Indian Diaspora
Voices of Grandparents and Grandparenting

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This book celebrates both the past and present existence of the Indian diasporic grandparents who live their daily lives in different countries – the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, Australia, Suriname, and Malaysia – and in different economic, social, cultural, religious contexts and specific household and family situations. The achievements of the few rich and the famous Indians living in diaspora have been given the celebratory treatment; similar status is not often given to the achievements of the diasporic Indian grandparents. However, “the vanquished and the victors, the subalterns and the sahibs, have equal claims on our attention … clearly there are areas where Indian communities have been settled for long periods of time … without having a significant effect on the countries of their residence … [but] they, too are integral parts of the diaspora” (Brij Lal, Peter Reeves & Rajesh Rai, 2006, p. 15). This book is about voices of contemporary Indian grandparents and their grand parenting practices. The diasporic Indian grandparents are engaged in keeping diverse “Indian families” and “communities” as strong as possible in the current era of globalization process and social policy initiatives that are dominated by the ideology of neo-liberalism. This book claims that the diasporic Indian grandparents have significant effects on the countries of their residence and too are integral parts of the Indian diaspora who deserve the celebratory treatment and status. The book can be used for courses in the areas of critical social work, family studies, gerontology, nursing, rural development, critical pedagogy, and diaspora studies.

“A veritable archive of stories, anecdotes, memories and reminiscences, of love, longing and search for a legacy, by diasporic Indian grandparents across the globe as they transgress boundaries in a socially porous world, negotiate generational differences complicated by the realities of modern living, cross cultures and seek to preserve connections between the past, the present and the future. A necessary contribution to the growing literature in the life of the Indian diaspora.”

— Brij V. Lal, Professor of Pacific and Asian History, The Australian National University & General Editor, Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora
Indian Diaspora
TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

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This book series is dedicated to the radical love and actions of Paulo Freire, Jesus “Pato” Gomez, and Joe L. Kincheloe.
TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy’s (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity – youth identity in particular – the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an
electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.
Indian Diaspora

Voices of Grandparents and Grandparenting

Edited by

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I would like to thank my colleagues and the staff in the Faculty of Education, Memorial University, Newfoundland, Canada. The professionals working in the General Office, Financial and Administrative Services, as always, were most helpful and patient. Special thanks to my Research Assistants Matthew Ryder and Daniel Reid. Laura Walsh, Kirk Anderson, John Hoben, Allyson Hajek, Joan Oldford, Gord Ralph, Clar Doyle, Bill Kennedy, Bill and Barb Roberts have helped me in many ways, so I am thankful to all of them. Also, at University of Hawaii, Manoa, I wish to thank colleagues in the Department of Sociology and Educational Foundations. I am grateful to professors Kiyoshi Ikeda, Eldon Wegner, Bill Wood, Tony Lenz, Valli Kalei Kanuha, Eileen H. Tamura, David P. Ericson, Monica Ghosh and Hunter McEwan for providing me support and encouragement on many occasions. My friends Ruth Larkin, John Witeck, Rupinder Singh, and Baldev Mutta, have exposed me to field work with the elderly and grandparents in ethnically, racially and culturally diverse communities in Hawaii and Toronto, respectively. My friends Professors Gary and Gerry Gairola from University of Kentucky, and Gay Reed of University of Hawaii, have asked insightful questions about the concepts of diaspora and the diasporic subjects and have been good conversational partners. My dear friend, the late professor Jagdish Sharma at University of Hawaii was a true scholar and an insightful conversationalist. I learnt a great deal from him about Indian history and the lived experience of Indian diaspora in Asia, North America and Europe. I miss him very much. Also in Hawaii my long term friends Professor Mimi Sharma, Mike Hamnett, Vir Amrit
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I am a grandfather like many diasporic people whose grandchildren live far away from them. So, like many, I am involved in distant grandparenting. I strongly believe that living in diaspora could be an inspiring experience. My two siblings live in Toronto, and my daughter Neera, her husband Mori, and their two daughters – Tala and Uale’a, live in the United States. Our son David has been going to school in Quebec for the last six years. Living in diaspora has encouraged us all to engage in building and maintaining good, supportive relations with each other; living in diaspora in this sense has been a constant source of joy, love and great incentive in building intimate relationship with each other. In this sense living in diaspora and doing distant grandparenting for me has also been a good learning process. My parents lived in India with my sisters — Veena, Papli and my niece Parmeeta. My parents have recently passed away. In their absence, especially in the absence of my mother, my sister Babu and brother Modi, who live with their families (Nehchal, Simrit, Neil, Sandeep and Kokal) in Toronto are the ones, who keep my sisters and the extended family members in India and me together by constantly providing family information.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Grandparents too are Integral Parts of the Indian Diaspora: Celebrating the Voices of the Diasporic Indian Grandparents

STARTING POINT: VOICES OF SOME GRANDPARENTS

“We have a broader view of life now. Some of our old traditions have changed.”

“I enjoy a lot when I do grand parenting. I simply love the way they [grandchildren] talk, play, eat etc. I feel like I am learning lots of things at this age from my school going grandchildren.”

“I barely see the grand-children… all our traditions will be washed out with them. If I don’t see them, how can I teach them? Our children no longer answer to us… so why would the grand-children?”

“What will they [grandchildren] be like in the future?”

“…our health is not so good and with age it will only deteriorate. Our own children and their spouses are both working so they do not have enough time and the new generation only want freedom so they will not take our responsibility”.

“How much burden of one’s culture one should carry?”

“…even we get ‘bitter’ by our children’s behavior, we still don’t want to leave them, because we are stuck with ‘mempta’ [attachment]. That is our tradition. And that is our weakness”.

“Too much love is not good.”

“In no circumstances we should lose our culture, as long as we have a breath.”

“I guess I could tell them [grandchildren] about me.”

This book is about contemporary Indian grandparents and their grand parenting practices. In this book we recognize and celebrate the various contributions of the Indian diasporic grandparents to promoting and sustaining good and optimal health and life styles of their own, as well as of family members, grandchildren and
communities – as they live their daily lives in different countries – the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, Australia, Suriname and Malaysia – and in different economic, social, cultural, religious contexts and specific household and family situations.

A few words about how this book became reality may be of interest to some readers. Over the years, as educators, some of my colleagues and I have been engaged in larger pedagogical projects of teaching and learning from reflective and critical pedagogical perspectives (Doyle & Singh, 2008; Hamnett et al, 1984; Singh & Devine, 2013; Singh et al, 2001a, 2001b). Among other things, we have been interested in the question: How could something that is “local”, perceived “desirable” and “sustainable” be promoted and legitimized in the age of “globalism”? The demand to produce local knowledge is also related to critical issues associated with the processes of self-representation and cultural appropriations. Thus I have thought of putting this book together mainly for teaching, reading, and pedagogical purposes. In my chapter in this book I reflect and describe the context of my personal involvement with the diasporic Indian grandparents. In order to make this book project a reality, I approached those people whom I thought might be interested in the role the contemporary Indian diasporic grandparents play in the Indian diasporic families and communities in different countries. This I did through personal contacts I made with people whom I met at various conferences, and by doing computer search. Once the contacts had been made and contributing authors been identified, I shared my interest in the diasporic Indian grandparents and in Indian diaspora with them in two ways: interpersonal face-to-face interaction, and correspondence with those who live away in different countries using e-mail messages. During face-to-face conversations I explained to the contributing authors about my approach to organizing this volume from reflective and critical pedagogical perspectives. Actually, this book is a sequel to my book I co-edited (Mehta & Singh, 2008), *Indian Disapora: Voices of the elderly in five countries*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. In this sense it has taken more than six year to conceptualize this book and finally get it ready for printing.

In organizing the material in this book the contributors make use of a number of pedagogical tools and on-going conversations drawn from various areas of studies such as diaspora, globalization, modernization, sociology of family, social gerontology, and cultural and post-colonial studies. However, the concept of voice as one of the critical pedagogical tools provides an anchor to various narratives that contributing authors have included in their respective chapters to this book.

One of the underlying ideas in organizing material for this book has been that it is not only that people of “communities of diasporic Indian seniors and grandparents” in different countries are experiencing rapid change, but people in many other sub-groups and cultural communities are also experiencing fast-paced transformation globally. Such global transformations taking everywhere have made
individuals and groups sensitive to the issues related to process of self-representation and cultural appropriation. Thus for the people experiencing change the issues of self-representation and cultural appropriation have become very critical in relation to practices where they engage in navigating and negotiating their daily lives in many situations, which are in constant flux (Singh & Devine, 2013). The diasporic Indian grandparents and seniors want to self-represent in areas such as sustainability of their communities, families, lifestyles choices, cultural values, and for their very survival in term of being a distinct political, social and economic entity in the context of globalization; people all over the world desire, imagine, observe, plan, and act self-consciously, albeit in varying degrees, to sustain and expand some aspects of the local place and space in their own individual and collective self-images. The active, engaged, and entangled voices and practices of grandparents recorded and presented in this book can be seen as testimony to those concerns. Singh’s chapter in this book further elaborates on some of these points.

Other underlying ideas have been that listening to the voices of Indian diasporic grandparents in many countries can also shed light on the changing roles of grandparents in many other diasporic societies. The small scale nuanced studies discussed in each chapter serve to complement and deepen the meaning of other research-based content in each chapter with authentic and personally articulated experiences of grandparents.

Over the years, part of my own overt agenda has been to extend conversations about the well-being of the Indian diasporic elderly and their voices that we presented in our previous book Mehta & Singh (2008). The contributing authors to this book present voices of the Indian diasporic grandparents who “do” grandparenting in their respective countries, in ways that show that, when accorded the opportunities to voice their concerns relating to grandparenting and to share their grandparenting practices with other people, the diasporic Indian grandparents are happy, satisfied with their life achievements, and relaxed, albeit to various extents and degrees, thus contributing to their overall well-being in the later year of their lives, as well as to the well-being of others around them.

The contributors to this book try to build their analyses by focusing on the voices of Indian diasporic seniors and grandparents. Those voices, combined with the biographical observations, commentary, and multilevel analyses of the contributors, should provide readers glimpses of the quality of aging and family life being experienced by the diasporic Indian grandparents and seniors.

In this book contributing authors write from multiple perspectives in capturing the voices of the diasporic Indian grandparents in the context of everyday living. With the help of the participating Indian diasporic grandparents, the contributors to this book have produced comparative narratives that highlight the place of grandparents in families and communities located at particular places in different countries. In producing various narratives the authors have combined relevant multidisciplinary professional knowledge with common and good sense daily
experiences of their own and grandparents in their respective countries (see endnote X in Singh’s chapter in this book). In this sense they have produced nuanced local knowledge with global implications.

