Abstract for PAA

Immigrants to USA from India and Pakistan- National and Transnational Practices and Impacts

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The events of September 11th 2001, revealed, more powerfully than any academic study, how radically the boundaries of social life are changing. Increasing numbers of contemporary migrants do not sever their ties to their countries of origin, or exchange one membership for another. Instead, they sustain economic, political, and religious ties to their homelands even as they work, vote, and pray in the countries that receive them.

While most scholars now acknowledge the salience of these ties, transnational migration studies are still the subject of much debate. Critics claim that much of this work "samples on the dependent variable," and that as a result, we cannot assess how widespread transnational practices are. Others say that migrants always sustained strong ties to their homelands but that earlier studies failed to capture these dynamics because they did not use a transnational lens. Still others argue that while transnational ties may be important for the first generation, they will not figure

prominently in the lives of the children of immigrants. Finally, some detractors rightly claim that the word "transnationalism" has been used to describe everything under the sun. As a result, we have a very crude account of what is and what is not actually transnational, based largely on the experiences of migrants from the same region with similar socioeconomic characteristics. Not enough comparative work has been done and too little attention has been paid to the factors which explain variations in the transnational migration experience.

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Emigration to the U.S. from Asia in general, and from South Asia in particular, has become a global phenomenon. This is because close to 56 percent of the world's population lives in Asia and about 22 percent lives in South Asia. Emigration began over two hundred years ago in response to the high demand for labor in the newly-established British colonies throughout the world. In response to rapid post-war development, labor migration from the sub-continent to the United Kingdom once again gained momentum. At the same time, the new US Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 opened the door for immigrants from South Asia to the United States, initiating a heightened stream to the region that still remains strong today.

According to the U.S. Census, the Asian population increased from about 1.4 percent in 1980 to over 3.9 percent in 2000. The majority came from South Asia (predominantly from India and Pakistan). Thus, while during the 1980-2000 period, the overall Asian population in the United States grew by 3.4 fold, (from 3.3 million to 11.1 million), those from South Asian countries experienced a five fold increase (from .36 to 1.8 million). In 2000, among those claiming to be of South Asian ancestry, 55 percent were born in India and another 12.5% in Pakistan. Similarly, data available from the website of Naturalization and Immigration Services (NIS) reveal that during the past decade

(1990-99) of the total 9.8 million immigrants admitted legally to the United States, 3.8% came from India and 1.2% from Pakistan. Whereas, in 2001, of the 349,776 legal immigrants who originated in Asian countries the largest number 70,290 (20%) came from India and another 16,488 (4.7%) from Pakistan. The 2000 US Census indicates that these immigrants are highly educated. Seventy-six percent have college or higher degrees. The figures were much lower among foreign born Chinese (58%) and those who immigrated from Korea (57%); Japan (43%); the Philippines (27%); US born Whites (30%) and US born Blacks(15%).

We seek to explore how these newcomers balance the process of incorporation into the United States with the maintenance of enduring transnational ties. To do so, we use ethnographic and quantitative data. We argue that assimilation and transnational involvements are not antithetical to one another. The immigrant experience is not a linear, irreversible journey from one membership to another. Rather, migrants pivot back and forth between sending, receiving and other orientations at different stages of their lives. They supplement the income they earn in the US with investments they still have in their homelands. They raise their children during the school year in their countries of destination and usually send them back to their for vacations because they want them to be culturally and linguistically fluent in

both places. Some are fortunate enough to be able to move up the US and homeland socioeconomic ladder at the same time, while for others, keeping feet in one place impedes their ability to move up in another. And the more their lives are grounded in legal, health care and pension systems on both sides of the border, the more likely it is that their transnational lives will endure. We argue that newcomers will not fully assimilate or remain entirely focused on their homelands but continue to craft some combination of the two.

This paper utilizes data from three sources. We used a one percent sample for the U.S. Census to determine the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of South Asian immigrants. We used yearly statistics from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) between 1989 and 2003 to explore age and gender migration trends. To examine the transnational ties these migrants sustain, we use ethnographic data on immigrant families living in Boston, Massachusetts from Gujarat, India and Karachi, Pakistan as well as the family members who stayed behind in both places of origin.