

The future of Indian ethnicity in Australia – An educational and cultural perspective

Ana Ivete Faria

Graduate School of Education, University of Adelaide

The term Indian encapsulates diversity of region, language, religion, custom and tradition representative of the complexity of Indian ethnicity and the pluralism within India itself. The history of the Indian diaspora has resulted in people of Indian origin emigrating once, twice, and in some cases even thrice within a generation to countries whose host cultures were different, even hostile. The tenacity with which these individuals of Indian origin have retained their cultural identity and define their Indianness in terms of their religious, regional, linguistic and cultural influences is surprising. But can this phenomenon continue in pluralistic societies such as Australia given the further integration of future generations into mainstream Australia?

Indian, ethnicity, migration, cultural identity

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

‘Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than the love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars’. (Walcott, 1992)

Ethnicity, and more specifically Indian ethnicity, is an issue that has interested me all of my adult life. Perhaps because I was born in Africa to parents who were not native to Africa, and because I, as an adult had chosen to migrate to a new land, I was, I expect hankering for a sense of belonging, a sense of identity. I was a child of Indian parents who had been influenced right up to their adulthood in Goa by the culture of their Portuguese colonisers and after their migration to British East Africa had experienced a somewhat watering down of their cultural collateral within the influences of an African setting.

It became somewhat of a pressing concern for me to explore this issue, to define it in terms of what had survived and how much had been eroded as a result of the cultural osmosis that takes place and to compare this with the experiences of others and their cultural understandings. The phenomenon of twice migration, while enriching on the one hand by creating a cultural synthesis some would claim, might it create its own problems in terms of cultural identity? This preoccupation with wanting to investigate the views of others whose ethnicity was Indian became the driving force for this study.

The Masters of Educational Studies program and exposure to theories and research in Humanistic sociology presented the opportunity and the discipline within which I was able to pursue this issue. The challenges I would face along the way did not seem insurmountable despite the fact that my initial investigations yielded very little in the way of data on research carried out specifically on Indians in Australia. I acknowledge the support and encouragement of Dr Margaret Secombe who helped allay any initial concerns I might have had at the time.

I questioned the effects of Multiculturalism, the reality and its success and how this success was to be determined. I questioned the long-term effects on individuals and their mother-culture given that the influence of the mainstream culture, the all-pervasive nature of this

influence evident in language, education, political and social systems into which individuals had ostensibly chosen to be placed. Would this not eventually result in a watering down of cultural practices, all but wiping out the essence of the group's original cultural identity and putting in its place a token acknowledgement of the group's cultural roots?

It occurred to me that the possibility of finding out whether first, second and third generation Indians identified with their Indian origins existed. To explore whether, in fact, they recognised and appreciated that they, like 'the broken vase' are products of the once, twice migrant forbears and that their capacity to retain some of the fragments of their Indian origins is an interesting cultural phenomenon.

Furthermore, by eliciting from them their views about the future for the maintenance of these ties with their Indian origins within the cultural context of Australia, I might be able to use their insight to determine whether there was a future, and if there was one, what might be the nature of this cultural capital in years to come. I was curious to discover whether their regard for their ethnicity was reflected in a determination to 'lovingly reassemble the pieces', despite the impossibility of concealing the white scars of restoration or whether they viewed this as a natural consequence of the tyranny of distance and time.

For my primary data, I collected concrete data and socio-cultural data from a closed sample of 15 individuals whom I surveyed and 4 others with whom I carried out face to face interviews and by using the qualitative research methodology employed by humanistic sociologists, I was able to derive my analysis on which I based my conclusions.

My secondary data was based on the works of several sociologists. On the recommendation of Dr Secombe, I made contact with Professor Jain of the Centre for the Study of Social Systems at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. He willingly assisted me with my study by recommending his book, *Indian Communities Abroad – Themes and Literature* (Jain 1993), and his paper entitled, *Indian Diaspora, globalisation and multiculturalism: A cultural analysis* (Jain 1998), thus providing me with a theoretical base. I also made reference to the research papers and lectures of Professor Smolicz whose dedication to multiculturalism was inspirational in my decision to pursue this issue as the basis for my study.

