Diasporic Contradictions: Indian (Hindu) Women Negotiating Canadian Higher Education

by

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Abstract

Tradition and modernity are often viewed as strong yet opposing influences on the lives of Indian women living in Canada. In particular, the customs and religion of the homeland are assumed to conflict with the modern aspirations of these women. This study utilizes standpoint theory as a framework to question and push against this popular portrayal, and examines how Indian (Hindu) values influence, challenge and contribute to the educational and professional advancement of diasporic women. By analyzing qualitative interviews conducted with recently immigrated and second-generation Indian (Hindu) women, this study reveals that these women take on the role of an ideal amalgamation of Eastern and Western practices and navigate through their educational and professional choices in a manner that accommodates both. Traditional values and modernity are not always mutually exclusive, as evidenced by my participants who mobilize both in order to achieve particular sites of classed and ethnic empowerment.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

I begin this first chapter by speaking to my own interest and investment into the topics studied in this research project. I follow that with a discussion of the interchangeability of the terms 'Indian' and 'Hindu' within this work, and explicit what I mean by using these terms. I then state my research questions and provide some background information to situate my work within current notions of Western and Eastern ideologies. I also detail the impact of these ideologies on Indian (Hindu) society, focusing on Hindu women's lives in particular. I then discuss current literature on the experiences of diasporic Indian women in Canada, particularly focusing on their education and profession. I next provide an overview of my study participants and of the study itself, and disclose some of the main findings and themes that emerged from this project including it's scholarly significance. I finally give a brief organizational breakdown of the rest of this thesis to allow for easier reading and navigation.

Positioning Myself in the Research

I was 10 years old when my parents first considered moving to Canada from India. It was a big decision for all those involved, and one that had many serious repercussions for me. After all, I was leaving behind my best friends, my doting grandparents, my school, my home, and all that was familiar to me. But instead of trepidation and anxiety, my reaction at the time could best be described as a combination of excitement, happiness and pride. Why would a little girl be so happy to leave her loving relatives, friends and a privileged upper-middle class life to move to a far and unknown land? When asked this question by an interviewer at the Canadian embassy, I answered with all the honesty and sincerity of a 10 year old – “because Canada is full of white people!”

Today, nearly 18 years later, I consider myself a feminist and have a deep interest in studying diasporic women’s issues. Yet I wonder how much of my 10-year old self continues to reside within me? What were the tropes that earned my admiration of this country without even seeing it firsthand? Have I truly moved away from being in awe at a world of ‘white’ people? How invested am I in the colonial messages that I culturally inherited from centuries of European domination? These are some of the questions that I keep in the back of my mind as I write this thesis.
I chanced upon this topic of interest for my research at the very onset of my graduate program at OISE/UT. I was a newly married woman living away from my husband to begin my graduate work, and for the first time it occurred to me how important my education was for both myself and my family-members. There was a great deal of encouragement for women in my diasporic community to pursue higher education, an attribute that was recognized as positive but one that came with its own complications. For instance, I noticed several parents (including mine) insisting upon their children achieving higher education irrespective of future career goals and interests. In fact, I recall my grandfather purchasing medical-school preparatory books when I was in middle-school, hoping that I will spend my summer days poring over them rather than playing outside. Needless to say, he was disappointed.

I found the link between Indian women, education and profession to be particularly fascinating, especially since this was a very personal journey for me. At graduate school, I began to take a scholarly interest in this attribute of Indian communities, and found Western scholarship to be lacking in their diligence to address the matter. I found much scholarly work that describes the social and emotional lives of diasporic women, but very little about their educational and professional pursuits. This thesis is my effort as as step towards filling this gap.

**Indian culture or Hindu culture?**

India provides one of the largest pools of immigrants to Canada, comprising about 12% of incoming immigrants from the years 2001-2006 (Statistics Canada, 2009). Important research has been conducted on the impact of introducing Indian traditions into western societies, and much of this work assumes Indian culture to be one that is essentially 'Hindu' in nature. Despite the strong presence of several other religions in India, the culture of the nation is often essentialized to be one that is predominantly influenced by the Hindu religious tradition.

This is particularly note-worthy given that the first Indians to settle in Canada were mostly of the Sikh faith (Johnston, 1999). Due to the extreme anti-Asian sentiments demonstrated by Canadians in the early 1900s, racially charged exclusionary policies were enforced that prevented large-scale immigration of Indians into Canada until the second wave of immigration (Goutor, 2007). With the acceptance of Pierre Trudeau’s multicultural policies in the 1970s, Canada opened its doors to highly skilled and educated immigrants from various
counties across the world who were now encouraged to settle in Canada (Ralston, 1988). Following the policy-level encouragement of family re-unification, many Indian immigrants have since moved to Canada with their spouses and families, and brought the cultures and traditions of their home country into the Canadian society, academy and workplace (Dasgupta, 1986).

The incoming 'traditions' and 'culture' however, are often viewed within the context of a Hindu religious tradition, perhaps due to the large historic presence of this religion's influence in the sub-continent, and the large population of the nation (80.5%) that identifies as Hindu (Census India, 2001). The Hindu religion is not monogamous in origin, nor homogenous in practice. It is a medley of several ancient indigenous religious practices of the subcontinent, and has also been influenced and transformed by the other religions of the country, such as Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and Buddhism. Within the context of this thesis however, the notion of an 'Indian' culture and tradition is often used interchangeably with that of a 'Hindu' culture and tradition. This replaceability is a reflection of my participant's experiences and narratives, as all of them identified Indian tradition within specifically Hindu terms. I am certainly not suggesting that all Indians experience their culture in the same context, however in light of my participant's narratives, these two concepts are fluid and mixed throughout this thesis.

The dominant ideology of Hinduism that is presumed within this work are guided by the ancient Hindu text *Manusmriti* - codified laws of Manu (Jain, 1998). The roots of current Hinduism and Hindu culture along with the rules of conduct for Indian (Hindu) men and women, are seen to have originated from the authoritative ideas of this text. In particular, the role of woman described within this text as a chaste, obedient, dependent and dutiful wife have carried over through the millennium, and continue to influence the roles of contemporary Indian women today. It is these age-old patriarchal ideologies from India, with strict social hierarchies and expectations of conformity and domesticity from women (Leslie, 1989), that are said to stand in opposition to the individuality, independence and personal freedom that characterizes the West (Sircar, 2000; Nayar, 2004). For this reason, Indian diasporic women are often portrayed as caught in the middle of a culture-clash, distressed and conflicted when they attempt to maintain their traditional roles and values rather than redefine themselves based on Western ideologies (Nayar, 2004; Dasgupta, 1998).
Such a presumption however, contradicts the trend of high educational and professional participation that marks South Asian women in Canada (Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2008; Hussain & Bagguley, 2007). There is little academic literature studying the possibility that traditional Indian values and customs may encourage and enable Indian diasporic women to fulfil their educational, professional and personal aspirations in Canada. This gap is particularly problematic as it can lead to the stigmatization of Indian culture as one that is static in nature and stagnant in its oppressiveness and patriarchy. The inherent diversity of the culture, and its empowering and enabling aspects remain concealed within such a view.

**Research Questions**

This research is an attempt to push against the popular portrayal of Indian (Hindu) traditional values as inevitably antagonistic to the needs of Indian diasporic women. I study the following two related questions in this thesis:

1) In what ways might Indian (Hindu) traditional values and cultures influence and contribute to the educational and professional lives of Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in Canada?

2) How are Indian (Hindu) traditions and values utilized by Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in order to enhance their educational and professional lives in Canada?

In studying these questions, I complicate the dominant narratives that construct Indian women as helpless victims of patriarchy while unveiling some of the new strengths and challenges faced by diasporic women as they navigate through Canadian higher education. In this attempt, I view hetero-normative patriarchy, race, socioeconomic class, religion and gender as multiple interlocking systems that construct particular patterns of both empowerment and dis-empowerment for Indian (Hindu) diasporic women living in Canada.

**Background to the Problem**

Research on Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in the West often categorize these women as possessing distinctly ‘traditional’ values (characterized through arranged marriages, adhering to Hindu religious principles, and having hierarchical and patriarchal notions about the location of men and women in society). These values are projected as sharply contrasting from the ‘modern’ or ‘liberal’ values of those who belong to mainstream Western societies (or who are
well-assimilated within the same.) ‘Western’ values are defined through notions of independence and autonomy, free choice marriages, increasingly secular ideologies, and a favourable attitude towards woman’s liberation movements and feminist ideas (Naidoo, 1986; Vaidyanathan and Naidoo, 1988).

Thus, ‘East’ and ‘West’ are often viewed as two polar identities, binaries standing in opposition with each other. The ‘East/West’, ‘Indian/Canadian’, and ‘traditional/modern’ categories are perceived to be so oppositional that the only possible conclusion of the resulting culture-conflict is emotional and psychological chaos and trauma. Handa (2003) reminds us that these oppositional categories are not simply descriptive, but rather evaluative in a deeply racist manner. While the modernity of the West is associated with independence, progress, innovation, and superiority; Eastern traditions are equated with primitive societies, outdated customs and regressive practices. In her research on South Asian immigrant women in Canada, Handa says that “the third world, the minority, the ‘other’, is associated more with pre-modernity and is seen as possessing more culture and ethnicity than the dominant first world majority.” (Handa, 2003, p.42). Thus, both ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ are viewed as opposite ends on the line of social change. While Western (European/North American) social, political and economical models are deemed as progressive, Eastern societies are perceived as backward because they are yet to fully shed their traditions and enter the ‘Western’ way of life (Jain, 1998).

According to such literature then, it is the traditions and religions of the East that pull these cultures backward, while the West advances forward unaffected by such regressive concepts. Very much in accordance to such thought, South Asian women are presented in many academic and popular literature as meek and docile characters. As a function of their regressive culture, these women are seen to be burdened with excessive family pressures to maintain their religious and traditional values, even as they enter Western society. The family and ethnic community together are seen to put great constrains on South Asian women, leaving them with fewer opportunities to pursue their personal ambitions (Hussain & Bagguley, 2007).

Thus, the principle obstacles that hinder the progress of these women are understood to be their own cultures and traditions, and rarely any external factors such as imperialism, colonialism, systemic racism or the West-centric educational system. Common-sense racism
erases how whiteness and the dominant 'white culture' are complicit in the process of constructing Asian women as a highly subjugated, dominated and 'lesser' version of their Western counterparts. The impact of hetero-normative patriarchy on the lives of Eastern women, viewed through the lens of western feminist cultural imperialism, acts as a faulty gauge that presents Western cultures as more 'modern' and 'progressive' than cultures of the East. Furthermore, the gender ideologies and hetero-normative patriarchal oppressions that exist within the West are largely ignored and negated by such intense focus on (and demonizing of) the Eastern brand of culture and patriarchy.

The concepts of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ are perceived as entirely antithetical in such works, as it is assumed that one cannot achieve modernity without discarding all that is traditional. Such a polar binary between tradition and modernity however, is questioned by some researchers who recognize that ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ do not have to function as opposite concepts. As early as 1967, Joseph Gusfield proposed that the movement towards modernity does not have to be linear, and nor does it have to involve restriction or conflict. He suggested that “modernity does not necessarily weaken tradition, while traditional forms may supply support for, as well as against, change” (Gusfield, 1967, p.351).

Consider for instance the works of many of the prominent nineteenth-century nationalist reformers in India such as Rajaram Mohan Roy and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Close, 1929). Both these reforms made use of the religions and traditions at their disposal to successfully challenge and change the customs of their society. Mohan Roy appealed to ancient Hindu scriptures to argue that the practice of Sati (widow annihilation) is not condoned or justified in ancient Hinduism. He argued that such derogatory practices against women are a modern addition to Hinduism and not part of the original customs of the religion. Similarly, during the fight for Indian national freedom, Gandhi liberally borrowed from traditional Hindu mythologies and symbols to mobilize the masses, and forge a mass movement against British colonialism (Jain, 1998). It is clear then, that when confronted with challenging new situations, individuals have the ability to go back to their past, filter through age-old traditions, cultures and religions, and use those to help deal with the present situation. ‘Tradition’ and ‘modern’ as two ends of an unbridgeable binary is a fallacy, and often a Eurocentric, colonial and invented
construct (Jain, 1998). The characteristics that these two terms have come to signify, can easily overlap and coexist without resulting in distress or conflict (Gusfield, 1967; Jain, 1998).

Given that the lines between ‘tradition’ and ‘modern’ are often blurry, a dismissal of the value of Indian/Hindu traditions and cultures within the Western context does not take into account the possibility that many Indian diasporic women in the West find the culture and religions of their home-country to be a source of support and personal strength in their new homes (Naidoo, 2003; Samuel, 2009; Rao, 1998). For instance, Helen Ralston (1992) says that the stress and trauma from the migration experience greatly increases the significance of religion in the lives of South Asian immigrant women. Her research with first generation Indian (Hindu) women in Canada indicates that a revived ethno-religious consciousness among the women greatly aids in acculturating them to the alien customs of their new country. By becoming members of Indian/Hindu cultural and religious institutions in Canada, the women were able to maintain and rejuvenate vital aspects of their religion and ethnicity. They socialized with fellow ethnic members, gathered together for religious celebrations, and took the effort to transmit important religious ideologies and beliefs to their children (Ralston, 1992).

**Indian Diasporic Women in the West**

Recent studies conducted with Indian diasporic women show that there has been a significant increase in the numbers of South Asian women pursuing higher education and professions in Western countries. Furthermore, the high professional aspirations of these women are strongly supported by their families and ethnic communities (Rothon et.al., 2009; Hussain & Bagguley, 2007). Family members are often cited as a valuable source of support (both emotional and financial) by young Indian diasporic women pursuing higher education in the West, and a vast majority of Indian parents from varying socioeconomic backgrounds encourage their children to pursue high levels of education (Blumberg & Dwaraki, 1980). In fact, children of Indian immigrants are the second largest immigrant group in Canada to attain university degrees, often surpassing the educational level of their parents (Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2008).

Research conducted by Naidoo (1985) shows that Indian diasporic women in Canada believe women should have equal opportunities for personal growth as men; and have higher educational aspirations for their own daughters as compared to Anglo-Saxon respondents. Despite the support that these women have from their families to pursue their higher education, research
exploring South Asian women’s experiences in Western universities reveal that marginalization and discrimination are also part of their educational and professional experiences. Additional factors such as religion, socioeconomic class, language, country of origin and country of living may also be relevant factors that influence Indian (Hindu) diasporic women’s higher education.

**Participant Overview**

Fourteen participants took part of this study, all of whom were Hindu women between the ages of 18 and 35 who belonged to the Indian diaspora in Canada. The women were either first-generation immigrants or born in Canada to parents who directly immigrated from India. For the purpose of this study, I did not include participants who had lived in other countries prior to moving to Canada. All the participants are either current students attending a Canadian post-secondary institution, or currently employed in Canada after completing their post-secondary education. In order to better understand how length of time spent in Canada might impact my participant's notions of Indian traditions, I separated my participants into two groups. One group had new immigrants who arrived in Canada less than 5 years ago, and the other group had second-generation women who were born in Canada. In addition, I attempted to include participants from a range of careers and socioeconomic class, as I was interested in understanding the classed market relations that organize the experiences of my participants as they navigate Canadian higher education and professional lives. The participants were primarily located through personal contacts as well as campus poster advertising.

**Overview of the Study**

This study was completed over a period of four years. During the first two years, I completed the course-work for my MA program, and found myself constantly revisiting this topic from different angles through my various graduate courses. Upon completing the course-work, I worked to design the study and prepare my thesis proposal. Once the proposal was approved, I set about finding my participants using both my personal contacts and the snow-ball technique (described in the methodology chapter). I was able to find my participants relatively easily, and conducted the interviews in 2012. I then spent the next year analyzing the data and writing my thesis.
Major Findings and Themes

Race, class, gender and hetero-normative patriarchy and religion serve as multiple interlocking systems that greatly shape the lives and experiences of Indian (Hindu) diasporic women living in Canada. Indian traditions and culture, as understood by my participants, were marked through specific gendered and classed markers that were borrowed from the repertoire of symbols and rituals from the homeland. Specifically, notions of virtue, chastity and obedience continue to remain essential markers of Indian womanhood, irrespective of the length of time spent in the West. Both the new-immigrant and second-generation participants discussed their inclusion within the Indian culture through their roles as the keepers and transmitters of the nation's (Hindu) culture. Similarly, nearly all of the participants also identified education as a key component of Indian culture, wherein women were expected and encouraged to attain high levels of education and suitable white-collar professions. The purpose behind this expectation were varied, but included the ability to be self-sufficient, gain economic mobility, improve family status, and to invite suitable marriage alliances.

The 'traditional' roles and expectations placed on the women however, were largely selected by the diasporic community to serve it's own purpose. In the choice of subject for higher education for instance, the women were often expected to obey their parent's wishes, sometimes to the detriment of their own desires. When the women did make their own independent choices, they found themselves hiding these from both family and community members. Similarly, the expectations of women as primary home-makers have continued on as part of Indian tradition, with very little modification made to account for the fact that the women were now employed and working full-time hours outside the home.

While access to education is thought to bring independence and autonomy to women's lives, the context of their education remains embedded within hetero-normative, gendered and classed relations. The women often deferred to parental and societal choices of profession and understood their education to play a role in future marriage alliances. Their education also had a stake in their investment into middle-class(ness), as careers that did not meet the community's standards of prestige were discouraged. Thus, socioeconomic class, both present and past, was found to play a significant role in shaping the lives of diasporic Indian women in Canada. The only participant in this study who did not place an excessive value on higher education is also the
lone working-class participant from a working-class background in India. Length of time spent in Canada and relationship status did not play as significant a role in shaping the lives of diasporic women as much as socioeconomic class and class mobility did.

Within this framework of home and host culture however, diasporic women also navigated through particular sites of power and privilege. All the participants felt socially and geographically empowered by their location in the West, and described themselves as 'a-typical' and separated from the popular notions of subservient and servile Indian womanhood. As the ideal amalgamation of East and West, these women exerted power over their home-land counterparts who are imagined as passive and submissive due to patriarchal gender relations that exist in India. However, the same relations also shape the experiences of diasporic women in Canada as they find themselves unable (or unwilling) to negotiate an egalitarian relationship with their spouses. Being primarily responsible for the domestic responsibilities due to their gendered 'traditional' roles, the women choose to accept professional stagnation or bring in outside help, rather than negotiate a more equal division of labour with their partners.

Systems of race and racism also shaped the experiences of these women, particularly as they feel social isolation and intellectual rejection in the presence of a dominantly Caucasian audience. However, the women coped with this situation by distancing themselves from their educational institutions and building a network of friendship with fellow racialized colleagues. Within these alliances however, sites of power are negotiated by bridging cultural and historic proximity to the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture while inventing distance from Muslim and black communities. Thus, individual and collective worth is constantly negotiated through historically grounded interlocking systems of race, class, gender, patriarchy and religion.

**Scholarly Significance**

This research project delves into the lives of Indian diasporic women with an intent to understand and highlight the historically grounded and interlocking system of power and privilege that shape their experiences in Canada. It pushes for a greater pluralization of feminist literature on marginalized women that de-centers dominant hegemonic notions of third world patriarchy. It also sheds a feminist light onto scholarly works of 'tradition', 'culture' and 'modernity' while speaking to the invented-ness, fluidity and flexibility of these concepts.
Organization of the Thesis

In the upcoming chapter, I discuss the theoretical frameworks and ideas that guide my work. Specifically, I speak about the standpoint theory from a feminist perspective while considering 'strategic essentialism' as a strategy to conduct my research. I also theoretically engage with the concepts of 'tradition', 'modernity' and 'cultural hybridity' and discuss how they play out within my topic of study. In the following chapter, I review the key literature that sets the foundation for the themes and topics that are discussed in this thesis. This chapter is subdivided into several sections wherein I discuss the socio-religious premise to the role of women in India, the significance of when and how Indian women began to receive formal education, and the function of the Indian nationalist movement in providing many of the constructs that continue to be used within the Indian diasporic community today. Furthermore, I also discuss several issues that concern Indian women living in Canada, including their roles as cultural transmitters and the significance of their education and profession.

In the subsequent chapter, I discuss my methodology in greater detail and provide my rationale for choosing qualitative interviews as my method of data collection. I also discuss my manner of participant recruitment and the interview process in detail. Included in this chapter is a brief description of each of the individual participants, along with two tables that summarize the information for easy access. In the results chapter that follows, I present my findings in four themes intended to highlight the intrinsic complications and contradictions that lie within the lives and choices of Indian diasporic women living in the West. This chapter predominantly contains the participant's voices and weaves their narratives together to create a multidimensioned perspective.

In the subsequent discussion chapter, I discuss the major themes that emerged within this project and highlight the inherent racial, social and classed dimensions of my participant's lives. Finally, in the conclusion chapter, I summarize my results and discuss the scholarly significance as well as some of the limitations of this research project.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Considerations

In this chapter I describe some of the major theoretical frameworks that guide my work. I use standpoint theory as the stepping stone upon which I develop this work about Indian women's educational and professional journeys in Canada. I engage with Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'strategic essentialism' to intentionally organize particular aspects of the diasporic identity and identify goals that will benefit the collective. In doing so, I use Sherene Razack's concept of 'interlocking systems of domination', and view race, class, gender, hetero-normative patriarchy and religion as historically grounded systems of power and oppression which shape the experiences of Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in Canada. In addition, I theoretically engage with the concepts of 'culture', 'tradition', 'modernity' and 'cultural hybridity' in order to ground my work and my participant's experiences within these dominant frameworks.

