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# Ways of speaking in the diaspora: Afghan Hindus in Germany

Chitra Venkatesh Akkoor  
*University of Iowa*

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WAYS OF SPEAKING IN THE DIASPORA: AFGHAN HINDUS IN GERMANY

by

Chitra Venkatesh Akkoor

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in Communication Studies  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Kristine L. Munoz

## ABSTRACT

In this ethnographic study, I sought to understand the diasporic lives of Afghan Hindus by studying how they discursively constructed their migration and settlement in Germany. By directing attention to their ways of speaking about migration I understood the importance of community and family to the Afghan Hindu way of life, and how the cultural premises of homeland constitute an integral part of their expectations of relationships in the diaspora. Speech codes theory is the primary theoretical orientation for this ethnographic study.

I engaged in fieldwork over four separate visits to Germany lasting from four to ten weeks, beginning in summer of 2005 and ending in December 2008. Primary methods used were participation observation and in-depth interviews. Sites of research included Afghan Hindu temples, homes, and family events.

The main indigenous term used to describe migration was *bikharna*, which captured spatial dispersal, relational fragmentation, and loss of traditions. The Afghan Hindu meaning of community was premised on physical proximity and relational connection among Afghan Hindus.

The changing meaning of family from the multi-member, multi-generational household of Afghanistan to Western ideas of the nuclear family also figured prominently in ways of speaking about migration. Cultural premises of the homeland continued to inform life in Germany, but were also increasingly being challenged by lifestyle choices of some Afghan Hindus.

The temple in Afghan Hindu diasporic lives emerged as central to discursive constructions of community. What was once a place of worship in the homeland was constructed in the diaspora as a place that could bring the fragmented community together. However, the temple was also contested space, as different groups of people

within the speech community had different perspectives on its importance in Afghan Hindu lives.

This study has implications for the study of culture, communication and relationships in the context of diaspora. Ethnography of communication offers an ideal theoretical framework in which to understand diasporic experiences, by examining the underlying rules and premises of everyday lives of diasporic people. As a case study of a refugee diaspora, this study also has implications for scholarship on South Asian diasporas.

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Graduate College  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph. D. thesis of

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degree in Communication Studies at the May 2011 graduation.

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Laura R. Graham

To Ravi

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I turn 50 in December, and getting this Ph.D. is the best gift I could have given myself. The pursuit of higher education has been such a deep desire of my soul, who knows for how many lifetimes, and now I am complete.

## ABSTRACT

In this ethnographic study, I sought to understand the diasporic lives of Afghan Hindus by studying how they discursively constructed their migration and settlement in Germany. By directing attention to their ways of speaking about migration I understood the importance of community and family to the Afghan Hindu way of life, and how the cultural premises of homeland constitute an integral part of their expectations of relationships in the diaspora. Speech codes theory is the primary theoretical orientation for this ethnographic study.

I engaged in fieldwork over four separate visits to Germany lasting from four to ten weeks, beginning in summer of 2005 and ending in December 2008. Primary methods used were participation observation and in-depth interviews. Sites of research included Afghan Hindu temples, homes, and family events.

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The changing meaning of family from the multi-member, multi-generational household of Afghanistan to Western ideas of the nuclear family also figured prominently in ways of speaking about migration. Cultural premises of the homeland continued to inform life in Germany, but were also increasingly being challenged by lifestyle choices of some Afghan Hindus.

The temple in Afghan Hindu diasporic lives emerged as central to discursive constructions of community. What was once a place of worship in the homeland was constructed in the diaspora as a place that could bring the fragmented community together. However, the temple was also contested space, as different groups of people

within the speech community had different perspectives on its importance in Afghan Hindu lives.

This study has implications for the study of culture, communication and relationships in the context of diaspora. Ethnography of communication offers an ideal theoretical framework in which to understand diasporic experiences, by examining the underlying rules and premises of everyday lives of diasporic people. As a case study of a refugee diaspora, this study also has implications for scholarship on South Asian diasporas.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*“Vahaan pe door rehne wale bhee paas the, yahaan paas rehne waale bhee door hain”*. This sentence, spoken in Hindi, by an Afghan Hindu woman in Germany, means, “There, even those who lived faraway were close, here even those who live close are faraway.” *There* refers to Afghanistan, *here* refers to Germany, and this comparison between the homeland and host country is an important feature of people in a diaspora.

Diaspora, which literally means scattering over space, is a rich site in which to study culture, communication, and relationships, and also one that has received very little attention from scholars of intercultural communication. While communication scholars are increasingly rectifying their previous lack of interest in diaspora, their focus tends to be either on cultural flow of media products, or on identity construction, and not on personal relationships. It is my intention in this dissertation to understand how Afghan Hindus discursively construct personal relationships in the diaspora.

In this introductory chapter I will give an overview of Afghan Hindus, their history, how and why they migrated to Germany. In Chapter II, I will review literature on intercultural communication, surveying important contributions and identifying gaps in this field. I also survey research in diaspora studies that informed my research. In Chapter III, I describe my research methods and fieldwork in Germany. Chapters IV, V, and VI contain themes from my analysis. The concluding chapter contains a discussion of the findings, and implications of this research for fields of intercultural communication and diaspora studies.

In this chapter, I introduce the reader to the Afghan Hindu community, describing their migration from Afghanistan, their choice of Germany as a destination, the routes they took to reach Germany, and the impact of German immigration policies on this community. I begin with a brief history of this community. A historical overview is important for two reasons; one, because history emerged as an important part of their talk

as the Afghan Hindus I spoke with emphasized their roots in Afghanistan and their need to preserve their identity in Germany; and two, because history provides a context in which to understand Afghan Hindu lives in Germany.

### Hindu Roots in Afghanistan

Hindus<sup>1</sup> were a small religious minority (about 1% of the total population) in Afghanistan, who resided mainly in Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Khost. This affluent community was involved mainly in business, owning import-export and currency exchange businesses. A report by the Indian Council of World Affairs (2001) states that Hindus migrated to what is now Afghanistan from present-day India<sup>2</sup>, however, many Afghan Hindus maintain that their ancestors were originally from that region. This is plausible considering that Hinduism and Buddhism preceded Islam in South Asia.

Since ancient times, the region was invaded time and again, attracting notable figures such as Alexander and Genghis Khan (Hilali, 2005), and ruled in turn by Greeks, Persians, Mongols, Turks and Uzbeks. While the more recent destruction of the famous Buddhist statues of Bamiyan by the Taliban publicized by the media, educated the world about Buddhist influence in the region, less known archeological evidence from excavations in the region suggest the presence of the Vedic people in present-day Afghanistan, who later came to be called *Hindus* by Persian invaders (see Pathak, 1999). It is estimated that a Hindu tribe called Daasa from Seistan inhabited this region in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C.E. Pathak (1999) offers archeological evidence to show that the language of the Kafirs, can be traced back to that of the Vedic people. Historical evidence

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<sup>1</sup> A religious and ethnic affiliation; the Afghan Hindu label was constructed in Germany after 9/11 to identify themselves as separate from Afghan Muslims.

<sup>2</sup> Although I use the names we use today to refer to these regions, one must remember the borders we know today did not exist then.



shows that Hindu kings ruled the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan until 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Newell, 1972).

In 712 A.D. Arabs began invading the region bringing Islam with them. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century Mahmud of Ghazna defeated the last Hindu king, Jayapala (Chandra, 2002). It is likely that at this time many Hindus fled southward from Kabul. Chandra traced the roots of several Punjabi (region in north India) surnames to regions of Afghanistan. Another Hindu community known as Lohana has documented history showing that they successfully defended their kingdom between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries against Muslim invaders. During the 11<sup>th</sup> century, as the invaders pressed forward, some Lohanas converted to Islam while others moved southward, settling in Gujarath, a state in the northwestern part of present-day India. This provides further evidence that Hindus lived in Afghanistan long before the advent of Islamic rulers, lending support to claims by at least some Afghan Hindus that their ancestors had always lived in that region.

Other folklore has it that Hindus were brought from India to Afghanistan during the regime of Mahmud Ghazni as prisoners-of-war. Ghazni attacked India 17 times before he finally succeeded in conquering the northern parts. During these attacks he is said to have taken prisoners-of-war. Thapar (2004) mentions that Indian mercenaries fought for Ghazni's army and were rewarded for their loyalty by the king with handsome gifts of land. It is likely that these mercenaries settled in Afghanistan and were the ancestors of present-day Afghan Hindus. Some Afghan Hindus believe that King Abdalli Shah, one of the Afghan kings, impressed by Indian intellectuals, invited them to Afghanistan to serve in administrative jobs, although I found no historical evidence to support this claim. Levi (2002), a historian, writes about merchants from Multan (now in Pakistan) traveling to Kabul and Kandahar. Some Afghan Hindus I met speak Multani. It is likely that these people were descendents of those merchants who settled in Afghanistan over time. While Levi focuses only on the trading community from India in his book, he did acknowledge that, "there were other communities of Hindus who

inhabited Afghanistan who were distinct from the Multanis. These Hindus were more permanent residents, and there had indeed been communities of Hindus (and Buddhists) in Afghanistan since antiquity to the late twentieth century” (personal correspondence, 2010).

While a multiplicity of narratives mark Hindu roots in Afghanistan, one must keep in mind that national borders change over time; India’s borders in the north included Kabul until the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and Pakistan until the 1947 partition.

### Afghanistan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Although Afghanistan has seen its share of war and invasion, there were peaceful times during which the country progressed on many fronts. The period between 1929 and 1978 saw reforms in government, introducing a parliamentary system, secularization, and women’s education under King Amanullah and his successor King Zahir Shah (Dixit, 2004). In urban areas, such as Kabul, education and employment of women was actively encouraged in the 1960s and 1970s (Cammack, 1995). Particularly women from Kabul, who came of age during the reform period were educated, and were employed outside the home. Rural areas such as Kandahar, that eventually became the hotbed of Taliban activity, however, were less progressive in terms of education and women’s freedom.

The partition of India in 1947 and the creation of Pakistan marked the first major turning point for Hindus in Afghanistan because direct access to India became difficult. Before partition, Hindus crossed the border into India freely, for trade, and for pilgrimage, and bathing in the Ganges. After partition, they had to travel through Pakistan to reach India by road. Although not impossible, it added an additional level of difficulty and bureaucracy.

The second major turning point occurred in 1978, when President Daoud was overthrown by People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The Soviets occupied Afghanistan in 1979 ostensibly to support the PDPA. At this time members of the royal

family and those connected to the previous government began leaving Afghanistan. Over time, 6 million people left for Pakistan, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. Much of the literature on Afghan refugees focuses on this migration. Not many Hindus were a part of this group because Hindus were not affected adversely by the Soviet regime. Many, in fact, welcomed the Soviet occupation because they provided law and order keeping the radical Muslim groups in check. Because the label “Hindu” is often associated with India, and the former Soviet Union and India were allies, Hindus did not perceive the Soviets as enemies. Afghan Hindus therefore remained in Afghanistan during the Soviet regime.

In 1986 Mikhail Gorbachev became President of the Soviet Union, and began withdrawing Soviet troops from Afghanistan. By 1989, the Soviet troops left and Najibullah became president of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the United States and other Western powers had been supporting local resistance against the Soviets. After the Soviets left, increased infighting within these resisting Afghan forces led to more people leaving Afghanistan.

In 1992, the Mujahideen deposed Najibullah. Hailed as heroes at first, they however, dashed the optimism of people as infighting broke their ranks, leading to the subsequent takeover by the Taliban in 1994. The Taliban immediately established *shari'a* (Islamic) laws. *Purdah* (covering for women from head to toe) was reinstated, and women were confined to the home, and any hope of even basic education was denied them. Young men were recruited for the army and many Hindus sent their young men outside the country.

Hindus, who had gradually begun leaving Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, left in larger numbers beginning in 1994. By 2001 most Hindus had left the country with the exception of about a thousand people who remain there today, mostly because they did not have the means to pay their way to leave the country (personal accounts; ICWA report, 2001).

## Leaving Afghanistan

The ways in which Afghan Hindus construct their migration experience differ depending on when they left. For example, one doctor and his family decided to leave when he got orders to serve in the Afghan army in 1985, against the Soviets. Not wanting to serve in the army, he was one of the early ones to leave Afghanistan. Others began leaving after the Mujahideen came to power in 1992. During Najibullah's rule, it was still possible to take flights out of Kabul and some people took advantage of this. Most people lingered hoping for peace. Later it became increasingly difficult to leave, and involved harrowing experiences of traveling in trucks and even on motorbikes by night. Most Hindus described locking their homes and businesses, packing one suitcase and leaving at night. Many left their large mansions, their cars, their clothes hanging in the closet, hoping that their stay away was going to be temporary and they would return when the fighting ended. Unfortunately, that day never came. Those who left in the early to mid 1990s managed to sell their properties from India or Pakistan through agents; in other cases one male member would stay back to sell the property, joining the family later. Success in selling property sometimes ended in tragedy because militants would show up on the night of the sale and take away the sale money at gunpoint, sometimes even killing the person. Thus many left their properties, rather than risk their lives.

While Muslims went to Pakistan and Iran, most Hindus went to India, via Pakistan. As Hindus, they felt a certain amount of entitlement in India. However, a sense of disappointment and even betrayal was evident in Afghan Hindus' accounts about their sojourn in India. In Afghanistan, Muslims had enjoyed privileges that Hindus had not. For example, Hindus had to pay a special tax in Afghanistan, and were expected to be discreet about practicing their religion, follow local dress codes, and had limited opportunities for employment in public sectors. In India with its Hindu majority, Afghan Hindus expected privileges over their Muslim counterparts. However, as a secular democracy, India offered no special considerations for Hindus. Moreover, in India,

anyone from Afghanistan was labeled as “fanatic or criminal” (UNHCR Report, 1999, p. 26) and seen as a threat to the security of the country (UNHCR Report, 1999). Thus, Hindus from Afghanistan did not receive any special privileges.

A report based on a study by the UNHRC (1999), a United Nations refugee agency, captures the refugee predicament:

In India refugees are typically denied any officially recognized status, they are subject to harassment by the police; and refugee women and children are not adequately protected. Additionally the prohibition on alien employment in India makes it extremely difficult for UNHCR to ensure self-sufficiency for the refugees (p. 23)

Given these difficult conditions in India, Afghan Hindus left India for Germany and other countries, after sojourn in India that lasted anywhere from six months to 10 years. It was generally not possible for entire families to leave at once. One member would leave and others followed over time. Typically, able-bodied younger males left first. Once they found employment, other family members joined them. A question that arises is, “Why Germany?”

#### Germany as a Destination

The destination for Afghan Hindus was determined by at least three factors. The first factor was a lack of choice. Most Afghan refugees did not have proper travel documents when they left Afghanistan (UNHCR Report, 1999). The only way to procure documents to leave India, was with the help of agents, which meant that one did not always have the opportunity to choose a desired destination (Gilbert & Koser, 2006). Agents procured fake passports for them, arranged for visas, and instructed them on what to do when they arrived at their destination. Agents determined the destination based on a fee. U.S. and U.K. were priced higher than Germany, and thus few were able to afford to go to those countries.

Second, the policies of the receiving nation played a crucial role in the choice of destination. Prior to 1993, according to a German law, known as Article 16 of the Basic

Law, people who were persecuted for political and religious reasons could easily gain asylum in Germany (Chin, 2007). Germany also had an established welfare system for refugees, thus making it an attractive destination for Afghan Hindus struggling for basic necessities in India.

A third consideration in choice of destination had to do with connections; friends and families who had departed earlier, influenced those who left later (Zulfacar, 1998). As a result, although currently there are small pockets of Afghan Hindus living in North America, the U.K., and India, the largest population resides in Germany.

In order to understand the discursive constructions of Afghan Hindus regarding their settlement in Germany, it is important to understand German immigration and asylum policies. These have a direct bearing on the everyday lives of Afghan Hindus.

### German Immigration and Refugee Policy

Immigration, labor migration, and refugee policy have long been a subject of contention, controversy and political debate in Germany. Faced with labor shortage after the Second World War, Germany recruited foreign labor, first from Italy and Spain, and later from Turkey (Schaeffer & Bukenya, 2010). Known as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) these migrants were expected to return to their countries, however a vast majority, particularly those from Turkey, settled in Germany. The subsequent family reunion policy of the 1970s resulted in further migration into Germany from Turkey. As a result, the largest minority population in Germany is now Turkish. Afghan Hindus made frequent references to this Turkish population when speaking about community, family, and identity. These guest workers have also played an important role in shaping German immigration policy since World War II, as will become evident later in this section when I discuss German citizenship.

### The Basic Law and Geneva Convention

While the post-Second World War era resulted in labor migration, the Cold War era brought refugees from the communist countries. Two laws that guided policy on refugees were the 1949 West German Basic Law and the 1951 Geneva Convention, which granted asylum to anyone fleeing persecution due to race, religion, nationality or political affiliations. Originally intended for ethnic Germans fleeing the Eastern Bloc countries, these laws were later used by people from former Yugoslavia, Asia and the Far East to gain asylum in Germany. Germany was particularly attractive to refugees for long-term residence because the Basic Law offered asylum seekers the right to appeal in a German court if their asylum plea was rejected. The appeal process could take up to eight to ten years, during which time they received welfare and social assistance. Even if their appeal for asylum was rejected, they could continue to live in Germany on humanitarian grounds. It was these provisions of the Basic Law that drew Afghan Hindus to Germany in large numbers.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and rising unemployment, however, brought immigration and refugee laws into sharp focus, resulting in new legislation and revision of the Basic Law in 1993, and again in 1997 and 1998. The new laws restricted entry, prohibited repeated appeals, and reduced social assistance (Boswell, 2003). Thus Afghan Hindus who arrived in Germany in the early 1990s were able to take advantage of the provisions of the earlier laws while those who came later found it difficult to receive asylum.

### Refugee Dispersal

A number of European countries, including Germany, have refugee dispersal policies to distribute refugees throughout the country to promote burden-sharing among states. Refugees are first accommodated at refugee centers until their case is heard, however they can be transferred from center to center on short notice based on space

availability. As Wren (2003) notes, refugees waiting for asylum are “moved around the country with little or no control over their circumstances, generating anxiety and uncertainty” (p. 60). As I will discuss in Chapter IV and V, German refugee dispersal policies had a profound impact on personal relationships of Afghan Hindus.

### Refugee Employment

German immigration policies have traditionally kept labor migration separate from refugee migration by ensuring that asylum seekers did not enter the labor market. In other words, asylum seekers although qualified for government assistance, are not qualified to work. Furthermore, not all refugee applications for asylum are accepted. Some linger for years, and while refugees can stay in Germany on humanitarian grounds, they cannot work or attend language-training courses, and must renew their visas regularly, sometimes every six months, sometimes annually, even daily. This uncertainty wreaks havoc with the mental health of refugees (Beisec & Edwards, 1994; Lau, 2000; Ying & Han, 2007).

Ways in which Afghan Hindus talked about their lives in Germany was somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand they praised the German system, and expressed gratitude to Germany for granting them asylum, giving them financial aid, provisions for living, and education for their children. On the other hand, the same laws that provided them these facilities also prohibited them from seeking employment and German nationality.

### German Nationality

While refugee policies have become increasingly strict over the decades, policy around citizenship has gained flexibility. “Germany for ethnic Germans” was the favored position until the late 1990s. Thus ethnic Germans abroad, the *Ausseidlers* who wished to return to Germany were granted immediate nationality, while second and third generations of the original Turkish *gastarbeiter* were denied citizenship (Boswell, 2003 p. 11). Continued controversy over this discrepancy forced policymakers to revise citizenship



laws. As a result in 2004, a new law was introduced which made it possible for those of non-German ethnicity to apply for citizenship if they had lived for 8 years in Germany, had permanent employment, and showed German language proficiency were eligible for German citizenship (Boswell, 2003). Many Afghan Hindus took this opportunity to become citizens. However, not everyone in a family was eligible for citizenship. For instance, the elderly either lacked the skills or are too old to be employed; most of them also lacked proficiency in German necessary for citizenship. Those with restrictive visas are limited in the countries they can travel to. These laws have direct impact on family dynamics, and what Afghan Hindus consider familial obligations.

I provided this brief overview as a context for what follows in succeeding chapters. Knowledge about these policies is necessary to understand the accounts Afghan Hindus give of migration and life in Germany, their ways of speaking about community and family as fragmented, and the attributions they make to explain fragmentation.

### Overview of Chapters

In this chapter, I presented an historical overview of Afghan Hindu roots in Afghanistan, their routes out of Afghanistan after escalation of fighting during the Mujahideen and Taliban regimes, and the subsequent migration to Germany. I also reviewed German immigration policies, as the context within which to understand the Afghan Hindu diaspora experience. In Chapter II, I will review relevant literature in the areas of intercultural communication and diaspora scholarship. I also present the ethnography of communication as the theoretical framework through which I studied Afghan Hindus. By paying specific attention to participants' ways of speaking about their migration and settlement, this perspective offers a means of looking at discursive constructions of diaspora. Following the review of literature and explication of theory, I pose my research question. In Chapter III, I present my methods, describing data collection and analysis. In Chapter IV, I explore discursive constructions of what it

means to be a community, for Afghan Hindus in diaspora. Chapter V deals with discursive constructions of what it means to be *family* for Afghan Hindus in diaspora. In Chapter VI, I describe efforts by members of the community to contain fragmentation by bringing the community together in a central place, the temple, but also the contestations as different groups construct the meaning of temple differently. In the final chapter I present my conclusions from this study, discussing its implications, limitations, and future direction for research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Intercultural communication as a specialized area of communication studies is varied, both in the methodological approaches used to study communication, and in the contexts in which communication is studied. International migration is one such context. Building knowledge about country-specific cultural behaviors, developing competence in communicating with people from other cultures, and developing skills for adapting to a new culture have been important contributions intercultural communication research. However, many of these models were based on assumptions of assimilation in which immigrants assimilated to the host culture severing ties with the homeland. Research on diaspora, mainly in other disciplines, however, reveals ties to the homeland as a defining influence in diasporic lives. Diaspora is only now emerging as an area for study in the intercultural communication scholarship, as a context in which to understand the complexities of immigrant lives.

In this dissertation, I seek to understand the diasporic lives of Afghan Hindus by studying how they discursively constructed their migration and settlement in Germany. By directing attention to their ways of speaking about migration, in conversations with me, I understood their constructions of community and family, and how the cultural premises of homeland were still an integral part of their expectations of relationships in the diaspora. Much of their current preoccupation is about trying to contain the fragmentation of their community as a consequence of migration. However, this process does not follow a straightforward linear trajectory, as suggested by immigrant adaptation models in intercultural communication (e.g. Kim, 2001); instead it involves struggle and contestations between different groups within the community who speak about unity, but are unable to realize their aspirations for a united Afghan Hindu community. Based on these findings, I argue first, that community is not inherited from the homeland, but is constructed anew in the diaspora, even though the premises of what constitutes

community may invoke homeland in the communicative conduct of community members. Second, the construction of community in the diaspora is characterized by communicative struggle within the community. Certainly, there are commonalities based on a shared history, geography, traditions, and identity that define a community, however, there is also fragmentation and contestation as those commonalities are internally challenged in the diaspora.

Finally, I argue that scholarship on intercultural communication<sup>3</sup> for the most part has been situated in U.S. American contexts; research among non-US, particularly non-Western populations is scarce. Emerging research on diaspora among intercultural scholars (e.g. Drzewiecka & Halualani, 2002, Halualani, 2008; Pathak, 2008) also tends to focus on groups in the United States (e.g. Asian Indian, Polish, Hawaiian). I argue for a need to explore culture and communication in diasporas outside the United States.

In this chapter, I first review research in intercultural communication, arguing a need for research on diasporic communities. Second, I present research on South Asian diasporas, reviewing how other disciplines study the complexities of diaspora. Finally, I propose ethnography of communication, particularly, speech codes theory, as a lens through which to understand how Afghan Hindus discursively construct their migration and settlement in Germany.

### Intercultural Communication: Origins and Research

Edward T. Hall's work with the Foreign Service Institute in 1951 set the agenda for decades of intercultural communication scholarship. Although Hall himself was an anthropologist, his work for the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) demanded a shift from anthropological approach of understanding a single culture, to examining how people from different countries communicated with one another. With the primary objective of

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<sup>3</sup> Here I am specifically pointing to scholarship on intercultural communication in the Communication Studies discipline.

training diplomats going abroad, *culture* for the most part was conflated with the nation-state (Starosta & Chen, 2003); in other words particular countries were characterized as having specific cultures, with the goal of providing “concrete, immediately useful details” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; p. 263) to American diplomats. According to Leeds-Hurwitz, Hall’s work for the FSI had far-reaching consequences for intercultural communication as a field. However, some limitations that Leeds-Hurwitz points out are conflation of culture with nation-state, comparisons of national cultures, and emphasis on micro level analyses of interpersonal interactions, particularly non-verbals, between members of different cultures, to the exclusion of macro level factors such as policy issues.

Like Hall, Geert Hofstede’s (1980, 2001) work had a long-lasting influence on intercultural communication. Hofstede’s classification of countries based on power-distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity, furthered the conflation of culture with country. The dimension of individualism-collectivism (I-C) particularly, has informed many studies in intercultural communication where researchers contended that I-C caused particular kinds of communicative behavior (e.g. Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). For example, Ting-Toomey (1988) used the individualism-collectivism dimension to study how members from individualistic versus collectivistic cultures negotiated conflict and performed face-work (see Ting-Toomey, 1990, 1991, 1998). A major assumption (and limitation) of this body of research was homogeneity and sharedness of culture within a group of people, based on nationality. Addressing this limitation, subsequent research added self-construal as a variable that mediates the effect of I-C on individual behavior (e.g. Gudykunst et al; Oetzel, 1998; Ting-Toomey, Oetzel et al. 2001); for example, someone from a collectivistic culture could construe self as independent rather than interdependent, thereby exhibiting a more individualistic communicative style. Although this move addressed the problem of a priori assumptions of homogeneity, it had other limitations. First, self-construal is a

psychological construct and assumes that an individual has particular traits that he or she brings to an interaction, rather than self as something that emerges from an interaction. Second, culture is still conflated with the nation-state and the individual who displays an orientation different from the “national” orientation is considered an anomaly. Third, the move from situating I-C at a national level to situating it in the individual ignores other contexts in which to study culture, such as community or ethnic groups.

Another strand of intercultural research has dealt specifically with migration and adaptation of immigrants to the host culture. Based on prior acculturation scholarships, Kim (1988, 2001) developed a communication model of cross-cultural adaptation of immigrants to their host country. The main assumption of the model is that “humans have an inherent drive to adapt and grow” (Kim, 2002; p. 241). The model further assumes that as first-generation immigrants learn the new culture they progressively “unlearn” the culture of origin. The model ignored the possibility that immigrants might desire to hold on to their culture of origin not only for themselves but for future generations. As Flores (2008) notes, “Immigrants prove to be both highly flexible in their abilities to think national identity in seemingly paradoxical ways as well as to maintain an almost rigid reliance, in some instances, on their connection to their native national culture.” (p. x). Frequent border crossings, and settlement spanning multiple locations, also raise the issue of multiple belongings, challenging prior assumptions that assimilation into one particular culture is necessary for immigrants. Moreover, at least some countries, in an attempt to embrace multiculturalism as a national agenda, acknowledge and even actively encourage immigrants to maintain their traditions (Shuval, 2000). Earlier models of cross-cultural adaptation are limited when it comes to capturing the complexities of postcolonial migrations.

A third strand of intercultural research is based on the ethnography of communication (Philipsen, 1976). Researchers in this tradition study culture in speech communities, by attending specifically to terms used by people, who share particular

ways of speaking and interpretations of communicative conduct. For instance, Fitch (1991) studied personal address to understand shared cultural meanings among Columbians in Columbia, while Katriel (1986) studied an Israeli way of speaking called *dugri* or direct talk. In this tradition, the definition of a speech community is not limited to national cultures. For example, Philipsen (1975, 1976) studied the discursive construction of a white, blue-collar identity in a neighborhood in Chicago, he called “Teamsterville”, while Carbaugh (1988) studied the Donahue show as a speech community. Researchers in ethnography of communication characterize their work as *cultural* communication, rather than *intercultural* communication. Culture, in this approach, is assumed to be situated and emergent in communication. The researcher does not impose cultural categories on the community, aiming instead to understand culture from the perspective of the interlocutors.

All of these various approaches to intercultural communication are situated in studying micro level communicative practices. Intercultural scholars, particularly those who approach intercultural communication from a cultural studies perspective, are interested in more macro level factors that shape intercultural interactions. These scholars mainly attempt to unmask power in intercultural interactions, approaching culture as a site of contestation among various groups, involving a struggle for meaning (Moon, 1996). Scholars in this tradition examine the struggles of minority groups, based on race, class, ethnicity, or gender, against a dominant culture, ideology, and larger power structures in society (e.g. Orbe, 1998, Hopson & Orbe, 2007; Allen, 1996, 2007; Flores, Moon, & Nakayama, 2006). A basic assumption of the researcher in the critical paradigm is that intercultural interactions seldom occur on an even playing field; one group is generally more powerful, and the researcher’s agenda is to unearth that power in intergroup communication. However, this assumption also has its limitations, which are, that power is always situated between a dominant and an oppressed group, once again

perpetuating assumptions of sharedness within minority groups. As a result, power and contestations within cultural minority groups are seldom studied.

Research on transnational migration, globalization, and diaspora has emerged only recently, mainly in the past decade. One strand of research is focused on the flow of technology and cultural products such as media and popular culture (e.g. Ciecko, 2001; Ram, 2002; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Helland, 2007; Gillespie, 2000; Sakr, 2008), covering a variety of contexts such as representations of race and gender in the media, Indian women's reactions to depictions of patriarchy in Indian films, internet use in the diaspora, and the role of television in diasporic lives. This body of scholarship takes a postcolonial approach to diaspora.

Others study identity and dilemmas of "belonging" in the diaspora, making macro-micro connections between structures of domination and diasporic identities (e.g. Drzewiecka, 2002; Pathak, 2008). For example, Drzewiecka and Halualani (2002) place cultural aspects of diaspora, such as narratives and discourses that unify and create a collective identity, in dialectical tension with structural aspects of the nation-state and governmental structures. The work of these scholars is based on the assumption that culture and identity are fluid, and constructed and re-constructed based on context and exigencies of the diaspora. My dissertation is situated in this body of research on culture and communication in the diaspora. However, while scholars have either concentrated on communication in mediated contexts, or on identity formation, I focus on culture and personal relationships in the diaspora, as they unfold in everyday experiences. I am interested in understanding how community is constructed in the diaspora, the struggles that are involved in the process, what constitutes family, and how familial relationships are negotiated as they undergo changes.

In the next section I review scholarship by anthropologists and sociologists that sheds light on cultural practices that diasporic people engage in to create a collective



identity. This body of literature, and different theories of diaspora informed my study of Afghan Hindus, and helped frame my research.

### Diaspora Studies

The word “diaspora” originated from the Greek word *speiro* (to scatter or to sow) and *dia* (over, through or around). The Greeks used the term in reference to colonization of Asia Minor beginning in 800 BC (Cohen, 1997). Later, *diaspora* came to be used specifically to describe the exile of Jews from Babylon in 586 B.C. The Jewish diaspora is generally described as a classical diaspora, while diasporas formed during European expansion and colonization, are known as modern diasporas, and those that were formed due to post-world war migration are known as contemporary diasporas (Amersfoort, 2007; Reis, 2004). While classical diasporas were mainly involuntary, involving exile, contemporary diasporas are formed as a result of voluntary and involuntary migration.

Safran (1991) provided one of the first articulations of contemporary diasporas with these characteristics: a) dispersal due to either involuntary or voluntary migration from a single place of origin to two or more distal places; b) sharing a collective memory about a real or imagined homeland that binds people in the diaspora c) idealization of homeland, ongoing connections with homeland, and possibility of returning in the future; and d) problematic relationships with the host society. In other words, a diaspora, while spanning multiple locations, is united by sharedness of geography, history and nostalgia for the homeland. Diasporic populations make efforts to maintain ties to their homeland through frequent visits. Where such visits are not possible, because of war or strife in the homeland, they develop a myth about the imagined homeland, through performance of specific traditions, and emphasizing a particular identity. As Brodwin (2000) notes, “collective self-identification is often a practical response to subordination and marginality” (p. 385) experienced by diasporic populations in host society. Recently, scholars have studied how the homeland also fosters ties with its diaspora (see Mani &

Varadarajan, 2005). Globalization and new technologies have fostered increasing connectivity with the homeland and different parts of the diaspora.

While Safran described general characteristics of a diaspora, Cohen (1997) offered a more nuanced typology, based on the conditions under which a group migrates, using categories such as victim diaspora, labor diaspora, trade diaspora, imperial diaspora, and cultural diaspora. For example, victim diasporas are formed as a result of political unrest or persecution in the homeland, whereas labor diasporas are created by people leaving the homeland for employment abroad. The experiences of these two diasporas are likely to be different. Labor diasporas are often voluntary, while victim diasporas are mainly involuntary and are likely to involve trauma. Return to the homeland may also be impossible for victim diasporas because of fear of persecution in the homeland. Cohen's typology, thus, captures the heterogeneity of diaspora experiences.

A third approach to studying diaspora was proposed by Vertovec (2000), who summarized the extensive scholarship on South Asian diasporas by distilling three main "meanings", a) *diaspora as social form*, that describes social relationships among diasporic people, b) *diaspora as a type of consciousness*, or the awareness of marginality combined with resistance to the host society, c) *diaspora as cultural production*, which includes cultural performances, cultural objects, and media products such as films from the homeland through which diasporic people attempt to reproduce homeland in the host society. All these typologies and definitions of diaspora have three criteria in common - dispersal, settlement in multiple locations, connection (actual or imagined) to homeland, and connections in the diaspora (Wahlbeck, 2002).

I would like to note here that usage of the term, *diaspora*, in scholarly parlance varies. As Martin Baumann (1995) describes it, diaspora can simultaneously refer to the *process* of being scattered, a *community* living outside of homeland, or a *place* in which a dispersed group lives; for example, Butler (2000) refers to diaspora as "a process of

community formation” (p. 212). More frequently diasporas are referenced by place of origin such as “the Jewish diaspora”, “the Indian diaspora”, “the Armenian diaspora”, all of which also indicate a community. More general usage of the term includes “diasporic communities” and “diasporic populations”. Diaspora is also referred to as a place, as “in the diaspora”. As Clifford (1997) points out, there is “slippage in the text between invocations of diaspora theories, diasporic discourse, and distinct historical experiences of diaspora” (p. 244). Despite the assortment of ways in which *diaspora* is deployed, it continues to be a useful analytic tool across disciplines to study international migration from one place of origin to multiple destinations.

With the above discussion as a background on the theoretical underpinnings of *diaspora*, I now turn to research on South Asian diasporas. I chose to situate my study in South Asian diaspora literature for three reasons; first, because diaspora studies is a vast area of scholarship and I found it necessary to limit my search to one specific area that was closest culturally to the community I was studying. Second, Afghan Hindus considered India their ancestral home and identified themselves with Hindu religious and cultural practices. Third, existing scholarship on other South Asian diasporas provided useful points of comparison for my own research.

I first describe two main phases of migration in the formation of the South Asian diaspora. Next, I discuss the importance of community and kinship ties and how those are accomplished in the diaspora, followed by a discussion of contestations in the diaspora in the process of building community.

