

South Asians in the United States
with a Focus on Asian Indians:

Policy on New Communities

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In this article I am going to focus primarily on Asian Indians—a community which has grown considerably during the decade of the 1980s but on whom there is, as yet, very limited research. Though there are several other communities of immigrants also from South Asia, as indicated below, the absence of published literature makes it difficult to discuss them in any detail. I start each section with the available data from 1980/1990 and then develop the discussion based on the projections. I have included a brief discussion of the Immigration Act of 1990 and its anticipated impact on Asian Indian immigration.

Background Information on South Asian Immigrants

"South Asia" is comprised of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. There are relatively few immigrants in the U.S. from either of the two Himalayan countries, Bhutan and Nepal; data are not available from the printed records of either the census or the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS). Up to 1980, separate data were also not available for immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka. However, the 1980 Census did count all the major South Asian groups in separate categories. The various South Asian groups share common cultural, linguistic and religious affiliations, as well as a com-

mon colonial history. Community newspapers such as *India West* and *India Abroad* reflect these regional ties and carry some news of all the South Asian communities.

Asian Indians: Asian Indians are the largest group of immigrants from South Asia. "Asian Indian" is a "self-identified category" so that it is possible that some immigrants of Indian origin from Fiji, Guyana, Britain and Africa are not accounted for in the total count of Asian Indians in the census which poses the question of ancestry as a question of national origin. Some community newspapers and political alliances use the term "Indo American" to denote "Asian Indian."¹ For purposes of this paper I will use the term "Asian Indian" as it is the official designation for immigrants from India and is used in the census.

The Preliminary Counts of the 1990 Census (June 1991 release) recorded a total of 815,447 individuals, making the Asian Indians the fourth largest group among the Asian Americans and slightly more numerous than the Koreans. The 1980 Census had noted 387,223 Asian Indians. That was the first time Asian Indians had been counted as a separate category. Asian Indians have thus grown 125.6 percent in the 1980s, making them one of the fastest growing Asian American communities, second only to the Vietnamese in the percentage increase during the decade. Asian Indians make up about 19 percent of the total Asian American Pacific Islander population of the United States. The actual total of Asian Indians as noted by the 1990 Census actually may have been slightly higher. In the fiscal year 1990, INS data show 30,667 Indians were admitted as immigrants.² Some of these immigrants may not have been accounted for in the 1990 Census.

The projection is that the Asian Indian community will continue to grow rapidly in the decade of the 1990s through immigration not only in the categories of skilled workers and professionals, but also as more Asian Indians become eligible to sponsor close relatives outside the preference system. Among those naturalized in 1990 by country of foreign citizenship, Indians represented the fifth largest group (11,499) following (in numerical order) naturalizations from the Philippines, Vietnam, Mexico and mainland China.³

Under the Immigration Act of 1990 (IMMACT90), all family-sponsored preferences have been reorganized.⁴ This second preference (spouses and minor children) category has been increased considerably

over that of 1965 (from 70,200 to 114,200). This should help ease the backlog facing many Indians. Some have had to wait three to five years before their spouses could join them in America.

IMMACT90 has also radically changed the employment-related categories, with preference given to skilled workers, professionals with advanced degrees, "aliens of exceptional ability" and "outstanding professors and researchers." These provisions will be beneficial for countries with skilled professional category immigrants such as India. The slowdown, and indeed, economic crisis of the Indian economy means there will be many with professional degrees seeking to immigrate. Already by 1990, the Indian unemployment bureau listed 30 million unemployed. Of these, 2.8 million held graduate or post-graduate degrees.⁵ So in the 1990s we are likely to see an increase in the number of educated and skilled immigrants from India.

