Artifacts, Identity, and Transition: Favorite Possessions of Indians and Indian Immigrants to the United States

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The things to which we are attached help to define who we are, who we were, and who we hope to become. These meanings are likely to be especially salient to those in identity transitions. In this study we examine such meanings by comparing favorite possessions of Indians in India and Indians who immigrated to the United States. Because the Indian sense of self differs considerably from Western concepts, these immigrants provide an interesting and important group in which to examine the use of possessions in securing identity. Results suggest that possessions play an important role in the reconstruction of immigrant identity.

The role of possessions in constructing and preserving identity is powerful and pervasive (Belk 1988a). Indian emigrants are an especially interesting group in which to examine the role of possessions in these identity processes because, although 80 percent of India's 800 million people still live in small villages (Leonhard-Spark and Saran 1980), internal migration to larger towns and cities is separating Indians from their ancestral roots at an increasing rate (Brahme 1977; Conlon 1977; Rajagopalan 1978). In addition, U.S. immigration policy since 1965 has resulted in an influx of Indians who are quite unlike prior immigrants to this country. Rather than the predominantly poor and uneducated European immigrants who came to America in previous generations, the "new immigrants" are Asians who are more highly paid and educated than those born in the United States (Boyd 1977; Datta 1975; Saran 1977). These contemporary immigrants' superior education and elevated occupational status paradoxically makes them both better able to adapt to the United States and freer to retain distinct Indian identities. A further reason for interest in the role of possessions among this group is that the Western possessive individualism thought to underlie American and European concepts of self is notably absent in India (Belk 1984), thus providing a markedly different context in which to examine the relevance of possessions to identity.

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In contrast to the United States, India more closely resembles a continent in which each state is like a separate nation, complete with different languages, religions, and ethnic groups (Fisher 1980, p. 23). To facilitate examining the role of possessions in India and the United States, only a single area of India (in and near Bombay) was investigated, and only immigrants from this area to a single area of the United States were chosen for comparison. Within India, we investigated residents in ancestral villages, a traditional town, a newer town, and a large city. In moving from village to town to city to the United States, the Indian emigrant moves ever farther from home and roots (Conlon 1977; Rajagopalan 1978). For greater comparability, this article focuses only on the possessions of residents of Bombay versus those of Indian residents in the United States. It was our general expectation that, during migration from India to the United States, possessions would be called on to fulfill roles that family, friends, and familiar environment once performed for the emigrant. For instance, the once unheeded physical environment associated with friends, family, and heritage may need to be made tangible in mementos and heirlooms (Belk, in press). Simultaneously, possessions that once acted as expressive signs may no longer perform this function in the new environment. Although several prior studies have researched the homes and possessions of immigrant families (see, e.g., Greenbaum and Greenbaum 1981; Lynch 1988; Meier 1981) and migrants who have returned to their homelands (see, e.g., Gmelch 1980; Rhoades 1980; Zwingmann 1973) and other studies have asked immigrants about changes experienced, this study appears to be the first to compare immigrants with those who stayed behind.

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The main focus of this study is to understand differences in material life-styles and favorite possessions between Indians in urban India and Indian immigrants in the United States. Using qualitative depth interviews and photographic methods, we investigated the meanings of possessions among 27 Indians in the city of Bombay, Maharashtra. All informants in Bombay were originally from the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra. After analyzing these data, we used similar research methods in the second phase of the study to study the meanings of possessions among 11 immigrant families from these states who had moved to a western U.S. metropolitan area of approximately 1 million people. Data collection and analysis procedures involved constant comparative method and emergent design, but the study also benefits from prior theory and research on the meanings people attach to their possessions and from prior studies of the adaptation process among Indian immigrants.

EXTENDED SELF, FAVORITE POSSESSIONS, AND MOVING

Concepts of self differ cross-culturally (Belk 1984; Harris 1989), and, compared with the Western self, the Indian self is thought to be less individualistic and less susceptible to the Cartesian dualism of self as both subject and object (Marriott 1976; Vaidyanathan 1989). Even the notion of actively extending self through possessions seems too proactive to apply in India, although Belk (1988a) notes that agency is not necessary in order to have a feeling of unity with the objects in our environment. More aggregate levels of self, especially family self (Belk 1988a), also appear to be more dominant in India. Since Hindu traditional beliefs emphasize renouncing material desires as the ultimate enlightenment, this too would seem to make a consideration of Indian extended self via possessions problematic. The voluntary displacement of Indians from their ancestral villages to large cities, however, coupled with unprecedented economic and social change in India during the past decade, has implications for the role of possessions to the Indian self. Vaidyanathan (1989, p. 164) notes a disorientation among affluent " 'urban alienates' . . . whose sense of cultural identity, which is the only identity the Indian has, has been jarred." One apparent result has been for these affluent migrants to the city to turn more to consumer goods. Media treatments in India and the West have recently heralded the yuppie-like "puppy": a prosperous urban Punjabi who is young (see, e.g., Desmond 1989), seemingly a clear instance of what Belk (1988b) has labeled "Third World consumer culture." This suggests that possessions may play an expanded role in construction of the self by mobile and affluent Indians. Dasgupta (1989) also found a conscious expansion of high-status material goods ownership by Indian immigrants in America and attributed it to a desire to fit in.

When possessions are seen as a part of the individual or family identity, they may allow immigrants to "transport" part of their former identities to a new place. Belk (1988a) offers several mechanisms by which objects might become a part of self, including habituation, knowledge (familiarity), self-creation, proximity, and metonymic association with loved ones. These transitional objects, when ritually incorporated into the new habitat, may provide an important aid to identity transition. For instance, a part of the ritual of occupying a new house involves "personalizing" it, partly by installing those objects that help define our identity (Saile 1985; Seamon 1979). Goodman (quoted in Saile [1985], p. 95) describes this process: "Slowly it is becoming our house. With each new coat of paint, each box unpacked, each tile set into place, we begin to feel our presence in its past. . . . We treat the house, the house which is slowly becoming ours, with some respect. We, after all, have moved into it. It may be our new house, but we are its newcomers. . . . Yes, other families have settled here, other lives have been played out here. But now it is our time. We renovate, renew this structure, make changes. Slowly it is becoming ours." Personalizing the house by deploying familiar possessions helps to fuse the house to self-concept (Buckley 1971). Cleaning the new house is another ritual that aids in this consolidation and incorporation (Becker and Coniglio 1975; McCracken 1988). Both are parts of the ritual sacralization needed to turn a house into a home (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). In the villages of rural India that were studied, a comparable purification ritual involves the installation of a new cow-dung-and-mud floor each year in conjunction with Divali.