There are many stakeholders interested in the well-being of the Indian diasporic grandparents as seniors. These include immediate family members and friends, a myriad of government and private service providing agencies, religious and cultural organizations, and various professionals trained people such as social and community workers, cultural workers, and social scientists – psychologists, sociologists, economists, anthropologists, gerontologists, physicians, political scientists, geographers, architects, city planners and developers, and educators, including teachers, students, and reformers. We hope this book will be of interest to all these stakeholders.

Like grandparenting, there are many dimensions of aging – physical aging, psychological aging and social aging. We believe the key questions with which those stakeholders should be concerned are: Are the diasporic Indian grandparents as seniors experiencing “optimal”, “usual” or “pathological” (see Singh’s chapter in this book) aging in the contexts of their household and family while they age in different cultural and nation-state contexts? What can stakeholders gather from the voices of Indian diasporic seniors and grandparents? How can the stakeholders prepare themselves to listen to the authentic voices of those elders and grandparents? What can the stakeholders do to create safe sites and places where the diasporic Indian seniors and grandparents feel empowered enough to help themselves to work toward realizing their full human potential as they grow old? What does growing old and doing grandparenting roles mean to the diasporic Indian seniors and grandparents? These are critical pedagogical questions (see Singh’s chapter in this book). The authors in this book provide readers some answers to these questions through offering them aspects of life stories of the Indian diasporic grandparents. These life stories should provide rich contexts for the stakeholders to make their own assessment of the Indian diasporic grandparents’ situations. This self-awareness of their own self-assessment of the diasporic Indian grandparents’ situations, we hope, may become a guide for actions by stakeholders to support the two main goals of the diasporic Indian grandparents: how to improve the quality of their lives in later years as they grow and age in their respective countries and settings, and how to contribute to the well-being of their grandchildren and families; for aging is both an individual and social process (Quadagno, 2002).

Cultures, communities, and aging in India have several levels of complexities (Lamb, 2008). This has not been the main concern of this book. However, it is obvious that any conversation of the Indian diasporic grandparents and seniors cannot be meaningfully carried on without thinking of life – past, present and future – in India, because the contemporary Indian diasporic cultures and communities are as complex as those are in India. The authors in this book to some extent explore areas that relate closely to the lives of the diasporic Indian
grandparents, as they reminisce on aspects of their life-long achievements in later
days of their life, by remembering history of their ancestors who before them lived
in diaspora and passed on to them Indian cultural values. Brij Lal’s chapter in this
book throws light on this connection among diasporic Indian grandparents and
India. Suffice here is to note that according to Cengel (2013) “as young families
move to pursue modern jobs in the cities and life expectancy increases, India
struggles to address a growing, heartbreaking gap in elder care (p.31). Further,
“the family structure that once cared for the elderly is under threat” (p. 38), and
“the demographic shift in India has caught the government and society
unprepared” (p. 39).

Another underlying idea in organizing this book has been that grandparents in
general in all societies and cultures play multiple roles as organic intellectuals (see
Singh’s chapter in this book). Thus, from the very beginning in our approach to
editing this book, we have seen Indian diasporic grandparents in different countries
as organic or transformative intellectuals. As such, this group of people is a
reservoir of stories and insights. If people only listen to grandparents, instead of
just hearing them, the listeners will realize that the stories of Indian diasporic
grandparents tell us many things: under what conditions the diasporic Indian
grandparents in different countries grew up, what they have made of themselves
and what they have lost and are losing as the diasporic families go through
transformation. Their stories tell us what we need to sustain, and how to sustain
what we desire having. As educators we are claiming here that, as organic
intellectuals, the diasporic Indian grandparents have had a vital role in the history
of development of communities and families while living in diaspora in many
countries, and in reinforcing the culture of the time. They continue to play this role
even today through story telling. The Indian diasporic grandparents as organic
intellectuals are vital actors in explaining to the younger generation of today and of
the future about the potential of young generations in deciding what type of social
self and identity they would want to develop – the social self and identity that
would enable them in imagining and in bringing about changes in their respective
countries that would correspond to that imagined social self. The readers will find
that stories told by the Indian diasporic grandparents in many chapters in this book
document this fact. Here we are also claiming that there is a fundamental
difference between the notion of listening and hearing. Listening requires paying
attention to the voices of those who are speaking without any stereotypes and
prejudices. Listening requires a sense of empathy. It is trying to understand the
deep meaning located in the voice of a person who is speaking, without imposing
interpretative schema that uses discourse that may lead to “colonize the life world”
of the speaking person. Listening is only fully possible when a person feels safe to
communicate with others what is in her/his mind (see Singh’s chapter in this book).
For these and other reasons, the contributing authors to this book from the very
beginning understood this in organizing their material for their respective chapters.
Thus in presenting their narratives, they consciously highlight the voices of
grandparents in their respective chapters, sometimes at the expense of disrupting the smooth flow of their narratives. This is not to say that the contributors to this book totally shy away from interpreting the voices of the diasporic Indian grandparents. However, they leave interpretation of grandparents’ voices, in large part, to readers (Fook, 2012; Van Manen, 1997). Thus the voice of each Indian diasporic grandparent is valued as it helps illuminate the meanings the grandparent attaches to the shared experiences with her/his family members and communities in their respective countries.

In their later years of life Indian diasporic grandparents play their roles in day to day living within a web of intersecting relations to their family members, who live near to them in varying sizes of communities and also to those family members who live away from them in diaspora. In addition to playing grand parenting roles, one of the other significant intersecting relations grandparents have with their families and communities entails focusing, on their part, on needs and desires concerning their own overall wellbeing in later stages of life. These needs and desires are associated with living and ending one’s life in terms of developing some personal and cultural perspectives on death and dying, and with one’s sense of happiness and evaluation of life-long accomplishments and contribution in all spheres of life-social, political, psychological, spiritual, and economic. The contributors to this book present voice of the diasporic Indian grandparents in the form of direct quotes taken during conversations with them. Most of these quotes are indented and appear in many chapters in this book. These direct quotes represent the voices of grandparents, showing their multiple concerns related to the well-being of everyone around them.

Today many Indian diasporic grandparents are younger and have higher education in a variety of professions and occupations. How these highly educated grandparents function today as intellectuals in relation to their grown up children will have profound impacts on their grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the future when their adult children set up their own households and become grandparents in the next twenty to thirty years. There are many grandparents in this group of intellectuals who have become diasporic grandparents because their children have moved away from places where they live, either alone or with their young families to find work in other places. These young grandparents have become “distant grandparents” and are engaged in grandparenting roles from a distance within their own localities and countries.

**Grandparents in Global Context**

The role of grandparents in today’s changing family structures has been recognized globally. Against all myths, grandparents all over the globe are engaged in lifelong learning, as they go through various stages of their normal life course journey, which cumulates in death.
INTRODUCTION

Globalization process accelerates changes in family structures, as it does in lifelong learning among grandparents. Indian diasporic grandparents are no exception to these global and biological trends. The contributions of grandparents to promoting and sustaining good and optimal health and life styles of their own, as well as of family members, grandchildren and communities – as they live their daily lives in different countries and in different economic, social, cultural, religious contexts and specific household and family situations – are celebrated on the International Day of Older Persons (see Singh’s chapter in this book).

Shilpa Davé in her chapter in this book notes that “while Grandparents Day exists to honor the presence of grandparents, it is their past rather than their present existence that is being honored.” In this book we celebrate both the past and present existence of the Indian diasporic grandparents in a number of ways.

We start by recognizing the fact that despite the otherwise rich literature on life and history of Indian diaspora, while the achievements of the few rich and the famous Indians living in diaspora have been given the celebratory treatment, similar status is not often given to the achievements of the diasporic Indian grandparents (Mehta & Singh, 2008). This is not to say those grandparents’ contributions in the past and present in creating the resilience nature of the Indian diaspora has not been recognized at all, but it is to point out that their contributions are still remembered mostly in sporadic, insufficient and not “good enough” ways. In contrast, in our view, the achievements of the few rich and the famous Indians living in diaspora have been readily and overly advertised and marketed.

Therefore, in conceptualizing this book our intention has been to claim that the diasporic Indian grandparents have significant effect on the countries of their residence. The contributors in this book show that historically this has always been the case, and also is the case in the present day history of diasporic Indians. Therefore, we are claiming here that the Indian diasporic grandparents also deserve the celebratory treatment or should be accorded such celebratory status because these communities of elders as grandparents “too are integral parts of the diaspora.”

The contributing authors to this book celebrate the contributions of “communities of the diasporic Indian seniors and grandparents” in various areas of family and community lives in an attempt to overcome this gap in the literature on life and history of Indian diaspora. They do so by way of listening to the authentic, local and nuanced “voices” of Indian diasporic grandparents in their respective countries: the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, Australia, Suriname and Malaysia. In this way the authors go beyond
providing comparative insights into the multiple and complex roles played by the contemporary grandparents by discovering and describing the actual grandparenting practices of the Indian diasporic grandparents in nine countries mentioned above.

By highlighting the lived voices of the diasporic Indian grandparents in this book, the contributors are engaged in revitalizing the contributions made by the diasporic Indian grandparents to keeping diverse “Indian families” as strong as possible in the current era of globalization process and social policy initiatives that are dominated by the ideology of neo-liberalism (Mehta & Singh, 2008; Stager, 2013; Sreger & Roy, 2010).

One of the consequences of globalization is that it spurs among people of all ages everywhere the desire to reflect on their material and social psychological experiences and to tell their own stories based on their everyday living experiences and sense making resources available to them. In other words, as individuals and groups they want to exert some degree of human agency to have some say in the organization of their everyday relationships with others that have been deeply affected by forces of globalizations and concomitant government economic and social policies (Quadagno, 2002).

Like other individuals passing through different stages of their lives, grandparents in general want to tell their stories to others around them and to friends and family members who are away from them. Indian diasporic grandparents as aging adults desire to do the same. Moreover, in this globalized situation, grandparents, like other people, want to tell their own “indigenized” and “local” versions of stories to other people (Giddens, 1990); they expect other people to listen to them sympathetically and respectfully.