The potential pool of Asian Indian immigrants has also been increased by the larger number entering the country as students. In 1990-91 there was a 10 percent increase over 1989-90 in the number of students from India for a total of 28,900 students.⁶ Studies done on Indian migration show that, on an average, one-third of those coming in as students from India adjusted their status to that of immigrant in the 1980s.⁷

In 1990, besides the students, over 120,000 individuals entered the country from India as temporary visitors for either business or pleasure, and over four thousand entered as "temporary workers and trainees."⁸ On an average during the 1980s, around six thousand of those coming in as visitors converted their status to immigrants each year as did around two thousand of those in the "trainee" category. These trends will probably also continue, adding to the size of the community as a whole.

Pakistani: The 1980 Census had accounted for only 15,792 Pakistanis. This was probably an undercount, for the 1990 Census notes 81,371 Pakistanis. This figure too may be an undercount. The 1990 Census data on "Foreign-born population by Place of Birth" gives the total of 83,663 for Pakistan.⁹ Even if one accepts that there may be over two thousand individuals born of American parents in Pakistan who were excluded from the census count, the addition of American-born children to the Pakistani immigrants should lead to a higher total than that given in the

1990 Census. Overall, the size of the Pakistani population is likely to show a sharp upward increase because as many as 49,986 Pakistanis entered the country in 1990 as "non-immigrants" in 1990, of whom over 33,000 were visitors and almost five thousand students.¹⁰ A portion of these "non-immigrants," given the current political situation in Pakistan, is likely to seek change of status as immigrants.¹¹ Perhaps presaging this trend, overall annual Pakistani immigration increased from 8,000 in 1989 to 9,729 in 1990.¹² Thirty-four percent (27,876) of all Pakistani immigrants live in the northeastern states.

Bangladeshi: The total number of Bangladeshi noted in the 1990 Census was 11,838. Almost 60 percent of the Bangladeshis are also concentrated in the northeastern states of the U.S. Like the Pakistani community, the Bangladeshi community shows an increase in recent immigration. In 1989 Bangladesh had only 2,180 immigrants but the number more than doubled to 4,252 in 1990.¹³ So it is likely that both the Pakistani and the Bangladeshi communities will grow rapidly in the decade of the 1990s.

Sri Lankan: The 1990 Census indicates there are 10,970 Sri Lankans in the United States. In contrast to all the other South Asians who are located primarily in the northeast, 38.3 percent of Sri Lankans live in West Coast states. Around one thousand Sri Lankans immigrated in 1990.

Other South Asians: There are also over seven thousand Fijians of Indian origin, most of whom live in California. There are around fifty thousand Guyanese Indians who live primarily in New York (Queens and Manhattan) and California (Long Beach).¹⁴ Both the Fijians and the Guyanese Indians are linked to the Asian Indian community through linguistic, cultural and religious ties. There are also a small number of Caribbean (mostly Trinidadian) Indians, located in New York.

Impact of Asian Indian and South Asian Immigration

The high level of immigration from South Asia in the 1980s has made South Asians a far more important component (almost 19 percent) of the Asian American population than previously anticipated. By the year 2000, Asian Indians, now the fourth largest group, will probably emerge as the third largest group, especially as part of a South Asian contingent.

While some links between Asian American political organizations and South Asian ones have been established, especially in California, far more needs to be done. Otherwise, the political potential of Asian Americans, representing approximately 14 percent of the American population by 2010, as projected by Paul Ong, will not be realized.

Overall, in terms of data on all Asian Americans, not just Asian Indians, there are some basic problems with the types of data available. Many studies on Asian Americans rely on the Current Population Survey (CPS). However, the sample size of the data for Asian Americans used for this survey is very small and the data set do not allow many types of analysis. This observation is made by William P. O'Hare in his study on Asian Americans.¹⁵ He points out that a few years ago when Hispanics faced the same problem, the Census Bureau began to increase their sample size in the CPS. A similar policy decision should be made for the Asian American data.