Home interiors contain a wide variety of objects that hold special importance for identity, as illustrated by studies in the United States and Niger (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). Such objects are meaningful because they remind people of their pasts—travel experiences, achievements, close relatives and friends—or because the objects are symbols of religious or ethnic identities. Treasured objects also may be used to silently convey and express self to others. But the individual-level self is not the only one that may be conveyed through such objects. In analyzing individual differences in favorite objects in the home, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) detect a dimension of "differentiation and integration" involving the choice between symbolizing self (differentiation) and symbolizing others (integration). Altman and Gauvain (1981) have detected this same dimension of difference and label it the "identity/communality" dialectic. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that men and adolescent informants tend to cite as favorite objects those symbolizing self, while women and older adults tend instead to choose objects symbolizing others. Older people also tend to be strongly attached to contemplative possessions that help them survey their

pasts. The severing of these attachments is thought to play a role in the high mortality rate from "transplantation shock" and "uprooting" when old people are separated from their possessions (Boschetti 1986; Godkin 1980; Howell 1983; Pastalan 1983; Sherman and Newman 1977; Stafford 1988).

During geographic movement away from the people, places, and things of previous homes, cities, and nations, an increased burden is placed on individual possessions for anchoring identity. As the distance of the move increases, the number of individual possessions retained is increasingly restricted by the cost of moving them. With more distant moves, return visits to the people, places, and things left behind are also more difficult. Furnham and Bochner (1986) and Levy-Warren (1987) view such estrangement as a source of grief and suggest that the migrant must go through various stages of mourning before mental health can be regained and the adverse effects of culture shock overcome.

Although the break with many of our prior material anchors for identity presents a problem to the integrity and continuity of identity, it also presents an opportunity to alter identity. Since geographic moves are often associated with status transitions due to changes in job, career, education, and marital status, we may welcome some loss of identity-relevant possessions as an opportunity to build a new identity, especially when the move is voluntary and reflects upward social mobility. In a society lacking in formal rites of passage, we may construct our own rites by "cleansing" ourselves of former possessions, undertaking the difficult journey of the physical move, and, after an appropriate liminal time (Turner and Turner 1978), acquiring the possessions symbolic of the new roles we seek to occupy. This may be especially appealing to immigrants who wish to establish a new identity as Americans (Heinze 1990).

Still, few people outside of monastic orders ever voluntarily rid themselves of *all* identity-relevant possessions. As George Carlin (1981) humorously and insightfully notes, even in temporary pilgrimages as tourists, we use our suitcases as what Erving Goffman (1961) called identity kits. The comfort of carrying some familiar possessions from home keeps us from the total identity alienation we are otherwise likely to feel in unfamiliar surroundings with no material anchors for our previously established identities. Holbrook and Grayson's (1986) analysis of the "imperialist nostalgia" (Rosaldo 1989) of *Out of Africa* detects just such a theme. Furthermore, Swidler (1986) argues that during periods of unsettled lives such as those that occur with migration, material objects become highly charged with meaning and help organize experience and provide coherent models of self. This seems likely to be especially true for objects that are linked to continued behavioral rituals such as eating, sleeping, grooming, and religious practice.

CULTURE, ASSIMILATION, AND INTEGRATION

The notion of culture has become ambiguous and controversial within anthropology and sociology (Keesing 1974). One major issue of contention is whether cultures are adaptive behavioral systems that emerge from the influence of environment and cause changes in the ideologies that encode these adaptations, or whether cultures are ideational systems that cause changes in behavior. Swidler (1986) resolves this debate by suggesting that, in settled periods and conditions, culture is diffuse and leads to various adaptive behaviors, while in unsettled periods and conditions, explicit cultural ideologies (or values) shape behavior. Since immigration constitutes an especially unsettled condition, she also suggests a test of this hypothesis among immigrants: "In new circumstances (after immigration, for example), who remains traditional longer? If culture influences action by constraining strategies of action, we should expect the greatest 'traditionalism' among the old . . . and those from culturally encapsulated backgrounds, people for whom the costs of learning new cultural skills would be greatest. If culture shapes action through values, on the other hand, we should expect the most socially advantaged to show greatest resistance to change, since they would have the greatest resources with which to protect and pursue those values" (p. 283). Although our sample of immigrants is primarily young and socially advantaged, this study nevertheless offers some evidence bearing on this test.

If the notion of culture has become controversial, so has the traditional analytical notion of assimilation in which immigrant groups are seen to adapt to the dominant or host culture (e.g., Wallendorf and Reilly 1983). Furnham and Bochner (1986, p. 26) note that such views of assimilation "are racist, implying as they do that the dominant culture is superior in relation to the minority, or 'lower status,' practices it is swamping." They summarize a continuum of progressively less offensive outcomes of culture contact: genocide of original inhabitants by outsiders, genocide of newcomers by insiders, assimilation of out-groups by in-group, segregation of out-groups by in-group, self-segregation of out-group, and integration.