### South Asian Diaspora

In the formation of the South Asian diaspora, mainly two phases of migration are described by scholars; the first phase included the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial migration of indentured laborers to East Africa, Fiji, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad due to labor shortage in the British colonies after abolition of slavery.

Indentured labor from South Asia, mainly India, fulfilled this shortage. Over time these laborers settled in the destination countries either by choice or because they could not afford the passage to return home.

The second phase included the postcolonial migration after 1947, to North America, Europe, and Australia. Postcolonial migration introduced a new kind of diaspora, the result of voluntary migration of people who left the homeland in search of better economic prospects abroad. Not only did these migrants not suffer from the trauma that indentured laborers had suffered, technological advances facilitated greater connectivity with the homeland. These new migrants also challenged earlier premises of adaptation and assimilation to the host country. Research among contemporary diasporas reveals a concerted effort to resist assimilation by maintaining traditions of the homeland.

While most of the post-colonial migration to the United States included an elite, educated population of doctors and engineers from India, who migrated after 1965, Europe has been a destination for Indians from East Africa, Sri Lankan Tamils, and Sikhs from India who fled persecution in their home countries some of whom are twice-migrants, such as South Asians from Suriname and East Africa, now settled in Europe (Jacobsen, 2003).

Differences in historical periods, reasons for migration, and destinations, mean a diversity of diasporic experiences. For example, the early indentured labor diaspora, formed due to migration of Indians to work in plantations in the Caribbean during the colonial period, did not have the technology we have today to maintain connections with the homeland; neither did not enjoy some of the privileges of the educated, professional, post-colonial migrants from South Asia. However, one thing that is shared among all diasporas is the quest for community. Sheffer (1986) wrote about contemporary diasporas:

...they evince an explicit ethnic identity; they create and maintain relatively well-developed communal organisations; they demonstrate solidarity with other members of the community, and

consequently, cultural and social coherence; they launch cultural, social, political and economic activities through their communal organisations (p. 83).

Organizing is therefore a key feature of contemporary diasporas and forming a community remains a major preoccupation in the South Asian diaspora.

### Organizing in the Diaspora

According to Baumann (2004) organizing takes place mainly in the second stage of settlement. The first stage involves learning and adapting to functional needs such as learning the language and finding employment; the second stage involves permanent settlement, and establishing organizations for religious and social purposes in an attempt to build community. “Warding off assimilation, members of the diaspora group intensify bond with the country of origin” (p. 85). These organizations become a means of resisting assimilation and educating the younger generation in the cultural traditions of the homeland.

Organizing occurs in the social, religious and cultural realms (Raj & Reeves, 2009). Typically when the population from the homeland is small, informal get-togethers in homes, meet these needs (Bacon 1996; Nye, 1995). As numbers from the homeland increase, larger and more formal organizations come up as a space in which to celebrate traditions, rituals and holidays of the homeland (De Voe, 2008), and as resources for introducing children born and raised in the host country to their cultural heritage (Rangaswamy, 2000; Khandelwal, (2002). Maira (2002) describes these organizations as

an institutionalized social context largely intended to reproduce, and sometimes to re-imagine the social maps that the first generation carried with them to the United States – maps of regional subcultures, religious communities, or nationhood (p. 103).

In the Indian diaspora, cultural organizations provide a socio-cultural platform to promote what scholars call a pan-India identity, representing nationhood. These non-religious organizations celebrate “culture” in the form of holidays such as the Indian Independence day, organize outings like picnics, screen Indian films and hold popular dance and music

festivals (Fisher, 1980). Vahed (2007) describes an Indian Bazaar with parades, speeches, music and dance, organized by the Indian Cultural Association in Brisbane, Australia, consisting of Indians from diverse countries, Fiji, South Africa, and Sri Lanka coming together promoting a pan-Indian identity. Cultural representation of Indians to mainstream audiences, in the form of dance, music, and ethnic food, is another function of these organizations (Helweg 1990, Mukhi, 2000).

A number of parochial organizations celebrate cultural traditions from particular regions of the homeland (Rangaswamy, 2000). By providing a space in which people can “eat, dress, and talk exactly the way they do back in India” (p. 231), these regional organizations are based on the premise that language provides an important anchor for culture and community. For example, the Telugu Association of North America (TANA) celebrates the culture of Andhra Pradesh, a state in southern India through music, dance, drama, and literature from there. Tamil Sangam around the United States cater to Tamil culture from Tamilnadu, another Indian state. Some like the World Gujarati Samaj, were established in the U.S. but are global, catering to parochial interests of Gujarathis around the world. Events held by the parent and branch organizations often promote cultural talent in the Gujarathi community, worldwide.

Besides these cultural organizations, religion has been identified by a number of scholars as another important part of community formation among South Asian diasporas (see Hirschman, 2004; Jacobsen & Kumar, 2003; Park, 1997; Saran, 1985). Religion “provides a transcendent anchor for collective memory that relates personal and group identity with the past” (Williams, 1992, p. 229). Religion can also become a way of resisting pressures from mainstream society. For example, Lal (2009) notes that religion played a key role for Indian indentured laborers in Fiji to resist conversion to Christianity. However, the place of religion in building community has occupied differential positions in different diasporas. Among the post-colonial diaspora of Hindu Indians, the need for a place of worship was not immediately felt, but came much later,

after the cultural organizations were established. Saran (1985) found that the need of a place of worship was felt more acutely after the first-generation of immigrants began to have children; suddenly the need to educate their children about their religious traditions as a way of counteracting what was perceived as the debilitating effects of the mainstream Western society, became urgent.

On the other hand, for Sri Lankan Tamils in Europe, religion was the primary force for building community and maintaining connections with the homeland. Luchesi (2004) writes about the Tamils in Germany, who fled Sri Lanka in the early 1980s when the civil war between the Sinhalese and Tamils escalated. By 1985 Tamil Hindu places of worship began emerging all over Germany, first in rented facilities and later in more permanent locations. Baumann (2001) notes that a temple for goddess Kamadchi in Hamm-Uentrop in Germany, with its annual festival and procession of the goddess draws thousands of Hindus from all over Europe. Similarly, Jacobsen (2003) describes the importance of religion for Tamils in Norway, who comprise 75% of South Asian Hindus in the country.

Unlike the Sri Lankan Tamils, the impetus for a religious space emerged much later in other South Asian diasporas. Baumann (2003) notes that Trinidad, which had a large population of descendents of indentured laborers from the colonial period, saw “a proliferation of Hindu temples during the 1950s” (p. 77), a century after the original migration. This impetus for temples in Trinidad was a result of a surge in nationalism after India’s independence that was also felt in the diaspora. However, these temples did not mimic the temples of India; instead they were hybrids, incorporating traditional temple architecture as well as that of Christian churches, and also a place for asserting an Indian political presence, so much so that “political aims and religious concerns appeared indistinguishable” (Baumann, 2003, p. 78).

An impressive collection of essays and research discusses in detail the ways in which religious traditions of the homeland are maintained in Hindu temples in the

diaspora (e.g. Clothey, 2004; Jacobsen, 2003; Junghare, 2003; Naryananan, 1992; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001). For example, scholars have noted that architects and priests are brought from India to design temples and conduct traditional worship, in an effort to reproduce traditions with as much exactness as possible (Sheth, 2001). However, changes are also inevitable. While temples were mainly places of worship in the homeland, in the diaspora they acquire other functions. Hindu temples in the diaspora serve as places for educating the next generation about their religion. Classes in Indian languages, classical dance and music, and scriptures, youth camps, and even stress management classes are offered as a part of temple activities (Narayanan, 1992). Temples provide wedding halls and reception halls to provide the means for having Hindu weddings (Williams, 1987). Another way in which Hindu temples are changing is by adopting congregational worship<sup>4</sup> (Junghare, 2003). Kurian (1998) discusses two kinds of congregational worship among Hindus in the United States, the *satsang* and *bala vihar*. The *satsang* involves a group of Hindus getting together for prayer and devotional singing, and the *bala vihar* is a term used to describe children's groups aimed at cultural/religious education of second generation Hindu children, and discussions of issues and challenges related to daily lives of Indian children in America. As Warner (1998) points out, "Because religion is so important to an immigrant group, and because the group's circumstances have been changed so drastically by migration, the religion must take on new forms to be capable of survival in the new land" (p. 20).

These studies offer insight into important aspects of community formation through religious and cultural organizations. First, they provide detailed accounts of the rituals and religious practices in temples (e.g. Baumann, 2004; Luchesi, 2003), and the kinds of cultural performances in non-religious organizations (Helweg, 1990). Second,

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<sup>4</sup> Traditionally there is no concept of a congregation in Hinduism like there is in Christianity, the emphasis being on individual worship or worship with the family.



this research is insightful in pointing to the continuity as well as fluidity of culture, as traditions of the homeland get reconstructed in the diaspora. Third, this body of research demonstrates the importance of *community* in the diaspora. Cultural and religious organizations serve as creative forces in bringing people together, providing a focus that connects them to homeland, and as a way to create an idealized image of the homeland for the younger generation born and brought up in the diaspora. They help maintain a collective memory of the homeland through shared practices.

Building community is, however, not a smooth process. Raj (2003) states that building community in the diaspora “generates ongoing politicking, struggle, schisms, and debates.” (p. 87) as a result of diverse cultural beliefs inherited from the homeland. Nye (1995), likewise, describes conflict in a Hindu temple in Edinburgh, Scotland, between people from different regions of India such as Punjabis and Gujarathis. Korom (2003) describes differences in the interpretations of Muharram between the Sunni and Shi’a Muslims in Trinidad. It is important to take note of conflict because it de-centers a major assumption of diaspora, which is sharedness based on a common homeland. These studies clearly show that a common homeland does not automatically imply homogeneity of cultural norms, traditions, or viewpoints. Commonalities and differences exist in tension with one another. As Gerd Baumann (1996) found, in his famous study of South Asians in Southall in the U.K., the very meaning of *community* is fluid, as the South Asians he surveyed constructed community differently in different contexts. Baumann writes:

The same person could speak and act as a member for the Muslim *community* in one context, in another take sides against other Muslims as a member of the Pakistani *community*, and in a third count himself part of the Punjabi *community*, that excluded other Muslims but included Hindus, Sikhs and even Christians. (p. 5)

By studying how Southhallians constructed *community* discursively, Baumann unearthed the multiple meanings that pointed to the complexities of belonging, in the diaspora.

### Transnational Connections

Family and kinship connections are other aspects of diasporic lives. Mainly, those who study kinship in the contexts of diaspora use a transnational approach to understand the connections that people maintain with the homeland (e.g. Haines, 1988; Chen, 2004). Transnationalism is a framework used to study the process through which dispersed populations maintain connections with their homeland (Schiller, Blasch, and Blanc, 1992). Rai and Reeves (2009) explain the difference between *diaspora* and *transnationalism* as follow:

While diaspora acts as a historical precursor to transnationalism in terms of the study of international movement of people, the corpus of transnational literature has tended to focus on greater connectedness ... through information communication technology that now links migrants and the homeland. (p. 5)

A transnational perspective stresses connections *despite* dispersal, and scholars use this perspective to study various kinds of connections that diasporic groups maintain with the homeland and with other parts of the diaspora.

Diasporas have also been compared to “webs” (Haller, p. 195) or “networks” (Buchignani, 1983), in which people maintain transnational connections in various ways. A transnational approach takes into account connectivity afforded by globalization, new technologies, and greater mobility of contemporary diasporas in traversing national boundaries.

Ballard (1990) discusses the important role of family in Punjabi labor migration from Northern India to Britain, that initially takes the form of financial support from extended family to the migrant going abroad and later the reciprocal relationships of the migrant supporting the family back home, financially. As Ballard notes, “Taking a well-paid job abroad was not just seen as bringing personal benefits... their most basic obligation as a family member was to make the maximum possible contribution to the collective resources of the group” (p. 234) Giving loans to family, investing in family business, solving family problems are all ways in which kinship connections are

maintained long-distance (Helweg, 1990). These are some ways that people in the diaspora continue to be a part of larger kinship networks. Thus, community and familial connections are two important aspects of relationships in the diaspora.

### Studying Diaspora

The study of diaspora is essentially a multi-disciplinary endeavor. As Brettell and Hollifield (2008) explain, research questions, units of analysis, and theories vary depending on disciplinary foci. Sociologists attempt to study *why* migrations occur and *how* they are sustained in the receiving nation; geographers study spatial relationships; political scientists are concerned with policy issues of immigration and emigration; demographers study population change; economists are concerned with cost-benefit analyses of immigration such as cost of education, public welfare and so on; anthropologists are interested in cultural change, and cross-cultural comparisons.

Disciplines also differ in the level of analysis:

Those who approach the problem at a macro level examine the structural conditions (largely political, legal, and economic) that shape migration flows, and those who engage in micro level research, examine how these larger forces shape the decision and actions of individuals and families, or how they effect changes in communities (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008, p. 9)

Khan (2004), who conducted ethnographic research in Trinidad for over a decade, argues for a discourse approach to diaspora as a way to study how people construct their realities. Rather than using various typologies as rubrics, and thinking about diaspora as “an abstraction” (p. 123), she looks at “diaspora discourse from within” (p. 123) as a way of “unpacking the dimensions of its meaning” (p. 123) from the natives’ (Indo-Trinidadian in her case) perspective. Furthermore, she defines discourse as “words people say to each other...the conversations they have” or “guided talk” (p. 124).

As someone who focuses on communication, I found Khan’s approach to diaspora, appealing. Taking a discourse approach allowed me to observe and listen, and be open to ways of speaking among those who live their lives in the diaspora. Although

prior research had sensitized me to particular challenges of life in the diaspora, I was not interested in imposing “rubrics” or typologies to understanding the Afghan Hindu experience. Instead I wished to be a participant, an observer wishing to understand what was important to Afghan Hindus, how they saw and interpreted their migration, how they talked about the homeland and in what contexts, how they spoke of their lives in Germany, how they constructed the kinds of social connections they deemed important. I chose Speech Codes theory in the Ethnography of Communication tradition as a theoretical framework to guide my study.

### Speech Codes Theory and Ethnography of Communication

Speech Codes theory was developed by Gerry Philipsen (1992, 1997) based on the work of Dell Hymes (1968), his own ethnographic work on “Teamsterville” (Philipsen, 1975, 1976, 1986, 1992), a white American, blue-collar neighborhood near Chicago, and other research in ethnography of communication (Carbaugh, 1989; Katriel, 1986). The theory has since informed a large body of research on culture, community, identity, and personal relationships by other EOC researchers (e.g. Carbaugh, 1993, 1999; Covarrubias, 2002; Cuoto, 2000; Fitch, 1998; Huspek, 1993, 1994, 2000; Katriel, 1997).

The unit of analysis in speech codes theory and more generally in the ethnography of communication tradition is the speech community. “To the extent that speakers share knowledge of the communicative constraints and options governing a significant number of social situation, they can be said to be members of the same *speech community*” (Gumperz, 1964). According to Gumperz (1968) a speech community can be any group that has interpersonal contact, or connected through occupation (e.g. gangs), “provided they show linguistic peculiarities that warrant special study. The verbal behavior of such groups always constitutes a system (1968, p. 66). The “system” is a set of norms shared by the group. Ethnographers of communication attempt to understand this system by studying the patterns of interaction in a group. Not only are these patterns of interaction

shared in the group, they also serve to set the group apart from other groups. Speech communities, thus exhibit distinctive ways of speaking. In addition, the ethnographer studying these ways of speaking takes into account, the setting in which speech events occur, the participants, the purpose of speech events, what is said and how, the key or tone of the message, forms and channels of speech, norms of interaction and interpretation of messages among participants, and genres of speech that participants use as a resource (Hymes, 1972). The ethnographer is interested in unearthing the meaning that natives give to a phenomenon by paying attention not only to the contents of the speech and how it is framed, but also to the setting, the people doing the speaking, the ends that are achieved by that speech, and different kinds of speech used to achieve those ends. Moreover, Hymes (1964) urged researchers to focus attention on the communicative performance of natives and how they used particular terms in specific speech events.

In developing Speech Codes theory Philipsen (1992) centered communication in the construction of community and identity in speech communities. A speech code is defined as, “a system of socially constructed symbols, and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct” (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126). The basic assumptions of speech codes theory are, a) communication is situated in particular times and places, b) by observing particular ways of speaking in a community, the meaning structures peculiar to that community can be uncovered, and c) ways of speaking contribute to an overall pattern of communicative conduct in a community. Thus, “Code, varieties, pattern of use, and shared outlook - all of these are suitable topics for an ethnographer of speaking to investigate in any community” (Philipsen, 1977, p. 44). According to Philipsen, speaking is always embedded in a culture. As people talk and create meaning, they invoke cultural codes in the form of symbols. Their talk is guided by assumptions and constrained by rules. Taken-for-granted assumptions, values and beliefs can be

deciphered in talk by paying close attention to the labels people use to name things, how they interpret events, evaluate them, and justify certain actions over others.

Philipsen (1997) offered four propositions in the original theory, with two recent additions, in the second iteration of the theory (see Philipsen, Coutu, and Covarrubias, 2005). Proposition 1 of the theory states that, “Wherever there is a distinctive culture, there is to be found a distinctive speech code” (p. 58). The ethnographer works to uncover this distinctive code in a speech community by observing, listening, and interpreting. Proposition 2 states that, “In any given community, multiple speech codes are deployed” (p. 59), as members of a community compare and contrast their own ways of speaking with those of other groups, based on class, race or ethnicity. These comparisons serve to mark membership in the community, making insider-outsider distinctions. Proposition 3 addresses the content of speech codes, stating, “A speech code implicates a culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric” (p. 60). This proposition refers to how the employment of a speech code serves to define the cultural meaning of human nature, social relationships, and conduct for a particular community. Proposition 4 addresses how members of a community interpret communicative behavior, by assigning meaning to action. Proposition 5 states that speech codes and speaking are intertwined, and thus understanding symbols, meanings, premises and rules under which a community operates requires close observation and listening to communicative conduct. The ethnographer of speaking learns about what is important for the community by paying close attention to meta-communication, use of particular words and expressions in interaction, the context in which those words and expressions are used, and distinctive conduct of the community. Proposition 6 draws attention to the discursive force of speech codes, or the ways in which people explain, evaluate, and justify the conduct of self and others. Speech codes exert social pressure on members of the community to conform to certain rules of conduct, which when broken, give cause for negative evaluation, that in turn serve to maintain social order in the community.

Although a community implies shared patterns of speaking within a group, Hymes (1974) also defined community as an “organization of diversity” (p. 433). The researcher is thus open to similarities *and* differences in the community. As Philipsen, Coutu, and Covarrubias (2005), clarify in the latest iteration of the theory, the researcher’s “open eyes and listening ears are directed to what the people being studied, in a given inquiry, insert into the discourse they produce and find in the discourse they experience” (p. 65). In other words, this is a theory that “gives voice to the people being studied” (p. 65). This coincides with my interest in Khan’s (2004) call for studying diaspora as discourse. Khan refers to discourse as “guided talk” (p. 124); the question that one might ask is, guided by what? Speech codes theory would answer, “guided by cultural rules and premises”; by paying close attention to discourse, one can understand the systems of meaning operative in a specific community.

Using speech codes theory as a framework, I sought to understand the patterned ways in which Afghan Hindus spoke about their migration from Afghanistan to Germany, and their present lives in Germany. As Hymes (1964) explains:

To focus on the events as such would be to discover the native terminology for such events, analyzing it as one or more semantic fields, and to join this with the other techniques of field work, observation, interview and the like, to get at the native system as a whole (Hymes, 1964, p. 43).

I was therefore interested in terms Afghan Hindus used to make sense of their migration from Afghanistan to Germany, and their present lives in Germany.

### Research Question

As the preceding review of literature demonstrates, diaspora is a fairly recent context for studying culture in the area intercultural communication. Mainly cultural products and identity negotiations have been the focus of recent studies on diaspora. Outside the discipline, diaspora has been theorized and studied in a number of ways. A diaspora may be understood by distinct features (Safran, 1991), by reasons for migration

(Cohen, 1997), by social relationships, awareness of marginality and through performative aspects of culture (Vertovec, 2000), by transnational connections maintained through networks of connections (Schiller, Blasch, and Blanc, 1992), or by studying discourse through which people construct meaning in particular contexts. My research was informed by all these approaches, however, as a communication scholar, I was interested in understanding how Afghan Hindus spoke about their migration, how some of the features described by Safran surfaced in their talk, and how they discursively constructed their migration from Afghanistan and life in Germany. Because I was interested in what was important to the people being studied, I approached the project with a broad research question that would allow me to listen and learn what was important to them. The question that guided my research was:

RQ: How do Afghan Hindus discursively construct the meaning of their migration from Afghanistan to Germany?

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter I reviewed scholarship in intercultural communication, arguing that diaspora offers a rich site in which to study culture and communication. I further argued that although communication scholars have been exploring diaspora in the last decade, much of this work focuses on mediated contexts or on identity formation; there is little work on social relationships in the diaspora. I next reviewed the diaspora studies literature, describing various characteristics of diaspora, and the kinds of relationships that have been identified as being salient in the diaspora. Taking up Khan's (2004) call for studying diaspora as a discourse, I described ethnography of communication, and more specifically Speech Codes theory as a lens through which I could focus specifically on ways of speaking in the Afghan Hindu. By listening to their ways of speaking, I hoped to understand the system of meaning that Afghan Hindus used to make sense of their



migration from Afghanistan to Germany. Finally, I stated the research question that guided my inquiry. In the next chapter I detail the methods I used to conduct my study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

Once upon a time, the Lone Ethnographer rode off into the sunset in search of “his native”. After undergoing a series of trials, he encountered the object of his quest in a distant land. There he underwent his rite of passage by enduring the ultimate ordeal of “fieldwork”. After collecting “the data”, the Lone Ethnographer returned home and wrote a “true” account of “the culture” (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 30).

In the last three decades, postmodern approaches to what constitutes knowledge, research, and “truth”, challenge the ethnographer as the voice of authority who unmask the intricacies of an exotic culture for an awestruck, mainly Western, mainly academic audience. Terms such as “native” and “field” have been replaced by “identity” and “place” (Jacobs-Huey, 2002). The identity of the researcher is as much a topic of analysis as the researched, and the term “native” comes up for scrutiny. Furthermore, “Truth” is now recognized as socially constructed situated reality in a time, place and context, rather than an objective reality to be uncovered and reported by the ethnographer; instead the researcher and researched are seen as constructing that reality jointly. Moreover, the researcher attempts transparency and self-reflexivity on her positionality in relation to the research participants, the setting, and the context. As I describe my research methods, participants, and the setting in which I conducted this research, I too attempt to be self-reflexive about how being a woman, of Asian Indian origin, a citizen of the United States, earning an advanced degree, and traveling alone in Germany, informed my observations of and conversations with Afghan Hindus.

In this chapter I describe the methods of data collection and analysis employed in this study. I include main phases of my research, how and why I chose to conduct my research among Afghan Hindus in Germany, how I gained access to this diasporic community, and my research methods. Finally, I discuss my positionality as a researcher and dilemmas of “fieldwork”, speaking to some of the issues foregrounded by postmodern ethnographers.

## Research Phases

I engaged in fieldwork over four separate visits to Germany lasting from four to ten weeks, beginning in summer of 2005 and ending in December 2008. Access to funding as well as time determined the duration of each visit. In retrospect, this phased approach, a result of circumstance rather than planning, was similar to phases of qualitative inquiry described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) - “orientation and overview”, “focused exploration”, and “member checking” (p. 235).

Phase I involved orienting myself toward the topic of interest by reading prior scholarship and documents, the research site, and introducing myself to members of the community. I made contacts in the field approaching the respondents in an open-ended way “to obtain sufficient information to get some handle on what is important enough to follow up in detail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 235). This stage helped me identify areas that prior research had not addressed, as well as ascertaining issues important to the research participants. Based on the initial exploration, I developed my research question, developed a protocol and got IRB approval before going back to the field for Phase II of the study. This phase involved participant observation which became the foundation for later interviews. Having identified broad themes, I embarked on Phase III or the “member check” (p. 236) phase. In this phase, I took the identified themes back to the field for “scrutiny of the persons who provided the information or counterpart persons” (p. 236), by conducting a second interview with the same people where possible, or with new people, looking for confirmation or counterpoints, as the case may be.

## Introduction to the Community

My first exposure to Afghan Hindus occurred in 2005 in Germany. I visited Germany with a grant from the Crossing Borders program at the University of Iowa. Earlier I had conducted research on Asian Indian Hindu places of worship in the United States. The grant enabled me to look internationally. With the idea of doing comparative

work, I turned my attention toward Europe. As I looked for scholarship on the Asian Indian diaspora in Europe, I found a number of studies on Asian Indians in the U.K. but none in Germany and other Western European countries. I did, however, find scholarship on Sri Lankan Tamils in Germany by one Dr. Martin Baumann, professor of Religious Studies at University of Lucerne in Switzerland. Wanting to know more, I contacted him through email explaining my research interests. Dr. Baumann provided me with a list of Hindu temples in Germany as a possible starting point. I noticed in his list, three entries for *Afghan Hindu* temples.

I had never heard of Afghan Hindus before. The label *Afghan Hindu* struck me as an oxymoron at first, because like most people I knew of Afghanistan as an Islamic Republic. I was unaware at that point that Hindus, a small religious minority, had lived in Afghanistan for centuries. My own Hindu background made me curious to meet these people and know more about them and I decided to visit their temples in Hamburg and Köln during my first visit in the summer of 2005.

I did not know any German at that time. Because English is understood and widely spoken in India, I assumed I would speak English with Afghan Hindus. I was wrong. Afghan Hindus who had grown up in Afghanistan were fluent in the Afghan languages of Farsi, Dari, and Pashto, but spoke little English. But most Afghan Hindus spoke Hindi<sup>5</sup>, an Indian language I was fluent in. And so I was able to initiate my first contact with Afghan Hindus.

In both Hamburg and Köln, I spoke with the temple managers. The first question they asked me was if I was from India. I explained that I was born and raised in India, but lived in the United States. Their second question was, “Are you from New York?” Many

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<sup>5</sup> Language spoken in North India. I was surprised at how fluent most Afghan Hindus were in Hindi and that they spoke it as it is in northern India. Afghan Hindus learned Hindi in Hindu schools in Afghanistan. Hindi affirmed their ties to India which they considered their ancestral land.

Afghan Hindus either had relatives in the U.S. or knew someone who did. Afghan Hindus who came the U.S. mainly live in New York or New Jersey.

I described my initial surprise about Hindus in Afghanistan, and explained my interest in knowing more about their community with the possibility of writing my dissertation about their migration experience. My proposal was received with enthusiasm in both places. One of the main preoccupations for this community is preserving their Afghan Hindu identity for posterity, and board members I met at both temples saw my proposed project as one way of documenting their lives.

On this positive note, I returned to the United States and began looking for scholarship on Afghan Hindus. Except for a passing mention in the work of an anthropologist (Dupree, 1963), and a historian (Levi, 2007), I found little evidence of scholarship on Afghan Hindus. I did find mention of Hindu kings who had ruled Afghanistan in history books that partly explained the presence of Hindus in the region. I also found a website in English, published by the Afghan Hindu Association that described their history in Afghanistan, the reasons for leaving the country, and their subsequent settlement in different countries. I also learned that while Afghan Hindus had dispersed to different parts of the world, the vast majority had settled in Germany. Access to this population was a key factor in my choice of Germany as the field, although I fully acknowledged that “field” was a misnomer for a diaspora spread across continents. I had to begin my research somewhere, and Germany was a logical choice with the largest numbers of Afghan Hindus.

### Gaining Access

In summer 2007, I returned to Germany, embarking on the second phase of my research<sup>6</sup>. I made Frankfurt my home due to its centrality. From Frankfurt I had easy

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<sup>6</sup> I also visited to Germany in 2006 for a conference in Dresden. Although this was a short visit, I was able to visit the temples again as a way to maintain contact.

access by train to other places in which Afghan Hindus lived, such as Dortmund, Köln, and Hamburg. The Frankfurt temple, *Asa Mai Tempel*, which during my 2005 visit was closed due to legal issues, was now open.

My first visit to the Frankfurt temple was on a Tuesday. The vice-president of the temple board, Mr. Raj happened to be in the office. I explained my project and the purpose of my visit to Germany. He showed immediate interest in my project and assured me of assistance from the board. Mr. Raj then introduced me to a group of women who were singing devotional music in the worship hall, explaining to them why I was there, and requesting them to include me in their group. The women graciously invited me to sit with them and join them in the singing. I have some training in Indian classical music and when I mentioned this, I was immediately drawn into their circle as a “singer” and was invited to sing on subsequent visits. This connection proved important to my research in gaining entry, acceptance and trust of these people, as well as enabling me to become a participant in regular events at the temple.

“Listen before you leap” (Brigg, 1986), was the defining feature of this phase. As I observed interactions of Afghan Hindus among themselves and with me, I learned the communicative and cultural norms by observing “simple facts as who talks to whom, who listens to whom, when people talk, and when they remain silent” (Briggs, 1986, p. 94). I paid attention to terms they used in these interactions. I also developed contacts, and learned about Afghan Hindu history, migration and settlement in Germany through conversations with the people I met at the temple. My fluency in Hindi enabled me to initiate and sustain these conversations with relative ease.

Between summer 2007 and my return to Germany in the summer of 2008 I worked on my research proposal and getting approval from the Human Subjects Board. Meanwhile I had kept in touch with the president of the Frankfurt temple, Mr. Desi, whom I had also met in 2007. He had offered to help in developing further contacts among Afghan Hindus. Upon arrival in Frankfurt I set up a meeting with him at the

temple and went over my research goals and methods. He in turn gave me additional background about the community, alerting me to certain sensitive issues that I might handle with care. Divorce was one such issue, which was new among Afghan Hindus, and also one that was closely connected with issues of face. A second issue was visa status. Although most Afghan Hindus were well established in Germany, there were some families who were still on refugee status. Mr. Desi suggested that I not ask direct questions about this topic.

Mr. Desi also gave me a list of names and phone numbers of people to contact. He told me that the names he was giving me were of people “who know something and who can talk intelligently”. I was concerned that Mr. Desi’s list contained names of only men. When I addressed this concern, the president told me these were “elders” (*buzurg*) who knew something about the history of their people and could articulate it well. Talking to people randomly, he said, would not help my project. While I knew that it is not uncommon for gatekeepers to want to present the best people in their community or present their community in a positive light (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), I nevertheless did not want to restrict myself only to his list. However, the list provided me with a starting point.

I set up times to meet with these people over the phone. During the phone call I explained my project, how I had got their names (in many cases the president had already informed them of my project), what my purpose was, explained confidentiality issues, and asked if they would be willing to talk to me in a setting of their choice. In some cases the agreement came readily, in other cases there was some hesitation, typically expressed as, “Please give me your number and I will call you back.” When I did not hear back in a week I would try again. I learned that the hesitation sometimes stemmed from a lack of time. As Mr. Desi explained few Afghan Hindus worked in professional jobs that had a set 8 to 5 type of schedule; most worked in shifts that changed. Many worked more than one job, thus eking out even 90 minutes was difficult for them. There was also reticence

on the part of some people about who I was, and why I was interested in talking to them. These were mainly people who did not frequent the temple; those who frequented the temple came to know me and thus had little hesitation in talking. I also understood that because Afghan Hindus had come to Germany as refugees, they were wary of strangers asking questions. After Mr. Desi spoke to them personally, assuring them of my credentials and asking them to “help” me on my project, they were generally more forthcoming.

I found meeting young people far more challenging. I noticed that the temple attracted mainly older adults, and young children who accompanied their parents. Youth between the ages of 15 and 25 were notably absent. I learned from parents that teens complained that they were “bored” in the temple, and went only if they knew some of their close friends were going. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Desi’s list contained only names of older Afghan Hindu men. I understood that the elder male traditionally held an important position in this community. But the Frankfurt temple was attempting to create a forum for youth. Actively helping them was one young woman of 23, whom I will refer to as Reena. I saw her at the temple most Tuesdays and sometimes on Sundays. Reena was studying International Business at Frankfurt University and was simultaneously working for a company. She not only spoke to me at length, but also gave me contact information for other people her age. Reena spoke English and Hindi fluently, besides German. Reena and I met at a coffee shop at her university for an in-depth interview. Reena also gave me contacts of people her own age.

Besides Reena, another man, whom I refer to as Kishan, helped me meet young people. Kishan himself was 30 years old and lived in Köln. I met him at a religious event in one of the two Afghan Hindu temples there, and was introduced to me by one of my contacts from Frankfurt. Kishan was actively involved in the temple and offered to assist me in any way he could. I had the opportunity to have two in-depth interviews with Kishan on two separate occasions. Kishan also invited me to his temple (there are two



Afghan Hindu temples in Köln), when I told him about my difficulties in meeting young people. The temple he was involved in had a group that met for a Hindi language class on Sundays. I therefore visited the temple on a Sunday and met with a group of 5 girls in the age group of 18 to 23, whom I talked with as a group.

I also met some young men in their early twenties at the Frankfurt temple. I saw them during dinner on a Sunday, and approached them, asking if they would be willing to talk with me. This was a group of four friends in their early twenties. They agreed, and I was able to talk to them for over an hour in the temple meeting room.

Getting women's perspectives presented yet another challenge. Early in my research process, I had assumed that I would talk to men and women. My assumption was based on previous research I had conducted among Asian Indians in the United States, in which I had no problems speaking with to both sexes, with women being particularly apt to share their experiences and thoughts more openly than men. However, I soon discovered, as have other scholars (e.g. Gans, 1999; Goodkind & Deacon, 2004; Smith, 2009), that gaining access to women in some communities is difficult, particularly in societies where men are considered the voice of the society. Mr. Desi's list gave me the first clue of this challenge, because as I mentioned earlier, the list contained only names of men, most of whom were elderly, and these were presented to me as the voice of authority about Afghan Hindus.

During the first few phone calls I made from Mr. Desi's list, if a woman picked up the phone and I began describing my project, she would give the phone to her husband or ask me to call back at a later time. On one occasion I asked a man I had set up an interview with, if I could also speak with his wife. He replied, "*Woh kuch nai jaanti*" (She doesn't know anything). When interviews occurred in the home, I seldom had a chance to interview women. The women were generally busy in the kitchen, appearing only to provide a steady supply of food as the man of the house and I talked. Occasionally they joined us for a few minutes but seldom participated in the

conversation. A few women who tried to participate often received a verbal or nonverbal sign from the husband to remain silent, or the husband continued to talk, ignoring her comments. When I visited homes, young people seldom spoke in front of elders. If I found an opportunity to talk to the woman alone, she would usually fall silent when the husband walked in, which meant that the only way I could hear the voices of the women and youth was to talk to them when older male members were not present. On one occasion, an elderly man who was observing me talking to some women in the temple called me aside and told me I was making a mistake talking to the women because according to him, not only did they not know anything, they would “mislead” me.

Being a woman myself certainly helped me in gaining access to women’s voices. However, I had to be careful how I worded my request. If I said something like, “I would like to talk to you about your life in Afghanistan and your move to Germany”, they would say, “I don’t know anything. You should talk to my husband (or son).” I soon understood that the best way for me to get women’s perspectives was to have conversations when I met them on the train from Frankfurt Main Station to the temple. Many of the women I saw regularly at the temple rode the train, and I had many opportunities to chat with them as we walked the mile from the station to the temple. At first I asked them simple questions that anyone might ask when getting acquainted, such as where they lived, how many children they had, when they came to Germany. As I got to know these women, I felt comfortable asking them about different aspects of their lives.