METHOD

I designed two sets of questions, one specifically for a one on one interview, the other to put to my survey respondents. I sent out 30 surveys by mail and received 15 completed responses. The survey sample ranged from two 16 year old young adults of both genders to adults of both genders ranging in age from 19-32 years of age. I attempted to reflect the regional origins of my respondents, their religious backgrounds, their language differences, trying as far as possible to survey those whose experiences or whose parents experiences as twice migrants might be of special significance in this study. I attempted to elicit from them whether they viewed themselves as Indian and if they did what their perspective of what it means to be Indian meant to them. I also sought to find out whether there were common core values and whether it was accurate to label them as core values for Indians.

I also tried to establish the role of religion amongst Indians and whether their religious views had any bearing on the responses they gave to some of the issues. I also wanted to ascertain what role religion might have in the differences in the responses to the questions. In this connection, I was less successful in acquiring a balance in that despite sending out surveys to individuals who were followers of Islam and Buddhism and following it up with phone calls, try as I might, I was not able to obtain a response from these two representatives. I was also keen to find out whether an Indian language was spoken at home, whether there was scope for retention of mother tongue.

The interviews with my 4 chosen respondents were carried out in at times and in places convenient to my respondents. As the answers sought were more in-depth, I carefully selected

my respondents because of their willingness to be part of this research. My 4 respondents were between 30 and 32. Two were male, two female. While the backgrounds of my respondents were somewhat diverse, there were some common threads in their experiences and their responses to the questions posed.

Two of my respondents to whom I will refer as A and B were born in India, the third C was born in Zambia and the fourth was born in South Africa. Both parents of A, B and C were of Indian descent. D's father was an Indian from South African whereas his mother was Scottish and was born in Scotland. Respondent A was born in India, lived in Malaysia for ten years, then went back to India to complete her education. All 4 respondents were tertiary educated, three completing their education in Australia while respondent A was educated in India.

My interviews comprised a series of questions to elicit from my respondents concrete data which I chose to incorporate into my survey analysis because it adds to the body of my analysis and provides a better spread of data and age groups. I elected to analyse the socio-cultural data that I was able to collect from my surveys and interviews separately and draw my conclusions from a review of all data.

ANALYSIS

Interview analysis

When asked whether their names were a give away, two respondents agreed; the other two believed that their names were a source of curiosity, not easily recognizable as necessarily Indian, but it was their appearance that was the giveaway. All four were in agreement with me in their separate interviews with me that the way they spoke, their accent and their intonation rather than their names or appearance drew some curiosity about their origins. It was on enquiry that people usually learned of their origins and their ethnicity. To me this represented very valuable primary data, attesting to the fact that it is speech that verifies identity of Indian ethnicity, although in some cases appearance can provide information and names add perspective. One respondent shared with me the fact that she spoke to her parents in the same accent that they used to speak with her. Yet when operating outside the home, the accent she had acquired as a result of her schooling and her interaction with the mainstream came into play. It seemed to me that this suggested that there was a certain comfort and confidence in responding in this diverse manner to the two audiences, to relate, to belong and to be at ease.

Having got that introductory quizzing out of the way, I posed my first serious question, the reason for the family's migration to Australia. In all except one case, these respondents were the product of twice migrant parents who saw Australia as a land of opportunity for furthering their children's educational prospects. Australia's political, economic and social stability provided the attraction particularly for those whose families were caught up in transitional changes in systems in which they were domiciled. Malaysia's pro-Malay policy as regards educational and employment opportunities, India's insistence on Hind as the education medium, South Africa's tussles with apartheid and the possibility of its dismantling with barriers that would be difficult to circumvent.