Berry (1989; see also Berry 1980 and Kaul 1977, p. 33) provides a more succinct model placing the locus of choice partly with the immigrant group:

	Considered of value to maintain cultural identity?	
	Yes	No
Considered of value to maintain relations with dominant culture?		
Yes	Integration	Assimilation
No	Separation	Marginalization

Within this model, integration results in a culturally pluralistic society such as that of Canada, while assimilation results in a "melting pot" culture as is thought to be typical of the United States. However, given the high educational and occupational status of "new immigrants" (Gold 1989) to the United States—as typified by recent Indian immigrants—we expected to find a pattern of integration rather than assimilation. A voluntary, often job-related, immigration decision suggests that good relations with the dominant culture are desirable. But the prestigious occupations and the intellectual resources of these immigrants suggest that they may also value, and have the ability to retain, their Indian cultural identity. Given features such as skin color, which distinguish Indian immigrants from white Americans, as well as low rates of intermarriage, it may also be that the dominant culture regards Indians as sufficiently "different" to preclude cultural assimilation. An alternative pattern of integration might be reflected in material culture by the simultaneous adoption of "American" possessions and conscientious retention of "Indian" artifacts.

INDIANS AND INDIAN IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES

Indians in Urban India

Strong regional differences exist in India in languages, religions, landscapes, and people. Associated with these differences are variations in architecture, cuisine, dress, rituals, music, and traditions (Dutt and Noble 1982). The Gujarati and Marathi communities studied in the city of Bombay are the two largest communities in India's most cosmopolitan city. Traditionally and somewhat simplistically, India is divided into north and south India on the basis of differences in language and race. Bombay, in the central region of western India, is not clearly categorized as either north or south (Fisher 1980). The Gujarati and Marathi communities speak Gujarati and Marathi, respectively. Both communities also speak Hindi. Because of British influence on the educational system, English is prevalent as well among the educated in Bombay.

While north Indians tend to eat more wheat and south Indians tend to eat more rice, those from Gujarat and Maharashtra commonly consume equal quantities of both. Because of the ahimsa concept of nonviolent reverence for all life, western Indians (especially Gujaratis) tend to have the strongest vegetarian beliefs in India (Lodrick 1982).

Despite constitutional proscriptions, the caste system remains evident among the Hindus, who account for over 80 percent of all Indians. In part because of Muslim influence, however, caste hierarchy in north India is mostly confined to rural areas, with social class hierarchies more significant than caste in urban areas (Dutt and Noble 1982). Bombay has a strong urban social class system, and the caste hierarchies are not strictly followed.

Modernization trends in India have also affected the nature of caste influence. "Sanskritization" is a process by which lower castes imitate Brahmans, practicing Brahmanic food-purity rules and giving up "unclean" occupations to thereby improve their relative status (Srinivas 1972). Secularization through declining state support of religious festivals and increased emphasis on secular education also tends to weaken caste influence (Rao 1978). A related process of Westernization has resulted in nontraditional clothing, foods, furnishings, and occupations, all of which help in the gradual process of replacing caste prestige with a social class system of status. "De-Brahmanization," in which both Brahmans and others are less attentive to the obligations and privileges of caste, has also elevated the importance of social class, especially in urban areas (Rao 1978). It may also be the case that Western ethnographies of India have previously overstated the importance of caste and Hinduism in Indian society (Malik 1986).

Caste-independent social classes are most evident in Indian towns and cities, where 20–25 percent of the population reside. Despite a per capita income of only $240 for all of India, a relatively affluent upper class exists in urban India. This upper class constitutes under 10 percent of the total Indian population but accounts for approximately 50 percent of the Indian gross national product. Indian immigrants in the United States, estimated at 600,000 (Culley 1987), come primarily from this upper class. According to a survey of Indian immigrants in New York City, over 70 percent came from large Indian cities, with only 9 percent from villages (Saran 1985; Kaul [1977] found similar patterns in Ohio). The remaining 20 percent were from intermediate-size towns. Just over one-third were from the state of Gujarat (Leonhard-Spark and Saran 1980).

The cities of India are growing faster than towns and villages. One effect of the urban life-style of larger cities is to disrupt the occupational prescriptions of caste that are still found in the towns and villages from which the many new large-city residents have migrated (Conlon 1977). The pursuit of economic riches in the city also tends to weaken kinship ties and lessen the frequency of joint or extended families (Lannoy 1971).

Power is gender related in India under the predominant patriarchal and patrilocal system. Alexander and Jayaraman (1977) find that, while the status gap between men and women is narrowing in upper castes as industrialization and urbanization create greater opportunities, sex inequality is growing in lower castes where these same trends have tended to take women out of production rather than provide them greater opportunities.

Marriage in India traditionally occurs just after puberty, although the age of marriage is now increasing, especially in cities. Arranged marriages remain dominant. Because daughters require costly dowries and

do not carry on the family name or remain in the home, they are less esteemed than sons.

Indian Immigrants

Although studies exist of Indian emigrants to a number of countries in addition to the United States (e.g., Helweg 1979; Kurian and Srivastava 1983; Schwartz 1967), including Canada (e.g., Chadney 1984; Ujimoto and Hirabayashi 1980; Wakil, Siddique, and Wakil 1981), there is reason to be cautious in considering how these studies bear on our research. Because of different immigration policies, other countries, including Canada, have not experienced "the new immigrant" to the extent that the United States has. The situation is also different when the proportion of Indian immigrants is considerably higher than in the United States, as is the case in Fiji, where Indians, who make up 50 percent of the Fijian population, control much of Fijian wealth and power. This has caused much resentment among native Fijians. Differing environments in different host countries also affect the acculturation of Indian immigrants. Compared with Indian immigrants to the United States, Indians in London are more numerous, in more concentrated communities, have greater caste and class diversity, and have been there for a longer time (Dworkin 1980). Even in considering prior research on Indian immigrants to the United States, there is reason to be cautious about comparing different waves of immigrants, immigrants from different parts of India, immigrants of different religions, and immigrants in different parts of the United States. While similarities are likely to exist among various Indian immigrants, there are also likely to be important differences that make generalizations problematic.

