

“That’s Not Real India”: Responses to Women’s Portrayals in Indian Soap Operas

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Abstract

This study examined the portrayal of women on Indian soap operas through content analysis. Quotes from in-depth interviews of 100 Asian Indians (50 couples) from five major metropolitan areas, NY, DC, SF, Chicago, and Houston, who watch Indian television (imported from India) via the satellite dish or cable, were used in this study. Researchers uncovered specific themes, such as Portrayal of women, Heterosexual Romance and Intimacy, and Joint Family, and analyzed these themes against the theoretical framework of cultural proximity. The authors explained that the role of Indian women being created in Indian serials did not reflect the image of Indian women the participants remembered when they migrated to the United States in the 1960s. The image of Indian women that was being portrayed was that of a “vamp” or someone manipulative and not family-oriented. Therefore, the cultural proximity of the Indian soap operas was disrupted by the negative portrayal of Indian women to a particular generation of Indian immigrants in the United States. The participants appreciated the image of a modern Indian woman, as long as she still maintained traditional values. Further, these portrayals reminded these participants that they were cultural outsiders in modern India.

Keywords

critical and cultural studies, diasporic identity, gender and media, qualitative research methods, satellite television

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Introduction

Immigrants often maintain connections to their home country in various ways, such as through cultural practices, language, and consuming products like media from the country of origin. Ethnic media¹ consumption among immigrants has received particular attention, because it has allowed immigrants to remain informed about news and events of their home country (Matsaganis, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2011). Among Indian immigrants, satellite television programming from India is extremely popular. Indian immigrants watch these programs to receive information about India, hear their native language, feel a sense of pride about the country, or enjoy Indian music and culture (Somani, 2008). In this study, the authors focused on understanding the popularity of Indian soap operas within a specific generation of the Indian diaspora in the United States. The changes in gender roles in Indian families portrayed in the soap operas were disruptive to these viewers since they did not align with participants' nostalgic memories about India in the 1960s. Thus, the cultural proximity of these media was reduced for participants. Participants drew on their firsthand knowledge of modern India (acquired during their postretirement visits) to evaluate the portrayals of women, and their responses revealed that these portrayals acted as a reminder for these participants that they were cultural outsiders in modern India, because they cherished traditional values that had been displaced in recent times.

Cultural Proximity

Cultural proximity refers to an audience's preference for media that reflects their own regional or national culture (Burch, 2002). This theoretical concept emphasizes the relevance of culture in media engagement. Furthermore, cultural proximity explains why productions from other countries continue to be popular, despite the saturation of the market by Hollywood productions. In addition, this theoretical concept more broadly explains the importance of culture in media choices, domestic or international (Georgiou, 2012; Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Zaharopoulos, 1990).

Straubhaar (2003) conceptualized cultural proximity as "the tendency to prefer media products from one's own culture or the most similar possible culture" (p. 85). Subsequent studies explored the various dimensions of culture to understand their role in media engagement. Language has often been viewed as central to cultural proximity. In addition, La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) identified other cultural elements contributing to cultural proximity, such as dress, humor, story-pacing, historical references, values, and norms. They found Brazilian telenovelas were popular among Southern Italians because the programs dealt with Italian immigration to Brazil, a topic that was personally relevant for many Italian viewers. Burch (2002) studied the popularity of the

Ramayana television program with the Indian (Hindu) diaspora, which revealed that the creativity and artistry behind the production contributed to its cultural proximity. Thus, cultural proximity helped explain the engagement of audiences with media that closely reflected their cultural values or lived experiences.

This study, however, shows that at least for one generation of Indian immigrants, those who migrated to the United States between 1960 and 1972, the portrayal of women in Indian soap operas revealed participants' dissatisfaction with the cultural changes occurring in India. This dissatisfaction was not because participants were unaware of the changes in Indian society, or because they first learned of these changes through soap operas. Instead, participants were dissatisfied with the changes that did not match up with the traditional values participants cherished, and viewing the soap operas was a reminder that their traditional values had no place in modern India. Their responses also revealed that they had some contradictory feeling to some changes related to gender roles. The authors investigated the participants' responses to better understand how gender complicated cultural proximity for older Indian immigrants.

Gender and Media Studies

The nexus of gender and media has been explored primarily through media representation and reception studies. In the realm of representation studies, media effects researchers have explored the negative impact of stereotypical representations of women in media ranging from advertisements to films to TV programs. Media portrayals of women have also been analyzed using the critical, cultural studies perspectives to uncover the complex, marginalizing ideologies that underlie negative representations of men and women of color (Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004; Hooks, 1993). Reception studies have focused on understanding women's engagement with media such as romance novels (Parameswaran, 1999; Radway, 1984), magazines (McRobbie, 1991), and soap operas (Ang & Couling, 1985) to discuss the experiences of female audiences, who were previously neglected in audience research. Additionally, feminist media scholars have shown that media reception can be a gendered experience that is often informed by race and class (Bobo, 1988). Research has also shown that portrayals of gender in media inform the reception of media texts (La Pastina, 2004).

In the context of audience studies in immigrant communities, portrayals of women in the media have emerged as an important characteristic related to engagement. In Oppenheimer, Adams-Price, Goodman, Codling, and Coker's (2003) study of audience responses to strong female characters on television, the researchers found that women's responses to female characters were more positive than men's responses. Rojas (2004) explored the responses of immigrant and nonimmigrant Latina women to female Latina portrayals on Univision and Telemundo and found that they rejected the philosophies of female

empowerment presented in these shows and the concept of Latino unity. Durham (2004) explored how South Asian female adolescents in the United States use oppositional readings of media to construct their sexual identities. Grewal's (2003) study of middle-class Indian women in Detroit revealed how they drew on media representations of Indian women in Indian and American media to develop and maintain their bicultural identity. This study contributed to gender and media studies literature by exploring how older male and female immigrants responded to portrayals of women in ethnic media, namely, Indian soap operas to better understand how immigration patterns might shape responses to media.

Indian Diaspora in the United States

To understand Indian immigrants' experiences and the cross-cultural adaptation processes, it is important to understand the notion of diasporas. Diasporas are immigrant communities that attempt to maintain "real" or "imagined" connections (Anderson, 1991) and commitments to their home countries. For example, Anjali Ram (2004) embraces Khachig Tölöyan's (1991) conceptualization of diasporas as "communities that actively maintain links with their culture of origin" (p. 122), while Schiller, Basch, and Blanc (1995) described diasporas as communities of transnationals who "forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994, p. 7). Thus, diasporas are long-term, although not static, communities bound together by issues of separation from their country of origin and feelings of hope about their lives in the host country (Moorti, 2003).