It is important for the Indian diasporic grandparents that others listen to their “local voices” because especially in North America, Australia and in Europe, listening to the stories of seniors and grandparents is an important theme in social gerontology, sociology of family, and government and non-government policy making and implementing processes. The social policy decisions made in various spheres of public lives in these “welfare-states” are directed towards providing hundreds of social, cultural, and health services to grandparents. Government and non-government agencies generally provide these services to grandparents as elderly by designing various types of programs and projects in communities where there is a concentration of seniors and grandparents. These programs and projects provide opportunities for grandparents and seniors to get together and share their stories in their own voices. Those agencies also provide funds to members of different diasporic communities to design and establish programs and projects that suit to maintain their well-being, while at the same time enable them to integrate in the mainstream culture of North American and European societies. Singh, Ludher, Sarma and Sarma-Debnath, Bihari and Juttla in this this book describe a few of those projects in their respective countries. It is important for the diasporic Indian grandparents to realize that all government and non-government agencies that
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provide various types of services to them and seniors are part of the aging enterprise. In my chapter in this book I particularly attend to this on – going discourse on designing culturally appropriate and sensitive projects and programs for and by the Indian diasporic grandparents and seniors in Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Grand Parenting as a Separate Identity and a Separate Stage of a Family Life

It is generally the case in Canada, U.S., Europe, and in many other countries that mostly retired people of fifty five year of age and over are considered seniors, old, elder, elderly or aged and, are often victims of the ideology of ageism (Mehta & Singh, 2008; Singh, 2008, pp. 124–126; CARP, 2002, p. 2). This is also the case with the diasporic Indian elders and grandparents in Canada, U.S., and other countries (Lamb, 2008; Mehta & Singh, 2008). Many people also hold the stereotypical view that all grandparents are seniors, ignoring the fact that today there are many people who become grandparents at a much earlier age (Singh & Devine, 2013; Newman, 2012; Quadagno, 2002). Further most believe that there is no difference between roles and identities of seniors who are grandparents and those who are not grandparents.

However, at least from the perspective of sociologists who study various aspects of family relations and roles in North America, the roles of seniors and grandparents in family relationship are not the same. According to these sociologists seniors as grandparents “do” (see Singh’s chapter in this book) grandparenting roles. To paraphrase Newman (2012) here, doing grandparenting entails an active learning component: that it is an accomplishment rather than a fixed attribute of each individual. Unless an individual dies prematurely, he/she may become a grandparent. Different people become grandparents at different ages. Like the transition from adolescent to adulthood, becoming grandparents is not solely determine by numbers of years an individual has lived but the trajectory of that individual’s life accomplishments, family relationships, and social circumstances. From this perspective then, “Grandparenting has thus become a separate identity and a separate stage of a family life” (Newman, 2012, p. 330). Many researchers in Canada and U.S. have identified several different styles of grandparenting (Mitchel, 2009). Almost all chapters in this book identify various types of grandparenting styles and roles played by the Indian diasporic grandparents in seven different countries.

Besides identity difference between the seniors and grandparents, sociologist and social gerontologists generally believe that both older people and grandparents have rich treasures of memory, and that both are “open books of experiences”-books that too often go unread. Seniors and grandparents themselves need and want to be listened to, and to share their experiences and wisdom with others. This process of listening to their life stories based on their long-term memories is extremely rewarding for their well-being and that of the listener.
Prita Mukta is one of those well-known researchers whose interest lies in memories studies. She believes that research, community work, and projects that focus on highlighting the voices and memories of diasporic Indian seniors and grandparents would just be “wonderful”. In her own words, such projects “…that involved the elderly were just wonderful. I would love to see this advocated as good practice throughout the globe ….” She thinks that those projects and programs that do not highlight voices of the seniors based on their memories and raise important and difficult issues that affect their and communities’ lives are not that helpful. In her words, “… a part of me feels that our intellectual and theoretical perspectives are often a mask to cover up all those very difficult things that happen within our midst such as elder abuse in particular as well as marital violence, and abandonment of human beings [personal communication, emphasis mine].” Psychologists of aging and social gerontology distinguish long-term and short-term memory among the aged. As aging adults grandparents are very good in long-term memory (Quadagno, 2002). The Indian diasporic grandparents have rich treasures of memory. Kisson Bihari in his chapter provides rich memories (nuanced, local, and indigenized) of diasporic grandparents in South Africa.

Families and Households as Contexts for Grandparents to do Grandparenting

In general, both at the global and national levels, there are two competing perspectives – family decline and family transformation – that frame the conversation of family as social institution, cultural symbol, and socialization place for the young in contemporary societies. Besides family, other social institutes in modern society include education, economics, politics, law, religion, health care, and the mass media. In North America, as in many other countries, family and household are defined differently (see Singh’s chapter in this book).

In North American social science literature family decline perspective is “an approach to understanding families that regards recent changes in family life as a sign that the overall importance of family as a social institution is eroding” (Newman, 2012, p. 31).

On the other hand family transformation is “an approach to understanding families that maintains that family-both as a living arrangement and as a social institution-is not disappearing but instead is becoming more diverse and complex as it adapts to changing social and economic circumstances” (Newman, 2012, p. 37).

The debates over the definition of family evoke highly charged emotions among many people. Thus for many people the key question is: What does family stand for? Many people strongly believe that rise and fall of the country is directly related to this question. Since many sociologists believe that in fact meaning of family and how people feel about it is socially constructed, the answer to the above question takes the shape of highly charged political debate. According to social
construction of family the meaning different families attach to their families “… is a matter of collective definition and human agreement” (Newman, 2012, p.5).

The contributors to this book have been able to listen to the voices of the diasporic Indian grandparents in their respective counties. A close and focused reading of the voices of the diasporic Indian grandparents reveals the nuances of their day to day family relations in which they are engaged in doing grandparenting role. Some of these grandparents voice their concerns that are associated with family in decline perspective, while others voice their concerns with issues related to family transformation perspective. The voices of the diasporic Indian grandparents presented in various chapters in this book make it clear that many of these grandparents constantly are struggling and problematizing these two dominant and competing perspectives and discourses – family decline and family transformation. Further, their voices indicate that they are searching for safe and in-between-places to “do” grandparenting. Below we discuss the notion of in-between-places and spaces as we have defined and articulated it and used it for conceptualizing the organization of this book.

*Searching for in-between Places and Spaces to “do” Grandparenting*

Singh in his chapter in this book discusses the notion of in-between places and spaces in more detail. Suffice here is to mention that for our purposes in this book the in-between-spaces are those openings or windows of opportunities (social, political, cultural, economic, and so on) that are to be found between the decline and transformation family perspectives. These are the locations in interaction and negotiation situations that enable grandparents to do the best possible grandparenting role from the perspective of their own well-being as grandparents, while at the same time taking their grandchildren’s and families’ well-being into account as they age in the context of various types of diasporic Indian households and family structures in countries in which they live in diaspora. Using perspective of George Herbert Mead on the emerging nature of the “I” of the “social self” in relation to the “Me” part of the social self, and work of (Frie 2008; Jenkins, 2008; Martin, 2008) and many other scholars who make use of George Herbert Mead’s perspective on the development of social self in developing their own theories of human psychological agency, I further elaborate and describe this notion of in-between-spaces in my chapter in this book, and in a chapter in another book (Singh & Devine, 2013).

That the Indian diasporic grandparents are of varying backgrounds, and that they are engaged in a variety of grandparenting styles, will become clear to readers of this book. Further, the reader will see that, using their psychological agency, the Indian diasporic grandparents are constantly seeking and imagining in-between-spaces to do grandparenting in ways that are mutually beneficial to all the stakeholders (e.g., government agencies, for profit and nonprofit organizations,
Looking for in-between-spaces for doing grandparenting makes even more sense when we realize that experiencing old age is never an isolated phenomenon. The life histories of older people and grandparents are intricately intertwined with the histories of their families, communities, nations as well as global trends. In this sense, the plight of the individual self of a grandparent is related to the social self of the others, and that of the larger society and culture. Thus, in general, understanding of the individual’s pains and happiness cannot be fully appreciated without having a deep sensitively to the social self of the larger social structure. (Mills, 1959; Odin, 1996; Aboulafia, 2001). If there is any validity to these statements, it follows that the causes of the personal troubles facing some Indian diasporic grandparents cannot be attributed solely to an individual grandparent as a person.

Further, the voices of the diasporic Indian grandparents presented in the case studies included in each chapter in this book make it clear that the grandparents are not quite interested in accepting the idea that their personal concerns can be ascribed exclusively to their generations’ so-called backwardness or simply to the notion of “generational differences”, “generational gap”, or to any other such labeling schemes that use dominant binary concepts to create stereotypical images of them as “others” (Mehta and Singh, 2008; Nayer, 2004; Singh, Martin & Singh, 1991).

Modernization theory has for a long time been one such dominant theory that has used various ingenious and insidious binary schemes. Calling certain people “traditional” and others “modern”, it has scuttled the imaginations and creativities of people, including grandparents, to perceive and act in ways that would have enabled them to create in-between-spaces in which grandparents could have self-images of themselves as both traditional and modern, as these two terms have been used in the modernization theory or in discourses of Western modernity (Lauzon, 2011).

On the contrary the voices of the grandparents presented in this book make it clear that grandparents see themselves as active participants in their aging process, recognizing the fact that various aspects of the global cultures and social structures around them are transforming in accelerated ways. Recognizing the agency of grandparents that enables them to deal with and experience changes that are taking place around them as they live their daily lives in relation to others, the contributors to this book provide us with rich biographical sketches of many grandparents who had conversations with the authors of various chapters in this book. These authors listened sympathetically to the voices of those grandparents and convey to the readers in nuanced ways: Who are the diasporic Indian grandparents? Where do they come from? When did they come? How do they feel as they grow older in different societies and cultures and experience the aging
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process? How do they construct images of their social selves? How do their self-constructed images influence their social interactions with others, and how do those social interactions with others in turn transform their behavior patterns?

For the standpoint of perspective taken to conceptualize this book, the answer to these questions is that without an understanding and savoring of the rich and long history of the Indian diaspora, we can only partially be in a position to listen to the voices of those seniors and make sense of their experiences, their struggles and their successes in life. To fully talk about the long and complex history of the Indian diaspora is indeed a Herculean task, and the purpose and scope of this book greatly limit discussion of the very rich and interesting aspects of the history of many of the the Indian diasporas, and the diasporic Indian grandparents. However, the contributors to this book attempt to make many preliminary remarks on the specific aspects of the history of people of the Indian diaspora in highlighting the voices of the diasporic grandparents. Thus the contributors provide the context in which they locate their respective case studies. These case studies provide safe spaces for various sub-groups of Indian diasporic grandparents to voice their concerns about their everyday lives and grandparenting styles.

Further, past, present, anticipated and imagined global social trends keep creating new social, political, cultural and economic, demographic and nation-state contexts, in which diasporic Indian grandparents of all backgrounds keep charting their own individual life courses as they experience all aspects of the aging process – social, psychological, biological. This has been possible, first perhaps, due to the fact that the the diasporic Indian grandparents, being a part of a larger Indian diaspora, are not a homogeneous group of elders. Secondly, because as social and cultural structures change, new forms of social self-emerge. Thirdly, although aging is a social process, each individual faces unique experiences as she/he goes through different stages of the aging process. These aging processes mentioned above unfold in the contexts of local, regional, state, national and global political economies, and of the welfare and non-welfare oriented policies of their respective nation – states.