There were two occasions where I had opportunities for in-depth interviews with women. One was Mrs. Swami, who was the wife of one of the founders of the Hamburg temple. Her husband was a physician and extremely busy and he asked me to talk to his wife at their clinic. The other in-depth interview occurred at the Hamburg temple when Prem, the manager of the temple introduced me two elderly women, Maya and Ratna, who were initially hesitant but opened up when I assured them of confidentiality and that

they were free to refuse answering any question that they did not feel comfortable addressing.

Another way in which I heard women's voices was in group settings. For example, I once mentioned to Raj's wife that I would like to hear more women's perspectives. Mrs. Raj volunteered to get a group of women together for a "chat", stating that it was less intimidating for them to talk in a group than in a formal interview setting. This group was made up of elderly and young women who met with me one Sunday after service and dinner. The mix of ages made it possible for me to hear different generational perspectives, and even the viewpoints of women from the same family (e.g. sisters, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law). In this way, I accomplished my objective of talking to people outside Mr. Desi's list.

### The Setting

My research took place mainly in two settings, the temple, and the home. Occasionally I met participants for interviews in other settings. For example, I met some young women in their twenties, in coffee shops; Kishan, who worked in a car dealership suggested I spend the day with him at the dealership and he would talk to me in between customers. In the evening he took me to his home to meet his family. I stayed the night in their house and had the opportunity to talk to his parents and his wife. However, the vast majority of interviews and conversations took place in the Frankfurt and Hamburg temples, and homes in Frankfurt.

### Afghan Hindu Temples

Afghan Hindu temples in Germany are generally situated in industrial areas of the city. Germany has strict zoning restrictions as well as architectural requirements. Hence, these temples were housed in buildings that gave the casual onlooker no clue that it was a place of worship, except for a nondescript board that reads *Afghan Hindu Tempel* or *Asa Mai Tempel*. Inside, the temples were set up in a similar manner. The altar was housed in

the main hall on the second floor. Leading up to the altar was an aisle marked by a red carpet runner. The entire hall was covered with silk carpets with what I learned was a typical Afghan motif of geometric designs. There were no chairs in the temple hall because the traditional Hindu manner of worship involved sitting on the floor.

The temple in Köln, which was the newest among temples I visited, had marble flooring in the foyer that gave the entrance a certain grandeur. The temple in Hamburg was visibly older, both outside and inside. The main entrance to the building had worn out rugs; the narrow staircase leading upstairs also had worn out carpeting, and the walls needed painting. This was also the oldest of all the Afghan Hindu temples in Germany, the one in Köln being the newest. However, the prayer hall was similar to those in Köln and Frankfurt temples.

The altar in the main temple hall had a raised platform in the center with a short-legged table covered in red velvet cloth. On the table was a copy of either the *Ramayan* or *Bhagavad Gita*, both Hindu holy books. The priest, or an elder in the community would sit cross-legged on a cushion behind the platform facing the audience to read from the book or give a talk. Devotees visiting the temple could also sit and read silently as part of their worship.

On either side of the book were icons of the main Hindu gods – *Hanuman*, *Krishna & Radha*, *Durga*, *Ram Parivar*, and *Ganesh*. *Lord Shiva* and his consort *Parvati* were generally depicted as residing in Mount *Kailash*, their traditional abode described in Hindu mythology, and a place of pilgrimage in the Himalayas. This scene was enhanced with spotlights that made the scene come alive.

The Frankfurt temple had photos on the pillars near the altar, of spiritual teachers (*gurus*) that Afghan Hindus followed, as well as that of Guru Gobind Singh of Sikhism. One of the temples in Köln had a separate altar for the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy book of the Sikh religion. When I asked a member of the board about the unusual appearance of a Sikh holy book in a Hindu temple, which I was not used to seeing, he replied that

this was done to be inclusive of everyone. Hindus and Sikh communities had been close to one another in Afghanistan. Although they had separate places of worship, it was not unusual for Hindus and Sikhs to intermarry, and by including the Sikh holy book, Afghan Hindus in Germany wished to acknowledge that connection.

In all Afghan Hindu temples, a devotee entering the temple first covered his or her head. Women covered their heads with the fabric they wore on top of their *salwar kameez*, the traditional dress of loose pants and a tunic. Men covered their heads with handkerchiefs. There was usually a basket at the entrance with square pieces of cloth knotted at the four corners that served as a makeshift cap for those who might not have something with which to cover their heads. The devotee then proceeded down the aisle to the altar, kneeled, touching the forehead to the ground; this practice was known as *mathaa tekna*. Some would sit cross-legged for a few minutes and pray, then stand in front of each god to pray and then proceed to the *Shivalay* or the section with Lord Shiva, after which they would come around the altar in clockwise direction and sit on the carpets facing the gods. As a Hindu, I was familiar with most of these practices. Others, I watched and learned.

The worship hall was separated by gender where men sat on one side and women on the other side of the aisle. As soon as they sat down, people would acknowledge their friends, greeting each other and enquiring about their families.

In Afghan Hindu temples the timings of attendance varied depending on the day of the week. Tuesdays are considered auspicious and are designated for the god *Hanuman*. People began coming in at 1:00 p.m. and first went to the altar for *mathaa tekna*. They would then proceed to the kitchen adjoining the dining room in the basement or first floor. The kitchen was open everyday and there was usually someone managing it. Usually there was some type of food available such as lentils and rice. Some devotees would eat, drink tea and chat for a while.

At 2:00 p.m. women would go upstairs to the hall and begin singing devotional music. There was no particular order as to who sang. There were one or two women who were the main singers who would begin the proceedings after which others would take turns leading. The singing was done mainly by women who sat in a group in the front part of the temple. The men generally listened. One woman generally played the *dholak*, the traditional drum played with both hands. Another woman would sit on the other side of the drum both propping the drum with her folded legs and hitting the wooden top of the drum with a spoon or stick to keep a steady rhythm. I recognized some of these songs, while others were unfamiliar to me. I was told that some were traditional tunes that were sung in Afghanistan; others were ones they had picked up from popular devotional music collections from India. By 4:30 more people would trickle in, as they got off from work. By 6:00 p.m. there would be about a 100 people. As more people came in, the singing would get louder, as more people joined in.

The women who came at 1:00 p.m. were generally elderly and not employed. They would meet up at the Frankfurt main station and take the train to come to the temple. The same group also came on Sundays. The format of the program on Sundays was similar but the timings were different. The singing would begin at noon. On Tuesdays and Sundays the singing was followed by a scriptural reading by the priest and chanting of prayers in Sanskrit, followed by *arti* or closing prayers. Only the priest chanted from the scriptures, while everyone sang the *arti*. The final prayer was the *ardaas*, a more informal colloquial prayer in the local vernacular that sounded more like a direct appeal to the gods, rather than the more formal chanting from the scriptures. The appeal was simple, praising the gods for their compassion, invoking their blessings for all assembled. Only one person, generally the priest, said the *ardaas*.

On some Sundays, special guests, for example a holy man from India, gave a talk and blessings. The crowd was much larger when there were special guests, than on regular Sundays. After the conclusion of worship, at about 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays, and

4:00 p.m. on Sundays, people made their way to the dining room for food which generally consisted of rice, bread, lentils, and a vegetable, made by volunteers. Both men and women helped in the temple kitchen. Families signed up to cook, and the Sunday meal was generally more elaborate, especially if the sponsoring family was celebrating a special event like an anniversary.

During the meal and afterwards, people sat around drinking tea, and talking to one another, visiting and catching up. In the Hamburg temple I saw older men sitting in a corner of the large dining hall playing cards, while women generally sat and talked in either Kandhari or Kabli, depending on which part of Afghanistan they were from. These were the two main dialects spoken by Afghan Hindus among themselves, although everyone who had grown up in Afghanistan also knew Farsi and Urdu. The children generally spoke German with one another, and Kabli or Kandhari with their parents. Many spoke Hindi as well.

Playing cards in a temple struck me as rather unusual, however, when I asked one of the people about this, they quickly clarified that they were not playing for money, which constructed it as harmless fun rather than as gambling. I understood from observing these proceedings at the temple, that not only was the worship important to those who attended, but the social aspect was equally important. The dining hall gave me further opportunities for observation and conversations. The kitchen manager came to know me quite well and would make special *dhoodhwali chai* (tea with milk) because he knew Indians preferred that to the green tea that Afghan Hindus drank.

### Afghan Hindu Homes

The homes that I visited were sometimes apartments, sometimes single family homes, some large, some small. Those who lived on government aid generally lived in one-bedroom apartments whereas the employed people, generally had nicer homes. I

visited two physicians who had larger well-furnished homes with nice gardens. Homes pointed to emerging differences in class among Afghan Hindus in Germany.

Regardless of the size of the home, I enjoyed the generous hospitality of Afghan Hindus wherever I went. I learned to eat a light breakfast or lunch the day I knew I was going to visit an Afghan Hindu home for an interview. There was always a steady supply of food and my hosts insisted that I try everything. If I declined, they would interpret my response as disliking their food asking, “*Kyon apko humara khana acha nai laga?*” (Why? Don’t you like our food)? By using the words “our food” they also made a distinction between Afghan cuisine and Indian cuisine. Although the food was similar in some ways, such as the use of bread, vegetables, mutton, and yogurt, the preparations were different. The curries had less gravy than Indian food. Indian food tends to be hot and spicy, and so my hosts would often comment that the food was probably not as spicy enough for me. On the occasions where I stayed in Afghan Hindu homes, I had the opportunity to observe the varieties of fresh bread (*roti*) they made. These were different from the Indian *roti*. I learned that they were Afghan specialties. Because I was Indian, and most Indians are vegetarians, my hosts would always check with me before serving any meat. Most Afghan Hindus eat lamb or chicken but not beef or pork. Some people checked with me over the phone when I called for directions, about my food preferences; others would ask before serving me. After an array of snacks with tea, during which the interview was unceremoniously interrupted as the hostess urged me to eat, dinner would be served.

After dinner, Afghan Hindus did not offer sweets for dessert. Instead they preferred an array of fresh fruits, followed by green tea. As they cut the fruits, sometimes my hosts would recall the orchards they owned in Afghanistan and the varieties of fruits they had enjoyed, some of which were unique to Afghanistan and not available elsewhere. Unlike Indians, who drink black tea with milk and sugar, Afghan Hindus drink green tea, without milk and sugar, and in glasses, not in cups. One woman told me



a funny incident during their sojourn in India when their Indian neighbors concluded that the light brown liquid they observed their Afghan neighbors drinking every day in glasses, was whisky. Only when the neighbors came to know them, did they realize it was tea. These stories, told with humor, distinguished Afghan Hindus as a community, while also positioning me as someone from outside the community. If my status as an Indian and Hindu helped me gain access into their lives, these ways of distinguishing themselves from Indians reminded me that I was there as their guest.

### Research Methods

As is customary in ethnographic studies, I used a combination of participant observation, interviews, and fieldnotes to conduct my study. Participant observation occurred mostly in the temple, where I could participate in the activities. In homes I went mainly on invitation. On one occasion I also had the opportunity to observe an extended family as they interacted during a family get-together, over the course of a weekend.

#### Participant Observation

As Conquergood (1991) observes, “The obligatory rite-of-passage for all ethnographers – doing fieldwork – involves getting one’s body immersed in the field for a period of time sufficient to enable one to participate inside the culture” (p. 180). Singing at the temple, walking and chatting with the women informally during the train ride to and from the temple, and participating in the worship, allowed me to become a part of the cultural milieu of Afghan Hindus. I became a participant to the extent that my absence began to be noted if I didn’t make it on a particular day. The women would ask the next time they saw me why I hadn’t come the previous time, or comment that they had missed my singing.

Participant observation at the temple mainly gave me opportunities to learn about Afghan Hindus in a communal setting. For example, despite men dismissing women as being ignorant, or women characterizing themselves as “not knowing anything”, my

observations led me to believe that there were domains in which women's voices prevailed. One such domain was the devotional singing. If a man wanted to sing he asked their permission in the moment. However, men seldom got a chance to sing because women would generally not pause long enough between songs for the men to ask, nor would they turn towards the men's side of the hall to ask if anyone would like to sing. Some men even complained that women monopolized the singing, but I never saw anyone challenge the women directly. It is possible that this was because many of these women were elderly and the younger men in particular, did not want to be disrespectful.

Participant observation helped me learn indigenous terms used by Afghan Hindus to describe their migration, their identity in Afghanistan and in Germany, and some of the daily issues they faced. The ways in which they spoke of their migration and their lives became the basis of interviews I conducted in the final phase of my research. I was also able to learn about cultural practices that were taken-for-granted by members of the community, or those that participants might consider too mundane to mention in the course of a conversation. For example, I noticed that when there was a death in the community, the family would have a gathering for formal mourning, called *baitak*, at the temple. Being familiar with Hindu protocol around death I knew that it was generally not permissible to have ceremonies around death at a temple. When I asked people about this practice of *baitak*, I learned this modification of tradition had occurred after migration. In Afghanistan the *baitak*, took place in the home of the deceased. Lack of space in Germany and complaints from neighbors about noise, prevented the continuation of this practice in the home. The temple as communal space became the place in which both weddings and ceremonies around death were held. Thus participant observation led to insights that would not have been possible by other means.

As a Hindu, I was familiar with many of the Afghan Hindu customs, such as not wearing footwear inside the temple, dressing appropriately in *salwar kameez* (long tunic with pants), sitting on the floor, and at least some of the protocols of worship. Because of

the commonalities among Hindu modes of worship, I did not have to go to any special effort to learn proper conduct in a temple, however, conduct that was unique to Afghan Hindus, I learned through observation.

A practice I observed as a requirement was keeping one's head covered at all times when I was in the main worship hall. While I had seen women in Northern India cover their heads with the upper cloth that they wear on top of the *salwar kameez*, I had never seen men cover their heads. While some of the participants explained it as a sign of respect to god, the priest, who was from India, explained to me that this was not a Hindu custom, and that this was due to Muslim influence on this community.

Participant observation also made me aware of gender-based codes of conduct. For example, in keeping with gender restrictions in the Afghan Hindu community, I became self-conscious about how I interacted with men. In the Indian and American communities I belong to, I am used to speaking freely with men. I understood from watching Afghan Hindus interact with one another that as a woman, approaching men openly, to have informal conversations, would not be appropriate conduct on my part. Men and women sat on different sides of the aisle in the temple hall. They only socialized with their own gender in the dining room. I seldom saw men and women casually chatting with one another or socializing.

As a participant observer, the ethnographer pays attention to mundane events such as how people greet each other, or how they introduce a newcomer, or how people talk about events, or the stories they tell (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995). For example, I noticed that when an Afghan Hindu introduced me to others, they seldom mentioned the name of the people being introduced to me; instead they named the relationship through which they were connected, for example, *yeh meri bhateji hai* (she is my niece), or *yeh mere bhai ka ladka hai* (this is my brother's son). I not only learned the importance of relationships but also how the individual's identity was tied to relational identities even in mundane routines such as introductions.

Everything I observed, I wrote down. Ethnographers routinely write fieldnotes to describe their surroundings. Field notes provided a valuable tool for capturing the social life of Afghan Hindus at the temple. As Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) note, “Attending to details of interaction enhances the possibilities for the researcher to see beyond fixed, static entities, to grasp the active doing of social life.” (p. 14). I regularly wrote field notes when I was traveling from the temple to my apartment, jotting down details from the scenes and interactions I had just witnessed at the temple, announcements made at the end of service, and casual talk among people. With practice I was even able to remember scraps of conversations I heard that I would jot down at the first opportunity I got.

On one occasion, the Chabras invited me to a family celebration in Köln. I traveled with them by train, and spent three days with their nieces and nephews from other parts of Europe (Netherlands and the U.K.). Mr. Chabra told them I was “writing a book” and would talk to them over the course of the weekend. Throughout the weekend I had the opportunity to be a participant observer in a family setting.

Besides observing, listening, and keeping fieldnotes, I used the “unstructured interview” (Fife, 2005, p. 1) also known as the ethnographic interview, to engage in casual, informal conversations with people in a naturally occurring situation.

### Interview

Lindlof (1995) describes the ethnographic interview as “the most informal, conversational, and spontaneous form of interview. The ethnographic interview often does not even seem like an interview to the actor. Typically, a casual exchange of remarks leads to questions related to the researcher’s interest.” (p. 170). I used this form of interview liberally during my visits to the temple when I engaged in conversations with people at meals, during the course of which I would ask them questions such as, “How long have you been in Germany?” or “When did you come to Germany”, and

“How do you like it here?” Generally these questions opened up further opportunities for me to ask about their family and community.

While these kinds of interviews occurred more-or-less spontaneously, some of the interviews were arranged more formally where I called and set up a time to talk. These interviews occurred at a time and place specified by the participant, and lasted about 60 to 90 minutes. However, there were some that lasted even 4 hours. The interviews were open-ended and I did not use an interviewing schedule. Sometimes, the hosts set the direction of the conversation; at other times they expected me to set the direction. I let them set the pace and length of the conversations. It was not uncommon for the conversation to continue over lunch or dinner. For example, I “interviewed” Mr. Chabra, whose name was on Mr. Desi’s list, and identified Mr. Desi as someone I “must talk to”. Mr. Chabra was an important, well-respected member of the community and the founder of the Afghan Hindu temple in Frankfurt. When I phoned Mr. Chabra, he invited me to his house. He asked me to accompany his wife who was going to visit the temple on that Tuesday. At their home I for the first two hours of conversation was more like an interview that I audio-taped, after which we had dinner. The conversation continued over dinner. After dinner the couple insisted I stay the night at their house, because it was already 11 p.m. and they did not want me to travel alone<sup>7</sup>. I accepted their offer. The next morning the wife invited me to join her for an early morning walk, which I gladly did knowing that that was my opportunity to get to know her and learn about her experiences. This was the beginning of a friendship that we have to this day. As I got to know Mrs. Chabra, she would tell me many things that she would not talk about in front of her husband, including family problems. I became a frequent visitor to their home.

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<sup>7</sup> Invitations to stay the night were not uncommon when I visited homes, particularly if it was late. Afghan Hindus are not only very hospitable, but also protective of women and they did not want me traveling alone late at night.

At the beginning of interviews I generally followed techniques described by Spradley (1979): (a) stating the explicit purpose of my project and of the interview and seeking consent, (b) offering explanations about my research and also about why I had chosen to conduct this study, (c) explaining who I was and where I was from, (d) asking permission to record the interview, and (e) asking questions.

Based on Spradley's recommendations I began interviews with *grand tour questions*. Grand tour questions are *descriptive questions* that ask the participant to describe a place or event and are broad in nature (e.g. "Could you describe what life was like in Afghanistan?", and "Can you describe for me why and how you left Afghanistan?"). These were supplemented by *mini tour questions*, which are also descriptive but intended to capture a "smaller unit of experience" (p. 88), such as "Can you describe what family life was like in Afghanistan?" The interpretation of "family" was left to the participant. A second type of question was the *structural question* (Spradley, 1979, p. 120), which usually seeks an explanation from the participant (e.g. "What were the kinds of issues you faced when you arrived in Germany?")

A third type of question is the *contrast question* (Spradley, 1979, p. 65), aimed at understanding differences between two or more things. In a diaspora the main contrast that arises is between "here" and "there" (Safran, 1991). This contrast occurred in my interviews even without a contrast question being asked. However, in some cases I specifically asked for a comparison. For example when Afghan Hindus described conflict in the family or in the community in Germany, and constructed it as a consequence of migration, I would ask "but conflict must have existed in the family in Afghanistan also, did it not?" Depending on the response, I followed this up with "How was that different or similar to what you described here?" or if they denied that there was conflict in Afghanistan, I followed up with, "Why do you think there was no conflict there?" Generally, I did not have to ask many questions during interviews, except when I did not understand something, or I wanted them to elaborate on a topic so I could capture their

words. As stated earlier, I let the person I was speaking with set the pace and share whatever they considered important to share with me. I generally assumed the stance that Spradley (1979) recommends:

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (p. 34)

This stance was useful for me, particularly when talking to men; as a woman who was more educated than they were, I had to be careful not to appear too aggressive or knowledgeable. Men in particular readily responded to this stance because from their perspective women were expected to be ignorant<sup>8</sup>.

It is important to note here, that the interview is one type of speech event very different from the speech events that occur naturally as natives interact with one another. I was well aware that the interview is a speech event that is constructed by the interviewer and the participant, in a context, for the express purpose of having a directed conversation about specific events, issues and topics. In other words the interviewer “stands as a co-participant in the construction of a discourse” (Briggs, 1986, p. 25). However, these interviews were based on interactions I had observed and listened to in the first two phases of research. These directed conversations helped me gain insight into whether the things I had observed were indeed important to the community. The conversations also helped me capture specific terms used to make sense of their migration and personal relationships.

I provide a list of people I interviewed in Appendix A. The age of the participants in my study ranged from 18 to 75. The age in most cases is an approximation because

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<sup>8</sup> On one occasion in the office at the Hamburg temple, I was waiting to speak with the manager, when I got into a discussion about Hinduism with a group of men gathered in the office. Afterwards one of the men commented how impressed he was with my knowledge, saying, “I have never met an intelligent woman”.

Afghan Hindus, particularly the older people did not always know their real age. As one of my participants explained to me, precision in age was difficult to ascertain because in Afghanistan the date and time of birth of children was not always recorded; when age had to be reported it was determined by reference to important events that took place around the time someone was born, not in terms of calendar date. Sometimes age was falsified to avoid certain repercussions. For example the fear of having male children recruited for the military in Afghanistan had led parents to report a lower age for male children.

In another case, one young woman explained that she was married when she was sixteen, as her family was preparing to leave Afghanistan. A friend advised her not to put down her real age because in Germany she would be considered underage for marriage. Fearing that her marriage would not be recognized, she had put down her age as twenty. As a result of these factors, I seldom received a straightforward answer when I asked for someone's age. Therefore I report actual age only in cases in which the participant was able to state it clearly; the rest are approximations. Similarly, I learned early in my interactions with Afghan Hindus that lack of education was a sensitive topic in this community, in which men had no more than a 10<sup>th</sup> grade education, and women anywhere from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to a 6<sup>th</sup> grade level. Unless their level of education came up naturally in the conversation, I did not directly ask them about it. I was also aware that I was far more educated than my participants, and did not wish to make that obvious by asking them about their education level.

#### Returning from the field

I left Germany on August 13<sup>th</sup> 2008 to return to the United States. When I returned from the field in August 2008 I had some of the interviews transcribed and had conducted a preliminary analysis to extract the main themes. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out, "in ethnography the analysis of data is not a distinct stage of research" (p. 205). Instead, analytic moves are made throughout the research in an



iterative process. Being away from the field gave me an opportunity to reflect on my data.

### Member Checking

I returned to Germany in December 2008 for a final visit. I went back with identified themes for “scrutiny of the persons who provided the information or counterpart persons” (p. 236). Wherever possible I spoke with people I had talked to during my earlier visits. In other cases I talked to new people I met. In either case the idea was to establish a thorough understanding of issues important to the community, cross-checking the validity of the data collected before, as well as remaining open to counterpoints or their reflections on the themes.

### Data Analysis

The analytic process began with transcription of interviews, and typing up field notes. Because all of my interviews were conducted in Hindi, I typed up the interviews verbatim in Hindi, translating into English only quotes that I chose to cite in the dissertation.

As described earlier, my research took place in stages, and I transcribed at least some of the interviews before going back into the field each time. Each transcript was assigned an identifying code beginning with IN followed by a three digit number, for example, IN001 for interviews and FN001 for field notes.

I analyzed the transcripts and field notes based on an open-coding scheme developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), which consisted of reading through the data, identifying categories and grouping data into those categories in an iterative process. With this constant comparative method, new data was compared to categories already derived and was either assigned the same code number or became part of a new category. Since this type of coding is an emergent process, I added, combined, revised, and refined

coding categories throughout the analysis, until I was satisfied that I had captured the different variations in the data, and that no new codes remained.

I developed code categories using Spradley's (1979) domain analysis of, (a) X is a kind of Y (strict inclusion), (b) X is a result of Y (cause-effect), (c) X is a reason for doing Y (rationale), (d) X is a place for doing Y (location-in-action) (e) X is used for Y (function), (f) X is a way to do Y, (means-ends), and (g) X is a step in Y (stage), and (h) X is an attribute of Y (attribution). For example, I developed a code based on location-in-action, when members of the temple committee described how they were attempting to bring the community together through the temple; I coded these statements as "Temple as a place to be a community". Similarly, when participants described German welfare laws as the reason for the break up of the traditional multi-generational, multi-member household of Afghanistan, they were offering a rationale that was coded as, "Law as a reason for changed meaning of family".

As the analysis proceeded, I maintained a codebook as recommended by Fife (2005), with the code number, transcript number, and page number on which it occurred. I continually updated the codebook as I proceeded with the coding. When a section of text contributed to more than one question, it was given two or more codes.

Once the coding was complete, the coded segments were organized into larger coherent systems or themes. For example, the initial coding category that contained statements such as, "We obeyed our elders unquestioningly", and "there we looked up to our elders", were combined to form a theme of "respect for elders in the community".

During analysis, I also paid close attention to taken-for-granted assumptions in casual conversations that I had captured in my fieldnotes, to see how they fit within a larger system of meaning. For example, the men commenting on women as, "They don't know anything", at a simple level may be construed as a piece of information about women. However, this utterance must be understood in relation to other textual segments such as "In Afghanistan, girls were not sent to school when they attained puberty", and

“Women stayed home and took care of the family, cooked and cleaned, while the men went out and worked or tended to their business”, and “our women have very little education”, which suggest that women had a specific place in Afghan society that did not include the outside world or male domains. After the coding was complete, I looked for patterns and recurrent themes, paying particular attention to those that referred to personal relationships, choosing the ones that were most salient to the people I spoke with. Once analysis was complete, I began writing.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described the methods I used to gather and analyze my data. I used a variety of methods that complemented one another, based upon the segment of population that I wished to hear from. I wanted to hear from women, youth, as well as educated and less educated Afghan Hindu men. Data collection also required cultural sensitivity in terms of my gender and education in comparison to my participants. I described the phases of my data collection over the span of three years. The analysis of data proceeded using qualitative coding methods. In the next three chapters I present the findings and my analysis.

CHAPTER IV  
*BIKHARNA* –WAYS OF SPEAKING ABOUT  
 MIGRATION AND COMMUNITY

Yes we are scattered, like a broken string of pearls. *Bikharna* also means that something has disappeared, gone forever (*khatam*). Really, we were so together (*ek saath*) in the family and community; parents, children, even in small houses; even when sons got married and had children of their own. There was love among people... That is lost. When the parents got old, we took care of them. I mean there was a spirit of sacrifice there. When we reached India, even then we had that. Now that we are in Europe, we have this problem of *bikharna*, because in Germany the law is such that it divides us. (Ahuja, 2008)

*Bikharna*, which literally means scattering, was a common way of speaking about their migration among Afghan Hindus. I heard this term from the very first time I met Afghan Hindus, and it came up not just in interviews but also in casual talk, in conversations about the difficulties they faced in Germany, and when talking about relational issues. The phrase I heard commonly was, “*Hum tho bikhar gaye na*” (We have become scattered, you see”) or “*Hum tho bikhare hue hain, kaheen ke naheen rahe*” (“We are scattered, we don’t belong anywhere”).

In its literal sense *bikharna* described dispersal to different parts of the world and dispersal within Germany. However, more nuanced meanings of *bikharna* emerged. In the above quote, Ahuja’s analogy of a string of pearls is indicative of the closeness of this community in Afghanistan, while the “broken string” constructs scattering as loss of that closeness. In this chapter, I describe *bikharna* as a way of speaking about migration. In describing *bikharna*, Afghan Hindus described not only the importance of community, but also about what it meant to be community.

Three meanings of *bikharna* emerged from Afghan Hindu ways of speaking. One meaning referred to loss of closeness due to physical distances, created by placement of refugees in different cities by the German government. A second meaning of *bikharna* referred to relational fragmentation in the community, which was constructed as loss of *pyaar* (love), *jude rehna* (remaining unified), and *aadar* (respect), replaced by *laalach*

(greed), competition, and selfishness, after migration. A third meaning of *bikharna* emerged when Afghan Hindus spoke about loss of traditions and religious identity.

These ways of speaking revealed some of the characteristics of diaspora as described by Safran (1991). As Afghan Hindus spoke of loss in Germany, they simultaneously idealized their past in Afghanistan. Similarly, problematic relations with the host society emerged when Afghan Hindus attributed cultural loss to the freedom (*azaadi*) of German society, which was constructed as having a negative influence on Afghan Hindus. Those who saw themselves as leaders in the community feared that the Hindu identity this community had preserved over centuries, in a predominantly Islamic country like Afghanistan, would disappear in Germany in a matter of decades.

In this chapter, I begin by describing the discursive construction of *bikharna* as scattering across space when Afghan Hindus left Afghanistan and their dispersal to different parts of the country when they arrived in Germany. Next, I describe constructions of *bikharna* as loss of relational closeness in Germany. In the final section, I present Afghan Hindu ways of speaking about *bikharna* as loss of traditions and cultural codes. All these ways of speaking about migration were informed by their past in Afghanistan some of which was constructed as the ideal, and a present and future that was constructed in terms of loss.

### *Bikharna* as Scattering Across Space

I met Rajesh in the Hamburg temple. He was 60 years old and volunteered in the temple office. I had several conversations with him, in between the many phone calls he received. In one of these conversations, he described how and why Afghan Hindus left Afghanistan:

No one knew that things would become so bad in Afghanistan. We used to live such happy lives, everyone, regardless of whether we were rich or poor. Everyone had something. We [our family] had a flourishing textile business. We had 9 shops, and three fruit orchards. Our houses were huge with 20 to 22 rooms. We had huge families, great living. But as things began to become worse,

people's hearts broke, and we began leaving, wherever we could go, through whatever means we could use to get out of there, scattering to different places. Some of us went to Pakistan, others to India, some to Russia. Most Hindus went to India. The United Nations gave us money for five years, afterwards they stopped giving money to Afghan Hindus, saying, "This is your country, stay, and work." But there was no work available. Those who had been able to get their money out of Afghanistan got passports and got out, to Germany and other places (Rajesh, 2008)

In describing the various routes out of Afghanistan, Rajesh describes the process through which Afghan Hindus became "scattered". He describes *bikharna* as "scattering to different places". India, Pakistan, and Russia were intermediate destinations, while countries such as Germany, the U.K., Belgium, Holland, and the United States became permanent destinations. Like Rajesh, many Hindus lived in India for a period of five to ten years before they left for Germany and other countries.

Not everyone in a family was able to leave together at the same time. For example, Mrs. Swami and her husband left as early as 1985, even before the advent of the Mujahideen. Dr. Swami, a physician, left the country with his wife, children, and mother, when he was tipped off that he was going to be recruited by an Islamic militant group against the Soviet army. Mrs. Swami described the experiences of her family in this way:

We [husband, child and mother-in-law] came through Pakistan. First we were in Pakistan for 10 months until we got passports. We had to get Pakistani passports. First we became Pakistani refugees then got a card there and worked while we waited for our passports. Then we came here [Germany]. Our visa was for London, but our agent told us, when you get to Frankfurt, get off the plane and pretend to be lost. My mother and my brother came through India later. First my mother got out, then my oldest brother with his children, and then my younger one with his daughters. He has two daughters. One cannot talk the other cannot walk because of the trauma from all the bombing that happened in Afghanistan. When my younger sister left she was pregnant, near term. They had to leave by truck. Two or three families bought a truck, packed a few bags and left by night. In her condition, how she reached Amritsar [India] was a miracle, only with the help of god. As soon as my sister arrived my mom said, she wept at her condition. Then the next day my sister delivered [the baby]. My b-in-law had been shot. He was in coma for a long time and also lost his hearing (Mrs. Swami, 2008).

Almost every Afghan Hindu had a similar story to tell, of family members being separated from one another, and hazards on the way. Like Mrs. Swami, most people described leaving secretly, at the dead of night. Everyone knew someone who had suffered physical injury or mental trauma.

Maya, who was probably in her late sixties, described why she and her sons left Afghanistan:

We left when the fighting began between the Mujahid and Russians. The Mujahid used to forcefully take young men to serve in the army. Then they said, "We will release you if you are willing to work". You know what kind of work? That of removing the corpses, broken bodies, body parts splintered into pieces, swollen bodies, some didn't have heads, some didn't have feet. My one son was in the army and he became mentally ill because of this. Things were particularly bad in Kandahar, so we went to Kabul, but conditions in Kabul also became really bad. We left Afghanistan much earlier than most people. We went to India but we wouldn't get ration [government food stamps], and we would go hungry on some days. We couldn't survive there. There was no work. We had lived in such prosperity in Afghanistan. We had houses, we had gardens, we had our own businesses. In India the climate was so hot. We couldn't bear it. So slowly one by one we came to Germany, individually, sometimes in pairs, as advised by agents. Once one person got out, he got another person to come and so on. Now all my family is here. The son who is mentally ill lives with me. I came to Germany in 2001 so it has been 7 years. (Maya, 2008).

The vivid description of conditions in Afghanistan during the Mujahideen rule and the indignities people were subjected to, the mental trauma, physical injuries, not only conveyed the extent of their suffering, but also repeatedly made the point that their departure from Afghanistan was a result of war and not voluntary migration. Afghan Hindus frequently said, "*Humen yahaan aane ki kya jaroorat thi*" (What was our need to come to this country?), or "We left because our lives were in danger", to emphasize that they did not leave Afghanistan out of choice or in search of better economic prospects; they left because they could no longer live in Afghanistan under the circumstances described by Maya. Therefore, theirs was not voluntary migration but more akin to

displacement. Descriptions of their affluence in Afghanistan emphasized that their departure from Afghanistan was a result of politics and not motivated by economics.

Fabri (2000) points out the subtle distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration when she states that, "...*migrants* are primarily motivated by economics, and the *displaced*, by politics" (p. 57). Afghan Hindu constructions of their migration emphasized displacement, which I suspected may have been important to gain refugee status in Germany.

Leaving Afghanistan occurred in phases. Due to their reluctance to leave their homes and businesses, sometimes the head of the family stayed back in Afghanistan, while the rest of the family went to India, with the idea of returning to Afghanistan when the situation improved. Kanha, a 75-year old man, was one such person. He had moved his family to India as early as 1968, during peaceful times, to give his children a "good education". He remained in Kabul, traveling back and forth between New Delhi and Kabul. However, when the infighting among warring factions of Mujahideen escalated in the early nineties, he decided to leave. However, even then he had hopes of returning. He moved all valuables such as gold and jewelry from his home to his *dukaan* (shop), locking them up in a safe he had there. He said, "When I pulled the shutters down, I thought I was coming back. None of us dreamed that we would never go back". I asked him what happened to those belongings, to which he replied:

Who knows? All our shops and homes were taken over by the Taliban; they probably got it. It's all God's will, he gives and he takes. People told me later that I should go back and sell the business but I didn't want to risk it. By then things were really bad. They would kidnap people and kill them to get the money. What I would have made in the sale, I would have paid for with my life. (Kanha, 2008).