Regional Distribution of Asian Indians

Like the four other major Asian American groups (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese and Korean), Asian Indians live predominantly in metropolitan areas. The only major rural agricultural Asian Indian community is the Punjabi Sikh community in Central California. Seventy percent of the Asian Indians live in eight major industrial-urban states—New York, California, New Jersey, Texas, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois and Ohio. Of the 815,447 Asian Indians counted in the 1990 Census, California had the largest number of Asian Indians (159,973), followed by New York with 140,985. However, unlike the other Asian American groups, Asian Indians continue to be concentrated in the Northeastern states. Thirty-five percent of Asian Indians in the United States live in the northeast. The distribution of states with the largest number of Asian Indians, besides California and New York are: New Jersey: 79,440; Illinois: 64,200 and Texas: 55,795. Overall in eight states—Alabama, Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee and West Virginia—Asian Indians are the largest subgroup of the Asian Americans.

Though the Metropolitan Statistical Area data for 1990 are not available yet, the major settlements are likely to be the same as they were in 1980. The 1980 Census data (which showed a total count of 387,223

Asian Indians) indicated the five largest Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA) with Asian Indians were: New York—56,815; Chicago—33,541; Los Angeles—18,770; Washington, D.C.—15,698; and San Francisco—12,782.

Because most other Asian Americans are concentrated in the West, Asian Indians formed a relatively smaller proportion of the total Asian American population in the metropolitan areas of the Pacific coast states in 1980. On the other hand, already in 1980, Asian Indians represented 29.6 percent of the Asian American population in New York, 23.7 percent of the Asian American population in Chicago, and 23 percent of the Asian American population in Houston.¹⁷ It is possible that with the increase in total numbers in 1990, Asian Indians represent an even higher percentage of Asian Americans in these areas and will continue to do so well into the next century.

This spatial diversity raises some problems in terms of coalition building. Asian Indians, and most South Asians, are concentrated in the Northeast, versus other Asian Americans who are concentrated in California and Hawaii. Educational strategies have to be developed to link the two shores; otherwise, a significant Asian American population group remains underrepresented in the formulation of public policy and discussions of the Asian American experience.

Economic Profile and Changing Pattern of Asian Indian Immigration

Though India, with 1,016 individuals entering the country in the third preference category of immigration (professional and highly skilled workers), was second only to Taiwan in the worldwide count in the number of immigrants entering in this category in 1990, the vast majority of the Indian immigrants came under other preference categories. In 1990, of the 19,157 Asian Indians immigrants permitted entry under the worldwide numerical limitation system, the number of individuals coming in on the second preference (spouses and unmarried sons and daughters of permanent resident aliens) and the fifth preference (adult brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens and their spouses and children) were 6,396 and 8,842 respectively. On the other hand, the number of immigrants coming in on the third preference (and their spouses and children) totalled only 2,038.¹⁸ This may suggest that the pattern of immigration

from India has been changing from the exclusively highly trained professionals in the earlier decades to those who may not have the same level of professional training as the initial sponsor.

In the 1980 Census, 35.5 percent of Asian Indian women and almost 70 percent of men were college graduates.¹⁹ Among the ranks of the professionals, engineers were the most numerous, followed by physicians. Overall, 47 percent of Asian Indians were in the high-status categories of managers, professionals and executives.²⁰ Associations of engineers of Indian origin in the U.S. are organized along lines of technical specialization, and many of the engineers are linked by alumni association membership. Because there is no single national organization, though the engineers are a significant and relatively wealthy segment of the community, their impact on the American economy remains difficult to ascertain. The physicians, on the other hand, are organized in a national organization, the Association of American Physicians from India (AAPI), with local chapters in all the metropolitan areas. The AAPI suggests that there are approximately 26,000 physicians of Indian origin in the United States at present, the second largest number of foreign-born medical personnel after the Filipinos.²¹ As discussed below, the economic power of this group, along with their active national organization, has given them a political presence both in the community and in terms of national politics. Overall, physicians have not been as adversely affected by the recession as some other segments of the Asian Indian professionals. The sluggish economy of the northeastern states throughout the 1980s and the layoffs in the aerospace industry in California in particular have forced many with professional engineering degrees to turn to alternative avenues of employment. For those with some capital, or access to financing, starting small businesses has been one common strategy.