Sandhya Shukla (2003) suggested that diasporas, as hybrid cultures, were a third space between "home" and "new" lands (p. 17). For example, in the United States, Jackson Heights, New York is known as "Little India" (Shukla, 2003). In the early 1970s, Jackson Heights developed into an Asian Indian² community as many Indian-owned stores and restaurants emerged within a few blocks in Queens. These stores included food stores, sari stores, beauty salons, record stores, and more, creating a "self-sufficient ethnic community" (p. 84). By creating this Asian Indian community, these Indians were also able to reinforce their cultural identity.

Diaspora studies focus on the construction of identity and community. Immigrants are not always accepted as "complete citizens" of the host country because of political, cultural, and historical differences. Caught between citizenships and affiliations, diasporas exist in a liminal space. This liminal or "third space" becomes a site for the production of a hybrid culture, formed through negotiations with the home and host cultures (Bhabha, 1994). Ethnic communities like "Little India" (described by Shukla) helped in the cross-cultural adaptation process for newcomers in the United States, because they offered ethnic

media and media from the homeland to assist with the adjustment process (Etefa, 2005; Johnson, 1996; Lee, 2004; Reece & Palmgreen, 2000; Yang, Wu, Zhu, & Southwell, 2004). However, depending on the migration period of the diasporic group, not all ethnic media resonated with immigrant audiences.

Transnational Subjectivity

Although participants watched the soap operas as a way of maintaining their connection to Indian culture, they also reported experiencing dissonance when watching the shows. For example, the setting of most soap operas was the joint family,³ a nostalgic cultural space for the participants who had to abandon this family system after migrating to the United States. However, the ways in which women in the joint family interacted were different from the ways in which participants believed they should interact. Since the participants visited India (although these visits were of varying frequencies and durations), they were aware about the move away from the joint family system, especially in urban India. Consequently, seeing a cherished family structure portrayed negatively exacerbated their anxieties about changes in India and acted as a reminder that the 1960s Indian culture, which they were nostalgic for, had ceased to exist, both in India and even on the screen. Thus, although by viewing the soap operas, participants were able to “revisit” the joint family, the joint family dynamics in the soap operas were not enjoyable. Consequently, participants expressed ambivalence about their viewing experience.

This tension that resulted from viewing media from the homeland is further explained using Louisa Schein’s (2008) argument that ethnic media texts are intertwined in transnational subjectification, a process that emphasized the complex identity negotiations by diasporic communities regarding cultural allegiances. Schein (2008) argued media that evoke memories of the homeland simultaneously capture diasporic audiences while simultaneously creating anxieties for these viewers by emphasizing their geographic and cultural distance from their homeland. The soap operas reflected contemporary India rather than the Indian culture of the 1960s, which participants idealized. As a result, they were reminded that they were cultural “Others” in relation to contemporary India. Furthermore, as part of an ethnic minority community in the United States, they were aware that they remained as cultural “Others” in the United States. Thus, they were doubly “Othered.”

Disapora studies have emphasized diasporic communities are often caught between allegiance to their old and new homes, and Schein’s (2008) view of transnational subjectivity points out that diasporic audiences’ connection to their native homeland is more complex. The participants in this study were not only cultural “Others” in their new homes in the United States, but they also had to grapple with another layer of “in-betweeness.” They had to reconcile the fondly remembered India of the 1960s with the contemporary iterations of

India presented in media texts, which was vastly different culture than in the 1960s. Viewing soap operas from India should have evoked nostalgia, because this genre has typically celebrated traditional Indian values. However, for the participants, it also generated anxieties about cultural changes in India because in these modern soap operas women were portrayed as disrupters of the joint family system and sexual beings. This portrayal was not only different from the nostalgic view that participants held of women (devoted to the joint family system and who embodied traditional values of sexual reticence) but also a reminder that the version of India they fondly remembered did not exist. Thus, viewing soap operas emphasized the in-betweenness or transnational nature of the participants' identities by highlighting that they were cultural "Others" in their native homelands too.

Nostalgia

Immigrant communities have engaged with ethnic media because it was important for maintaining transnational relationships and cultural identity (Aksoy & Robins, 2003). Sun (2005) proposed the idea of a "global diasporic Chinese mediasphere" to explain how engagement with ethnic media helped Chinese diasporas develop a collective identity and thereby a sense of community that was based on reaffirming their cultural loyalty to their country of origin.

When the Indian diasporic communities were beginning to form, in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, Hindi movies were also shown in the San Francisco area, New York area (Queens and Manhattan), and Northern California (Yuba City). Distributors showed the films in university halls and public school auditoriums on the weekends, as well as theaters devoted specifically to a full screening of Indian films in Hindi with English subtitles (Fisher, 1980). As Fisher (1980) explained, these films were "a nostalgic link to India" (pp. 63–64). One filmgoer told Fisher, "this film is as boring to us as it must be to you, but you see it was filmed in our home town; the sights are all familiar to us. And it's good to hear the language" (pp. 63–64). Therefore, these early screenings became a way for Indians to leave the mainstream, "wear traditional clothes, speak in Hindi or other regional languages" and join other families to meet and participate "in a ritual of sharing personal and collective memories of life in India" (Punathambekar, 2005, p. 154).

Gillespie (1989) examined the use of the VCR by Asian Indians in a London suburb, who watched Hindi films to stay connected to their country of origin. For the older Asian Indians, "nostalgia" was the key to watching the films (Gillespie, 1989). These parents felt they could "convey a sense of their past in India to their children" (Gillespie, 1989, p. 236). Parents also had specific uses for film, such as linguistic, religious, and sociocultural learning for their children (Gillespie, 1989).

The Indian immigrants studied here did not grow up watching television in India, because television was not introduced until 1959 (Ray & Jacka, 1996) and that was only in a few homes in urban areas. When Indian television became available on the satellite dish, this form of media contributed to the “imagined homeland⁴” that Indians were creating to help forge a connection with India and maintain a memory of India that was quite nostalgic. In the modern Indian soap operas, the image and role of women in particular changed, disrupting the Indian diaspora’s identification with their home culture and reducing the cultural proximity of these soap operas for this audience.

Modern⁵ Soaps in India

The content and distribution of soap operas, colloquially known as “serials,” changed dramatically following the liberalization of India’s economic policies in the late 1990s. These policies in conjunction with massive telecommunications growth in the early 2000s opened Indian markets to foreign programming and expanded domestic programming. STAR Plus, Zee TV, and Sony TV, for example, became popular in the early 2000s in part due to their Hindi soap operas.