Familiarizing Oneself with Some Key Words Spoken about the Indian Diaspora and Perceptions of Self-Image Held by Indian Diaspora

The roles of grandparents in families are rapidly transforming under the impact of globalization on all aspects our lives (Quadagno, 2002; AARP, 2013; Global Fund for Children, 2010). We are here assuming that everyone may not be interested enough in knowing what grandparents do, especially the diasporic Indian grandparents. However, since diaspora studies now generally are an integral part of globalization discourse, it may be helpful for some to familiarize themselves with the rich and long history of Indian diaspora, since it is one of the largest diasporic groups in the context of global migration, imperialism and colonialism. To be sure, a lot of the material on migration history of people from India is already available.
in other places, so no attempt is made here to cover this vast material on Indian
diaspora. I have been interested in studies in Indian diaspora, because some of my
colleagues and I are involved in a larger project in reflective and critical
educational pedagogy. I will attend to the pedagogical purposes involved in
compiling the book soon.

Therefore, in this section of the chapters we include discussions of many things
that interest us pedagogically. What interests us here most is the fact that what
individuals actually do (in our case the diasporic Indian grandparents) in social
situations (in our case many types of diasporic Indian households and family
structures) and how they do what they do are crucial factors in comprehending
human behavior and its social consequence. This means that human conduct cannot
be comprehended apart from the actual contexts in which it occurs. In social
science literature many scholars have suggested several methods to study how
people carry out their activities in various social situations. A method suggested by
(Lofland, 1976) includes four steps. One of those step suggest that those whose
interests lie in understanding the lived everyday life of others should try “getting
close-up to people actually acting some place in the real world and developing
intimate familiarity (with them and their situation).” If we decide to follow this
method of knowing others, we will have to be physically present in all those
countries, places, spaces, and locations where people of Indian origin now reside,
and also be present in all those varied Indian diasporic household situations in
which the Indian diasporic grandparents engage in doing grandparenting. Obviously
it is just not possible for anyone to be able to do all those things, since this type of
undertaking is very time consuming and expensive. But there are some people who
have been able to accrue enough resources to participate in many of those
situations in which the Indian diasporic grandparents do grandparenting. For
example, the contributing authors to this book have been able to enjoy such an
undertaking. It is our hope that the situated information they provide about styles
of grandparenting of the diasporic Indian grandparents in their respective countries
is pedagogically relevant to a variety of readers, as well as enhancing our
professional and common sense knowledge in making sense of socialization
process in the diasporic Indian family structures across different societies, cultures
and sub-cultures.

However, given the financial and time constraints all we could do is to try
“getting close up to people…” who have actually acted somewhere in the course of
their career in situations where the diasporic Indian grandparents do grandparenting role. These are those people who have been able to have enough
social and cultural capital, particularly money and time, to spend greater part of
their life span in interacting with members of Indian diaspora more intimately,
deeply, frequently and systematically. In this way they are supposedly more
familiar with all sphere of daily lives of Indian diaspora – social, cultural, political,
historical, and economical-globally and locally. Keeping this perspective in mind
about what individuals actually do, below we present selected excerpts from Brij
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Lal and his associates’ work, hoping that these excerpts will familiarize readers, students, and many other stakeholders interested in Indian diaspora and lived lives of Indian diasporic grandparents in the context of much broader field of diaspora studies.

Brij Lal, Peter Reeves & Rajesh Rai (2006) make a number of the following general points about the nature of Indian diaspora. I have selected these points, because they were helpful as a potent frame to organize the material presented by the contributors to this book. This list is not exhausted; more such selective points can be added to the following list. Here are the selected points:

• “… how rich, varied, contradictory and confusing the subject [Indian Diaspora] is, defiantly rejecting the easy grasp of smug theory.” (p. 15)
• “it is the individual distinctiveness of the various disaporic communities, however, that stands out and underlines the enormous complexity and variation in experience” (p. 9).
• “In the Indian case, there is a common ancestral homeland from which people left for various reasons, voluntarily and involuntarily, heading to all corners of the globe…. However, fractured or frayed, ossified or fluid, there is a sense of cultural, religious and historical ties with India, in various combinations of longing and nostalgia (p. 14).
• There is, somewhere within us, a deep desire to know who we are, where we have come from, and our place in the larger schemes of things (p. 13).
• The Indian diaspora is large and growing… but we should be cautious about speaking of the Indian diaspora in the singular… there are diasporas within…. (p. 13).
• One may consider oneself to be a part of the Tamil, Sikh or Gujarati diaspora first, but not necessarily at the expense of a wider identification…. Generally, relations among diasporic Indians are harmonious; though occasional friction and misunderstandings occur… caused by… contrasting perceptions of culture, when ‘hybrid’ notions clash with ‘essentialist’ notions of what is right and proper (p. 13).
• Facts do not speak for themselves; they speak when they are spoken to (p. 14).

GLIMPSES OF VOICES OF THE INDIAN DIASPORIC GRANDPARENTS IN THIS BOOK

Earlier we aluded to the fact that the debate over the definition of family evokes highly charged emotions among many people. People have strong beliefs about what family stands for. There are two dominant and competing perspectives – family decline perspective and family transformation perspective. The voices of the diasporic Indian grandparents presented in various chapters in this book make it clear that many of these grandparents constantly are struggling and problematizing
these two dominant and competing perspectives (see Singh’s chapter in this book). This is highlighted in the voices of many grandparents in this book as follows:

“A rootless tree [in this case an Indian family] can’t survive for a long time [without strong values]. So is the case of a tribe or a nation.”

“Our culture is being diluted more and more…I feel that eventually our culture will go. Just think about such things as living together before marriage.”

“I barely see the grand-children… all our traditions will be washed out with them. If I don’t see them, how can I teach them? Our children no longer answer to us… so why would the grand-children?”

“…although we are taking care of our grandchildren at this age, there is no guarantee that they will take care us when we need them”.

“From what I see, not that Indians are any better off than Westerners, but I feel like we have some values that the children should have…. For instance, in Punjabi elders are addressed a certain way. You have a certain respectful way of speaking to them. Whereas in English it’s just plain ‘you’. I just feel like children should know … being respectful. I find that by mere use of language it made them [respectful]”.

“…yes, although we are far from our ‘motherland’, yet in Maritius we live according to the traditional Indian values. Values such as, love, respect, truth, peace and happiness help us to be more spiritual than having a materialistic approach to life.”

“I would love my children and grandchildren to understand and adapt our rich culture, tradition and values in our daily life…but our life is now here… my grandparents and parents were born here…all my relationships are now here”.

“…parents set examples for children. I am afraid to say that the education system does not cater for training in spirituality. So this task has to be fulfilled by parents. Parents should consciously impart values. These days parents are too busy at work. They do not give enough time to their children. Often they just provide material benefits to satisfy the children.”

Yet voices of the many diasporic Indian grandparents presented in this book reveal that they are searching for in-between-spaces. The voices of some grandparents listed below epitomize such concern:

“I am very liberal about religion. One of my grandsons got married with a white American girl last year. I think my grandchildren can choose their life partner from any community and religion. I just expect love and respect from
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them. These qualities should prevail in all the families that bind them together.”

And she says,

“My second generation came abroad, settled down but their life style and thoughts changed in the new environment. The same thing will evolve eventually in the third generation. Although I am not sure whether such a change is good or bad but I am worried about new generation, whether they would be heading to the right direction.”

“…to build up my third generation with our own culture and tradition I need to know their language, liking and disliking, need and demand and life style. If I get any support from our community to know and learn all those it would be very nice and helpful for me.”

In the voices of other diasporic Indian grandparents,

“Indian and Canadian societies have different backgrounds… We should let our children [and grandchildren] adopt [some attitude of Canadian Society] too, and stop always mentioning to them what we did in India or how things are done in Indian Culture home.”

“…the would be Indian diasporic grandparents need to have balanced approach. That is, they should look for common values that they and their Canadian born and grown up children hold. Future diasporic Indian grandparents need to educate themselves with open mind approach. As a first step, collaborate with your grown up children who have their own families, and then ask yourself, do your adult children support “Indian values” held by you? Do not assume that they do. If your adult children do not support your kind of “Indian values”, they would not support your way of socialising their children – your grandchildren. In other words, they may not allow you to play the grandparenting role according to your wishes. There certainly will be resistance, if not out-right conflict between you and your adult children. For example, if your own children do not speak Punjabi (i.e., you did not teach your children Punjabi when they were growing up, or they did not learn how to speak Punjabi because they grew up in the context of Canadian society), and they think it is not that important for their children to learn Punjabi in Canada, then how can you, as grandparents, expect your grandchildren to learn Punjabi and expect to avoid some degree of conflict between you and your adult children?”

“….you cannot be successful in your grandparenting role, unless you first learn to listen to your grandchildren carefully, who are growing up in the Canadian social context. In other words, you cannot approach your grandchildren expecting them to listen to you always and pay respect to you
unconditionally, as some grandparents who did not grow older in the Canadian context do (see the first three categories). You have to learn to earn respect from your grandchildren, first by respecting them as children.”

“I have raised my children in a balanced way. I have encouraged them to learn the Punjabi culture and at the same time the American way. My daughters and sons are well versed in American culture and they have been successful… However, I now feel my daughters are caught between deciding whom to marry – with a Punjabi man or the American. I think I should have socialized them in different ways in this area. Perhaps, I should have given them clear message that they could marry anyone of their choice, and not necessarily with a good Punjabi man, or a good man from India. I should have given them more freedom in this area.”

“…look at your situations. Change your mentality. Forget about what you did in India. Canada is your country. Learn from them what people do here. So many ways of doing things! Learn from each other. Forget what you did in Punjab.”

“…yes because sometimes their father doesn’t have a stable job….he might not even have a job… and when the mother also doesn’t work… then you have to help the child… you should give a few things… what the parents give will not be enough so we as grandparents should help”.

“our health is not so good and with age it will only deteriorate. Our own children and their spouses are both working so they do not have enough time and the new generation only want freedom so they will not take our responsibility”.

She further voices her concerns,

“I don’t know what is awaiting me in the future…I always think about this… for the time being everyone is here but sometimes we are alone…if something happens to us who will look after us”.

Many grandparent lament,

“In my experience in Toronto, most of the diasporic Indian grandparents/seniors are miserable and unhappy with their lives in Canada. Their children are too busy to ‘meet two ends’, they have no time for parents, therefore seniors and grandparents have to learn to be independent, but the problem is that their children keep them too busy to look after their children [seniors’ grandchildren] and to do their house work etc. etc. The children must give two or three hours free time to their parents. If children have a nanny or ‘live in’ to do the house work and to look after their children [seniors’ grandchildren], the children have to pay to that nanny about 20 thousand dollars a year, plus after six p.m. the nanny or the ‘live in’ do not work, plus
they get weekends free. Grandparents who are looking after their grandchildren are getting nothing of anything as ‘live in’ gets, but on the top of that children get their parents’ pension checks.”