Kanha tried to continue his business in India, but he said it was difficult, "The business climate in Afghanistan was very different from that of India. In Afghanistan, there was a lot of trust, and you could start something with a small capital. Not so in India, and you can't trust anyone there. So I gave it up." These narratives alluding to conditions in India



emphasize their desire to settle in India and being unable to do so. Leaving India was thus constructed as lack of choice.

Kanha's son left for Germany, and Kanha and his wife followed in 1997. His two daughters, who were married, lived in India. I asked Kanha how he liked living in Germany, to which he replied:

Well, I don't like it here. In Afghanistan we were together (*ek saath rehte the*), here we are broken up (*toot-phoot*). Even my own family, my son and we are here, my one daughter is in Munchen, two daughters in India, other family is elsewhere, scattered all over. (Kanha, 2008).

The original meaning of the word *diaspora*, of scattering over large spaces, is evident in all these accounts, as these Afghan Hindus described different members of the community and family leaving at different times, settling in different countries, or in different cities within Germany.

Although Germany was the final destination for many, the process of dispersal continued after Afghan Hindus arrived there. Kapoor, a man who was probably in his sixties, spoke about dispersal within Germany:

Before 1989 Germany gave anyone coming from Afghanistan a red-carpet welcome. Those who came at that time, were able to settle here without problems. But most of our people came after 1990. We had to go wherever they sent us because we were refugees. They sent us to refugee homes where there was vacancy. You couldn't say, "Oh my relatives are in Frankfurt so that's where I want to live". In this way also, we became scattered (Kapoor, 2008)

Kapoor's words, "before 1989", refers to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan when Western nations welcomed anyone who fled the communist regime. However, few Hindus left Afghanistan during that time. The vast majority of Hindus left only after 1990 when the Mujahideen, and later Taliban came to power. Kapoor mainly talks about the process of *bikharna* after arrival in Germany, attributing scattering to German asylum policy. According to German asylum laws, refugees were first placed in refugee homes based on availability. On rare occasions, new arrivals were assigned homes in the same

town as other Afghan Hindus, but for the most part, in an attempt to prevent enclaves, refugees were distributed around the country (Zulfacar, 1988). Adjusting to their new lives as refugees was difficult as Mrs. Swami described:

It was very difficult because we had lived in such huge homes in Kabul and to come here and stay in one room. When my mother came, she was used to such prosperous living there, and here she had two tiny rooms for herself and the children. It took 15 years for us to get a decent house for ourselves. Every Afghan Hindu has gone through such difficult times (Mrs. Swami, p. 10)

Although, many Afghan Hindus expressed gratitude to Germany for giving them asylum and aid, those who had thriving businesses and had been wealthy in Afghanistan found their refugee situation difficult to accept.

Poonam, a 40-year-old woman, I met in Frankfurt, with whom I had a number of conversations, described her situation when she arrived in Germany with her husband in 1990. Poonam was pregnant with her first child. By chance she and her husband were first assigned to a refugee home in a town where she had a relative who invited them over on weekends so that she “did not have to eat the awful food at the refugee home”. One day when she and her husband were visiting her relatives, they got a phone call from their neighbor at the refugee home asking them to return immediately because they were being moved to a different town. Poonam and her husband rushed back to pack their belongings and found out that they had been moved to a “far off place. I cried the whole night”, stated Poonam, “because the only people I knew in Germany was this family from back home. In the new town we knew no one. It was very lonely ...” (FN, 2008, p. 2). Like Poonam other Afghan Hindus described being placed in remote towns, with little access to their people.

Ashok, a man who was about sixty, living in Frankfurt with his wife, a married son, and grandchildren, described a similar experience when his niece arrived in the mid-90s:

You met my niece, she and her husband were sent off to a remote town. When her mother-in-law and sister-in-law arrived, they were

placed in Frankfurt. It took more than 10 years for them to all end up in one place, after they filed appeal upon appeal to the government. You could file a case, but sometimes the case didn't come up for review for years. Those who could afford it worked through a lawyer, those who couldn't, had to wait and hope. The other problem was that our people were mostly uneducated, and didn't know what to say, or how to answer questions to officials. They were fearful. Then there were language difficulties. These are also reasons how we became scattered (Ashok, p. 36).

Ashok, not only attributes scattering within Germany to asylum policies, he also attributes it to a lack of education among Afghan Hindus, and language problems. He went on to explain that different people in the community had different understanding of what policies meant; as a result, the information they gave to new arrivals was often misleading. Ashok said, "I told my niece that she could let the authorities know that she had family in Frankfurt, but someone else told her not to mention relatives; because of this wrong advice they had to face so much difficulty".

Moving closer to one another emerged as an important consideration in every one of these accounts, a point that is related to the meaning of community for Afghan Hindus. Kapoor said, "You couldn't say, 'Oh my relatives are in Frankfurt so that's where I want to live.'" Poonam's story recalls her feeling of loneliness because she was separated from the one family she knew, and Ashok's account of his niece's extraordinary efforts to get her family members to move closer to her, all speak to the importance of physical proximity to Afghan Hindus. Most Afghan Hindus gravitated towards Frankfurt, Hamburg or Köln, three of the largest concentrations of Afghan Hindu populations, as soon as they were able. They could move either with special permission from the government, or when they were employed and no longer dependent on welfare. As one young woman of 22, Rani, I met in Frankfurt, told me, "We lived in a small town outside Munich. There were no Hindus there, only Germans. It was very difficult for my parents not having a community. Only recently were they able to move to Frankfurt and now they are happy" (Rani, p. 19). It is clear from Rani's sentence that "community" specifically referred to Afghan Hindus, and moving closer to other Afghan Hindus was equated with

happiness. These accounts reveal a cultural premise that “community” meant living in close proximity to other Afghan Hindus. From other conversations I understood that this cultural premise was based on how community was defined in Afghanistan.

### Community means living together

In the quote with which I began this chapter, Ahuja talks about Afghan Hindus as a “string of pearls” that was “scattered”. A string implies being bound together and this is how Afghan Hindus described their community and social relationships in Afghanistan. The terms they used to describe togetherness were *sab ikatte rehte the* (we all lived together), *jude hue the* (we were connected), and *hum sangatith the* (we were cohesive). Scattering, on the other hand, implies force. Some people used *toot-phoot* or breaking up, and *idar-udar* or helket-skelter to describe the results of scattering. These terms constructed migration as forced, conjuring up the image of a string of pearls being forcefully pulled apart, with the beads scattering and rolling away unchecked. This image served to emphasize not only the involuntary nature of their migration from Afghanistan and the post-migration trauma of dispersal inside Germany, but also a nostalgic construction of communal life in Afghanistan in which Hindus were together and united.

Dr. Pyasa, a physician, and one of the very few Hindus who came to Germany in the seventies for higher education, explained to me that Hindus had always lived together in particular areas of the cities in Afghanistan:

Hindus [in Kabul] mostly lived in Shor Bazaar and Hindu Guzar [areas of the city]. Hindu Guzar was full of life, shopping, street vendors, lots to eat; people could easily spend two or more hours there. In our homes, we had servants do the cleaning, washing and so on. So we can say that Hindus had a good life there (Pyasa, 2008, p. 3).

Similarly, Hindus in Kandahar lived in enclaves known as *Kabli Bazaar* and *Shikarpuri Bazaar* (Mr. Chabra). Living in a community or *kuam*, meant living in close physical proximity. Another man I met, Das, who had written a book about important Hindu sites in Afghanistan, said, “Many of our temples were also in the area. In the old days, there

were huge gates that would shut at night so no outsiders could come in” (Das, p.5).

“Outsider” was generally used to refer to Muslims.

Kishan, who had left Afghanistan as a boy of 11, now in his thirties, also described the areas in Afghanistan where Hindus lived, adding, “It was perhaps natural that Hindus banded together because they lived in a Muslim country where they were a minority. Staying together meant safety” (Kishan, p. 33). Kanha confirmed this when said that there was danger (*khatra*) from the “outside” and because of this “our people were united (*sanghatith*)”. One strand of the string that bound them together in Afghanistan was the physical spaces they inhabited that buffered them from the larger society; a second strand was relational closeness.

#### *Bikharna* as Relational Fragmentation

There were several themes in descriptions of *bikharna* that spoke about a relational component rather than a spatial component, although scattering over space also impacted relationships. The loss of close physical proximity in Germany, contributed to lack of contact and hence loss of relational closeness among Afghan Hindus. However, there were other aspects to *bikharna* that constructed it as relational loss.

Ahuja, whose quote I began this chapter with, elaborated on the relational meaning of *bikharna*. My interview with him took place about halfway through my research project, after I had interviewed and spoken with several people. Although I met Ahuja as early as my second visit to Germany, I was unable to set up an interview with him until my final visit in December of 2008. This was an interview I sought eagerly because Ahuja had described himself to me during my first meeting with him as someone “who had toiled to bring this community together”. During my interview with him, I mentioned *bikharna* as a term I heard often in my conversations with Afghan Hindus. Ahuja elaborated on the term.

### Pyaar and Communal Bonding

According to Ahuja, *bikharna* was more than simply physical or spatial scattering:

The meaning of *bikharna* is not only scattering physically, but also, loss - loss of relationships, loss of mental capacity, you know the reference to someone's mental state as not quite being together (*jaise kehte hain na, vo bikhara hua hai*). And really, there we lived in such a way; we lived together. There was love between people. The community was cohesive. There was a spirit of sacrifice. When we reached India, we were still able to retain those relationships. Then we came to Europe, and the scattering began. (Ahuja, 2008, p. 2)

*Pyaar* (love) and a "spirit of sacrifice" formed another strand of the string that kept Afghan Hindus unified in Afghanistan. Loss of *pyaar* was something I heard from others, in references like, "There was love there. That love is no longer remains" (*vahan pe aapas mein pyaar thaa, vo pyaar ab nai raha*). *Pyaar* was constructed, not simply as a feeling, but as communal bonding enacted through generosity, sharing, and hospitality among Afghan Hindus. For example, Mrs. Chabra told me once that her family had owned many orchards in Afghanistan, and affluent families helped others less fortunate than themselves by sharing produce and fruits (Mrs. Chabra, 2008; p. 4). Similarly, Ashok told me, "If someone knew that a man had a daughter and he did not have the means to conduct a wedding, they would help out financially, and a third person would not even know. It would be handled so delicately that the person taking the help did not have to feel bad." (Ashok, 2008; p. 30).

Masterji who had been a school-teacher in the Hindu school in Kandahar, spoke about generosity, and the joy people took in helping one another *there*, lamenting the loss of that generosity *here*:

Now our people's eyes are constantly on their pocketbooks. In those days their first instinct was to give. In Afghanistan the first word that escaped people's mouths was – "*lo*" (please take), now it is "*dho*" – (give me). Our people have become selfish, greedy. (Masterji, 2008, p.11).

His choice of words such as “instinct” constructs “giving” as natural not as something a person had to think about, while “our people have become selfish” constructs selfishness as artificial, and “become”, constructs it as a new phenomenon. A culture based on “*lo*” (please take) was “now” replaced by a culture of “*dho*” (give me). This account also reveals that the cultural codes of homeland served as a yardstick for evaluation of conduct in the diaspora. The use of “now” further attributes these changes directly to migration. While Masterji did not offer an explanation for how migration led to people becoming “selfish”, others gave reasons for why this was happening.

### Competition within the Community

Besides the loss of *pyaar*, Ahuja described the pervasiveness of social comparison and competition within the Afghan Hindu community that had replaced the old unity:

The law here is such that it creates those divisions among people. For example, if a person who comes today, one law is applied to him, if a man comes tomorrow another law is applied to him. There were differences in our documents, and here you get houses based on these documents. These discrepancies created divisions within the community, “What do you have, what do I have? How come you got a visa and I didn’t?” This has created fissures - comparisons, competition, greed. That love that kept us together there, is now completely finished. (Ahuja, 2008; p. 3)

In this account, Ahuja attributes the divisiveness in the community to the German legal system that conferred different privileges on different people. Ahuja is referring to the multiple changes that the refugee and immigration policies have undergone in Germany. These changes impacted Afghan Hindus differently depending on when they arrived in the country. For example, some people were able to receive “stay visas” that permitted them to stay in the country, without too much trouble, while others had to go through complicated processes. Some Afghan Hindus mentioned having to renew their visas weekly or even daily. These differences led to comparisons among people that according to Ahuja created “divisions” that had not existed before.

Mr. Chabra referred to competition in terms of status and material possessions, “Here it has become such that people look at one another that he has bought a house, I don’t have one. It wasn’t like that there. People were satisfied with what they had. People were not greedy. Here people have become greedy (*laalchi*)” (Chabra, p. 13). Once again, in this quote, evaluation of the present occurred in comparison to the past; competition, social comparison, and greed were constructed as new phenomena, directly attributed to migration and German policies. Uncertainties about visa status and future in Germany, created trust issues tearing the community apart.

Competition was mentioned not only by older Afghan Hindus who had lived in Afghanistan for many years and had migrated to Germany later in life, but also by young people. A young woman of 23, Reena, was working in the computer industry and simultaneously pursuing a degree in business at the university. I give here, an excerpt from my interview with her:

Reena: A bad thing among our people is the comparison that he has something that I don’t have, these status differences. I hear this a lot and I don’t like it. If someone doesn’t have something why should you make that person feel bad, by showing yourself as superior? This is not a good thing.

I: But don’t status differences and such comparisons exist everywhere? They must have existed in Afghanistan too?

Reena: No, because there everyone had their own business, they were not on welfare like we are here. There was no disparity like here. I mean there may have been some comparisons between women about clothes and jewelry and whatnot but that is there in every community. Women tend to compare. But not like what I see here, like “Oh his son works there or their son is studying [getting an education], their daughter is being educated, so and so is not”, this type of thing. This did not happen in Afghanistan because most boys ended up joining their father’s business. Everyone had something. (Reena, 2008)

In this excerpt, Reena constructs “status differences” as a consequence of migration; even when I suggest that status differences might exist everywhere, she negates my suggestion. Not only does Reena construct competition within this community as a consequence of migration, she also constructs the type of competition as being qualitatively different in



the diaspora, from those in the homeland. She dismisses differences in Afghanistan as trivial (“clothes, jewelry and whatnot”). Although Reena was only 6 when she left Afghanistan, and did not remember much about her homeland, the confidence with which she claims lack of differences in Afghanistan suggests that this must be a communally valued way of speaking about *there* and *here* - about the “ideal” community in Afghanistan in which there were no class differences. It was evident from Reena’s description that young people heard idealized constructions of the homeland from their elders, which then contributed to their constructions of homeland.

### Loss of Respect

Older Afghan Hindus, who had spent much of their lives in Afghanistan, spoke about loss of respect as another aspect of fragmentation. Afghan society, both Muslim and Hindu, was hierarchical based on age. The elder of the tribe, or community, or family, occupied the highest place and was respected by others. In Afghanistan, Hindus had a group of prominent men, usually elders, known as a *panchayat* that settled disputes inside the community, and maintained social order. In Germany, Afghan Hindus lacked one authoritative voice that could hold them together. As Ahuja stated, “If you try to say something, they ask, ‘Who are you to tell me?’ Everyone is an individual here, there is no collective, and even if you try to do some collective good, there is opposition. I have given up.”

In Afghanistan, when the elder spoke, people listened and did not refute his decision. Dr. Fakir summed it up by saying, “Here [Germany] people speak of rights, but in our culture we don’t talk about rights, we talk about respect” (Fakir, 18). Dr. Pyasa, described respect as follows:

There was respect for elders; when an elder spoke whether it was correct or not, we did not tell him he was wrong. We would listen to him. This was our culture. Once in a while even if there was a quarrel, for example, property disputes or relational conflict, a few elders would get together and resolve the problem (Pyasa, 2008; p.13)

Dr. Pyasa constructs respect for elders as part of the Afghan Hindu culture, and elders as mediators in the community. Similarly, Ashok said:

The elders may not have been highly educated but they had experience and had the wisdom to know what to do in a difficult situation and they were able to maintain our community despite the fact that we were only 1% of the total population (Ashok, p.16).

According to Ashok, elders were worthy of respect because of their “wisdom” which was gained from experience; it did not matter that they were not highly educated. In the Afghan culture, age was associated with wisdom; the term *tajurba* was used to describe life experience. Ashok, told me a story from his own life, to exemplify the position of the elder:

If there was a conflict between husband and wife then the elders in the family would mediate between them. When we are young these things happen. Let me give you an example. One time my wife and I had an argument with raised voices. My aunt overheard us and became really concerned and expressed her concern to my uncle who reported it to my father when he got home. My father called me and said, “What’s going on?” I explained, of course, blaming my wife for the problem. He said, “OK then why don’t you do this. We have another house in town in Hindu Guzar that is vacant right now. Pack what belongs to you and go there. You are not needed in this house. But she [wife] will not go with you. She is my daughter and I will take care of her, but since you don’t seem to get along with her, you are free to leave”. Of course, I came to my senses at that point. Father had spoken, and what was I going to do, and of course after some time the whole thing blew over. This was how it was there (Ashok, 2008; p. 26).

This story is constructed in a way that highlights how Ashok, although himself an adult and a married man at the time, still respected his father as elder of the family. “Father had spoken” and his word was final. This excerpt reveals an important rule for speaking in Afghan Hindu culture; elders spoke, youth listened. The elder’s word was final (“father had spoken”) and must be obeyed. Contrasting this with life in Germany, Kanha, said, “We used to respect our elders, serving them, here we have to listen to the young” (p. 2). When I asked him what he thought was the difference, he said:

The environment (*mahaul*) there was different. That is because the Muslims also respected their elders. They also valued the things we valued. They are even more strict than we are, doing their

prayers five times a day. But here these people [Germans] are atheists, they don't believe in any god, they don't respect their elders, they do what they want, smoking, drinking, going to discos. You see Western culture and our culture is very different. (Khanna, 2008; p. 12)

Like Kanha, others also attributed changes in rules of conduct to the *mahaul*; for example, *vahaan ka mahaul aur tha* (the environment was different there) or *yahaan ka mahaul hee kharab hai* (the environment here is bad). In this excerpt, Kanha constructs Muslims as culturally similar to Hindus, whereas he constructs Germans as culturally “very different”. The “strictness” of Muslims is being evaluated positively, while Germans are constructed as “atheists”, who “smoke, drink, and go to discos”.

When I asked participants directly about their interactions with Germans, and about discrimination at an individual or societal level, they generally denied feeling discriminated against, saying, “They [Germans] mind their business, and we mind our own” or “Germans are basically good people”. I had read about violence against minorities in Germany, however, Afghan Hindus said they had not experienced any such violence. In other words, Afghan Hindus did not speak about overt threat from the German majority the way they spoke of having felt threatened by the Muslim majority in Afghanistan; the threat in Germany was constructed as being more covert, largely due to cultural influences. With the exception of Ahuja, few Afghan Hindus spoke about oppression or discrimination; instead most spoke about *mahaul*, or the general environment, a “free society” that was leading their youth astray. For most Afghan Hindus, the force of cultural influence was far more potent than any direct or discrimination.

#### *Bikharna* as Loss of Traditions

Loss of traditional norms was described in a number of ways, but the phrase I heard most often was, “*Humare bache baahar shaadi kar rahe hain*” (Our youth are marrying outsiders), the outsiders being Turks in Germany. Earlier in this dissertation I

described the Turkish as the largest minority in Germany. Afghan Hindus described a “new trend” of marriages between Afghan Hindus and Turkish.

In Afghanistan, there were distinct rules about choosing a marriage partner. First, marriages were arranged by elders and second, people married within the community; in Germany this trend was changing. Parents no longer expected to arrange the marriages of their children. Instead, youth chose their spouse and then sought the blessings of the family. Although elders no longer expected their youth to have their marriages arranged, they did expect them to make their choices within the community. Marrying outside the community was related to loss of religion. *Mazab bachana*, or protecting religion had been a major preoccupation for this Hindu minority in Afghanistan. Now, in Germany, as youth were beginning to marry outside their community, possible loss of religious identity troubled many Afghan Hindus.

#### Traditions of marriage

In Chapter I, I discussed the large population of Turkish immigrants in Germany. There were a few cases of Afghan Hindu youth marrying Turks. Dr. Pyasa, explained this as a “disturbing” trend and a “new problem”:

Recently we have started facing a new problem. See before, we have had some of our people bring brides and grooms from India, and that is fine because the adjustment is easy, the language is similar, culture is the same, religion is the same. Minor differences get adjusted. But now our youth are beginning to marry Turkish. A few such weddings have taken place in the past year and this is very disturbing to us. (Pyasa, 2008, p.8)

Dr. Pyasa, like many older Afghan Hindus I spoke with, declared Afghan Hindu marriages with the Turkish, a problem. Marrying an Indian was not a problem because of the common religion, language and culture. In Afghanistan, “outsiders” and “insiders” were defined by culture and religion. For Afghan Hindus, in Germany the Turkish were outsiders because they were Muslim. Hindus often mentioned fear (*dar*) in Afghanistan. As a religious minority conversion to Islam had been a major source of fear. Their

children marrying Muslims now, was therefore “disturbing” to older members of the community. It was also rather paradoxical that Hindus who were proud of having preserved their religious identity in a dominant Muslim society, were now faced with the possibility of losing that identity in a society where Muslims were also a minority.

The opposition to marrying Turks was also informed by a premise of marriage as a collective enterprise, arranged by the family, and as a means of maintaining relationships in the community. As one man described it, “Usually the elders in the family arranged the marriage among their relatives, when they knew of an eligible boy or girl” (Ham 1, p. 2). Eligibility of the prospective bride or groom was determined by the family, based on different criteria, such as age, and most importantly by relationship of the families. *Biradari* or kin was important in determining the family someone chose to be associated with through marriage. Marriage was a way of strengthening familial ties. For example, Mrs. Swami talked about how her own marriage was arranged:

Mrs. G: My maternal grandmother and paternal grandmother were sisters.

I: Oh so cousins could marry?

G: Yes, yes. On the mother’s side, not on the father’s side.

M: My m-in-law thought that if I bring a bride from outside it may not work out, so that’s how she picked me for her son (Mrs. Goswami, p. 1)

In this quote, “outside” is being used in an even more restrictive sense, as outside the family. Her mother-in-law’s thinking that “if I bring a bride from outside it may not work out” also highlights the importance of the new bride fitting into the multimember family; closer the family ties, greater the chances of compatibility. As one young woman, Renu, who was 18, explained to me, “In our culture *khandan* (lineage) is very important because they say you are not just marrying the man, you are getting married into a family” (Jungen, p. 10). Lineage and background of the family was important in “knowing” a family. An individual was judged not by his or her individual merits, but by

the family he or she belonged to. Kishan further elaborated on how a bride or groom was evaluated based on his or her family:

The way in which the prospective bride or groom was evaluated was based on the family; her father is a good man, his mother is a religious woman; her sister has earned a good name among her in-laws, so the younger sister must also be good. This is how they evaluated a person for marriage (Kishan, p. 34).

In the process of arranging a marriage, not only was the family background evaluated, the conduct of other members of the bride or groom's family was also evaluated.

The system of arranged marriage was based on reaffirming ties to the family.

Choosing a bride or groom from a particular family, sometimes reaffirmed old ties, and in other cases created new ones. In either case an individual's identity did not exist separate from that of the family's background and conduct.

Dr. Pyasa told me that, in Afghanistan, while Hindus had friends among Muslims, the thought of marrying Muslims never occurred to them. Giving an example, Dr. Pyasa spoke of a Hindu festival called *Raksha Bandhan*, in which the sister affirmed the brother-sister bond by tying a charm (*rakhee*) around the brother's wrist:

There we had sisters among Muslim women, they would tie *rakhee* for us, but no one married a Muslim. We would attend each other's parties and weddings; we were like their brothers. We lived in that country for 500 to 600 years, but it never happened where some girl said, "Here's my neighbor, he loves me and I want to marry him". Never. We had brothers or sisters among Muslims and that was it (Pyasa, 2008).

By constructing the relationship like a brother-sister bond among men and women who were not biologically related, the possibility of romantic involvement was eliminated.

Marriage was also a way of retaining one's cultural and religious identity. In Afghanistan, people married within their *biradari* or community and there were social sanctions for breaking tradition. As Ashok explained it:

We married amongst ourselves, not outside. If a man happened to marry a Muslim according to his own wishes, then everyone would cut off relationship with him, saying that as far as they were concerned, he was dead. That is why our religion and culture

remained. Otherwise it would have been lost a long time ago (Ashok, 2008)

In this excerpt “outside” clearly denotes Muslims. Also, religion and culture were to be protected at all costs, even at the cost of giving up a son or daughter as “dead” if he or she married a Muslim. “Otherwise it would have been lost a long time ago”, speaks to how Afghan Hindus were able to maintain their Hindu identity in Afghanistan, despite being a small minority. Marriage to outsiders, particularly to Turks, thus meant losing their religious identity in Germany.

Most Afghan Hindus I spoke with agreed that they did not expect to arrange the marriages of their youth in Germany. Young people generally chose their prospective spouse and informed the family about their choice; the families then met and proceeded to make wedding arrangements. However, I discovered that this choice was in fact constrained choice; it did not extend to choice outside the community because elders still expected youth to marry in the community. As Dr. Pyasa indicated, Indians were accepted because they were Hindus, but marrying a non-Hindu, particularly a Muslim, was unacceptable.

Afghan Hindus frequently spoke of *dar* (fear), and this fear was related to a loss of identity. Many Afghan Hindus predicted that if steps were not taken to prevent these marriages, the Afghan Hindu identity would disappear over time. For example, “If we don’t do something, we as a people will be finished in 20 or 30 years” (Avinash), was another statement I heard frequently. Children, however, challenged their parents, as described by Mrs. Swami in the following excerpt:

...we are fearful. See for the kids this is commonplace they ask, “What happens if we marry someone we like? What is the big deal”? Well, after two or three years, problems begin. Each spouse will want their children to adopt their religion. This is where the problem starts. Suppose a Hindu and Muslim get married. We might argue that god is one, but when a child is born then is that child going to take the mother’s religion or father’s religion? It’s very difficult. These children don’t think of the future (Mrs. Swami, 2008)

*Hamen dar hai* (we are fearful) was a common way in which Afghan Hindus expressed their concern about loss of identity. Mrs. Swami describes how this is likely to occur in the future. The words, “we might argue god is one”, marks a contradiction between abstract ideas of all humans as one, and concrete reality. While Hindus believed in one God or Almighty, the concept did not translate in terms of daily living, especially when it meant giving up one’s religion (*mazab*). Mrs. Swami’s report of children’s argument also indicates that the younger generation viewed marriage as a matter of individual choice, and did not see inside/outside distinctions that the parents perceived.

I found constructions of the “outsider” noteworthy. Most Afghan Hindus who expressed their concerns in the matter of marriage, mentioned Turkish, but not Germans. When I asked specifically if marrying Germans was a concern Dr. Fakir said, “No not really. For one thing, most Germans marry other Germans, and even if they did marry someone else, they live in their religion and let you pursue yours. There is no pressure to convert.” Thus, conversion to Islam was the main fear that Afghan Hindus had in relation to Turks in Germany. And this fear came from the homeland. As Kishan, explained it, “...our experience from Afghanistan tells us that if a man marries a Muslim girl, not only has he been converted to Islam but his whole family has been forcefully converted. So we feel threatened by these happenings” (Kishan, 2008, p. 50). By describing the past as “our experience”, Kishan is again using a communal way of speaking about marriage, because having left Afghanistan when he was only eleven he had no first-hand experience of conversion. These communal ways of speaking, equating marriage to Turks with being converted to Islam, was used to discourage youth from seeking marital partners outside the community.

Discussions about marriage provided another important insight into an Afghan Hindu cultural code, namely, people’s relationships to their religion (*mazab*). In Afghanistan a community’s identity was closely tied to religion. Particularly, as a religious minority, preserving their religious identity had been of utmost importance to



Hindus in Afghanistan. Afghan Hindus frequently used the term “*mazab bachana*” or “protecting our religion”, to describe how they had collectively preserved their religion and culture, despite being a Hindu minority in a Muslim country. In Afghanistan, Hindus reported being under continual pressure to convert. Common narratives spoke about incidents in which a Hindu had been duped into converting, or forcefully converted. In Afghanistan, single Hindu women did not venture out alone without a male escort because parents feared “they would be kidnapped and forcefully married to a Muslim.” In many families girls were not sent to school after they reached puberty. Girls were also married at thirteen or fourteen because once a woman was married she was no longer under the threat of being kidnapped.

Afghan Hindus differed on how frequently such forced conversions took place in Afghanistan. Some like Das denied that this was a common occurrence, while others spoke about it as though it was. According to Das, one or two incidents had occurred which inspired deep fear in the rest. Regardless of how many conversions actually occurred, it was apparent that Afghan Hindus carried that fear of conversion to Germany, which in turn informed their ideas about marriage.

Marriages outside the community in Germany were largely blamed on too much freedom (*azaadi*) of the larger society. Some Afghan Hindus, particularly older men, who had lived most of their adult lives in Afghanistan, talked about this freedom as a lack of “boundary”:

You can call this a type of boundary that existed in Afghanistan; here that boundary is gone, there is complete freedom here for individuals to do whatever they want and go where ever they want to go. When children turn 18 they become independent in this country, parents don't have any control over them (Mr. Chabra, 2008).

In Afghanistan, relationships and in-group/out-group distinctions were marked by clear boundaries. The rules and norms of conduct were clear, as were sanctions for breaking these rules. No such “boundaries” existed in Germany. Children attained complete

autonomy at the age of 18, at which point they were no longer within parental control. In an earlier excerpt Ashok pointed out how even as an adult who was married, he respected his father's word. *There* the elder was in control, whereas *here* anyone who was over 18 had control over their own lives. Not only did this new-found freedom have an impact on young people, it was also constructed as having a negative impact on adults.

Another “new” trend that they talked about was the way in which weddings were conducted. Afghan Hindu weddings in Germany had become “ostentatious”. This was attributed to the influence of media, not German media but Indian media, specifically Hindi films. Ashok gave me an example:

One of my friends owns a wedding hall. I had dropped in to say hello, and he told me that he had just finished meeting with a family whose daughter was getting married. He said, ‘Our people are amazing. This girl [the bride to be] says my *lehenga* (long wedding skirt) is blue so I want the napkins on the table to match my dress. The cake should also have some blue in it. And my husband's dress is such and such so the flowers you have on the stage should be like this.’ I began laughing and he said, ‘Really I'm not joking. Some of these people come here with their *lehenga*, even their jewelry and tell me that the candle in the centerpiece, and the flowers have to match the bracelets the bride is going to wear’. I laughed but that it is the truth. These girls watch Hindi TV serials and when they get together with their friends they talk about nothing else, about who is wearing what. Then they compare with other girls in the community who got married and what they were wearing. They are going to wear the *lehenga* for one day, and the poor parents end up spending so much money. It wasn't like that before; it was simple; people wore whatever they could afford. These Indian TV serials are spoiling our culture (Ashok, 2008; p. 20)

Many other Afghan Hindus also spoke about this trend of having “lavish” weddings. I heard in the course of conversations that someone was going to India to shop for a wedding. I also had occasion to attend a wedding. Although it did not seem “lavish” to me, perhaps because I was used to Indian weddings, I heard several comments before and after the wedding about the ways in which people were “wasting their money”. In this case, it was not the *mahaul* of Germany, nor German media, but Indian television that was blamed for its effects on Afghan Hindu “culture”.

“There is too much freedom here”

I heard this phrase (*yahan pe bahut zyada azaadi hai*), often. Dr. Fakir, a physician, who lived and worked at a hospital in a town near Köln spoke about why they had been able to preserve their culture in Afghanistan despite being a small religious minority, and despite fears of conversion. He explained it in this manner:

See it's a matter of resistance and pressure, two things that make a person strong. For example in boxing right? One pushes, the other resists. Here [in Germany], there is no push, no pressure. The ring is wide open. There in Afghanistan there was pressure.... There we used to take pride in our culture. We used to relish it. Being united was a type of resistance to counter the pressure from the outside (Fakir, 2008).

The doctor constructs pressure from the larger society as a positive influence on a minority. In Afghanistan, the perceived threat of conversion to Islam posed by the larger society is being described as a positive because it created unity among Hindus in resisting that pressure. Banding together to maintain a tightly-knit community was a way to resist conversion. In the process they developed a strong cultural and religious identity. Most Afghan Hindus I spoke with, perceived German society as being too permissive. Again it was rather paradoxical that on the one hand Afghan Hindus could freely practice their religion in Germany; they did not have the kind of fear they described in Afghanistan. Yet this very freedom was also constructed as being problematic. The doctor went on:

Another problem with us Hindus is that when we have democracy and money we go beserk. When we have dictatorship, when there are restrictions, when we don't have money, when we don't have rights, then we walk on the right path. ... There is a proverb “whatever is free ultimately proves expensive”. In the long term this type of thing [freedom] is proving expensive for us. People are not responsible. They drink, smoke and gamble” (Fakir, 2008).

According to Fakir, freedom of choice was making Afghan Hindu people irresponsible because they were making wrong choices like drinking, smoking, and gambling. The community's morals were being eroded. In Afghanistan the rules of the larger society imposed a certain discipline. According to Mr. Chabra, drinking was not totally absent in Afghanistan, but it was not open and not indiscriminate like it was in Germany. “The

Muslims laws were very strict, so people could not drink as they pleased. People were afraid.” (Mr. Chabra, 2008). Fear acted as way to maintain order. Like Fakir and Chabra, Kanha also constructed fear in Afghanistan as a positive factor:

Yes there was fear, but see it worked to our advantage in some ways. In Afghanistan, there was fanaticism. Muslims were very staunch about their religion, so we could also be staunch about our religion. That is why our religion was safe there. Otherwise it would have been difficult. So, as far as our religion was concerned it served us well, otherwise what is now happening to us [in Germany] would have happened there, and nothing of our culture would have survived. It would have been finished right there (Kanha, 2008).

The dominant culture, in these excerpts, is constructed as having a direct bearing on how people in a minority group conducted themselves. Although Afghan Hindus had for the most part lived in fear (*dar*) in Afghanistan, that fear had also benefitted the community in many ways, first in keeping the community together, and second, in maintaining certain codes of conduct. German society, on the other hand, was constructed as having a negative impact on the Afghan Hindu community. Alcohol on the open market tempted people to develop drinking habits; rules of appropriate conduct were changing. They had faced one kind of threat in Afghanistan; here the threat was of a different kind.