Until around 2007–2008, a particular subgenre of soap operas termed *saas-bahu* (mother-in-law vs. daughter-in-law) serials, ruled audience ratings. In 2000, television producer Ekta Kapoor ushered in the era of these *saas-bahu* soaps with megahits like *Kanyadaan* (Ceremony in which the parents give away the daughter for marriage) and *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (Because the mother-in-law was also once a daughter-in-law), which were followed by a slew of other *saas-bahu* soaps, all starting with the letter K, leading to this subgenre being called “K-serials” (Munshi, 2012). *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii* (The story of every household), *Kasautii Zindagii Kay* (The criterion of life), *Kaahin Kissii Roz* (Somewhere, someday), *Kahin to Hogaa*, *Kkusum* (Name of the main character in this series), and *Kutumb* (Family) were examples of popular K-serials that were broadcast between 2000 and 2008. K-serials typically focused on family politics and centered on the relationships among women in large joint families (Munshi, 2012). *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, for example, which ran from 2000 to 2008, featured a married woman navigating family politics in her husband’s home. These K-serials had dramatic storylines, female protagonists who occupied center stage, and clearly delineated good and bad female characters who also promoted aspirational, extravagant lifestyles via their over-the-top fashion, makeup, and ornaments (Deprez, 2009; Munshi, 2010).

Shoma Munshi (2012) connected the popularity of K-serials to the socio-economic conditions at the time. In the early 2000s, as India was entering a liberalized capitalist economy, the economic prosperity of middle-class families previously rooted in having stable government jobs, now became tied to jobs in the information technology industry, which were tied to fluctuations in global

markets. Thus, although Indians now had more money to spend, job security was rare. Consequently, the family once again became the central support system and safe space. In many ways, the K-serials, by focusing on large joint families, evoked a sense of nostalgia for preliberalization days when joint families were the norm. Deprez (2009) pointed out that audiences were also able to identify with values celebrated in these K-serials, such as “self-sacrifice for the good of the family, respect for your elders, moral standards and a black and white view of right and wrong” (p. 429).

Despite their popularity, these soaps were widely criticized for unrealistic storylines and glorifying female characters that sacrificed everything for their husbands and families (Joshi, 2001; Stanley, 2012). In addition, the mother-in-law often played the role of the shrew, who was prone to mood swings and subjects the daughter-in-law to numerous indignities and mistreatment. As Namrata Joshi (2001) noted,

Most soap moms-in-law are given an ambivalent character as they keep swinging from good to bad to downright ugly. In *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, the *saas* [mother-in-law] goes to the extent of accusing her *bahu* [daughter-in-law] of theft and even alleging that she was having an affair. Yet when the son dies she decides to have her widowed *bahu* marry again. However, the contradiction in this positing of women’s liberation is obvious—widow remarriage is only toyed with, not executed. . . . In *Kahani Gahr Gahr Ki*, the action takes the opposite turn as the goody-goody *saas* turns venomous against her Ram-like eldest son and the sweet *badi bahu* [elder daughter-in-law] in yet another Ramayana⁶ retold.

Similar to Joshi (2001), Munshi (2010) had also likened the early K-serial narratives to the Ramayana, particularly in terms of the daughters-in-law being scripted to model Sita⁷ from Ramayana. Moreover, the daughters-in-law in K-serials often had to protect their families from external threats such as the “other woman” who was presented as independent, working outside the home, and wearing clothes that were “immodest.” Thus, the dutiful daughter-in-law represented the ideal Indian woman who must survive against foreign threats that could destabilize cultural values of “parivaar and parampara” also known as “family and tradition” (Munshi, 2012).

By around the mid-2000s, although K-serials were still popular, other soaps were beginning to also gain popularity. Munshi (2012) noted that *Jassis Jaisi Koi Nahi*, the Hindi adaptation of the Colombia telenovela, *Yo Soy Betty La Fea*, known as *Ugly Betty* in the United States, was one the first such challengers to the K-serials. By 2007, the popularity of K-serials decreased; soap operas that centralized women’s social issues became more popular. Examples included *Bidaai* (Farewell ceremony for brides) and *Saat Phere-Saloni Ka Safar* (Marriage-Saloni’s journey), which discussed colorism; *Balika Vadhu* (Child bride), which focused on the repercussions of child marriage; and *Chotti Bahu*

(Younger daughter-in-law), which exposed the perils of the caste system. Although tackling socially relevant issues, these soaps continued to have evil relatives who schemed against the central female protagonist. However, the main focus of the storyline now often was the relationship between the husband and female protagonist (Munshi, 2012). *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* (How should this relationship be named), for example, focused on how a couple in an arranged marriage navigated their new relationship alongside everyday family drama. Similarly, *Pavitra Rishata* (Holy relationship), *Banoo Main Teri Dulhann* (Become your wife), and *Saath Nibhana Saathiya* (Keep your promises, fellow traveler) also centralized the relationships between husband and wife.

In many ways, this focus on love after marriage resonated with the lived experiences of many young Indian couples, who were still having arranged marriages, as well as the older generation of Asian Indians used in this study. The move toward depicting modern relationships meant the inclusion of sex and romance. This complicated the cultural proximity of the soap operas that were previously admired for their “clean” content. For example, extramarital affairs, divorce, and intergenerational love stories were now often part of the storylines. *Bade Ache Lagte Hain* (I like you), for example, started trending on Twitter for depicting the first on-screen kiss during prime time (“Ram Kapoor ‘kiss-and-tell’ trends on Twitter,” 2012).

Munshi (2012) pointed out that female protagonist concerns expanded to include her original home in addition to her marital home (examples: *Bade Ache Lagte Hain*, *Sapna Babul ka Bidaii* [Father’s dream to marry his daughters]). The early K-serials focused mainly on the female protagonist’s marital home. In some cases, female roles have expanded beyond that of mothers-in-law, daughters, and wives, to include career women (as in *Diya Aur Batti Hum* [We are like the earthen lamp and it’s wick]), although family and career were often placed at odds (Munshi, 2012). Hindi serials also continued to be the touchstone for determining the latest fashions. These designs became the fashion of choice for weddings in India and among Indian immigrants, particularly the clothing and jewelry worn by female protagonists in these soaps (Munshi, 2012). Thus, even while debates continued about whether the female characters in Hindi soap operas challenged or reinforced patriarchal norms, these soap operas continued to have cultural relevance in India and among a particular generation of the Indian diaspora in the United States.

Research Questions

This study focused on how Asian Indians who have lived in the United States for 40 to 50 years responded to portrayals of women in modern Indian serials. This generation developed their television-viewing habits after moving to the United States in the 1960s (Somani, 2008). The need to stay connected to their culture led the Asian Indian participants to eventually subscribe to the satellite dish to

watch programs from India in real time (Somani, 2008). These research questions investigated how the participants connected with cultural proximity and the role of ethnic media played in their adaptation process.