I began this project with attention to my own stance as a feminist researcher. Feminism, as a political, literary and academic movement, is a response against the exclusion and degradation of female voices in an almost exclusively male account of the world. The aim of feminism as a framework is to encourage, respect and legitimize female narratives while challenging the historical subordination, silencing and passivity of the same (Bhopal, 2010). Thus a crucial part of feminist work is the intent to support authentic accounts, histories and narratives of all women.

Despite this immense potential for possibilities however, are all women’s voices heard? Gauging from the content of the bulk of Canadian literature on women, it might be easy for a reader to imagine that women of colour are a negligible part of Canada’s living and labouring population. Furthermore, these silences might also suggest that there is not much to be learned from studying these women (Bannerji, 1995). Himani Bannerji, in her provocative article on anti-racism and feminism, states that, “in volumes of material produced in the West on women, with all the talk of ‘her land’ and ‘her story’, our (coloured women’s) absences have not ceased; our voices, if we have any, are very small. I have rarely....come across a framework which addresses or legitimizes the existence and concerns of women like us, or helps give voices strength and authenticity. How then can we speak of ‘gaining voices’, ‘shattering silences’, of sharing experiences and being empowered?” (Bannerji, 1995, p. 43).
Thus Bannerji, along with other prominent social scientists, argues that in the majority of feminist work, the plurality of ‘women’ is often replaced by the singularity of ‘woman’, whereby all women are essentialized by the notion of ‘sisterhood’, their subjugated gender status overriding all other differentiating factors including race, social class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, (dis)ability, and much more. Thus, all of women-kind is superficially brought together as one - with the same issues, the same concerns, and the same solutions (Lugones and Spelman, 1983). These universal notions of ‘womanhood’ or ‘sisterhood’ however, largely neglect the social contexts within which gender relations and identities emerge (Mohanty, 1988). When the limitations of an academic work are not proclaimed but rather legitimized as issues relevant to all women, then one group’s (generally those of white, middle-class, heterosexual Christian women) interest is masqueraded as that of every woman’s (Bannerji, 1995).

In this manner, research and literature that delves extensively into the lives and experiences of some women, is given authority and legitimacy through the pseudo-universal relevance to all women. The legitimate act of writing about the specific experiences of certain women becomes an oppressive act when claimed to be the experience of all. This form of silencing produces a feminist body of knowledge that is marked by the absence of the true voices of minoritized women, who remain in the shadows of research, literature and social consciousness (Lugones and Spelman, 1983). Thus, traditional feminism, despite its encouraging goals, does not always provide the needed space to bring out historically silenced voices of women who have been marginalized due to their race, class, colour and/or sexuality. It is for this reason that I turn towards the Standpoint Theory to guide me in conducting this work.

**Standpoint Theory**

Standpoint theory is a powerful tool that can accompany feminist research to counteract oppression (Hundleby, 1998). According to Hundleby, it increases the variety of available knowledge perspectives by both addressing the problem of marginalization and by counteracting the tendency of oppression to limit knowledge. A standpoint is an orientation or perspective from which one views the world, and this perspective is greatly shaped by one's circumstances and physical realities.
Standpoint theory argues that there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced, as knowledge is both situated and perspectival (Hekman, 1997). Furthermore, one's material life both structures and sets limits to an understanding of social relations. Thus, it is the very material realities of one's life – such as race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status and ability that shape all aspects of one's life, including how one understands and communicates, and what one values and dismisses. These material realities lay the foundation to the power relations that govern people's lives, as they negotiate through an interlocking system of privileges and oppressions that is further shaped by their own positions, outlooks and viewpoints (Tisdell, 1993).

For instance, my perspective as an able-bodied, heterosexual and middle-class woman of colour living in Canada has positioned me within a particular interlocking system of both privilege and oppression, and these material realities of my life have significantly impacted both my access to and production of knowledge. My worldview is largely a result of my standpoint, and the systemic inequalities of race, class, gender and sexuality have positioned me in a particular system of social hierarchy. It follows then, that reality can be perceived differently as material situations differ. Standpoint Theory supports the view that the perspectives and viewpoints of a marginalized population is essential in order to create an objective account of the world (Olesen, 2005). These perspectives of people who are oppressed or marginalized in society lend an objective account to dominant narratives, and further allows them to question and challenge the oppressive status quo (Buzzanell, 2003).

The reason for this, explains Hundleby (1998), is that marginalized people are never wholly outsiders, but rather 'outsiders within'. In their life experiences, they have to learn to negotiate their own environment that is limited by race, class, religion, sexuality and so on, while also mediating the intricacies of the worlds of those in power. Those who are subservient are intimately involved in the lives and mechanics of those in power, and so have the potential to see political relationships more clearly than those who depend on and are advantaged by these relationships. This potential can provide immense epistemic advantage as it can reveal social and political problems that are difficult to recognize while being at the centre of society (Hundleby, 1998).
Thus, the standpoint of the oppressed is a more impartial account of the world, since it is closer to representing the interests of society as a whole rather than simply that of one particular section of the population. Furthermore, the troubles and struggles of the oppressed are not easily visible to the ruling class, whereas the oppressed are likely to be better able to explain the standpoint of the ruling class (Jaggar, 2004).

The marginalized, subordinated and silenced nature of coloured women (Bannerji, 1995) can often render them oppressed, and this location provides them with a different understanding of the world than may be available through dominant narratives. The inclusion of their perspectives allows us to obtain a more accurate and undistorted view of the world. Racialized and marginalized women have a greater potential for understanding this world-view, as they offer not just a different perspective but a more comprehensive one due to their location as 'outsiders within'. However, Hekman (1997) reminds us that a feminist standpoint is not always a given, even for the oppressed. She says, “The nature of their oppression is not obvious to all women; it is only through feminist analysis that the feminist standpoint can be articulated” (Hekman, 1997, p.346). Thus, it is only through analysis, questioning and reasoning that a feminist standpoint is achieved.

Furthermore, it is critical for those with little power to actively understand, articulate and promote their knowledge, as there is little incentive among power-holders to consider other perspectives, particularly those detrimental to the status quo. Jaggar (2004) writes that at any period in history, the predominant world-view is a reflection of the values and interests of the dominant class. If knowledge is produced in the hands of a certain class, it follows then that the values and interests inherent in the said knowledge will reflect that of the knowledge-producers. The ruling class labels their knowledge as actuality and remains largely insulated from the suffering and oppression of other classes. They are likely to be convinced of the merits of their own ideology and have an inherent interest in concealing their domination and exploitation of other populations. Within their world-view, the present societal organization is justified, and the sufferings of others are portrayed as chosen, deserved, or even non-existent (Jaggar, 2004).

The oppressed, on the other hand, directly suffers from the present organization of society, and are more likely to realize that something is missing from the dominant world-view.
They might feel the need to search for new interpretations of reality and develop new ways of understanding the world that are a more accurate representation of their reality and less distorted alternative to the dominant standpoint (Jaggar, 2004).

Since standpoint theory addresses the uniformity in experiences of oppression, it has often been accused of essentialism – wherein all of women-kind are essentialized into one and the differences among them are neglected. “Essentialism presupposes that a group or a category of objects or people share some defining features exclusive to the members of this particular group or category” (Eide, 2010, p.66). This accusation was particularly strong against early standpoint theory, as it was more likely then for feminists to speak for all women as though they were united by their essence of womanhood. In the late 1980s however, standpoint theory moved from assumptions of a common feminine essence to an interest in the differences among women and their material realities (Hundleby, 1998). Nevertheless, the commonality in the experiences of women weren't entirely rejected either.

Patricia Hill Collins (1997) argues that the idea of a standpoint refers to shared histories based on shared locations within an interlocking system of power and oppression. She articulates that “standpoint theory places less emphasis on individual experiences within socially constructed groups than on the social conditions that construct such groups” (Collins, 1997, p.375). As a theory, standpoint focuses on the common location of a particular group within hierarchical power relations rather than the results of the actions and decisions of individuals within the groups. Thus, categories such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality are not simply descriptive, but rather are the key devices that generate systemic inequality within groups.

Collins further asserts that “groups who share common placement in hierarchical power relations also share common experiences in such power relations” (Collins, 1997, p.377). Their shared experiences lead to shared angles of vision which allows for the interpretation of their experiences in a comparable fashion. However, the unit of analysis being a group, it is possible for individuals within that group to have different experiences and to interpret and analyze their experiences in different ways. Thus, using the group as the focal point does not lead to essentialism, but rather, “provides space for individual agency” (Collins, 1997, p.377).
Strategic Essentialism

A vital element within this discussion of standpoint theory is the concept of a 'strategic essentialism', a term coined by Gayatri Spivak who spoke of using essentialism to support political work (Eide, 2010). It can be defined as “the ways in which subordinate or marginalized social groups may temporarily put aside local differences in order to forge a sense of collective identity through which they band together in political movements” (Dourish, 2008). Strategic essentialism is the idea that while groups may be highly differentiated internally, it is sometimes useful to essentialize parts of their group identity in order to achieve collective objectives. By extracting the core element of a group it is possible to strengthen the group's presence in society while forming links of solidarity. Thus, even though terms such as “Indian” or “Asian” are problematic in their erasure of significant distinctions within the group, they nonetheless aid in identity formation that support important political works (Spivak, 1987).

The risk of engaging in strategic essentialism however, is when the essentializing is not a result of the group's choice after deliberate assessment of their socio-political options, but rather forced upon them by media conventions that essentialize to serve the purpose of those with greater power (Eide, 2010). Thus, as a scholar who is using Standpoint Theory as a framework for my work, it is vital for me to be mindful of the power differentials and hierarchies that are implicit in the social fabric that my participants and I live in, while bringing to light the power relations hidden within traditional forms of knowledge and knowledge production.

While women’s oppression is often viewed as occurring at the levels of race, class and gender, scholars have since noted that these categories alone do not sufficiently meet the realities of immigrant women in Canada. Moving beyond the race-class-gender triad, immigrant women also face issues of financial constrains, language barriers, inter-generational conflicts, cultural differences, work-family balance, and family-links from home countries (Ng & Ramirez, 1981). Thus, I recognize that in order to support the authentic accounts and lived realities of Indian diasporic women in Canada, I need to understand the multiple and interlocking systems that shape my participant's lives in dynamic and unpredictable ways. Pursuing this line of thought has made it possible for me to delve deeply into my participant's narratives and discern how their
experiences are shaped by various systems of oppression, and also how these very systems are produced and sustained by their own actions.

Pursuing Sherene Razack's (1998) notion of interlocking systems of domination, I have come to understand that structural systems of oppression like sexism or racism does not exist in a vacuum, but rather are dependent on and interlock with other systems such as imperialism and class-ism in order to create interlocking systems. Within this, each system of oppression relies on the other to give it meaning, and the way to trace these interlocking and symbiotic relationship is through historically specific ways. Razack argues that interlocking systems need one another in order to exist, and we can understand how they organize the experiences of diasporic women by tracing the complex and symbiotic manner through which the systems interact.

Furthermore, in order to understand these complex relations, I believe that it is necessary to be aware of both the sites of empowerment and dis-empowerment, privilege and subordination, as they transform the experiences of the women that I study. I agree with Sherene Razack that when we only focus on our subordination (such as being women of colour or women in a patriarchal society), we might fail to also see the privileges that these subordinations uphold (such as material or class privileges). Razack further argues that we are each implicated in the greater systems of oppression as each one of us acts in ways that reproduce social hierarchies. Failing to understand and address these multiple and interlocking systems will result in the betrayal of the solidarity and comradeship needed to build movements across arenas of political struggles.

In relation to this study, I view race, racism, gender, religion, hetero-normative patriarchy, and socioeconomic class as historically grounded processes of interacting and interlocking systems that are mutually constitutive in shaping the lives of Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in Canada. Furthermore, I also discuss how notions of 'modernity', 'tradition' and 'culture' inter-play within these dynamics and further the impacts of these systems as they shape the experiences of Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in Canada.
Tradition, Modernity and Cultural Hybridity

In discussing the topic of 'Indian traditions' and their impacts on diasporic Indian women, I pay particular heed to Hobsbawm's notion of invented traditions, wherein traditions are seen as a “set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules...(that) seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity from the past” (Hobsbawm, 1983, p.1). With regards to this project, I view the very concept of 'Indian traditions' and women's roles within it, as examples of invented traditions. The traditions and customs of India are as varied as the regions, languages and religions that populate the country, and therefore to essentialize the nation's diversity into a monolithic tradition that is common to all, is in itself a significant sign of it's invented-ness. Furthermore, the roles of women within this tradition are also invented as appropriate responses to various historical situations. For instance, the construction of women as 'saviours of the nation' was largely created during the nationalist movement as a means of encouraging women to actively enter the political arena in the late twentieth century. Similarly, the notion of women as the reservoirs and transmitters of religion and culture is also an invented notion that came to existence because it benefits the purposes of the Indian diasporic community living abroad.

Hobsbawm (1983) further argues that the invention of tradition happens most prominently when a society rapidly transforms, thereby weakening the older and familiar patterns and ways of life. As such, the newly invented traditions are an attempt to establish an appropriate continuity with a distant past by strategically borrowing from the rituals and symbols from the homeland (Hobsbawm, 1983). This is particularly clear in the select aspects of Indian tradition that have come to be accepted and propagated by the Indian diasporic community. The move to the Western world required the invention of traditions that allow strong linkages to a historical and geographical past, and several aspects of diasporic Indian traditions are borrowed from the symbolic and rhetoric collections of the Indian nationalist movement.

As salient as the topic of 'tradition' is to this thesis, so is the concept of 'modernity'. Often viewed as the opposite of tradition and in conflict with it, I visit modernity as an analytic category through the lenses of Frederick Cooper (2005). Cooper offers four distinct perspectives of modernity through which to understand the concept, starting with it being “a long and continuing project central to the history of Western Europe, and in turn defining a goal to which
the rest of the world aspires” (Cooper, 2005, p. 113). It can also be viewed as a “bundle of social, ideological, and political phenomena whose historical roots lie in the West, but at this time is condemned as itself an imperial construct, a global imposition of specifically Western social, economic, and political forms that tames and sterilizes the rich diversity of human experience and the sustaining power of diverse forms of community” (Cooper, 2005, p.113). In a third perspective, it is a distinctly European project and accomplishment that is defended against others, whose cultural baggage renders them unable to attain modernity. And finally, it takes the form of an 'alternative modernity' in which non-Western people develop cultural forms that bring their own perspective to progress, alternatives that are forward-looking but also, as Cooper puts it, “self-consciously distinct” (Cooper, 2005, p.114).

All of these four perspectives laid out by Cooper are valid and contributory to my project. Gauging from my participant's narratives, 'modernity' is often viewed in a positive light wherein it is a phenomena that allows greater access to education and new opportunities for personal and professional gains to diasporic women. Simultaneously however, there is also trepidation regarding the extent to which diasporic women can become 'modern' without losing their 'traditions' and 'culture'. In other words, modernity is viewed as a primarily West-facing phenomena that brings with it the potential to take away historical and cultural inheritance as the diasporic community worries about the next generation becoming too modern. As an attempt to navigate through this binary, an alternative form of modernity is created that attempts to bridge the chasm between East and West. This alternative modernity is represented by diasporic women in their attempts to create a hybrid culture that maintain select aspects of Indian 'traditions' (particularly in the privacy of their homes), while accessing 'modern' goals such as professional education and career-choices.

'Culture' is another salient subject that is discussed throughout this thesis, particularly with regards to issues of opposing Indian and Western 'cultures' and their impacts on the lives of Indian diasporic women in Canada. In addressing the notion of 'culture' theoretically, I find it useful to study Homi Bhabha's (1991) work on cultural hybridity and interstitial spaces. Bhabha argues that when two opposing cultures meet in a liminal (interstitial) third space wherein they negotiate their cultural differences, they create a culture that is a hybrid of the two. This is not to say that the original cultures existed as holistic and separate entities, but rather, that “the
difference of cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply there to be seen or appropriated” (Bhabha, 1991, p. 113).

This hybrid culture is not a novel entity that is progressively better than the two originals, but rather, a reminder of the impossibility of containing a culture within strict boundaries. Bhabha asserts that “cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of self to other” (Bhabha, 1991, p.36). This is to say that a nation's culture is never holistic in and of itself, but rather is ambivalent and open to interpretation through both internal and external lenses.

Thus, the monolithic Indian 'tradition' and 'culture', as invented at various stages during the nation's history, is not a proof of the existence of such an isolated culture, but rather, of the need to present one that meets the outsider's gaze. Furthermore, Bhabha suggests that in an attempt to reject the inferiority stemming from the colonizer's gaze, the colonized mimics the colonizer, and it is this mimicry that brings forward the ambivalence of the very notion of culture. If the Indian diasporic community can mimic Canadians by working and studying among them, eating with them, dressing like them and living amidst them, then what differentiates the Indian community from Canadians? What purposes are served of retaining an imagined culture that attempts to connect with the home-land through invented traditions?

These are some of the questions and theoretical lenses that I utilize to analyze the complex gender, racial and socioeconomic matrix navigated by Indian diasporic women studying and working in Canada. I hope to understand the intricacies of power, empowerment and dis-empowerment experienced by this minority population, that has traditionally been marginalized within both academy and broader society.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

In this chapter I briefly describe many of the key research findings and ideas that helped form my own thought-processes and guided me in understanding my research topic with greater clarity and detail. I begin by describing the main tenets of Hinduism that guide the notions of 'tradition' and 'culture' among Indians living in the homeland and abroad today. In doing so, I discuss the frameworks of the Manusmriti (Laws of Manu) and the impact that this canonical work has on the roles and expectations of Indian (Hindu) women. I then briefly discuss when and how Indian women began to receive formal education, focusing on the historical situations and societal needs of the time that led to such a development in the late nineteenth century.

I next speak to the Indian nationalist movement which reached its zenith in the early twentieth century in the fight for the country's freedom from the British Raj. Women played an important role in this political movement, and this further modified the roles and expectations that were placed on women at the time. I describe how and why these roles changed, and the impact that these changes have on the lives of modern Indian women today.

In the final sections, I shift gears towards diasporic Indians living in the West and their experiences through the raced, classed and gendered interlocking systems in Canada. In particular I highlight the lives of diasporic community within the context of multiculturalism, trans-nationalism and their status as a visible and model minority.

Understanding Hindu Traditions

In considering the traditional values and cultures that impact Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in the West, it is essential to understand what is meant by 'Indian culture' and 'traditions'. ‘Indian culture’ is not a static concept and nor does it have a single root. Aside from the Hindu religious tradition, which forms a major component of what is today considered ‘Indian culture’, it is also greatly influenced by the conquests of neighbouring lands, invasion by foreign powers, and a deep colonial history. Foreign religions introduced into the Indian mainland (such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism), as well as theological ideologies born within India (such as Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism) have greatly influenced the nature of family life, religious believes, cultural practices, and social structure in India (Gusfield, 1967; Jain 1998).
Furthermore, the Hindu religious tradition itself is not a homogenous model, but rather an amalgamation of the diverse indigenous traditions that have existed within the Indian subcontinent over several millennia. However, the dominant ideology that most scholars (including myself) have in mind when we refer to Hinduism today, is the framework of ideas, attitudes, and institutions codified by the *Manusmriti (Laws of Manu)* (Jain, 1998).

The *Manusmriti* is a Hindu religious text that presents itself as a discourse given by Manu, the progenitor of mankind in Hinduism. The authoritative ideas in this text regarding the laws of social class and the nature of femininity have greatly influenced the social and moral position of the ‘ideal’ Hindu woman in Indian society. Said to have been written around 200 A.D., *Manusmriti* is considered a foundational work of Hindu law in ancient Indian society, and became the point of reference for all future *Dharmaśāstras* (rules of proper conduct) that followed over the centuries (Wadley, 1992; Leslie, 1989).

While ‘woman’ within this ideology is celebrated in her many roles (such as daughter, sister, mother and lover) her dominant location within it is through her position as a wife (Leslie, 1989). Ancient Hindu texts, along with popular mythologies and folklores provide several examples of ideal female behaviours. These stories often involve a loving and devotional wife who remains true to her husband despite all adversities, and ultimately brings glory to him through her dedicated loyalty and chastity (Wadley, 1992). The epitome of such wifely virtue is Sita, the chaste, dutiful spouse of King Rama in the *Ramayana*, one the most revered religious epics in India (Subrahmanyan, 1999). Often quoted as a role-model for all women, Sita willingly follows her husband during a prolonged exile, remains true to him when abducted and enticed by the powerful king Ravana, and demurely lives the life of a hermit when forsaken by her husband over questions regarding her chastity. Thus, a key and recurring theme about proper female behaviour within present Hindu ideology is the notion of women who remain willingly subdued under the dominance of their husbands (Rao & Rao, 1988; Wadley, 1992). The ideal Hindu woman/wife is dutiful, servile and chaste, and her very salvation depends on her devotion and loyalty to her husband (Wadley, 1992; Leslie, 1989).