Ahuja gave an account that he used to exemplify the changes that were occurring. Ahuja described meeting a man he knew from Afghanistan who “back home, was a man of modest means”. He met this man and his family in a restaurant in Hamburg:

We were all sitting, he, his wife, my wife and I. We had ordered beer and this man turns towards the ladies and offers them beer. I said, “What are you doing?”, and he turns to me and says, “egal, this is Deutschland, makes no difference”. I was shocked. I knew this man’s standard of living in Afghanistan, what he did for a living. There he probably had not even heard of beer, and here he is offering it the ladies and on top of that he says, “egal this is Deutschland”, so anything goes. Don’t get me wrong. I am not conservative or saying that women should not drink beer. I am giving you an example of how our people have changed after coming here. That means that this type of behavior must be normal now for this man. This is also *bikharna* (Ahuja, 2008)

In this incident, an important code was violated for Ahuja who first clarifies for me that he is not “conservative” in making a general statement about women drinking alcohol; he is talking specifically about a norm being violated by offering beer to Afghan Hindu women. Ahuja would perhaps not have been so shocked if the man had offered beer to a Western woman. Moreover, what Ahuja found even more shocking was the man’s response, “after all this is Germany”, that he used to justify his conduct. By giving this example, Ahuja wanted to emphasize how traditional norms and codes of conduct were being “lost” in Germany. The loss was attributed both to the influence of German culture, and to the readiness with which Afghan Hindus were adopting these codes of conduct that were not only foreign, but alien to the Afghan Hindu worldview. This change was troublesome to many. The drinking issue also came up in a conversation with Dr. Fakir, who spoke about “kitty parties”<sup>9</sup> that his wife attended sometimes in which Afghan Hindu women drank alcohol, adding, “My wife stopped going to these because she just doesn’t like it” (Fakir, 2008).

Not only did these accounts offer insight into ways in which codes of conduct from the homeland were changing in the diaspora, but these ways of speaking about fellow Afghan Hindus had an evaluative component that displayed the discursive force of speech codes as codes of conduct from the homeland continued to provide the yardstick against which conduct in the host country was evaluated. Those who departed from those codes were gradually becoming “outsiders” within the community.

There were other instances in which someone’s conduct was evaluated negatively. Ashok described an incident he witnessed at a wedding when a young woman with a child, sitting with her friends, repeatedly called out to her husband to take the child and change his diaper. Ashok said he was “furious”, and immediately turned to his own

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<sup>9</sup> These parties are organized by housewives once a month, where women take turns hosting the party. Each person contributes money to the “kitty” which is used for party expense and sometimes a lucky draw that someone wins each month.

daughter-in-law, who was sitting next to him and said, “If I ever see **you** doing what she just did, you will not live with my son another day”. Ashok’s sensibilities were deeply offended because one, a woman did not speak to her husband in this manner, let alone in public; asking him to change diapers while she chatted with her friends was completely unacceptable to Ashok. Moreover, his comment to his daughter-in-law served to reinforce rules of conduct in their family, where such (mis)conduct would not be tolerated. Ashok’s evaluation is a comment on the personhood of women, their relationships with the men in their lives, and public presentation of that relationship. There is a judgment here about what constitutes acceptable behavior for a woman, and calling out to her husband to change the child’s diaper, in public, did not constitute acceptable behavior. By evaluating the conduct of individuals, these speech events made a statement about how premises and rules from the past were being maintained, as well as changing in the diaspora.

Being a researcher and an Indian did not exempt me from these evaluations. When I met someone for the first time I came to expect three questions; “Are you married?”, “How many children?”, and “Is your husband with you?” When I replied that I was married but did not have children, their response was either, “Oh not yet!”, or a look that said they were sorry for me. When they learned my husband was not with me, the typical response was, “Oh you are here alone?” The frequency with which I encountered this last question, the tone of the question, and the surprise of the interlocutor indicated that I had broken a code that said that a married woman did not travel around alone.

On another occasion I learned that I must be discreet about what I disclosed in casual conversations. I had met Mina during my first trip to Germany, and had come to know her as a friendly, outgoing woman on subsequent trips. I estimated that she was in her early forties. During my final visit to Germany, I was trying to set up a time to talk to her in more detail. She suggested a day I could come over to her house, and I said I

would be in Berlin that week. She asked me, “Who is in Berlin?”. I replied, “No one. I am just going there for a few days because I really want to see the place”. She asked, “Just like that? You’ll just go to a strange place on your own without knowing anyone?” I said, “Yeah, I didn’t know anyone when I first came to Frankfurt”. She asked, “Where will you stay?”. I said, “In a hostel.” Her husband was sitting across us listening to the conversation. After that conversation, this woman became evasive whenever I suggested that we meet to talk. I suspected that either she, or her husband, or both had concluded that I was not desirable company. Mrs. Chabra summed up my suspicions when she told me, “If one of our women traveled around like you do, she would quickly get a bad reputation in our community”. Speech events such as these, in which codes are violated, are particularly important sites in which to understand norms of a community. They afford opportunities to understand what constitutes appropriate conduct, what is permitted, and what is considered a breach of code.

### Discussion

*Bikharna* was a way of speaking about migration among Afghan Hindus that captured scattering spatially, fragmentation of personal relationships, and feared loss of traditions. Moreover, this way of speaking invoked the meaning of community and family from Afghanistan that informed their experiences and practices in the diaspora.

According to Speech Codes Theory, codes comprise a “system of symbols, meanings, premises, and rules” (Philipsen, Cuoto, & Covarrubias, 2007, p. 58), that guide a community on what constitutes identity, social relationships, and conduct. These codes can be identified, by observing communication practices. Afghan Hindu ways of speaking about migration as loss was based on drawing comparisons to Afghanistan; these comparisons revealed a code of *togetherness* that defined what it meant to be community. Togetherness encompassed living together in one physical area, maintaining

close relationships cemented by love, showing respect for elders, helping others in the community, and rules such as marrying within the community.

The meaning of community was premised on living in close proximity of other members of the community; physical closeness (*ikatte rahna*) had been an important part of maintaining community. Assumptions of what it meant to be “community” emerged in their continual talk about trying to move closer to one another in Germany, as well as the sense of loss experienced when this was not possible due to legalities of asylum.

Relationships in Afghanistan were premised on love, communal bonding, sharing, and respect for elders as the voice of authority. Social life was governed by particular norms and rules of conduct. Whereas, once Afghan Hindus had been affluent, now they were dependent on government assistance creating status differences within the community, leading to competition and greed. Competition within the community was attributed to differences in visa status, differential access to education, and disparity in material possessions among Afghan Hindus. Fissures in the community were attributed directly to migration, and more specifically to their refugee status. For many, the migration from Afghanistan to Germany had resulted in downward mobility. Yet it is difficult to believe that there were no class differences in Afghanistan. Perhaps idealization of the homeland and nostalgia for the past contributed to these constructions; or, it is possible that the people I spoke to mostly came from affluent families. Perhaps, people accepted class differences as a part of life in Afghanistan and coming to Germany had somehow enhanced those differences.

Traditions were also being challenged by migration, and these challenges were attributed mainly to the freedom of German society. Trouble with the host society, a defining feature of diaspora, has mainly been constructed in prior research as prejudice, or overt discrimination by the host society, however, Afghan Hindus denied encountering



such discrimination<sup>10</sup>. Instead, their trouble with German society was the cultural influence. Afghan Hindus blamed the *mahawal* (environment), constructing mainstream culture as having excessive *azadi* or freedom. One example of such freedom was marriage of Afghan Hindu youth with Turks, which was problematic for Afghan Hindus for a number of reasons; first, tradition dictated that marriages occur within the community; second marriage to Muslims meant conversion to Islam; third, marriage was a means to maintaining an Afghan Hindu identity.

In Afghanistan, out-groups and in-groups were clearly defined and were marked by what Afghan Hindus referred to as “clear boundaries”. Muslims were clearly the out-group, and marriage to a member of the out-group was prohibited. In Germany, the Turkish were the out-group for Afghan Hindus because they were Muslims. Marriages of Afghan Hindu youth with Turkish people led to concerns of loss of religious identity. The personhood of an Afghan Hindu was based on protecting one’s religion by resisting conversion to Islam. The present opposition to marriage with Turkish was based on the premise that such marriages would inevitably lead to conversion to Islam, and over time, to loss of religion.

On the other hand, although Muslims had clearly been the out-group in Afghanistan and a source of threat for Hindus, some aspects of Muslim culture was also constructed as similar to their own; Muslims also respected their elders; they married only within their own kind. German culture on the other hand was constructed as very different. Paradoxically, the threat in Germany was not forceful conversion, but a free society, in which traditions were likely to be lost not because of force, but through choice of individuals in the community. Individual choice was no longer subordinated to the collective, as it had been in Afghanistan. Thus, the fear (*dar*) in Afghanistan was

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<sup>10</sup> Many Afghan Hindus expressed gratitude to Germany for taking them in as refugees and for the education that their children were receiving.

simultaneously constructed as a threat and security, while the freedom in Germany was constructed only as a threat. *Dar* in Germany was fear of losing their cultural identity through assimilation.

Much of the talk I observed and recorded was evaluative as these Afghan Hindus explained, interpreted, and criticized the actions of fellow Afghan Hindus who were embracing mainstream culture. Among aspects of German society that were constructed as problematic, discos and alcohol were mentioned specifically. The conduct of those who seemed to be embracing these cultural norms of the host country, was evaluated negatively by other members of the community. Other evaluations were based on media influence; interestingly it was not German media, but Indian television that was blamed for some of the changes occurring in the community. When I visited homes it was not uncommon for the TV to be blaring and usually it was tuned to either a channel from Afghanistan or to an Indian channel. Many of the Indian TV serials were also dubbed in Farsi and beamed from Afghanistan, which the whole family, including younger members watched.

Watching these channels was also related to nostalgia for the homeland. Whenever I visited the Chabras, which was quite often, Mr. Chabra would be watching the Afghanistan channel. When they showed particular regions of Afghanistan during the news hour, he would point out places to me that he said were now barely recognizable as the places he knew. Most of it was rubble, however watching Afghan TV helped maintain connections to the homeland. *Bikharna* as a way of speaking thus captured not only physical dispersal but also the loss of place, symbols, meaning, and the feared loss of premises and rules that had guided social interaction and personal relationships in Afghanistan.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter I began by describing the discursive construction of *bikharna* as scattering across space when Afghan Hindus left Afghanistan, and their dispersal to different parts of the country when they arrived in Germany. I described constructions of *bikharna* as loss of physical closeness, loss of relational closeness in Germany, and feared loss of Afghan Hindu identity. Finally, I analyzed these ways of speaking through the theoretical lens of Speech Codes theory and the diaspora framework. In the next chapter I discuss fragmentation of the family in Germany.

## CHAPTER V

### WAYS OF SPEAKING ABOUT FAMILY

This relationship [with family] is very important in our culture. For example, my German neighbor asked me last week, “What happened? Is everything alright?” I said, “Yes, why do you ask?” And he said, “Well looks like you haven’t had any visitors lately” [laughing], because he sees that we have family visiting constantly... Our neighbors see how strong family relationships are for us. They appreciate it; they say, “It is not like that with us”. So this is something that is unique to our culture (Pyasa, 2008)

Maintaining family connections figured prominently in talk about migration. In the above quote Pyasa emphasizes the importance of such connections. His report of the neighbor’s comment serves as a point of comparison with German culture, which is discursively constructed as lacking in familial bonds; by contrast family connection is constructed as something “unique” to Afghan Hindu culture. Although one might argue that familial relationships are important in all cultures, Pyasa constructs them as “strong” and as something “unique” to Afghan Hindu culture; frequent visits of family members is demonstrative of this strength and uniqueness. As I sought to understand discursive constructions of personal relationships in this community, I understood not only what constituted strong relationships, but also what constituted family.

In this chapter I explore the meaning of family. Family, like community, was described in spatial, and relational terms. Just as Afghan Hindus spoke about community as living in one neighborhood, they spoke of family as living together in one multimember, multigenerational household with the elder as the head of the household. In Afghanistan, a nuclear household or “living separately” (*alag rehna*) was considered an aberration and was indicative of dysfunction in the family.

In Germany, the nuclear household is becoming the norm. The splitting of Afghan Hindu families into nuclear households was attributed by some to the legal system in Germany that denied aid to dependent individuals living in joint households. Others attributed nuclear families to lack of space due to the smallness of homes in Germany.

These people constructed living separately, as *lack of choice (majboori)*. However, others challenged these explanations, stating that there *was* choice and that those who did not live together, *chose* not to do so because they valued individual privacy and autonomy over living together (*saath rehna*).

Besides living arrangements, fragmentation of family was described in terms of conflict. Conflict was attributed to “not getting along” with other family members, the need for privacy, and increasing autonomy of youth afforded by education and fluency in the German language. Divorce was described as a “new trend” in the community and attributed to “interference” by members of the bride’s family.

In this chapter I first present how Afghan Hindus discursively constructed family, Second, I describe family in Afghanistan, both as a physical arrangement, and relational connection. Third, I describe changes in living arrangements in Germany, and the explanations offered for these changes. Next, I present narratives of family conflict and divorce as “new” phenomena in this community post-migration. In the final section I describe parent-child struggles and youth perspectives on communal pressure.

#### Meaning of *Family*

I spent an evening with the Pyasas, staying overnight in their home in Dortmund. I learned that the Pyasas did not come to Germany seeking asylum; the husband, a physician, came in 1975 to pursue further education with the intention of returning home. However, in 1978 during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Pyasa’s father asked him not to return because he anticipated that conditions would worsen. Instead, Mrs. Pyasa joined her husband in Germany, where they settled. Their son, also a physician, their daughter-in-law, and their two small children, all lived in their three level house. Dr. Pyasa’s yard was separated from his neighbor’s yard by a low hedge, and as he and I talked in the garden, the neighbor waved across the hedge, which prompted Dr. Pyasa to make the comment I quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

During my stay with the Pyasas, I was introduced to Mona as their “niece from U.K”. who was visiting with her son. During a conversation with Mona, I learned that she was not Dr. Pyasa’s direct niece, but his cousin’s daughter. By then I had observed that it was common among Afghan Hindus to refer to someone as their niece or aunt or brother, even if they were only indirectly related. Mona happened to mention her relationship to the Pyasas when she described to me how much they had helped her and her husband when they first came to Germany (before moving to the U.K). Mona was pregnant when she first arrived 15 years ago; she said, “She [Mrs. Pyasa] took such good care of me as if I was her own daughter-in-law”. She then explained that she was Dr. Pyasa’s cousin’s daughter. Mrs. Pyasa retorted, “What does it matter. You **are** my daughter-in-law”. I discovered that *family* was a comprehensive term for Afghan Hindus and included all types of close and distant ties through blood, marriage, or friendships.

I once jokingly mentioned my confusion to Mrs. Chabra about how everyone seemed to be related to everyone else. She laughed, saying how her granddaughter Amita faced the same dilemma, “Whenever my daughter [Poonam] introduces someone as *maama* (mother’s brother) or *chaacha* (father’s brother), Amita, asks her, ‘First tell me is he my **real** (*sagge*) uncle?’ [laughing], so you’re not the only one who is confused. Children growing up here also find it strange” (FN, 2008).

Rani, a 22-year-old woman, I met in Frankfurt, confirmed this when she described how difficult it was for her to know who was really family:

You see this all the time, like at a wedding, my parents will call me and say, “Come here, I want you to meet your *maasi* (mother’s sister)”, and I am thinking to myself, “My 13<sup>th</sup> *maasi*, how many more do I have?” Or my dad will say, “Meet your *chacha*” (father’s younger brother), and so I say politely, “Hello *chachaji*”, wondering where he had sprung from. If you go to one of our weddings there are at least 600 people there. So you sit with your parents and they are introducing you to all these people “Oh he’s you *mama* (mother’s brother), she’s your *maasi*, we grew up together, and blah blah blah.” It is really awful [laughing] because I can’t keep count of all the *mamas* (uncles) and *maasis* (aunts) and *chachas* (uncles) I have. It is quite ridiculous (Rani, 2008).

These practices revealed what it *meant* to be family, and who counted as family. The younger generation's perplexity at having everyone named as family also points to some of the changes that are occurring in the traditional meaning of family.

I also noticed relationships being fore-grounded when I was introduced to new people in the community. The people being introduced were referred to not by name, but by relationship to the person performing the introductions; for example, “*Yeh mera bhatija hai*” (This is my nephew), “*Yeh meri behan hai*” (This is my sister), without mentioning names<sup>11</sup>. I once joined the Chabras for a family gathering. Mr. Chabra introduced several members of the family to me, but I learned their names only later as I heard them being referenced in conversation. I understood from these instances, that the relationships were emphasized over the individual.

#### Family as a Multi-Member, Multi-Generational Household

A typical description of family in Afghanistan was, “We used to live as family with mother, father, children; when sons got married they used to live in the same house” (Ahuja, 2008) or “We had huge families, uncles, aunts, brothers, their wives, their children. Everyone lived together. And imagine, they did not have one or two children [laughing]; some even had ten. So you can imagine the large households we had” (Mukesch, 2008). Afghan Hindus used *ghar* to describe these large households.

The elder of the family, generally the oldest male, was the head of the household and the family business; mostly, all male members in the family worked for the business. The women stayed home, with the mother-in-law at the helm, and the daughters-in-law who helped run the household. A common way of speaking about this arrangement was,

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<sup>11</sup> From my own Indian background I knew that referring to an older person by name is considered rude, but here even those younger than the person performing introductions was introduced by relationship.

“*ek kamata thaa sab khaate the*”, meaning, “one person earned, and everyone ate [fed everyone]”.

Besides describing the household, Afghan Hindus also spoke about family in terms of physical arrangements:

We had big houses, not like small ones here, and in one house everyone lived. Those who were married had their own rooms but the food was cooked in one common kitchen. We used to eat together. Then after dinner we would all sit and drink tea together. There was a lot of fellowship and closeness between family members. (Pyasa, 2008)

This description emphasizes the largeness of the physical space in terms of the size of the homes, the living arrangements of the people, and “fellowship” and “closeness” among members of the household.

In the previous chapter I described how Afghan Hindus took pride in the “big big homes” (*bade bade ghar*) and “beautiful estates” (*sundar haveli*) they owned. However, as Ahuja explained, “Not everyone had huge houses but even in small houses, when sons got married they used to live together. When parents became old, children would take care of them. I mean, there was a spirit of sacrifice there” (Ahuja, 2008). Even though not everyone had big homes, they managed in the space that was available. People did not mind sharing the limited space in the interest of living together. Maintaining the family unit was key, as was taking care of the elderly, even if it meant discomfort for the individual. Family was thus constructed as something based on “sacrifice” in which individuals gave up their comfort for the collective.

It became evident that older adults talked about family in these terms not only to me the researcher, but also to their children. I generally asked younger people, who were either born in Germany or were infants when they arrived, if their parents ever spoke to them about their past in Afghanistan. I asked this question to understand the extent to which the homeland figured in talk within the family. Rani, who was about eight when her parents left Afghanistan, said:



My father tells so much about his family how he grew up not with one father but three fathers [his uncles]. Um he tells about the family because he always has in mind that our family has to be together. **Always**. So he tells about the family, but not so much about Afghanistan (Rani, 2008).

This construction of family, in which uncles are like fathers, emphasizes certain types of connections. Fatherhood is not restricted only to the father. This quote is also indicative of Rani's father impressing upon his daughter that relationships extended beyond those of a nuclear family. Besides this, "he tells us about the family not so much about Afghanistan", indicates idealization of relationships rather than that of place, demonstrating that nostalgia for homeland in this community is not necessarily about a physical place but about people, and connections between people<sup>12</sup>.

I was particularly curious about how women viewed these multi-member, multi-generational households and their constructions of relationships. Here, Mrs. Swami describes the role of women in Afghan Hindu homes:

Because the family was so huge, by the time we cooked for everyone, packed lunches for the children, got them ready for school, take care of dinner, attend weddings, how time flew. There we used to cook everything ourselves like *papad* (food item). Many women got together to do this. Or one day we might decide to clean the house. Many women did sewing. We sewed our own clothes. And the house was full of people. Like the older *bhabhi* (sisters-in-law) were there so we would talk and laugh and have fun (Mrs. Swami, 2008).

Like Mrs. Swami, other women appreciated the multi-member household, evaluating it positively as one of caring, connection, closeness, and enjoyment. These idealized constructions of family in Afghanistan made me wonder about conflict. I asked Mrs. Chabra about this, "Living in a large family, wasn't there conflict (*jhagda*)"? She replied, "Of course, but they generally blew over." She related an incident when her mother and her aunt (father's brother's wife) did not speak to each other for some weeks, "They had a fight over something and didn't speak to each other for a month [laughing], but

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<sup>12</sup> Some people clearly stated that they had no attachments to the place.

eventually they were fine. You can't live under one roof and not speak to someone" (FN, 2008). Another time Mrs. Chabra was telling me about her in-laws, particularly her father-in-law who was fond of her. She related an incident that demonstrated the kinds of conflict in the family, and how they got resolved:

One time during dinner all the men were eating dinner. There was something wrong with the *roti* (bread) and my father-in-law commented on it. Immediately my mother-in-law blamed it on me, saying I had made it, even though I had not made it that day. She thought because my father-in-law liked me so much he would ignore if he thought I made it. But my father-in-law was a very observant man. He somehow knew I had not made it and got really upset with her for telling a lie. So silly things like that, but usually the elders were fair and resolved these things (FN, 2008).

The dismissal of such conflict as "silly" indicates that these skirmishes were not given a great deal of weight and were certainly not enough to break a family apart. Hierarchy, with an elderly male as the head of family, was key in maintaining the multi-member family. As Kanha described it, "This hierarchy made it easier to maintain control and harmony in the family" (Kanha, 2008). Age and gender worked together to maintain "control" over individuals' conduct.

Although Kanha spoke about control and hierarchy, the picture that emerged from women's narratives was not one of subjugation or tyranny. On the one hand they spoke about rules of conduct appropriate for a woman, but on the other hand they described being well taken care of, not having to "worry about anything", and about companionship of other women, which they missed in Germany.

Maya described life in the traditional family for me, saying, "We [women] had to wear *ghoongat* (upper cloth covering head and face) and serve the father-in-law, serve the *devar* (younger brother-in-law), the *jhet* (older brother-in-law)". But she also talked about how younger family members subverted this control, finding ways to have "fun". She was only 12 when she got married, which was typical of her generation. Maya said:

When I got married, I remember, I still had my *chooda* (marriage bracelets worn filling the entire forearm, by the bride, for a year) on my arms, but I wanted to play. My husband's nephews were

close to me in age so when my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law went out shopping, we would sneak up to the roof to play and fly kites [laughing]. When it was time for my mother-in-law and sister-in-law to return, I would quickly wash my face, change clothes, and sit down as though I was so honest [laughs]. The boys were my allies and didn't tell. We would have lots of fun like that (Maya, 2008).

In the absence of female members her own age, Maya managed to find company in the large household among the “boys”. The light-hearted tone of the utterance and the laughter that accompanied it, emphasized playfulness and the enjoyment she derived from resisting the constraints placed on her as a woman and a young bride. Thus, despite control and gendered roles in the family, women constructed their family lives as “fun”, “enjoyable” and filled with companionship.

Nostalgia for the multi-member family was evident in many women's narratives as they compared family life there with the present in which they sorely missed close companionship. As Mrs. Swami explained:

There is no time for anything here. We all work and on weekends we catch up with household work. It is worse for elderly women because they have no one to talk to. How long can you look at the four walls? They were surrounded by family there and here they have no one. Life is lonely here for these women. They don't know the language so they cannot interact with people outside (Mrs. Swami, 2008).

Lack of time in Germany figured prominently in these descriptions. Sharmila, a woman in her early forties whom I met in Frankfurt, described some of these difficulties:

There, the family was big so they [women] had plenty to pass time, in housework. They would also talk to each other. They had company. Here these poor women are lonely. Sons, daughters-in-law, adult children, are all working. Here everyone has to work to make ends meet. They don't have time for anything besides. So these poor women's lives pass away just waiting to talk to someone. (Frankfurt ladies group, 2008).

Sharmila went on to explain that in Germany the vast majority of Afghan Hindus worked in shifts. In her own family she said her husband and she sometimes didn't have a chance to see each other for weeks because she worked days and he worked nights. It was difficult under these circumstances to get family time. For the elderly, it was particularly

lonesome. While men ventured out more confidently, movement for elderly women, who did not speak German, was more restricted. Paradoxically, in Afghanistan also these women did not have the freedom to venture outside the home alone, without a male family member accompanying them for fear of being harassed by Muslim men; yet they talked about their inability to go out by themselves in Germany as more restrictive, perhaps because they lacked the female company that they had in Afghanistan. Also, as Sharmila explained, the younger generation was too busy to attend to their elderly parents even when they lived in the same household. Both husbands and wives had to work in Germany to make a living, whereas in Afghanistan, most married women, except the a few who had a college education, stayed at home.

While the elderly women who lived with their children spoke about loneliness, others who lived separately lamented not being able to live with their children. For example, Mr. & Mrs. Chabra had two adult sons, both of whom lived in their own individual households with their wives and young children, while the Chabras lived alone in a one-bedroom apartment. Living separately from their children was a major source of sorrow for Mrs. Chabra. She frequently complained that her sons never visited them. Only one of her daughters-in-law, whom I met several times, visited with her children. I never met her other son or daughter-in-law. The main source of entertainment for the Chabras was television. Mr. Chabra watched a channel from Afghanistan and Mrs. Chabra watched soap operas in Hindi and Farsi. As the nuclear household became increasingly the norm in Germany, Afghan Hindus like the Chabras missed the “family” of Afghanistan.

#### The Nuclear Household in Germany

The Swamis arrived in Germany with their three-year-old daughter and Dr. Swami’s mother in 1985. Unlike other Afghan Hindus who either lacked a high school education, or had college education but could not pursue higher education in Germany

because of financial constraints and language difficulties, Swami, a medical doctor in Afghanistan, was determined to get his license to practice in Germany. He took language courses in Germany and went back to medical school. Here Mrs. Swami describes their experience of how their family was separated on arrival in Germany:

We were placed in Neuberg near Stuttgart. My husband was studying there. His degree from Afghanistan was not recognized and he had to start all over again. He needed these specific courses that were not available in Stuttgart and so we had to move to Hamburg. But the government would not allow my mother-in-law to move with us. They wanted her to live alone there. It was really difficult. She lived there by herself for 18 months and was miserable. Then somehow we hired a lawyer and brought her here. This is not just in our family; many families have members stuck in various places (Mrs. Swami, 2008).

As the expressions, “it was really difficult”, “she was miserable”, and “stuck” indicate, the mother’s expectation was that she would move with her son. Although they acknowledged that large households were no longer viable in Germany, Afghan Hindus at least expected that elderly members would be able to live with one of their sons. The German system did not allow this, as indicated by, “had to move”, “would not allow”, and “they wanted her to live alone”. The German asylum law was premised on the nuclear family. Refugee aid was given to each adult member. Thus anyone over the age of 18 was not considered a dependent. A household, according to this system, comprised one or two parents, and children below 18. Homes were also allotted based on this definition. Clearly, the legal definition of family in Germany was in opposition to the community’s definition of family. While the Swamis had been able to hire a lawyer to bring Dr. Swami’s mother to Hamburg, not everyone was able to accomplish this type of reunification.

Kishan, a young man in his early thirties, and one of the very few Afghan Hindus who had a university education, a B.A., from a German university, came to Germany at the age of 11. He was fluent in German and had helped his father with legal paperwork even as a boy, while they were making a case for staying in Germany. He had gone on to

get German nationality, and was familiar with the asylum laws. Kishan acknowledged the difficulties of reuniting the family:

That's what happened with my grandmother [father's mother]. My parents and she were living in a remote village. I wanted my parents to move in with me but the government wouldn't allow my grandmother to move. We made a case that my parents were unable to take care of her by themselves. Luckily for us we were successful and they all moved in here with me, but others are not so lucky. I know a family, my grandmother's sister, who is living with her son and daughter-in-law; all three are in poor health. We have been trying so hard to bring them here close to us, or to Frankfurt where their two sons live, but the government says that if you are willing to completely take over their expenses then you can move them, otherwise not. But her sons cannot afford to do that. Their economic situation is not so strong (Kishan, 2008).

While the Swamis were able to get legal assistance in the case of their mother, Kishan's words construct it as a privilege that only a few people could afford. Kishan brings up another important point when he speaks about "expenses" of caring for elders. If children brought the elderly to live with them, they were expected to take care of the finances because the elderly could forfeit their allowance from the government, which is cited as another reason that some elderly lived separately from their children.

Maya, whom I mentioned earlier, spoke about a similar dilemma. Maya had a son who was "mentally ill" because of a trauma he had suffered in Afghanistan when he was in the army at the age of 17. On arrival in Germany, his illness was confirmed, and he lived with his mother in a refugee home. Maya told me that a nurse came once a week to their home "to check on him and make sure he was on medication". Meanwhile, Maya had become eligible for an apartment of her own, however, the government, backed by a physician, declared that her 34-year-old son was now fit to live on his own and could take up some employment. Maya, however, did not want to leave her son. She described why:

I am still in a refugee home. I don't have a house of my own. I may be getting one soon. I have a three-year visa stamped on my passport. In a month or two I will be eligible for a house, but the problem is, they want to separate my son from me. They say, "He is ill, he doesn't listen to you, he doesn't work. You have to leave him alone so we can give him work, make him productive, so he gets better. The more you nurture him, the more he gets spoiled",

but how can I leave him? The doctors and nurses are saying, “The mother doesn’t want him to get better”. I don’t understand. He is my son. If I don’t take care of him, who will? As a mother my place is with my son (Maya, 2008).

Maya’s getting a home of her own is predicated on her living separately from her son, but in her understanding, a mother’s place is with her son. She discursively constructs government policy and the physicians as wanting to separate her from her son, while the doctors and nurses perceive her as hindering the son from becoming an independent and productive citizen. Clearly, there is a conflict between two opposing cultural codes, a code of *interdependence* of family members that Afghan Hindus understood as important to being a family, and a code of *independence* of the individual on which German society and the legal system was premised.

While Mrs. Swami, Maya, and Kishan, all spoke about the separation of family as a consequence of German laws, others talked about physical constraints, such as lack of space that prevented them from being a family; for example one woman I chatted with casually at the Hamburg temple, “Well, we don’t have the kind of big houses we had there. Here people live in flats [apartment] with two rooms. It is physically impossible for everyone to live in one house” (Inf. Conv, 2008). While these people constructed living separately as *lack of choice* or *compulsion*, others in the community challenged this construction, attributing the change in meaning of family to individual *choice*.

One woman, Ratna, who I estimated to be in her late 60s, and who lived separately from her children spoke about her situation as personal choice:

This is a different environment (*mahaul*). I can’t just sit around and expect my daughter-in-law to serve me. In fact I don’t go to anyone’s house or depend on anyone. I make my own food. By god’s grace both my sons have their own independent houses. They say, “Why don’t you come and live with us?” but I say, I came to this world alone, and when I leave I will go alone too, no? So whose hands should I hold? I help out the children when I can. Let them be happy. Our life is over, now it is their time. Why spoil it? I don’t demand anything of my children. They ask me, “Mom how are you?”, I say, “I’m fine”. They ask, “Did you eat?”, “Yes I ate”. They ask, “What are you doing?”. I say, “I am watching TV”. They ask, “Are you happy?”. I say, “Yes, very”. See, they are busy

with their lives. Both of them [son and wife] have to work. I don't want to add to their burden (Ratna, 2008).

As in the references to community, reference to *mahaul* (environment) surfaces again in this excerpt, however unlike others, Ratna does not evaluate it negatively. She states quite matter-of-factly that the traditional hierarchy of the mother-in-law expecting to be “served by the daughter-in-law” did not work in this *mahaul*. She further constructs herself as an autonomous individual who does not “depend” on anyone. She prefers to live alone despite her children’s invitation to live with them. Furthermore, her words “why spoil it” and “I don’t want to add to their burden”, show her subscribing to a cultural code of autonomy or independence, in which dependence is evaluated negatively. On the other hand, in the words “They say, why don’t you come and live with us”, indicate that her children subscribe to the traditional meaning of family, perhaps finding it discomfiting that their mother lived alone.

Ahuja also spoke about choice when he described how families came to be fragmented. In many cases families did not arrive in Germany together. One son came over first, and gradually paid for his family to come over:

For example, the son may have come here [to Germany] first; he found some job somehow, and arranged for his parents to come here. When the parents came they were placed in a refugee home. Even if they all wanted to live together as a family they could not because he did not have the income. But then when he eventually became better economically and was able to get his own house, the situation here is such that maybe the daughter-in-law did not want to live with her in-laws, or the mother could not get along with the daughter-in-law, or the son doesn't get along with the father or vice versa so gradually the family became separated (Ahuja, 2008).

The above quote captures the process of dispersal of the family, and formation of the nuclear family. Just as the community became scattered due to migration, families also were scattered in the process. Typically, the son first came to Germany to explore possibilities and then brought other family to join him. However, the family was unable to live with him because he was not able to support them financially. The government provided aid, which meant that the new arrivals had to live where they were placed.



However, according to Ahuja, even when the son's financial position improved, where he could afford to have his parents live with him, other issues surfaced, such as the son's wife not wanting to have her in-laws living with them, or the son himself not "getting along" with his parents. Thus "getting along", which according to earlier narratives about family was not a problem in Afghanistan, had become an issue in Germany.

Another man, Katyal, also took the position that living together or apart was a matter of choice. I met Katyal in his home in Rudesheim, a tourist town about 90 minutes from Frankfurt by train. His name was on the list I was given by the president of the Frankfurt temple. His elderly mother lived with him, his wife, and his 20-year-old daughter in his home. While he was talking about his mother, I asked him about legalities that prevented the elderly from living with their sons. I asked him how he was able to have his mother live with him, to which he replied:

This depends on each family. My wife is totally dedicated to her [Katyal's mother] in taking care of her. My daughter takes her to the doctor, or I take her. Because this is a small town, sometimes the doctor even comes home. My mother has diabetes, and it is very important to monitor her medicines. She also suffers from depression, so she needs extra care. Other families can do the same thing. By now all our people are quite aware of the system. It is not **that** unreasonable, the way they portray it. They can make a case with the court to have them [elderly] live with them. It is not impossible (Katyal, 2008).

Here, Katyal clearly disagrees that the asylum laws and the government were "unreasonable". His words, "It is not impossible" challenges the *lack of choice* explanation for nuclear households. He acknowledges the effort that goes into taking care of his mother but the care that his wife shows his mother also echoes Ahuja's earlier descriptions of family as involving "sacrifice".

Katyal provided further evidence for his claim that it is "not impossible", in the following description of how he had filed a case for his mother to live with them:

My mother had a mental problem, and the government wanted to make some type of a separate arrangement for her in a nursing home. I filed a case. They summoned me to the court and asked me what I wanted. I explained to them how much my mother had

suffered in Afghanistan. We children were very young when our father died. She suffered a great deal in raising us. The judge told me that the state would arrange for her to be taken care of. I said, “no, she will live with us until the end of her days”. The judge warned me that she was not in good shape mentally, she could even commit suicide, that the state would take care of her and pay for her expenses. I refused and made a good enough case that I won. The judge understood my position in the end. So, all this about blaming government laws for not living together, it’s an excuse for some people. The system cannot prevent you from living together if you really want to. The government may not give you as much money if you live together, but that’s alright. I am earning, I can make up for the rest. Money is not everything. But yes, there is adjustment involved which these elderly women also must be prepared to make. In Afghanistan the authority of elders, men and women prevailed in the family. Without their permission, not even a stone could be moved. Here everything has changed. They may not understand that we came here as beggars asking for asylum. We no longer have that grandeur we had in Afghanistan. That is the truth. (Katyal, 2008)

Katyal brings up several issues in this narrative. First of all, he argues that it is “not impossible” to get an elderly parent to live with the son. Second, his statement “money is not everything”, emphasizes filial responsibilities over financial issues; it also implies that those who “blame” the system do so because they are not willing to part with the government aid. Like Ratna, whom I quoted earlier, Katyal also talks about a “different environment” (*doosra mahaul*) in which the old hierarchies do not work; the elder does not have the power they once took for granted. But unlike Ratna, who chose to live alone, Katyal argued that the elderly needed to live with their families but make adjustments. He expressed strong disapproval for women who chose to live alone:

I have also heard about elderly women living on their own and that they complain of not being taken care of. But they have to think. All earning members of the family leave in the morning and come home later. No one has time. Well, they complain, there is conflict and the older woman says, “Fine! The government gives me money and a home, I will go and live alone”. I have seen this happening, but the woman should think for a moment that it is that same son who has to go buy her groceries for her and take her to the doctor. It is easy for her to bring him shame by taking off and living on her own, but it is ultimately he who does everything for her, and he is the one who will perform her last rites (Katyal, 2008).