One shared characteristic, however, is that emigrants from India are almost exclusively from the top three varnas—Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Kayasths (Mukherji 1982). While emigration from India is thousands of years old, immigration to the United States began only with India's 1947 independence and became common only with changes in U.S. immigration laws in 1965 to emphasize skills and education rather than ethnicity and race (Chandrasekhar 1982). As already noted, this has resulted in a sharp increase in Indian immigrants and a tendency for these immigrants to have or acquire advanced professional degrees. This is not the case for all Indian immigrants, however. Small-scale entrepreneurship is especially common among Gujarati immigrants to New York City (Fisher 1980; Leonhard-Spark and Saran 1980) as well as among Punjabi (or Sikh) immigrants to Vancouver (Chadney 1984). Saran (1985), however, found a higher incidence of professionals among Indian immigrants in the Madison, Wisconsin, area. And unlike the New York sample, the majority of these immigrants had first arrived as students and later changed their immigration status, which is also true of the majority of the immigrants in the present sample.

A variety of motivations for immigration, including survival, economic improvement, pursuit of religious and political ideologies, and desire for group solidarity, has been detected in prior research (e.g., Eisenstadt 1955; Taylor 1969). Helweg (1987) finds that individualistic models of emigration decisions do not apply to Indian emigrants; their concern is more with bringing honor to their extended families. Getting a prestigious foreign education in England or America is one way to do this, and this is most commonly the purpose for which Indians initially come to the United States. Even with good intentions to go back, after obtaining a graduate education many Indians decide to stay and work in the United States, often arguing that this will allow them to accumulate money and better prepare them to get a good job in India. After they experience America as students, material desires often dominate desires to return to family, friends, and India. Both because of considerably poorer job and income prospects in India and because of the potential for bringing their families shame by appearing to return to India as failures, most of those who begin working in the United States continue to do so. They may well return to India to visit and marry (usually a marriage arranged by their parents), but they continue to live and work in the United States. Once children are born another consideration emerges: Will the children be raised in India or in America (which those in India tend to perceive as drug infested and sexually permissive)? Most decide to remain in the United States, with plans to return to India once the children reach adolescence or, if not then, at retirement.

It is too early in the history of Indian immigration to the United States to determine whether there will be massive return migration on retirement, but this scenario is doubtful. Fisher (1980) has found evidence of the myth of return migration among Indian immigrants. A lack of full commitment to remaining in the United States makes the acculturation of Indian immigrants more tenuous than with other immigrant groups. Through language, travel, and consumption patterns involving Indian foods, clothing, furnishings, music, films (on video), mementos, and religion, Indian immigrants strive to maintain important symbolic ties to India, even though there is ironically a fascination in India with things Western (Helweg 1987). Perhaps like other immigrants, however, they will try in vain to perpetuate "Indian" rather than "American" identities among their children and grandchildren. Such assimilation appears to exist among the second generation of early Sikh immigrants to California (Bradfield 1971; Chakravarti 1968; Khush 1965; Wenzel 1966).

Montero (1981), in his study of Japanese-Americans, found that, by the third generation, Japanese-American hybrid culture faced a demise and the Japanese immigrant's descendant was almost fully assimilated. The study also found that the rate of cultural assimilation was positively related to the socioeco-

nomic mobility of the immigrant population. The first-generation Japanese, who lived in Japanese-American ghettos, assimilated very little. The level of assimilation increased dramatically in second-generation Japanese. Notably, these Japanese were college educated. The Indian immigrants in our study have primarily come to the United States for higher education, exhibit very high socioeconomic mobility, and are not confined to immigrant ghettos as was the first generation of Japanese immigrants.

Thus, there is likely to be an *ability* for considerable assimilation by Indian immigrants, even in one generation. But their high education, economic resources, and distinguishing features also make it more plausible that they will retain their Indian identity and become integrated rather than assimilated in U.S. society (Berry 1989). Previous studies of Indian immigrants in the United States have examined indices of cultural retention and adoption, including foods, religious practice, language, marriage, housing and savings patterns, friendships, and contact with India, but these studies have not considered favorite possessions as an index of the cultural retention and adoption process.

METHODS AND SITES

Semistructured depth interviews were conducted with informants in urban India and a single city in the western United States. All informants are between 30 and 60 years of age, and in each area the number of males and females interviewed was balanced, with no two being drawn from the same household. Before starting the interview, we explained the purpose of the study and revealed the general nature of questions. Permission to take photographs was also obtained. No one refused the interview or photography. Our study focuses only on favorite possessions and is not a complete ethnography of the sites studied. For a more complete understanding of the people and areas studied, the literature reviewed in the previous section and noted in the following subsections is recommended.

In the first part of the interviews, the contents of the rooms were inventoried, and the informants were asked about the meanings of each object and their attachments to them. Before leaving a room, the informants were asked which object was their favorite in the room and why. The same procedure was followed in each room of the house. The informants were then asked which was their favorite room in the house and which was their favorite object in the entire house. Each room of the house was then photographed and the informants were photographed with their favorite possession.

Bombay

The urban Indian interviews were conducted in the city of Bombay, which has a population of over 6 million people. Although Bombay has a cosmopolitan and diverse population from all areas of India, the two most dominant communities in the city are from Maharashtra and Gujarat. A typical house in the city is made of bricks and cement. Multistoried apartments are common. Many semipermanent shacks also exist in the ghettos and slums of the city (for descriptions of life in Bombay, see Blaise and Mukherjee [1977], pp. 10–18, and Brahme 1977).

A snowball sampling procedure was used, and 13 males and 14 females were interviewed. The social class structure of Bombay consists of a small upper class, a large middle class, and an even larger lower class that struggles to survive in marginal conditions. The middle class, where interviews were focused, consists of a comfortable upper middle class and a lower middle class that lives just above the poverty line. Because of differences in life-styles in the upper middle and lower middle class, an equal number of each group was interviewed. Social class was gauged by the size of the house, its location, and the number of people living in the house. Upper-middle-class households were considered to be those with at least two bedrooms, a formal drawing (living) room, and a kitchen. Lower-middle-class households were taken to be those in one-room apartments (one room and a small kitchen). Other houses that had one bedroom, a kitchen, and a drawing room were classified as upper middle or lower middle class depending on the number of people in the house. This classification scheme enables an approximation of the emerging social class structure in India without recourse to the possessions that constitute the focus of the study.