“all our life we have struggled for our children and grandchildren but we are not sure what to expect in the future”.

“In Mauritius there are many grandparents who cry…they complain that their children don’t pay attention to them…see how many are going to homes” and “whatever we earned, we gave to our children, now most of them don’t have time for their parents”.

Further, the diasporic Indian grandparents are not very keen to accept the idea that their personal concerns can be ascribed exclusively to their generations’ so-called backwardness or simply to the notion of “generational differences”, “generational gap”, or to any other such labeling schemes, including the stereotypical associated with the ideology of aging (CARP , 2002; see Singh’s chapter in this book). Here are typical voices of some grandparents:

“After all they [my granddaughters] are citizens of this country and this is their home but it’s important for them to know the U.S. is also the home to people from India like me.”

One grandmother’s voices her relationship with her family and grandchildren in Canada this way,

“I like to spend time living with all my family”.

“I love to learn new things and keep active”

“I find it easy to check e-mails and send them messages, when our family sends out group mails, I’m usually the first one to reply”.

“I love it when they upload pictures so I can see them in all their lovely outfits.”

PEDAGOGICAL AND CURRICULUM GOALS IN EDUCATION FOR TRANSFORMATION

Finally, the impetus to write this book also comes from our desire to meet the demands of our students whom we teach in the contexts of multicultural societies and classrooms. Our students come from diverse backgrounds and bring with them rich social and cultural capital. In many cases they are directly involved in care giving to their aging parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. We also teach courses to professional students who work in the areas of community development, social work, health care delivery systems, and who specialize in other academic disciplines, such as cultural studies, post-colonial studies, and globalization
studies. These students bring with them field based practical knowledge and
experiences. Their field-based practical knowledge enables them to couch their
voices in subtle nuances of everyday lived experiences. Students demand that this
form of nuance based practical knowledge should be recognized in the
development of curriculum that is based on perspectives that are critical and
reflective, at all levels of training and educational institutions. In producing this
book, the contributors have tried to heed their advice and voices in a variety of
ways. For example, in this book all contributors in their respective chapters provide
a relatively extensive list of references, endnotes, and relevant statistics taken from
government census reports, and a review of research carried out both at micro and
macro levels in different countries. Everyone encounters many situations in her/his
everyday life and uses his/her commonsense knowledge and social-cultural capital
in interacting with other people. In this way each of us is constantly involved in
learning and teaching process. This process of mutual learning and teaching
enables us to contextualize and problematize various situations in much more
meaningful ways and to make sense of other’s voice for developing a perspective
on our own life as we go through different stages of our life course journey from
childhood to old age. So in the appendix we present some reflective and critical
questions that may be helpful to the reader to engage and question narratives
presented by the contributors to this book. This should serve as a guide for those
who want to study further, and who might find themselves having a desire to know
a particular topic in greater depth in a comparative framework. As an editor I have
encouraged all the contributors to write in a language accessible to all stakeholders
and lay public, such as family members and the seniors, and grandparents who may
not relish excessive specialized social science language. We hope that, albeit in a
modest way, this book will prove useful to all those students and to their teachers.

NOTES

i This chapter is re-worked and modified version of my four co-authored chapters: chapters 1&7 in
Mehta and Singh (2008), and chapters 1&36 Singh and Devine (2013). Rural transformation and
Newfoundland and Labrador diaspora: grandparents, grandparenting, community and school

ii Grandparents as seniors often have to deal with ageism. Ageism is an ideology, like racism and
sexism, which encourages the tendency to generalize, categorize and simplify the diverse histories,
voices, experiences, struggles and successes of seniors by lumping them into a single set of
representation. A recent CARP (Canadian Association of Retired People) report (2002:2) points
that this tendency “manifests itself through a variety of myths about seniors.” According to this
report, some of these myths are: seniors [grandparents] are all alike and predictable; they all live in
institutions; they are all frail, sick, dependent or senile; they are all rich; they cannot learn new
things; they are useless and cease to contribute to society; they are all isolated and lonely; they are
waiting to die; they become aimless in retirement and die soon after they retire; they are vulnerable
and therefore more easily victimized than younger people; and that they are all devoid of sexual
feelings and experiences. The most prevalent “myth” that is held by many about Punjabi seniors in
Canada is associated with ageism, is that they are ‘illiterate’, hold ‘traditional Punjabi’ values, do
not understand ‘modern Canadian’ values, and are unable to appreciate and negotiate what the
modern, industrial, liberal, democratic, western societies like Canada have to offer in the context of cultural globalization. Kalish summarizes the views of ageists as follows: “Ageists...express overt and covert dislike and discrimination regarding the elderly. That is, they avoid older persons on an individual level; they discriminate against older persons in terms of jobs, other forms of access to financial support, utilization of social institutions, and so forth. Further, the ageist individual derides the elderly through hostile humor, through accusations that the elderly are largely responsible for their own plight, and through complaints that they are consuming more than their share of some particular resource. They may also contend that older people deserve what they get, are, in effect, a drain on society, are functionally incapable of change or improvement (or, conversely, are capable of change and improvement and should be required to do so with their present resources), and do not contribute adequately to the society from which they are taking resources. Ageism involves stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, segregation, hostility…the list can go on and on,” (p. 398). Kalish, R.A. “The New Ageism and the Failure Models: A Polemic,” The Gerontologist, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1979, pp. 398–402. See Morgan, L. & Kunkel, S. (2001) (2nd Edition). Also see Quadagno, J. (2002) (2nd Edition).

“The lifecourse framework is an approach to studying of aging that emphasizes the interaction of historical events, individual decisions and opportunities, and the effect of early life experiences in determining later life outcomes” (Quadagno, 2012. P. 30.)

“We realize that voice is not something that someone gives to others. It is something to be engaged and critically understood. Voice is often problematic, yet it is central to any sense of personal action and power, that is agency. While a great deal has been written on voice as critical pedagogical category, no attempt is made here to review the literature on this category. However, it suffices to mention that the exercise of listening to the voices of both the diasporic and the non-diasporic Indian grandparents , and to all the stakeholders who are interested in their well-being, enables us to realize what forms of knowledge and cultures those groups bring in the form of cultural and social capital. It is important to know what sorts of cultural and social capital get produced and reproduced when different voices are engaged in real life situations. Once the grandparents come to realize that their voices are liberating, they can build on that freedom. They can feel confident in solving real and perceived problems pertaining to their daily lives in their own specific ways. We should remind ourselves that in this process of prioritizing the voices of the grandparents all parties involved are simultaneously teachers and learners. Part of the struggle for voice, in pedagogy, is to help the grandparents to develop a language that can serve as a means to empower them to socially transform their lives. Further, we should remember that lived experiences and language are linked together. We speak out of our lived experiences, for in fact there is no other way to speak. Therefore, if we do not have freedom to speak out our experiences, we might become voiceless. If the individual is voiceless, does it mean that the individual is negated? Silenced? Our orientation is that if the Indian diasporic grandparents, with the help of other stakeholders, can use their voices to produce “local knowledge” and “local theories” in their respective countries about their own aging process in relation to the larger debate in society about aging and grand parenting , they might be able to speak to their own specific reality with confidence. They could self-consciously reflect on their own construction of old age and on their own transformation. In writing this book we are claiming that integrating case studies presented in this book into pedagogical practices give us a site to engage the voices of the Indian diasporic grandparents living in various countries and other

We have noted that in many Indian diasporic families grandparents function as cultural workers and roving leaders. As such they are involved in sense – making process. Weick (1995) points out that “sense-making is about authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovering” (p. 8). Sense-making is “a process in which individuals develop cognitive maps of their environment” (Ring and Rands, 1989, p. 342). And “people make sense of things by seeing a world on which they already imposed what they believe” (Weick, 1995, p. 15). Sense-making involves both individual and social activities (see Singh’s chapter in this book).

The usefulness of small scale, community and neighbourhood based studies is well recognized by the social science community. The contributors to this book note that most studies on diasporic Indian seniors are small scale studies. We will see in this book the review of those studies. Smith’s (1999) comments on small scale research projects involving Maori communities are useful here, and so are presented in some detail. Smith writes about the concerns of Maori researchers in New Zealand and the challenges they face in articulating indigenous research agenda in the context of a highly institutionalized world of research. Her observations may throw some light on how to appreciate the place of small scale research done by local people who are deeply involved in the well-being of their communities. She points out that “…research is highly institutionalized through disciplines and fields of knowledge, through communities and interest groups of scholars, and through the academy.” She reminds us that research is a political process since it “is also an integral part of political structures: governments funded research directly and indirectly through tertiary education, national science organizations, development programmes and policies.” Further, like governments “corporations and industries fund their own research. Their research programmes can involve large amounts of money and resources, and their activities take place across several parts of the globe. Others like ‘non-government organizations and local community groups also carry out research and involve themselves in the analysis and critique of research. All of these research activities are carried out by people who in some form or another have been trained and socialized into ways of thinking, of defining and making sense of the known and unknown. It seems rather difficult to conceive an articulation of an indigenous research agenda on such a large scale.” This is so, she explains, because “…to imagine self-determination, however, is also to, imagine a world in which indigenous peoples become active participants, and to prepare for the possibilities and challenges that lie ahead.” (p. 124) She goes on to say that “… in addition to reasons outlined earlier … about the general regard for research by indigenous peoples, there is another reason for a reticence in naming an activity or project as research. Research is also regarded as being the domain of experts who have advanced educational qualifications and have access to highly specialized language and skills.” The diasporic Indian communities are interested in producing their own culturally relevant knowledge. But it is not easy to do so in real life situation, because they have to constantly engage the so called ‘research experts’. Smith explains, “…communities carrying out what they may regard as a very humble little project are reluctant to name it as research in case it provokes the scorn and outrage of ‘real’ researchers. Furthermore, indigenous communities as part of the self determination agenda do engage quite deliberately in naming the world according to an indigenous world view.” (p. 125). In this context one could appreciate the usefulness of the small scale studies. Theodoratus (1984–1989) also endorses the usefulness of small scale studies, and his 1984–1989 series compiles research on the presence of small ethnic communities in the United States and Canada that might otherwise not have been noticed by larger group projects.
INTRODUCTION