Katyal refutes claims of independence by the elderly. The phrases, “the same son has to buy her groceries and take her to the doctor”, “who will perform her last rites”, and “he is the one who ultimately does everything for her” construct these women as still being dependent on their sons. Furthermore, by living alone, these women bring “shame” on their sons, placing the son in a position of being negatively evaluated by the community. This mention of “shame” indicates deviance from a norm. An elderly parent’s place is with the son; a son has filial duty towards his elderly parents. Those who do not adhere to these rules are evaluated negatively in the community. It is evident from Katyal’s narrative that the premise of what it means to be family is based on rules of fulfilling filial responsibility, and sacrifice.

Ashok also spoke about living together as the right thing. Currently, Ashok and his wife lived with their second son, daughter-in-law and their two small children in one house, while his older son Ram, his wife, and two children lived close by. Ashok spoke about living together as *choice*:

And the way it worked out is that my younger son happened to get this house. My wife and I were living in Hochst [suburb of Frankfurt]. And he kept saying, “What is the point in all of us being separated. You should come here”. He managed to get government permission and we moved here. Now Ram [older son] has moved close by too. So other than when they are at work, they are practically here. My grandson goes to the school in the neighborhood, so I tell him as soon as school is done come here. Amitha [older son’s high school age daughter] comes here from school and spends time with her uncle. She is very close to him. This contact is good for the children. It is natural that when they are in school their friends are German and Turkish; we have no control over that, but when they come home we are here for them. They sit here talk, we discuss things...When my wife and I go off to America to visit my other son, these people keep asking when we are coming back. They miss us so much (Ashok, 2009).

Ashok clearly approves of this arrangement and appreciates his second son’s invitation to live together. He also emphasizes interdependence as he talks about the elderly presence in the family as being “beneficial” to the children, and a means of counteracting the influence of other cultures on the children. At one point in the conversation, Ashok said,

“If Ram (older son) had his way, we would all be living together. Unfortunately his house is small, and we didn’t have enough space”. Ashok, feels the need to explain why he and his wife were living with their second son and not the older son, which was generally the custom. But he quickly adds that Ram had “moved close by”, to the same neighborhood, and that his family is “practically here”, in their house. I had the opportunity to watch this family interact and observed that Ashok as the elderly male, held authority in the family. The sons showed deference to the father in the way they spoke to him. Ashok also told me that his sons ensured that he and his wife had every comfort. This family had clearly chosen to follow the cultural code of being together and it was working out well for them.

I also had the opportunity to talk to young adults about their views on family. I wanted to learn about how they saw family. I generally asked them the question, “After you marry will you live with your parents”? I asked a group of four single young men in their early twenties, this question. I met these youth in the Frankfurt temple, and spoke with them as a group. I refer to the three young men who participated in this conversation, as Ramesh, Chaman, Munda:

I: After you all get married, will you live separately or with your parents?

Ramesh: I live separately now.

Chaman: His parents don’t live here, they live faraway. He has been on his own from the beginning.

Ramesh: And I work here [in Frankfurt].

Chaman: I intend to live with my parents, but let’s see what happens.

Ramesh: That person can do that [live together] who has lived together from the beginning, because if you have to look for another house there is an additional expense of 20,000 [euro]

Chaman: But it is our responsibility also [to take care of parents], our parents have raised us for 25 years.

Munda: Yeah and they also want that their children to live with them, that they have the chance to be with their grandchildren.

Chaman: It is because of the laws here that families are being separated.

Ramesh: Not just here, everywhere in the world.

Chaman: That's not true. In India people managed to live in two rooms.

Munda: Here it is not like that. If the son and daughter-in-law both earn then the parents don't get their allowance [from the government] so people think it is better to live separately, but all said and done, if there is love, if people truly want to live together, they can; parents can live upstairs and the son can live downstairs. It can be done. The law is not **that** rigid. If people really wanted to live together they can find ways to do so.

This conversation also revealed the *choice/lack of choice* debate. Chaman's words privilege the traditional meaning of family, as indicated by, "I intend to live with my parents...", "It is our responsibility...", and "In India people managed..."; however, "but let's see what happens", also introduces an element of doubt, and a reluctance to commit to the future. He then states that the law "separates" families, creating nuclear households. Munda however, refutes his claim that German laws are to blame for separation of the traditional family. He acknowledges that members who live together forfeit government aid, but he disagrees that it prevents people from living together. Like Katyal in the previous excerpt, Munda takes the position that "the law is not **that** rigid" or unreasonable, to prevent people from doing what they want. Similarly, his way of speaking about living together ("if there is love...") constructs it as *choice* and not something that is mandated by law. Finally, Ramesh clearly takes the position that he will not live with his parents after marriage, and he offers the fact that he already lives alone as justification for his choice. Furthermore, he absolves himself of blame by adopting a pragmatic stance when he describes the additional expense of finding a place if his family moved in with him. This speech event exemplifies the dilemma that a younger generation of Afghan Hindus faces in Germany. This is a generation that migrated from Afghanistan when they were old enough to remember their lives in Afghanistan and India, but young enough to adapt to the new setting. On the one hand, they acknowledge and respect

traditions, while on the other hand they are drawn by pragmatic considerations. The need to justify their action when it is contrary to expectations of the community, further exemplifies the discursive force of speech codes for this generation.

I asked one young woman who was engaged to be married, the same question, “When you get married will you live with your husband’s parents or separately?” Rosie, said: “Depends. Nitin [fiancé] says, ‘When we are married, for the first 2 months or 6 months we will live with them [his family], then we will find an apartment’” (Rosie, 2008). In this utterance Rosie does not answer the question directly in terms of what *she* wants; instead she reports her fiancé’s position. His response acknowledges the traditional cultural code of living with the family, yet he only wants to live together for a brief period, and then move out. Rosie was an infant when she left Afghanistan and had no memories of life there.

Striking a compromise was a way for youth to negotiate cultural expectations of living together with family, with their own need for privacy. This strategy was also evident among a group of young women I interviewed in Köln:

Puja: In the beginning [soon after marriage] usually they start out by living together with the parents. If the newlyweds move out right after the wedding then the whole community talks that the woman separated the man from his family.

I: Does that happen, moving out immediately after the wedding?  
Mamta: Yeah once in a while the girl might make it clear at the time of the engagement that she prefers that they live separately, if not immediately then at least after a year or two.

Like Rosie, Puja does not speak of what *she* would do, but addresses the issue in the third person as a general trend in the community. She speaks of newlyweds living independently immediately after the wedding, as the exception (“once in a while”) rather than a commonplace occurrence. Puja’s words, “the whole community talks”, shows that the discursive force of codes in the community also affects younger people. Even those who prefer the nuclear family are discreet, allowing for a suitable period of time to elapse before moving out.

These conversations reveal an important aspect of what happens when cultural codes come up for questioning. People feel compelled to justify or give accounts when there is deviance from accepted cultural codes. The “shame” that Katyal referred to, Ramesh’s need to justify his living separately in terms of cost, the young women’s response of waiting for an appropriate period before moving out, all show that the premise of family continues to be based on *ghar* or the multi-member multi-generational household; as a result anyone favoring the alternate definition of family as a nuclear household, feels the need to give accounts for why they live alone.

I next turn to issues within families who *chose* to live together. While the multi-member, multi-generational family in Afghanistan was associated with happiness, enjoyment, connection, and companionship, those who lived in multi-generational families in Germany were unable to quite capture the same sense of happiness.

#### Living Together as a Family

In many of the families I met and interacted with, elderly parents did live with a son. However, except for Ashok who spoke about it as a happy arrangement, others described problems among family members.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the hierarchy in Afghanistan in which the elderly male members of the family exerted authority to resolve conflicts in the family. The boundaries within the family in Afghanistan dictated that the elder’s word be obeyed unquestioningly. Earlier I quoted Kanha who spoke about “control”, and Katyal who spoke about how “not a stone could be moved without permission of the elders” in Afghanistan. It became evident as participants talked about their lives in Germany that those hierarchies were changing. Pyasa described this as a “problem”:

The main problem is this. When some of these [Afghan Hindu] girls came to Germany they were one or two years old. They went to school here. They learn here to take care of their own life, to live for themselves, to eat on their own, this life is for oneself type of thing. The mother-in-law is still in the other world where she thinks the daughter-in-law should not speak directly to the father-

in-law, she should hide her face, and so on. She may comment on the daughter-in-law's clothes, expecting her not to wear pants in the house, or ask her not to talk to certain people because "our relationship is not good with them". In the old days, if the rest of the family's relationship with someone was not good, the daughter-in-law would never think of having friendship with them. Now the daughter-in-law says, "Why should I be drawn into your politics? She is nice to me, so I talk to her". (Pyasa, 2008)

According to Pyasa, the autonomy prevalent in German society is imbibed by Afghan Hindu youth raised in Germany, who "learn to take care of their own life, to live for themselves". In Afghanistan certain kinds of conduct were prescribed for women such as covering the face, dressing in the traditional dress, and showing solidarity to the family by not interacting with people the family chose not to associate with. The clash in the family now is being constructed by Pyasa not so much as a clash of personalities of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law but as cultural difference. The mother-in-law operates from the traditions of the "other world" based on respect and obedience to the elder, whereas the daughter-in-law who grew up in Germany operates under a cultural code of autonomy of the individual. She also does not hesitate to question her in-laws.

Pyasa gave another example of conflict in the multi-generational family in Germany:

There is a good movie in the theatre, and daughter-in-law thinks, "I would like to go with my husband to see the movie tonight" and the mother-in-law says, "You should not be going on the streets that late, you are pregnant, you should curtail your activities". She is in a different place and different time. There [in Afghanistan] they wouldn't let pregnant women go out in the dark because the streets weren't always paved, there wasn't enough lighting, in the old days people didn't have cars, so on and so forth; there was a concern that the expecting mother might fall and injure herself. So the elders in the family wouldn't let her take unnecessary risks. The mother-in-law means well. But now people have cars, we are in a different country. But the mother-in-law still objects; the daughter-in-law resents it and so the tension escalates. The mother-in-law is unable to come out of her thinking, and these girls are very independent too. Hence the conflict (Pyasa, 2008)

Pyasa constructs the mother-in-law as meaning well when she objects to her pregnant daughter-in-law going to the movie in the evening, however the mother-in-law is operating under a different premise, and one that no longer holds in the new milieu. The



boundaries in the traditional family in Afghanistan were such that the daughter-in-law would not think of defying the mother-in-law's words, perhaps even recognizing that the mother-in-law "means well" in her concern for the daughter-in-law's welfare, however, the daughter-in-law who has grown up in Germany and is influenced by the cultural codes of the larger society that promote "independence", sees the intervention as interference, and "resents" it. Obedience thus comes up against independence, creating "tensions" in the family.

Another issue, also related to autonomy, was privacy of the individual. For example, Ashok said as he compared Germany with Afghanistan:

In Kabul some people's houses were small and not everyone had a room. Sometimes a married couple with children had a small room to themselves, but no one felt it as a disadvantage. Here, the child is not even born yet, and parents are already setting up a separate room for the child (Ashok, 2008)

As I described in a previous section, although some Afghan Hindus talked about the big homes in Afghanistan, others stated that not everyone had large homes. Here Ashok reiterates this point. Using the example of a separate room for a baby to illustrate the need for privacy of the individual, he juxtaposes life in Afghanistan with that of Germany. Migration has changed people's ideas of sharing space.

The premise of family, distribution of space, and the place of the individual in the family were different in Afghanistan. Ahuja also spoke about different expectations related to privacy:

The daughter-in-law wants to go to the beach with her husband. She wants to spend time alone with her husband, perhaps swim in the water. And in our culture there is one thing. Wherever we went when we were in Afghanistan we went together as a family. So [now] the daughter-in-law says, "We are going to the beach" and the father-in-law says, "Great. Let's all go". He doesn't understand that the couple wants their privacy. So that is one way problems begin (Ahuja, 2008).

In the traditional family in Afghanistan, there was little or no expectation of privacy. It was common for families to gather and enjoy events collectively. As Mrs. Swami told

me, “There life was different. We used to go for camping trips to our cabins for 8 days at a time, all the relatives. We used to take our big vehicles and say lets go”. In Germany married couples expected to have their private time away from rest of the family members. In Ahuja’s words, “many problems begin with these differences”. Sometimes these differences escalated into conflict leading to rupture in the family.

#### Divorce as a “New” Phenomenon

Afghan Hindus spoke of divorce as something “new” in Germany that they were unfamiliar with in Afghanistan. Here Mukesch explains that while families had their problems, divorce had not been a solution that people readily resorted to among Hindus in Afghanistan:

One more thing that is new here that wasn’t there in Afghanistan is divorce. That was extremely rare there among Hindus. But since we have come to Europe, the number of divorces has increased. There were mother-in-law/daughter-in-law issues in Afghanistan too, and it is present here. The difference is that there people didn’t just pick up and leave, here they do (Mukesch, 2008).

By talking about divorce as a “new” phenomenon, and as “extremely rare” in Afghanistan, Mukesch implies that it is a consequence of migration, and specifically a result of coming to Europe. He attributes divorce to “mother-in-law/daughter-in-law issues”.

Mukesch acknowledges that family conflict existed in Afghanistan, however people did not “just pick up and leave”. Thus, it was not about whether there was conflict or not but rather the ways of dealing with conflict had changed after migration. In Afghanistan the unity of the family was prized above all things. Rules of conduct were clear, as was authority of elders who resolved conflicts in the family before they escalated. One of the things I gathered from these conversations was the lack of clear authority after migration. The elder had lost status in the community and family due to changes in economic status. In Afghanistan, both the culture and economics placed the elder in a position of authority. Respecting elders was a way of life. Moreover the eldest

male in the family was also often the head of the family business and the household. In Germany, where the elders were financially dependent on the younger members of the family, loss of status was inevitable.

While Mukesch spoke about breaking up of marriages as “picking up and leaving”, a different construction of break-ups I heard was “they [in-laws] sent our daughter back home” (*unhone humaree ladki ko vaapas bhej diya*). Mina, who I mentioned in the last chapter, told me that her daughter was separated from her husband only 6 months after her marriage. The in-laws claimed that the young woman had not “behaved well” in their family. I wanted to ask Mina more about it, but I had been warned by the president of the temple not to delve too deeply into marital breakups because of the sensitivity of the issue. However, I took the opportunity to broach the subject with Katyal, who mentioned that he was sometimes asked for advice on these matters. When I asked him about Mina’s case (without mentioning her name), he understood who I was speaking about, and explained that he was called on by the girl’s father-in-law when the crisis occurred:

The father [of the boy] calls me and asks me for advice. I told him why don’t you first tell me the whole story. When the story came out I understood that there was some tension that escalated and there was an argument. The *devar* (husband’s younger brother) hit his *bhabhi* (sister-in-law) and she left. I told the father, “This is terrible. How did you let this go on till that point of the brother-in-law raising his fist against the *bhabhi*, not even the husband, but the **brother-in-law**.” Apparently, the daughter-in-law had some argument with the mother-in-law and said something offensive and that’s when the brother-in-law intervened. I explained to this man. I said, “Think about it. Your daughter-in-law is educated and is a German citizen and your wife is *anguta chaap* (thumb imprint meaning one who cannot even write her name in a signature). Your daughter-in-law goes to work in the morning and comes home in the evening and after that if your wife demands that she cook and clean, then of course she is going to rebel. Your wife is trying to continue her Afghanistan style of family life. That doesn’t work here”. He said he was prepared to go and apologize to his daughter-in-law and bring her home. I told him that was only a short-term fix. He asked me what he should do, and I told him the best thing was to separate the family, have his son and daughter-in-law move into their own home. He says, “No I don’t agree with that”. I said, “Well then it is going to be difficult. This blaming

will continue and it will end up in divorce. If you love your son then you have to do this for his sake”. I really believe this. I think it is better after the sons get married, to have them live on their own. So I told him, “Your wife is not going to change, so if there needs to be harmony at home you need to do this, because if later on your son decides to leave of his own accord neither you nor your wife will like it. Better that you take the initiative and do it” (Katyal, 2008).

There are several aspects to the problem described by Katyal. In Germany both boys and girls had at least a high school education, which was more than the parents had, particularly more than the mother had. This difference led to shifts in who had greater voice in the family. While the mother-in-law had entitlement based on her position in the family, the daughter-in-law who had education, spoke German, and was an earner in the family had more power. This power differential led to a new set of issues to contend with that was absent in Afghanistan. Former rules, about who had the right to speak, to whom, when and in what manner, were no longer applicable in the new context. It is also noteworthy that Katyal, who earlier argued that an elderly mother’s place is with her son and that living together was one of choice, advised the father to “separate” the family in the interest of harmony. The circumstances, in his estimation, called for a break from the traditional configuration of a family.

While Katyal took the father-in-law to task for not intervening (“how did you let this go on”), I understood from others that not everyone had the right to intervene. In the above situation, as the head of the household the father-in-law had the right to speak, and was expected to do so to avert the crisis. However, not everyone had equal right to intervene. Ashok claimed that marital breakup of young people occurred because of “interference” from the parents of the bride. In the Afghan Hindu culture, boundaries of family were clearly demarcated in the traditional family. Once a woman was married, she became part of the husband’s family and the woman’s parents did not have any right to intervene in her life. Ashok related an incident from his childhood to illustrate this point:

I remember, I was a young boy. My oldest sister was already married. One time, she came home one morning crying and with a red face. My mother asked her what happened, and my sister

talked about some conflict in her home. My mother kept quiet, didn't say anything but made her wash her face, sit down and made her a good lunch, and then later in the afternoon, she told me to go drop her off at her house. A couple days later the same thing happened. My sister came home again and my mother did the same thing. When my sister came to our house a third time, my mother told her politely, "Look, I don't know what's going on in your family. It is none of my business. I don't want to know. It is up to you and your in-laws to resolve whatever problems you are having. I don't like you coming here every time you have a problem". And that was that. My sister did not come back with her problems again. So that is how it was there (Ashok, 2008).

Ashok's words indicate specific rules that existed for resolving conflict. A married woman's family was her husband's family. Once a woman was married she was expected to live by the rules of her husband's family. She could not carry her troubles to her birth family and expect help. In that meaning system, clear rules existed on who was allowed to intervene and who was not. Ashok explained this further, comparing this kind of situation with what was happening now:

Once a daughter was married off, we did not go to her house unless there was a wedding or occasion and we did not go inside her family or interfere in her matters. **Now** what happens is, the daughter directly talks to her parents on the phone all the time, you know, everyday three or four times, "Mom what should I do? Dad what should I do?" If there is a problem, then she confides in them. The parents say, "You don't have to put up with that. You are educated". That's it, the next thing you know the daughter leaves her husband and moves in with her parents. Then her uncles, aunts, all add fuel to the fire and the whole issue escalates, leading to divorce. In Afghanistan we had arranged marriages; we never even saw our prospective spouse until the day of the marriage, yet we had never even heard of divorce. Here these kids choose their own spouse, yet marriages break up, why? It is because of this [interference by parents] (Ashok, 2008).

Ashok describes rules about who could intervene in family conflict. Once a daughter was married, her parents did not have the right to speak in matters of conflict in her [husband's] family, but the in-laws did. By giving an example of his mother and sister, Ashok demonstrates how such matters were dealt with. It is his contention that in Germany, these boundaries were not observed. Parents "interfered" in their daughter's life offering advice, encouraging her, and offering support when she decided to leave her husband.

Ashok also presents a paradox, of how marriages by individual choice were ending in divorce, while the arranged marriages in Afghanistan did not. Perhaps this is not so paradoxical considering that youth in Germany enjoy more freedom; the freedom to choose a spouse also permits them to walk out of a marriage. Also, the fact that the woman is more educated affords her power that women in Afghanistan did not have. These examples point to a shift in power structures in the family.

Besides these issues, divorce was also attributed to *mahaul*. Rajesh, from Hamburg, described influences of the environment as a reason for the problems this community faced:

We also have other problems, which have started in the last 10 years or so. There have been cases where people have married by mutual liking Hindu to Hindu, but they broke up within, two years, one year, 6 months, like that. It is not just one or two instances; this is a growing trend and has us really concerned. In my assessment the environment here in schools is not right. Even twelve, thirteen- year old children have freedom to do as they please. In this country they tell them everything in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, about sex and so on. By the time they are 15 and 16 their life is all over the place. By the time they are 18 they are completely independent of their parents, their family and so on. They get a room somewhere and live on their own. Because they live alone they are not afraid of anything, whether boy or girl. They come back late at night. They live with their boyfriends and girlfriends. This is their culture (Hamburg conversation, 2009)

Rajesh speaks of marital breakup as a “growing trend” attributing it to the influence of mainstream German culture, a culture in which children had the “freedom to do as they please”; sex education occurred at an early age in schools, and they could be independent, living with “boyfriends and girlfriends” after 18. Others, like Rajesh, explained that the permissiveness of the larger society made Afghan Hindu children challenge their own community’s rules of conduct. Many parents described the struggle to raise children in their culture. Not only was their conflict after marriage, but there was also parent-child conflict as children were growing up. I address this type of conflict next.

## Parent-Child Conflict

Not only adults, but also many of the young people I spoke with reported parent-child conflict in their families. Rani, recalled that her relationship with her parents as being turbulent at times:

I mean I respect them but I also had arguments with them. I had very big arguments with them. At these time I also think I have the power because I know the language. It's bad to think this way, but maybe if we had been in Afghanistan I would have had more respect [for them] but here life um I've grown up in this culture and I say what seems to be right at that moment. So it's um not the fault of the children and not the fault of the parents (Rani, 2008).

Rani specifically mentions power. Knowledge of German is a trump card that children hold. Children had to assist parents in translating official documents. Asylum cases often stretched over many years, and parents would get frequent letters from the government, which they could not read themselves. Rani went on to describe how as a child she would translate letters from the government for her parents. She accompanied her parents to government offices to speak to the officials. This dependence of elders on children eroded parental authority, also leading to a shift in power in the family.

Another related issue that surfaced in conversations was a lack of education among the parental generation. Parental lack of German fluency and their limited education that posed difficulties in helping children with school-work. Although these parents valued the education their children were receiving in Germany, they found it difficult to understand the German school system. As a result, the children were on their own when it came to making decisions about career choices. Some parents also told me that this created a gap between their children and them. Parents could not monitor what the children were reading, their internet use, nor help them with homework.

Kishan mentioned a different kind of power that children had over parents. In Germany children could not be raised in the same way that Afghan Hindu parents were accustomed to:

One thing is for sure. The authority with which they used to raise children [in Afghanistan], that does not work here because children know that they have freedom here in this society. The child who is growing up in Germany knows that if my dad spanks me I can call the police. In Afghanistan it was common practice to spank the child, not just your parents, but you probably got a couple [of spankings] from your uncles and grandfather too [laughing]. So there was little chance of the kid being spoiled (Kishan, 2008)

Once again the “freedom” of the larger society is mentioned. The old ways of disciplining a child did not work in the new setting. The word “spoiled” at the end of the utterance indicates that as a result, children were not being raised appropriately in Germany. Just as the loss of traditional meaning of family was attributed to the German legal system, here again, the erosion of parental authority is being attributed to laws that prevented the parent from disciplining the child in the traditional manner.

In Germany, anyone over 18 was free from parental control. Such autonomy of youth came up repeatedly in conversation, as in this example:

Parents also are not able to do much. You may know, it’s the law here that when children turn 18 they can do what they want. No one can do anything about it. Parents are also silent because of this. And one can’t blame the children either. See if they were home or had the surroundings then they can learn something, but 8 to 9 hours of the day they are with Germans. They go to school, friends are Deutsch. (Mrs. Swami, 2008)

Once again German mainstream culture is blamed for loss of authority of parents. Like Rani who stated that the shift in power was neither the parents’ fault nor the child’s, but circumstance, Mrs. Swami also explains the problem as continual exposure of Afghan Hindu children to mainstream culture.

Mukesch pointed out a slightly different but related issue. His main complaint had to do with teaching his children their traditions. He said:

Anytime you ask them to do something they ask “why?” For example, it is customary for us to touch the feet of elders. I tell my son, to do so, and he asks “why?” They want an explanation for everything and we don’t have the answer to this “why” for everything? We would never have thought of asking such a question when we were growing up in Afghanistan, but in this society they must question everything. It is really difficult. (Mukesch, 2008).



The child wants a rational explanation for practices that he does not understand. On the one hand, the parent may be at a genuine loss in explaining the reason behind traditions because he never questioned his elders; on the other hand, the parent's sensibilities are offended by such questioning, which he interprets as questioning his authority as a parent.

While parents evaluated the mainstream culture negatively, young people saw in it opportunities to broaden their horizons. Again, education gave them exposure to the outside world. Twenty-three year old Reena, who was attending the university a degree in international business, spoke about her struggles with her parents in this manner:

And then [after high school], I found Ausbildung Schule [internship]. I started in a Federal agency and then I saw the world with another eyes because until my 17<sup>th</sup> year I was just home, school and friends and nothing more. And I never wanted to go out and I never asked my parents because I knew they would say, "You are not allowed to go out" but when I started doing Ausbildung [internship] I met people. I met people from higher standard I met people from lower standard and when they did things then I wanted to also, but my parents said, "No you can't do that" and I would say, "No I will do it". I went to the cinema I came at 10 and 11 o'clock. It was a very difficult time for my parents, and it was a difficult time for me because we argued all the time and then it harmonized after some time and um in between I also realized what my religion is. Until my 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> year I just did what my family did - you got up in the morning, you have to pray, you went on occasions to *mandir* (temple) but when I started my Ausbildung I started to ask who I am and what I want to be. It is very difficult to find a middle way to give my parents the feeling that "Oh you are my parents and I want to do what you want", but on the other side I also want to do what I want....Then I moved to Bonn. It was a very big decision because my parents did not want me to live alone but I told them, I want to work and I will go there, so I went there and worked for one year in Bonn. It was a very good year for me because I lived with students and I got to enjoy student life and I was working. Then after one year I found work here and I came back, and that was also very different, to live alone and then to come back home. It was very, very difficult...I mean I understand my parents' position also. For forty plus years they were in a country where the mentality was different, and only in the last 10 years they have been here where there is a different mentality. I have got more freedom than my older sisters ever did. So my parents tend to compare and they say, "Tanu did not do this, Renu did not do this, you are doing it. Enough is enough", but I say, "No its not enough. I want to study. I want to do things". The

more freedom you have the more freedom you want I guess  
(Reena, 2008).

Reena conformed to parental authority, however when she left Frankfurt for her internship and later started to work, she encountered alternative ways of living. She met people who lived by a different meaning system that she embraced. Her statement, “I understand my parents’ position also...” and “I want to do what you want”, acknowledges that her parents function under a different premise, but Reena also wants to do things that she considers important. She wants more freedom.

Another young woman, Rosie, who was studying in Munich, spoke about her struggles. Her family had lived in Munich when she began studying at the university there. Later her parents moved to Frankfurt. They wanted her to transfer to a university in Frankfurt, but she preferred to continue in Munich, both because she liked the university and because she saw this as an opportunity to live away from her family. While her parents accepted her decision reluctantly, the Afghan Hindu community was likely to gossip about a girl living alone in another city. Her parents handled the situation by not telling anyone that her daughter was still in Munich. They pretended that she lived in Frankfurt with them, which meant that they had to make continual excuses for her absence when someone came to visit, or at family celebrations, which she was unable to attend. Thus even if parents accepted their child’s autonomy, the community pressure was something they had to deal with.

In another instance, another young woman spoke about an incident when she was delivering newspapers in their neighborhood. She ran into one of her school-friends, a boy, who offered to go with her to help out. However, by the time she got home, her father had received a phone call from one of his friends that he had seen his daughter with a boy. Her father was upset, until she explained who the friend was. Although her father calmed down, he told her to be careful in future whom she was seen with in public. This young woman said, “Our community is really terrible that way”. Young people frequently perceived the community as intruding in their personal lives.

Similarly, Shalini, a young woman heading to Australia for further studies said, “I know after I leave, there will a hundred things said about me, but it doesn’t bother me because my parents support me” (Shalini, 2008). It was enough for Shalini that her parents supported her, however she also understood that her parents would have to face censure after she left.

These utterances show that young women were embracing different cultural codes and asserting their autonomy not only from their parents but also from the community. However, parents were still concerned about their image in the community; they must deal with censure because children were seen as departing from the norms of community. Thus, the codes of the homeland exerted discursive force to regulate the conduct of the members of this community, but these young women were also finding ways to subvert those codes.

Those who lived in a multigenerational household mentioned a different kind of pressure. Puja, for example spoke of pressure from her grandparents who lived with them:

In our house, my grandparents live with us, and they are completely old-fashioned. And our parents of course will listen to them and if I say I am going out, then my grandparents will say to my father, “Son where is she going? Why are you letting her go?” and my father immediately gets pressured because he feels he ought to listen to his parents (Jungen, 2008)

The parent in this case also embraces the traditional system in which no matter how old the son is he obeys his father. As a result the young woman is restricted from going out with friends, even though the father himself has no objection. Sometimes girls spoke about the circuitous means they had devised in order to spend time with their friends.

Evaluation of conduct by the community was also gendered. Girls were more likely to be censured than boys. Boys could move around freely, and date, while daughters were not allowed the same freedom. Shalini said:

This is one really bad thing in our community. They let the boys do as they please....And now they [parents] complain that their sons

are marrying Turkish girls. Well, what do they expect? Serves them right for allowing the boys to wander about. If anything we girls are far more loyal to the family and more concerned about not bringing shame to our parents (Shalini, 2008)

Girls felt they had to fight for their rights. They clearly felt that boys in the family were favored over the girls because they enjoyed more freedom. On the other hand, when I talked to older Afghan Hindus, I heard nothing but praise for girls. They talked about girls as being more responsible and doing far better in education than their boys. Clearly, the older generation was proud of the girls in their community, but for this very reason, Afghan Hindu girls may also feel the pressure to rise to those standards. *Izzat* or the family honor among Afghans and other South Asian cultures also depends on the conduct of girls in the family (Zulfacar, 1997).

Finally, I also noticed that generation was a fluid term in this community. Depending on the age at the time of migration, children exhibited varying degrees of deference to elders. Those who were in their late teens, or older at the time of leaving Afghanistan, were more inclined to adhere to or at least acknowledge rules of conduct from the homeland; those who were infants at the time of migration were more likely to display autonomy, and dismiss pressure from the community. I also learned that many families had sent their young men to Germany from Afghanistan to avoid military service. These young men, who were only 17 or 18 at the time of arrival, learned to live independently and fend for themselves. Ashok referred to them as the “lost generation”, meaning that they had lost touch with their roots. They had become used to living alone and fending for themselves. Moreover they had helped their family immigrate to Germany and hence the parents did not have a say in their lives. Some Afghan Hindus spoke about the “new generation”, consisting of young children who were born in Germany, who were still young, in whom they could inculcate some of the traditions and norms of their culture.

## Discussion

Family figured prominently in conversations about migration. According to the Afghan Hindus I spoke with, the structure of family, conflict between family members, divorce, and parent-child conflict, were indications that prior meanings of family were changing in ways that they found to problematic. Even more important to note was the ways in which this community spoke about and justified these changes. Some spoke of these changes as a lack of choice due to government policies that gave or denied aid based on definitions of a family as nuclear family. Others took the stance that attributing these changes to governmental policy was inaccurate and a mere excuse for people who *chose* not to live together in the traditional multi-generational family. Some maintained a neutral position, acknowledging both viewpoints, that while it was possible to live together, not everyone had the financial means to make it possible. Clearly there was disagreement in the community about why these changes were occurring. However, it was also clear from the ways in which those living in nuclear households felt the need to defend their position by offering explanations and justification for their conduct, that traditional meanings of family as a multi-generational, multi-member household prevailed. “Accounts are offered in a community when there has been a tear in the fabric that holds a community together” (Cuoto, 2000, p. 184). The need to give accounts about family arrangements was an indication that there was a rupture in the meaning of what it meant to be a family. In either case, it was clear the move to a welfare state such as Germany, arriving as refugees, loss of economic status, was having a profound impact on the meaning of family for Afghan Hindus.

Those who chose to live together faced a different set of problems. Mainly elders spoke about the autonomy of Afghan Hindu youth, particularly young women, which they discursively constructed as the consequence of education and the influence of the larger society. Young women who grew up in Germany were more educated, contributed

to the earnings of the family, and spoke German<sup>13</sup>. This change upset traditional norms. The old adage of *ek kamatha sab khaate* (one earned everyone ate), the “one” being the oldest male in the household, was no longer true. The elderly in Germany were dependent on welfare and their children. As the daughter-in-law gained power in the household, established rules of conduct in the family, such as who should talk to whom, under what circumstances, who was allowed to intervene in matters of conflict, and how conflict should be resolved, were being challenged. As George (2005) suggests, “The resilience of patriarchy is limited by the resilience of class and status configurations” (p. 206). The loss of status for the elderly meant a shift in power structures in the family.

Simultaneously, however, the discursive force of traditional codes was also evident when young women talked about pressure to conform to expectations of parents, grandparents and more generally the community. Those who deviated from norms were subjected to negative evaluations. Both parents and children struggled with these evaluations. Parents struggled between letting their daughters have the autonomy they wished, and being evaluated by their peers for giving them too much freedom; young women struggled between wanting to pursue opportunities afforded by mainstream society, yet not wanting to bring discredit to their parents. This struggle also points to an important overlap between community and family in this community. Even though the community was scattered, and no longer living in enclaves where everyone was informed about everyone else, still the community was connected enough to exert pressure on families and individuals. Loss of face in the community was still a matter of concern for the parental generation, and to a large extent for the younger generation. Yet, youth also found ways to subvert these cultural codes. A newly married couple knew that “people will talk” if they moved out of the parental home, however, it was acceptable if they

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<sup>13</sup> George (2005) notes similar issues when women immigrate to the U.S. first with men joining them as dependents.

moved after a respectable amount of time had elapsed after the wedding. Similarly, a young woman found a way to live on her own by letting people assume she was living with her family. These changes have to do with economics, with a desire for independence, and social mobility in Germany.

Single elderly women faced their own set of problems. A few chose to exert autonomy and live separately, however, these were more the exception than the rule. Most of the elderly preferred to live with one of their sons. However, living with a son did not mean that they were happy; they were lonely, lacking the companionship they had enjoyed in the multi-member family in Afghanistan. “Home” was a different kind of place in Afghanistan, more public, more social than it was in Germany. Being confined to the home in Afghanistan was a different experience than being confined to home in Germany.