Throughout the 1980s there has been a rapid increase in the number of Asian Indians going into small businesses. The Chinese, with 89,717 firms, have the largest number of businesses among the Asian Americans; followed by Koreans (69,304); Japanese (53,3720); and Asian Indians (52,266).²² Asian Indian-owned businesses increased 119.9 percent between 1982 and 1987. The growth in receipts for these Asian Indian firms was even more marked, with an increase from \$1.66 billion in 1982 to \$6.715 billion in 1987, an increase of 304.6 percent. The vast majority

of these firms are individual proprietorships.²³ Average receipts per Asian Indian firm were \$128,477. This indicates the highest level of earnings among all Asian American firms, though as is well known, average figures of income such as these blur distinctions between the two poles.

The three metropolitan areas with the largest number of Asian Indian firms are New York (5,744), Los Angeles-Long Beach (4,037), and Chicago (3,049). In twelve states—Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia—Asian Indians are the dominant non-black, non-Hispanic business group.²⁴ Broken down by industry sector, the primary areas of Asian Indian investment are the following: services, 29,787; retail trade, 9,314; finance, insurance and real estate, 3,537; transportation and public utilities, 2,812; wholesale trade, 1,634; construction, 1,199; manufacturing, 878; agriculture and forestry, 358; and mining, 112.²⁵

Economic Sectors with Significant Asian Indian Involvement

The prominence of Asian Indians in the service sector in the *Economic Census* above reflects their involvement in the lodging industry. Unfortunately, the data for minority-owned hotels and lodging places is not broken down by different Asian American groups.²⁶ But survey data from elsewhere as well as media reports establish the high degree of Asian Indians' involvement in the lodging industry. By 1987, for example, 28 percent of all motels in this country were owned by Asian Indians.²⁷ Most of the hotel and motel owners are from the western Indian state of Gujarat (hence the common last name of Patel for many of the owners), though there are some owners from other Indian states. The motels and hotels owned range from decrepit downtown residential hotels to motel chains such as Days Inn and Best Western to isolated properties on interstate routes. Approximately five thousand of the hotel-motel owners are originally from East Africa, and immigrated either to the U.S. or to Britain when Indians were expelled from Uganda. As British passport holders, some of them immigrated first to Britain, where they established small businesses such as grocery stores, and then to the United States, bringing their investment capital with them. Others,

direct immigrants from India to the United States, have entered the lodging business after investing savings from white-collar professional jobs, such as in pharmacy or engineering, where they did not perceive opportunities for economic mobility for themselves. Some, especially on the West Coast, who had degrees in construction engineering, have started construction companies along with the hotel-motel business. The operation of the smaller hotels and motels, as well as common areas of ethnic enterprise such as restaurants and grocery stores, rely extensively on unpaid family labor. Women, often the wives and sisters of the motel owners, do all the work of cleaning the rooms and laundering the sheets and towels in addition to tending the hotel desk.²⁸

Investing in such economic niches as the hotel-motel industry seems to have been more the result of networks within the community and the particular juncture of when and where these immigrants were entering the U.S. economy than any experience prior to immigration which would have predisposed the immigrants to a particular line of business. The absence of other choices for those with small amounts of capital seems to have been a determining factor. However, the motel and hotel industry has reached a plateau, and in some areas with the decline in tourism and travel due to the recession, motel owners are facing an economic crisis. Increased investment in this sector is unlikely to continue at the pace of the 1970s and 1980s.

Other small business preferences for Asian Indians and Pakistanis in New York and California include the operation of 7-11 stores. In New York, South Asians seem to have a virtual monopoly of subway newsstands.²⁹ Like the small hotel-motel business, these enterprises also operate through combinations of kin and ethnic networks and low capital requirements. However, women do not seem to be directly involved in operating businesses such as newsstands.