When questioned further as to why Australia and not traditional areas to which people of Indian origin had migrated, their responses were unanimous; Australia's position as an emerging power, presented them with an obvious role for them to play. In the case of two of my respondents, their parents' queries about business migration had been welcomed. The perceptions of Indians outside Australia about life in Australia, opportunities for further education and employment played their part in the decision to pull up existing roots and move. To add to this, the positive response to their queries directed at the Australian immigration authorities which could be explained by the fact that the parents of my respondents were tertiary educated and had the social and economic capital to contribute to Australian life rather than to end up posing a liability. Their applications according to my respondents were guaranteed success on those grounds.

Respondent A's father served in the British army and that 'facilitated his application to migration. He was even encouraged to bring his children with him, waiving aside our need to apply separately even though we were adults', indicating the special condition that applied to people who had distinguished themselves in the service of the British. In the case of Respondent C, who came to Australia as a student, his family followed because it was easier for him to come on a student's visa while the family's papers were being processed.

Respondent B's family situation was such that remaining in India where the system was changing with Hindi replacing English as a compulsory language, job opportunities would have been difficult. Getting in the employment door was based 'less on merit and more on who you knew'. Respondent D's parents were forced to migrate owing to the 'stateless status of my father and Australia's recognition of his South African tertiary qualifications' facilitated the family's migration to Australia.

My second question focused on acceptance into a new host culture. Respondent A was a qualified architect but found it difficult to get an opening in private practice and joined the civil service. Her family's support made the transition easier. Respondent B came to Australia as a child and was enrolled into an affluent Catholic primary school in Lane Cove in Sydney. She experienced some harassment and put it down to the clientele in that school who had little exposure to other cultures, with the result that she and her young brother were the subject of 'racial inferences and taunts'. The attitudes of students and staff changed dramatically when they got to high school in Chatswood where students were much more disposed to accepting difference and the school's multicultural policies made schooling very culturally inclusive. Respondent C described his experience as 'bloody hard work' and said that he turned to the "subculture of university students" to compensate for the absence of family. He went so far as to say that he looked for Indians with whom to associate, attended Indian functions and generally sought the company of other Indians because of his loneliness and isolation. Respondent D's positive experience was only tainted when he faced racism 'when the kids saw Dad's dark skin'. His education was accelerated when he won a scholarship to Pulteney Grammar in Adelaide. He met very few Indians because his family socialised with people of diverse ethnic backgrounds. He put this down to the fact that in the 70s, the Indian community was not clearly defined. This can be explained in the light of changes to the Emigration Restriction Act under the Whitlam administration.

The next question set out to identify core values to see whether these reflected their Indian origins. Respondent A said that while in appearance she could be identified as Indian and was proud of it and was comfortable with it, her Christian values of mutual respect, concern for others, reverence for older people and respect for the sanctity of human life are significant and were not contradictory to the values she learned as a child. Her parents' view that she was entitled to equal educational opportunities as her brother reflected a trend that was reflected worldwide. She was a regular at church and did not regard home as a second temple as would a Moslem or Hindu woman. She often wore traditional Indian clothing but found western dress uncomplicated for daily use. She was multilingual and prided herself on her fluency in three Indian languages. She also found some Indian beliefs concerning food universally accepted in dietary guides. As regards health, she was inclined to use ayurvedic medicine to sort out any health concerns she might encounter, particularly those that presented themselves as urgently in need of swift results and she only resorted to western medicine as a last resort. She associated with Indians as well as non-Indians preferring to seek the company of non-Indians who were less probing of her unmarried status. In this she was reflecting the Indian tendency to view single women with some concern whereas her decision to remain single would hardly be a cause for concern and her choice would be respected as her business not anyone else's. Respondent A was "comfortable with her Indian roots because I think like an Indian" implying that she belonged to a group and accepted the collective view.