Nostalgia for the traditional family of Afghanistan was evident in all their talk, as life in a multi-member, multi-generational household was idealized. Any memories of struggle and family conflict were dismissed as minor disagreements; women chose, instead, to talk about the companionship afforded by large households. Family life *there* was discursively constructed as enjoyable, while lives *here* were described as being lonely, despite *dar* or fear in Afghanistan for women. They were harassed on the streets there; they could only go out in groups or with a male escort; yet life there was glorified. They did not have fear for personal safety in Germany, yet they perceived this life as one lacking freedom because they did not know the language. In my observation, I noticed that many elderly women were quite comfortable taking public transportation to the temple. But several women also told me that this was the only route they travelled alone because they were familiar with it.

I began this chapter by describing the Pyasas. Although some families like the Pyasas were able to maintain connections with family members living locally and in different parts of the world, I discovered that their situation was atypical. Those who had

the financial means were able to travel and maintain familial connections transnationally, however, not everyone was so fortunate. Both time and money were scarce resources for many who worked low-paying jobs in restaurants and factories. Others did not have the necessary visas to travel internationally. For example, Mrs. Chabra could not attend a wedding of a family member in the U.K. because she was denied a visa. Afghan Hindus mentioned how they were denied visas to visit India at one point in time, for a period of three years because the Indian government held all those of Afghan origin as suspect. Likewise, while the Pyasas had a multi-storey house in which they lived with their son, daughter-in-law and two children, the Chabras' sons barely visited them. Thus, although familial connections were still celebrated and idealized, not everyone was able to, or chose to, maintain those connections. While those breaking codes of conduct risked evaluation, perhaps not everyone was so concerned about censure. Thus, the hold that community had over the family in Afghanistan was gradually losing strength in Germany.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed discursive constructions of the meaning of family in the Afghan Hindu community, the changes that were taking place in those traditional meanings, how those changes were explained variously by members of this community, shifting roles in the family and resulting conflict, and displacement of the elderly. As in discussions of community in the previous chapter, descriptions of family also had both spatial and relational components. Although members of the community agreed that family meant a multi-member, multi-generational household, living under one roof, the explanations offered for why that system could not be sustained in Germany, differed. Both young and old struggled to come to terms with new modes of conduct in the family. The displacement of the elder as the voice of authority left a void, particularly when it came to managing conflict in the family. Afghan Hindus were looking for a way to



contain the scattering. In Chapter Six, I focus on the temple or *mandir* as the place that brings community and family together.

## CHAPTER VI

## PLACE OF TEMPLE IN AFGHAN HINDU LIVES

There were many old temples there. You see our history in Afghanistan is very old. In Afghanistan first there were Aryans who were Hindus. Muslims came very late. In Kabul we had *Asa Mayi* temple, a *devi* (goddess) temple, very old. There was one in the plains, the original one was in the mountains. There were many such temples, for example in Herat. This is the place *Raja Harischandra* (ancient Hindu king) lived. The river there is called *Harirudra*. In Gazni, you may have heard of the Muslim king Gazni who plundered and looted the Hindu temple in Somnat (India)? There are temples near Gazni. During *Navratra* (nine-day Hindu festival) people from Kabul and Kandahar used to go there. These temples are living proof of our long history in Afghanistan. (Kapoor, 2008)

The temple (*mandir*) figured prominently in Afghan Hindu talk about community and family. In Afghanistan, the temple had been a central part of the daily life of Hindus. Almost all accounts of life in Afghanistan contained some description of temples. Talk about temples occurred mainly in two contexts, to emphasize that Hindus had lived in Afghanistan for many centuries, for which the existence of ancient temples was offered as proof, and as part of descriptions of daily life in Afghanistan. The above quote is an example of the first type of account in which the emphasis is on the history of Hindus in that region. As discussed in previous chapters, Afghan Hindus spoke with pride about *mazab bachana* (protecting religion), and the temples were offered as further evidence of how Afghan Hindus had retained their religion in an Islamic culture. From these ways of speaking about the temple, I understood that the longevity of Hindu presence in Afghanistan was closely tied to the identity of Hindus in Afghanistan.

The other mention of temples occurred in the course of describing daily routines of Hindus in Afghanistan. In the following example of one such description, the place of the temple in Hindu lives becomes evident:

In the morning people would take shower and go to the temple to pray, come home, have breakfast and go to work... In Kandahar we had a *Jule Lal* temple (one of the patron saints of Afghan Hindus). On Sundays they had *aarti* (prayer) and different *pooja*

*paat* (prayers). After that we would all have *prashad* (food offered to god), and chai and come home in the evening. On Mondays we would fast for *Shivji* (Hindu god). In Kandahar we had a *Shivalay* (temple for Shiva). There they used to do special *pooja* (worship) for Shiva, so people would fast during the day and then go there in the evening for *arati* and *prashad*. On Tuesday we used to go to the *Hanuman* (another Hindu god) temple. On Wednesday we would go to a place called *Devi Dwara* where there was a *devi* (goddess) temple. It was outside the city... Sunday was a working day but at 2:00 p.m. everyone would go to the *Jumpe saab* temple. (Chabra, 2008)

Visits to the temple were woven into the fabric of daily living. There were special days set aside for particular gods and there were many different temples dedicated to the different gods. What is also noteworthy is that *mandir* is discursively constructed mainly as a place of worship, as evidenced by references to *aarti* and *pooja-paat*, (particular types of worship), a point I return to later in this chapter.

In Kandahar the temple was also associated with educating children about their Hindu heritage. Kandharis generally described a school they attended, run by the Asa Mai temple. This school (*paatshaala*) was established for the purpose of teaching Hindu children their language, culture, and religion, besides other academic subjects. Until 6<sup>th</sup> grade Hindus went to this school in the morning and the Afghan public school in the afternoons. The school affiliated with the temple, was another way in which religion was maintained by ensuring its passage to the next generation. After grade six, only boys attended the public school full-time. Girls were not sent to school after they attained puberty.

*Mandir* also figured prominently in talk about life in Germany. However, while *mandir* in Afghanistan was mainly defined as religious and educational space, in Germany the temple was envisioned as the place that could contain *bikharna*. Members of the temple board spoke about *mandir* as the place to bring people in the community together, by creating not only a religious space, but also a social space for the elderly to meet, for youth activities, for young children to learn their culture, and for family members to meet each other. Not everyone agrees with the temple as social space arguing

that the focus of a temple should only be religion. Others argued that the temple should go beyond traditional religious practices and be more involved in educating the community about “practical” matters. Some people expected the temple to mediate in family conflict. Ways of speaking about *mandir* revealed schisms in the community.

In this chapter I first describe the temple board’s perspective on *mandir* as the place to contain *bikharna* by bringing the community together. I then present the voices of those who disagreed and critiqued the temple board’s vision of *mandir*.

### *Mandir as a Way to Contain Bikharna*

In earlier chapters, I discussed *bikharna* as loss of physical proximity, loss of relationships, and loss of traditions. The temple board envisioned the temple the physical space in which to promote togetherness, and promoting cultural awareness, particularly among the next generation to prevent loss of traditions. Board members also discursively constructed the temple as a place to cater to multiple needs of a diverse audience within the community. Different meanings that emerged in their articulations of *mandir* were: a) *mandir* as a place to preserve and promote culture and identity b) *mandir* as a place to celebrate life and death, c) *mandir* as a social place, d) *mandir* as a place for the elderly, e) *mandir* as family space, f) *mandir* as a place for youth, and g) *mandir* as the new elder.

### Preserving and Promoting Cultural Identity

The original inspiration for starting a temple was described as the need for a place to preserve and promote an Afghan Hindu cultural identity. Mr. Chabra, who was instrumental in founding the Frankfurt temple, gave this account of what prompted him to take the initiative in establishing a temple in Frankfurt:

I was traveling somewhere on a train and this man was sitting across from me. We struck a conversation. He asked me, “Are you from India?” and I said “From Afghanistan”. He said, “You speak good *Urdu* how come you are from Afghanistan?” to which I replied, “Well, I am from Afghanistan but I am Hindu.” Then he said, “You know you Hindus from Afghanistan, you’ll be gone in a matter of the next 25 to 30 years.” I asked him, “Who are you, and

what makes you say that?” and he said, “I am a Pakistani journalist. I am doing research on Afghans, and I don’t see any presence of your Hindu culture in this country [Germany]”. When I got off the train I began thinking that what he said was right. If we didn’t do something soon, our culture, our identity would be wiped out. I immediately got to work to find out if there was some property that we could rent to start a temple. (Chabra, 2008)

Mr. Chabra began by renting a property to hold religious gatherings. The initial response from the people was positive, which then prompted him to raise money to purchase the property in which the present temple is housed. A chance remark by a stranger prompted the establishment of the temple in Frankfurt. Although, the journalist did not mention a temple in particular, his comment about no “presence” of Afghan Hindu culture was interpreted by Chabra to mean a place of worship, perhaps because religion had been so closely associated with their identity in Afghanistan.

Avinash, a man in his late twenties, who was closely involved in one of the two temples in Köln, described more explicitly how the temple could preserve and promote Afghan Hindu culture:

Our children do not know their history; our religion, our customs, our traditions that have been continuing through the ages; our culture is unknown to our children here. And that is why we are making every effort to bring them to the temple to show them these things, so that they can know their people, know their own selves, their religion so that even if they are not getting these things at home, at least they will get them at the temple. I personally am really afraid that they are imbibing all the wrong things from the society and if they are not in contact with their own culture, very soon they will be completely lost. (Avinash, 2008)

In this utterance Avinash emphasizes the importance of children knowing their history, customs, traditions, and religion. In Afghanistan going to temples had been a part of daily life; “contact with their own culture” did not require special effort because Afghan Hindus lived together in one area and maintained close contact, whereas in Germany, special effort was required to expose children to their culture and people. Additionally, Avinash expressed the fear (*dar*) that their children were “imbibing the wrong things from the society” and *mandir* is positioned as the place to counteract these influences.

Concern for future generations (*agli nasal*) was a driving force among various temple board and other members I met with. This concern was articulated by Masterji, an 80-year-old man, a school-teacher in the *patshala* (school) in Kandahar:

I worry about what will happen after our generation is gone. Who will teach these children our religion, our values? Already these values are disappearing. Parents say, “Let’s go to the temple”, kids say, “What’s there in the temple?” Our children are only learning what they are taught in school... Tomorrow, we will be gone, who will even know we existed? (Masterji, 2008).

Masterji had studied Sanskrit and Hindi, and was well-versed in the Hindu scriptures. He was one of the very few Afghan Hindus who could read these scriptures, since most Afghan Hindus had only basic education. In the above excerpt Masterji articulates a concern that many elderly Afghan Hindus and some younger members voiced about anticipated loss of Afghan Hindu traditions. Thus, one important function of *mandir* was to serve as the place to educate the younger generation in religious traditions. Like Avinash, Masterji also expresses concern that posterity would know nothing about Afghan Hindu history and traditions.

Avinash further elaborated on the importance of maintaining an Afghan Hindu identity:

There is one main difference between Afghan Hindus and Indian Hindus. Afghan Hindus have almost all completely left Afghanistan. India is very big, so even if the majority of Indians abroad given up their culture and religion, the source will not dry up. Hindus will remain in India. But Afghan Hindus have their own identity that we retained for centuries, now that is under threat. No doubt, **Hindus** will remain forever, but it is quite possible that **Afghan** Hindus will disappear over time. That is our fear (Avinash, 2008).

Avinash makes a case for not just keeping Hinduism alive but *Afghan Hindu* identity as a distinctive identity. By drawing attention to a difference between the diaspora experience of Indians and Afghans, Avinash is constructing Afghan Hindus as a distinct community different from Indian Hindus, despite a common religion; the difference is that Indians have a homeland that they can return to, that keeps their culture alive, whereas Afghan

Hindus have no homeland left to draw from. Thus they must preserve what they have, in the diaspora.

Besides people like Avinash and Mr. Chabra, who were involved in the temple directly as organizers, some parents also described the temple as a place for children to imbibe their own culture. One young mother, who was probably in her late twenties, whom I met at the Frankfurt temple, explained that she and her husband made every effort to take the children to the temple as often as possible, even though they lived almost two hours away from Frankfurt, and going to the temple took time and effort:

At least they will learn something. See the whole environment is so bad. Let them learn something good. They should be able to also explain our customs and traditions when someone asks. If we don't take them to the temple they have no way of learning. They don't know any Hindi, they only know German. So we think at least let them learn something that is ours (Sonia, 2008).

As in the previous utterance this mother refers to culture in terms of customs and traditions. She wants her children to learn these not only for themselves but to be able to explain it to those outside the Hindu community, such as their school friends, or teachers. Once again, there is the reference to the *mahaul* (environment), which is evaluated negatively and “our culture”, is evaluated positively. In earlier chapters I described how *mahaul* figured prominently in Afghan Hindus ways of speaking about fragmentation. The larger environment was evaluated as having a negative influence on their youth. In this excerpt this mother not only reiterates that evaluation but also discursively constructs *mandir* as the place in which children will learn their culture. *Mandir* was frequently positioned as the place that could counteract the negative influences of *mahaul*.

#### Mandir as a Place to Celebrate Life and death

While the Frankfurt temple was inspired by a need to preserve culture and identity, the temple in Hamburg began with another purpose. In this example, Mrs. Swami, wife of one of the founders of the Hamburg temple, described some practical

necessities that had prompted the need for a temple, during their first few years in Germany:

There were so many things, for example when someone died. Neighbors [in Germany] wouldn't allow us to cry. If we cried they would call the police and the police would come and ask what's going on here. When we had weddings in the family we didn't know where to go, what to do. Now, through the grace of *Mata Rani* [goddess] we have the temple. In our community we need these things, whether someone dies or is born. For weddings too it is necessary. This temple is a big anchor for us. (Swami, 2008)

In this utterance Mrs. Swami constructs the temple as a place for happy and sad occasions. As she and others explained to me, in Afghanistan the dead were mourned at home; weddings too were held in the home because the homes were large. In Germany, Afghan Hindus lived in government apartments that were small. When family and friends came in large numbers to mourn the death of someone in the community, neighbors complained about the traffic and noise. There was a need for a central place in which to hold these ceremonies of death. The temple was envisioned as that place. Mrs. Swami also speaks of the temple as an “anchor” that holds Afghan Hindus together.

I witnessed a ceremony in the temple called the *baitak*, or a gathering to mourn the death of a family member, and for friends and family to offer condolences to the bereaved. Being familiar with Hindu protocol around death I knew that it was generally not customary to have death ceremonies at a temple. When I asked people about this practice of *baitak*, I learned this modification of tradition had occurred after migration to Germany. In Afghanistan the *baitak*, took place in the home of the deceased. In Germany this was not possible. However, gathering for a death was an important way of showing solidarity and maintaining relationships. As Kishan explained, “It doesn't matter if you are unable to make it to a happy occasion, but you **must** attend a sad one like death, to offer your support. Its an important time to be together” (Kishan, 2008). The temple facilitated bringing people together at these times, even though holding a death ceremony in the temple was a break from tradition.



On another occasion I arrived at the Hamburg temple for devotional singing to find that there was a change of program; the regular Tuesday program was postponed in order to hold a *baitak*. As Maya explained this to me, she said, “Why do we have a *mandir*, if not for this type of thing, right?” (p. 15). Maya’s comment also constructs the temple as not just religious space but a space that has broader purpose, which is to serve the community in times of need. Thus, although on the one hand Afghan Hindus spoke about “preserving” and “maintaining” traditions, on the other hand, those traditions were being modified to accommodate the exigencies of the new context.

### *Mandir* as Social Space

Another meaning that emerged in Afghan Hindu talk was, *mandir* as a place where people could meet their friends. The following description came about in an interview when I asked a committee member in the Frankfurt temple about the design of Afghan Hindu temples in Germany, which was different from traditional designs of Hindu temples I was familiar with. Hindu temples generally have a presiding deity in the center to which the temple is dedicated, with other deities in the surrounding areas of the main hall. Instead, in Afghan Hindu temples in Germany, the center was occupied by a raised platform that housed the *Ramayana* or *Geetha* (scriptures). The gods were on either side of this platform. Most Afghan Hindu temples had at least one photo of the main Sikh guru, and some like the Köln temple had even devoted a separate space to the Sikh holy book. Ramesh, who was also a key member in the Frankfurt temple, and a man who had played an active role in designing the main hall, offered the following explanation for this unique design:

There are a couple of reasons for this design. One is that the books represent the word of god, what was heard, so we needed a place for that. Usually back home these books were off to one side or in a separate room. We wanted to make it prominent. We don’t have that much space to have separate spaces for things. We had to integrate everything, the lamp, the *Bhagavad Gita* (Hindu scripture), and the idols. Second, we have people of different beliefs coming here. If you see in Essen temple, they have *Geetha*,

and *Guru Granth Sahib* (Sikh scripture), and because we need to attract every kind of people. Our purpose is to unify people. Maybe it's wrong from a ritualistic point of view, but here we have only one place. If we follow only one belief then others may leave. Also, people who come here [temple] are less religious and more social. They want to meet others and we don't want to be so rigid as to discourage people from doing that. (Ramesh, 2008:)

Ramesh's way of speaking about the design of the temple constructs it as a place where people with diverse beliefs, congregate. He further speaks about *mandir* not only as a religious space but a social space, because not everyone who comes to the temple is motivated by religion. The main purpose of the temple, according to Ramesh, was to "unify people", and given the limitations of space, both the social and religious aspects were being accommodated in one space. Ramesh also explains that in Afghanistan, the old Hindu temples were dedicated to one god whereas a great deal of thought had gone into designing these temples in Germany. By placing two major scriptures that all Hindus followed regardless of sectarian and regional differences, the board wanted to emphasize commonalities. By placing statues of all the main gods of Hinduism, the board wanted to accommodate diverse beliefs. Finally, there was also space created to include Sikhism either in the form of photos of Guru Gobind Singh or a special altar for their holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. It is ironic that on the one hand Afghan Hindus spoke about "preserving" a distinct Hindu culture and identity, and yet, as Ramesh's statement "maybe it is wrong from a ritualistic point of view" suggests that some of these traditions were being compromised in the interest of creating community, and accommodating diverse beliefs.

#### Mandir as Meeting Place for the Elderly

One aspect I discussed at length in the previous chapter was the displacement of elderly after migration to Germany, their loneliness and lack of companionship. *Mandir* also served as a space for some of these elderly men and women to meet one another. During my visits to the temple in Frankfurt, I often met elderly women who visited the temple regularly. These women spoke about how eagerly they anticipated Tuesdays and

Sundays when they could come to the temple. One woman told me, “I so look forward to Tuesdays when I can just get out of the house and come here. I get so much peace of mind from praying here” (FN, 2008) Another woman said:

This is one outing I look forward to. See we cannot go places because we don’t know the language. Our children are afraid that we might get lost, so they don’t like us going out on our own. We know how to get to the temple and back. It is so nice because we get meet each other (Inf Conv, 2008).

In these two utterances, the temple is constructed not just as a place for praying but for meeting friends. Moreover, visiting the temple was an “outing” for these women who did not have much opportunity for social life because of language limitations. A younger woman who accompanied her mother-in-law once told me, “Having the temple is so nice for these women, they come here, meet their friends, worship, celebrate our festivals. It is really nice for them” (Inf Conv, 2008). These women also took active part in singing devotional songs at the both the Frankfurt and Hamburg temples.

Women’s frequenting the temple, particularly on their own, was a new development in Germany. One time I asked the main singer at the Hamburg temple, if she used to sing in Afghanistan. She replied that in Afghanistan it was not common for women to visit the temple alone:

Not all men allowed their wives to go. They would say, “What are you going to go and do there. On the way there, Muslim men will harass you”. See these Muslim men would tug at our *chadri* (covering) as they passed by, sometimes they would throw stones. They might throw rotten fruit. So this is the way it was for women. We only went to the temple with our family. The *kirtan* (singing) was done mainly by men. But we [women] used to hold *kirtan* at home (Inf. Conv, 2008).

Once again a change in context revealed a change of practice and departure from tradition. Women did not sing in public in Afghanistan; they performed *kirtan* in the privacy of the home. Also, in Afghanistan women did not venture outside the home, alone; in Germany they had the freedom of movement and some elderly women took

advantage of this mobility to visit the temple. Moreover, I observed that women did much of the devotional singing in both the Frankfurt and Hamburg temples, which was again a departure from tradition. Again, on the one hand people spoke about preserving traditions, yet many of these practices were undergoing changes.

At the Hamburg temple I also observed men who got together and played cards in the temple dining-hall situated on the first floor. Someone explained to be that these men were “regulars” who came to the temple to “hang out” with one another. These men spent more time playing cards and drinking tea than in the temple, going up only for the conclusion of worship called *arati*. The temple, for the elderly, was a place that enabled connections with friends thereby alleviating some of the loneliness that they experienced at home.

### Mandir as Family Space

In the Frankfurt temple, I noticed that several people lingered after dinner on Sundays visiting with one another in the dining room in the basement. I wrote in my field-notes:

It was about 7:00 p.m. on Sunday and there were a group of people still in the dining room and I joined them. Sharmila introduced me to the people explaining that they were all “family” who didn’t get a chance to see each other during the week because they lived in different parts of Frankfurt. She said the temple was one place where they could all meet each other saying, “It is nice for the children to meet their cousins and play together”. I noticed the young children playing in one corner, and older children sitting together in another part of the large dining hall, while the adults chatted with one another in another part of the hall. I gathered that the temple is also a place for families to meet (FN, 2008).

The temple provided the space in which families could meet and spend time together. Children met their cousins, while adults caught up on news about various branches of the family. Some families also came together to cook lunch on Sundays. The temples usually had a sign up sheet for volunteers. Entire families of about 15 to 20 members got together to cook bringing together members even from large distances. One woman told me, “We

try to do this at least once in six months. At least on that one day, we all come together as a family” (Inf. Conv, 2008). Here *mandir* was discursively constructed as “family space”. Given the close proximity that Afghan Hindus were used to in Afghanistan, and the loss of that closeness in Germany, the temple provided a central place in which to maintain family connections.

### *Mandir* as a Place for Educating Children

*Mandir* was also positioned as a place to educate children. I mentioned earlier that loss of traditions was a major concern among adults. Mrs. Swami emphasized the importance of educating the young, recalling a time before the temple in Hamburg was established:

Before we got the temple, children did not even know what a temple was. My own daughter, she was only 4 when we came here [from Afghanistan]. What would a 4-year-old remember. So later when we had a temple and the first time we went to the temple, she had no idea what to do, how to bow, how to pray. Everybody’s children that have grown up here were like that. Now my grandson knows everything. If this temple hadn’t been there it would not have happened. Here the mixing with Germans is Ok, we need it to live here, but still our customs are different. We don’t want to give up that. (Mrs. Swami, 2008)

While the Swamis’ daughter had been unable to learn her religion because Hamburg did not have a Hindu temple when she was growing up, her son was learning their culture, and this is attributed to the presence of the temple. For Mrs. Swami the temple was clearly accomplishing an important objective.

The Frankfurt temple offered Hindi classes at the temple and the young children there were actively involved in activities related to the temple. One mother of a young child described how her child got involved:

My younger one doesn’t speak our language. But even he became interested after the last Diwali program when other children performed on stage. They chanted *shloka* [hymns]. So my son asked me how come he couldn’t participate. Now he wants to join the Hindi class and learn. (Fra Women, 2008)

This statement also positions *mandir* as an accomplishment because it was attracting children to language classes. Sharmila, who taught this class at the temple said that having children perform at the festival had inspired others to join the class, and this has been her goal, stating, “You can tell them only so much at home but the impact is more when they see other children. That is the idea of bringing them to the temple, so that they can see their friends, and speak their language” (Fra Women, 2008). *Mandir* in this description was constructed as an extension to the home in educating children. Seeing their friends perform, provided incentive for children and the temple provided the space in which to get them involved. I learned that speaking Hindi and their own language of Kabli or Kandhari, was emphasized by parents, and I observed that many children spoke their language with their parents, although siblings and friends spoke German among themselves. Language was described as being an important part of maintaining their cultural identity.

#### Mandir as a Place for Youth

Bringing youth to the temple was another important focus of the temple board, because youth attendance at the Frankfurt and Hamburg temples was low. I observed children and some teenagers at the temple on some Sundays, but except for Reena, and on one occasion a group of young men in their twenties, I did not frequently see young adults at the temple. Ramesh, who was a member of the temple board described the temple’s efforts to attract youth:

Some people have questioned us that why don’t you do something to attract children? Why don’t children come here? So we thought we’ll do something. We had a small youth association. Our hope is that they will participate and take this temple forward. But now they don’t come. As you saw that day, only three people showed up. We don’t want our children to go elsewhere. Our children go to discos in the evening. Yes they must have fun, but still that should not be seen as a normal thing. Their children will do the same thing. Unless the children come to the temple they will not know. First we need to find out why more children don’t come. What is the problem? Is it a time issue? Are we to blame? We have given them all freedom. We are willing to work with them and give them

anything they want. But children don't seem interested. But we keep trying. (Ramesh, 2008)

Here the temple is again being constructed as the place to for youth to visit. While Ramesh acknowledges their need to “have fun”, such as going to “discos”, he is concerned that this would become a “norm” among youth if not curtailed. His words “some people have questioned us” indicates that there is social pressure from the community for the temple to take active part in influencing their youth. It is considered the temple’s responsibility to “do something to attract children”. The Frankfurt temple was actively engaged in trying to attract youth. During my visit in summer 2008, a youth meeting was arranged. Reena took a lead role in organizing it with help from the temple committee, however, only three youth showed up. Ramesh told me, “This is the problem. Even if we make an effort, they don’t come.” However, one of the two temples in Köln was more successful in organizing their youth. There were regular language classes that youth attended, and several activities they initiated. The reason for success in that temple was attributed to two committee members Kishan and Avinash, who acted as liaison between the youth and the elderly. Both men were in their late twenties to early thirties, and were seen as the intermediaries between the older members of the community, and youth.

### Mandir as the New Elder?

In earlier chapters, I discussed the loss of status for the elder as the head of the community and family. In Afghanistan, a group of elders regulated conflict in the community; the head of the family intervened and harmonized conflict within the household. As these traditional hierarchies disappeared post-migration, there was a void, which the temple board was expected to fill. In other words, *mandir* was being positioned as what I refer to as the “new elder”. One situation in which this was evident was the “problem” of marriages between Afghan Hindus and the Turkish. Dr. Pyasa indicated that the *mandir* was taking a stand on this issue, “We even had a big meeting at our

temple that if we don't stop this type of thing now, then twenty years from now we as a people will be completely gone. We must stop this" (Pyasa, 2008).

During my visits to the Frankfurt temple, I also heard frequent announcements by the president, asking people to pay attention to their children so that they did not marry outside the community. For example, in 2007 I heard one announcement in which the president of the temple appealed to the congregation to "boycott" a Hindu-Turkish marriage by not attending the wedding, thereby sending "a clear message" (FN, 2007) that this type of practice would not be tolerated in the community. The temple was attempting to apply social pressure as a way of discouraging such marriages.

Another expectation from families who were experiencing conflict or break-up of marriages was that the temple act as a mediator. However, there were others who argued that it was not the temple's business to get involved in personal matters. I discuss these and other points of contention about the place of *mandir*, in the next section.

### Dissenting Voices

While those associated with the temples, either in an organizing capacity or as regular participants, spoke about *mandir* as an accomplishment, there were many who soundly criticized the temple board, pointing out inadequacies, and challenging claims about the temple being all things to all people. They discursively constructed the temple as a failure. These dissenting voices were important to hear because they not only gave alternate perspectives on the place of *mandir* in the community, they also pointed to the kinds of struggles in building community. Some of these people were involved in the temple, while others completely disassociated themselves from the temple, because they felt the temple was not serving their needs.

### Importance of Education

Among those who spoke about inadequacies, criticized the temple for not doing enough to educate children. Speaking about the Hamburg temple, Kanha said:



Our main problem is that we are not educated. And that is why we are losing our children. When there is education, then people automatically get on the right path. In families where parents are educated or where there are elders who have religious knowledge, they are able to teach the children, but for the rest, what is there? We don't have a school. Fine, these temples have been built, we also have many programs, but we should have a school here. If we don't have the resources in terms of teachers or books, why can't we get together with the Indians, Nepalese; they are Hindus, why can't we have some type of partnership? If we really wanted to do it, there are many ways, but our people don't want to do it. This is our own weakness. There is no point in blaming circumstances (Kanha, 2008).

Kanha clearly sees the temple as a place to provide education and as a place that can fill the gap that the family was not able to fill. Kanha envisioned a school like the *patshala* in Kandahar, however, he envisions it as a collaborative project with other Hindus. His critique of his community is that they blame “circumstances” for loss of traditions, but are not actively taking steps to curb such loss by collaborating with other Hindu groups for resources.

While Kanha spoke of education in terms of religion and culture, Fakir, argued for a different kind of education:

Our people need a lot of education on practical things – what are the rules in this country, what are the social problems here, what is the banking system here – these things. And this is not the job of the temple. Temple is for worship, for weddings, for *baitak* (death). People are confused; the temple committee is confused... There should be a separate organization to take care of these things. If you look at Holland, the Surinamese Hindus have done just that. They address human rights issues. They maintain connections with foreign offices, legal offices (Fakir, 2008).

Fakir argues that the primary function of *mandir* was worship; clearly for Fakir maintaining traditions alone was not enough, but also learning about the new country. He argues for a separate organization such as ones established by Hindus from Suriname. It was not uncommon for critics to draw comparisons like this with other Hindu speech communities, generally evaluating others' accomplishments more positively than their own.

Unlike Fakir, Kishan criticized the temple leaders for not doing enough on the religious front, and allowing it to cater to too many social aspects:

These people are taking donations in the name of religious. People put money in the donation box because of their faith but these people only want to do social activities and education. They [temple board] have bought these big TVs for what? They use the money for uniforms for children's football teams. Fine, let them do that. It's not a bad thing, but without the foundation of values prescribed by our religion, what is the point of these other things. The foundation is getting corroded here and if we don't teach our children the right path, how to respect elders, what is the point in doing social work? (Kishan, 2008)

Kishan was actively involved in one of the two temples in Köln, however, he was critical of the board. I gathered that as one of the younger members of the organization, Kishan did not have great deal of voice and had to defer to the elders in many decisions.

### Youth Perspectives

Besides these voices, I also heard youth perspectives. While the temple committee saw the temple as a place to bring youth together, and complained that not many youth took advantage of this opportunity, others complained that there was nothing to attract young people to the temple. In the following excerpt Mukesch, who had a 16 year old son described his son's reluctance to go to the temple:

We have created these big temples, they cater to the older generation, who get bored at home so they come to the temple, "Ram Ram Ram Ram" [chanting] that's all. We have not paid attention to our youth that they too learn, that they sit with us and talk. Even in my family, my son says, "What is the point, sitting there for two hours listening to this noise [music]", then *ardaas* [final prayer] then eat and go home. What is going on in the world no one knows. This is a real problem (Mukesch, 2008).

*Mandir* is being criticized here for being mainly a place for the older generation "who are bored at home", and not for youth. Reference to "Ram Ram" and *ardass* further shows the traditional ways of worship such as chanting, music, and prayer are of less importance to Mukesch because they do not hold the interest of the younger generation. Similarly,

Ashok complained about the elderly women who dominated proceedings in the temple, describing an incident with this three-year-old grandson:

See my little grandson here. He's only three. One day he had gone to the temple with his mother. She tries to take him as much as possible. So there was a drum there and he began playing on it. One older woman caught hold of his hand and pushed him away and said something to him. After that he refused to go to the temple. It is terrible. You will see the same thing happening when there is a *jagaran* (special event in which singing is a major part of the festivities) the same people doing the same singing, so what will children do there? (Ashok, 2008)

Like Ashok, Rosie, also criticized elderly women for dominating the singing at the temple. She described her failed efforts to mingle and participate in the singing:

I know a few devotional songs, not completely but a little. If I go to the temple and sit down with these women to sing and if I make a mistake then they look at you in such a way that you become so conscious and never want to participate again. So then you think why even bother to go there. There is no one to teach you how to do it properly either. (Rani, 2008).

While the temple board spoke about the temple as a place for the youth to meet, others spoke of them as discouraging youth participation, first by allowing elderly women to dominate the proceedings, and second, by not offering some kind of instruction for the younger generation on appropriate conduct. According to Rosie, the criticism directed at younger people who may not know protocol by these elderly women discouraged them from participating. When I asked Rani if she or others had expressed this to the board, she said, "What's the use. They are not going to do anything".

The theme of elderly women dominating activities at *mandir* was acknowledged by one board member but he also rationalized it by saying, "I know people complain, well what do you do, they are elderly, you can't say anything or they will feel offended. And this is the only thing these women look forward to" (Katyul, 2008). Because these women were elderly, and according to Afghan Hindu code of conduct, elders must be respected, it would have been offensive for these committee members who were much

younger, to say anything to the women directly. And thus the problem remained unaddressed.

While Rani was critical of the elderly in particular, in another instant she and her friend also criticized the youth who came to the temple:

I: I have heard that the temple committee is very concerned that youth don't come to the temple and if this trend continues their children will be lost to their culture.

Rani: But what do **they** do at the temple?

Kiran: What is the point in going there? Ok fine we go to the mandir, there is singing all that fine but what do the rest of the people do downstairs? If you have been to the temple you will see that young people, when they meet all they do is flirt, check out each others clothes, who is wearing what, they model their clothes on that stage downstairs for their friends to see. I agree that we have only one place to meet in but...

Rani: You know the other thing is people live 20 km, 50 km away and also people have their own lives, you know how busy we all are. You know we are [she and Kiran] are such good friends but when I was in Munich we would barely talk once a week.

Kiran: and look how chaotic things are at the temple. No system. That's why I prefer going to the *gurudwara* [Sikh place of worship], the singing there, the devotion with which they do it, the orderly way in which they worship. I like that, it gives me peace of mind.

First, "What do **they** do", suggests that adults and temple committee members are not doing any activities that might interest youth. Hence, while adults were busy in the temple hall, the youth used the space "downstairs" to "flirt", something that these young women found unacceptable. Interestingly, unlike some of the board members who were hoping that the temple would serve as a social space for youth, these young women construct the temple as primarily a place of worship, a place that should promote "devotion" and "peace of mind", which these youth find lacking. Rani's earlier comment about trying to be involved in the singing also shows that the religious aspect of the temple is attractive to her. She finds the behavior of other youth who use the temple as a social place, offensive. Yet, she is also frustrated that the people in charge do not find

better ways to engage youth in the activities of the main hall. As a result, both Kiran and Rani prefer to attend the Gurudwara. I heard other people mention the gurudwara as well, praising the organized manner in which services proceeded there, and the quality of the devotional singing, criticizing their own temple for lack of system and organization.

One man, Bansi, who was a regular at the temple, talked to me once as we were walking from the bus stop to the temple. He gave me an example of a young woman who had joined another faith. He too felt that unless there was concerted effort to involve youth, they would gradually drift away from the community.

