics and their priorities all of

which are not necessarily of their choosing. Similarly, mothers of this study were compelled to make some choices, because of their living conditions, cultural interpretations of their lives, understandings and emphasis on cultural continuity. Like the previous generation of women immigrants from India, mothers of this study had concerns about the future generation, i.e. their children, and as cultural preservers, felt obligated to prepare their children for their future lives in the United States, alongside emphasizing the importance of them maintaining their ethnic identity.

I must add that one of the most unrecognized challenges that Asian-Indian mothers have known to confront is “self” affirmation. Based on my own experiences, as well as mothering for schooling stories shared by mothers who came before me, prioritizing “themselves” for who they are becomes important; in fact it is a survival mechanism and an American way of living, i.e. claiming one’s individuality.

Many Asian-Indian immigrant women get so immersed in their “appropriate” Indo/American mothering practices that their work does not allow time for their “real” selves. In the process of becoming the “the Indo-American” mother, they lose familiarity with themselves, putting themselves in the absent/present mode so that they can carry on with their futuristic, cumulative everyday mothering work.

Through this study, I am hoping to strengthen family-school-community connections, mainstream white American as well as Indian. I hope school teachers, administrators and community members will make efforts to understand how Asian-Indian mothers, despite their English language skills struggle to fulfill their mothering for schooling obligations and help their children achieve academic success. In fact, they do

schools an immense service by taking their mothering role seriously while guiding their children to be responsible students and become high achievers.

Schools benefit from parents and students who take education seriously. Hence it would be beneficial for teachers and school administrators to pay attention to Asian-Indian mothers to gather support in their own teaching and administration. More importantly, I believe this study will help in rethinking perspectives pertaining to minority families in general and about perceptions about parent involvement in particular.

This study to some extent has presented the down side of cultural perspectives and social class related perspectives of the mothering for schooling dilemmas, making education to be the problem as well as the solution. Mothers' stories reflected their middle class ways of thinking, which in turn influenced their cultural "Indian" mind-set, some of which created hurdles for mothers in their role-taking and execution. As Mother Asha, mentioned that doing mothering for schooling work while adhering to three and sometime four cultural contexts, meeting four sets of rules and standards, home, school, mainstream American community, and the local Asian-Indian community can make mothers deliriously steeped in maternal responsibilities.

Mothers' understanding of mothering, schooling, and mothering for schooling work were very different than what they perceived to be the mainstream white mothers' ideas for mothering. The daily rituals of schooling and mothering put mothers to the test of cross-cultural survival and cultural allegiance. Mothers' stories revealed that despite being endowed with the social and economic capital, they needed "emotional capital" to do their mothering for schooling work. Being unequal partners (David 1980) in their children's schooling process, they felt they needed to device a kind of mothering for

schooling process that would not only help and support their children to be successful learners, but also help them to develop emotional stamina to deal and address the culturally different messages that their children bring home from school.

This study justifies education and feminism share common bonds in empowering all people---men, women, adults and children, and remain united in advocating “full expressions of human potential” (Gaskell & McLaren, 1987).

### **Recommendations**

This study reiterates that educational researchers and sociologists need to focus more on women immigrants in their research endeavors and try to understand issues pertaining to minority women immigrant lives, particularly their role in schooling children. In doing so, they will be able to learn more about the cultural and social ways of thinking, all of which seem to affect their lives and their children lives.

Researchers, exploring issues pertaining immigrant women and children can also help in resolving some of the cultural dilemmas that seems to prevail in schools today (Spindler & Spindler, 1995). By focusing on their responses to their immigrant experiences, as well as their children’s schooling, educators and researchers can learn to understand and value their life experiences more, and not think of them as deficiencies as they have done in the past.

For early childhood/elementary teachers and teacher educators, it is important that for them revise their parent-involvement literature, to include and understand the expanse of mothering for schooling work many immigrant mothers, including Asian-Indian mothers undertake. School administrators need to add more in service hours to train

teaches about diversity. They can begin by thinking of mothers as equal partners, and by creating a friendly and non-threatening atmosphere within the school, communicate and interact with them, and listen to them. By forming focus groups, mothers and teachers can participate in discussions and learn about each other's perspectives about schooling children, and in the process arrive at finding solutions to some everyday problems that seem to plague the schools in general and classrooms in particular. Forming focus groups to discuss school-related issues would be a good way to begin.

