CHAPTER FIVE

THE MINORITY PARADIGM

The African American experience in the twentieth century, therefore, has meant the evolution of an ethnic and a minority identity. Though certainly a minority till the Civil Rights movement, this status of the group was overshadowed by their caste status. As a result, they were considered by society, the policy makers, and academics as a "racial group" primarily, rather than as a minority.

The Encyclopedia Americana defines minorities as:

Minorities are generally groups within a society that are characterized as having lower social status, possessing less power and prestige, and exercising fewer rights than the dominant groups of society...¹

The dismantling of the legal discriminatory regime was expected to remove the "racial" underpinnings of relations between the majority and African Americans and move them closer to a more "normal" paradigm of majority-minority relations in America. Even within this "normal" paradigm discrimination and lower status for minorities were not expected to disappear instantly. In fact, discrimination against a new minority of immigrants has been part of the American Way for long. Jews, Irish, Catholics, people from the South and East of Europe, in short,

almost all ethnic groups except the English, have been subjected to violent hostility upon first arriving in the United States. In time, however, they shed some of their cultural baggage and imparted some of their culture to the American one, and have found acceptance. The racial paradigm meant that the African Americans as a racial group could never hope to achieve equality because they were kept down by the force of law. As a “normal” minority, however, they could be expected to work their way into acceptance by the rest of the society as other minorities had done before them.

Thirty years after the Civil Rights revolution, however, the African American community is still engaged in a “low-intensity” but nagging struggle for acceptance and equality. The complaints of ordinary blacks about continuing discrimination in everyday life were sharply illuminated by the Rodney King episode in the early 1990s in which recorded evidence of deliberate police brutality against a black man merely drew from the judicial system a light sentence. But, unlike in the Civil Rights era, there is no consensus in society today over continuing discrimination towards blacks in America. During the earlier period, even those who had defended the discriminatory regime had first acknowledged its existence. At the end of the century, on the other hand, there is wide divergence in perceptions of racial discrimination between blacks and whites which was dramatically clear in the O. J. Simpson episode. The black sports superstar Simpson was widely perceived as guilty by whites and as innocent by blacks in a case involving the murder of his white wife even before the verdict was in.
The minority paradigm assumes importance in light of the expectations aroused by it. It was assumed that with this new paradigm in place the blacks could work their way up as others had previously done. The expectation has led to the comparison of African Americans with other minority groups of colour in the United States. The most visible minority to emerge since the 1970s has been that of the Asian Americans. As an economically successful group, they are often branded a “model minority” and compared favourably with the struggling African Americans. Since the struggle of the African Americans centers on claims of systemic injustice and racial prejudice, the success of the Asian Americans is often cast by unsympathetic scholars as a vindication of the fairness of American system and the sound health of American values. For instance, in the current debate on the contents of a desirable history curriculum in schools, scholars opposed to glorifying Africa for the benefit of black children have pointed to Asian Americans as a group that has done very well without such glorification of the motherland. As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has commented:

Nor are there Semitocentric or Asiacentric Public-school curricula glorifying the civilization of their ancestors. Yet Jewish Americans and even more particularly Asian Americans--3 percent of the population, 30 percent of the students at Berkeley--have academic success out of proportion to their numbers in the population.²

² Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Disuniting of America (New York, 1992), p. 89.
To fully appreciate the impact and validity of such comparisons, it would be desirable to first summarize the main points of the history of Asian Americans in the United States. However, the group, though given a blanket name, is composed of a number of varying ethnic and cultural groups who have often had different experiences in their journey to success in America. For the purposes of this chapter, therefore, the discussion will be confined to one—Asian Indians—amongst the group. With the burgeoning of the field of information technology they have suddenly become more visible and appreciated in the last decade and are, therefore, highly relevant to the discussion here.

ASIAN INDIANS: A BRIEF HISTORY

The history of the East Indian Americans (henceforth Asian Indians) is essentially a twentieth-century story. While the African Americans form over 12% of the US population, the Asian Indians, even in the 1990s, constituted only about 0.3%. Although there is some evidence of the presence of Asian Indians in eastern United States in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they began to come to the country in statistically significant numbers only at the turn of the twentieth century. Their settlement in the United States in this century can be divided into two phases. The first phase covered the period 1900 to 1965, and the second from 1965 to 1990s. Economic dislocation in and land laws of British India, primarily affecting the prosperous province of Punjab, inspired the first phase.