1. How does a specific generation of Indian immigrants (Asian Indians) understand modern Indian society through watching Indian soap operas?
2. How does this generation of Asian Indians define women in the serials?
3. How does this generation describe the way family relationships are portrayed on the screen?

Participants and Methods

Asian Indians: Migrating to the United States and Current Status

Following the introduction of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965, Asian Indians began migrating to the United States to fill the need for professional and skilled workers (Chandrasekhar, 1982), which arose as a result of programs such as the newly introduced Medicare and Medicaid programs that created a need for scientists and other medical professionals (Prashad, 2000). Indian immigrants were immediately absorbed into the American workforce, and consequently, they attained middle-class status (Dasgupta, 1989).

These Asian Indians first resorted to letters and the phone in the early days to find out what was happening in their homeland. But because of the delays in airmail, it took weeks, if not months, to find out what was happening in India. The phone connection at that time was weak due to India's poor infrastructure, which contributed to substandard landlines. When information about India became available via the satellite dish, this was the first time this particular generation could maintain their connection to India in real time (Somani, 2008).

Most of the participants in this study watched Hindi movies growing up in India, especially since television was not introduced yet. Once these participants arrived in the United States, they watched Hindi movies at the local university theaters in the 1960s. Indian immigrants had a strong sense of ethnic and cultural heritage that eventually became a source of pride and group identification (Dasgupta, 1989). This strong sense of identity is what led to the first Indian newspaper (catering to Asian Indians in the United States) produced in the United States, *India Abroad*. The Indian community not only wanted to stay connected to India but also wanted to stay connected to each other.

Some of the participants in this study were also subscribers of *India Abroad*, the first and largest Asian Indian publication serving the diaspora since 1970. Although it was headquartered in New York, it published five separate editions

(Eastern, Midwestern, Western, Canadian, and European). Stories from around the world and United States were sent to New York.

This generation also listened to radio programs. By 1975, 13 weekly half-hour radio programs catering to Asian Indians aired in New York. The shows included interviews with Asian Indians celebrating the accomplishments in their fields, cultural programs, and musical performances.

For this generation of Asian Indians, media consumption did not stop with television and radio; the VCR became another way for this diasporic group to ingest their culture. By 1980, many movie houses that showed Hindi films closed down in New York and Chicago (Helweg & Helweg, 1990). Many participants in this study preferred watching Indian movies at home on their VCR, where they invited friends to watch movies with them.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, cable television offered public access channels for groups and individuals to make programs about their own communities. This generation of Asian Indians was also ready to spread their community news through electronic media. *TV Asia*, *Namaste Television*, *Darshan TV Show*, *Chitrahaar*, and *Bharat Darshan* were channels or programs that were developed by the Indian diasporic communities around the United States to air on cable. Some participants were consumers of these programs.

All the participants visited India over the years; some managed to go every 2 to 3 years. Others could only go every 5 to 7 years, because it was too expensive to take their entire family. In addition, the participants kept in touch with their Indian family members and relatives, and for some, their extended family had even migrated to United States. As they reached retirement or after their children were married and settled within their own careers, some participants began traveling to India every year, particularly during the winter months. Now, many participants spend their winters in India (December–February), which means they go every year.

All the participants in this study viewed themselves as a racial/ethnic minority in the United States. Some members of this study viewed themselves as Indian Americans, but most just called themselves Indians. No one used the term *Indian diaspora* but understood what the researchers meant if it was part of a question in the in-depth interviews.

Like Gillespie's (1989) study, this generation not only maintained a connection to their Indian culture to reinforce their strong sense of identity, but they wanted to expose their children to Indian culture as well. Some participants spoke their native Indian language at home because they wanted their children to learn their mother tongue. But they found that their children began to speak "Hinglish" (a combination of both Hindi and English). In addition to watching movies on the VCR, these Asian Indians tried to expose their children to Indian culture by taking them to India (when they could afford the travel) and joining Indian groups, which organized cultural programs and performances further exposing the second-generation offspring to Indian culture.

Participants

Cohorts of Asian Indians were interviewed from the following metropolitan areas from 2007 to 2012: Washington, DC; Chicago; San Francisco-San Jose; Houston; and New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island (NY). In all five of the chosen metro areas, Asian Indians were large ethnic populations. Specifically, there were 186,000 and 142,000 Asian Indians in the Chicago and Washington, DC metro areas, respectively. In both these areas, Asian Indians were also the largest ethnic group (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). In San Francisco-San Jose, Houston, and New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island (NY) metro areas, there were approximately 250,000; 100,000; and 600,000 Asian Indians, respectively (Hoeffel et al., 2012).

Each group from the respected metropolitan areas comprised 10 married couples (20 people per groups). Of the 100 participants, 50 were men and 50 were women. More than half (57%) of the participants had graduate degrees (Master's, PhD, MD, JD), and 99% had a college degree or higher. Each participant was interviewed separately. Couples were not interviewed together, specifically so answers could not be influenced. Most participants had well-established careers or were of retirement age (mean age: 68.1 years). The majority had high socioeconomic status (82% had annual income levels of \$100K or higher, and 44% reported annual incomes of more than \$200K). Most participants had migrated between 1960 and 1972 (mean year of migration: 1968), with only a few outliers who had migrated in 1973. That is, the participants had been residing in the United States for an average of 42 years as of 2012. Finally, 91% of participants identified themselves as Hindus. Pseudonyms were used only for the participants from Washington, DC.

Participant Recruitment

Snowball sampling was used for participant recruitment. Inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) The couple had to have migrated to the United States between 1960 and 1972 (exceptions for three spouses who migrated in 1973) and (2) the couple must subscribe to Indian television programs from India via satellite dish or cable. The salience of using these participants was twofold: (1) because all participants belonged to the same generation and had similar migration experiences and (2) this generation learned to watch television only after migrating to the United States, and therefore learned their television-viewing habits in the United States. As a result, this cohort eventually acculturated into watching Indian television via the satellite dish, once it became available (Somani, 2008). The value of using these participants allowed the researchers to study a cohort of Asian Indians who experienced the same migration patterns and shared a similar sense of nostalgia.