In terms of improving diversity policies, it is important to rethink student-teaching policies, culturally responsive teaching and learning practices and teacher preparation goals. And, also divert attention to the many of the Culture Schools that seemed to have emerged over the years.

Last but not least, regarding Asian-Indian mothers, they need to remind themselves that they can benefit from mainstream white American culture as well as their Asian-Indian culture. It all depends, on how and what they select from each culture to construct their mothering for schooling work. Both cultures come with their share of strengths and weakness. Mothers must find ways, to complement, integrate, connect and may be substitute one for the other, depending on time, space and circumstance.

### **Topics for Future Studies**

In terms of future research, I would like to explore cross-cultural perspectives, focusing more on issues pertaining to immigrant lived experiences, which to a large extent are shaped by divergent contexts and cultures and less by individual preferences. Other issues that I would like to explore include: women's work cultures, the presence

and absence of speech and language in defining their everyday work experiences. It is important to remember that not all women articulate their experiences, particularly immigrant minority women. For some women, their lived circumstances do not allow them to speak about their experiences. Firstly, women are physically involved in their work, and hence are too busy to talk. Or women are too busy working trying to create changes to improve their lives while simultaneously participating in their own oppression. Hence in order, to create change they are forced to participate in their own oppression. In other words, they have to use their oppression as a resource to find solutions that may improve their lives as well as the lives of their children, who depend on them. Secondly, since women and children are connected, feminist theorists in studying the lives of mothers, need to think of mothers in relational terms, particularly while exploring issues of children's schooling.

As an early childhood educator, I would also like to explore issues pertaining to ethnic culture schools. In particular I am interested in understanding children's experiences, who participate in culture schools.



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## **Appendix A**

### **Anju's Supplementary Mothering for Schooling Work**

This study is greatly enhanced by the participation of Anju, an immigrant Asian-Indian mother, and an active member of local American, and Asian-Indian community. Due to extenuating circumstances Anju could not participate in the focus group interviews. However, I could interview her on a one on one basis. Hence, I chose to include information about her mothering for schooling work in the Appendix.

Anju along with her husband and son run the Indian Culture School. The school was started by Anju and her friend Vani; to help their American born children stay informed about the rich social and cultural history of India. What started as a family goal has extended beyond and at the present time has become an integral part of the community, and serves the needs of many Asian-Indian families with young children.

In fact, the school is a blessing in disguise for our remotely situated rural town. Unlike, bigger towns and cities within the United States where there are many Hindu temples, churches and mosques, culture schools and community centers, the local town does not have such facilities that can benefit Asian-Indian families and children.

As a consequence parents, mostly mothers interested in their children's ethnic, cultural growth and identity development, have no other choice but to rely on themselves and come up with their own enrichment devices. Particularly, when mothers find that their children are receiving greater exposure to mainstream white American culture through schools and not enough of their own Asian-Indian culture. Under such culturally and contextually divided circumstances, places like culture schools are a welcome change for parents and children alike.

Parents find themselves relieved that they do not have to drive long distances, three to four hours to gain access to a temple or a culture center. As a teacher/volunteer of the Culture School, I not only derive great pleasure teaching and working with the children, but also enjoy learning about my country of origin. Hence, in many ways, Anju has created a positive change in the community. It is wonderful to be part of a community of learners who enjoy learning.

As an educator and change agent, Anju has taken great initiative to run the local Indian Culture School. She devotes a lot of time and energy into the school, and with each year, strives to make it better. Anju has been very supportive of my research endeavors. As a mother and researcher, I am also learning from her, and felt it was important to include her in this study.

### **Past Experiences and Mothering Influences**

Anju came to the United States following her husband after marriage, and has been living in the local community since 1981. She grew up in Bangalore, a city in Southern India. Starting from kindergarten to Ph. D, she received her education in Bangalore. As a child, she went to a private Catholic school where the medium of instruction was English. Besides her mother-tongue Tamil, she can speak English and the South-Indian language Kannada, fluently. She has traveled to many places across the globe. As a researcher specializing in toxicology, she worked in India, Germany and the United States.