On the other hand, there are sectors where the recent rapid increase in Asian Indian presence is a result of prior experience. Gujarati Jains have controlled the South Asian diamond trade for centuries in India. In the U.S. they form the second largest ethnic group, after the Hasidic Jews, in the New York Diamond District.

A more visible and numerically more significant area of business for Asian Indians, also based on prior experience, has been the entry of Punjabi Sikhs into the transportation industry. In India, this community

dominates the transportation sector with more than 80 percent of the bus and trucking services being run by them. Some trucking stops, including the nation's fifth largest stop (located in Maryland), are owned by Asian Indians.³⁰ In New York City 43 percent of the applications for cab drivers and, in the boroughs, 15 percent of the applicants are of subcontinental origin.³¹ This reflects a threefold rise over the last eight years. The vast majority of the cab drivers are Punjabi Sikh.

Gas stations have been another major area of investment and employment for many Punjabis. In New York City, the Department of Consumer Affairs estimates that 40 percent of the city's gas stations are owned and operated by South Asians.³² Though there are some white-collar professionals who own these gas stations, many of the Sikh Punjabi gas station owners and operators are either from farming backgrounds or from working-class backgrounds in India. This type of class and educational background reflects, to some extent, the changes in the pattern of immigration from South Asia.

These two niches, gas stations and taxicabs, have provided points of entry into the economy for a group of immigrants coming to the U.S. in the midst of a long recession. In the Northeast, particularly New York, the economic downturn has existed for much longer than in the western states. Both gas stations and taxicabs are labor intensive and require 12-hour days but seem to provide high returns for those who are owner operators.³³ However, they are also high-risk enterprises. Crimes against cabdrivers are among the most common of all crimes in the city; in the boroughs like Queens, Bronx and Brooklyn the rate of crime involving cabdrivers is even higher. Gas stations are also frequently held up. One station owner interviewed by the *New York Times* indicated the station, in Harlem, was held up an average of two times a month and that two Indian employees have been shot and killed during holdups.³⁴

With the increase in the size of the community, we see Asian Indians are no longer only professionals and executives. Yet there are very few community organizations among South Asians which are even interested in building alliances across class lines. On the other hand, as victims of racism, such alliances are increasingly necessary.

The increase in the South Asian component of Asian Americans is also leading to competition between them and other Asian Americans. As the economic pie has shrunk, such competition has intensified. For

example, the recently well-publicized case recommending that Asian Indians be excluded from contracts given through the minority business ordinance in San Francisco was initiated by Harold Yee of Asian Inc.³⁵ Educational programs are needed to prevent such internal divisions.

Women's Issues

Perhaps the most important and most problematic area of immigration legislation affecting women is the 1986 U.S. Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendments Act. Passed in an environment of political hysteria about "sham" marriages and immigration, the legislation provides for conditional residency status to spouses of green card holders for the first two years after entering the U.S. To convert the conditional visa to a permanent resident status, a joint petition has to be filed by the couple three months before the end of the conditional residency period. A divorce, prior to the expiration of the two-year period, unless contested and special petitions submitted to the INS, makes the spouse on the conditional visa deportable. This two-step process and long, drawn-out process of application are to be continued under the Immigration Act of 1990.

Among South Asians, unlike the immigration pattern from the Philippines and even China, the typical pattern of immigration has been predominantly male.³⁶ After acquiring the green card, individuals return and get married and sponsor the wife. In a troubled marriage, the conditional residency status of the wife gives the husband additional power. Frequently, as reported by crisis-intervention centers and battered women's centers nationwide, husbands hold the threat of deportation over the wife, refuse to file the joint petition, or serve divorce papers just prior to the two-year expiration date.³⁷ In several cases, women continued to live in abusive marriages because of the fear of divorce and deportation. National data on this subject are lacking. But in one example, which may be typical of many, a Cook County Commissioner noted that of the 2,500 impoverished Indian women in Illinois in 1985, most had been abandoned by their husbands.³⁸