Methodology

Between 2007 and 2012, in-depth ethnographic interviews were conducted with these five separate cohorts of Asian Indians in the Washington, DC metro area (2007); New York metro area (includes Northern New Jersey and Long Island, NY) (2010); Houston metro area (2011); Chicago metro area (2011); and the San Francisco-San Jose metro area (2012). All the interviews were asked the same series of approximately 45 questions. The interview guide was designed to gain the participants' perspectives about their culture and media habits (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In-depth ethnographic interviews were particularly useful for this purpose, because they were conversations that elicited structured responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Areas covered by the questions were participants' media use at various stages in their lives, from their early life in India to their present-day life in the United States. Authors focused on the responses to the following three questions: (1) What do you say in response to critics who say Indian television programming imported to the United States is much too "Western?" (2) How does it make you feel that Hindi movies rarely showed any affection in film, but Indian television today shows much more "affection" in its programs between couples? (3) What kind of improvement is needed in the Indian television programs? All interviews were transcribed and read multiple times by both authors. Patterns discovered in the data became themes for analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Results and Discussion

As India became more modern, women's roles on television changed. Participants knew of the sociocultural changes occurring through visits to India and also through media (after it became available on the satellite dish). However, their dissatisfaction with the cultural changes in contemporary India manifested as interesting, sometimes contradictory statements that were made when participants critiqued the version of India portrayed in Indian soap operas. It is important to note that participants did not view modern Indian soap operas to learn about cultural changes in India; rather, viewing these soap operas allowed participants to express dissatisfaction about the changes occurring in contemporary India.

Three categories were created from the participants' answers. These categories were called *Portrayals of women* (behavior and dress), *Heterosexual romance and intimacy*, and *Joint family*. Participants viewed Indian society as undergoing rapid changes and expressed ambivalence about how the portrayals of Indian women in Indian soap operas did not align with the participants' ideas about Indian womanhood. Some of those ideas were rooted in their nostalgic memories of 1960s India, instead of reflecting modern Indian culture. For example, Mrs. Ramanathan of New York said, "cultural practices are not shown in

Indian television nowadays. They are so westernized⁸ [or Americanized].” Mrs. Sharma, another New Yorker, expressed a similar sentiment: “Sometimes the focus is lost and they make it too western [American] to think, yes, that’s it. Right. Whereas they are not really showing the Indian culture and that’s what I feel that it is too western.” In this instance, when Mrs. Ramanathan claimed the India being shown on screen was not the “real” India, she was referencing the India of the 1960s. She idealized Indian culture of that time period for its cultural distinctiveness, an attribute that she knew was on the decline following the opening Indian markets to Western goods in the 1990s. Thus, viewing soap operas reminded her that Indian traditions were being eroded.

According to this cohort, the use of English language and the lack of traditional elements, such as dance styles, did not represent the 1960s version of Indian culture they cherished. For example, Mr. Nandi of DC listed the dance forms that no longer found a place in popular Indian programming: “Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi, and so many like Kathakali are so many dances, all of them, you know, I don’t see them.” Mrs. Ramanathan also suggested a similar lack of traditional elements by pointing out that an “American” dance style had replaced traditional Indian dances: “I mean western dance, dama dama dama dham you know, nothing classical, nothing Carnatic, nothing.” Additionally, much of the anxiety centered on how women in soap operas dressed, behaved, fulfilled relational roles within the joint family structure, and expressed their sexuality.

Portrayals of Women

This section on the portrayals of women was divided into two subsections called behavior and dress, based on the responses from the participants.

Behavior: Subservient Versus Assertive. Participants from all five cities believed female characters were portrayed negatively. In Chicago, Mr. A. Sharma said the following regarding the soap *Saas Bina Sasuraal* (In-laws’ home without a mother-in-law):

There is a poor girl, who is being reined on by everybody, and she is taking all the shit and doesn’t respond. Who gives her trouble, it could be mother-in-law, sister-in-law, father-in-law, husband and that poor lady is always being the nice person.

Referring to the soap opera *Ram Milaayi Jodi* (Partnership made in heaven), Mrs. Chawla, also of Chicago said, “they [women] are portrayed as very domesticated, suppressed, subservient, this thing, yet they got a brain underneath that they can outsmart like an ant can kill an elephant.” Both Mr. Sharma and Mrs. Chawla did not agree with how women were portrayed. They wanted to see an independent, modern Indian woman and were troubled to see the female

character still portrayed as subservient. These two serials depicted women in negative ways, portraying them as meek or calculating. Both Mr. Sharma and Mrs. Chawla were tired of seeing women portrayed in these roles and wanted to see strong, independent women.

However, when women in soap operas were assertive, their characters were not well received either. Mr. Mehta of San Francisco said, "I think, they are getting more independent, more aggressive, more open. They express their views and ideas and feelings and everything." Such a contradiction was interesting to explore, because it reinforced the idea that although modern Indian women were expected to be go-getters and working outside the home was no longer a taboo, women were still expected to be docile or express their views and opinions in limited ways. The authors interpreted this to mean that participants believed that even if Indian women were economically independent, the family still needed to be their priority.

Mr. Mathur, also of San Francisco, expressed this contradiction best when he said,

But some women come out too much I would say against the Indian values, some of the things they should not be doing it, but they do it. And from there, the people, the children in India they probably learn to be that way and which is kind of loss of character, loss of moral, loss of Indian values.

Mrs. A. Sharma of Chicago, who watched *Saas Bina Sasuraal* (In-laws' house without a mother-in-law) and *Bade Acche Lagte Hai* said, "at this point, I think it looks like as if all women are like vamps." Both Mr. Mathur and Mrs. Sharma also did not agree with how women were portrayed. The "modern" soaps depicted complex female characters. Monteiro (1998) described the women in the modern soaps as "self-sufficient, aggressive and manipulative hussies, who smoked and drank and manifested all the habits of the 'archetypal vamp'" (p. 168). Mrs. Sharma's description was similar.

In Houston, Mrs. Ayachit said,

They just show the women [as] villains. They are battering their daughter-in-laws and they are making . . . all the time they are showing these big, big conspiracies to kill somebody. That's not real India. And that's like the women . . . I know that women are in every field in India. They are pilots and they are in air force, and they are, not only, doctors and engineers, lawyers, but in every field. So they should really show the real stuff. If they show some real stuff on Indian dramas, I would appreciate that very much.