Just like the other mothers of this study---Asha, Reema, Nina, Hima, she too is greatly influenced by her mother. During our conversations she mentioned her sense of

commitment and child-rearing practices come from her own upbringing and maternal guidance. Like Jyoti, she lost her father, when she was very young, and was raised by her mother, who is a retired teacher. She admires her mother for her courage and dedication, love and guidance.

Like Reema she thinks of her mother as her mentor, and has been greatly influenced by her life experiences. While talking about her mother, Anju's sense of childhood comes alive to the forefront. Even during this present time she continues to depend on her mother for guidance and emotional support. With great pride she mentioned that her mother met famous woman educator Maria Montessori, and has her autograph.

### **Present Mothering for Schooling Work**

Anju and her husband are proud parents of a son. After giving birth to her son, she decided to give up her career and devote time to her mothering work, and never for once regretted her decision. Through her mothering for schooling work Anju exemplifies the true spirit of caring. In one-on-one interview, Anju defined mothering for schooling as “sharing activities, sharing our culture with others in his (son) school. Helping, contribute something back to the school which is giving him an education, and I shared...so much food, Indian dresses, clothes, language, music, and everything” (One-on-One Interview, January, 14, 2004) .

Sharing her views about her mothering for schooling work Anju mentioned that from the very beginning of her child's preschool years, she made conscious effort to expose him to the various aspects of her ethnic culture, as well as the mainstream white

American culture, particularly in terms of food (vegetarian), clothing, language, music, art, travel, etc. She communicates with her son in Tamil and English. Anju's mothering for schooling work includes yearly trips to India. She and her son visit India every year to spend time with extending family members.

One on one interview revealed trips to India are integral to Anju's mothering for schooling work. As an immigrant mother, living and schooling her child in a predominantly white American cultural environment, she felt her trips to India are particularly important, for her son's bi-cultural identity development. As an Asian-Indian mother she wanted her son to be exposed to and imbibe important aspects of Indian family life, which include extended family members, like grandparents and elderly family members, things that he misses living in America. By observing her interactions with her mother and parents-in-laws, she wanted her son to learn about culturally defined Indian ways of living, parent-child relationships, respect and reverence for the elderly.

One on one interview conversations revealed, Anju is secure, well informed, and well organized. She is active both inside and outside her home, at the same time flexible enough to accommodate others. Her mothering work extends beyond her home, into the schools and local Asian-Indian, and white communities. Observing her interaction with children revealed that Anju was familiar with approaches to children's social, cultural and emotional development. She respects children, and enjoys talking to them. As a parent volunteer, she has spent many years volunteering in her son's school. Over the years she has been invited to several schools within the local school district and other schools districts, preschools to talk about India and share her cultural artifacts and food.

She has adapted well to living in the local community and has many white American friends. Appendix 2 provides Anju's mission statement for the Indian Culture School.



## **Appendix B**

### **Indian Culture School**

**Mission Statement:** The *Nittany Valley Vidyalaya* (Indian Culture School) aims to expose children to the many facets of India, beyond what they have absorbed at home, in school and via the media. With a carefully drawn curriculum, the basic elements of Indian culture and civilization are covered through lectures, audio-visual presentations, hands on activities, class discussions, and individual and group projects. The students will also have access to a library of children's books from India. Specific topical themes of the program include history and geography, religions and languages, arts and crafts, feasts and festivals, music and dance, the government and leaders, science and technology, ways of life and modes of thought. We hope to inculcate in the children a sense of the ethos of India that may strengthen the foundation for their selfhood in their growth to maturity. The Nittany Valley Vidhyalaya is a non-profit voluntary organization.

**Meeting Time:** Alternate Sundays between 10:30 a.m. and 12 noon.

**Level 1:** Ages seven and above.

**Level 2:** Ages five and above

**Language of Instruction:** English

**Teachers:** Parent Volunteers, Community Members---Asian-Indian, and American.

**News Letter:** Published twice a year. Students from Level 1 contribute stories and articles.

**Appendix C**

**Background Information Sheet**

1. I first came to the United States in the year .....

2. Circle all that applies to you.

I first came to the United States as

- a) a student   b) after marriage following/with my husband   c) a professional
- d) as a child with my parents   e) I was born in the United States

3. I have been living in rural Pennsylvania with my family since the year .....

4. Circle the highest diploma/degree completed:

- a) High School   b) Undergraduate   c) Master's   d) Ph. D.   e) Professional Degree

5. My mother tongue is .....

5.1 Circle the appropriate category.

Medium of instruction during my early years of schooling was English. Yes/No

5.2 As a child I learned to communicate in the following languages.

.....