Respondent B's family made a conscious decision to adopt English, their multilingual experience notwithstanding. Christian values were paramount and whilst being open to the

mystery of other religious beliefs was encouraged in her upbringing, Christian values were their most treasured. A Doctor of Letters in the field of Oncology, respondent A maintained her integrity to Indian cuisine, ayurvedic medicine always looking for healing of her ills in homeopathy and naturopathy, regular yoga which are not necessarily the domain of Indians today. Her home was decorated with Indian prints and textiles and she liked using Indian traditional dress when not at work. She abhorred the notion of seeking the company of Indians for Indian sake preferring to let spontaneity and like-mindedness help her choose her friends. She tended to have meaningful companionship with Indians which might be coincidental or offer genuine relationship because of shared values. Family links particularly links with extended family, grandparents, uncles, aunts and their families suggest the maintaining and nurturing of family values is a significant component of Respondent B's value system. Her evidence relates well to the Indian, whose core values are family and religion and whose views and experiences reflect the unmistakable influence of westernisation.

Respondent C's Malaysian Sikh background may have had something to do with the way he chose to respond to the issue of values. While he valued the comfort and caring atmosphere in which he was raised, he believed his real debt to Indian culture was in the matter of providing him with the ability "to philosophise independently yet act collectively and thus promote community spirit in the selflessness of being of service rather than being served". It was this philanthropic responsibility, which can be found in the tenets of most of the great world religions but constitutes a significant part of the practice of Sikhism that was reflected in this response. The family's encouragement was significant in the realisation of his dreams. He used the Punjabi language to interact with family even though they were fluent speakers of English. With regard to diet, dress and health, my respondent who is a well known Adelaide restaurateur, he "found Italian cuisine delightfully different". His friendship circle was multicultural although he did belong to various Indian associations and as a businessman, he was expected to assist in the promotion of Indian cultural events which was particularly rewarding.

Respondent D, although the son of a Hindu father, was not raised in the Hindu tradition per se. In fact, he lamented the fact that he didn't learn to speak an Indian language, that Indian dress was not really promoted and that though he was an observer of the religious festivities around Diwali, the Hindu festival of Lights, its influence on him was minimal. What he put much more emphasis on was the versatility of Hinduism and its emphasis on Tolerance and Harmony which he believed was passed down to him by his parents. Indian cuisine which was favoured in the home, continued to be the cuisine he enjoyed. He believed he had a genetic predisposition to the healing provided by Indian remedies and natural medicine. While his home had reminders of Indian cultural influences, it was essentially western in its style. While he had a multicultural mix in his circle of friends, he found himself seeking the company of Indian friends and joining Indian clubs and associations. Respondent D believed that his formal education and subsequent career path was strongly influenced by his Indian background as education and success as professionals was highly prized by Indian parents. While given the freedom to choose his career path, the interest, the encouragement, financial support and even the nurturing of his career choice by his parents was something he was raised to expect, even assume.

My penultimate set of questions pertained to the respondents' views of the subtle and more obvious ways they manifested their Indianness. According to two of the respondents, class-consciousness and the hierarchical system of classifying people were a significant hand-me-down from previous generations. Hindu thinking which some people regard as new age but which my respondents were very clear about had permeated the personal philosophies of both Hindu and non-Hindu respondents amongst them the belief that life on earth is not one lifetime but one of many life cycles and we reap in this life what we have sown in a past life, just to name two. India was a favoured holiday destination for my respondents, not merely because holidays were made memorable by the presence of extended family but because there was something in the rejuvenating of the spirit, that went beyond the mere recharging of flat

batteries that guided two of my respondents back there, time and time again and was on the must-do list of the other two.