Female-headed households are relatively less numerous among Asian Americans than among other ethnic groups. Asians also have the lowest level of family dissolution through divorce and widowhood among the foreign-born immigrant groups.³⁹ The percentage of di-

vorced and widowed females in the Asian-born category is, however, almost three times as high as the number of divorced and widowed Asian-born males, suggesting that males remarry far more quickly than the female cohort.⁴⁰ The national aggregate data also disguise local realities. A Chicago-based social worker suggested that in 1990 there were over 25,000 divorced South Asian women in the Chicago metropolitan area alone.⁴¹ While this figure is certainly an overestimate, it is indicative of a growing trend both in South Asia and in the immigrant community. Support networks for women need to be developed and all Asian American community groups, and South Asians in particular need to undertake research projects and active data-collection projects on the women in the community. The level of information available is distressingly little.

Some comparative work is needed to ascertain how other Asian immigrant groups have been affected by the 1986 U.S. Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendments Act. The legislation, at least as suggested by the South Asian experience, needs to be rethought and perhaps revoked. While technically the routes to petition and appeal to the INS are supposed to prevent the type of abuse outlined above, the "conditional residency" status leaves women in an unfairly vulnerable position.

Poverty among Asian Indians

Data are not yet available to indicate how the Asian Indian fared overall in the labor market in the 1980s. The 1979 data showed that 14.4 percent of the Asian Indian males who were in the labor force had some period of unemployment. The average period of unemployment was 11.5 weeks.⁴² The relatively higher percentage of unemployment among U.S.-born Asian Indians (7.6 percent), when compared to other U.S.-born Chinese and Japanese Americans (1.5 percent), suggested to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission that Asian Indians faced labor-market discrimination.⁴³

It is possible that this trend of labor-market discrimination may actually have been accentuated in the second half of the decade due to the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). While data are not available on the direct impact of IRCA on Asian Indians and their employment, there is evidence that labor market discrimination increased as a result. Directed primarily at Hispanics, and

therefore receiving all too little opposition from the Asian Americans who assumed they would not be affected, a recent report from the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) found that employers were practicing discrimination in two forms: first, not hiring applicants whom they suspected of being unauthorized aliens because of their accents or appearance; and second, applying IRCA's verification system only to those who had a foreign accent or appearance.⁴⁴ Some employers used both practices. The same study found that levels of discrimination were higher in areas with high Hispanic and Asian populations. It is thought that there are around ten thousand illegal immigrants from South Asia.⁴⁵ With the ongoing civil war in Punjab and in Sri Lanka, it is possible that the numbers have increased slightly. There is a small increase also in the numbers applying for refugee status from both these regions, though many more have been accepted into Canada. How these individuals may have fared on the job market and indeed how Asian Indians have been affected by this legislation remains to be ascertained.

A closer examination of the 1980 data also shows that not all Asian Indians enjoyed the same degree of upward economic mobility. On the one hand, the 1980 data showed that the Asian Indian income levels were, like that of Japanese Americans, above the median level of full-time white workers. However, among those who had immigrated between 1975-1980, 10.7 percent lived below the poverty level.⁴⁶ This was a higher level of poverty than among Japanese Americans and Filipino Americans. Approximately 17 percent (16.9 percent) of Asian Indians received Social Security payments in 1979.⁴⁷ Many were the elderly, some of them survivors of the first groups of immigrants from earlier in the century. With inflation and increased health costs, some of the elderly may also be among the impoverished. A study of the Civil Rights Commission, *The Economic Status of Americans of Asian Descent*, also based on the 1980 data, found that poverty level among American-born Asian Indians was 20.2 percent, or five times that of other Asian American groups.⁴⁸ Many of the American-born Asian Indians are in the Central California Valley and are farmworkers. With the increase in the number of female-headed households and changes in the immigration pattern, it is possible that with the recession, and indeed depression in the north-eastern states where many of the Asian Indians reside, poverty levels have probably risen in the intervening decade among Asian Indians in some other regions as well.