6. I have .....child(ren). I have .....boy(s) and .....girl(s).

6.1 My child(ren) attend(ed) local public elementary school(s) in rural

Pennsylvania (Yes/No)

6.2 My child(ren) attend(ed) local pre-school in rural Pennsylvania (Yes/No)

6.3 In addition to attending preschool/elementary school, my children are(were) involved in the following extra curricular activities.....

.....

6.4 During weekends, my child(ren) are(were) involved in the following Asian-Indian cultural activities.....

.....

6.5 As a family, my children and I attend(ed) the following Asian-Indian cultural activities.....

.....

7. Circle Yes or No

a) I volunteer(ed) in my child(ren)'s school Yes/No.

b) In my family, I am (was) the primary caregiver and responsible for my child(ren)'s early schooling and educational needs. Yes/No

8. I speak to my child(ren) in the following language(s)

.....

9. Circle all the statements that apply to you.

a) My child(ren) speaks(speak) to me only in English

b) My child(ren) speaks(speak) to me only in my mother-tongue

c) My child(ren) speaks(speak) to me in English and mother-tongue

d) I have a child who prefers to speak to me only in English and not in mother tongue, even though the child (is/was) familiar with the language.

10. My child(ren) and I visit India once in .....years.

10.1 We visit India because.....

## Appendix D

Sudha Babu  
IRB#15930

### 1b. Telephone Script

Hi!.....How are you? I need a few minutes of your time. This phone call pertains to my dissertation. As you know, I have been working on my Ph. D. The study is centered on immigrant, Asian-Indian mothers living in \*Mid-Atlantic section of the United States. Specifically this study will focus on Asian-Indian women and their work as mothers in schooling young children amidst cultural differences between their homes and white American schools.

At present, I am at the data collecting stage of my dissertation for which I need to interview Asian-Indian mothers. The interviews will be less formal in nature. They are essentially meant to create opportunities for mothers to share their experiences, using their own voices and in the process draw attention to their everyday challenges in schooling young children.

I would appreciate if you can participate in this study. If you agree, I will send you a formal invitation letter and consent forms. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me. Have a nice day.

#### 1d. Focus Group Interview Topics

- a) Participants' past schooling experiences as a young child.
- b) Participants' role as immigrant Asian-Indian mothers in schooling young children.
- c) Participants' suggestions for future Asian-Indian mothers in schooling young children.

#### 1d. Follow-Up Interview Topics

- a) Specific focus on Asian-Indian Family goals.
- b) Asian-Indian Children's educational success
- c) Cultural differences between Asian-Indian home and white American school.
- d) Social aspects of schooling young children in Pennsylvania schools.

#### 1d. Interview for Case Study—Topics \*

\* To preserve anonymity the name of location had to be changed.

\*Due to overwhelming response during the follow-up interview phase, the plan to conduct interviews for Case Study had to be abandoned.

## Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Consent Form

<b>ORP USE ONLY:</b> The Pennsylvania State University Office for Research Protections  Approval Date: 6/9/03 – J. Mathieu  Expiration Date: 6/8/04 – J. Mathieu  Social Science Institutional Review Board
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### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University

#### **Title of Project: Mothers' work in schooling their young children: Perspectives from immigrant, minority Asian-Indian women**

Principal Investigator: Sudha Babu, Doctoral Candidate, Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction, 144 Chambers  
Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802.  
Phone: \* Email: \*

Thesis Advisor: Prof. James E. Johnson, Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction, 145 Chambers,  
Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802.  
Phone: \*, Email: \*

The purpose of this research study is to explore issues about Asian-Indian women and their work as mothers in schooling their young children. Based on the principal investigator's own experience as a voluntary, immigrant, minority Asian Indian mother, this study will draw attention to culturally different contexts of the Asian-Indian home and white American school and address issues of gender, culture, social class and minority status.