Mrs. Ayachit could not relate to the female characters portrayed in the soap operas, because the soap operas did not align with her own understanding of contemporary women's roles in India. Mr. Mathur, Mrs. Sharma, or

Mrs. Ayachit were not accustomed to seeing women portrayed as villains or to seeing Indian women suffer from domestic violence on screen. Moreover, according to them, contemporary Indian women were professionals and well respected in society. Cultural proximity was achieved by the inclusion of cultural elements that resonated with the audience members' lived experiences (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005), such as having characters who were Asian Indian and spoke Hindi or television. However, the portrayals of women in Indian soap operas did not correspond with the participants' firsthand knowledge of who they believed to be "real Indian women." This discrepancy created a sense of dissonance for Mrs. Ayachit, who explained that she did not find the female characters in soap operas believable and as a result could not relate to them. All the participants described the women portrayed as completely submissive and perhaps even victims of domestic violence, or aggressive manipulators. These negative portrayals of the women created a discrepancy, which disrupted their cultural proximity to soap operas. This disruption, as Schein (2008) has argued, not only created dissonance, but an anxiety. For these participants, the professionalization of women in modern India was a source of pride, because it showcased the type of progress the participants appreciated: economic independence of women. When the soap operas did not depict the expanded roles for women in modern Indian society, they contradicted the participants' firsthand knowledge about modern India (obtained by traveling to India and maintaining connections with India). Moreover, by showing ongoing gender inequalities, these shows pushed participants to acknowledge persistent patriarchal elements in Indian society, which most likely challenged their ethnic pride, and the limits of their firsthand knowledge about the changes in India. Finally, the participants' negative responses to "assertive" women reveal the ambivalence they felt about gender equality in India. Thus, viewing these soap operas meant participants had to confront the contradictory feelings they had about modern Indian women.

Dress: Excessive Versus Minimal. A similar discrepancy between the participants' knowledge of Indian women and portrayals of women in soap operas was revealed in responses that focused on the over-the-top dress style of the female characters. Mr. Advani of San Francisco expressed his dissatisfaction as follows: "they show them all constantly fully dressed up with their heads draped and walking around the house like they are going to a wedding, which is nonsensical." Mrs. Sankpal of New York echoed Mr. Advani's dissatisfaction. She stated, "all that jewelry and the saris and everybody's living in mansions, and so unrealistic that's why I don't watch those shows, the serials." Mrs. Sankpal described how the people in the serials did not depict everyday wear. This portrayal of how Indian women dressed and how they lived on screen generated anxiety for these viewers because it did not align with their "imagined homeland," and it also did not align with their firsthand knowledge of modern India.

The soap operas' portrayals of Indian families and women as wealthy should have appealed to participants because they offered a counter narrative to Western portrayals of Indians as poor and economically disadvantaged. However, participants critiqued the excessive displays of wealth on the show. Their discomfort with displays of wealth could be traced back to their discomfort with the changes in Indian society. As Mankekar (1998) has explained, in modern India, consumption is a hallmark of modernity, and soap operas mirror and reinforce consumerism. However, for the participants, who migrated decades before the economic liberalization policies of the 1990s opened up Indian markets to foreign goods and encouraged the development of a consumer culture, the consumerism seen on soap operas was not associated with traditional Indian culture (or their memory of India from the 1960s). Interestingly, their discomfort with the consumption of material things by women intersected with literature that women were often burdened with being "keepers of tradition" (Punathambekar, 2010).

The authors learned that modern soaps disrupted the nostalgia for the India this cohort once knew and their cultural connection to it. Even though the homeland was changing, much of this cohort's cultural identity was invested in the India they left in the 1960s. Although participants visited India frequently postretirement, they remained invested in the India they left behind in the 1960s because they believed that to be the real "traditional" India. For them, modern India was seen as a place where tradition was eroded by Western influences and was thus, "not real India."

Participants' responses to the ways women dressed in soap operas provided evidence that this particular cohort wanted their homeland to remain frozen in time or they did not want to accept changes in cultural values (Shukla, 2003). Although participants were aware of the influx of consumerism, their responses showed that being reminded of this change was a source of discomfort. For cultural proximity to be possible, the soap operas would have had to portray cultural values that were cherished in 1960s India, since that was the version of India with which participants felt a deep connection. Modern soap operas, which portrayed the modern value of consumerism, could not achieve cultural proximity for this cohort.

For this cohort, viewing soap operas challenged their understanding of modern Indian women. As India became more modern, women's roles on television changed. With the changes in women's roles, female immigrants, especially, felt a sense of dissonance. For example, women characters were also viewed negatively when they wore American clothes. Mrs. Sircar of San Francisco said, "the way they dress up in the dressing, in the background, it's definitely more western." Moreover, these clothes were considered indecent because they exposed women's bodies. Mrs. Zutshi also of San Francisco said, "like dresses, like they show lot of vulgarity, which is not in our culture when we were growing." The participants lived in the United States for almost five

decades. They were used to seeing non-Indian women dressed in American clothes and their discomfort did not stem from seeing American women in “revealing,” modern clothes. Rather, participants found *Indian* women dressed in “revealing clothes” in the Indian serials to be problematic. The reason for this discomfort was not that participants had never seen Indian women in “revealing clothes” (because participants who had visited India recently had most likely observed Indian women in Western clothes). Instead, the reason for this discomfort can be traced back to Mrs. Zutshi’s claim that these styles were promoting vulgarity, which she explained was not part of the India in which she was raised. Through this response, Mrs. Zutshi revealed that soap operas did not showcase the traditional Indian culture she cherished. This argument was further supported by Mr. Massand’s (of New York) comparison of American and Indian women’s dressing styles: “I don’t like to see an Indian naked girl, but if an American naked girl, you can always see, you won’t be able to feel about it, she’s naked. It is part of life [here in the U.S.]” For Mr. Massand, Indian women in revealing clothes were not acceptable. He was not surprised to see Indian women in revealing clothes on screen; rather, he was displeased. That is, the soap operas did not allow participants to engage with their nostalgic version of Indian culture. Showcasing cultural changes, which participants were not enthusiastic about, diminished the pleasure the participants could derive from viewing soap operas.

These responses showed how this cohort faced complex identity negotiations. For example, they felt anxiety about the Americanization projected onto women, as some female characters were expected to constantly negotiate between maintaining tradition and being modern (Punathambekar, 2005). Furthermore, these tensions were bound to the participants’ anxieties about how American dressing styles were “corrupting” Indian women. Finally, the pleasure that participants derived from watching soap operas was diminished because modern soap operas did not showcase 1960s India, for which participants were nostalgic. Instead, these soap operas showcased modern India, and participants had reservations about the ways in which women dressed in modern India. Their ambivalence about cultural changes occurring in India resurfaced when viewing modern soap operas.

Heterosexual Romance and Intimacy

The participants grew up watching Hindi movies as television was not yet introduced in India. However, there was an absence of images of sexual intimacy in Hindi cinema.⁹ Participants explained that modern Indian programming was depicting open expressions of sexuality or intimacy. These participants viewed these portrayals as deviations from Indian norms. Mrs. Bhattacharya of San Francisco said,

It’s kind of we are not used to see it in Indian things, so it is sometimes little uncomfortable, but I don’t mind much. It’s okay, because I am used to watch

the English movies, but as we are not used to watching the Indian style or way, it is sometimes, you know, little bit bothers me.