Political Participation and Anti-Asian Indian Violence

Not since 1956, when Dalip Singh Saund became the first Asian American to be elected to the U.S. Congress, have South Asians succeeded in being elected to either the Congress or the State Assembly. The year 1992, however, marks a turning point of sorts. South Asians entered electoral politics in larger numbers than ever before. Most of the candidates running for office were in California where four South Asians ran for Congress, two as Democrats and two as Republicans. Two also ran for the State Assembly, one as a Democrat the other as a Republican. A couple of people ran for County Supervisor.⁴⁹ None were elected in the June primaries and most cited their meager resources as the main obstacle and noted they were outspent by their rivals by more than three to one.⁵⁰ This financial crunch seems all the more noteworthy because the South Asian community has been very active in raising funds for both Bush and Clinton, as well as for several non-South Asian candidates in California, sometimes raising as much as \$100,000 at a single event. Though the majority of South Asians profess support for candidates running from the Democratic party, like wealthy Cubans in Florida, many have now become ardent supporters of the Republican Party as well. Already by June 1992, Asian Indians had contributed close to a million dollars to Bush's war chest.⁵¹ To some extent this may be a belief in backing a winning ticket and the politics of opportunism. But it is also a reflection of class politics. Wealthy South Asians, often earning well over a hundred thousand dollars and living in exclusive suburban areas, have little sympathy for the problems of inner cities and those who do not seem to be able to make it up the economic ladder.⁵² However, the politics of race and the increasing number of racially motivated attacks against South Asians make the issue of political alliances somewhat more complicated.

The 1986 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Report, *Violence Against Asians*, did not contain coverage of Asian Indians or South Asians. Nor did the Asian American Legal Defense Fund keep data on Asian Indians. However, even by the mid-1980s, when the South Asian immigrant population was about half the size of the present one, there had been extensive levels of violence against South Asians, a trend which has continued.

Like the Koreans, Asian Indians have faced violence for owning

businesses formerly owned by other ethnic groups. Over a three-month period in Chicago, in 1986, Indian grocery stores, electronics stores and restaurants were vandalized and attacked 47 times.⁵³ The police believed the vandals were white competitors, some of whom had owned these stores.

There have been numerous beatings and attacks on Asian Indians with serious injuries and one death in various cases on Staten Island, in the Bronx, and Jersey City Heights, Middlesex County (New Jersey). Forty anti-Asian bias-related incidents were reported in Hudson County (New Jersey) in 1991 alone, and statewide 58 such incidents against Asian Indians were reported the same year.⁵⁴ Specifically anti-Indian gangs have developed in New Jersey; in addition to the infamous "Dotbusters" in Jersey City Heights, a gang known as "The Lost Boys" has been recently very active in the Edison-Iselin area.⁵⁵

Similarly, across the country on the West Coast, Indian homes and businesses have been vandalized, property destroyed and racial epithets spray-painted in Fremont, Union City, Artesia (California), Springfield (Washington), and Portland (Oregon). All these incidents were reported in 1991.

In addition to racial prejudice, Hindu and Muslim South Asians also face discrimination due to perceptions of their religions. In Chino, California, for example, Christian fundamentalist groups put out anti-Hindu pamphlets in 1991. One pamphlet, entitled "The Traitor," proclaimed Hinduism a bloodthirsty religion which calls for human sacrifice, and asserted that "Satan created all the gods of India" and that they are demons who will "rob your soul and take you into hell."⁵⁶ In 1988, in Aurora, Illinois, when the City Council met to consider the Indian community's request for permission to build a temple, it was turned down because many at the hearing believed that the temple "would possibly cause rat-infested streets, human sacrifices, and become a haven for terrorists."⁵⁷ Rev. Zarris, a Baptist minister said at the hearing, "The Hindus are always associated with the drug culture. . . . Theologically we are opposed to the Hindus because they are practicing a false religion."⁵⁸ Similarly, Dr. Nazeer Ahmed and Nisar (Nick) Hai, Muslims who ran for office from southern California in the 1992 primaries, found that prevalent notions about Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists were fully exploited by opponents during the campaigns.⁵⁹ Many Muslim South Asians, as well as those whose names sounded as if they could be