My restaurateur respondent felt like running away from the scrutiny of his role because his Indian appearance made his origins so obvious and he was expected to play the role of the typical or “pukka” Indian in his tastes suggesting a feeling of being trapped. One interesting point made by Respondent B was her career options were supported because of her parents perceptions of what would be acceptable in India. When her brother briefly entertained the idea of becoming a chef, he was steered away from that career path as it was “using your hands” and therefore demeaning, a legacy of the caste system. She was sorry that she hadn’t tried her hand at pottery and put it down to the family’s frowning upon skills traditionally the work of the scheduled classes lower down the social ladder. When she was having second thought about completing her PhD, her parents’ encouragement was more like emotional blackmail, making her feel less of a daughter and bringing ridicule on the family if she abandoned her studies. While not unappreciative of the positive effect the pressure put on her had in the completion of her doctoral thesis, she deplored their reasoning which had everything to do with their face saving and little to do with her wellbeing.

When I asked that my respondents to describe themselves, Respondent A referred to herself as an Indian living in Australia “transmitting Indian values” in her interaction with younger members of her family. Respondent B regarded herself as Indian who had become Australianised. She didn’t see herself as traditional because of their perception of what Indians are meant to be. Respondent C called himself an Australian whose origins were Indian and respondent D said that he had a strong sense of being Indian and prided himself on his Indianness; he was continuing to work at it by keeping in constant touch with extended family and learning to speak Hindi.

My final question focused on my respondents perception of the future of Indian ethnicity in Australia. Respondent A said that it depended on the way young people were raised. Despite the influences around them, traditional Indian values such as respect for family, a reverence for the wisdom of the older generation could and should be transmitted not just by parents but by the support of extended family. Respondent B spoke of the benefits of keeping alive our links with India. She foresaw some practices continuing but not necessarily because Indian values underpin them. She also saw the existence of India as offering a focus for people of Indian origin. Her comment “When people leave a country, they often keep alive the cultural practices they learned in their country of origin”, does resonate with the quote that refers to the putting together of the fragments. Respondent C saw each generation losing some of its Indianness as evident when he compares his generation with that of his nephews.. Respondent D saw a future for Indian ethnicity in the very existence of India and its potential to provide channels for revitalising Indian values and providing the mystique that inspired his generation to regard themselves as Indian which he hoped to transmit to his children.

It was interesting to note that the dilution of cultural practices through migration was hardly alluded to neither was the eroding of cultural values with intermarrying.

Survey Analysis

My clientele for my survey was sought from a range of young Indian adults ranging in age from 16-32. Since the purpose of my study was setting out to ascertain the future of Indian ethnicity, it made good sense to put this question to a range of younger people on whose shoulders, I believed the future of Indian ethnicity rested. The concrete data, namely gender, place of birth, parents’ place of birth, respondents’ schooling and education levels attained, parents education levels, parents ethnicity, time of migration, reasons for migration, religious affiliations, language links, which have been tabulated in a series of graphs, included in a later section of this study.

In eliciting from my respondents a list of customs they observed that they perceived as Indian, I found most of them derived from social conditions back in India and in many ways were hardly different from the common hygienic observances. A tendency to classify people according to ethnicity, creed and region must have had its roots in the caste system. The values that my respondents saw as essentially Indian were loyalty to family, respect for elders and an adherence to the wishes for parents. This respect feature was taken far, to the extent that several respondents welcomed their parents' choice of career paths, even future partners. There was more than lip service given to the notion that parents who no longer were able to work needed to be supported, to the extent that allowing your aged parents to be looked after by aged care was regarded as a social and cultural slur. Maintaining strong links with extended family, keeping a live links with connections in India were ways in which cultural cohesion was promoted. Family matters have always been given high priority in Indian tradition for generations so it was hardly surprising to see this trend in the survey responses.

The second most significant issue was the importance placed on education in the Indian value system. The pursuit of education went beyond education for education's sake. There seemed to be a link between education and the meeting of family responsibility, in the attainment of social status. Education might well have been a means of unlocking the fetters imposed by the caste system, which for centuries had shackled Indians to set levels of social acceptance. Education was seen to provide the key to social mobility. This historical conditioning was reinforced by colonial rule. In order to be successful in a western value system, Indians found themselves compelled to embrace the British education system, often at the expense of abandoning the traditional schooling that was customary prior to the days of the Raj. This gave them some form of parity, a form of recognition or social acceptance.