Mrs. Bhattacharya, as well as other, participants were most troubled by the expression of what they considered sexual intimacy. Mrs. Keswani of San Francisco said, "I mean the way they go on their dating, the way they are like hugging and kissing, I mean it was never that open in India." Mrs. Sinha, also of San Francisco said, "because we are not used to seeing things like that. We don't practice sex in the public. That was not our culture in our time."

The modern soaps in India changed how diasporic groups identified with their home culture, especially with the depiction of sexual intimacy in the Indian serials. This generation felt nostalgic for the way sexual intimacy was shown in old Hindi films, since they did not grow up watching Indian television, and the ways in which sexual intimacy was valued in the 1960s in India. Old Hindi films never actually showed public displays of intimacy; it was left up to the imagination of the audience. In the modern soaps, public displays of intimacy reminded participants that the norms they were brought up with did not seem to exist on current Indian television programming or in modern India. Viewing soap operas from India should have evoked nostalgia, but instead feelings of alienation from modern India were reinforced by the public displays of intimacy.

However, some accepted these changes in Indian television's depiction of modern society, as stated by Mr. Sircar of San Francisco:

I am sort of subconsciously reconciled to the fact that maybe that's the way it is. It may not have been this way 40 years ago but it is right now. We accept so many things, inter-caste marriage or something like that. It's one of those things.

When Indian soap operas were viewed through the lens of cultural proximity, the expression of such dissatisfaction about changes in the home culture became important to explore. These participants valued their ethnic identity and tried to preserve it by building an Indian diasporic community in the United States. They also felt nostalgic for their "imagined homeland" or India as it was in the 1960s. However, when watching Indian soap operas, participants were reminded of changes in Indian women's family interactions and sexual expression, which they found troubling. They felt the changes in India could be resulting in Indian norms for women becoming similar to American norms for women. These older Indian immigrant audiences did not find parts of these soap operas mirroring values they associated with Indian culture.

Joint Family

Participants indicated that they were dissatisfied with the portrayal of the joint family system in Indian soap operas. The Indian diaspora in the United States

formed nuclear families after migrating here. The nostalgia for the joint family grew and was remembered from the time they left India.

Mr. Dharma of DC said, "Indian television, especially the soaps and all these things, generally speaking, you will see the feud between the families that you will see on the Indian television." Mrs. Ayachit of Houston said, "but one of these serials is shown in, this young girl who marries in Gujarati family and there are so many family members in joint family and everybody is just harassing her."

The "joint family" has been the hallmark of Indian culture (Mullatti, 1995) and the focus of many Hindi movies (Deakin & Bhugra, 2012) and soap operas (Munshi, 2010). Furthermore, support for the joint family system comes from the veneration of the economic success of family-owned companies, such as the Birla and Tata business empires (Mullatti, 1995). For our participants, therefore, the joint family system is symbolic of tradition and like other cultural norms, a source of ethnic pride because it is considered a tradition that engenders success in society.

In recent times, however, in urban areas in India in particular, census data show that the number of individuals per household is decreasing, leading to concerns that joint families are being displaced by nuclear families (Shah, 1998). The nuclear family is seen as un-Indian and focused on individuals rather than the family unit. The reasons for the rise in nuclear families were practical rather than value-laden, with reasons ranging from convenience, demographic coincidences, or relocation for jobs (Shah, 1998). More recent research points out that family structure might depend on additional factors such as economic status, land ownership, and demographics of the head of the household (Niranjan, Nair, & Roy, 2005).

In Hindi soap operas, the joint family was still represented. The persistence of this cultural system contributed to the nostalgia the participants experienced when viewing soap operas, because the India on screen corresponded with the "traditional" Indian family structure they cherished. However, the modern Indian soap operas depicted the joint family negatively showing family feuds and quarrels between the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

In DC, another Mrs. Sharma described the image of women she saw in the joint family on Indian soap operas,

Also in all of drama plays I have seen whatever the good character is suffering throughout the life. There was a Kkusum show, it was very good when they started, and then what happened to Kkusum, she died, her own daughter was against her.

In Houston, Mrs. Mutyala said,

Some soap operas I saw portrayal of women, well, some of the wickedness is being shown, which I do not like at all. Some women, I mean, some portrayal is showing as they are very manipulative. They are very wicked and they are going to the extent of violence.

Mrs. Tripathi, also of Houston, said,

There is always [a] nasty woman and she is always playing the dirty tricks and there is sister-in-law or the mother-in-law or some woman or whatever, which is basically the main focus in the soap operas. I wish they would get away from that and do something a little bit more constructive.

Mrs. Sharma (DC), Mrs. Mutyala, and Mrs. Tripathi remembered family supporting each other, not being “against” each other. In these Indian serials, women were typically shown as manipulative and played the role of villains or long-suffering heroines. Women were not shown in a positive light, and this depiction was not representative of how the participants remembered or wanted to remember the women in the joint family.

These negative portrayals of women in joint families were problematic because they called into question the legitimacy and success of the family structure. The emphasis on how the negative portrayals of women contributed to the demise of the joint family structure reinforced the idea that successful family structures were predicated upon women behaving in a traditional manner and that “uncontrollable” women were the cause for disharmony in modern families on screen.

Furthermore, although Indian women continue to face domestic violence in India (Fernandez, 1997; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Panda & Agarwal, 2005; Segal, 1999) and abroad (Dasgupta & Warriar, 1996), these participants resented the portrayals of such harassment in soap operas. Rather than acknowledging the ongoing gender violence that occurred within families, these participants chose to frame such instances as unrealistic, such as Mrs. Rathi in Chicago, who said, “sometimes mothers-in-law they behave very badly, which I don’t think in this day and age it happens.” One reason for rejecting such negative portrayals of the women in the joint family might be because these participants felt a sense of nostalgia for the congenial joint family. The soap operas were laying out a contradictory narrative, by framing the joint family system as a site of strife and gender violence.

Conclusion

The participants were enculturated into their television-viewing habits (Somani, 2008), because they migrated to the United States before television was introduced in India (Ray & Jacka, 1996). Watching Indian television on the satellite dish should have helped this cohort affirm their Indian identity and contributed to the Indian identity they established in their host country. Media engagement also helped with building a diasporic community, which, in turn, helped these immigrants build their confidence, self-worth, and self-esteem. Viewing ethnic media such as soap operas also helped the participants maintain their connection

to their homeland. However, when the content of soap operas changed, the participants' idealized views of India challenged their nostalgia for India. Their diasporic group identity was also called into question.