IMMIGRATION: THE FIRST PHASE
There was no direct passenger service between India and the American West Coast at that time and most of the immigrants arrived through trans-Pacific shipping services. They arrived generally as sojourners and their goal at this stage was to save enough money to send home so their family members could buy land. This close connection with home—a strong sense of one's roots—was to mark the immigrants from India to a large extent throughout the century.

A majority of the immigrants in the early years belonged to one region of India—Punjab. Most of them were Sikhs though Hindus were not lacking either. The industries that attracted their labour in the first instance were lumber and railroads. Though they were preferred to Euro-American workers as labourers who worked harder for lower wages, they attracted the hostility of the workers for these very reasons. The Indian workers, in fact, stepped easily into an unfavourable mental mould created to hold the Chinese and Japanese workers who had preceded them to these industries. The antipathy of Euro-Americans gathered force and at the end of the first decade expressed itself in the form of riots that drove the Indians out to less visible employment.3

They went South in large numbers to California where an agricultural growth was beginning to blossom at this point of time. During the second decade of the century wages for

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3 Asian Indians have begun to attract the attention of academic researchers only in the last decade or so. Consequently, data and information on the subject are concentrated in a few major studies though scattered references also exist. For the facts cited in this chapter I have relied mainly on Joan M. Jensen, Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America (New Haven, 1988); and Harry H. L. Kitano and Roger Daniels, Asian Americans: Emerging Minorities (Englewood Cliffs, 1988), pp. 43-56.
agricultural labour began to compare favourably with those in other industries open to migrants. One of the reasons for Indians to adjust quickly to this work was the similarity between the farming conditions in Punjab and certain tracts of California. They also adopted the practices of cooperative land leasing and gang work, developed by other immigrants before them. The areas of Indian activity were concentrated in the Sacramento, San Joaquin and Imperial valleys of the state. Although evidence regarding the settlement patterns and work conditions of the Indian immigrants in these early stages is scant, it seems they were considered honest and hard workers but still faced discrimination on account of their race. Eventually, however, they seem to have settled in the three Californian valleys where they had found work as agricultural labourers. Taking advantage of the shield from publicity, created by the scattered and rural nature of their occupation, they seem to have quietly prospered in time. A 1919 census of land occupancy published by the state of California showed that Asian Indians occupied more than 88,000 acres of land in the state. Of this, 52% was in the Sacramento Valley and 32,000 acres in the Imperial Valley. The Indian immigrants established themselves as skilled farmers and patient with the land problems typical of bringing land under the plough for the first time. But they were not content to remain as labourers. As soon as they could manage, they sought loans and tried to set up independent farms. Since the banks considered them safe and reliable clients, they did not have much trouble on this front. This is what accounted for their growing occupation of land.

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4 ibid.
The other feature to have aided Indian occupancy of land was the creation of ethnic networks that made capital available to entrepreneurs even when formal economic structures of society, like banks, may not be willing to do so. Moreover, loans from within the community were cheaper to have, flexible due to personal relations involved and based on trust rather than formal contracts enforceable in law. This kind of kinship network was typical of most Asian communities. But, significantly, the Indians remained confined to isolated rural areas and did not form highly visible ethnic enclaves like the Chinese or the Japanese. Joan M. Jensen concludes that the fact that death records of Sikhs were available in 29 counties of California in 1923 means that individual settlers went their way. This was an important difference in the pattern of settlement of Asian communities in America and gave the Indians a low profile and fostered their perception as an innocuous group by the native majority.

This perception was further backed by the relative dearth of female immigrants of the community. Immigration records showed some 5,800 East Indian immigrants entering USA between 1901 and 1911, only 109 of them were females. Yet a large number of those entering were married. One Immigration Commission Survey in this period reported that more than half the 474 labourers from India that it had interviewed had reported being married but were without their wives at that moment. This was a pattern common to all Asian immigrant communities at the time and has been termed as “mutilated marriages” by sociologists. But it led the whites to hope that the Indian immigrants would intermarry with the population already present and assimilate in time. The hope did materialize.
in certain cases and Punjabi Indian males married predominantly Mexican women to form about 400 families in California. These have been studied in detail by Karen Leonard and Bruce La Brack. Only few of the marriages, however, succeeded because the women generally came from female-headed households while men wished to retain the family hierarchy of their patriarchal upbringing. To these were added difference in economic priorities and this first attempt at Indian assimilation with a relatively more Westernized culture was only a qualified success.