Giroux is one of the leading voices within the discourse of critical pedagogy. One of the important tenets of Giroux’s thought about curriculum is that teachers and professors should need to take seriously those cultural experiences and meanings “that students bring to the day-to-day process of schooling itself. If we take the experiences of our students as starting point for dialogue and analysis, we give them the opportunity to validate themselves, to use their own voices” (1981, p. 123). This suggestion does not fit well to “a predetermined and hierarchically arranged body of knowledge [that] is taken as the cultural currency to be dispensed to all children regardless of their diversity and interests” (p. 123). He further explains that the concept of hidden curriculum allows us to make “linkages between schools and the social, economic, and political landscape that make up the wider society, the hidden curriculum theorists provided a theoretical impetus for breaking out of the methodological quagmire in which schools were merely viewed as black boxes” (1983, p. 45). Giroux maintains that curriculum must not be limited to the domain of the few and the privileged, but it must center on the “particular forms of life, culture, and interaction that students bring to school” (2005, p. 104). He writes “critical pedagogy always strives to incorporate student experience as official curriculum content. While articulating such experience can both be empowering and a form of critique against relations that silence, such experience is not an unproblematic form of knowledge” (Giroux and Simon, 1989, p.231). Giroux suggests, “instead of stressing the individualistic and competitive approaches to learning, students are encouraged to work together on projects, both in terms of their production and evaluation” (2005, p. 104). Like Giroux, we realize that curriculum should go beyond the experience of students’ life. It should expand their boundaries and borders “while constantly pushing them to test what it means to resist oppression, work collectively, and exercise authority from the position of an ever-developing sense of knowledge, expertise, and commitment’ (p.104). According to Giroux and Aronowitz what we need is “really useful knowledge that draws from popular education, knowledge that challenges and critically appropriates dominant ideologies, and knowledge that points to more human and democratic social relations and cultural forms” (1994, p. 153). See, Giroux, H.A. (1981), Giroux, H. A. (1983). Ideology, culture, and process of schooling. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; London: Farmer Press; Theory and resistance in education: a pedagogy for the opposition. London: Hienemann Educational Book, Giroux, H.A. and Simon, R.I. (1989). Popular culture, schooling, and everyday life. Granby, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, Giroux, H.A. (2005) (2nd.Ed.). Schooling and the struggle for public life: democracy’s promise and education’s challenge. Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers, Giroux, H. A. and Aronowitz (1994). Education still under siege. Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, Doyle, C. and Singh, A. (2006), op. cit.

The 1970s saw the rise of critical pedagogy. It rose in resistance to so-called transmission approaches to education and curriculum. Therefore, in our reading we find that in critical pedagogy a distinction is often made between the pedagogical goals and curriculum goals of teaching and learning. Curriculum goals generally entail providing students the opportunities to learn the already existing forms of knowledge produced within the framework of dominant paradigms. Pedagogical goals require more than this. They are framed to bring about progressive social change. See endnote 7. Based on our research (see Doyle, C. and Singh, A., 2006, op. cit.) in the “field”, we have developed the RCIT (Reflective and Critical Internship Teaching model), a model of teacher education designed to engage students with curriculum that aims at achieving both the curriculum and pedagogical goals. In this model we envision that generally there are three forms of knowledge production that dominate our daily conversations and lived experiences. We label these forms of knowledge as common sense knowledge, professional knowledge, official knowledge, and defined them as follow: common sense knowledge is taken for granted dominant cultural norms, values,
attitudes, self-concepts, behavior patterns, and overall orientations which we have acquired through socialization in cultures and societies. It constitutes more of our personal opinions and idiosyncrasies. The professional knowledge is produced by various professionals, such as sociologists, psychologists, and so on, and their respective professional organizations. The official knowledge is produced by the state, i.e., various government apparatuses, such as the department or ministries of education, health, economic development, and so on. In building the RCIT model we find ourselves more inclined to accept the assertion that it is the on-going conversations we have with others that makes it possible for us to live together and solve our problems. Therefore, the model encourages students to self-consciously combine the three forms of knowledge described herein when they engage in communication with others. We have found that when students do that, they feel more empowered. They are more likely to make sense of their environment (personal and social predicaments in which they find themselves due to their specific locations in general social structure) more confidently. Empowerment also entails prefigurative politics and living. Kaufman (2003:277–8) writes that “prefigurative politics is based on the belief that we are creating the new world we are advocating as we go, and so we should try to build in the present, the institutions and social patterns of the society we are working toward.” And “in prefigurative movements, we are reweaving the social fabric. We are creating an alternative social world, and the relations we create along the way lay the foundations for the relations we will have after we achieve our goals.” See, Kaufman, C. (2003). Ideas for actions: relevant theory for radical change. Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press. Also see, Schon 1987, 1983.


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INTRODUCTION


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2. VOICES OF INDIAN DIASPORIC GRANDPARENTS IN MAURITIUS

Roles, Issues and Concerns

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to capture the perceptions and lived experiences of third and fourth generation Indian diasporic elders regarding their role as grandparents in contemporary Mauritius. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with grandfathers and grandmothers. Thematic analysis of interviews was undertaken to identify the main issues and concerns that these elders have regarding their role as grandparents. Most saw their role as even more important now given that their children as dual earner couples may not have sufficient family time. Although most elders live separately, they play an active role in the upbringing of their grandchildren and perceive themselves as custodians of values, traditions and culture. Other issues that emerged were related to old age, economic concerns and health.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to capture the perceptions and lived experiences of third and fourth generation Indian diasporic elders regarding their role as grandparents in contemporary Mauritius, specifically, their perceptions regarding their role as grandparents in a fast changing society and their concerns over their present and future lives.

Our motivation to undertake this study emanates from our perception that Indian diasporic elders constitute an impressive number of people over the age of 65 in North America, Asia and Europe. Consequently, gerontology has emerged as a popular field of study and research in recent years. Despite this focus on the elderly, some specific elderly populations have been largely under-represented in the gerontology literature and research. Grandparents constitute one such group. With globalization, diaspora studies have emerged as a vibrant and dynamic area of research, but research on diasporic elders, particularly grandparents, still needs to be undertaken. Some specific questions asked in this study are: who are the Indian diasporic grandparents, how relevant is their role as grandparents in contemporary Mauritius, what are their concerns regarding their role, how do they...
negotiate and manage their interactions with their own grandchildren, how difficult or satisfying is their role, what concerns do they have regarding their future. Findings of this study throw light on the Indian diaspora in general and on the role of grandparents in particular.

HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY MAURITIUS

Mauritius lies 500 miles from the east coast of Madagascar and over 1000 miles from South Africa. The island is volcanic with a total land mass of approximately 720 square miles. The country had no aboriginal inhabitants and has over the past few centuries gone through waves of colonization. The Portuguese were the earliest Europeans to discover the island in 1510, followed by the Dutch in 1598. The French, who were the first colonizers, arrived in 1721. The French occupation of Mauritius lasted a hundred years, long enough for French culture and language to have left a permanent mark on the population. A British colony since 1810, Mauritius became independent in 1968 and a Republic in 1992.

The French colonial period saw the island as a strategic point in the Indian Ocean trade route. During this period about 30 artisans were inducted from India (mainly from Pondicherry) to develop the colony. The next Indian arrivals consisted of prisoners brought in by the British Indian government during 1816 – 1820. Slavery was abolished in Mauritius in 1835. As in Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago and other Caribbean countries, the substantive Indian settlement of this country began only in 1834 with the induction of indentured labour from the British colony of India to Mauritius to work in the sugarcane fields of British planters (High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, 2000). By 1869, just 30 years later, 67 percent of the population of Mauritius was derived from the Indian subcontinent (Bowman, 1991). The socio and political life of Mauritius since independence has largely been determined by people of Indian origin who have a strong cultural identity with their immigrant past. According to Mishra (2007), “the rich and varied experiences of Indian immigrant on the island have made Mauritius a microcosm of the historical diaspora” (p. 263).

Post-independence, Mauritius moved from a mono-crop economy based entirely on sugar export to a newly industrialized country with a flourishing economic processing zone, tourism and more recently an information & technology sector and offshore financial sector. Mauritius has often been cited as a success story or miracle in the African continent not only for its economic progress but its success in maintaining its linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity.

INDIAN DIASPORA IN MAURITIUS

To say that, among all countries in the world in which Indian diaspora is established, Mauritius is unique and distinctive would not be an exaggeration
(High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, 2000). The small island is home to various ethnic groups (e.g., Hindus, Muslims, Tamils, Telagus, Marathi, Gujratis, Creoles, Whites, and Chinese), 15 spoken languages and four world religions are practiced here (Eriksen, 1994). It is no wonder that the representation of the nation is one of a complex multicultural mosaic in which all ethnic groups are incorporated and are considered to make up the “national mosaic” [a “rainbow nation’’] (Wong & Verkuyten, 2010, p. 625).

Hindus in Mauritius constitute about 52 percent of the population, followed by 17 per cent Muslims. Both trace their origins to South Asia. About 28 percent of Mauritians are Creoles of African and mixed origin, while Chinese and French constitute for 2 and 1 percent of the population. Unlike the other South Asia diasporas in Guyana, Trinidad and Fiji, also established through the indentured system, the people in diaspora in Mauritius are not confronted with a hegemonic national identity tending towards their exclusion (Eisenholr, 2006). Unlike other diasporic locations, the Indian diaspora in Mauritius does not face any challenge by indigenous population in the imagined community of the nation (Munasinghe, 2002; Kelly, 1998). State institutions in Mauritius explicitly encourage the propagation and celebration of diasporic links, expending significantly more resources and effort on supporting ethnicized ancestral cultural traditions, values and languages (Eisenholr, 2006). All major Hindu festivals like Diwali, Holi, Durga puja, Shivratri, Ganesh Chathurthi, Cavadee and Ougadee are celebrated at the national level. More recently, the government constructed cultural centres which are representative of the major ethnic groups and are state funded.

According to Eisenholr (2006), in “Little India”, the performance of diasporic traditions and allegiances to India as a land of origin becomes a hegemonic basis for cultural citizenship in Mauritius with continuing commitments to ancestral traditions (p. 5).

“These traditions are portrayed as ancient and glorious and as repositories of cultural values that enable their adherents to lead spiritually and economically productive lives in solidarity with others….full membership in the Mauritian nation is performed through the cultivation of such tradition with origins elsewhere” (p. 5).

In line with studies conducted elsewhere, Hindu elderly in this study believed spirituality to be a core value of traditional Indian culture. Their attachment to religion and spirituality was manifested in many different ways, such as, observation of cultural festivals, in religious practices, participation in religious groups and most importantly in pilgrimage to motherland. All religious festivals are celebrated with a lot of fervor. As expressed by a female respondent,

“we would not be who we are if we did not celebrate these festivals”.

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Another stated,

“Spirituality and religion give meaning and direction to our life, without these we would not be known as hindu”.

Although these respondents have lost contact with their close ones and with the motherland, they have maintained and reconstructed their religious and cultural identities through direct participation in religious/spiritual practices and movements of their homeland. Most were regular followers of some temple or kovil. Some had followed courses in spirituality and meditation offered by organizations such as the Brahma Kumari and Art of Living. A common practice for these respondents was to take a pilgrimage to India during which they would visit religious places. Another was to construct a Hanuman temple in their yards. All the Hindu respondents agreed that traditional Hindu values enabled them to be spiritual,

“yes, although we are far from our ‘motherland’, yet in Maritius we live according to the traditional Indian values. Values such as, love, respect, truth, peace and happiness help us to be more spiritual than having a materialistic approach to life”.