In a stark contrast to these benign characterizations of women however, is the all-powerful image of the fierce female Goddess (most commonly referred to as *Durga* or *Kali*). As
the divine feminine principle of power, this goddess maintains an autonomous identity independent of her male consort, and is venerated as the absolute embodiment of power, strength and courage. Goddess *Durga* is most popularly worshipped in the form of *Mahisasuramardini* (‘killer of the demon *Mahisasura*’). Represented as a ten-armed woman, she rides a lion while wielding her weapons and defeats the demon *Mahisasura* (Subrahmanyan, 1999). In her more gruesome form as *Kali*, the Goddess is characterized with four arms, each respectively carrying a sword, a trident, a severed head and a skull-cup to catch the dripping blood from the severed head. Goddess *Kali* wears a skull necklace and dances in joyous abandon over the dead bodies of her enemies, even as her divine consort requests her to cease her passionate victory dance.

These deep-rooted and often conflicting religious ideologies about the strengths, virtues and characteristics of women have great social consequences on the modern Indian/Hindu psyche. The mythologies and stories provide contradicting role models for Hindu women, all the while exerting considerable influence on their behaviours and expectations. For instance, while the ‘wife’ is often depicted as a demure and passive member of the family, the image of the ‘mother’ (whilst nurturing and caring) has considerable power within the family (Subrahmanyan, 1999). The status of a wife improves significantly upon the birth of children; and as a mother she is given higher esteem, a greater degree of independence, and a much large say in important family decisions (Rao & Rao, 1988).

Given these complicated roles and expectations of women within Hinduism, the purpose of Indian (Hindu) women’s education has largely been a topic of controversy at the familial and community levels (Seymour, 1995). Should a woman’s education be geared towards enhancing her primary role as the home-maker or is it be the yardstick used to measure social reform and modernization? Will her education threaten existing family dynamics even as it enhances her prospects of independence, confidence and happiness? These were some of the questions debated by scholars and laymen, men and women, young and old, when Indian women first began to receive formal education in the late twentieth century.

**Beginning of Formal Education for Women in India**

Since this thesis delves into the educational and professional lives of Indian diasporic women, I believe it is worthwhile to understand the role that education has played in the lives of
Indian women, both historically and in contemporary society. In the next two sections I discuss how and why women's education as a movement originated in India during the late 19th century, the manner through which this education was conducted, and how this education has altered the roles and expectations of Indian (Hindu) women as traditionally understood. Furthermore, I also discuss the links between women's education and the larger nationalist movement which engulfed the nation at the time. I discuss the roles that women played within this movement and the impact that India's nationalist freedom movement had on women's roles in society. In particular, I highlight how these roles were changed and modified in order to suit the purpose of the nationalist movement.

Nineteenth century India produced an educated and urban middle-class, largely as a result of English-educated youth involved in new occupations and institutions created by the British Raj (Walsh, 2004). This being a time of immense social and political awakening of the nation, questions over the social position and education of women attracted the attention of this literate class (Chanana, 1996). Women's rights stood out as a key element in both the colonial and nationalistic discourses of the time. The status of women in society was viewed as the ultimate benchmark of a society's progressiveness; and the presumed subordinate status of Indian women was heralded as a justification for the continued colonial rule over the Indian nation.

The British government listed practices such as child marriage, Sati (widow annihilation), dowry and female illiteracy as the result of the egoistic and imbecilic nature of Indian men, thereby judging them as incompetent for self-rule. By characterizing India and Indian men in this negative light, the British were propagating their own superiority to India and emphasizing notions of Western progress, egalitarianism and competence for governance (Thapar-Bjokert, 1997). The nationalistic ideologies and social reform strategies that emerged in India at the time were greatly influenced by these claims made by British officials and missionaries regarding the degraded position of women in Indian society. While the British saw Indian men as effeminate and Indian women as retrograde, passive, and subordinate, the Indian nationalists inverted these images by portraying themselves as the heroes and the British as the foreign and violent aggressors invading their nation.
The chief tenets that defined national culture in India were religion and vernacular language, and Indian women were constructed as the custodians of this culture (Thapar-Bjokert and Ryan 2002; Thapar-Bjokert, 1997). Indian nationalists used Hindu Indian traditions as a sanctified and legitimate source of national identity which differentiated them from the foreign colonizers. The role of women was quintessential for this purpose, as they were seen as the keepers of this national culture and tradition.

As a response to the attacks made by the British, Indian reformers constructed a model of a new Bhadramahila (respectable woman) who represented the unchanging soul of the Indian nation (Thapar-Bjokert, 1997). Print being a primary medium of expression during the time, several pamphlets, manuals, novels and magazines began to actively articulate the relative roles and social places of men and women in India (Walsh, 2004). These books and articles discussed various aspects of women’s lives in India, including their duties and responsibilities toward their families and the nation at large. They all however, seemed to converge at one main point – the need for a resurgence in women’s position in India. This included propositions for radical social reform movements that would significantly alter women’s education in India (Chanana, 1996).

The definition of a Bhadramahila (respectable woman) went through an immense transformation during this time period. She became more than simply respectable; she was also educated and virtuous. The Indian nationalist leaders modelled this 'new woman' to be able to withstand the pulls of Western ideas while retaining her spiritual core and familial roles. Faith in modern education led to the belief that women’s education was a mandatory requirement to achieve any reform, not just in the condition and status of women, but also that of the nation at large. Since family was considered the basic unit of social organization, it was argued that the woman’s contribution to the development and stability of the family was of great importance to the whole nation. Furthermore, women had a significant role in raising children, and their influence in the socializing and molding of the future leaders was also recognized (Chanana, 1996).

During this movement, the primary goals of women’s education were identified as, “to create an ideal housewife, ideal wife, an ideal mother and an ideal citizen” (Walsh, 2004, p. 22). By being educated, it was argued, a woman can better maintain a household and thereby make
her husband and family members happy. A popular slogan among Indian leaders and social reformers at the time was “educating a girl means educating a family” (Chanana, 1996, p.117).

Thus, in order for the construct of this new respectable Bhadramahila to be successful, women had to not only be given formal education, but also made more responsible toward their familial duties. The formal education that middle-class women received inculcated “feminine” virtues of cleanliness, discipline, restraint, and domestic responsibility. Apart from their own private sphere of activity, women were seen to greatly influence men’s public activity through cultural and value transmission. Thus, the construct of this “new woman” allowed women to acquire education but only in order to maintain the harmony of the household and society (Thapar-Bjokert, 1997).

The domestic lives of women in India were dramatically reshaped in order to construct a role model of the Bhadramahila that was similar to the model of Victorian womanhood (Borthwick, 1984, p. 358). The 'new woman' was provided with primary level education, which was often in English from Christian missionary schools. In essence, she was groomed to be the ideal partner for the new Indian bourgeois man, himself a recipient of Western education. She was educated in the relevant foreign language, and attuned to the Western standards of presentability and respectability. However, the very purpose of her construct was to stand in opposition to the image of the English-woman (Thapar-Bjokert, 1997).

The Indian Bhadramahila was projected as markedly different from and vastly superior to her Western counterpart – the Memsahib. Despite having an exterior that could match the Memsahib, her inner core was much more pious and purer than the latter. Unlike the wayward Memsahib, the Indian Bhadramahila knew her rightful place in society, and she did not indulge in social vices such as smoking, drinking or keeping the company of men. An educated Indian woman could not do these things because by doing so she risked not only her individual identity, but the identity of her nation. The Bhadramahilas of India were the protectors of the country’s culture, and their behaviour was watched and regulated by both colonial and Indian men.

As the guardians of tradition, Indian Bhadramahilas were circumscribed to play specific roles intended to “protect” them from Western influences. While external adjustments were
made to accommodate for Western norms and changing circumstances, the preservation of the core traditions was seen to be of utmost importance to the nationalistic movement. The sanctum of tradition and culture represented by the Bhadramahila with her Indian soul was to be protected and preserved from the encroaching colonizer at any cost (Thapar-Bjokert & Ryan 2002).

While the doors of women's education were finally opened, the methods of conducting their education remained largely confined within the gendered societal boundaries of the early twentieth century India. Schools that catered exclusively to girls had to be set up as it was considered inappropriate for young girls to be in such close proximity to boys of similar age. Escorts were hired to accompany the girls who travelled to school to ensure that they were properly chaperoned while away from home. All-female hostels were provided when the distance between home and school was not commutable. Several female teachers were hired as parents were reluctant to allow their young daughters to come into contact with male teachers.

Despite all these measures to link the education of girls to their familial and social roles, the education of girls continued to be regarded with suspicious eyes. This was because any inappropriate behaviour of a girl while away from home could put her own (and her family's) reputation at risk, greatly hindering her prospects for a respectable marriage. Thus, whenever affordable, home schooling was the preferred method of instruction, where young girls were taught at their own homes by female tutors or family members (Chanana, 1996).

It is clear then that while women were being educated, the objective for their education remained tightly intertwined with their social role. Even as their roles change and evolve to suit the purpose of the larger population, Indian women continue to be contained within the gendered roles assigned to them. The education for women, more than any substantial benefit for the women themselves, was seen as a tool for the betterment of the larger society. The changing roles of Indian women to suit the purpose of their family or society is a theme that is re-visited in the next section as well.
Women's Role in India's Nationalist Movement

Closely linked to the construct of the ideal Indian woman were the concepts of femininity and motherhood. These constructs and the qualities that they represent were further modified to enable women to support the nationalist movement from within the confines of their social roles (Thapar-Bjokert, 1997). The concept of femininity that emerged alongside the “new woman” was largely based on mythology, literature, and history. While ‘woman’ within this ideology was celebrated in her many roles, her dominant location was through her position as a wife (Leslie, 1989). Her primary duty was to perform the role of the Ardhangini (complementary half) and Sahadharmìni (helpmate) of her husband. She was to possess the virtues of benevolence and self-sacrifice needed to dedicate her life to her family, while also maintaining the courage needed to take on the burden of raising a family during politically turbulent times.

While the qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, and patience are oft-discussed as appropriate within the private sphere of domesticity, women were also needed to participate more actively in the public political movements. The presence of women at protests and marches was essential to strengthen the nationalist fight for freedom, but this required an altogether different representation of womanhood. Since the “wife” and “mother” roles could not sufficiently help this cause, the concept of a strong and virtuous “motherland” was created. Along with being an ideal wife and mother, the defence of the nation or motherland was now added to the repertoire of woman’s duties.

Even as the earlier images of a mother who nurtures the civilization were maintained, the new model of the Indian mother as the “saviour of civilization” became popularized by the Indian nationalist leaders during the peak of the freedom movement. The role of the Mata (mother) was expanded and merged with the concept of Bharatmata (Mother India). The duties and responsibilities that once identified with an ideal mother were now modified and aligned to fit the duties of a woman toward her nation. This merging of duties served important purposes for the nationalistic movement. The image of a pure and virtuous Mother India, whose dignity must be preserved from the villainous British, aroused the patriotic sentiments of the Indian population as a whole. Citizens of India were beseeched to protect the virtue of their Motherland, as they would protect their own mothers. In many instances, death and distress caused from the freedom fights was glorified as sacrifices made at the altar of the ideal Mother.
This representation of women served another key purpose for the nationalistic movement. Early motherhood, largely a result of child marriages, was viewed by the British as a sign of India’s repressiveness and proof of the debased nature of Indian men. A sanctified image of Mother India provided a strong counter to these attacks. Motherhood was now projected as not simply producing healthy progeny, but also educating children to be enlightened citizens of the nation. A mother’s role was vital in maintaining the nationalist sentiments, as she was responsible for instilling patriotic feelings in her children. She served the nationalist cause by producing and training the future sons and daughters of the nation who will serve as ideal citizens in the anti-imperialist struggle. Therefore through the roles of 'nurturers' and 'good mothers', women were expected to politically assist the nation while maintaining the sanctity of the Indian culture at the same time (Thapar-Bjokert, 1997).

The Indian nationalist movement invited women to participate more fully in collective life by interpolating them at ‘national’ actors: wives, mothers, educators, and even fighters. On the other hand, the idealization of the national mother further reinforces the limited role of women in the newly established nation-state. It reaffirms the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct, and exert pressure on women to articulate their gendered identities and behaviours in a manner that suited the interests of the nationalistic discourse. While the nationalist movement desired to mobilize women, they did so in limited ways and for a limited time period. Once the national goal of freedom from British was achieved, the role of women once again reverted to it's domestic and spiritual one (Thapar-Bjokert and Ryan, 2002).

**Indian Diasporic Women in Canada**

“So where are you from?”

“I am Indian.”

“No, you are not!”

“Yes I am!”

“No, Indian people are native to Canada...and you are not from Canada. So you can't be Indian.”

The above conversation is one of my most poignant memories of my first day in Canada at a new elementary school. I was unsure of how to walk through the freshly fallen snow on the school grounds, how to address my teachers respectfully, and what to wear to a school that did
not have uniforms. I was unsure about speaking with a 'Canadian accent', if I would make any friends at all, or if I could ever forget my old ones. In short, I was unsure about a lot of things about Canada, but the one thing I was certain about was my past. Born and raised in India till the age of 13, I had never questioned my nationality. So it came as a rude shock when a classmate declared that I could no longer claim to be ‘Indian’! For the first time in my life, I was made aware of my ethnicity as it shifted from being an Indian to a ‘non-Canadian’ visible minority. It is only later that I realized that the native Indians got their name from Columbus’s geographical misconceptions, and that I was to accommodate for this fallacy by giving up my right to be called ‘Indian’ and settle for being ‘East-Indian’ instead.

Ng and Ramirez (1981) argue that people are not born into their ethnicity, but rather, that ethnicity arrives when they enter Canada. Being 'un-named' is a particular standpoint of power and privilege that emanates from being the majority, the obvious, the normal. This privilege of being the universal un-named in society is reserved for members of the mainstream bourgeoisie, and the power of the bourgeoisie lies in its ability to name others while itself remaining un-named. It is to this power that Bhattacharjee (1992) refers to as “ex-nomination”.

Bhattacharjee suggests that the power of 'ex-nomination' is lost to Indian immigrants when they move to the West. Being (upper) middle class in their native land, this third world immigrant bourgeoisie in the first world finds itself in a position of subordination to the native bourgeoisie. They move from the being at the centre of society in their homeland to the periphery of the Canadian society. Where they once stood as the no-name universal bourgeoisie, they are now known by their position of difference from the norm and contained in the pre-labelled slot of 'visible minority'.

Bhattacharjee further argues that it is the Indian immigrant community's desire to overcome this secondary position that manifests itself through grasping at its former glories. In its need to overcome their social demotion, the Indian bourgeoisie grasps at the familiar essentials from when it was the ‘un-named’. It finds solace in reverting back to the glories of its native culture, traditions and religion, seeking to regain the power that was lost through immigration. Thus, faced with the threat of losing its power to stay un-named, the Indian immigrant bourgeoisie takes refuge in the unifying Oneness of being Indian: a unity that all
Indians possess simply from being Indian (Bhattacharjee, 1992). However, the culture and values that the community draws from in order to main this Oneness, is specifically defined to serve the purpose of ex-nomination.

Being an educated and largely middle-class population, the Indian community’s subordination to the 'invisible majority' of Canadian society is primarily reflected in their experiences of racism, nationality, and colonialism (Bhatacharjee, 1992). Their discomfort in this subordination is reflected in the many efforts made by the community to opt out of racial hierarchy while simultaneously constructing themselves through the terminology of ethnicity (Shukla, 1997). For instance George (1997) highlights the importance placed by Indians on their legitimacy as members of a 'pure Aryan stock'. Even as mainstream Western society views Indians as 'dark skinned', their own insistence on being inherently 'Aryan', beseeches a 'by-association' inclusion into the exclusive white club. Attempts at complete inclusion into this group however, is foiled by obvious skin-colour difference that prevents Indians from being able to “move unconsciously and unobstructed through the public sphere as they do in India” (George, 1997, p.48).

Simultaneously, Shukla (1997) argues that for middle-class Indians in the United States, the language of ethnicity allows them to construct a group identity that is untainted by the baggage of racial tensions. I add that a similar identity is constructed by the Indian diaspora living in Canada, whose use of both class and ethnicity over race allows them to benefit from the projection of a glorious ancient civilization. With the influx of highly educated and skilled professionals from India, the educational and socioeconomic backgrounds of the second wave Indian migrants has moved them straight into the heart of Canadian middle-class. Here they attempt to use their class and ethnicity to avoid the racial and colonial violence inflicted upon their ancestors who arrived at Canadian shores just a century ago.

Shukla contends that the ethnicity propagated by this diasporic community is one that propels the illusion of a seamless and cohesive Indian culture that negates historical and political conditions, both past and present. The weavers of this ethnicity create a brand of Indian-ness using select historical links to the homeland that serves their particular purpose of ex-nomination. In doing so however, they often resort to a-historical and popular essentialism that
propagate the myth of an ancient India (and Indian-ness) that is unaltered since time immemorial (Bhattacharjee, 1992). In their attempt to (re)gain racial invisibility by reformulating their identity on the basis of class, culture and ethnicity, they perform irrevocable violence to the historical and material conditions of their homeland, and its rich cultural mosaic and diversity.

As a relatively new but growing sub-population, the Indian diaspora finds itself in the middle of a Canadian national project where its own role is relegated to the side-lines. Not large enough yet to be a politically viable group, nor influential enough yet to affect large-scale national policies, it settles for being an exceptionally civil and docile minority group. Being a model-minority in a culturally plural nation-state, the community’s strategy to become a national-level player is to present an image of it's homeland as a homogenous, educated and egalitarian country (Bhattacharjee, 1992). The educational, financial and social success of its members is a key factor in establishing the Indian immigrant group's standing as an exceptional and model minority. The trope of a timeless history of India that is heavy with ancient traditions and knowledge fits very well with this purpose. Unfettered by the colonial struggles of the past and the religious and political struggles of present, this timeless essence of India is a model that is continuously constructed and molded to suit the needs of the Indian community living in the West.

Much like the Indian nationalist rhetoric of the pre-independence era, the preservation of India's cultural essence is seen as quintessential to the community's needs. It is viewed as a domain that must be defended against outside intervention. Ever-vigilant against contamination by Western values, Indian immigrants in the West are exhorted to preserve their cultural individuality even while successfully participating in Western economy. They are required to learn Western technology and economics, all-the-while maintaining the sanctity of Indian culture and traditions (Bhattacharjee, 1992).

The burden of maintaining the sanctity of this Indian culture however, falls squarely on the shoulders of the women of the community. Prema Kurien (1999) argues that women's role as cultural custodians greatly increases upon immigration to the West. While Indian culture might be taken for granted in the homeland, it's content, meaning and importance has to be explicitly maintained and transmitted upon immigration. Within the context of the immigrant community,
it is mostly the women who recreate the traditions and cultures of homeland in the West. It is the women of the community who wear the traditional clothes, cook the traditional food and perform traditional dances. They observe religious fasts and cultural codes of conduct, while also donning the role of teachers and cultural transmitters to the next generation (Kurien, 1999). Amita Handa (2003) argues that women have (yet again) come to be defined as the symbols of their sanctified culture. They are seen to represent the other side of modernity, the possibility of being outside of Westernization.

Indian women in the West today are associated with the memories of a glorious Indian past, and seen to be in need of protection from the Western forces around them (Handa, 2003). Specific concepts of femininity and womanhood are selected and mobilized to assert notions of Indian identity and belonging in the West. The purpose of ex-nomination on Western grounds relies on the re-introduction of colonial understandings of woman, culture and tradition into the Canadian context. This is accomplished in much the same way as during the nationalistic movement: by drawing boundaries around women in terms of what they can do, where they can go, and how they must conduct themselves.

Women marked the boundaries of culture during the nationalist movement in Colonial India, and they continue to do so in Canada today. The familial and societal roles of Indian diasporic women are molded to serve the purpose of ex-nomination, and their femininity is regulated as the border between East and West (Handa, 2003). Strong and powerful female role models that exist in the mainland, such as the powerful goddess and mother figures, are erased and replaced by a homogenized model of womanhood that is devoted to her homely duties (Bhattacharjee, 1992).

As a virtuous and sacrificing wife, the Indian woman moves to a new land to be with her husband. Once here, she continues to place great importance to her Indian roots by ensuring cultural continuity in the West and cultural transmittance to the next generation. Rajiva (2006) writes that as the quintessential symbols of the Indian culture, the daughters of the Indian diaspora are often expected to maintain standards of femininity that are outdated even in their home-country. These cultural traditions often do not mesh with their day-to-day realities as they attempt to live in the West with Eastern norms and practices.
Despite these characteristics that link gender to culture, Indian culture in the West is also characterized as being gender egalitarian. Highly sensitive to the perception of Indian women as passive victims of a patriarchal society, Indians living in the West realize the importance of emphasizing the value of gender equality in the Hindu culture. They emphasize that Indian women are treated with respect, honour and equality, and the large number of Indian American professional women is cited as proof of this gender equality (Kurien, 1999).

According to this model of the ‘new’ and ‘improved’ India, it is the innate qualities of the community’s women that allows the community to flourish. It is argued that the Indian woman, through her cultural values, is successful in maintaining a harmonious home along with a successful career. Their traditions service them in raising their children with the right culture, and allows their husbands to reach professional heights. Thus, the triumph of the Indian community rests on the ability of its women to meet the demands of the western world while maintaining her Indian roots within the home. Their success can erase the community's personal identification with memories of a socially struggling India that once battled issues such as *Sati* (widow annihilation) and widespread dowry practices. It demonstrates to the world that Indians are not essentially 'backward' (Bhattacharjee, 1992).