Muslim, got harassed and received death threats throughout the country during the Gulf War.

These experiences have forced many South Asians to become far more actively involved with the political process. Indian Chambers of Commerce have been founded in most areas with Indian businesses; various types of lobbying groups have been set up in other places. Some groups started to make efforts to link up with local branches of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the NAACP. There are also four national associations which have sought to organize Asian Indians politically and provide lobbying services in Washington and some of the state capitals. These are the Association of Indians in America (AIA), the Federation of Indian Associations (FIA), the Indian American Forum for Political Education (IAFPE) and the National Association of Americans of Asian Indian Descent (NAAOID). The Indo-American Political Association (IAPA), a group dedicated to enhancing political participation in mainstream politics, has succeeded in getting some delegates elected to the County Central Committees of the Democratic Party. All five organizations have been active in debates on the 1990 Immigration bill, on issues affecting medical personnel (Foreign Medical Graduates, or FMG), voter-registration drives, as well as in fundraisers for various political candidates. Given the increased level of political involvement noted in the most recent primaries, some Asian Indian representatives will probably be elected to some political offices in another three or four years.

However, as the numbers of Asian Americans increase, along with the number of Asian Indians and other immigrants from South Asia, the thorny question of racism against visible minorities remains a difficult problem.

In conclusion, I would like to raise the question of coalition building. There is all too little discussion of how Hispanic American and Asian American coalitions are to be built, particularly in states like California where both groups are increasing rapidly. Similarly, on the East Coast, with many new African American immigrants, particularly from Haiti, Guyana and the Caribbean countries, there is very little discussion of developing new coalitions with African Americans. Asian Americans will become numerically far more significant by 2010 and 2020 than they are now, but so will the other minorities. An increase in total numbers does not obviate the need for political coalitions among minorities.

Notes

1. Robert Gardener et al., *Asian Americans: Growth, Change and Diversity* (Washington, D.C.: Population Reference Bureau, 1985), 6; see figure 2.
2. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook of Immigration and Naturalization Service* (NTIS) (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991), 52; henceforth noted as *Statistical Yearbook INS*.
3. *Ibid.*
4. For a fuller discussion of IMMACT90 on Indian immigration, see the four-part series by Indra M. Gandhi, "Immigration Act of 1990," *India West* (September 20–October 25, 1991). Gandhi is an attorney who writes the regular immigration column.
5. *India Today* (September 15, 1990), 37.
6. Institute of International Education, New York; report released October 16, 1991.
7. Binod Khadria, "Migration of Human Capital to the United States," *Economic and Political Weekly* (August 11, 1991), 1790.
8. *Statistical Yearbook INS*, 124, table 40.
9. Foreign-Born 1990 CPH-L-90. This data includes persons born abroad of American parents. Data for foreign-born persons by place of birth, citizenship and year of entry will not be available until 1993.
10. *Statistical Yearbook INS*, 124, table 40.
11. Briefly, the availability of arms and military weaponry has increased enormously in Pakistan as a result of its position as a U.S. supplier during the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan is one of the largest producers of heroin for the world market. The links between the drug and arms traders, combined with the rise of Muslim fundamentalist politics and the consequent unstable political situation, has meant that many from the middle classes are seeking to emigrate.
12. *Statistical Yearbook INS*, 51, 64, table 8, and 86, table 20.
13. *Ibid.*, 64, table 8, and 86, table 20.
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