Spirituality to them meant having a strong connection with god. As stated,

“to me, to be spiritual means to forge a strong relationship with the supreme being god. Spiritual life means to live according to values”.

Further,

“the essence of Ramayana is how to create harmony with oneself, the family, the society and the nation. The Gita teaches us the philosophies of karmayoga, gyanyoga and bhaktiyoga. These values help me to think, speak and act accordingly.”

For these respondents, it was extremely important that their children and grandchildren also live according to these values. As expressed,

“parents set examples for children. I am afraid to say that the education system does not cater for training in spirituality. So this task has to be fulfilled by parents. Parents should consciously impart values. These days parents are too busy at work. They do not give enough time to their children. Often they just provide material benefits to satisfy the children”.

What emerges from these expressions is a strong attachment to values and traditions of motherland India which these elderly have strongly followed in their lives and a strong desire to see these values and traditions being preserved and followed by coming generations.

One such tradition is people’s understanding and notion of family which is generally the most significant social institutions in the everyday life of the
VOICES OF INDIAN DIASPORIC GRANDPARENTS IN MAURITIUS

diasporic Indians. Despite influence of larger macro level phenomenon such as international migration, globalization and transnationalization, families in Indian communities retain some common features of Indian family life. Parents still take responsibility for the educational, emotional and religious development of their children. Social and religions festivals are celebrated together. The elderly in this study see such gatherings and celebrations as extremely important for the social and emotional development of their children and grandchildren,

“if we (the elderly) do not make the effort to keep everyone together, our children will never know what a family is or what relationships mean”.

However, the stereotypical Bollywood image of the happy extended and large family living together under one roof is almost non-existent. Our respondents expressed their mixed feelings of togetherness and loneliness as:

“well we have always lived together, we do everything together..celebrate festivals, new year, birthdays and weddings…I would not want to stay alone at this stage of my life..I am happy that I have my family around me”

Nuclear families are the norm rather than the exception As stated by a female respondent

“when I look after the children and when their parents look after them, it’s not the same… the children stay with their parents now and I live here, so it’s better that their parents look after them. The children are theirs so they know how they want to raise them, but had they been here it would have been good”.

Another added

“Now I am alone… earlier they were here… now they have married and went away…now I am alone…I have to stay here only…when they were young I used to look after them…now all of them have grown up…they work or go to school…but every day I get to meet them as they stay nearby”.

It is often claimed that the hardest hit by this change are the elderly. Both elders and their adult children use different discourses to explain, justify, understand and adjust to this change. As narrated

“earlier my children were staying with us and then they went away…but… well…they want their privacy so we let them go….but our relationship is the same.”

“You know in our times we had eight to ten children but still managed to stay together but my elder son always tells me that bringing up two children nowadays is more difficult than bringing up ten children in the past as life has become more difficult now”.

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While elders often complain of neglect and alienation, adult-children explain their busy life in terms of demands of their work and pressures of modern life. These perceptions and sentiments were expressed by these elderly as:

“there are some children who don’t look after their parents…they go to leave their parents in homes…they don’t visit them there…so you see…we have looked after these children and now that we have become old we have become children for them…now they should look after us”.

“For that they should have time but that’s exactly what they don’t have, they come home, eat and then go to sleep so how will they interact with anyone”.

Social and economic changes in Mauritius have given rise to the dual-earner family. Females constitute almost half of the working population. This has led to improved standard of living for most families but at the same time childcare has become a major concern for most parents. As stated:

“yes we should help our children because nowadays everyone works and for children who have not started school or nursery it’s a big problem. We should help the mother as she also works and it’s not like in the past when you had ample time…so nowadays it’s a type of support…this is how I see it”.

With inadequate childcare facilities available a major question for working parents is: “Who will take care of their children?: Most couples turn to their own parents in this situation. As stated by a female respondent:

“yes my children wanted me to look after their children…it’s better when grandparents are here…they are elders, their presence is important for the family and they have the experience of looking after children”.

In many western societies, grandparenthood has traditionally been associated with a ‘peripheral role’ where grandparents assist in childcare without taking full responsibility for child rearing (Cox, 2000). Such a role has been construed as being one of ‘pleasure without responsibility’ (Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964, p. 31). Recent research has revealed that an increasing number of grandparents have moved from this traditional notion to assuming the role of full time parents (Ochiltree, 2006). This shift in childcare is often related to parental drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, HIV/AIDS, child abuse etc. However, in Mauritius, most grandparents expect to play the role of grandparent. As quoted by some:

“yes as grandparents you are happy to do all that you can for your grandchildren…when they were young we used to look after them. You see the parents go to work so shouldn’t we be looking after the children”.

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Also

“I am very happy that I am a grandparent...when our children got married, we were waiting to be grandparents and now we are waiting for our grandchildren to get married so that we can have great grandchildren”.

Although the Indian diaspora has been the focus of many studies by researchers, none has looked at this specific elderly population. We hope to contribute in some way to understanding the concerns and aspirations of this diasporic population.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Since a major interest of the study was on understanding grandparents’ experiences, this approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to “access the personal experiences of the storyteller who frames, articulates and reveals life as experienced in a narrative structure we call story” (Kramp, 2004, p. 105). This approach is not concerned with representativeness or making inferences about the larger population but seeks to gain rich, comprehensive data from a small number of participants (Mason, 1996). Such research is particularly appropriate for a study of this nature as it can give depth and detail of a phenomenon that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

To delve deeper into the lived experiences of Indian diasporic grandparents, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 seniors (5 males and 15 females). The age range of respondents was between sixty two to seventy five years.

A purposive sampling technique was used in order to select ‘information-rich’ participants (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Respondents were selected through acquaintance with the researchers and by reference provided by participants themselves. Taylor (2005) described the qualitative as “inductive, with the purpose of describing multiple realities, developing deep understanding, and capturing everyday life and human perspective.”

These interviews generated a wealth of data that captured the emotions, experiences and perceptions of third and fourth generation people of Indian origin in Mauritius. An interview took between one to two hours to complete. Notes were taken by the researcher.

The interviews were transcribed, coded and sorted accordingly to emerging themes. The data offers rich data, in terms of respondents perspectives on life, their roles, values, social norm etc. but cannot be used to generate information that can be subjected to quantitative analysis or used as a basis for generalization.
FINDINGS

Characteristics of Respondents

Respondents were twenty Senior Indian diasporic grandparents (15 females and 5 males). All were third and fourth generation of people of Indian origin whose great grandparents had come to Mauritius as indentured labourer during the French and British occupation. In terms, of ethnicity, 9 were Hindu, 6 Catholics and 3 Muslims.

Their average age was 67 years. Except for two grandparents who had studied up to school certificate level, the rest had only some basic primary schooling. Only three female respondents were still employed at the time of the interviews. The remaining were retired and living on old age pensions. They had between one to 6 children and between 7 to 10 grandchildren. Of these, 14 grandparents were actively involved in the bringing up of their grandchildren on a daily basis. The remaining took care of their grandchildren for a few hours on weekdays till the parents returned from work. An interesting and common feature of housing in Mauritius is that most married children live in a separate house from that of their parents but in the same yard. Some would live in the same house but have separate cooking arrangements.

Origins and Family

For most respondents in this study, child rearing was intertwined with their culture, religion and their colonial past. The topic of origin and family was an important component of the discourse of most respondents. At different points in the conversation they referred to the hardship faced by their grandparents and parents, how they were cheated by colonizers, how they left their motherland in search of a better life and opportunities. As stated

“my grandparents had left their motherland because they were cheated by the whites that this place is full of riches and they would have a comfortable life”.

Many narrated how their parents left their motherland with nothing but their religious scriptures that have guided them in all aspects of their life, including child rearing and how important it was for them to transmit these values and culture to their own children and grandchildren. These feeling and emotions were expressed as

“you know my grandparents had nothing when they came here but yet they succeeded in transmitting good values in their children and grandchildren”.

Another respondent stated

“all that I have learnt from my parents I pass on to my children, I teach them good manners, how to walk on the right path.”
“I always teach them what I have learnt, especially since they are girls, someday they will go to their husband’s place, I tell them to respect their in-laws in the same way as they respect me”.

When queried on the role grandparents can play in the upbringing of their grandchildren, most respondents spoke of their wisdom and experience which they acquired from their own parents and how this experience can help in shaping the character, values, culture and spiritual life of youngsters today.

“Yes…because you need knowledge…so we should share our experiences… if we keep them for ourselves it’s like having discovered a gold mine and keeping it unearthed”.

Religion and culture was a common theme which linked the past, present and the future of these elderly: what they acquired, what they have and what they would like to transmit to the new generation. All respondents took a lot of pride in the hard work put in by their forefathers and their achievements, especially with regard to education of their children. Although all respondents showed strong attachment to their country of origin, they had no desire to return there as they had a comfortable life. As narrated

“I would love my children and grandchildren to understand and adapt our rich culture, tradition and values in our daily life…but our life is now here…my grandparents and parents were born here…all my relationships are now here”.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF CHILDHOOD

The initial question put to the respondents was on whether they (grandparents) should be involved in the upbringing of their grandchildren. Interestingly all respondents said yes but in citing reasons for their involvement most talked about changing patterns of childhood and the difference between childhood in the present and the past. The type of childhood experienced by grandparents and grandchildren portrayed a change from children being involved in work and taking care of younger siblings in the past to children whose lives are centered on school education, tuition, friends and the internet. As stated by one respondent

“whatever time my grandson gets after school and tuition, he spends on the internet. He prefers to chat on the net rather than talk to people around him. His parents don’t mind because they also do not have enough time to communicate with children”.

Another difference between past and present related to love and affection. As stated
“nowadays there is no time because all of them go to work. They put their children in nurseries. They return late from work, hurry up to cook food and give to the children because next morning they have to go to work again, it’s not like before…the way we used to look after our children”.

“There is a lot of difference…in our times, we did not leave our children and go… and even if people worked they would look after their children before going to work but now days parent’s don’t look after the children, they just leave the children and go”.

Many respondents said that in their time they would give more love and affection to their children but nowadays these emotions are equated with materialistic goods. One elderly narrated

“now days children don’t have anything to say. Parents don’t communicate well with the children. When children come back from school, they sit down and start doing their homework. They don’t have the wish or desire to talk… nowadays children can only be seen with their mobiles…they are more interested with their mobiles than with their studies or anyone”.

Parents express their love by giving expensive things to children.