**Maintaining Transnational Links**

Another reason for the maintenance of ethnic culture could be the emotional and psychological benefits derived from experiencing ethnic pride. Rowles and Duan (2012) argue that in environments where racism is prevalent, the sense of belonging and pride derived from an ethnic and cultural heritage aids in providing minorities with psychological strength and self-confidence, allowing them to combat racism and discrimination while decreasing their own feelings of self-doubt, apprehension and mistrust. Thus, minoritized ethnic groups re-affirm their heritage and ethnic boundaries in foreign lands as a response to racial and cultural discrimination in the host-country.

Rai and Reeves (2009), in their scholarship on the value of transnational networks of immigrant communities argue that it is the very memory of a collective homeland that separates a diasporic community from other migrants who choose to be entirely integrated into the host-
culture. The members of a diasporic community do not simply settle in to a new country, but rather, attempt to recreate the socio-cultural, religious and political milieu of the homeland they remember fondly. Thus, it is the very persistence of a homeland identity and the desire to maintain those connections that allows south asian immigrants in the West to identify and behave as a collective diasporic community.

Having said that, there is also a body of literature that views the migration of populations within the context of transnationalism. According to Bhattacharya (2008), transnationalism is the study of the international movement of people who develop and maintain social links with both their home and adopted countries. Given the professional nature of Indian immigrants, and the forces of globalization that allows them to travel fast and communicate instantly from across the globe, Indian immigrants today are much more likely to maintain close contacts with their homeland than ever before. Thus, the identities and experiences of these migrants cannot be understood strictly within the borders of either their home or host country, but rather is shaped by the complex relationships that are forged between these various countries.

In fact, Aihwa Ong (1998) posits that the multiple passport holder is a vital figure when studying contemporary migration since he or she displays the increasing split between state-imposed and personal identity, while also demonstrating the growing insignificance of international borders. She suggests that in today's era of globalization and ultra modern communication, individuals develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty as strategies to accumulate capital and power. Furthermore, changing political and economic conditions allow immigrants to take on fluid conceptions of culture and citizenship, which are largely steered by changing market, political and cultural regimes.

Within this context of transnationalism, a growing body of literature argues that the affirmation of ethnic ties allows immigrants to become more firmly established in the host-country. Dhingra (2008) insights that second generation Indian immigrants become more 'American' upon asserting their ethnic roots, because it allows them to integrate into the representative elements of the nation-state. Many second-generation immigrants choose to (re)affirm their ethnic identity upon entering post-secondary education by forming close friendships with fellow ethnic-members and by joining local religious and secular cultural
associations (Prashad, 2011). In a similar manner, I suggest that by affirming their ties with the homeland, Indian immigrants can feel comfortable with their presence in Canada. After all, their presence is now integral to the image of Canada as a multicultural nation. They represent the 'multicultural' aspect of Canada that has become a mainstay of its international identity as a modern country.

**Indian Immigrants as Model Minority**

The exemplary face of Indian immigrants as a 'model minority' in the West is the result of the pressures of racism and assimilation faced by the community (Bhattacharjee, 1992). On the surface, this category of 'model-ness' entices with notions of success and excellence in a new land. It promotes the seemingly positive message of success in a democratic and multicultural land where anyone can be successful through hard work, irrespective of race, class and ethnicity. Within this seductive imagery, Indian Americans feel deserving of the economic and social mobility that comes with being the 'favoured' group. But as Vaidhyanathan (2000) reminds us, “The benefits (of being a model minority) are clear. The costs are not” (p. B4).

Bhattacharjee (1992) further argues that this desire to gain social status as a model minority has also led to the 'selective amnesia' among the immigrant Indian bourgeoisie regarding their entry into the West. In their construction of a 'modern Indian community' that is socially and economically at par with its Western counterpart, they often forget their own turbid past. The arrival of first Indians farmers in the early 20th century, the various policies that were implemented to prevent their social and economic transition to Canada, and the infamous Komagata Maru incident, are some examples of historical narratives that go largely unacknowledged amongst the Indian diasporic community in Canada today. The Indian bourgeoisie in Canada often considers itself a relatively new immigrant community, one that came to Canada as educated and respectable professionals just a few decades ago. Stories of past racial and spatial marginalization are almost entirely erased from the collective memories of the diaspora.

This collective loss of historical memory has specific consequences for the community as they negotiate their position in multicultural Canada. Intoxicated by the possibility of success and social mobility, they often fail to perceive racism towards themselves and others. By
disregarding the crucial analysis of race and power, they are unable to unite in solidarity with other communities who face more virulent forms of racism in Canada. Prashad (2000) articulates that the cost of being invested in the 'model-minority' rhetoric is that Indian diasporic communities are often apprehensive about forming alliances across race, class, religious and ethnic boundaries. In failing to forge such solidarity, they express their willingness to be used, not just as symbols or solutions, but as a weapons against affirmative action.

In their zeal to succeed and accumulate wealth, Park (2008) argues that model minorities often neglect to recall that they are minorities nonetheless. While the term 'model' signifies the attainment of a standard of excellence set by the dominant white power, being a 'minority' is a reminder of their exclusion from the dominant vision of Canada (Bhattacharjee, 1992). Their access to material wealth and social success is a reward for their appropriate behaviour and acceptance of their second-tier citizenry without complaints. As such, Lee (1994) found that some minority students believed that the only road to success in the West was to win the approval of the whites by altering their own behaviours and expectations, and fitting into perpetuated stereotypes of 'model behaviour'.

However, despite these notions of model minority and behaviour, South Asians students continue to experience both overt and covert racism in predominantly white educational institutions (Samuel, 2004). According to her study on South Asian student's experiences in Canadian academe, these students often find universities and colleges to be a hostile and silencing environment where they feel excluded, minimized and segregated. Furthermore, these students also felt forced to take on the roles of cultural 'experts' and 'speak up' for their group, regardless of their knowledge or willingness to do so. As a response, many South Asian students form close alliances and friendships with co-ethnics and find support and respite from the hostile university environment (Bhopal, 2008). In other words, while researchers like Dhingra (2008) argue that ethnic communities become more entrenched in host nation by asserting their ethnic roots, there is also the contention that minority students have no choice but to assert their ethnicity in a society where, despite their legal citizenship and length of stay in Canada, they continue to hold an outsider status.
Himani Bannerji (1997) argues that the category ‘Canadian’ applies to people who have two things in common: I) their white skin and II) their European North American background. In a similar vein, Ralston (1988) similarly says that the term ‘immigrant’ does not necessarily refer to a specific legal status, as much as to a process of social construction whereby people who are visibly ‘different’ in skin colour, language, religion, dress, and customs from the rest of (white, Anglo-saxon, Christian) Canada, are constructed in their everyday lives as national ‘minorities’.

Thus, while visible minorities are considered an integral part of Canadian economy and civic society, they are largely relegated to the periphery of Canada’s national identity as a white settler nation. Even while recent European immigrants are often welcomed as part of the construction of Canadian nation, visibly minor coloured bodies remain perpetual ‘immigrants’, irrespective of their official status (Bannerji, 1997).

This immobility or fixed-ness is what Radhika Mohanram (1999) describes when she asserts that “whiteness has the ability to move...the ability to move results in the unmarking of the body. In contrast, blackness is signified through a marking and is always static and immobilizing” (Mohanram, 1999, p.4). Thus, while white bodies are transformed into global citizens due to their disembodiment, unmarked positioning, and mobility; coloured bodies remain marked, pinned and incarcerated in body and space. Indians, pinned and marked by the colour of their skins, become solely associated with the body. Kim (2000) argues that the model minority construction socially defines Asian Americans as an inferior 'other', while reinforcing the established inequalities and racism that require Asian Americans to constantly prove their worth as 'real' Americans.

**Canadian Multiculturalism**

Today Canada prides itself as one of the most diverse, multiracial and multicultural countries in the world. It is a country where other cultures are not only let in, but defined as fundamental to the nation's identity. Thus, multiculturalism is projected as a way of imagining and living in a nation with differences (Ahmed, 2000). However, the construction of Canada’s multiculturalism in terms of cultural diversity silently erases particular histories of past and present racism, violence and discrimination (Ahmed, 2000). Equality is presented within a
pluralistic discourse where citizenship is conceptualized through hyphenated identities (such as Indian-Canadian), and categories of marginalization are constructed as equivalent contenders of privilege. Thus, socioeconomic and political structures that are inherently raced, classed and gendered are legitimated and cast as liberal and democratic (Magnusson, 2000). Furthermore, racial differences become construed as ethnic differences, and the resulting innocent pluralism invalidates racial and colonial histories (Ahmed, 2000; Bannerji, 2000). Within this multiculturalism, systemic and structural racism, and anti-immigrant policies are displaced as the immigrant’s own cultural problem.

Multiculturalism in Canada is often used as a way of managing cultural difference (Handa, 2003). Incoming third world immigrant populations of Canada are projected as wanting the same religious, linguistic, and cultural lives that they had in their countries of origin. They are frozen into ‘traditional/ethnic cultures’ that are socially conservative and morally ‘different’ from the rest of white Canada. Mapped into this framework of ethnicity and culture, structural and social inequalities remain hidden behind differences in looks, languages and cuisines (Ahmed, 2000; Bannerji, 2000).

Furthermore, modern-day racism in Canada operates within an ideology of multiculturalism through the discourse of tolerance, wherein people of colour have the permission to retain their cultural identity so long as it is performed in private. In public, they are to accept and follow the cultural norms of the dominant West, and thereby remain a permanent minority, irrespective of their ‘model-ness’. Thus, culture comes to replace race, and cultural tolerance becomes the acceptable substitute for racial intolerance (Handa, 2003).

While clearly stated racism undoubtedly continues to exist, a greater problem for racialized minorities in Canada is the common sense aspect of this ‘new racism’. This discourse has given birth to a wide range of arbitrary and shifting markers (such as physical features, language, accent, nation of birth, ethnicity, and relationship between nations), that define and naturalize racial groups into boxed categories (Taylor, 2006). It defines cultural practices in racist ways (as deficient and less civilized) in order to justify continuing Euro-centric distribution of power and privilege (Taylor, 2006; Vaugeois, 2007; Lee, 2007). The threat emerging from this new form of racism is its ability to hide prejudice behind the guise of ‘common sense’.
Rendered invisible, these forms of institutional and systemic discrimination prove highly beneficial for the dominant racial and social groups in society; maintaining the group’s power and privilege at the expense of the marginalized and racialized members (Malhi and Boon, 2007).

This notion of a hidden racism within Canada's multicultural discourse is further elaborated by Magnusson (2000) in her works on the role of higher education as an essential aspect of the Canadian nation-building project that greatly impacts the educational and professional lives of women living in Canada. She reasons that during the postwar years, Canadian post-secondary education played particular purposes in the development of the Keynesian welfare state wherein it was transformed from an institution of elite education to that of mass education. Serving the newly stratified Canadian labour market and the unprecedented division of labour, these institutions of mass education provided increased educational access to the public and aided in the national strategies of capital accumulation.

However, post-secondary education in Canada is no longer a guaranteed path to economic security (Magnusson, 2013). As part of the neoliberal restructuring of the Keynesian welfare state, access to higher education has shifted dramatically. State universities are moving away from the philosophy of universal entitlements through low and accessible tuition fees, to education accessed through financial aids that are targeted at economically disadvantaged students who are deemed meritorious (Magnusson, 2000). Thus, the state is systematically offloading the cost of higher education onto individual students, who are responding by taking on increasing student loans, either through public sources of credit (such as federal or provincial loan services), or through private-for-profit lenders. Once graduated, students find themselves delayed in achieving financial stability due to the predatory loans that they have secured (Magnusson, 2013).

Thus, notions of education and career are woven through the dynamics of financialization (Magnusson, 2013), which can be understood as a broad organizing set of economic and market relations that organize the living experiences of all people, including my participants who experience the effects of these relations in their everyday relations to labour and learning. For instance, the increasing tuition-cost and fee deregulation in Ontario, when paired with decreasing
state funding of tuition, places a substantial financial burden on individual students. Interlocking with social and structural pressures to access higher education, the result is an inequitable participation in higher education where only some of my participants can access the more expensive and high-dividend programs like the MBA.

Thus, the impact of the financialization of education paves the path for an interlocking system of oppression and violence that particularly impacts the lives of marginalized groups such as women of colour. Magnusson argues that the Canadian higher education reinforces this inegalitarian system by making working class skills and lower-remuneration programs more accessible to economically and socially marginalized populations, while making higher education and high-remuneration careers more accessible for those with greater social and economic access.

For instance, Magnusson posits that women and faculty of colour in Canada are particularly impacted by the growing trend towards ‘precarious’ employment within Canadian higher education. As universities and colleges reduce the number of tenured positions, female and racialized faculty are highly represented in the part-time and sessional positions within the academy. This leaves them with much greater work-load and reduced salaries and benefits in comparison to their (predominantly male and white) tenure-track colleagues. Magnusson argues that this trend intensifies the creation of tiers among knowledge workers, particularly between those who are hired to teach and those who are paid to conduct research.

Magnusson’s analysis of debt and financialization as it impacts women’s participation in the knowledge economy, is particularly salient for my own work as I study the educational experiences of a particular group of women of colour within Canada’s higher education. As Canada’s welfare state experiences increasing fiscal crises, public systems of debt (such as government-funded student loans) that were established to benefit the debtor (the student in this case) may begin to decline. Taking their place are more privatized debts (such as credit cards and private student loans) that primarily function to benefit the creditor at the expense of the debtor. In such financial situations, racialized working-class women can be adversely affected because of their increased needs to access private loans to fund their higher education (Magnusson, 2013). Such institutional policies and financial discrimination can greatly impact
the access and quality of education received by women across Canada. In particular, as a group that is at the forefront of receiving higher education in Canada, the costs and function of Indian diasporic women’s higher education across varied socioeconomic class strata becomes an even more salient and significant topic.

Despite such complications however, some Indian diasporic women continue to create a workable environment for themselves as they are driven to attain high levels of education and lucrative careers. Within this research project, I interview a group of women who are already within the Canadian higher education system, and whose experiences continue to be organized through class and market relations that are both gendered and raced. However, the experiences of these women are not meant to generalize the experiences of all Indian diasporic women across all social and economic strata. This is especially the case since women who have chosen not to access, or are unable to access higher education have not been interviewed within this research project.
Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology that I followed in order to collect data for this study. I will first explain my methodological basis and describe why I chose to use this particular means of data collection. I will then discuss my own standpoint as a researcher and how this influenced my methodology. Further in, I talk about the methods that I used to recruit participants for the project, and the measures that were taken to ensure their confidentiality and rights. Finally, I discuss the interview process in detail while examining issues of interviewer-participant power dynamics and research accountability within the project. I end the chapter with a short description of each of my participants followed by a table summarizing this information. This insight into their lives will shed more light to the data and findings that will follow in the next chapter.

Research Design

The empirical data in this research comes from semi-directed, open ended, in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with Indian diasporic Hindu women in Canada. Two categories of participants were chosen for this study:

1) Women who are new immigrants to Canada
2) Women born in Canada

All the participants belonged to the Indian Hindu diasporic community and were either current post-secondary students, or part of Canadian workforce having already attained post-secondary education. I proceeded to design this project using the following steps:

Identified the topic of research
Created specific research questions
Defined the research methodology
Selected appropriate participant sample
Collected Data
Analyzed and sorted data into specific themes that answered research questions
Research Rationale and Questions

Much of the academic work conducted on the impact of introducing Indian traditions and culture into Western societies, implies that these traditional values are antagonistic to the members (particularly women) of the Indian diasporic community. Indian diasporic women are often portrayed in academic literature as caught in the middle of a culture-clash, distressed and conflicted when they attempt to maintain their traditional roles and values rather than redefining themselves based on Western ideologies (Nayar, 2004; Dasgupta, 1998).

Such a presumption however contradicts the trend of high educational and professional participation that marks South Asian women in Canada (Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2008; Hussain & Bagguley, 2007). There is little academic literature studying the possibility that traditional Indian values and customs may encourage and enable Indian diasporic women to fulfil their educational and professional aspirations. This gap is particularly problematic as it can lead to the essentialization and stigmatization of Indian culture as static, patriarchal and oppressive.

As an attempt to fill this gap, I study the following two related questions in this thesis: 1) In what ways might Indian traditional values and culture influence and contribute to the educational and professional lives of Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in Canada? 2) How are Indian traditions and values utilized by Indian diasporic women in order to enhance their educational and professional lives in Canada?

Within this project I view hetero-normative patriarchy, race, gender, imperialism, socioeconomic class and religion as multiple interlocking systems that construct particular patterns of both empowerment and dis-empowerment for diasporic women in Canada. Furthermore, I also investigate how the impact of traditional values differs over varying time spent in Canada.

Researcher's Perspective

I undertake this research from an integrative feminist anti-racist perspective. Having said that, I realize that there is nothing inherently ‘feminist’ about studying women or using oral narratives and in-depth interviews. Rather, in agreement with Susan Geiger (1990), I understand that what makes any particular subject or methodology ‘feminist’ is its objective, and the manner
through which data is collected and presented. By placing my participants at the centre of my analysis, I wish to stress that their experiences are varied and valid, and form a vital component of knowledge about Canadian women (Donkor, 2000).

As a member of the Indian (Hindu) diasporic community myself, I am cognisant of my relative ‘insider status’ amongst my participants, and am both critical and self-reflexive of this position. Shared racial identity is generally reasoned to promote better communication between the researcher and participant. In addition to providing a greater foundation for establishing rapport, the sharing of common languages and cultural experiences are seen to equip the researcher to better understand the nuances that exist within participant narratives (Twine, 2000). However, I am also aware that while I share race, gender, and a racial minority status with my participants, these similarities do not necessarily balance out all the power dynamics that operate during and after an interview.

In her essay on methodological dilemmas, Daphne Patai (1991) says that, “the image of the North American academic researcher interviewing women from the so-called Third World epitomizes an interaction typically characterized by systemic inequality. In such situations, it is the very existence of privilege that allows the research to be undertaken” (Patai, 1991, p.137). While Patai makes this point through explicit references to ‘white’ researchers studying non-white women, I argue that similar forms of exploitation are possible in an interview where the researcher and participants are racially matched. It can be dangerous to assume that an ‘insider’ status will automatically add authenticity and embodied knowledge or provide a more valid and reliable form of research. The insider status is one that is fraught with tension, because although I may share certain aspects of my identity with my participants (such as race and gender), other differences (such as socioeconomic class and access to education) can have significant impacts on the manner through which communication takes place and data gets interpreted (Bhopal, 2010).

The emergence of the ‘new racism’ (Taylor, 2006) adds several new dimensions through which I can be placed in a position of greater power and privilege than my participants. This privilege could be a product of my familiarity with Canada as a nation and culture, my acquisition of a ‘Canadian’ accent of speaking English, or my position as someone who is able to
define and theorize other people’s realities for a larger audience (Ribbens, 1989). Thus, it might not always possible, as Oakley (1981) and Finch (1984) have recommended, to appeal to the notion of ‘sisterhood’ in order to equalize the power relationship between the researcher and her participants.

Methodological Basis

In-depth qualitative interviews were the preferred method of data collection for this research project because they are one of the most powerful tools available to understand and describe nuanced experiences and phenomena. The fluid and flexible nature of qualitative interviews allow for a better understanding of the subjective experiences and lived realities of participants (Bhopal, 2010). The process of “recording women's voices and then telling their stories has, arguably, been empowering for all involved, for the woman telling her own story, the woman recording and then retelling this story, and then the reader, who vicariously experiences it” (Scanlon, 1993, p.639). Thus, in-depth interviews provide a voice to the women who have been historically silenced, and opportunities for readers to learn from the lives and experiences of these women. Furthermore, it also supports the transformative element of feminist work, by providing new avenues to initiate political action that are meaningful and powerful to a wider scope of women (Scanlon, 1993).

Etter-Lewis, in her article on Black women’s life stories, says that, “oral narratives offer a unique and provocative means of gathering information central to understanding women’s lives and viewpoints. When applied to women of colour, it assumes added significance as a powerful instrument for the rediscovery of womanhood so often overlooked and/or neglected in history and literature alike.” (Etter-Lewis, 1991, p.43). While Etter-Lewis’s work is specifically focused on black women’s lives and life histories, I suggest that the articulation of all women’s experiences are characterized by the multi-layered interactions, intersections and interlocking of the various dimensions of their being, including race, class, gender, sexuality, language, history and culture. Thus, by encouraging participants to express their thoughts in their own words, in-depth interviews reveal the intricacies and interactions that form these women’s lives, and are aptly suited for the purpose of empowering the (marginalized) voices of (marginalized) women.
Ethical Approval and Participant Confidentiality

The nature of this project and the need for participant interviews made it mandatory to receive ethical approval to conduct the study. The project received its approval from the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto in January of 2012. The confidentiality of participants was maintained according to the policy at University of Toronto, whereby research data was stored in a secure server. Only the primary investigator (myself) had access to the raw data, as well as all audio and manual transcripts used during the research process. Participant confidentiality was also maintained by addressing them using pseudonyms and not publicizing identifiable details about their personal lives such as names of workplaces and universities attended.