Through the life history of Mangoo Ram, who later founded the Adi Dharma movement of Untouchables in the Punjab in 1926, it seems the hostility shown by the inhabitants of America to all Indians was instrumental in promoting a sense of “Indianness”. It had the effect of reducing the play of class and caste that had divided the migrants back in India.

Another factor which drew Indians to the United States at this point of time, and which also militated against social barriers of Indian origin, was India's colonial status. At the beginning of the twentieth century, America was the only country with an anti-colonial revolutionary heritage that the colonized people could identify with. This factor was responsible for a sprouting of various nationalist movements of the people of Indian origin in the United States. Doubtless, the most prominent amongst these was the Ghadar Movement in the second decade of the century. It was an attempt at overthrowing the colonial British rule through an armed revolt with its base

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at San Francisco. The movement failed but others, like the Independence for India League at New York, continued the work in more peaceful ways. This showed up the irony of American vision of India. While many Americans chose to study Indian—in particular, Hindu—religion, they did not really connect their ideas of India with Indians amongst their midst. The migrants from India had to undergo all of the economic hardships and social and legal discrimination that was traditionally the lot of immigrants in United States, specially for immigrants of colour.

The problem was aptly summed up by E. E. Chandler, a white rancher in California, when he complimented the Indians by saying “the Hindu resembles us”, but conveyed in the same sentence the racists’ contradiction through, “...and we are shocked to see a black white man”. The Indians were not allowed in many “white only” places but they chose to accept the social taboos and concentrate on their work rather than struggle for equality. During competition for opportunities, this attitude opened them up to such insults as the Japanese calling them “English slaves”. But it also enabled them to engage in economic improvements to the exclusion of all other concerns which reduced any perception of cultural threat from the community to the American Way.

By the third decade of the century, the miniscule community found itself economically secure enough to challenge the legal discrimination against it. Individuals, like Mubarak Ali Khan, and organizations laboured continuously throughout the 1920s and 1930s to achieve this end. The attitude of both the courts and the legislatures, nevertheless,

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6 Quoted in ibid., p. 39.
7 ibid., p. 41.
remained unaccommodating. The decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1923 in the *Thind* case said that Indian immigrants were Asians rather than white and made it impossible for immigrants already in the U.S. to gain citizenship. Indians naturalized before *Thind* found their naturalization called into question. Increasingly strict immigration laws reduced immigration and the Immigration Act of 1924 barred all further immigration from India. The estimate of South Asians immigrating to the U.S. before 1964 is around 6,400.8

The only diversion from economic goals, in this phase, occurred in the form of nationalist activities which attracted support from quite a large number of the community. At this historical juncture, however, the Indians could afford to be both nationalists and non-threatening to the Americans because their nationalism was directed against the British in India. But they could not manage, till the 1930s, to enlist real American support to the cause of Indian independence. In the 1930s, when Nazi politics made racial injustice an issue in the western world, interest in Indian independence revived in America. The movement was led by a group of Indian businessmen and professionals. Prominent amongst these was Sardar Jagjit Singh. A successful merchant, he was able to lobby successfully with American media and to pressurize bureaucrats and politicians to put India on their agenda. His other achievement was to manage such Westernization of methods and tactics without surrendering completely his ethnic individuality. He continued to show himself as a recognizable Sikh though

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8 Suzanne McMahon, “The South Asian Diaspora”, South Asia Bibliographer, University of California at Berkeley @ www.lib.berkeley.edu/SEAL/SouthAsia/diaspora.html
giving up the turban which had become the most persistent target of white American hostility whenever the interests of the two communities clashed and was capable of arousing unpleasant memories.