An interesting aspect of the survey was the response to the issue of career aspirations. My respondents, with 2 exceptions, had their career paths mapped out for them. Following in the footsteps of their parents, encouraged to aspire to careers prospects beyond that of their parents, acting on the advice of parents reflected not just the influence of Indian parents on their children but the willingness of these children to accept guidance and act on advice.

In situations where the respondent was a product of a mixed marriage, cultural practices took second place to importance of family and the pursuit of education. There was evidence a rebellion during adolescence but a realisation on the respondents' part of their need to revive some aspects of their dormant value system. The desire to pass on to the next generation some of these values was very evident with both males and females whose religious and cultural practices and language use were interspersed with Christian values.

Several of my respondents alluded to the situation in India amongst young adults where acceptance of Indian values, customs and practices have suffered a serious setback by the eroding influences of technology in the form of satellite television, film and the Internet. There seemed to be, according to my data, a desperate effort among older Indians outside of India, to keep alive those cultural practices that they brought with them at the time of their migration, their memories of India remaining unchanged from what they knew or what they had been told. The free thinking spirit of young people today is challenged by the compulsion imposed by custom which not only wishes to control aspects of one's daily life (such as eating, drinking, and socialising), but more significantly, wishes to control belief systems, relationships and the future. Consequently, they find this form of social control rigid, inflexible and downright irksome.

While there seemed to be a definite connection between cultural retention and the female Hindu respondents, despite the challenges within the social milieu of Australia. Amongst the males, a dichotomy existed between their concern that responsibility lay with them to pass on the culture, language and religious beliefs and their need to belong and function in Australia. They valued their Indianness, but were pragmatic in their view of the quality of the cultural heritage they were leaving to their children.

Very few of my respondents had given the prospects of mixed marriages amongst their generation bringing its influence to bear on the cultural collateral that they had inherited. Adhering to orthodox religious observances of worship, the caste system, arranged marriages, and diet were already been viewed as out of date and incongruous in Australia. The need to blend in with the social milieu of their peers and become part of the mainstream was a far more significant concern for young people of Indian descent.

When it came to the question of identity, it was clear from the data, that their appearance was the identifying feature, their accent hardly imperceptibly different to the mainstream.

CONCLUSION

This study has been a journey of discovery in my understanding of the difference that exists between ethnicity and an ethnic identity. *Ethnicity* is more than just a state of mind. It is the social organisation of cultural differences. It is about who we are, our origins and our traditions, our beliefs and our practices, what we are aware of and have retained and continue to put into practice and what we have changed, modified even abandoned. It has to do with a sense of loss experienced by older people that the old way that they cherished is disappearing. It also includes the interest expressed by younger adults who want to know more about how things were done in “the old country” and why. It is a form of identification and could well be described as a ‘cultural thumbprint’. It is also the activation of cultural differences through the existence of structural social groupings.

An ethnic identity, on the other hand, is based on the perception of the wider community to which a group or an individual belongs. That this group or individual has some identifiable differences, is society’s acknowledgement of those cultural differences that gives the group or individual its *ethnic identity*.