“honestly, I can tell you that some people are doing it well…but there are some who well, what we can see here…it’s a bit unfortunate…parents go to work…the children are left on their own…you can see them on the streets with their mobiles or on the computer and that’s why I say the situation is deteriorating.in our times it was not like this”.

The parent-child relationship, in general, was perceived to have undergone changes from past to the present in terms of love, respect and commitment. This was expressed as

“yes we looked after the children well… but now days people put children in nurseries but sometimes when you put children in nurseries, they don’t have an attachment with their parents…they are getting attachment with the person who is looking after him…it’s not like in the old times…nowadays parents and children work, but still there is no progress in the house and life is becoming tougher”.

**REASONS FOR CARING FOR GRANDCHILDREN**

With respect to respondents views regarding their involvement in the upbringing of their grandchildren, interesting reasons were put forward. Some were compelling circumstances that forced grandparents to support their own children in the rearing
of their grandchildren. One reason was financial hardship due to unemployment on the part of their sons and the high cost of living. As stated by one respondent:

“yes because sometimes their father doesn’t have a stable job….he might not even have a job… and when the mother also doesn’t work… then you have to help the child… you should give a few things… what the parents give will not be enough so we as grandparents should help”.

The most common reason put forward by most grandparents was the rise of dual-earner families in Mauritius. With parents working, the onus for taking care of grandchildren was on grandparents. This was a recurrent theme for most grandparents. As one states

“that’s because if both parents work, when the child will come back from school, there won’t be anyone to look after him, he will go wherever he wants and do whatever he pleases and he might learn wrong things… so in such cases, we are here, we should support him”.

In addition to these compelling external reasons, respondents also gave social and emotional reasons for being involved in the caring for grandchildren. Two-thirds of the respondents cited experience on parenting as a major reason for why grandparents should care for their grandchildren

“Our children don’t have that experience…. that’s why we should help them and teach them what to do with grandchildren because we have already become grandparents, so we have experience of what not to do….those things that parents are unable to do.”

Such views reflect the views of most grandparents in this study. Tied to their experience in grand parenting was their ability to teach grandchildren good manners, proper behaviour and education. The latter was aggravated by their concerns regarding children’s behavior in modern society. The fear of values and culture being eroded was a constant theme. Many grandparents saw themselves as guides and custodians of culture and values. As stated

“grandparents should be here to help in looking after the children. And if they make mistakes, we correct them….we tell them what is good and what is bad…the children will have a guide….they will know that there is someone to teach them how to differentiate between right and wrong”.

It needs to be emphasized that grandparents in this study saw themselves as support for their own children but were careful in drawing a line between helping and interfering. Some explicitly stated that they would not like to interfere in the way their children were bringing up their children. As stated
“I do understand that times are not the same anymore. I try to guide my children and grandchildren and give my opinion only when it is needed, otherwise they may think I am interfering in their life, you see”.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GRANDCHILDREN AND THEIR NEEDS

In response to a question asking grandparents to describe their relationship with their grandchildren all stated that they had a good relationship—full of attachment, love, closeness and affection—whether they stayed with them in the same house or separately. Even when they live far away their presence was kept in the form of photographs,

“but as you might have noticed… we have kept pictures of all of them here… just take a look…you will see we have photographs of all my grandchildren…that’s how their presence is felt in the house”.

Contrary to the past when grandparents as the elder most in the family had the final say in all matters, this generation of grandparents made a clear distinction between their authority and power over their grandchildren and that of the parents. As remarked by one grandfather

“we are like friends… we don’t have that kind of relationship like an authoritarian grandfather would have with his grandchildren”.

Another grandmother stated

“we have an affectionate relationship… and of course I am their grandmother not their mother… whenever there is a problem, I will talk to the mother”.

In terms of the needs of grandchildren today most grandparents emphasized that children need their own parents the most but given time constraints of a dual-earner family they also recognized that grandparents need to cater for some of the monetary and emotional needs of grandchildren. Two important needs were education and advice and grandparents saw themselves as fulfilling both of these needs. As reported

“their greatest need is education…not only academic education, but the foundation itself which they get from the family… how to live in society… so we guide and tell them what is good and what is not… it is very important because earlier there were not so many social problem as there are nowadays”.

However some grandparents were quick to acknowledge that they cannot compare the world today with their own times and that there is a need for them to adapt to this changed world.
A constant theme emerging from all the interviews was grandparents’ concern and fear regarding erosion of values and traditions that were preserved by them and passed on to their own children. These values and customs were perceived to be even more important in today’s world than ever before. They made constant references to their times and how the world has undergone change. As said

“nowadays we are living in a different world…the environment and atmosphere is different…it’s not the same as before”.

This concern was aggravated by their perception that

“children are not obedient as before”….and “there is a lot of difference in the way youngsters used to dress up in our times and the clothes they wear these days…earlier it was much better…the body was covered up”.

Given these perceptions it was considered even more important to transmit the right values and traditions and most respondents considered it their duty to assume the role of custodians of values and traditions and their culture in general. When queried about specific things they do in order to teach their grandchildren their values and culture, almost all made reference to religious symbols and teaching and this was common to the respondents of Hindu, Muslim and Catholic faith. As stated by one Hindu

“every morning we teach her how to do prayers…we ring the bell while doing prayers…teach her how to say Om”.

Another said

“when we pass in front of a temple, we bow our head in reverence and we tell the children to do the same…we tell them about god…this is lord Ganesh or Ganesha, this is lord Hanuman, this is Durga”.

For these diasporic Indian elders concern for values, language and tradition was central to the cultural concern. On the one hand they showed a strong adherence to tradition and customs and expected the younger generations to do the same but on the other hand they recognized that times have changed and they need to adapt to new ways of life. They were at a crossroad where on one side the values on which they built their life were being challenged while on the other side the same values were perceived to be more important than ever before. Most respondents saw themselves in the middle trying to preserve these values and also embracing the changes that society was undergoing.
CHILD REARING THEN AND NOW: REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST
AND THE PRESENT

Our sample of respondents consistently reflected upon the child rearing practices of their time and comparing it with practices nowadays. All acknowledged that times have changed but also hinted in very subtle tones that parents are not as devoted to children as before. Economic concern was a constant theme:

“well, I don’t know how to explain but we had time to look after our children. Both my wife and myself used to work, but we still managed to look after our children”.

Despite the hardships that were experienced by most respondents as young parents they still perceived that the effort they put in was immense compared to parents nowadays who have all facilities to support them. As stated,

“we got full opportunity to look after them… and children were more obedient in those times…well we can’t say that it was very easy because there was very little money and no facilities…we all lived in one house and only one person worked…but still we struggled”.

When probed on precisely what was going wrong with child upbringing nowadays, the unanimous answer was that parents are not devoting enough time to their children resulting in communication gaps. Some commented

“In our times we did not use to leave our children and go…and even if people worked, they would look after their children before going to work, but nowadays parents don’t look after the children, they just go”.

Another said,

“Nowadays children don’t have anything to say to parents. Parents also don’t communicate well with their children. When children come back from school they sit down to do their homework, they also have no desire to talk. They are more interested in communicating with others on their mobile phones and internet than with parents, this is also reducing attachment of children with their parents”.

Parents were seen as responsible for reversing this situation,

“children are young, they have no experience of life, so it’s the parents’ responsibility to find time to communicate with children, attachment and right values need to be inculcated when children are young otherwise you lose them”.

Interestingly, despite these perceptions, observations and concerns, most respondents in this study saw their own children fulfilling their parental role exactly as they (the respondents) taught them
“I think that whatever we taught him, he is teaching those to his children… whatever values we have inculcated in him he is inculcating them in his children, the children are following the path their father is showing them”.

MAJOR CONCERNS FOR THEIR FUTURE

As mentioned earlier, most married adults in Mauritius live in separate houses in Mauritius but in close proximity to their own parents. Despite this physical closeness to their children, many respondents expressed concerns and worries about their future. The two main concerns were related to finance and health. As stated by a male respondent

“although we are taking care of our grandchildren at this age, there is no guarantee that they will take care us when we need them”.

When probed about their apprehensions, one female respondent stated

“our health is not so good and with age it will only deteriorate. Our own children and their spouses are both working so they do not have enough time and the new generation only want freedom so they will not take our responsibility”.

She further added

“I don’t know what is awaiting me in the future…I always think about this… for the time being everyone is here but sometimes we are alone…if something happens to us who will look after us”.

Another one lamented

“all our life we have struggled for our children and grandchildren but we are not sure what to expect in the future”.

Despite this, many still had hopes that their children would support them in times of difficulty. Related to this was the issue of inheritance. Some respondents narrated stories of how some children rejected their old parents once they had inherited parents’ property. These concerns were expressed as

“In Mauritius there are many grandparents who cry…they complain that their children don’t pay attention to them…see how many are going to homes” and “whatever we earned, we gave to our children, now most of them don’t have time for their parents”.

In conclusion, what emerges from this study is a picture of Indian diaspora elderly actively engaged in caring for their grandchildren. Their role as grandparents is inextricably linked to their origin, tradition and culture. Grand parenting is a duty and an expected progression in the life cycle of these adults and they show an
eagerness to be involved in the caring of their grandchildren. The underlying motivation is to preserve and transmit the values and culture acquired by their own parents to the new generation. Most recognized and accepted the dramatic changes that childhood has undergone from their time to the present, especially with regard to the way in which technology has changed communication patterns between parents and children. Social, emotional and economic reasons were cited for being involved in caring for grandchildren. Erosion of values, traditions and culture was a constant worry for these diasporic elderly and many saw themselves playing an important role in preserving and transmitting these values. They saw themselves as filling a void left by working parents in the social, emotional and cultural development of their grandchildren. This was achieved through storytelling, pictures of gods, visits to the temple and family celebrations. The elderly in this study, although very attached to their culture and tradition were quick to recognize that the world has changed not only at the macro level but also at the micro level of the family in terms of relationships and authority and the need for them to adapt to these changes. Consequently, they drew a sharp line between helping and interfering. In the course of the discussions, many elderly navigated between the past and the future reflecting on the relationship between parents and their children. The past was often glorified by successful child rearing despite very limited means whereas the present was a concern despite more means. Standing at the zenith of their life, these elderly had economic and health concerns but also hopes for support from their children who they expected to have imbibed their own values and culture.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this research gives voice to Indian diaspora adult grandparents, it is not free from limitations. The qualitative bottom-up approach is high in ecological validity but the findings cannot be generalized due to the sampling frame and the qualitative methods. Consequently, external validity remains in question. However, the findings that emerge are not very different from similar studies conducted elsewhere and has generated rich data providing significant depth of insight into the complexity of the experiences of grandparents caring for grandchildren. This may be taken as partial evidence for external validity. The data generated can be used to construct quantitative measures for larger samples. Future research needs to examine the extent to which contextual factors shape the experiences of this specific population.

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