U.S. Interview City

The informants for this part of the study are Indians who have left the Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra and are now residing in a city in the western United States. The mountain region of the western United States has the lowest regional concentration of Indian immigrants (Leonhard-Spark and Saran 1980), and Indian residential communities are absent. Wallendorf and Reilly (1983) suggest that controls on age, social class, income, education, and family size are desirable in order to make meaningful cross-cultural comparisons. Efforts were made to control for all these factors in this study, except that the U.S. sample was more highly educated than the upper middle class of Bombay. All U.S. informants but one have a master's degree or a doctorate. In the urban Indian sample, just one informant has a doctorate and the rest have either a bachelor's degree or a high school diploma. This educational bias reflects current U.S. immigration laws and the tendency of Indian immigrants initially to come to the United States for advanced education. Approximately 50 Indian families live in the city in which the study was conducted. Out of these, approximately 40 families came from the western Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra, and these were the

families studied. One person was interviewed per family, as in India.

A local Gujarati organization called "Gujarati Samaj" was the initial source of informants, and again snowball sampling was employed to obtain introductions to other Indian families in the city. The organization has 40 members—30 families plus 10 students—who pay an annual membership fee of $10. The Samaj arranges religious activities, dances, annual picnics, and the Divali celebration in late October or early November. Indoor functions are held in a rented local community hall. Membership also includes a list of members' names, addresses, and telephone numbers. During periods when no organizational activities are planned, groups of members get together at someone's house, providing year-round contact with the local Gujarati community. The Maharastrian community is a much smaller group. Ten Maharastrian families live in the city, and they have no formal organization. These families gather informally at one person's house for religious functions and for Divali activities, with each family taking a turn.

Eleven informants (six males and five females) were interviewed. All 11 come from upper-middle-class families in India. They are U.S. citizens, green-card holders, or awaiting their green card (resident-worker status). All are 30–60 years old, like the Indian informants, and all lived in India for at least the first 20 years of their lives. All completed their bachelor's degrees in India. Length of stay in the United States ranges from 6 years to 20 years. With a single exception, female informants followed their husbands to the United States. Most informants consider the western city in which they live to be their home now, and they have all been in this city for at least one year.

In addition to the questions asked of informants in India, immigrant informants were asked about why they had come to the United States, their life after they arrived, how they came to live in this city, their home selection procedure, and their feelings about the national and ethnic identities of their children. A typical interview lasted 45 minutes, and all interviews were tape-recorded.

RESULTS

In the results that follow, we first present a brief description of favorite possessions among the groups studied and then consider the types of differences in meaning that these possessions involve. In so doing, we move from the descriptive to the interpretive.

Favorite Possessions

Urban India. Although informants in Bombay displayed diverse preferences in their favorite possessions, nearly 50 percent of informants cited their family shrine, a family idol, or their guru's photo as a favorite possession. The reasons for preferring religious

objects differ between the two social classes. The lower-middle-class informants cherish religious objects because they are the focus of their prayers for a better life. The upper middle class informants, who are thankful that they are more successful than others but feel some anxiety that it may not last, revere religious objects because they believe these icons help them to avoid the wrath of natural forces that may take away their belongings. Randive (upper-middle-class male, age 45) has a family shrine which was given to him by his parents. He tried to explain his feelings toward the shrine:

> This shrine was given to me by my parents. Lord Ganesh's idol is the main idol in the shrine. Every year we have to celebrate Ganesh festival because we have the idol. We cannot break the cycle because bad luck and ruin befalls those who break the cycle. When we become old, we shall give this to our son and hope that he has as much faith as we have. I pray daily and believe that He has brought us a lot of good luck.

A preference for photographs of one's guru cuts across social classes and symbolizes a relationship centering on love and duty that Vaidyanathan (1989) suggests is a leitmotiv for Indian identity. Our Bombay informants add support to Vaidyanathan's contention that gurus act as surrogate others who bolster identity in the face of increased anonymity.

A second frequently cited favorite possession, especially for females, was a Godrej cupboard. This steel cupboard is typically presented to the bride at marriage by her parents or in-laws. If not, then it is usually the first major purchase the young couple makes. The Godrej, which serves as a safe for most of the expensive clothes and jewelry in the house, conveys the message that the family has some wealth. Formerly an upper-class status symbol, the Godrej has now trickled down to lower middle classes as well. Emotional feelings for the Godrej become stronger with the passage of time as it comes to symbolize the family's history. Mrs. Rao (age 55) described her sentimental attachment to her Godrej:

> Recently, for the first time in my life, I lost the key to the Godrej. I cried for two days. We then had to get a locksmith to open the Godrej. The duplicate key was inside the Godrej. It was the most horrible feeling. Some outsider was going to lay his hands on my cupboard. The feeling I got was very similar to [the] feeling one gets when someone hurts your children. This Godrej has been with us since we were married. It has traveled everywhere with us. Now our children have gone and settled elsewhere; only the Godrej has remained with us.

Similarly, Mrs. Mehta (age 50) remembers that their Godrej has been with the family all through her married life. As with Mrs. Rao, it has become like a child for her.

Other favorite objects in the urban sample include status objects (e.g., television, VCR, music system,

photographs). Expensive electronic goods are frequently mentioned as favorites, especially by men. Mr. Bhalla (age 45) loves the music system he bought during his first trip abroad, a possession that reflects the status associated with foreign travel in India. Photographs of personal accomplishments or relatives in positions of power are also cited by male informants. Praful (male, age 40), president of the local chapter of the Lion's Club, is proud that his position enhances the status of his family. His favorite possession is a photograph of him making a speech as the president of the club. Mr. Salvi (age 40) favors the picture of his uncle who is a captain in the Indian army. The uncle was the first person from Mr. Salvi's village to reach such a high position in the army, and this provides status to Mr. Salvi's family, even in Bombay. Similarly, Mr. Gunjal's (age 57) favorite possession is a medal given to him by the Indian government.