Kishore, a twenty-seven-year-old man who was very involved in the Hamburg temple, complained that older people did not allow youth to take the lead in temple activities. There was no “trust” and if youth tried to organize something they were dismissed as “inexperienced”:

If they trusted young people then something can work out, but these people here they are full of themselves, “What will these youngsters do” is their attitude. They have no trust whatsoever on young people. If we engaged the young people in the temple, they wouldn’t go outside. This is a challenge for the temple folks, a challenge for our community, how to attract youth. But the problem is if there was one boss then something can happen. In this place [temple] everyone wants to boss so that is the problem. They are more concerned about their own positions. The people on the committee have to think, if they don’t want their children to go outside, if they don’t want their children to marry into other religions, that our culture should be retained, that people come to the temple in large numbers, that we protect our Hindu religion and take it forward, then it is necessary to do something about it.  
(Kishore, 2008)

Kishore said he wanted to engage youth in temple activities but because adults did not trust the youth enough to let them work independently, the unity that they wanted to accomplish was not occurring. “In this place everyone wants to boss”, constructs the people in positions of authority as being interested in power rather than truly bringing youth to the temple. In this excerpt, and further descriptions of the temple board, Kishore criticized the board members’ talk about preventing cultural loss, and unifying youth as mere rhetoric. He cited the *Baisakhi Mela*, an event around a festival that fell in the

month of April, as an example. He spoke of how he had organized and brought youth together to the temple for rehearsals and how successful the event was.

While Kishore constructed the rehearsals as a way of bringing youth to the temple, the 80 year old Masterji, described it differently:

You must have seen the posters about the Baisaki mela. For three or four months all our youth, boys and girls came to the temple basement. I told our leadership so many times, “This is a temple not a place to dance”. How does the temple benefit from allowing these types of activities? In fact this type of activity encourages girls and boys to mingle and increases the chance of their getting into trouble. The boys – they sit outside and smoke. They enter the temple and their mouths stink (Masterji, 2008).

The temple board was thus criticized on the one side by youth, who felt not enough was being done to promote activities that interested them, and on the other hand was criticized by people like Masterji for promoting the “wrong” types of activities. Clearly there were generational differences in these discursive constructions of the place of temple in the community.

I also observed that dismissing youth as “inexperienced” was a way of speaking among many elders that reinforced authority of the elder. For example, when I met Ahuja, I applauded the good work being done at the Köln temple by young men like Kishan. Ahuja nodded but then dismissed Kishan with, “*Woh abhi kaccha hai*” (He is still raw). The fact that Kishan had a bachelor’s degree from a German university, spoke German fluently, and had considerable knowledge of the legal system seemed to make little difference to older people like Ahuja; perhaps they found these youth who were more educationally qualified threatening, or the premise that elders knew best disallowed the possibility that youth could be taking the lead. Either way, their dismissal of youth as inexperience or “raw” contradicted their stated desire to have youth participation.

“It is not *mandir*’s business”

While members of the temple board were urging the community to “boycott” Afghan Hindu-Turkish weddings, as a way of discouraging such marriages, others like

Kishan argued that it was not the temple's business to interfere in people's personal matters:

Recently a [Afghan Hindu] boy married a Turkish girl and there was a great deal of discussion about it in all our temples. The head of all our temples placed a lot of emphasis on this and said that we should make announcements in our temples, we should take steps to prevent this sort of thing ...but if you look at it in a democratic way, then we shouldn't be interfering in this matter, because it is every individual's right to decide whom to marry (Kishan, 2008).

Kishan clearly embraces a cultural code in which the individual has a right to choose a partner, even if that person is from outside the community. He also questions whether it is the temple's place to interfere in personal matters. As I observed earlier in the chapter, Kishan belongs to a different generation from the majority of the temple board members.

In this debate of who should mediate or whether there should be any mediation at all, Afghan Hindus who had lived much of their adult lives in Afghanistan still operated under the premise that an "elder" was required to mediate in personal relationships. As discussed earlier, the elder had an important and well-defined role in Afghan Hindu community in Afghanistan. There was a clear hierarchy in place, and it would not occur to a younger person to refute the authority of the elder. This hierarchy was no longer in place after migration, leaving a void. Mostly, older Afghan Hindus expected some type of authority to step in and resolve conflict, but the question was who? Should *mandir* be that authority?

One of the members of the Frankfurt temple board, Raj, summed up the issue of the temple's involvement in this way:

There [Afghanistan] we had a *panchayat* [committee of community elders]. They would resolve issues in the community. Here it's not like that. The temple's board is in a delicate position. There we had unity, if someone was up to something bad, or we heard that there was conflict in some family, or that there was a possibility of breakup of a marriage, the community elders would get together, discuss the issue, sit down with the families and find a solution. Here the temple cannot do this, the temple cannot say, "You must do this". If we do, then someone will ask, "Who are you to dictate?" If they come to us for a solution then yes we can intervene, but we cannot force someone to come to us (Raj, 2008).

In the absence of old hierarchies that ensured harmony in social and personal relationships in the community, the temple board was attempting to step in, however, the temple's position was tenuous. According to Raj, the temple could intervene if asked to do so, but could not take it upon itself to intervene without that permission. In other words, the temple could not take the place of the *panchayat* of Afghanistan. Once again, the question of authority and power surfaced. In a community where hierarchy had played such a central role, the lack of hierarchy, and clear boundaries and rules were extremely problematic for many members of the community.

### Discussion

The need for a place in which to gather a fragmented community was felt by many Afghan Hindus. Just as the “string of pearls” was a metaphor for the unity of the community in Afghanistan, and the scattering of the beads was symbolic of the dispersal of Afghan Hindus, *mandir* became a metaphorical place to gather the scattered beads together. Specifically, “when people are learning new ways of organizing individual and collective action... then doctrine, symbol, and ritual directly shape action” (Swidler, 1994, p. 278). Yet, culture, religion, and traditions are also situated in a context. With migration comes a change in context and with it problems in situating old customs into the new contexts. “All cultures are lived and therefore always in flux” (Gillespie, 1995). As much as diasporic speech communities attempt to hold on to tradition, those traditions must change to accommodate new exigencies. As a result Hinduism is not merely reproduced, but reinvented. For example, traditionally Hindu worship is not based on a congregational setting; instead worship is individualized. Vertovec (2000) describes the Hindu temple as “a structure housing an image of a deity which serves as a kind of receptacle into which the deity's power or presence is believed to manifest.” (p. 125). A temple is made up of a *garba griha* or the sanctum sanctorium in which the image of the main presiding deity of a Hindu god or goddess is housed. In the diaspora congregational



worship on weekends has become commonplace, one, because people are more likely to find time on weekends to visit the temple and two, to foster a feeling of community in the diaspora (Junghare, 2003). Hindu festivals in the diaspora are celebrated not on the day they fall on the Hindu religious calendar, but on the nearest weekend in order to draw maximum attendance. Often new practices that did not exist in the homeland are introduced in the diaspora (Kurian, 1998). It becomes the space for practices that in the homeland used to take place in the home (e.g. weddings and death ceremonies). The temple becomes the space in which people who otherwise do not have the opportunity to meet, socialize. Kurian also describes how elderly parents from India visiting their children in the U.S., frequent the temples. The temple thus serves many functions in the diaspora that it did not in the homeland. It also has different meanings and relevance for different groups within a community.

These changes, cannot take place without what I call, “changing pains”; they involve struggle and much of it is internal to the community. Afghan Hindu discourses around *mandir* capture this struggle. The meaning of a temple was clearly changing in Germany despite the talk about “preserving” traditions. In Afghanistan, the temple had mainly served a religious function. When Afghan Hindus spoke of temples in Afghanistan, they spoke of it as an important part of their religious identity and history. The temple was a part of their daily lives as a place for prayer. And although it continues to serve a religious function it is also discursively constructed as more than a place of prayer. It is expected to fulfill a social function. There was general agreement about the need for a place for the community, however, the meaning, use and function of that place was contested. Thus, on the one hand the temple was envisioned as the place for social interaction, important for creating community; on the other hand, the temple itself was evolving as a product of contested interactions.

The temple board had one vision, but without participation and support of the community, their vision was difficult to attain. The temple depends on financial support

and attendance from the community. In Afghanistan attendance was part of a daily routine. In Germany, the temple board had to put special effort to “attract” members of the community to come to the temple. Distance, and distractions of mainstream society were cited as two reasons for lower attendance.

Power issues surfaced as certain groups were perceived as dominating events at the temple. When the board attempted to fulfill the need of one group, other groups were offended. Interestingly, elderly women, who otherwise did not have a voice in the community, seemed to be dominant in the temple. The temple seemed to be one place in which these women asserted their voices. As George (2005) suggests, gender relations work differently in different spheres of social life. In Afghanistan their age and position in the family would have invested women with authority over younger women in the family. In Germany they had lost that authority. However, the temple seemed to be a place in which they could once again exert some authority mainly in the domain of devotional singing.

The need for an identifiable place in which to practice their communal identity, has been well-noted in much of the research on South Asian diasporas. Upon arrival in the new country migrants first look for their basic necessities to be met. In the second phase of settlement people experience the need for community look for means of organizing themselves (Baumann, 2004). For Hindus from India, the organizing began with secular organizations, as community was defined not simply along religious affiliations but more of a pan-Indian identity (Fisher, 1980). Temples came much later in their diasporic settlement. Afghan Hindus differ in this respect. The temple was established first and was envisioned as the primary place for creating community. The focus of this community is to establish a strong *Afghan Hindu* identity, not a pan-Afghan identity, or even a pan-Hindu identity by collaborating with other Hindus from South Asia. An Afghan Hindu identity was differentiated from an Indian identity in references to a permanent homeland. Indians have a permanent homeland that provides continuity

for those in those in the diaspora, whereas Afghan Hindus lacking that connection to a homeland must rely on memory of the past. Once they let go of that memory, there was nothing to ensure the continuity of their identity. This was the main fear among the elders in the community.

Paying attention to ways in which people in a community talked about the temple as a place to enact a communal identity enabled me to understand the struggle involved in constructing community. Changes in the diaspora do not happen automatically but occur through struggle, as various possibilities are deliberated and contested. A shared understanding of the meaning of temple in the diaspora is elusive as different groups within the community construct it differently. As the temple board tries to cater to different groups, its actions come up for criticism. Those whose needs are met discursively construct the temple as an *accomplishment*; others construct it as a *failure*.

Only a few scholars have touched on the lack of consensus in diasporic communities (for exceptions see Nye, 1995; Raj, 2000). It is important to pay attention to dissension in a community because a community does not necessarily imply unity; instead it is an “organization of diversity” (Hymes, 1974). Paying attention to dissenting voices enables the researcher to understand the diversity within. While there was consensus that loss of cultural identity was imminent because of outside influences of the *mahaul*, there was no consensus on how that loss could be contained.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter I first presented ways of speaking about *mandir* as the place to bring a fragmented community together. The temple board envisioned the temple as catering to a diverse audience within the community. However, the board’s actions were negatively evaluated by others in the community. In the second part of this chapter I presented these dissenting voices that challenged the temple board’s claims of *mandir* as a place for diverse groups. Their points and counter-points served to highlight the

diversity within a community and also struggle within a community in the diaspora. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I discuss the major themes from Chapters Four, Five and Six, drawing conclusions about how people's ways of speaking about migration in a community construct the diaspora experience. I also discuss the implications of this research for studies in the South Asian diaspora, ethnography of communication, and intercultural communication.

## CHAPTER VII

## CONCLUSION

## Summary/Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation has been to understand the discursive constructions of diaspora in the Afghan Hindu community. By observing and understanding distinctive terms used to describe migration and settlement in Germany, I sought to understand Afghan Hindu constructions of dispersal. *Bikharna* was a term that emerged as a way of describing dispersal. The term captured spatial dispersal, relational loss, and loss of traditions. I discovered that in describing fragmentation, Afghan Hindus were really describing the importance of both physical proximity and relational connection in their lives. The speech codes that emerged from Afghan Hindu ways of speaking were relational closeness, and physical togetherness.

In the process of understanding *bikharna*, I understood the ways in which Afghan Hindus discursively constructed *their* meaning of social relationships. Community and family meant a way of sharing space, a way of relating, and a way of conducting oneself based on cultural rules of the community. The premise of community was *pyaar* (love), *jude rehna* (being connected), and practices such as sharing, generosity, helpfulness, and respect for hierarchy. Community also meant marrying within the *biradari*. Distinctions of insiders and outsiders were particularly evident in talk about marriage. Indian Hindus were acceptable as marriage partners, but not Muslims. Although marriage to Indian Hindus was acceptable, the first preference was another Afghan Hindu. Similarly, Afghan Hindus said they would not object so strongly if their children married Germans, but the Turkish were not accepted because they were Muslims. I found this interesting in light of what we know about the Indian diaspora in Trinidad where there was intermarriage between Hindu and Muslim indentured laborers. These people constructed themselves as *jahaji bhai* or “shipboard brothers” based on their common experiences on board the ship

from India to Trinidad, which resulted in *mixing* of religious traditions of Muslims and Hindus (Khan, 2004). Yet, Afghan Hindus who claimed ancestry in Afghanistan over many centuries spoke with pride about how they had resisted mixing by laying clear boundaries that marked Muslims as outsiders. Drawing comparisons between how Hinduism developed in Trinidad versus what she calls “British Hinduism” (p. 55), Kurian observes how Hinduism is being shaped in the diaspora not only by the nature of the community and the circumstances of migration, but also by the context of the host society. Hinduism is developing differently in multicultural Britain than in Trinidad, while Hinduism in the United States is developing more uniformity despite regional linguistic differences. Based on my research, I would add that we must also take into consideration the context of the homeland. Indian Hindus come from a homeland in which they are a majority whereas Afghan Hindus were a religious minority in Afghanistan. These differences might be interesting to study in the future.

The premise of family among Afghan Hindus was the multi-member, multi-generational household in which the personhood of the individual was inextricably connected to other members of the family, through companionship, adjustment, sacrifice, and a clear hierarchy based on rules for who could speak, when, to whom, and how. For example, women covered their faces in the presence of male elders; children did not question elders; even adult members did not defy the elder of the household. The younger generation, particularly the oldest son, was obliged to take care of the elderly. When elderly parents did not live with their son or even when they lived with a younger son, they felt the need to explain their situation. Similarly, young couples, who clearly wanted privacy after marriage felt the need to remain with the family for a respectable amount of time before they moved out on their own.

Afghan Hindu ways of speaking confirmed many of the characteristics of diaspora but also revealed some differences. The literal meaning of *diaspora* was evident in descriptions of leaving Afghanistan to different international destinations. However,

their ways of speaking about dispersal within Germany reflected an aspect unique to the refugee condition, which is not evident in other contemporary South Asian diasporas. Thus, as Cohen (1997) suggests, the conditions under which migration occurs has bearing on the diasporic experience. The experiences of involuntary migrants who leave the homeland due to war or conflict are very different from those who migrate for higher education or professional advancement (e.g. Asian Indians). In fact, Afghan Hindus claimed that their life style had vastly deteriorated as a result of migration. They had not only suffered relationally because of the migration, but also economically. They also described the trauma of war. In many ways then, their diasporic experience resembled that of classical diasporas (e.g. Jewish, Armenian) rather than modern diasporas (e.g. Asian Indians).

In speaking graphically about the conditions in Afghanistan under which they fled, Afghan Hindus constructed themselves as a “victim diaspora” (Cohen, 1997), and not as voluntary migrants, a construction that was perhaps necessary to gain asylum in Germany. The vividness of their descriptions had a certain rehearsed quality to them. Given that many Afghan Hindus had pending cases for asylum, it was entirely possible that narratives I heard were ones intended to convince the government about their status as refugees. I came to this conclusion based on two comments I heard; one was when a young Afghan Hindu woman who had grown up in India said to me, “None of these people came directly from Afghanistan. They had all lived in India for sometime. They basically lied to come to Germany” (Sonia, 2008). A second instance was when I asked a woman who was introduced to me at the temple, her name; she gave me a name, and then after a moment’s hesitation, she told me that was not her real name but the name on her passport. When Afghan Hindus left India, agents procured fake passports for them and coached them on what to say when they arrived in Afghanistan, which probably explained the rehearsed feel to some of descriptions of trauma. My intention is not to cast doubt on the suffering that these people may have experienced, nor to imply that their

leaving Afghanistan was involuntary, but I do want to draw attention to the constructed nature of these “realities”. The horrors of war in contrast with nostalgia for the “good times” served to emphasize the involuntariness of departure from Afghanistan, yet, their reasons for leaving India was lack of employment and business opportunities, not unlike those of other South Asians. However, in order to gain asylum in Germany they had to conceal the fact that they had lived in India for some years. Rather than imposing Cohen’s (1997) typology from the outside, and categorizing Afghan Hindus as one or another type of diaspora, understanding how they positioned themselves sheds light on discursive constructions of migration. Clearly constructing themselves as a victim diaspora was necessary for them to gain asylum in Germany. As Drzewiecka (2002) states, diasporic populations are strategic in their use of discourses.

I also wondered how much of their insistence of the involuntariness of their migration was influenced by my identity as an Indian settled in the United States. There were many instances in which Afghan Hindus compared themselves to Indians, such as in food habits, spending habits, and the fact that Indians had roots in a homeland they could return to, whereas Afghan Hindus had no homeland. The very name “Afghan Hindu” was an attempt to define their identity as separate from other Hindus. Moreover, until they got German nationality, Afghan Hindus were either denied visas to India or had to report to a police station in India upon arrival and departure. Others described many “hassles” in India when they returned for a visit. Certainly there was a discourse of betrayal in their talk about India. Thus it is entirely possible that they felt it was important to emphasize to me, an Indian, that unlike my people who had left their homeland to seek better prospects abroad, they had been quite content in their homeland, and left only because they were forced to.

Other features of diaspora described by Safran (1991) were also evident in Afghan Hindu ways of speaking about migration. For instance, idealization of the homeland was evident when rules and premises of the homeland were constructed as the



ideal way to regulate social relationships. Cultural codes of the homeland were glorified and expected to guide conduct in Germany. Similarly nostalgia and collective memory of the homeland was evident as they spoke about the *bade bade ghar* (big big homes), the fruit orchards, the many temples, religious festivals, and the companionship they had enjoyed in the large households. They denied having class differences in Afghanistan and insisted that status differences were the result of migration and the German refugee system. It was evident that these ways of speaking about *there* and *here* were being passed on to the next generation, because even youth who were too young to remember anything about Afghanistan, spoke confidently about the way of life there. On the other hand, they also spoke of *dar* (fear) in Afghanistan, particularly for women. Some of the younger women I met, who came of age during the turmoil in Afghanistan, regretted not being able to get even basic education. A few told me frankly that they had no regrets leaving Afghanistan and would never want to return. One medical doctor, Dr. Fakir, spoke about the plight of women. As a physician, he had seen the lack of medical facilities and women dying in childbirth. He spoke of the superstitions and lack of education in Afghanistan. It is important to note that not everyone in a community idealizes the homeland, and not all aspects of the homeland are idealized. While, nostalgia is certainly a part of diasporic imaginings of the homeland, not all imaginings are shared. Gendered constructions of the homeland and host country must be considered.

Ongoing problems with the host society, is another defining characteristic of diaspora (Safran, 1991). Although, Afghan Hindus stated that they did not face overt discrimination or prejudice from Germans, they spoke about influence of freedom or *azaadi* in German society, negatively. Autonomy of young people at age 18 and easy access to alcohol in German society, were offered as other examples of negative influences. Thus, although Afghan Hindus did not report direct problems with members of the host society, clearly the cultural codes of the host country were problematic.

Other problems with the host society emerged in descriptions of individuals being separated from community and family, by governmental policies. However, accounts differed, as some people blamed this separation on the asylum system, and others argued that it was an increasing need for autonomy and privacy that prompted people to live in nuclear families. However, the quickness with which those who lived in nuclear families justified or offered explanations for living separately revealed that the traditional meaning of family as multi-generation, multi-member household still had a strong hold on the community. Those who lived in nuclear families were well aware of the stigma attached to their conduct, and felt the need to defend themselves. The discursive force of speech codes was evident in the evaluations of those who did not conform to norms.

Protecting their religion (*mazab bachana*) had been a key concern for Hindus in Afghanistan, and the same preoccupation continued in Germany. In Afghanistan, Hindus were fearful of being converted to Islam; this fear informed their inability to accept people, especially Muslims, into the community. In Germany, marriage of Afghan Hindus to Turks was described as a major source of concern because they were Muslims. Afghan Hindus seemed less concerned about their youth marrying Germans. This point is worth noting, because although much of the diaspora scholarship and intercultural communication scholarship focus on troubled relations of diasporic populations or ethnic groups with the dominant majority, they ignore tensions between different minority groups. Afghan Hindus were more concerned about the Turkish population, another minority, than about the German majority, when it came to forming interpersonal relationships. Some parents also told me that they did not allow their young children to interact with the Turkish. Diasporic populations may therefore have uneasy relationships not only with the host society but also with other minorities, something that hasn't been explored much.

As many scholars have noted, creating community is a major preoccupation in the diaspora. Afghan Hindus, were not different, however those closely associated with the

temple, spoke about their struggles in trying to bring the community together by creating a space in which they could practice their religion, meet with family members separated by distance, and present an Afghan Hindu identity to the larger society. Their efforts involved struggle, because different groups in the community constructed the meaning and purpose of a temple differently. While many scholars (e.g. Clothey, 2004; Jacobsen, 2003; Junghare, 2003; Naryananan, 1992; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001) have described modifications of temples in the diaspora in great detail, we have little insight into the communicative process through which these changes occur. Paying attention to ways of speaking about a place in which to enact a communal identity enables the researcher to understand the struggle involved in constructing community. While a few scholars have commented on conflict and struggle within diasporic speech communities, they have attributed conflict to *factionalism* (Bacon, 1996; Nye, 1990) based on regional and linguistic difference. Although, I found some mention of differences between Kabli and Kandhari (Hindus from the two main regions in Afghanistan), regional differences did not seem to be a defining aspect of struggle around the temple. I met many families in which the husband was from one region, and the wife from another. Certainly they joked about differences, however, the issues in the temple seemed more to do with the meaning of the temple and its use by various groups - people who defined the temple as solely religious space, those who saw it as a place for educating people about religious issues, political issues, and health issues, and those who saw it as a social place. There was also some indication that the temple was expected to take on the role of the community elder, or the *panchayat* that used to settle disputes in Afghanistan, a position that at least some members of the temple board did not feel comfortable taking on.

The symbolic place of the temple in Afghan Hindu lives was also different from other South Asian diasporas, such as Sri Lankan Tamils who also came to Germany as refugees. Many of the Sri Lankan temples in Germany are closely associated with organizing political support for the freedom struggle back home. Afghan Hindus had

taken no part in politics in Afghanistan, nor did they express any interest in political affiliations in Germany. The only time the temple had tried to organize a protest was when one Afghan Hindu family in Hamburg was deported. For Afghan Hindus the main struggle was bringing their community together. Nor were these Hindus working toward re-building the homeland. Most have no desire to return to Afghanistan even if conditions improved there.

Parent-child conflict is also not new in diasporic lives, with children wanting more autonomy than the parents were comfortable giving, as they adapt to the host culture. This struggle is usually discussed as first-generation (immigrant parents) versus second-generation (children born in the host country). However, I found that “generation” was more complicated among Afghan Hindus than it is among other South Asian diasporas. Generally, in other diasporas first generation refers to the actual migrants, second generation refers to children born in the host country, and a 1.5 generation are people who were born in the homeland but migrated when they were children. Among Afghan Hindus, it was difficult to make those kinds of clear distinctions in generation. Children had migrated at various stages of their lives, anywhere, from infancy to adolescence to young adulthood. Some had lived in India for five or six years before they came to Germany. Their way of speaking about the older generation, about Afghanistan, about Germany, about traditions, and their identity, varied, depending on where they had received their primary socialization. These nuanced generational differences need be understood further.

Diaspora scholars have emphasized transnational connections of diasporic populations with the homeland, and kinship connections with different parts of the diaspora. Appadurai (1991) marvels at how a Hindu priest from his hometown of Madurai, India, who has moved to Houston, Texas, is now part of a “global ethnoscape”. Kelly (1990), likewise, talks about the transcontinental families in which grandparents “flew to join their sons and daughters on extended visits” (p. 251). Raj (2003), during her

fieldwork among Hindu Punjabis in London observed what she calls the “six-months mantra” in which her participants talked about spending six months in India, and six months in the U.K. These observations suggest a great deal of transnational movement and connectivity, thanks to globalization. Based on the findings of my study I argue that this type of connectivity is not possible for all diasporas because first, not all South Asian diasporas have a home that they can go back to; second, not all diasporic communities can afford such travel. Many Afghan Hindus could not travel within Europe, let alone make transatlantic journeys. Certainly there were a few people who were in a position to do so, mainly a few who had children in the United States and in Germany, however, these opportunities were not equally available to everyone. Transnational connectivity may be a privilege available to some diasporic populations or some parts of a diaspora, but it is certainly not something that can be assumed as commonplace. There were disparities within families too. The younger generation, who were employed and could speak German, were able to get a German passport, whereas the elderly, particularly women, lacked the language skills to write the necessary tests. As a result, within a family, some had citizenship, whereas others were still on welfare. Affordability of travel, visa restrictions, and pending asylum status, were only some of the obstacles to travel for Afghan Hindus.

Another aspect in which Afghan Hindus differ from the Asian Indian diaspora is in education levels. Most Afghan Hindu men have less than high school education, which was adequate in Afghanistan because most Hindus owned their own businesses and young men joined the family business. After coming to Germany they acutely felt their lack of education. A few who were engineers could not pursue their profession in Germany, because their degrees from Afghanistan were not recognized in Germany. They could not pursue further education because they lacked proficiency in German necessary for higher education. They ended up working in restaurants or on factory floors. Dr. Swami, a physician in Afghanistan, was determined not to give up his

profession. He learned German and went back to medical school in Germany. However, he was an exception. Some, in their haste when leaving Afghanistan, or because they intended to return, had not packed their certificates and degrees, and hence had no proof of education. The unevenness of the diaspora experience among South Asian diasporas must be further explored.

Women who had an education and had worked in Afghanistan also experienced the same problems as men, but a number of women also commented on their lack of education. Some women wished they knew at least some English so that she could pick up German. Education levels, never an issue in Afghanistan, had gained salience in Germany. Lack of language skills meant curtailed movement; asking for directions was problematic for these women; explaining their health condition to the doctor was impossible. Everywhere they went they had to be accompanied by someone who could speak German. One aspect that is noteworthy is that in Afghanistan also women did not go out without a male escort, yet they did not describe that as a problem; however they found restricted movement in Germany was problematic, perhaps because of the general freedom in German society that they could not partake in. There seemed to be a new awareness, new desires after coming to Germany.

Finally, a word about the label *Afghan Hindu*; I asked several people about this label. They explained that in Afghanistan they were known as Hindu. Religion was the main marker of collective identity. When they left Afghanistan for India, they had hoped that their Hindu identity would help them assimilate in India, however there they were known as Afghan, which worked against them, thwarting their hopes of integrating into Indian society and calling India their home. However, the Afghan label helped them gain entry and asylum in Germany. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, they felt the need to reassert their Hindu identity to set distinguish themselves from Muslims. Their identity has been constructed and re-constructed depending on the situation, pointing to the fluidity of a identity, as well as strategic highlighting of particular identities at particular

times. One question I asked was, “What do you tell people when they ask you where you are from?” I got a range of answers. Some said, “I tell them I’m from Afghanistan, but I’m Hindu. Then they say, ‘oh you’re Indian’, and I say ‘no I’m not Indian.’” Some people said that they simply let people assume they were Indians, or even replied, “Indian” when people asked rather than trying to explain. What struck me as interesting was that there was no attempt to construct a hyphenated identity as in the United States; no one told me they said they were German-Hindu, or German-Afghan, or German-Afghan-Hindu. Perhaps it will take another generation or two to develop that identity, although from my understanding of ethnicity in Germany, minorities do not use hyphenated labels (e.g. Turkish). While I focused mainly on relationships, the identity aspect is something that merits further examination.

#### Implications of this Study

This study has implications for ethnography of communication, diaspora studies, and intercultural communication. First, it shows how ethnography of communication and specifically speech codes theory is a useful framework to study diaspora from an emic perspective. Khan (2004) argues for a discourse approach to diaspora to understand the “dimensions of its meaning”. Speech codes theory “grounded in the observation of communicative conduct” (Philipsen, 2007, p. 56) provides a way to understand these discursive constructions. It also offers a way of understanding the *there* and *here* of diasporic experiences, nostalgia, and the idealization of homeland by examining the underlying rules and premises of everyday lives of diasporic people. Nostalgia for the homeland and collective memory are revealed in ways of speaking which in turn reveal rules and premises; uneasy relationships with the host country are a consequence of codes of conduct of the host country coming up against those that a community brings with it from the homeland. For future research, I propose an extension of the theory to examining speech communities in the diaspora.

Insight into the struggles of diasporic lives also has implications for intercultural communication scholarship, which has mainly considered struggle as something that happens between the dominant majority and minority. However, my findings suggest that there is also conflict between different minorities, something that has not received much attention in intercultural scholarship. Second, struggle may not be necessarily be the result only of overt threats or rejection from dominant majority; instead the threat can take the form of perceived but more covert threat of cultural influences of the dominant society. Third, struggle and conflict is not only situated outside the community in interactions with the majority culture; there is also internal struggle and power issues situated within these communities that intercultural scholars have not examined. Finally, my study sheds light on the intertwined nature of culture, communication and personal relationships in a diasporic context.

This study also has implications for diaspora studies, particularly the study of South Asian diasporas. The bulk of scholarship focuses on the Indian diaspora, and the Afghan Hindus provide a useful comparison especially in highlighting some of the privileges of the Indian diaspora such as an intact homeland to draw upon, access to resources like education, and ability to engage in transnational movement. There is a tendency among scholars to generalize the Asian Indian experience to all South Asians. However, the Afghan Hindu experience offers a case study of a very different kind of diaspora, one that was formed due to involuntary migration of a refugee population. While the Sri Lankan Tamils were also refugees, I have pointed out subtle differences even between these two refugee populations, both of which migrated due to war in their country. I urge more comparative studies among the different South Asian diasporas.

#### Limitations and Directions for Future Study

As in any study, this one has its limitations. Although I claim to study diaspora, this study was confined to one location - Germany. The ideal way to study diaspora



would be multi-sited research, but as Jayaram (2001) points out, the vast majority of studies, tend to be country-specific; this study is guilty of the same limitation. Thus, one productive direction would be to study Afghan Hindu speech communities in other locations such as, the United States, the U.K. and India. Comparisons between these speech communities would provide an opportunity to get a more comprehensive understanding of this diaspora, and at the same time help us understand differences between Afghan Hindu speech communities in different nodes of the diaspora. One obvious difference might be policy differences in different countries leading to different trajectories of assimilation and resistance. For example, many Afghan Hindus in Germany referred to their community in the U.K. as having more of “community” because they lived in the same area, were able to dress in their traditional clothing, and had access to many temples. U.K. was constructed as a more conducive place in which to maintain one’s tradition. The U.S. was constructed as promoting education, and hence Afghan Hindus there were more educated.

Some scholars have explored the notion of a *Hindu* diaspora (e.g. Vertovec, 2000; Jacobsen, 2004), and the Afghan Hindus are as yet unexplored part of that diaspora. Their efforts to carve out an identity separate from that of other Hindus, specifically Indian Hindus, is worth exploring in the future. Also, something that I did not go into depth in this study is gender difference in the experience of diaspora. As much as the elderly women I spoke with reported loneliness, the younger women spoke about the opportunities they had for education in Germany. On the one hand women talked about the fear in Afghanistan, yet they simultaneously idealized their lives there. These contradictions need to be more fully explored.

The place of media in the lives of Afghan Hindus is another area that needs more in-depth understanding. I observed that in most homes parents watched Afghanistan channels or shows from India. That children also watched these shows came up in references to how these shows influenced wedding arrangements, however, I did not have

the opportunity to understand how much German television was seen as an influence on the younger generation. More work is necessary to understand the place of media in Afghan Hindu diasporic lives.

### Final Thoughts

My interactions with Afghan Hindus were enlightening to me, personally, in a number of ways. I made friends in the community, enjoyed their hospitality, trust and affection. The very first thing I noticed on my first visit, when I stepped into a temple was the welcoming nature of these people. As I interacted with them, I became only too aware of my privilege. I, like most Asian Indians, take for granted my fluency in English, my access to higher education, professional qualifications, and citizenship of the United States. I also take for granted my homeland that I can return to at any time, knowing that I belong there even though I am an American citizen. India makes it ever easier for people such as myself to maintain overseas citizenship and maintain my bond with my homeland. As one Afghan Hindu said, “You can hold your head high and say, ‘I am Indian. India is my country’. When you say that you feel a surge of pride. We cannot say that. We have no country” (Ahuja, 2008). I understood the unevenness of the diaspora experience, that transnationalism, globalization, and technology are privileges that are well beyond the grasp of many immigrants. As a scholar, I must also remember that the Asian Indian experience by no mean captures the experiences of a South Asian diaspora.

## APPENDIX A

**Table A1. List of Participants**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>City</b>
Interview 1	Avinash	Male	Early 30s	Single	Köln
Interview 2	Ahuja	Male	Mid 50s	Married	Hamburg
Interview 3	Fakir (physician)	Male	65	Married	Dortmund
Interview 4	Mrs. Swami	Female	Late 40s	Married	Hamburg
Interview 5	Ashok	Male	65	Married	Frankfurt
Interview 6	Mr. Kapoor	Male	60s	Married	Frankfurt
Interview 7	Mukesch (M.A)	Male	54	Married	Frankfurt
Interview 8	Sonia	Female	28	Married	Limburg
Interview 9	Sonia's mother- in-law	Female	60s	Married	Limburg
Interview 10	Maya	Female	60s	Widow	Hamburg
Interview 11	Raj (engineer)	Male	40s	Married	Frankfurt
Interview 12	Chopra	Male	65	Married	Frankfurt
Interview 13	Rani (student)	Female	20	Single	Frankfurt
Interview 14	Kishan (B.A.)	Male	30	Married	Köln
Interview 15	Sanjay	Male	Early 30s	Married	Frankfurt
Interview 16	Ramesh (B.A.)	Male	Late 30s	Married	Frankfurt
Interview 17	Sachdeva	Male	mid to late 40s	Married	Frankfurt
Interview 18	Ratna	Female	68	Widow	Hamburg
Interview 19	Khanna	Male	75	Married	Hamburg
Interview 20	Prem	Male	65	Married	Hamburg
Interview 21	Katiyal	Male	42	Married	Rudesheim
Interview 22	Reena (student)	Female	24	Single	Frankfurt
Interview 23	Ratin	Male	26	Single	Frankfurt
Interview 24	Gracy	Female	20	Single	Frankfurt

Table A1. Continued

Interview 25	Lutra	Male	50s	Married	Frankfurt
Interview 26	Masterji	Male	70s	Married	Hamburg
Interview 27	Pyasa	Male	Late 50s	Married	Köln
Interview 28	Mohan	Male	Early 50s	Married	Hamburg
Interview 29	Kakar	Male	Late 40s	Married	Hamburg
Interview 30	Rinku	Female	22	Married	Köln
Interview 31	Kishore	Male	26	Single	Hamburg
Interview 32	Pinki	Female	52	Married	Köln
Group Interview 1	Women	Female	30 – 70	Married	Frankfurt
Group Interview 2	Youth group	Female	15 – 20	Single	Köln
Group Interview 3	Youth group	Male	Early 20s	Single	Frankfurt
Conversations		Female & Male	20 – 70	Single/ Married	Frankfurt Hamburg

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