Recruiting Participants

The 14 participants included in this study were Hindu women between the ages of 18 and 35 from the Indian diaspora in Canada. They were either current post-secondary students or currently employed in Canada after completing their post-secondary education. A balance between new immigrants (within 5 years of immigration) and second-generation (born in Canada) women was sought. In addition, the participants came from a wide range of careers, family backgrounds, and socioeconomic status.

The participants were located through both personal contacts and poster advertising (attached as Appendix A) in the Greater Toronto Area. Upon ethics approval, the posters were placed at designated areas at the University of Toronto and OISE campuses. In response to the poster, the participants were able to contact me through e-mail or telephone. Once the participant expressed interest in taking part in the study, we set up a mutually agreed upon location and time for the interview. I provided a written consent form (Appendix B) to the participants prior to their agreement to participate in the research, which informed them of their rights to anonymity, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of the project. They signed and kept a copy of the form for their own records, and were also told of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

As a form of recruitment, I also used the snowball sampling method (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981) wherein I requested my participants to forward the study information to other
members within their social circles. If any of the new members were interested in participating in the study, they could contact me for further information. The interviews took place at either a private site within the University of Toronto campus (such as my office or library booth), or at a location that was convenient for the participant.

The Interview Process

The empirical data for this research comes from semi-directed, open ended, in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with Indian diasporic Hindu women in Canada. The interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis and lasted approximately 60 minutes each. Attention was given to ensure the privacy and comfort of the participant at the time of the interview. With their permission, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed, both of which were only accessible to me.

The interview questions (Appendix C) focused on what each participant recognized as traditional Indian/Hindu values and culture, the various factors that contributed to the development of these values, and the impacts that these values have had on their educational and professional lives. The questions also delved into details regarding the participant’s place of birth, current place of living, socioeconomic background, religious, cultural and social activities, educational training, the financing of their education, and work history. The questions were designed in a manner that encouraged the participants to speak openly about their views and experiences. The use of open-ended and semi-directed questions allowed the participants to elaborate on any sensitive issues that came up during the interviews, such as isolation, loneliness, and racism, which further enriched the study.

At the time of the interview, I found that many of my participants appeared comfortable, and often eager, to share their ideas on this topic. While they were assured that they could choose not to answer any question that they are uncomfortable with or withdraw from the study at any time, none of the participants utilized either of these options. In fact, many of the participants seemed to appreciate the interview process as it allowed them time to reflect on their views, choices and personal experiences.
I tried my best within this project to minimize the power differentials that invariably exist within interview situations. While encouraging my participants to share their experiences with me, I also freely spoke about my own background and personal history. We shared personal stories about family expectations, educational choices and life as a visible minority in Canada. As a result of my childhood in India till the age of 13, I was able to identify with both my participant groups. With the women who are new to Canada, I could share my memories of schooling in the homeland and how that may be different from education here. We also spoke about family dynamics in India and how that may have changed over the last decade. With my second-generation participants who were born and raised in Canada, I shared my experiences at high school and University, and discussed the challenges of being the first generation to access higher education in Canada. These discussions, sometimes outside the specific questions investigated in my thesis, allowed my participants to feel comfortable and identify with me. Similarly, I also got to know my participants on a more personal level, which gives me a stronger urge to give a true outlet to their voices through my work.

All my participants were adults either in post-secondary education or working after having attained higher education, and so I sensed that they did not view me as someone significantly higher in societal status than themselves. They often talked to me as an equal, and with the understanding that their participation in the study was partially a favour to me, since it provided me with tangible benefits. An issue that stood out with some participants however, was English accent acquisition. Some of the newly immigrated women were not comfortable with speaking English, particularly with a Canadian accent, which caused them to question their ability to participate in the study. While they could read, write and speak English at an advanced level, their inability to speak it with a particular accent seemed to cause them some concern. A powerful remainder of India's colonial past, the ability to speak properly accented English is often viewed among the Indian diaspora as a highly desirable trait that marks one as educated and intelligent (Azam, Chin, & Prakash, 2013). Regional languages are often relegated as secondary to English, and the inability to formulate their ideas in Canadian-accented English was a matter of mild distress to a few of the participants.

Being of the Indian diaspora myself, I was able to hear and understand my participant's hesitation very quickly. I cleared their uncertainty by explaining that I was primarily interested
in their views, and that we could work with any language that they were comfortable with. Since I was fluent in their native languages (Hindi, Malayalam), I ensured their understanding of the consent letter and conducted the interview in their preferred language thereby minimizing their discomfort in the situation.

**Researcher Accountability**

As I engage in the acts of writing and theorizing, it is also vital for me to think critically about whom I am accountable to (Lugone and Spelman, 1983). Feminist scholarship suggests that at times our accountability to our profession and to our political visions can be at odds with our accountability towards the community and people that we are theorizing about. Katherine Borland talks of this perplexity when she says, “on the one hand, we seek to empower the women we work with by revaluing their perspectives and their lives in a work that has systematically ignored or trivialized women’s culture. On the other, we hold an explicitly political vision of the structural condition that lead to particular social behaviours, a vision that our field collaborators, many of whom do not consider themselves feminists, may not recognize as valid” (Borland, 1991, p. 62). This dilemma is particularly relevant to my work, as it is possible that the term ‘feminist’ may hold several negative and threatening connotations for some of the women who participated in my study. Working within a feminist framework greatly shapes my own perspective, but what about my participants who do not consider themselves feminists?

I anticipate that some of my interpretations of my participant’s experience may be rather different than their own. Would it be ethical for me to impose my voice on their narratives? If I chose to ignore the voices of my participants, I would be relegating them as mere possessors of raw data, without the means or abilities to theorize their own experiences. With such an outlook, the reciprocity between the researcher and the researched become simply the means to easy gathering of data, with little regard to the sentiments of the participants and the intentions of their narratives.

While it is certainly unethical to undercut, discredit, or write-off participant narratives that may differ from my own, is it correct to refrain from all interpretations by letting the subjects speak entirely for themselves? Completely ignoring my own voice and letting my
participants do all the talking could undercut my own feminist objectives which motivated me to conduct this work in the first place. While this seems like a rather difficult dilemma that has no real solution, I pay heed to Amita Handa (1997), who attempted to negotiate a similar predicament while working on her own thesis. She recommends treating the participant’s narratives as one side of a valid and insightful reality, a reality that is partial nonetheless in its analysis. Thus, these varied narratives can be used together to explore, gain insight and deconstruct the ideologies and educational experiences of Indian Hindu diasporic women in Canada.

**Participant Introduction**

**Born in Canada**

**Participant NM** – NM is in her early 30s, married and lives with her husband and their toddler daughter. She completed her undergraduate degree in Biology, and then pursued her second/third degrees in a combined Pharmacy and MBA program. She primarily relied on student loans and scholarships to fund her education. She currently works as a pharmacist at a hospice-network and specializes is end-of-life care. She identifies herself as being middle-class.

**Participant RJ** – RN is in her early 20s. She is an only child and lives with both her parents. She is currently in her third year of undergraduate studies. She does not have any student loans as her parents financially supported her throughout her post-secondary education. She identifies her family as being middle-class.

**Participant SM** – SM is in her mid 30s. She completed her undergraduate degree in Environmental Sciences, but is currently working in an unrelated field in telecommunications. She relied on both student loans and parental support to finance her higher education. She is single, and identifies herself as being middle-class.

**Participant AN** – AN is in her mid-20s and has completed her undergraduate studies in Biology. She is about to begin her second degree in Pharmacy at a university in the United Kingdom. Her parents covered all her finances during her undergraduate studies, and she has taken student loans to fund her international degree. Her parents continue to financially support
her in the UK by providing money for food, housing and travel within the UK, as well as between the UK and Canada. She identifies her family as being working-class.

**Participant MO** – MO is in her early 20s and in her final year of undergraduate studies. She is studying in an inter-disciplinary program that encompasses law, ethics, political science and economics. She is currently applying to graduate programs in Public Administration at various universities. She was financially supported by her parents for her undergraduate studies and does not have any educational debts. However, she anticipates taking out student loans for her graduate work. She identifies her family as being working-class.

**Participant PR** – PR is in her early-30s, and lives with her husband. She is the mother of a 4-year old boy, and is expecting her second child soon. She completed her undergraduate degree in Psychology, but is working in an unrelated field as a pharmacy technician. She relied on student loans to cover her finances during undergraduate studies. She identifies herself as being working-class.

**Participant MG** – MG is in her mid-20s and completed her undergraduate degree in Life Sciences. She is currently working in Public Health while also pursuing her Masters in Public Health. She relied on student loans and part-time jobs to fund her education, and identifies her family as working class.

**New to Canada**

**Participant AG** – AG is in her early 20s and has been in Canada for 5 years. She is currently studying English literature, and is interested in pursuing a degree in Law after the completion of her undergraduate studies. Despite being a landed immigrant, A is ineligible to access student loans due to some legal technicalities. Thus, she is financially dependent on her parents for the cost of her higher education. She identifies her family as working class.

**Participant BN** – BN is in early 20s and has been living in Canada for 1 year. She studies Business Management at a community college, and also works nearly full-time hours to cover all her expenses. B is an international student, and is dependent on both her family's financial support from India, as well as student loans in order to cover her tuition and living costs.
in Canada. She identifies her family as upper-middle class, but herself as currently working-
class.

**Participant SH** – SH is in her early 20s and had been in Canada for 6 months. She
completed her Bachelor of Commerce in India, and is presently working full-time at her family's
grocery store in the GTA. She identifies her family as working class.

**Participant MD** – MD is in her late 20s and has been in Canada for 3 years. She came
here as a sponsored spouse after marrying her Canadian husband, and is expecting her first child.
She completed her Engineering degree in India, and also an accounting program at a community
college in Canada. She runs the family's business with her husband, and identifies herself as
upper-middle class.

**Participant RA** – RA is in her mid-30s and has been in Canada for 5 years. She lives with
her husband and their 2 daughters. She completed her undergraduate degree in Commerce in
India, and also did an accounting course at a community college in Canada. She presently works
full-time at a related administrative position at a banking firm. She identifies her family as
middle-class.

**Participant TN** – TN is in her early-20s and has been in Canada for 4 years. She is
currently pursuing her engineering degree as a full-time international student at a university in
Canada. She relies on a paid-co-op program, as well as financial support from her parents to
fund her international education. She identifies her family as upper-middle class.

**Participant RN** – RN is in her early 20s, and currently pursuing an undergraduate degree
in graphic communications. She has lived in Canada for 5 years. She relies of part-time jobs,
parental support and student loans to fund her post-secondary education. She identifies her
family as middle class.
## Participants Born in Canada – Information Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education and Occupation</th>
<th>Family Status</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Status * (in Canada)</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Status * (in India)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NM</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
<td>Married with a toddler</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate: Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Only child, lives with her parents</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td>Mid 30s</td>
<td>Education: Environmental Science, <em>Occupation</em>: Telecommunications</td>
<td>Single, lives by herself</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>Pharmacy student in the UK</td>
<td>Single, lives on campus residence</td>
<td>Working-class</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate: Inter-Disciplinary program</td>
<td>Single, lives with family</td>
<td>Working-class</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td><em>Education</em>: Psychology <em>Occupation</em>: Pharmacy Technician</td>
<td>Married, expecting her second child</td>
<td>Working-class</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>Masters in Public Health</td>
<td>Single, lives with family</td>
<td>Working-class</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Socioeconomic class self-identified by participants during interview
## Participants Born in India – Information Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time in Canada</th>
<th>Education and Occupation</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Status* (in Canada)</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Status* (in India)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Undergraduate: English Literature</td>
<td>Working-class</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BN</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>International Student (Business Management @ Community College)</td>
<td>Working-class</td>
<td>Upper middle-class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| SH        | Early 20s | 6 months       | Education: Bachelor of Commerce (India)  
Occupation: Family business (Canada)                                                        | Working-class                     | Working-class                     |
| MD        | Late 20s  | 3 years        | Education: Engineering (India), Accounting (Canadian Community College)  
Occupation: Family Business                                                              | Upper middle-class                | Middle-class                     |
| RA        | Mid 30s   | 5 years        | Administrative position in a Bank                                                            | Middle-class                      | Middle-class                     |
| TN        | Early 20s | 4 years        | International Student (Engineering)                                                          | Middle-class                      | Upper Middle-class               |
| RN        | Early 20s | 4 years        | Undergraduate: Graphic Communication                                                         | Middle-class                      | Middle-class                     |

* Socioeconomic class self-identified by participants during interview
Chapter 5: Results

Theme 1 – Contradictions of Education

In order to discuss the impacts of traditional Indian values on diasporic Indian (Hindu) women in Canada, it is essential to decipher what are the aspects that are distinctly understood as 'traditional' and 'Indian' by these women. When asked to describe their notions of Indian culture, almost all of my participants equated it with a strong emphasis on both family values and higher education. In this first theme, I will discuss the manner through which notions of family values, culture, and education are linked within the experiences of diasporic Indian women, and how this link impacts the educational and professional choices made by these women. Furthermore, I will highlight the nuances and subtleties within the narratives that illustrate the inherent complications and contradictions faced by these women as they negotiate their educations and professions in Canada.

Education as a part of Indian Culture

Like many of her contemporaries, NM, a pharmacist born in Canada, described Indian values as a mixed bag of goods. She felt that it has both challenging and uplifting aspects that impacted her life, with one of the positive aspects of Indian culture being its high emphasis on education. Describing the contribution of Indian culture in her life, she says:

“(it gave me) my ability to study hard, or to just focus on what is important and not be swayed by other things. Because there are lots of distractions. Hello, I moved out when I was 22....I could have done all sorts of things that my friends were doing.”

She felt that her 'Indian' upbringing helped her to focus on her education and to achieve her career ambitions without being distracted. In particular, she compared her own focus to that of her non-Indian friends, and felt that her attention towards education was a result of her culture's emphasis on the same. RN, a new immigrant to Canada, felt much the same way about the emphasis of education within Indian diasporic families. She said,
“Indian families...they always...they would tell you to go to University. And (that) education is of utmost importance. And you know what, I kind of agree with that.”

RN's compatibility with her family's sentiments about education and it's importance signifies the internalization of these values by the participants themselves. I found that nearly all my participants, irrespective of time spent in Canada, agreed with their families about the importance of education and it's intrinsic value to their future. But what are the reasons behind this emphasis on education? Why are Indian diasporic parents so insistent upon their children achieving higher education? One popular response to this question was the notion that education would make second-generation Indians competitive in the Canadian workplace. RJ, a Canadian-born undergraduate student says:

“I think it's because they (parents) struggled when they came here, and school makes it so much easier. If you have that knowledge, no one can take it away from you, right? You can do whatever you want after...but it's something you can fall back on. It's like a safety net.”

RJ's sentiments were echoed by many others, who felt that the high emphasis on education was partially the result of the difficulties first-generation parents might have faced when they first moved to the West. Having struggled to access Canadian job-markets which undervalue international (particularly non-Western) degrees, they consider a Canadian university education vital for their children to become marketable in the Canadian workplace. The purpose of education is largely seen to be financial security, and a Canadian degree provides a 'safety net' which would break any fall in the children's career-choices.

Another reason behind the high propensity towards higher education was as a justification for the move to the West. MO, an undergraduate student born in Canada, says:

“Their (parent's) justification for coming here is....they renounced this comfortable life in India. They currently have blue collar jobs here, and the idea is that they moved here for our education.”

According to MO, Indian families sometimes regard their children's education as the primary motivation for their move to the West. This places an additional incentive on the
children to obtain lucrative careers through their higher education, both as a sign of respect for
the parent's sacrifices and to make their move worthwhile. This is particularly the case when
parents are seen to have made sacrifices in lifestyles and socioeconomic status for the sake of
bettering their children's future. In such instances, the child's educational success is key for the
(re)upward mobility for the parents, who view their own entry into working-class jobs as a
temporary sacrifice for their child's success.

However, these were not the only responses to my query about the importance of
education in the Indian culture. MD, a new immigrant to Canada, said:

“There is also the competition thing. Your child studies, therefore
mine will too. Sometimes...it’s like ‘her daughter did engineering,
my daughter better do that.’ What you get out of it (education)
later is not even a priority.”

MD's response makes it clear that women's education within the Indian community is
multifaceted and often serves contradictory purposes. While higher education is often used as an
instrument for financial/career safety and upward mobility, it is also used as a tool to wield
prestige and mobilize family status. Traditional Indian (Hindu) notions of filial piety and family
values intersect with aspects of 'modernity' such as higher education, to create distinct
educational and professional trends for diasporic Indian women in Canada. The amount of time
spent in Canada does not seem to affect these relationships as both my newly-immigrated and
second-generation participants are equally emphatic about the importance of (and
interconnections of) family values and higher education within their lives as Indian women
living abroad.

Furthermore, socioeconomic status from 'back home' also holds high significance to the
educational and professional choices made by members of Indian diaspora. MO feels that her
parents sacrificed a “comfortable” middle-class lifestyle in India in order to provide valuable
educational opportunities for herself. However, despite their present working-class situation,
their attachment to their past middle-classness is visible through their investment in the children's
education. Despite modest earnings, they willingly covered all of MO's (and her sister's)
undergraduate expenses, while encouraging both their daughters to pursue further graduate
education. Both the girls were told to view their education as an important investment that will pay back through social and economic mobility in the future.

The links between socioeconomic class and education is further elaborated by the narrative of SH, a new immigrant who works in her family-run grocery store. Unlike most of my working-class participants in Canada who professed their middle-class roots back home, SH comes from a working-class background in India as well. When asked about her reason for pursuing a Commerce degree in India, she said:

“Actually in high school I didn’t like studying much. When the (12th grade) results came out, so I was at my grandparent's home (on vacation). When I got the results...it was too late for college applications. So I finally got into this program....I figured commerce is good, I’ll always find a job....that is the reason I picked this course. Nobody forced me. (My parents told me to) study if I can. No forcing about what or how long to study.”

SH's family, while generally encouraging of her educational pursuits, are a lot less insistent on her achieving the same. Their nonchalance is also reflected in SH's laid-back efforts to apply to a specific college or program of interest. Her decision to leave her college applications till the last minute, and to work in her parent's grocery store upon arriving in Canada rather than re-qualifying her foreign degree, suggests a reduced investment in education when compared to my other participants. While she later states in the interview that she would like to climb the social ladder and rise from her working-class environment, she does not deem education to be necessary for that.

**Studying for Prestige**

Among my middle-class (and previously middle-class participants), higher education is greatly encouraged and largely expected. However, some topics of studies are given more value than others as they are seen to result in more prestigious or lucrative professions. For instance, AN who currently studies Pharmacy in the U.K., talks about how her choice of profession is a direct result of such value distinctions.
“I originally wanted to study psychology while my parents wanted me to do biology, so it was sort of a......it was a little bit of a conflict. My mom is a pharmacy technician and she was just really....she’s the one who originally got me into the whole pharmacy thing. In the beginning..she always had this aspiration of me being a pharmacist and she always told me ‘go into this field, go into this field”....so science was something that she really wanted me to do....so finally I was like ‘fine, I’ll make them happy and do that I guess’.”

Despite AN's own preference of subject that she wished to pursue, her wishes were ultimately discarded to fulfil the wishes of her parents. AN's narrative highlights the intertwining of notions of 'Indian culture', family responsibilities and higher education within the diasporic community. Filial piety is often considered a trademark of the Indian (particularly Hindu) culture where respecting one's parents is the primary duty of children (Mullatti, 1995). Transported into the diasporic context, filial piety has take on the shape of following parental designs of education and professions. The respect and obedience that elders expect within Indian (Hindu) diasporic families, along with the notions of decorum, obedience and gratitude that mark a 'virtuous' Indian female, it is not surprising that parent's wishes are given significant value by these women while making educational and professional choices.

Choice of subject aside, NM also acknowledges a sharp value distinction placed between university and college education for Indian diasporic students in Canada. When asked about the reason behind her choice of educational institution, she replied:

“Because my Indian culture has told me that in order for me to do good, I have to be a doctor or an engineer......and I cannot get there by going to community college.”

University is considered the only viable option to attain a respectable and high-status profession, and therefore among my participants, community college was largely overlooked as a primary site for gaining knowledge. NM is not the only participant to feel this way about community college. When asked why RN did not consider community college as an option for her higher education, she replied:
“Community college...it's fine you know.....but it's a prestige thing in our family. When I was first applying to university, I did think it was better than community college. But now that I see... I have a few friends that went to community college and I don’t see a big difference in terms of job options. But I personally don’t want to go to community college, just because I have the opportunity and the finances to get a university education.”

This narrative sums up the sentiments that my participants felt regarding higher education, which was that while it is a tool that provides them with financial security in the future, it also had high stakes in personal prestige and family reputation. Herein lies another contradiction, as despite acknowledging community college as a viable option for higher education and asserting it's ability to help students attain healthy careers, university is (unanimously) preferred if circumstances allow. Individual and family reputation is seen to stem from being established in a well-paid and sought-after white-collar profession, and community college was not viewed as a feasible option to achieve this goal.