Photographs of parents or loved ones are also mentioned as favorite objects. These photographs, however, are exclusively of relatives who have either died or are no longer living in the same city as the informant. The photographs help the informant to remember and revere the missing person. Mrs. Sharma (age 50) is very fond of her only photograph taken of her two sons when they were very young. Both now live in other cities, and Mrs. Sharma is all alone.

Males were more likely than females to choose a sentimental photograph as their favorite possession, most often a photograph of an ancestor, reflecting the importance of patrilineage. Males were also more likely to cite a religious object as their favorite possession. Particularly among lower-middle-class males, these religious objects seem to be a way of proclaiming that they have not changed their ways since moving to Bombay from a small town or village. These men and their families retain strong connections to the villages they come from. When friends from their former villages come to their houses while visiting the city, the male head of the household proudly displays his new house, furniture, television, and other possessions in the living room. The religious objects favored by these men are featured in this room to symbolize a retention of traditional village values. As income rises, former villagers fill their houses with an ever-increasing number of religious items.

Indian Immigrants to the United States. As has been found in other studies of Indian immigrants (e.g., Fisher 1980; Saran 1985), caste considerations were virtually nonexistent among U.S. immigrants. The sole exception was one Kshatriya family who were contemplating moving to Los Angeles so that there would be more members of their subcaste with whom they might associate. Their subcaste traces its heritage to seven villages in India, so this desire represents extreme and unusual caste sensitivity.

Not only did U.S. Indians have more possessions than the most comparable upper-middle-class infor-

mants in India, but each room in U.S. informants' homes has more things in it than a comparable room in Indian informants' homes. The immigrants' homes would very likely appear to Indian informants to be so crammed with things on walls and floors and in display cases that there is no place left. Nevertheless, Indian immigrant homes lack ostentation, especially relative to income. This is partly due to the high rate of savings and remittance to India of these immigrants and also appears to be due to a conservative attitude of rejecting what is seen as excessive American materialism (Klein et al. 1986).

Informants cite a greater number of favorite things than those in India and often even have trouble in choosing a favorite object in a single room. Three informants in the United States (two females and one male) cite their household shrines as their favorite things. This is a considerably lower incidence of religious-object preference than among either social class group in Bombay. In all three cases the shrine was given to these informants by their parents. For the women it is routine to pray in front of this shrine daily. Kalpana (female, age 40) prays every morning after her bath and before meals. Pragna (female, age 35) prays every evening after her bath and before cooking. Notions of purity are still displayed in the timing of these rituals. Such habits were inculcated when the women were young, and praying has remained a routine that provides some continuity in the life of these immigrants. Kiran (male, age 45) tried to explain his attachment to his family shrine:

> There are seven or eight idols in the temple. These idols were given to me by my parents. In some sense they relate to the Indian culture. It reminds me that these are my gods and there are people in India who pray to them. For me they are more special. They help in reinforcing my convictions. Also in times of sorrow and difficulty the gods help me. I can talk with them and hence in some sense they give me strength and courage in a strange place and a different culture.

Kiran also suggested that these idols are like parents in that they provide a sense of confidence and support.

Artifacts from India are found in the living rooms of all U.S. informants, an even greater frequency than in a previous study that found 77 percent of Indian homes in Ohio featured Indian decor (Kaul 1977). The Indian artifacts in our study included wooden statuary, wooden screens, inlaid woodwork, various kinds of native cloth pieces, brass vessels, copper vessels, and replicas of Indian landmarks. These handicraft and artistic objects are seen as authentic "pieces" of India, even though the objects may be reproductions. These artifacts are most often cited as the favorite items in the living room, and the living room is often decorated entirely with objects brought or shipped from India. A strong positive association exists between the length of stay in the United States and the number of Indian artifacts in the living room. Most of the artifacts were brought to the United States specifically to represent

India. Although a number of these objects were received as gifts, only a few were brought primarily because they reminded the informants of their home, family, and friends rather than India in general. Such Indian artifacts were not present in Indian informants' homes. It seems that there is little need to represent the country of origin when one lives there.

In most cases the favorite object in the living room was an Indian artifact. Arun (male, age 50) likes a carved wooden elephant obtained in Bombay that he brought to the United States because it represents India to him. In several cases Indian artifacts were presented as gifts to the informants by parents, relatives, or friends. Pornima (female, age 40) explained:

> I like this inlaid woodwork which was given to me by my mother. There are other things in the room which were presented to me by my sister and other friends. But I like this piece given by my mother. It represents my mother.

Similarly, Carmin (female, age 35) has some treasured brass vessels from her grandparents. The importance of social linkage in favorite-object selections echoes findings of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) and Wallendorf and Arnould (1988).

Also unique to the U.S. immigrant sample were collections of Indian musical records or tapes and videotapes of Indian movies and shows. Kiran is very fond of his collection of videotapes of India. He has gathered approximately 100 tapes of Indian movies and U.S. television shows concerning India:

> The collection on Indian shows has some intrinsic value. You cannot put a price tag on it. I have a tape on which Indira Gandhi's funeral is recorded. . . . Only value of that particular thing is that if you want to show the feelings when people die in India that is a graphic way to show it to others, meaning my American friends, their children, my children, and the children of my other Indian friends. They can then appreciate why we do certain things. It has excellent commentary by one of our consul[s] in Washington. He has explained everything very thoroughly.

He also has tapes of Indian movies from the period when he was in college and just before he left India and a record collection of Indian songs from these movies. Davis (1979) has noted that the objects a person is most sentimental about at midlife are those that were popular in their late high school or early college period, when identity is crystallizing. Bhikhubhai (male, age 50) has a collection of Indian movies and James Bond movies, again movies about 20 years old and from the period when Bhikhubhai was in college. He explained this fascination:

> The movies are of my college years. Those are the movies I saw and enjoyed in India. When you watch those, all things of that period come [a]live to you. You feel that you are living in the world that you enjoyed one time. It reminds of those good old days. When you see a particular movie, you remember where you were, who was with you watching that movie, what were the times, what other things were happening during that time (politically and economically), where you were staying and all those kinds of things.