Given that the programs showcased the complexity of Indian cultural systems, such as the joint family, the authors suggest that the discomfort participants' expressed regarding women's portrayals was because these portrayals challenged participants to accept that their cherished India of the 1960s no longer existed even on screen. Despite visits and interpersonal connections they continued to maintain, participants' cultural values did not match contemporary Indian values and viewing the soap operas emphasized this disconnect. Consequently, participants experienced alienation not just from American cultural life but also from contemporary Indian cultural life.

The participants believed that women were portrayed negatively in soap operas because these portrayals did not conform to their idealized expectations regarding the role of women in Indian culture. The negative depictions of women on Indian soap operas were subcategorized into *behavior* and *dress* under "Portrayals of women." The participants contradicted themselves in that they did not want to see the women in subservient roles but were also not accustomed to seeing the female characters as manipulative, or dismissive of Indian traditions. For them, a positive portrayal involved women who were assertive but still continued to value tradition. As a result, the participants could not relate to all the female characters on screen, which reduced the cultural proximity of Indian soap operas.

Female characters were expected to constantly negotiate their image, maintaining tradition while showcasing modernity (Malhotra & Rogers, 2000). The participants did not want the negative portrayals of Indian women on screen to reflect women in India, such as depicting women scantily dressed, or showing public displays of sexual intimacy on television. They felt nostalgic for the Indian women who still practiced cultural norms that were in place when the participants migrated in the 1960s.

This study contributed to the communication literature of cultural proximity in understanding media engagement of diasporic groups. The Indian diaspora felt nostalgic about the India they left in the 1960s, and cultural proximity of Indian soap operas for participants was reduced, because the portrayals of women did not showcase the traditional India participants idealized or the cultural changes they favored (such as the professionalization of women). Rather, they showed contemporary India, and although participants knew of the changes in modern India, they had mixed feelings about the changes in cultural and gender norms (e.g., they appreciated that women now had economic independence but not that women were more sexually expressive). As defined earlier, cultural proximity was achieved by audiences when cultural connections were found in the media. Indian culture portrayed on Indian television programs,

specifically the portrayal of women in contemporary Indian soap operas, differed from the role of women in Indian society, 40 to 50 years ago. These media portrayals created concerns and anxieties among the participants about the changes in Indian culture and reduced their identification with the women in these soap operas. These Asian Indians' remained nostalgic for "traditional" India, a version with which they were reminded they could not longer engage even during trips back to India. These trips back home also made them aware that their cultural values were an uneven match with modern India. For example, consumerism was valued in modern India but not by the participants in this study; economic independence was valued by both modern Indians and the participants; and sexual expression was celebrated in modern India but not by the participants. These modern soap operas reignited this mismatch between participants and modern India, reminding them that in modern India they were not cultural insiders. Being cast as a cultural "other" created a sense of "in-betweenness" for participants, because they had to negotiate their "imagined homeland" with the contemporary iterations of their home culture.

Although the existing communication literature on ethnic media showed that diasporic groups enjoyed ethnic media because of cultural proximity, the responses of the participants showed that over time, changes in the home country culture were reflected in media, and these changes reduced the cultural relevance of these shows for older members of the Indian diaspora in the United States. Studies about ethnic media popularity and cultural proximity among immigrants should thus take into account the changing nature of cultures and explore additional reasons to explain the continued engagement of immigrant audiences with ethnic media. In addition, gender emerges as an important construct for maintaining cultural proximity.

Ethnic media have been found to help in the cross-cultural adaptation of immigrants by helping reduce the stress of acculturation and alienation immigrants might feel as a result of being marginalized in their host country. However, if immigrant groups cannot identify with the images in the media about their particular home culture, these media might further exacerbate their sense of alienation.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is that it addresses a specific cohort of Asian Indians based on when they migrated to the United States and developed their television-viewing habits. This study does not apply to the entire Indian diaspora in the United States, because later generations would have watched television in India before they migrated to the United States. Later generations would also have a different sense of nostalgia for India and even a different "imagined" homeland.

Future Study

These Indian programs on the satellite dish were not available to this generation of Asian Indians when they were raising their children. By the time Indian programs became available on the satellite dish, the children of these participants had graduated from college and were married and settled in their own homes. However, future studies could address how Indian programs are being used to maintain Indian culture with grandchildren.

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Notes

1. *Ethnic media* are defined as “broadcast, print, and digital communication channels that serve a particular cultural or racial group. This definition does not impose boundaries such as geographic location, size, scope or ownership” (Johnson, 2010, p.108). The Chicago school’s early work by sociologists such as Robert Park looked at the significance of foreign-language media (especially newspapers for immigrant populations) and found that they “preserve(s) old memories [and are] the gateway to new experiences” (Park, 1922/1970, p. 449). However, here the authors are less concerned with the role of ethnic media in the acculturation process and more interested in its role in maintaining ties with home culture. Ethnic media are not necessarily produced by members of a diasporic group, but diasporic populations use media from their country of origin to stay connected with their homeland. Diasporic media refer to media of people displaced from their homeland and may be called transnational media or migrant media; also, diasporic media can be more nation-state-oriented than ethnic-oriented (Georgiou, Bailey & Harindranath, 2007; Johnson, 2010; Kosnick, 2007; Sun, 2005).
2. Asian Indians also refer to Indian immigrants in this study.
3. The “joint family” is when the sons stay with their parents. After they marry, their wives (the daughters-in-law) come and live in the same home where their mother-in-law and father-in-law lives. All the sons and their wives and the children learn to live in one house and learn to get along.
4. The imagined homeland fulfills a nostalgic desire of immigrants “to recreate a lost home” (Anderson, 1992; Moorti, 2003, p. 356).
5. “Modern” is used to refer to contemporary conditions, which include current ambivalences in Indian society related to the coexistence of tradition and foreign influences. This version of modernity does not replicate Western modernity, but it also challenges Independence-era versions of nationalism without rejecting the significance of a national identity (Chatterjee, 1997).

6. Ramayana is a Sanskrit epic poem that tells the story of the Hindu God Rama, whose wife, Sita, is abducted. The story Ramayana explores human values.
7. In Indian media, the archetype of Sita functions as a representation of virtuous womanhood, by celebrating gentleness, piety, and faithfulness to husband and nation (Ranganathan, 2010).
8. In this context, “Western” means “American” because American culture was the reference point of Western culture for our participants.
9. Prasad (1998) and Rajadhyaksha (2003), authors who have written extensively on this topic.

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