**Shame of Studying Outside the Norm**

What impact do these notions of prestige and reputation have on the women in question? How do they deal with the responsibilities of achieving higher education from a University while also selecting a course that will be viewed as respectable by their family and community members? It was clear from speaking with my participants that this is not an easy feat to achieve. RN's choice to leave her IT course and join a Graphics Communication program was not taken well by her family. She talks about the distress that this decision caused her parents:

“My mom was very upset for a few months when I got into graphics....she was like 'you're ruining your life!'. She wanted me to go do business, accounting or finance or something like that......graphics was too much for her. But it's not like...I’m not in political science or social science or anything!”

Upon realizing her disinterest in Information Technology, RN not only had to take on the responsibility of finding an alternative and acceptable career-choice, but also had to pitch it to her parents and get their approval. Her mother's distress in this situation was due to the concern that RN's choice of Graphics Communication will leave her with reduced or low-paying job
options. While RN continued to pursue her new program despite her parent's initial resistance, it is clear that her parent's opinion mattered a lot to her. She justifies her choice by suggesting that while this new program might be a bit risky in comparison to IT, it is certainly more mainstream (and potentially lucrative) than the social science options.

Not all of my participants are able to have such forthright and honest discussions regarding their education. RJ, an undergraduate student in a combined college-university program says:

“I went to a University for 2 years and then 2 years to a community college...but when people ask, I would lie...and only mention the University part. Even though I'm in ECE...and that’s mainly a college program and there is nothing wrong with it, but that’s what I said to the uncles and aunties (the elders in the Indian community).”

RJ's discomfort in disclosing her educational choice is abundantly clear in her narrative. She chooses to shy away from the truth rather than risk ruining the social image of her well-to-do family by admitting that she studies at a community college. RJ is not the only participant to have such an evasive relationship with her education. MO, who changed her undergraduate program after her first year of studies says,

“Actually my parents don’t know that I’m not studying commerce. I didn’t have to heart to tell them I didn’t like it, so I’ve been secretly doing this other degree.”

MO's parents have been in the dark about their daughter's undergraduate program for the past few years. While MO intends to start graduate school next year and wants them to be knowledgeable about her graduate work, she does not wish to ever disclose the subject of her undergraduate studies to her parents.

These narratives expose yet another contradiction in the educational lives of Indian diasporic women. Despite acknowledging their love, respect and commitment to their families, many of these women find themselves in a position where they have to lie and be deceitful to the very people who encouraged them to pursue their education. Regardless of whether they
were new immigrants to Canada or have lived here all their lives, the social and financial values of attaining a higher education is highly instilled among nearly all my participants. The only exception to this is SH, whose (past and present) working-class background separates her from the rest of my participants in both attitude and efforts towards accessing higher education. In my next theme, I will discuss additional roles, expectations, opportunities and limitations negotiated by the Hindu women of the Indian diaspora, as they navigate their higher education in gendered and culturally specific ways.

Theme 2 – Contradictions of Gender

In understanding the relationship between culture, traditions and higher education, I attempted to decipher the specifically gendered ways through which my participants perceived notions of Indian 'culture' and 'tradition'. I also investigated how these perceived notions of culture and tradition interact with systems of hetero-normative patriarchy and socioeconomic class to generate interlocking systems that shape the educational and professional trajectories of Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in Canada.

Many of my participants spoke of the importance of 'traditional' gender roles in their lives. BN, a new immigrant to Canada, spoke about what Indian values mean to her:

“To be within your limits. Respecting you elders.. your parents and husband. In India, girls have specific restrictions...'you cannot do this or that' or 'you cannot go out.' You have to obey this. Girls need to ask parents for permission, or (from) your husband if you are married.”

BN feels that part of her cultural role as an Indian (Hindu) woman is the expectation of staying within certain societal limitations. These boundaries are enforced by parents as well as the larger society, and together they curtail female movements and thoughts. Women are expected to seek permission from others for their everyday needs, including venturing outside the house. But why are these expectations placed specifically on women? Also, what are some of the cultural aspects that make these limitations acceptable within the Indian diasporic family in the West? When discussing her role within the family, TN answered:
“I know that my brother is out every weekend. It was not the same with me. I wasn’t allowed to rent a car and go for the weekend...because I’m a girl and what will people say if I was found alone? They will say ‘their daughter doesn’t have a good character because she is out late at night’.”

TN's narrative shows a distinction that is maintained in the privileges and freedoms allowed to boys and girls within the Indian/Hindu culture. Boys have the gendered immunity to stay out late at night or to take off for the weekend with friends, but that is not the case for all girls. Girl's movements are more closely chaperoned by both family and society, and any indiscretion by the girl can lead to the label of 'bad character'. In a society where arranged marriages are still part of the norm wherein a girl's reputation can make or break her eligibility to obtain a good proposal, the 'character' and 'reputation' of girls is a very serious matter.

While both TN and BN are new to Canada, I was interested in understanding how these gender distinctions are negotiated in families that have lived in Canada for a substantial period of time. MG, a graduate student born and raised in Canada, says:

“They (parents) always expect me to do more than him (brother)......have more responsibilities than him. For example, cleaning the house. When I was a kid, I’d be like ‘why do I have to and he doesn’t?’ and their response was always ‘you are the girl of the house, so you have to’. I never really understood that.”

Thus, it seems that MG, despite her upbringing in the West, was expected to follow the gendered cultural norms from India which required her to take more responsibility of household chores than her brother. While she did not understand the reasoning behind this distinction, it is clear that her gender impacted her role within the family. When asked for the reason behind these differences between the treatment of boys and girls, MG replied:

“My family has this ‘we gotta watch out for the girls’ kind-of thing...like if we turn around, they’ll get pregnant!!’...but the fact that my brother could get someone pregnant does not register.”

This family's concern about their daughters sexuality and reputation echoes the sentiments voiced by TN's family. The maintenance of appropriate 'character' of women seems
to be a significant concern for the Indian diaspora, irrespective of the number of years lived in the West. Furthermore, it is seen as the family's duty to protect their women by keeping a careful watch on them and limiting their movements outside the house.

Given this vital aspect of the Indian 'tradition' that is continued in the West, how do they impact the educational and professional lives of Indian women living in the West? If a woman's 'character' and resulting marriageability is of such importance, what purpose do education and career serve for these women? TN, an international student pursuing a degree in engineering said:

“I think it’s just to get you a good husband. An engineer guy is looking for an engineer girl...a doctor is looking for a doctor wife. That’s the one big thing about girl’s education.”

TN articulates that one of the primary purposes of women's education in current society is to enhance her options in the marriage market. By being well-educated, a woman can expect marriage alliances from well-educated grooms who belong to affluent families. TN's statement highlights a very important link that is generated between 'traditional' and 'modern' values as understood by my participants. While parentally-approved marriage and domestic roles are emblems of stereotypical traditional Indian womanhood, access to higher education and careers do not necessarily pull the women in the opposite direction. Rather, quality of education has become a significant player within the hetero-normative gendered relations of Indian diasporic women, as their access and ability to achieve particular types of education/career can open avenues to particular types of partners and family alliances. Thus, the 'modern' notion of formal education goes hand-in-hand with the 'traditional' concept of arranged marriage, highlighting the presence of a 'hybrid culture' (Bhabha, 1991) within the diasporic community that generates it's own versions of 'alternative modernities' (Cooper, 2005).

The link between gendered norms such as marriage and education can be further examined by AG's narrative. AG is from a working-class family in Canada, and her newly-immigrated parents are paying for her university education. However, she says that the only caveat to this arrangement would be a good marriage alliance.
“If marriage will play a role....stopping my education when I get married, I’m not really sure about that. I have heard of such things...when my cousin got married, they discontinued her education after the marriage. But people now get married at 23-24....so there is sufficient time to finish a degree before that.”

According to AG, marriage could take precedence over education if the two were pitted against each other. However, because the average age of brides is increasing, young women now have enough time to complete their undergraduate (and potentially graduate) education before marriage proposals come in. With the two priorities of education and marriage often going hand-in-hand in the lives of Indian diasporic women, in what ways might the two interrupt each other? BN talks about her friend who is facing such a dilemma:

“My friend....she studied a lot...her parents are not finding a good groom for her. It becomes important that the guy should be more educated than the girl.”

BN's friend's difficulty in finding an appropriate match shows the other side of the situation. While it is important to be highly educated in order to attract a good marriage match, it is also expected for the groom be more educated that the girl. A husband who is often times older and more educated re-instates an unequal and gendered hierarchy in marriage, which can be maintained even if the wife has access to educational and career options. Thus, invented and selected traditions from the homeland are used to mold the roles of diasporic women in ways that suit the purposes of the hetero-normative and patriarchal society. Tellingly then, there is not much encouragement for women whose choices might break the norms of this society, such as women who may choose to remain single, or marry a younger man, or are involved in a homosexual relationship. Education and career seem to be encouraged to (and as long as they) maintain the status quo of gendered hierarchical relations within the family and society.

What other impacts might these asymmetrical hierarchies have on Indian diasporic women living in Canada? MD, a young wife newly immigrated to Canada answers:

“Nowadays the expectations from women is way too much. They have to be super woman....perfect in everything possible. They need to be real good wives..cook, clean all that...also go to work, make money, bring in extra funds, have children and take care of
them. It’s not possible to do all of that…no body can do justice to all that together. You will drop the ball somewhere.”

MD brings up the difficulties that women face when playing 'super woman' as they try to balance their home and working life. As MD says, this is a very difficult feat to achieve alone, and requires significant assistance from partners or other sources. But this assistance is often not found, and sometimes not even expected. PR, a second-generation women who works full-time as a pharmacy technician says that she will not consider upgrading herself professionally, even if that means a higher salary and more flexible work hours.

“If I wasn’t married and I didn’t have kids and stuff, I would have considered it. It’s too hard being married and the housework, and the job…it’d just be insane. With Indian people...(there is) too much pressure on girls...guys don’t have to do anything really! There’s no pressure to help with the household. I have to do everything, from cooking to cleaning to taking care of the kids.”

In PR's case, as much as she would like to climb professionally, she feels that it is not feasible given the realities of her situation. She finds herself responsible for all the domestic and child-rearing work, and feels that her career will have to take a backseat to her domestic roles and responsibilities. She especially feels that the Indian culture, with it's differential expectations of men and women, is responsible for her situation as she is unable to negotiate a better arrangement with her husband due to the cultural backing of his behaviour.

However, not all my participants responded to this dilemma with hostility. RA, a newly-immigrated mother of two who also works full-time says,

“My husband will help me a bit. He’ll buy groceries from outside, or if I’m sick then he’ll help out a bit in the kitchen, but otherwise I do everything. I don’t really like it when he does these household things.”

RA clarifies her own preference for doing the household work, as she does not want her husband's contribution on a regular basis. BN echoes the same thoughts. When asked how she intends to manage her work and home life after marriage, she answered:
“Maybe he (husband) can help out once in a while, just for fun. Not everyday...but once in a while. Actually I expect that I’ll keep a cook.”

BN also prefers for her husband to stay away from domestic work, apart from the occasional 'fun' day. But she also realizes that the amount of work that needs to be done around the house is significant. Thus, in order to balance out her household and career responsibilities, she intends to delegate the housework by hiring outside help.

Several of my participants felt that they were doing the lion's share of household work, which can impact their career choices and progress. Interestingly however, the women rarely took up the issue with their partners. Rather, the women either accepted the situation as is, or mitigated the issue by choosing careers that allow them sufficient time for family-work. Several of them, regardless of socioeconomic status or amount of time spent in Canada, also chose to curtail their professional growth in a manner that allows them to take care of the household responsibilities simultaneously. This trend was largely seen among women who were married and living in a nuclear family with their partners.

Among the women who were unhappy or dissatisfied with their assigned gender roles, the notion of hiring domestic help rather than dividing the house-work equally between spouses came up very often. While speaking of her concerns regarding this matter, RN says:

“If the husband has the same mentality as you, it’ll work out. Then he can take some of his time and help them out and I can take some of my time and help out. I don’t think it’ll be that bad. Or maybe I’ll get a nanny if it gets that bad and if I can’t deal with it.”

Thus, in the cases where the women anticipated difficulty in crossing the gender barrier within their own families, they often resorted to seeking outside help rather than actively re-negotiating the traditional gender hierarchies that are viewed as an intimate part of the Indian culture. This allowed them to both carry on their careers to some extent while also playing the traditionally-sanctioned and gendered role as the primary care-given and keeper of the house.
Theme 3 - Locked in Body and Culture

While discussing how notions of culture and traditions impact the experiences of diasporic women in Canada, it is vital to remember that their experiences are not formed solely through their experiences from the home-land. Rather, the cultures and traditions of their host-nation also play a significant role in the manner through which diasporic women experience education and profession in Canada. In this theme, I discuss the issues of race and racism as they are understood and negotiated by my participants. In particular, I highlight instances of discomfort and isolation experienced by my participants, and also their reactions and solutions to the same as they navigate through Canadian higher education system.

For many of my participants who grew up in Canada, their first few years of education was fraught with tension and discomfort over their 'brown' skin. When discussing her experiences as a racial minority growing up in Canada, MO says:

“It didn’t affect me much at the post-secondary level, but growing up as a visible minority in public school, it makes a huge difference at least at the time when I was growing up. Now not so much, because half the school is brown...but growing up it was a big deal to be anything but white. I stood out like a sore thumb. There were people who were quite racist. I don’t recall teachers saying anything, just because they were probably taught to be tolerant despite what they may or may not believe...but the kids were totally nasty, with name-calling, teasing and such.”

MO talks about the difficulties that she faced as a child due to blatant racism from her peers. This experience tainted her school-going experience as she describes herself as a loner during those years who stood out due to her skin colour. However, she feels that this is not the case at the post-secondary level largely due to the increased student diversity at many of these institutions.

But all my participants did not feel such comfort at their post-secondary institutions. RN, who studies at a large university in urban Toronto, describes her own feelings of discomfort at the post-secondary level:
“I have felt that (racial discomfort)...not so much in IT, but I feel it in graphic communications a lot. Because my whole department had like 10 brown people...and a lot of white people. It made me feel a bit excluded, but honestly it doesn’t matter. At this point I don’t really care. I’m just comfortable because most of my friends are majority brown...Indian or Pakistani or Arabic. I’m sure I have some friends who are white, but they’re just school friends...my best friends are brown.”

RN describes her own feelings of exclusion when she was part of an academic department that did not have a significant racially diverse student body. Unlike MO, who felt that her post-secondary education was more egalitarian due to the high number of 'brown' students, RN continued to feel excluded from her peers due to her race. However, she avoided openly speaking about her experiences and discomfort, and rather coped by initiating friendships with other students who are racially similar to her.

RN is relatively open about who she views as racially similar. In spite of differences in ethnicity, culture and religion, she forged strong friendships with students of Pakistani and Arabic backgrounds at her campus. While she has some friends who are Caucasian, she hesitates to claim them as so since they remain 'just school friends' with whom she only interacts at campus. Her 'brown' friends however, are her real companions with whom she has forged a more intimate friendship.

Thus, an inherent complication that comes up through these narratives is that even as diasporic women experience higher education as an integral part of their individual and cultural identity, they experience it from the margins of Canadian society. They do not feel integrated into the culture of mainstream Canadian higher education, and find it difficult to navigate through it without feeling isolated and left-out. As such, Indian diasporic women seem to experience higher education as a means to achieving an end (parental/societal approval, stable career, social mobility etc.), but do not address systemic issues of racism, discrimination and isolation that prevents them from being well-integrated into the system. When faced with such situations, they are unable to (or willing to) address the issue systematically through voicing their experiences, and rather cope with it by ignoring these feelings and building solidarity with fellow-ethnics.
These experiences of racism and isolation have further impact on the educational lives of diasporic women, as indicated by MO's narrative. Aside from feeling detached from her Caucasian peers, MO also brought up a sense of self-doubt or lack of knowledge/competence in comparison to them.

“In commerce it was more diverse, but as I got into humanities I did feel like a minority. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that I joined my major late...and a lot of the people in my major already knew each other...so I was the only one left behind. So I don’t know a lot of the people in my major. I also feel like...a lot of Caucasians have this inherent historical knowledge...like maybe their grandfather lived through it...there is always a wider knowledge of the world war and things like that...that I feel that I’m a disadvantage.”

MO's acknowledges the lack of student-body diversity at the multidisciplinary Humanities program that she switched into after deciding to stop her Commerce studies. Her narrative struck me as interesting that while she acknowledges that she may have initially felt left out because she joined the program late, she continued to feel like a 'minority' till the end. At the time of this interview, MO was in her final semester of undergraduate and she still felt that she doesn't know her peers and wasn't friends with anybody in her program. Her choice of the World War is also interesting given that India did take part in WWI as a British colony, and Indians were present in Canada during the time when the war was being fought. However, her comments display self-doubt about her knowledge, history, and ability to contribute to her peer's knowledge. Thus, issues of systemic and curricular racism also impact the educational lives and attitudes of Indian diasporic women in Canada.

While RN describes her own feelings of exclusion from the white majority at her university program, MD had the opposite experience. She felt included and valued, and remembers her days at the university with fondness. While describing her post-secondary education in Canada, MD says:

“I think a lot of people are curious about where I come from and my culture, so conversations start rolling. Once conversations start, then you get into a comfort zone with each other. It was the curiosity that triggered them to approach me. My teachers were
extra nice to me and they were very amused with a lot of
terminology that I used compared to what others did. Simple
things like...I would say cello-tape instead of scotch-tape. So
they’d be like ‘you’re so funny! You use these weird terminology
for these things.’ They were like really amused with all that.”

MD describes her post-secondary experience in Canada as overall positive, as she felt
that her teachers and peers were particularly nice to her. She took their amusement at her
vocabulary as lighthearted fun and went on to describe her relationship with some of her
Caucasian classmates as triggered by curiosity about her culture. During her interview, she
describes many instances in her campus life where she was asked questions regarding her
religion, eating habits and dialect, to which MD responded with enthusiasm as she felt that this is
how conversations flow and friendships form. Despite her positive relations with her classmates
however, she still noticed a difference in her treatment compared to others:

“It's mainly the accent. It's not just about being brown. People
who are brought up in this country with the accent still are in a
different category.”

Like RN, MD also felt some discomfort with regards to her accented English, and
ultimately chose to be friends with other new immigrants in her class, rather than with people
who had lived in Canada for a long time. While discussing instances of racial discomfort and
isolation, one of my participants also brought up a situation where being prejudiced due to her
race served her in a positive manner. When asked about her post-secondary experiences, NM
said:

“I was the girl that wrecked the curve. I was prejudged before I
even got there. If you are told that you're the one that’s going to
wreck the curve...you damn straight ARE gonna wreck the curve!
If you have a preconceived notion that I’m smart, I’m not going to
let you down!”

Due to preconceptions about her due to her race and ethnicity, NM was prejudged as
being academically smart before her classmates even got to know her. While this could certainly
be problematic, in this particular case it served to motivate NM to study harder and maintain the
preconception. She went on to receive one of the highest passing grades in her graduating class
and felt that the initial pre-judgement made about her was the starting point of her academic success at the institution.

**Theme 4 - Sites of Empowerment**

As I explore the challenges and difficulties that my participants face everyday as a function of living in the West as women of colour, I also pay heed to the locations of their privilege and power. These sites of empowerment come from material and economic mobility, pride in their Indian culture, as well as from family and community support. Furthermore, my participants also generate particular sites of empowerment for themselves, as they negotiate which aspects of 'tradition' and 'modernity' to accept and which ones to reject. They also make particular choices about the social and racial groups with whom to form alliances while strategically separating themselves from others.

**Educational Empowerment**

The high focus on education was often seen in a highly positive light by many of my participants. They viewed this characteristic of the Indian culture as a motivation for women to attain high levels of education, and therefore become more self-sufficient and independent in their day-to-day lives. Regarding the importance of education in her life, MD says:

“(It provides me with) independence, freedom. If I’m not comfortable or happy somewhere, I should be able to walk out of the situation and support myself. That is important. And it develops an individuality and identity of your own, which is important. So it's not even about the money.”

MD's narrative shows the importance that she places on attaining a high level of education and career. More than the financial aspect of working, she sees them as leading a path towards emotional and financial freedom for women who may need to walk out of unhealthy relationships. Education and career also provide emotional benefits to Indian diasporic women, including the development of a personal identity that is their own. In line with this thought, RA talks about the importance of work in her life:
“I like to work. Once the kids start going to school then you don’t have much to do. Because I’m working I’m busy again...and I don’t miss my family because (I) also have my own life...you feel like you have something of your own.”

RA's narrative reiterates MD's opinion that having an education and career give Indian diasporic women a life of their own that they can maintain outside of the family. Despite the amount of additional work involved in maintaining the work and home balance, Indian women seem to enjoy the freedom and independence that they get from working outside the home. Furthermore, some of my participants were also able to negotiate flexible work hours and locations due to their high levels of education. NM is a new mother to a toddler, who works from home as a pharmacist consultant. Regarding her working hours, she says,

“I love the flexibility, the fact that I just have to wear jeans. I like that I finish work and I’m at home and I don’t have to drive anywhere. The lack of commute is wonderful!”

NM finds her ability to work from home to be highly convenient for her current lifestyle. This flexibility is a result of her high educational qualifications which make her highly marketable in her field. Due to this bargaining power, she is able to tailor work arrangements that suit her personal needs while still maintaining a career that she enjoys.