Like Kiran's record collection, Bhikhubhai's movie collection is valued because it is hoped that it will teach children something about Indian culture and the glory days of their parents. What might be transmitted orally by relatives in India is sought in vinyl and magnetic tape in the United States.

All houses in the United States had a family photograph framed on the wall of the living room or family room, and these were often the favorite possessions in these rooms. There were no instances in India where a multimember contemporary family photograph had been framed or hung, only ancestor photos or photos of family members who had moved away. Photographs of deceased elders were also cited as favorite objects by some U.S. informants, but less commonly than in India.

Except for the Godrej, no one in India cited a furniture piece as their most favorite object. This was not the case in the United States. Arun likes his rocker in the family room, which he regards as a private haven. Carmin is extremely attached to the dining table she had shipped from India:

> There were a lot of memories associated with the table. Whenever I see the table it reminds me of all the family fun and conversations we had when we were in India.

In clothing we found a mix of U.S. and Indian influences. Although clothing was not cited as a favorite object, several women spoke fondly of their saris. These saris were wedding gifts, gifts since marriage, and special purchases made on return trips to India. None of these women routinely dressed in saris now, but all of them wore their saris (as well as some of their wedding jewelry) on special occasions such as parties, holidays, and evenings out. Men did not cite Indian clothing as favorite possessions, and they wore Indian clothing only infrequently.

Other favorite objects in the U.S. sample include personally crafted objects (e.g., embroidery, carpentry projects) and objects that symbolize transitions in status. These status transitions most often involve getting married or getting a job. Santosh (male, age 30) is very fond of the bed that has traveled with him since he got married. Carmin bought an expensive Persian rug after she got married that is now her favorite possession. Bhikhubhai likes the grandfather clock that he bought just after he got a job in the United States and notes:

> I first owned a watch on the day I started to come to the U.S. This [grandfather] clock was bought in the mid-seventies. It was one of the first things we bought of some value which is still with us.

For Bhikhubhai, the clock symbolizes the movement of his family from lower-middle-class to upper-middle-class status. The objects may differ, but big purchases

made immediately after a major change in status remain important long after the change has taken place.

THEMES IN IMMIGRANT POSSESSIONS

Transitional Objects

Like the transitional objects or "security blankets" that comfort infants separated from their mothers (see, e.g., Hong 1978; Passman and Halonen 1979), adults may gain a sense of security from certain objects (Halpern 1968; Kahne 1967; Nemy 1986). For the Indian immigrants in the United States, a number of objects seem to serve such a purpose. The household shrine and objects brought from India serve prominently in this role. Similarly, Indian music and videos offer a sense of connection to "mother India." And ancestor photographs, heirloom furniture, saris, and jewelry serve as cues to call to mind a prior life and identity in India.

Transitional objects provide a sense of cultural identity and security that was taken for granted in India. Immigrants treasure Indian artifacts, movies, and songs more than do Indians in India. These objects represent India and bring back memories of youth in India. Gifts and photographs symbolize those left behind. Even though the people the objects represent are absent, their presence in these surrogate objects provides an important symbolic source of security and cultural identity. Religious objects also perform these functions and allow the performance of prayer rituals that provide some familiar continuity in behavior.

Compromise Consumption Patterns

It was noted that saris and wedding jewelry are mixed with more typical American clothing in immigrant wardrobes. The same pattern of pastiche can be seen in food consumption. These immigrants retain a strong preference for Indian foods, although to varying degrees they all also eat "American food." Informants are more likely to include American food (e.g., barbecued chicken) if they are entertaining American friends because they fear that these guests will not like Indian foods. Because of the difficulty of obtaining some of the spices needed for Indian cuisine, several informants keep large pantries of such items, obtaining them when they traveled to areas with larger Indian communities. Those who have been in the United States a longer period of time tend to have adopted American cuisine to a greater degree, and children are enthusiastic about American foods.

Like other immigrant groups, Indian immigrants feel pressure to celebrate American holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving, especially when they have children (see, e.g., Matz 1961; Newall 1989; Witt 1939). The result for these immigrants is generally a secular celebration of these holidays and the incor-

poration of some of the traditional foods and icons such as Thanksgiving turkey and Christmas gift giving. The Thanksgiving meal in the home of one informant consisted of turkey and stuffing combined with curries and other Indian foods. In addition to American holidays, Indian holidays (at the very least, Divali) are also celebrated. Similar results have been reported among Indian immigrants in Canada (Wakil et al. 1981; Paranjpe 1986). Like the combination of foods at Thanksgiving, such dual celebrations seem to reflect a desire both to adapt *and* preserve Indian heritage. Similar results also have been noted in Jewish immigrant celebrations of Christmas and modifications of Chanukah versus more traditional celebrations of Passover (Belk 1987; Heinze 1990).

Immigrant Self and Possessions

Asked what they missed most about India, informants invariably cited people—especially family—and the values and interactions associated with these people. Thus, material culture was far less a concern than abstract culture. To better understand the reconstruction of self among Indian immigrants and the paradoxical role of material possessions in this construction, it is useful to consider the anchors for identity in India and America.

In India, and especially in the towns and villages in which the Bombay informants were born, the extended family of the groom is commonly housed together. The private property of Western property law is largely replaced by family property. Individual notions of self are contingent on, and subservient to, aggregate notions of self at the level of the extended family (Belk 1988a). For instance, even the ego property of an individual's name is less central than his family, as Vaidyanathan (1989) explains, "An Indian thinks of himself as being a father, a son, a nephew, a pupil, and these are the only 'identities' he ever has. An identity outside these relationships is almost inconceivable to him" (p. 151). "When asked to identify himself, he is instructed to specify his *gotra* (seer's lineage), his particular Veda, his remembered agnatic ancestor, and whose grandson and son he is before giving his own name" (p. 153). The Indian is not so much an individual as a "dividual." In India there is not the need for privacy in the way it is fostered by the possessive individualism of the West (Roland 1988). Instead of privacy, an intimacy exists that, although decreasingly true in the large cities of India, makes it appropriate to drop in to see a friend at any time. Indian friends are expected to be friends for life. Who one is may be readily ascertained from position within this familial and social net.