Ten immigrant Asian Indian mothers are chosen to participate in this study. The criteria for selection includes, mothers whose young children are currently enrolled in the local elementary schools, as well as those mothers whose child(ren) attended local schools in the past. The Focus Group Interview will be conducted at my house\* at a time and date suitable to all consenting participants.

The interview will be conducted in English and will be audio-taped. The interview tapes will be stored in a safe place that will be locked, and no one except me, the principal investigator will have direct access to them. The tapes will be destroyed by the end of year 2006-7. The interview will consist of four phases. It will begin with issues pertaining to the participants' past schooling experiences as a young child, followed by their role as immigrant minority mothers in schooling young children. The interview will end with suggestions for future and concluding remarks from each participant. The interview will last approximately 120 minutes. Your responses and individual information is for research purpose only and will be treated with utmost confidentiality, and no one except, I will have access to that information. If this research is published, precautionary measures will be taken not to include identifiable written information pertaining to you or other participants. Pseudonyms will be used to the protect privacy of participants.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study. Informed consent form can be given to me upon arrival at my house, at the beginning of the focus group interview. Providing consent in-person will allow you to ask me questions on a one on one basis. Once you make your decision to participate in the Focus Group Interview, you will be required to sign the two copies of the informed consent form. Upon signing you will be given a copy of the same for your personal records.

Participation in this study will be on a voluntary basis only, with no discomforts or risks involved. I will curb the line of questioning should any discomfort becomes evident. However, if an unseen or unanticipated risk was to emerge, that would make you uncomfortable in providing any information, you may choose to withhold such information. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

In addition, you are required to maintain confidentiality and agree not to share with anyone except the principal investigator, information that is made available to you during the Focus Group Interview. You are free to withdraw from the research process at any time by informing the principal investigator about your decision. You have the right to questions about this research study. Please feel free to call me—principal investigator, at the above mentioned telephone number, or send me an email at the above address. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

Your participation in this study will be beneficial to yourself, your child(ren), Asian-Indian families and public school personnel. It will help you better understand yourself as a woman, and mother. It will create opportunities for you to share your thoughts and opinions with other Asian-Indian mothers, and draw attention to similarities and differences in your work as mother in schooling young children. In addition, your participation in this study will create cultural awareness for teachers and administrators of public schools and help them rethink issues pertaining to minority families and parental involvement. For institutes of higher learning, your participation will benefit teacher educators and faculty members who are proponents of cross-cultural research. It will highlight the importance of intercultural communication, and create opportunities for revising diversity policies, student-teaching philosophies and teacher preparation goals. Last but not least, it will help future mothers in general and Asian-Indian mothers in particular, to better prepare for schooling their children in rural Pennsylvania.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

The informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\* Residential information, phone number and email address of the researcher, and phone number and email address of advisor are removed.

## Appendix F: Follow-Up Interview Consent Form

<p><b>ORP USE ONLY:</b> <b>The Pennsylvania State University</b> <b>Office for Research Protections</b></p> <p>Approval Date: 6/9/03 – J. Mathieu</p> <p>Expiration Date: 6/8/04 – J. Mathieu</p> <p>Social Science Institutional Review Board</p>
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### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Mothers' work in schooling their children: Perspectives  
from immigrant, minority Asian-Indian women

Principal Investigator: Sudha Babu, Doctoral Candidate, Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction, 144 Chambers  
Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802. Phone: \* Email: \*

Thesis Advisor: Prof. James E. Johnson, Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction, 145 Chambers, Penn State University,  
University Park, PA 16802. Phone: \*, Email: \*

The purpose of this research study is to explore issues about Asian-Indian women and their work as mothers in schooling their young children. Based on the principal investigator's own experience as a voluntary, immigrant, minority Asian Indian mother, this study will draw attention to culturally different contexts of the Asian-Indian home and white American school and address issues of gender, culture, social class and minority status.

The Second Part of data collection process for this research study will include Follow-Up interviews. Six immigrant Asian Indian mothers will be chosen to participate in a one on one Follow-Up Interview. The primary criteria for selection include, mothers who had participated in the Focus Group Interview. The purpose of the Follow-Up Interview is to give you an opportunity to say things that you would not have chosen to do in a group setting, i.e. Focus Group Interview. The Follow-Up interview will give you a chance to contribute specific information of your choice that you think is critically important and pertains to your work in schooling young children. In addition, it will give me--the principal investigator a chance to learn about your various schooling activities, inside and outside your home.