Many of my participants also discussed the immense family support that Indian diasporic women get in order to achieve their educational goals. The cost of their education was almost never seen as a deterrent, as parents saw it as their duty to provide their daughters with all the support they need to achieve their educational goals. MO, who hails from a working class family says:

“In my family there is a very strong value given to education, where monetary issues are seen as a return on investment. More expensive schools are usually better.....in the long run there is a pay off..you will get a better job. And if you work hard to get into that harder school, then that’s worth it.”

MO's family sees her education as a very high priority and an investment that will pay off when she gets a good job. It must be perhaps for this reason that, despite their modest earnings, they were willing to pay for her undergraduate education without resorting to student loans.
However, not all of my participants were able to afford higher education without financial assistance. The inability to receive financial assistance however, was not seen as a deterrent to receiving higher education. RN, a new immigrant to Canada says:

“If I did not receive OSAP, my parents would have still paid for me. They would have figured out how to. Like I said, education is so important….they’d sell stuff and get me into university. They’re that determined.”

While RN does receive financial aid and also works part-time in order to help with her educational bills, she is also confident that lack of money will not prevent her from attaining her education. Her parents are determined to see her gain higher education, even if that means liquidizing the assets that they had accumulated over their lifetime.

In addition to financial assistance, Indian diasporic women also gain much emotional support from their family during their educational stage. TN, while discussing the value of Indian culture to her education, stated:

“In a way it's good that our parents take care of us till we are married and ready to move out. We are never kicked out of the house. Even education-wise, I know so many of my friends here who are paying for their own education...in a way that makes you independent, but still Indian parents are very good...they will support you till you have a job. That’s a big thing...not many cultures have that.”

TN's narrative shows the value that she places upon her culture for the availability of parental support to students. Aside from financially supporting their children to attain higher education, Indian parents also continue to help them till they are ready to be independent and move out. There is no culturally determined deadline by which children are expected to be independent, and a child is welcome to stay with her parents for as long as she needs. TN views this as a function of her culture, and one that is not shared by other (presumably Western) cultures.
Cultural Empowerment

While my participants said much in favour of their Indian/Hindu traditions and culture, nearly all of them also made a sharp distinction between themselves and a 'traditional' or 'typical' Indian girl. A 'typical' Indian girl, according to RN, was somebody very unlike herself:

“(She) doesn’t do anything wrong, who doesn’t drink, who depends on her husband for everything.”

BN added to these characteristics by saying a 'typical' Indian wife is someone who:

“cooks all the time, surrounded by groceries, babies. Tied to the house...always at home.”

While my participants felt that these characteristics defined 'typical' Indian womanhood, these were also the standards that they resisted in their own lives. Nearly all my participants said that they were 'different' from 'typical' Indian girls, and felt empowered because they had more freedom and choices than the latter.

Thus, a recurring theme that stood out in my participant's narratives was the fine line between conformity and non-conformity regarding their Indian-ness. Even as my participants recognized themselves as Indians with strong roots in their home-culture and traditions, they purposefully and strategically detached themselves from particular images of Indian-ness that did not appeal to them. The image of a 'typical' Indian woman who is a victim of intense patriarchy and chauvinism from the home-land, was rejected by my participants as they considered themselves atypical in this regard. They felt liberated from these aspects of 'Indian-ness' even as they willingly accepted others. Thus, the women seem to take some ownership upon which cultural tropes to follow and which to discard upon moving to the West.

This notion of selective culture is furthered by TN, who discusses the various things that she loves about the Indian culture, including the food, festivals and colours that have become the hallmarks of India's global identity. She says:

“We have so many colours and traditions...Diwali and Holi are two of my favourite festivals. I also enjoy the colours of Indian
clothes...I just love how rich our culture is....particularly Hinduism. I know there is a little bit of bitterness between Hindus and Muslims but the history goes back into our roots. If I were to go back and pick my own culture, I would still prefer to be a part of Indian culture because it is so rich in tradition.”

TN fondly remembers Indian (Hindu) culture largely for its festivals and celebrations, colours and clothes; aspects of India that are locally and globally propagated. While she displays love and patriotism towards her homeland, she is also selective about which aspects of this culture she loves and shares. When describing aspects of India, she does not acknowledge the gender restrictions within her family, poverty, violence, or any other negatives within her homeland. Nor does she expand on the intense communal animosity, religious partition, war and other violent histories that have impacted her nation in the past few decades. While the hostile relations between Hindus and Muslims in the nation is briefly mentioned, TN dismisses this animosity as a staple aspect of the Indian subcontinent which does not mar her happiness derived from the 'Hindu' aspects of the culture, such as the colours and festivities of Holi and Diwali (both Hindu festivals).

TN is not the only participant to speak of the Indian culture as a primarily 'Hindu' entity that is separate from the 'Muslim' culture in the same country. When asked to define Indian culture in her own words, RN said:

“As opposed to Islam, Hindus are very very liberal. There are extremists in every religion, and I’m not talking about them...but I’d say our religion is more liberal. We’re calm and peace loving, and for us its more about karma, about what’s good and what’s bad.”

RN instantly connected the 'Indian' culture with a 'Hindu' culture, and understood 'Hindu' culture to stand in opposition to the 'Muslim' culture. With her idea of Muslim culture as a point of reference, RN felt that the Indian/Hindu culture was more liberal and conductive of peaceful living. Her construction of Indian/Hindu culture as exceptionally liberal is interesting because during her interview, RN had made several comments about the lack of freedom and restrictions placed upon Indian women, including herself. For instance, regarding her relatively strict curfew, RN says:
"In our culture it's a very big deal that a girl be a virgin till she is married...so they try to protect you at every single step...that is the whole point of 'you shouldn't go out at night', because they don't want to find you with another guy....If u go back to ancient roman culture, its the same thing. A guy who’s married can be found with another woman, but a woman cannot be found like that. So I think India has taken a lot from ancient Roman culture."

Thus, despite acknowledging her lack of freedom, RN continues to construct her culture as particularly liberal, at least in relation to other minority groups such as Muslims. Her explanations for the restrictions and curfews placed upon her are through a narrative of care and protection, where her sexual safety and chastity is protected by members of her family. Interestingly, she compares this aspect of the Indian culture to ancient Romans, with whom she creates a link of shared culture and possibly a common history.

While not all my participants spoke about their culture with reference to other minority cultures, TN and RN both verbalized the religious tension and animosity that exists between Hindu and Muslim populations, which continue to show up as communal riots and mass violence in India till date. However, Muslims were not the only group 'othered' within these narratives. When discussing her own and parental expectations regarding marriage, RJ said:

“No real expectation to marry an Indian or a Hindu guy. Only thing is.. 'don’t marry a black guy!'...It’s just something that you don’t do...and I’m like..I’m not really trying to marry one...going out of my way to meet them or anything!"

It is clear from RN's narrative that while her parents are generally flexible regarding her choice of life-partner, they would strongly prefer for her to not marry a 'black' guy. Unlike the history of tension that exists between Hindus and Muslims in India, there was no particular reason provided to justify this animosity displayed towards Black Canadians. However, the need to maintain a distance from the Black community was presented in a matter-of-fact tone that implies it's popularity amongst the Indian diasporic community. It might be a reflection of the colonial baggage that continues to mark lighter skin tones with beauty and value among members of the Indian diaspora. Additionally, it might also be a conscious effort made by the Indian community to maintain it's desirable status as a model minority by disassociating itself from other communities that are not considered 'model'.
Thus, these narratives show that while Indian immigrants in the West may be 'othered' by the Caucasian-majority in the country, they also contribute towards the 'othering' of various minority communities that are a part of Canada. This is vital to keep in mind as we study how Indian diasporic women navigate through Eastern and Western cultures to acquire higher education in Canada.

The four themes in this chapter are organized in order to highlight the experiences of diasporic women predominantly through their own narratives. In the next chapter, I will further analyze these narratives to stress the ways in which race, class, gender, hetero-normative patriarchy and religion are mutually constitutive and interlocking systems that shape the lives of Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in Canada.
Chapter 6: Discussion

In this chapter I discuss some of the major themes and ideas that emerged through this research project. In response to the changes in social values and material realities upon moving to the West, I suggest that the Indian diasporic community borrows selected invented traditions from the nation's nationalist past. Women are once again christened as the sanctum of Indian cultures and traditions, and as such, expected to uphold the values and practices in their private domestic sphere even as they follow educational and professional pursuits. Many of the traditions that are selected are chosen as a response to Western influences, and therefore viewed as superior in their ability to foster patience, discipline and family relations among diasporic members. In their invented stance as the ideal amalgamation of Indian traditions and Western practices, diasporic women navigate through particular sites of empowerment and disempowerment which are shaped by interlocking systems of race, class, gender, religion and hetero-normative patriarchy.

Kalpana Ram (2005) argues that the anxieties and predicaments regarding one's culture is not a new occurrence for migrants who have previously experienced colonization and it's aftermaths. Indian immigrants in particular, sense the recreation of an environment experienced by their ancestors, and thus revert to the ideas and representations forged in resistance to British colonization of India. Particular discourses from the 19th and early 20th century India make a strong come-back, as Indians living in Canada attempt to create a sense of community by inventing traditions and cultural identity in response to their pre-labelled designation as an ethnic and visible minority.

During India's struggle for freedom from the British Raj, the Indian nationalist leaders constructed the model of a new Bhadramahila (respectable Indian woman) who represented the unchanging soul of the Indian nation (Thapar-Bjokert,1997). This middle-class Indian woman represented the cultural and religious essence of the country, and was seen to be the very spirit of India. The Indian nationalist leaders modelled this 'new woman' to be able to withstand the pulls of Western ideas while retaining her spiritual core and familial roles. As the guardians of tradition, Indian Bhadramahilas were circumscribed to play specific roles intended to 'protect' the nation's soul from Western influences.
In much the same way within the Indian diaspora living in Canada today, I suggest that women once again don the role of a modern and transnational Bhadramahila albeit one who remains 'traditional' at the core. The sanctum of culture and convention are once again represented by these diasporic Bhadramahilas, who protect and preserve Indian culture from the Western influences present outside the home. Much like the Bhadramahila of the past whose role was transformed to fit the needs of the nationalist movement, so the role of Indian women in Canada today is molded to suit the purpose of the diasporic community.

As symbols of the everlasting purity and cultural superiority of the Indian national spirit, Indian (Hindu) diasporic women in the West are given little leeway in which to perform this culture. Seen as the emblems of tradition, their roles have largely been constricted to that of a respectable daughter/wife/mother who innately knows and values the patriarchal gender ideologies of her homeland. As such, most of the participants I spoke with defined their 'Indian-ness' in terms of hetero-normative and gendered cultural boundaries that they were expected to observe and respect. For BN, Indian culture encompassed staying within socially prescribed 'limits' by remaining obedient and seeking permission when stepping outside the house. Similarly, TN mentioned the need to follow appropriate female decorum and maintain a 'good reputation' even while living in the West. Thus, characteristics such as 'modesty', 'obedience' and 'chastity' continue to remain synonymous with the notion of an ideal Indian femininity, even as diasporic women face multiple challenges in their new environments that require them to resist and modify the same.

Interestingly however, despite claiming their knowledge and allegiance to Indian culture, many of my participants seem to understand their location within this culture in very static terms. Being 'Indian' was associated with specific markers such as valuing education, respecting elders, and maintaining female decorum by wearing modest clothes and obeying strict curfews. Furthermore, these categories were often constructed in contradiction to what was seen as stereotypically 'Western' culture. For instance, NM mentions that while she could have partaken in 'all sorts of things' with her friends upon moving away from home, it is specifically her Indian upbringing that allowed her to resist these influences and focus on her studies instead. Thus, the importance of education in the Indian culture was not simply as a valuable component intrinsic to the culture, but also in relation to a presumed 'slack' attitude towards education by the rest of
Canadian society. Similarly, TN suggests that Indian parent's insistence on paying for their children's education and not 'kicking them out of home' after a certain age reflects a particularly warm and compassionate bond between family members that does not exist in many other cultures. Thus Indian culture, as understood by the majority of my participants, exudes particular strengths that are constructed in relation and opposition to the perceived 'Western' culture that surrounds them.

This need to set Indians and Indian culture apart from the rest, I suggest in agreement with Handa (2003), is due in part to the invisible and pervasive dominance of White/Anglo norms within Canada which insist on the inferiority of Eastern cultures and practices. Such virulent forms of common-sense racism force Indian diasporic members to claim their social credibility by insisting upon having cultural norms that are superior to the dominant Anglo or 'white' culture. The superiority of these cultures and traditions from the home-land are touted as the rational explanation behind the community's relative monetary success and class mobility upon moving to the West. Interestingly, it is also the community's investment in a particular middle-class socioeconomic status that allows for these invented Indian traditions to become salient within the diasporic context.

Despite acknowledging their deep affinity with Indian culture however, almost all my participants strongly vocalized their exclusion from 'typical' Indian femininity. In her interview, BN listed the stereotypes associated with such a typical woman as one whose life revolves around her family to the point where she is dependent on others for her day-to-day life. Such a womanhood was strongly denied by all my participants who insisted that they were not 'typical' Indian women and have strong identities of their own. Furthermore, given that many of my participants mentioned that their own mothers were working women (both in India and Canada) who managed their careers and families efficiently, it was further suggested that my participants were not from 'typical' Indian families with patriarchal gender roles and hierarchies.

While scholars have previously suggested that diasporic women create such distance between themselves and typical Indian womanhood in order to resist being negatively stereotyped and essentialized by the dominant society (Handa, 2003), I add that they also construct these comparisons as a method of negotiating power and mobility within their existing
interlocking systems of power and oppression. Having maintained strong transnational connections with their home-land, my participants are well-aware that India is going through an extensive socioeconomic and cultural revamping. Important social changes have occurred since the late twentieth century (such as commercialization, urbanization, migration and improved employment opportunities) that inspired challenges to female identity as it is traditionally understood. Furthermore, parental approval and support for women’s educational and professional aspirations have increased significantly across most social classes (Alur, 2007; Maslak & Singhal, 2008). As such, young Indian women (particularly those who live in commercial towns and cities) no longer live the secluded and domestic lives of their fore-mothers, but instead receive high levels of education and are gainfully employed. The lives of these women might not be much different from those of diasporic women living in the West, which my participants are aware of given their own mothers and other female relatives who live and work in India.

For this reason, I find it intriguing that my participants essentialize 'typical' Indian womanhood into such a lamentable state. If they themselves, their families and acquaintances in both India and Canada do not resemble the stereotypical nature of Indian womanhood, then who are these 'typical' Indian women that were regularly pitied by my participants?

I argue that this popular image of a subservient Indian womanhood is largely maintained in her distressing state within the collective imagination of the Indian diaspora for a specific reason. While rooted in the age-old ideologies from the homeland, today this image serves the purpose of reminding the Indian diasporic community that even as the West continues to denote their culture as inferior, the diasporic community is above that essentialization due to their own transnational, cultural and geographic capital. Even as the Western world uses the image of the pitifully subjugated Indian woman to reduce the East as hopelessly patriarchal and regressive, the ideology of the pathetic and subjugated Indian woman salves the egos of the diasporic Indians by serving as a reminder of their own exclusion from this 'typical'-ness.

Furthermore, the construction of this typical Indian woman also places the diasporic women in a position of cultural empowerment, positioning them as the perfect amalgamation of East and West. Their distinctly Indian culture and upbringing positions them a notch above the
regular Western women, who are (according to popular diasporic imagination) less likely to value their families, respect their elders, and focus on education. Indian diasporic women living in the West are able to do all this because they have been instilled with their traditional values and culture which, according to my participants, allows them to avoid the mistakes made by their Western counterparts. However, the diasporic women are also able to bypass the 'typical' patriarchy and chauvinism associated with the homeland, due to their own exclusion from that aspect of Indian culture. Situated thus, these diasporic women construct themselves as having just the right mix of tradition and modernity, in order to situate themselves as the glorified face of modern Indian womanhood.

This construction of East-West hybrid is not without its share of costs and contradictions. Being the penultimate 'modern' Indian woman implies the embodiment of both Indian and Western values within oneself without being essentialized or constrained by either. However, understanding my participant's narratives in all its complexities, I would suggest that these women are actually constrained by both.

The educational and professional choices of my participants bring to light the many complexities and contradictions inherent within this matrix. Nearly all my participants expressed the importance of education and profession in their lives for various reasons, including its role in enabling self-sufficiency and an independent identity. However, their own feelings aside, there is also an immense pressure placed on middle-class diasporic women to signify their Indian-ness through success in educational and professional endeavours. Education is viewed as a quintessential part of Indian culture by several of my participants, and their educational success is deemed necessary to qualify themselves as an ideal 'modern' Indian woman.

For instance, NM feels that the only way for her to gain the respect of her fellow-ethnics is to be successful in a highly qualified profession such as medicine or engineering. Other professions are not respected as much, and women are often coerced to study subjects they are not particularly interested in. AN provides an example of this, as her parents agreed to pay for her undergraduate and an international graduate program provided she adhered to their wishes to study pharmacy (a more lucrative science-based program) over psychology. Thus, despite having more access to education and career options than previous generations, the women's
choices are still largely mandated by their family's wishes, particularly when financial support is in the line. This situation highlights some of the inherent contradictions embedded within the diasporic community as 'traditional' notions of filial piety and family values are negotiated to achieve 'modernity' and independence through education. It also complicates the causal relationship emphasized by my participants between Indian traditions and parental love, as access to familial support may be contingent upon sacrificing personal choices for the family's social and financial mobility.

The link between cultural acceptance and education can also prove to be emotionally deflating, as demonstrated by RJ's and MO's narratives who both resorted to various forms of deception in order to conceal their shame from achieving 'low-status' education. Studying at a community college and outside of the respected math and science subjects were seen as shameful acts by these participants, who hid the fact from their family and community members. In an effort to negotiate their personal aspirations with the expectations imposed upon them, they chose to conceal a vital part of themselves and essentially lead a double-life.

The experiences of SH however, sheds a new light on the lives of working-class diasporic women, particularly those who have a working-class background prior to immigration. SH was moderately encouraged to study, but never felt pressured to continue her higher education. Her choice of college program was made at the last minute because she was on vacation during the time of application, and she was actively discouraged by family-members from working after graduation. This is a stark contrast from the experiences of the rest of my participants who engaged in significant discussions with their families regarding their higher education and future careers.

Upon coming to Canada, SH chose to help her family's business rather than continue her education. When asked about her future goals, she hoped to elevate her family's social and economic status in the future. However, she did not mention further education as essential to achieve this goal. SH, being my only participant who is of working-class background both in Canada and India, describes her experiences as organized through a set of social expectations and market relations that differ significantly from the rest of my participants. While her experiences are not to be generalized for all working class women, it does highlight the
importance of social class (both present and past) as a factor that guides the roles and expectations of Indian diasporic women living in Canada. Women of working-class origins, while still socially and financially ambitious, may be less inclined to view higher education and a white-collar profession as mandatory for achieving their goals. Thus, the notion of education as a key aspect of 'Indian culture', as mentioned by several of my participants, might only be applicable to women who have access to a middle-class lifestyle and life-choices.

For the said women, along with access to a middle-class lifestyle also comes the responsibilities of upholding the said socioeconomic status, both through their educational and professional achievements as well as their domestic and social conduct. It is here that the majority of my participants navigated through the contradictions of the traditional and modernity dyad. Within a context of gendered family roles and expectations, my participants were rarely able to negotiate significant domestic contribution from their partners. While some of the women mentioned that they occasionally received help, the work-load was almost never divided equally. The women often found themselves overworked after doing the double-duty of full-time work outside the house while also being primarily responsible for taking care of the various needs of the family-members. Despite their assertion of themselves as 'modern' and outside the patriarchal gender relations of 'typical' Indian families, the same gender relations makes it difficult for them to negotiate a more equal relationship within the household. Their identity as Indian women was maintained through the satisfactory completion of these gender roles, and even as the women strive to attain their educational and career goals, their domestic role was deemed necessary to locate them within Indian culture and tradition.

Needless to say, an immense burden is placed on the shoulders of these middle-class diasporic women, as they are asked to meet unrealistic standards of domestic and career/educational aspirations. RJ negotiates these roles as a working woman by placing her family's needs well above her own, and taking ownership of all the household responsibilities. She spoke of her dislike in receiving help from her husband, and thus positions herself as the decision-maker who chooses to do all the extra work at the expense of career-climbs and physical exhaustion.
Other participants who were more vocal about their dissatisfaction also resorted to various strategies in order to meet this challenge, including hiring a cook or a maid if the situation demands. However, none of my participants actively questioned or challenged the stereotypical gender hierarchies in place that rendered them responsible for all the housework in the first place. Thus, within this context of diasporic Indian culture, the success of modern India depends on the success of its women in both public and private spheres. And while the women were encouraged to present a positive face of global India by being highly educated and gainfully employed, they were also expected to adjust these aspirations to ensure the successful operation of the household.

The underlying assumption within these family relations however, is that of a relatively affluent heterosexual middle-class bourgeois family, where the husband's career and time is given more value than the wife's. The husband's role as the primary bread-winner, and the wife's role as the primary care-taker are both assumed and encouraged within this ideology. It thereby continues to propagate the 'traditional' heterosexual family where the role of women is primarily located within the domestic/spiritual sphere, even as the women engage in professional activities outside the home. Despite the narratives of emancipation through education and profession, Indian (Hindu) women's movements continue to be limited by the selected and invented traditions that do not significantly alter their roles as dutiful and domesticated wives who meet the needs of community.