According to sociologists there is a need to define the term Indianness because it varies somewhat when one compares the Indianness of Indians who have always resided in India and diasporic Indians some of whom have been twice migrants. I am referring specifically to their cultural collateral, reiterated by humanistic sociological theory, to have value and meaning if individuals attach importance to it because it characterises their human experiences. The significance individuals put on the existing order and their place in this order, also contributes to an understanding of their cultural values. And so, the definition of Indianness for diasporic Indians has everything to do with their perception of what constitutes Indian values. Their Indianness, according to Niranjana’s study (1994) of the diaspora, is shaped within the social imaginary in India, even if it is deployed in a society such as Australia, in which Indians are not culturally hegemonic. That there are ‘slippages’ has become obvious through the process of interview and survey. Jain referred to them as ‘syncretic forms of culture’, which others label hybridisation. Whatever the form, the essential core of culture, which Smolicz (1994, 1979) called ‘core values’, is retained amidst all the flux and change. Barth’s study (1969), which emphasised that ‘central and culturally valued institutions and activities in an ethnic group may be deeply involved in its boundary maintenance by setting processes of convergence in motion’, reinforcing and reproducing aspects of culture. To support this theory, the statistics I collected on parents’ place of birth and respondents’ place of birth suggested that although a large number of the former were born in India, the majority were twice migrant, bringing with them what they had retained of their Indian culture, as well as some influences from where they had last migrated. Again, a few of my respondents were born in Australia, the majority elsewhere, yet their understanding of their Indianness was not that different from each other. This suggested that the way they were raised and the emphasis put on aspects such as family, education, religion and language varied little and might well have more to do with their parents’ experiences.

What then is at the core of Indian culture for my sample of 19 respondents?

Family values, in other words, respect for the family and all it entails has certainly emerged as a *core value* for most of my respondents. The role of family in keeping alive cultural awareness of the beliefs and practices, in determining relationships and maintaining them within and outside the family, in promoting contact with extended family, in influencing, even directing career aspirations, choosing life partners are all part of the family's role description. Family values act as the lynch pin for other values such as religion and language. Family practices have kept participation in religious practices and family has been the nurturing ground for language, serving as a conduit between older and younger generations. Family views on social mobility still reflect the influences of the caste system.

It is concern for the family's economic and social wellbeing that has motivated Indian migration to countries such as Australia. Images of a safe, clean environment, where a politically stable system is in place; where a fair system of law prevails; where the potential exists for the individual to contribute to the economic and social life of the country; and where the education system offers scope for families, are, according to my data, characteristics that have attracted Indians to Australia. This provides me with a lead into the second core value-the emphasis placed on education. The statistics on education levels of the parents of my respondents as well as respondents' education levels reflect this significance. Education is seen as a responsibility, a duty to family, a means of acquiring social mobility, acceptance, a form of recognition even and not merely symbolic of economic and social status. Acquiring an education is perceived as an acquisition this less likely to jeopardise the relationship Indians seek within the mainstream.

As regards other values, Language and Religion came up as third and fourth, significant though perceived to be watered down with the fluency of language and the beliefs and practices of religion confined to the older generations and less significant to the young adults. There was an element of grief in the response of some to the dilution, even erosion of these values with future generations of Indians marrying outside the group. With the universalisation of belief in God and religious thinking, the nature, context and form of religious practice would significantly change for the next generation. However, for most of the female respondents and the males contemplating parenthood, religion remains significant.

Caste which might be an issue for some Indians, was set aside in conflict situations as occurred in Malaysia, where a single Indian identity was a means of ensuring its very survival. For most it was a non-issue. This might suggest a change about to emerge in the new generation or it might reflect the diversified origins and experiences of Indians in Australia.

That emigration loosens community bonds has been shown to be the case in studies on the diaspora. In some cases, those who migrated once, twice, even thrice, have their links with community torn asunder. Their adaptation to their new situation has led to the forging of new links and acquiring of new ways to make the resettlement work. Even though families migrated as individual groups, they have resorted to clustering, using common religious beliefs or regional or language affinity to develop some homogeneity with other Indians. This is borne out in the numbers and the popularity of Indian associations all around Australia and the frequency with which they meet. The association becomes a kind of surrogate extended family and their attraction to it a reaction to the promotion of the nuclear family that to some is a drawback of their emigration experience. The loss of the extended family, influences that helped to reinforce Indian culture, is compensated by this interaction.