This model contrasts sharply with that of the mobile American and, to a large degree, that of the mobile Indian immigrant to America. For both, friends and family are generally left far behind and caste is largely irrelevant. Identity is much more dependent on oc-

cupational and material success, as codified in posses-
sions. Material things crowd out people in importance,
and privacy replaces intimacy. These shifts were evi-
dent when the visiting Indian mother of one U.S. in-
formant told her daughter how strange she thought it
was that no one had stopped by to visit all afternoon.
In addition, cooperation and loyalty are less valued at
work than is competition (Desai and Coelho 1980).
Despite ambivalence about remaining in America, and
the support of Indian groups in America, the pressure
to at least superficially conform to American values is
great. This is even the case within Indian peers, as
Dasgupta (1989, p. 85) found: "Thus conspicuous
consumption, possession of material goods like a big
house, expensive cars, maintaining a specific lifestyle
have become important criteria within the Indian
community. Acceptance of the value, achievement
orientation, in a materialistic society has made Indian
immigrants measure success in terms of material pos-
sessions."

While an Indian home is considered rich if it is filled
with people, an American home is considered rich if
it is filled with things, and especially things regarded
as expressing individual identity. Such adaptation was
found to some degree in the case of Dr. and Dr. Shah
(female, forties, and her husband [male, forties]), who
bought an expensive home overlooking the city and a
Mercedes, and that of Bhikhubhai, who had recently
upgraded to his second house since moving to the city.

Identity versus Commonality

Favorite possessions in India emphasize common-
ality with family and culture rather than personal
identity (Altman and Gauvain 1981). This is evident
in the familial and cultural symbolic meanings of fa-
vored religious objects, photos of ancestors, and the
Godrej. Even seemingly identity-relevant status objects
such as televisions and photographs documenting per-
sonal achievement are thought to bring prestige to the
family more than to the individual.

The favorite possessions of immigrants to the United
States also often emphasized commonality over indi-
vidual identity. Such an emphasis on culture and fam-
ily is seen in artifacts from India, religious objects,
family photographs, Indian foods, and objects that
represent family transitions. A number of favorite ob-
jects exist, however, that emphasize individual identity
rather than commonality. These include personally
created objects such as Pornima's framed embroidery
and Arun's living room furnishings, seen as an expres-
sion of himself. A greater emphasis on children's art-
work and other accomplishments among U.S. infor-
mants also suggests stronger support of individualism
than is found in India. Such recognition of individual
identity in possessions was not strong enough to sup-
plant the traditional Indian emphasis on family and
cultural commonality, but it suggests partial accom-
modation to values of American individualism.

CONCLUSIONS

The informants in the U.S. sample are restricted to
a single city, which may limit the transferability of
these findings. All were Hindu and immigrated from
a single area of India. While this facilitates compari-
sons to the Indian sample, it means that this study
cannot be interpreted as a study of Indians and Indian
immigrants to the United States in general. The length
of stay in the United States by these informants was
as short as six years, so follow-up work in this and
succeeding generations of immigrants is desirable.
Nevertheless, some provocative tentative insights
emerge from this study.

The Indians who migrated to the United States and
the Indians in India are different in many ways. The
Indians in the United States are more mobile and more
willing to move from one place to another as their
status changes. They have generally adopted local pat-
terns of clothing, food, furnishings, and language.
Their houses are bigger, have more rooms, and are
more extensively furnished.

At the same time, most still nurture the dream of
someday returning to India and worry that their chil-
dren will lose Indian language skills, will not marry
other Indians, and will lose their identities as Indians.
In acquiring and displaying mementos and souvenirs
that proclaim Indian identity, they are more patriot-
ically Indian than those left behind in India, a pattern
that appears to differ from that of prior generations of
immigrants to the United States, who often engaged
in an "overidentification" with the host culture. Al-
though this pattern has been reported among some
Indian immigrants (Desai and Coelho 1981), it is rare
and was totally absent among the current sample of
immigrants. Perhaps because of their high educational
and occupational status, the Indian immigrants studied
are more prone to what Desai and Coelho (1981) have
identified as "hyperidentification" with India. It is a
tendency also detected by Saran (1985, p. 89): "In-
dian identity remains a very strong part of the psy-
chological makeup. Our respondents often went out
of their way to emphasize the fact that despite being
away from India they had not lost contact with her,
and that as a matter of fact they now value Indian
traditions and customs more than they did when living
there. They all show the utmost interest in possessing
and maintaining an Indian identity." This study adds
to these observations the strong role played by pos-
sessions in anchoring this Indian identity. A psycho-
logical commitment to remain Indian is elusive with-
out the tangible manifestations that these possessions
help to provide.

This key finding seems to support the strong cultural
influence model of Swidler (1986), inasmuch as the
socially advantaged Indian immigrant shows a resis-
tance to change. Rather than a result of the persistence
of abstract Indian cultural values, however, the data
in this study suggest that this may be a strategy of ag-

gregate identity preservation anchored in more concrete symbols. This may be seen for instance in the preservation of rituals (praying at the family shrine, celebrating Indian holidays, eating Indian foods, and wearing Indian clothing), while disregarding Indian religious beliefs (ignoring food purity, eating meat, allowing girls to wear skirts). Coupled with reverence for artifacts of India, these findings suggest that the *appearance* of being Indian may be more critical to maintaining a viable identity than the more fundamental value persistence that would be reflected by maintaining Indian extended family structure, caste sensitivity, and child-rearing practices, and thus defying U.S. values. The prominence of such hyperidentifying artifacts perpetuates the myth of return migration. Even among immigrants who have become U.S. citizens, the dream of return migration is strong.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the integration model of Berry (1989) is most apt. Indian immigrants adapt to U.S. culture in some ways, but not in others. The dimensions of adaptation tend to be the more external and public ones needed to assure career and community acceptance. Given the unique status of Indian immigrants as the vanguard of the "new immigrant" phenomenon in the United States, follow-up studies with second and third generations of these immigrants will be especially interesting.

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