The interview will be conducted in English and will be audio-taped. You will be interviewed for only 30 minutes. The interview tapes will be stored in a safe place that will be locked, and no one except me, the principal investigator will have direct access to them. The tapes will be destroyed by the end of year 2006-7. For your comfort and convenience, we can meet at your house or any other place of your choice. The interview will serve as an extended conversation carried over from the Focus Group Interview. We can decide the date and time of the interviews based on our schedules. Your responses and individual information will be treated with utmost confidentiality, and will be used for research purposes only, and no one except, I will have access to that information. Pseudonyms will be used to protect privacy of the participants. If this research is published, precautionary measures will be taken not to include identifiable written information pertaining to you, or other participants.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study. Informed consent form can be given to me upon my arrival at the place of interview, at the beginning of the interview. Providing consent in-person will allow you to ask me questions on a one on one basis. Once you make your decision to participate in the Interview, you will be required to sign the two copies of the informed consent form. Upon signing you will be given a copy of the same for your personal records.

Participation in this study will be on a voluntary basis only, with no discomforts or risks involved. I will curb the line of questioning should any discomfort becomes evident. However, if an unseen or unanticipated risk was to emerge, that would make you uncomfortable in providing any information, you may choose to withhold such information. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

In addition, you are required to maintain confidentiality and agree not to share with anyone except the principal investigator, information that transpired from the Follow-Up Interview or the Focus Group Interview. You are free to withdraw from the research process at any time by informing the principal investigator about your decision. You have the right to questions about this research study. Please feel free to call me—principal investigator, at the above mentioned telephone number, or send me an email at the above address. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

Your participation in this study will be beneficial to yourself, your child(ren), Asian-Indian families and public school personnel. It will help you better understand yourself as a woman, and mother. It will create opportunities for you to share your thoughts and opinions with other Asian-Indian mothers, and draw attention to similarities and differences in your work as mother in schooling young children. In addition, your participation in this study will create cultural awareness for teachers and administrators of public schools and help them rethink issues pertaining to minority families and parental involvement. For institutes of higher learning, your participation will benefit teacher educators and faculty members who are proponents of cross-cultural research. It will highlight the importance of intercultural communication, and create opportunities for revising diversity policies, student-teaching philosophies and teacher preparation goals. Last but not least, it will help future mothers in general and Asian-Indian mothers in particular, to better prepare for schooling their children in rural Pennsylvania.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

The informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*Telephone numbers and email addresses of the researcher and the advisor are deleted.



## Vita

**Name:** Sudha G. Babu

**Educational Background:**

1971-1974 B.A. Andhra University, India  
1990-1994 Certificate: Child Services Personnel  
Certificate Program, Graduated in 1994.  
Pennsylvania State University  
1993-1995 Master of Education, Curriculum & Instruction  
Early Childhood Education  
Pennsylvania State University

**Research:**

April 2004 Paper Presentation, "Mothers' work in schooling their children: Perspectives from Immigrant Asian-Indian Women, Women's Studies Graduate Students' Conference, Penn State University

October 2001 Paper Presentation "Breaking silence and coming to voice: Problematizing my educative role amidst cultural dislocation: An Asian-Indian Mother's Perspective" Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education Conference, New York City, NY.

April 2001 Co-Presenter, Research paper entitled "Feminist Standpoint as an Investigative Perspective and Analytic Tool: Linking Feminist Thought with Educational Development Literature" at AERA Conference at Seattle.

June 1999 Paper Presentation, "Immigrant Mothers as Teachers: Integrating Home and School Cultures" at Reconceptualization of Early Childhood Education Conference at Columbus, Ohio.

**Workshops and Diplomas:**

May 31- June 3, 1994 Workshop on 'Play Therapy and Developmental Play'. Twenty five hours of Instruction, Pennsylvania State University.

April 30, 1994 Workshop on 'Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Education'. 5 hours of Instruction, Pennsylvania State University

April 10, 1994 Workshop on 'Children and Violence.' Five hours of Instruction, Pennsylvania State University and State College Area School District

July, 5-July 15, 1988 Extended Workshop on 'Montessori Method of Education' Widener University, Delaware Campus