While the society into which the Diasporic Indians have settled might not identify Indians with a specific value system that it recognises as Indian and significantly differs from the mainstream, the superficialities of appearance, accent and clothing continue to be the defining signs of difference and bear the stamp of Indianness for mainstream non-Indians. The deeper values such as how Indians interact with their families and extended families, how actively they pursue their religious beliefs and how mother tongue languages are promoted in the family, remain hidden from the public gaze. Thinking collectively rather than individually is evident

from my research on Indians, Diasporic Indians find themselves in a quandary when their children are thrust into the society of the schooling system and encouraged as individuals to think for themselves, challenging the very core of traditional Indian way of thinking.

There seems to be a genuine concern among younger Indians to retain their island of Indian culture, even though at times it might put them in a collision course with the sea of influences swirling around it. This retentionist view of Indian culture has been borne out by studies of Indian diaspora. The ability of Indians to retain, reconstitute and revitalise many aspects of their culture in an overseas setting by holding on to their cultural differences of race, language, religion and fellowship, referred to in studies by Jain as cultural persistence, has been evident in communities which have been isolated or victimised by discrimination and racism. This theory has some relevance to many Indian groups whose migration in the 19th Century has some links with 20th Century migration to developed countries.

The adaptationist view put forward by Jain using case studies of South Indian communities in Malaysia and Mauritius show how an immigrant community adapts to its host country.

The third perspective, that of the plural society, applying to the Australian situation, makes the views of a specific group of Indians that I surveyed and interviewed pertinent to the future of ethnicity. Jupp (1988) points out that the multiculturalist policies of Australia are culturally relativist to some degree in that they favour the dominant strand. He also states that the core of Australian life and institutions remain essentially British. With the ethnic minorities remaining small and peripheral, there is little public policy that can contribute to fostering the maintenance of ethnicity, even though it might acknowledge the existence of minority cultures. Rex, in his reference to Britain, referred to a two domains policy, where the mainstream culture is recognisable and actively promoted in public, while the minority cultures are encouraged to maintain their practices in private. There is some variation in Australia with the absence of the strict adherence to the maintenance of the two domains. While the recognition of a mainstream or centre is evident in public life and public policy, the peripheral cultures are not confined to the private. Rather there exists an encouragement for them to share their culture with the mainstream. The existence of Ethnic schools where the study of mother tongue languages is promoted and the availability of government funding to the Multicultural Communities Council suggest that there is an overlap rather than a strictly maintained two domains policy. Even then, the future of Indian ethnicity hangs in the balance.

Unless migration policies are particularly favourable to Indian migration and new waves of Indians are encouraged to migrate, the ethnicity of those Indians who have been here for two, even three generations is likely to be eroded and the culture that is recognisable as Indian is likely to be diluted by outside influences. What will keep Indian ethnicity alive is the perception of those who call themselves Australian Indians or Indian Australians that their way of life is truly Indian.

REFERENCES

- Jain, R.K. (1998) Indian diaspora, globalisation and multiculturalism: A cultural analysis. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 32 (3) SAGE Publications; New Delhi.
- Jain, R.K. (1993) *Indian Communities Abroad: Themes and Literature*. Manohar.
- Jupp, J. (1988) *The Australian People. An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its people and their Origins*. Angus and Robertson; Sydney.
- Smolicz, J.J. (1994) *Australian Diversity*. Curriculum Development Centre; Canberra.
- Smolicz, J.J. (1979) *Culture and Education in a Plural Society*. Curriculum Development Centre; Canberra.
- Barth, F. (1969) *Ethnic groups and Boundaries*. Little, Brown and Company; Boston.
- Niranjana, T. (1994) 'The Indian in Me': Studying the culture of the Indian Diaspora. Paper presented at the International Conference on 'Indian Diaspora', Hyderabad (mimeographed).
- Walcott, D. (1992) *The Antilles-Fragments of Epic Memory*. Nobel Lecture.