There seems to be very little space within this ideology for women who identify any differently from this norm. There is no talk of women who are willingly single, who identify as homosexual, or who are transgender. Of women who choose not to identify with their Indian roots, or women who willingly abstain from having children. In essence, there is no mention of any form of female identity that might interrupt the delicate organization of a classed and heteronormative patriarchy that propagates a selective and invented Indian culture. Here, despite engaging with the outside world, the woman's true spirit is situated within the realm of the house. Even as she goes to school, travels to work and engages in professional activities, the Indian/Hindu diasporic woman's femininity continues to lie within culturally fixed terms of domesticity.
This ideology guides the women to speak in terms of a perfect amalgamation of their work and home lives, even as they continue to restrict their career ambitions and over-work themselves. This premise might explain the ease with which some of my participants accepted their arguably unfair, and emotionally and physically tiring situation. Most of my participants embraced the idea of wanting an education and pursuing a career, not just for monetary reasons but also for the pursuit of independence and confidence. In light of their intense advocacy for such goals, their decision to also take on the bulk of domestic work, often at the expense of their professional progress might seem contradictory.

However, the intense investment into middle-class affluence within this ideology also places the women in particular positions of power. By enlisting a maid to help with the housework rather than negotiating the work-load with their husbands, the women are able to (re)establish the class power that they had forgone upon moving to the West. It places my participants in a position of heightened empowerment, as the maid in question is often another woman of colour who does not have access to the socioeconomic, educational and citizenship status that my participants enjoy. Thus, my participant's class and cultural privilege as middle-class women who can simultaneously and smoothly navigate her career and home-life, would not be possible without the presence of economic and sociocultural conditions that cause other women to take on the roles of house-maids. Market and economic relations which organize the experiences of the maids also impact my participants as they negotiate their own access to social, class and financial mobility.

Furthermore, by taking a backseat in their career and accepting the culturally accepted role of a home-maker, the women are also pushing their husbands to take on a more active role as the 'traditional' bread-winner. Being first-generation immigrants themselves, this is certainly not an easy feat for the men to achieve, as many of them find themselves in positions that are under-matched for their educational qualifications from the home-country. Within a matrix of systemic racism that de-values their foreign education, my participants are able to utilize particular aspects of their traditional roles to focus on the domestic responsibilities, with the understanding that the primary financial responsibility of the household is the husband's domain.
This middle-class rhetoric however, can be highly problematic for a large number of women who do not fit into the middle-class life-style and the socioeconomic access that it demands. Several of my participants were working-class women who, despite their middle-class affluent roots back in India, had relocated to find themselves in a different socioeconomic status in Canada. They often did not have the option of hiring a maid due to lack of finances, and nor could they step back as being the secondary earner, as both partners were required to work long hours in order to maintain their desired standard of living. It is these women who primarily bear the brunt of these systems of oppression, as they find themselves unable to negotiate a more equal division of labour despite working the same hours and earning the same amount of money as their husbands. For these women, the popular rhetoric of a gendered division of labour falls through, as they find themselves being responsible for both earning a large share of the family's income while maintaining their Indian femininity through domestic and social responsibilities.

The contradictions of diaspora are also seen among my participants who are students pursuing their higher education. In line with the notion of being the ideal amalgamation East and West, many of my participants suggested that, aside from isolated incidents, they had not experienced systemic racism in Canada and felt well-integrated into the society. However, despite this assertion, there is a striking lack of Caucasian friends among all my participants. When asked about their friend-circles both at campus and outside, all my participants mentioned that they were primarily friends with fellow diasporic members who were also visible minorities. While some like RN mentioned casual acquaintances who were 'white', every one of my participants, irrespective of time spent in Canada, asserted stronger friendships with fellow ethnics both in and out of campus.

While such friendships could partially be formed due to having a similar history and common interests, it was also accompanied by a distinct lack of confidence and comfort in situations with mostly Caucasian peers. MO, for instance, felt left out of her university program and expressed feelings of being a 'minority'. She also questioned her own knowledge and found it to be lacking in comparison to that of her white peers. Similarly, RN also mentioned her discomfort at being a racial minority in her graphics program, as it was not racially diverse. In both these cases, the participants chose to ignore their discomfort and focused on forging bonds
with fellow-ethnics instead. I suggest that in doing so, my participants are choosing not to view (and thereby not to validate) the racism that they face from the dominant culture in Canada.

This phenomenon of South Asian students feeling othered and silenced at Universities has been previously documented by scholars such as Edith Samuel (2004) and Kalwant Bhopal (2008). Tisdell (1993) in her work with graduate students articulated that the more an individual benefits from the interlocking system of structural privileges, the more influence they will have in implementing their perspectives and worldviews onto others. Conversely, those with less power and influence within this matrix are more likely to be silenced, both at individual and systemic levels. Thus, due to their lack of structural privilege and systemic influence, South Asian women are less likely to feel that they are a significant part of their higher educational institutions, and more likely to remain silenced and in the margins of knowledge-production. Bhopal asserted that South Asian students form close alliances and friendships with fellow ethnic-members to find support and respite from the hostile university environment. While my participant's narratives certainly add validity to these assertions, it is also vital to revisit the dynamics, complexities and contradictions that are present within such camaraderie.

RN, while speaking about friendships, mentioned that she was most comfortable with her 'brown' friends, and had a diverse group of friends from India, Pakistan, and Middle-East. Though she did not necessarily verbalize it, implicit in her narrative is the idea that these 'brown' students, in spite of their varying religions, customs and socio-political history, are able to come together in solidarity and friendship in order to support each other. Vijay Prashad (2011) discusses this phenomena within the Indian-American diasporic context wherein children of parents from the various countries of South Asia intuitively connect with each other. A very similar phenomena was observed among my participants too, who were able to forge deep connections with fellow South Asian peers on the basis of shared diasporic experiences.

However, these friendships are not quite as straightforward as they might seem at first glance. These alliances are also confronted with battles of power that are wielded, I suggest, by positioning oneself as close to the dominant white culture as possible. Even as RN counts Arabic and Pakistani (including Muslim) peers among her best friends, she constructs her Indian culture as a Hindu culture that stands in opposed to (and as better than) the Islamic culture. RN regards
herself and her fellow 'Hindu' Indians to be 'calm', 'peace loving', and also 'very liberal' despite her aforementioned struggles with educational autonomy and gender hierarchies within her household.

I argue that positioning Indian culture in opposition to Islamic culture allows RN to establish her ethnic community as one that is liberal, peace-loving and more-or-less at par with the dominant narrative about Canada as a 'modern', 'peace-loving' and 'liberal' nation. In doing so, RN enhances the power that she can wield even whilst at the margins of Canadian society, by articulating her heritage as more liberal and 'modern' than those of other minorities who are also racially othered. As such, she fights against the popular notion of 'modernity' as being located outside of the native's reach and ability due to inherent cultural baggage (Cooper, 2005). Rather, she locates herself and her culture closer to the dominant culture, and thereby brings herself nearer to the freedom and power wielded by the invisible majority.

It is for the same reason that TN linked Indian culture to the ancient Romans, and RJ distanced it from the black community. While discussing the importance of female decorum within the Indian/Hindu context, TN compared the greater restrictions placed on women's bodies as linked to the Roman culture where only men were allowed to be promiscuous. She connected the foundations of Indian traditions to the ancient Roman culture, and in doing so, attempts to place Indians closer to hitherto 'Aryan' race and reduce the racial distance between Indians and Anglo-Saxons. Similarly, RJ's parents are quite lenient regarding their expectations of her marriage, with the only stipulation being against marrying a black person because, as RJ explains, “it is just something you don't do.” This brings up the question – why is this something you don't do?

I suggest that it is because my participants are actively asserting their cultural worth through particular cultural and historical narratives that can bridge the racial, social and cultural chasm between themselves and the dominant 'white' culture in Canada, even while maintaining a sense of cultural and traditional superiority. This closing of the cultural distance between East and West is reticent of Homi Bhabha's (1991) concepts of cultural hybridity, where opposing cultures negotiate their differences at interstitial spaces. The diaspora is the liminal space, and the bodies of diasporic women are the active sites where these differences are negotiated.
Prashad (2000) argues that while South Asians living in the west do not expect to be fully included into the 'white club', what they truly seek is to be exclusion from the 'black club'. They strongly wish to erase the imagined immobility that comes from being black, and opt instead to use their culture, religion, socioeconomic class and ethnicity to become racially invisible and economically mobile. However, despite the flexible notions of citizenship utilized by middle-class Asian immigrants which allows them to be more culturally adaptable (Ong, 1998), I suggest that coloured bodies remains perpetually marked and therefore permanently immobile. Even when they claim their rights as global citizens with the ability to move, they are forcefully incarcerated in body and culture.

Incoming third world immigrant populations of Canada are primarily projected as wanting the same religious, linguistic, and cultural lives that they had in their countries of origin. They are frozen into ‘traditional/ethnic cultures’ that are socially conservative and morally ‘different’ from the rest of white Canada. Mapped into this framework of ethnicity and culture, structural and social inequalities remain hidden behind differences in looks, languages and cuisines.

The first world body today however, is not necessarily white in skin colour. Rather, its privileged position in relation to the third world (black) body allows it to momentarily step into whiteness. Benefiting from privileges of social class, education and cultural capital, I argue that these (racialized) first world bodies attempt to transform into mainstream Canadian bourgeoisie through various strategies, in order to both take on the privileges that accompany this transformation as well as to deflect the negative connotations of being a 'raced' minority.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this chapter I re-iterate some of the major results and themes that emerged from this research project. I also discuss the scholarly significance of my work, and speak to some of the limitations of this study and how they may be addressed in future work.

This study attempts to understand the manner through which traditional Indian (Hindu) culture and traditions impact the educational and professional lives of Indian diasporic women living in Canada. It questions and pushes against the popular portrayal of Indian traditions and values as inevitably detrimental to the modern aspirations of Indian diasporic women in the West, by seeking the possible influences and contributions of these values to their educational and professional advancement. It also considers the manner through which diasporic women might use their traditions and culture to achieve their educational and professional aspirations in Canada.

In viewing hetero-normative patriarchy, race, class, and colonialism as multiple interlocking systems that impact the lives of Indian diasporic women, this study reveals the inherent complexities and contradictions that mark their narratives. While education is considered a key aspect of Indian culture by most of the participants, the access and results of this education were intricately weaved through racial, social and patriarchal systems that produce both sites of empowerment and dis-empowerment for Indian women living in the West with Eastern practices.

Specifically, diasporic women are seen as the glorified face of modern India who represent the ideal amalgamation of Eastern and Western cultures. Access to higher education is markedly high among Indian diasporic women wherein they find high parental and communal support to pursue their educational and professional goals. Despite financial and lifestyle constrains, they are encouraged to study as much as they desire and to attain a professional career that is both financially and socially lucrative to them. The women themselves take pride in their educational and professional endeavours, and see it as a source of their identity and autonomy.
Meanwhile, even as their 'modernity' is on display to the world through educational and professional enterprises, Indian diasporic women are also on cultural display through their personal and familial behaviours. Cultural markers from the home-land such as modesty, filial piety and chastity are viewed as priced souvenirs of Indian culture, translated and preserved through the bodies of the community's women. This act of translation however, is one that involves systemic selection and strategic invention of tradition such that it propagates the hetero-normative, gendered and classed dynamics of the diasporic community.

The balancing of these dynamic expectations is often physically and emotionally draining for the women as they find themselves performing to a global and ethnic audience simultaneously. Both these audiences have differing expectations, which the women are expected to fulfil synchronously. For instance, women who are unable to pursue esteemed educational degrees and lucrative careers are seen to bring shame to their family and community-members, and may even jeopardize their chances of attracting potential marriage alliances. Simultaneously however, women who have successfully integrated work and family lives are often overwhelmed by the overload of domestic responsibilities that remains primarily theirs in an undeniably hetero-normative patriarchal system.

However, underlying within this interlocking system are the women's own negotiations of these complexities, as they carve out particular sites of empowerment and privilege for themselves that guide them to make specific choices about their lifestyles. For instance, the women refer to themselves as 'a-typical' and emancipated in comparison to a (largely imagined) submissive and servile Indian womanhood of the homeland who is subjugated under the patriarchal rules of the society. As such, Indian diasporic women position themselves as living the ideal blend of Eastern and Western practices and representing the ideal amalgamation of these two opposing cultures. However, the same gender dynamics play a role in their own lives as they choose to avoid negotiating equal domestic responsibilities with their partners in favour of hiring a maid. Thus, they bypass the issue of gendered hierarchies in a manner that in consistent with their 'traditional' domestic roles, while also engaging in educational and career options that further their investment into a middle-class hetero-normative family dynamic.
Similarly, the women avoid openly discussing experienced racism and discrimination that cause them to experience alienation and rejection in the absence of fellow-ethnics, and focus rather on their (often imagined) similarities and connections to the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture in Canada. This can take on the form of pride in a shared 'Aryan' ancestry with white Canadians, or through communal distancing from Islamic and black communities. In this manner they bring themselves and their collective ethnic closer to the imagined centre of Canadian society, while distancing themselves from (and further marginalizing) groups that are already at the periphery of Canadian social imagination.

**Scholarly Significance**

As a research project that was conducted with 14 participants, this study is not meant to be a generalization of Indian diasporic women’s experiences as a whole. Rather, my goal is to raise some relevant questions that can enhance our understanding of this population, and bring attention to the historically grounded and interlocking system of power and privilege that shape their experiences in Canada. This work pushes for further pluralization of feminist literature that de-centres dominant hegemonic notions of third world patriarchy. It brings a feminist perspective to scholarly works of 'tradition', 'culture' and 'modernity', while highlighting the invented-ness, fluidity and flexibility of these concepts.

**Limitations of the Study**

As a study that intently studies notions of Indian culture, tradition, and the diasporic location as a site of cultural hybridity, there exists a lack of focus on Canadian culture and traditions within this project. The lives of diasporic women are not simply guided by the practices of their home-land, but also by the practices of their new country. This aspect of the women's lives has not received adequate focus within this research project, both in terms of the study questions and analytic themes. Furthermore, the themes of tradition and modernity as they apply within the Canadian context are also not studied within this work. I did not explore the perspectives of 'Western' culture in any detail, but rather discussed it from the perspective of my participants. This is certainly an area that I would like to explore further in the future as a means to add greater depth to my work.
Furthermore, even as I interviewed women from various family and socioeconomic status, there is a lack of true diversity regarding this matter. All of my participants are invested in hetero-normative relationships and are either married, or single but preparing to enter a heterosexual relationship. Thus, family status did not really play a large contributing factor within the themes that emerged in this work. My participant sample does not reflect the true diversity of Indian diasporic women living in Canada. We do not hear from (or about) women who stand at the margins of this community and whose choices or actions may rupture the intricate classed and gendered system.

For instance, we do not hear from women who deliberately choose not to get married or have children. We also do not hear from women who identify as homosexual, trans-sexual or otherwise questioning of their investment into heterosexual relationships and hetero-normative family dynamics. There is no perspectives from heterosexual families that have female-dominated power dynamics, as are sometimes seen in India. Thus, the true diversity of the diaspora is not represented within this work, and this contributes to the further silencing of particular voices that have been historically marginalized. This is an aspect of my research that I wish to rectify in the future by consciously seeking out these voices and understanding their perspectives.

Finally, I am also cognisant of a relatively middle-classed bias of this thesis, as most of my participants (and myself) are socially invested and respond in a manner that brings out our investment into middle-class(ness). The lone voice of SH, with a past and present working-class background, shows the great impact that social class as a system has in shaping the experiences of women. However, SH is only one participant, and my thesis would benefit from the inclusion of more voices from a diverse background. In particular, I would like to hear from more women of working-class backgrounds as well as from women who identify as upper class.

**Final Reflection**

As a woman who grew up in a middle-class and education-focused Hindu family, this thesis has been a very personal and rewarding journey for me. I began this work by trying to understand the ways in which Indian women's education and profession enable them to break systems of patriarchy and leap into independence and autonomy from gendered and hierarchical
relations. With my own feminist view-point and middle-class bias, I believed that a high participation in educational and professional endeavours is a clear sign of such a 'progressive' movement.

Today however, I continue to see the signs of a patriarchal structure in the way diasporic women live and move in the West. I see this reflected in my own life, even as I continue with my professional and educational endeavours with relative freedom. I see it in my transnational move across the continent in a gender-prescribed act to move in with my husband. And I hear it when I am called 'lucky' to be able to work at a job that allows me to come home early, so I have enough time for my domestic chores.

But I also am able to see my own sites of empowerment which allow me to discuss education from the standpoint of one who has access to it. It allows me to discuss marriage and relationships from the privileged perspective of one who has never been marginalized because of sexual or gender identity. In many ways, this work has greatly shaped me both in terms of understanding myself and my fellow diasporic members, as well as the structures and society that we live in. I have become more cognisant and reflexive of my own biases and prejudices that have undoubtedly played a part in all aspects of this thesis, including the choice of topic, type for participants and selection of narratives and themes. What I heard and understood from my participants is greatly dependent of what my own investments and choices are. I see this clearly in the themes and findings that have emerged through this work, and I hope that this clarity will bring greater depth to my future endeavours.
References


Appendix A

Poster Advertisement

Are you a woman of Indian (Hindu) background currently pursuing post-secondary education or working in Canada?

If so, your participation in my project will be greatly appreciated!

I am an M.A. student in the Department of Theory and Policy studies, at the Ontario Institute in the Study of Education at the University of Toronto. My research examines the impact of traditional Indian values on Indian (Hindu) diasporic women pursuing higher education or working in Canada.

If you are willing to participate in this study, I would like to talk to you about your experiences as a student or employee in Canada. The interviews will take between 45-60 minutes of your time. I am flexible in terms of time and location, and can meet you at your convenience.

For more information, please contact:

Mini Tharakkal

(416) 953-2353
mini.tharakkal@utoronto.ca
Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

December, 2011

To the participants of this study,

The purpose of the present study is to understand the significance of traditional values and culture emanating from the Hindu religion, as it impacts the increasing pursuit of higher education and profession among Indian diasporic women in the West (and specifically Canada). Other factors contributing to the educational experiences of diasporic women (such as race, socioeconomic class and gender) will also be investigated in this study. The participants, who will take part in this study on a volunteer basis, will be selected based on the criteria of being women over the age of 18, who have experienced post-secondary education and/or working life in Ontario. In addition, a balance between newly immigrated women and more established (long-term residents or second generation Indian diasporic women) will be sought.

This study will be carried out in the Greater Toronto Area of Ontario under the supervision of Dr. Jamie-Lynn Magnusson, associate professor in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. The data is being collected as part of my thesis project. The results of the study may be published and presented at public venues, professional conferences, as well as scholarly journals. I would appreciate your participation in this study through a one-on-one interview at the University of Toronto St. George Campus, or at a location convenient to you. The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and the questions asked will be on the topic of traditional Indian values, culture, and religion, particularly as they impacted your pursuit of postsecondary education and profession in Canada. As the interview proceeds, you may be asked questions for clarification or further understanding, but the researcher will mainly to listen to you speak about your views, beliefs and lived experiences.

It is the intention that each interview will be audio taped and later transcribed to paper; you have the choice of declining to have the interview taped. You will be assigned a pseudonym that will correspond to your interviews and transcriptions. All information will be reported in such a way that individuals and their responses will not be identified. All data will be stored in a secure password-protected University of Toronto server, and be accessible only to myself. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be kept securely in a locked cabinet at my personal residence, and will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

You may at any time refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the interview process without any consequence. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, all data collected from you will be automatically destroyed and this will not require your request. At no time will value judgments will be placed on your responses nor will any evaluation be made of your effectiveness as a student or employee. Finally, you are free to ask any questions about the research and of your involvement with it, and may request a summary of the findings of the study.

Through your valuable participation, you will improve the scholarly community’s understanding of the postsecondary experiences of the women in the Indian diasporic community in
Canada. Furthermore, participating in this study may provide you some time for personal reflection regarding your views, choices and life experiences. Your contribution will help illustrate the educational barriers experienced by marginalized women in Canada, and also help to identify more effective learning environments within the Canadian postsecondary educational context.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (905) 279-3555, or at mini.tharakkal@utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor Dr. Jamie-Lynn Magnusson at (416) 978-1208, or at jamielynn.magnusson@utoronto.ca.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Boards of the University of Toronto. If you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study please or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

We thank you in advance for your participation.

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By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions above.

Name: _____________________________________________________________

Signed: __________________________ Date: __________________________

Please initial if you would like a summary of the findings of the study upon completion: _____
Please initial if you agree to have your interview audio taped: _____

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.
Appendix C

Interview Guide

• How would you define traditional Indian values?

• What are some factors that may have contributed to your development of these values? (ex: family, community, religion)

• Do you think your traditional values impacted your life, particularly your education and profession, in any manner?

• Why did you choose to pursue post-secondary studies? Why did you choose to pursue this particular program/course/school for your post-secondary education?

• What do you aim to accomplish through your higher education?

• Did your traditional values play any role in your decision to pursue higher education?

• Are you currently working? If so, in what field/position? Is it on a full-time or part-time basis?

• What are some of the factors that made you decide to work? What are some factors that made you decide to take up this particular job/career?

• Did your traditional values impact your choice to work, or your choice of work, in any way?