It was international politics which ultimately weighed the balance in favour of Indians. From the time of the Yalta conference in 1942, the United States had found itself under pressure from its own minorities to match its practice with its repeated rhetoric of democracy and racial justice as its ideals. President Roosevelt found himself confronted with an implacable Winston Churchill on the question of dominion status for India when he suggested it. Yet in 1944 American troops were stationed on Indian soil. The Indians were suspicious of a United States constantly in league with Britain and there were riots against American troops still in India at the end of the war. The American politicians were hard pressed to make some kind of a gesture to give substance to their talk of justice and equality. Though the Congress was still difficult to convince, the president intervened to facilitate the passage of the Luce-Celler Bill in July 1946 that established very small quotas for immigration from India and Pakistan (100 per year from India) and gave them naturalization rights. Almost immediately, Dalip Saund became a congressman displaying Indian ability when opportunity was allowed. It was not until 1965, however, with the Immigration and Nationality Reform Act that the United States' immigration laws allowed Indian immigrants to enter the country in numbers equal to those from other countries. This act ended the national origins quota system and opened the doors for professional Asian Indians and their families to enter the United States as immigrants under
various categories. It also allowed naturalized Asian Indian citizens to be able to sponsor the immigration of their siblings and parents. From 1968 began the second phase of Indian immigration to America.

IMMIGRATION: THE SECOND PHASE

Asian Indian immigrants began to arrive in the United States in sizable numbers at the end of the 1960s. They came with their families and were the first amongst all the migrants to apply for American citizenship once they became eligible. Between 1958 and 1978, 78.56% of Asian Indians who met the eligibility criteria were naturalized. In comparison, the percentage for all population groups was 50.56, while Chinese in the second place were behind the Indians by 12.39 percentage points.9 It has been pointed out that part of this rush is due to the chain migration that Indians are engaged in along with several other ethnic groups. A US citizen has more avenues open to facilitate the entry of relatives compared to a resident alien. However, the fact remains that Indians are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 815,447 Asian Indians lived in the United States during 1990, constituting nearly 0.3% of the total U.S. population. They are the fourth largest Asian population group—following Chinese Americans (1,645,427), Filipino Americans (1,406,770), and Japanese Americans (847,562)---in the United States.10 The percentage of change for Asian Indians in immigration from 1965 to 1977 was

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9 Kitano and Daniels, n. 3, p. 172.
about 3098.1, because of changes in the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965. In the 1980s, an average of about 20,000 Asian Indian immigrants entered the United States annually. Analysis of data developed by the Census Bureau shows that there currently more than 1 million Asian Indians in America. Between 1980 and 1990, the community grew by 125.6 percent. In 1990, the census indicated that 4.7 million Asians comprised 1.9% of the total U.S. population.

The immigrants in the second phase were very different from those in the first one. They were mostly professionals such as doctors, engineers, scientists, academicians, and students seeking professional degrees in American universities. Census data shows that 14 percent of Asian Americans in America are engaged in work related to science, medicine, engineering, and technology. Significant percentage (19.3 percent) also can be found in managerial, administrative, sales and teaching positions. In fact, more than 5,000 Asian Indians currently are faculty members at American universities. In certain select industries, Asian Indians have had a particularly notable impact. It is estimated, for instance, that about 25 percent of all small hotels and motels in America are owned by Indian-Americans. At the same time, Asian Indians are now significant players in the world of computer software and in certain sectors of California's farm economy. The software boom of the 1990s has consolidated the position of Indian Americans further while at the same time feeding old stereotypes about them. Silicon Valley in California has become a favoured destination for new

12 U.S. Bureau of Census, n. 10.
immigrants from India and their high-profile success in the field has gone to reinforce the image of their being good in certain types of fields, primarily academics and things requiring "intelligence". Career advancement seems to be an important motivation for those emigrating from India.\textsuperscript{13}

In the realm of education, the Census Bureau data shows that 87.5 percent of Asian Indians in America have completed high school with 62 percent having some college education. More than 58 percent hold Bachelor or higher degrees, which is the highest percentage among all Asian American ethnic groups. The Asian Indians have entered a wide variety of fields including, software technology, sciences, academics and music but like other Asian immigrants they have become stereotyped in popular imagination as "superstars who achieve wonders in a few limited fields, particularly science and mathematics".\textsuperscript{14} Though for a long time the Asian Indians remained overshadowed by the Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the United States, in their second phase of immigration their economic success has been spectacular.

The highest median income of a full time worker in 1979 was that of Asian Indians at $18,707 as compared to $15,572 for whites and $16,829 for Japanese. The percentage of Indian families below the poverty line stood at 7.4 while for the whites it was 7.0%. The Japanese and the Filipinos, however, fared better than both these groups with 4.2% and 6.2%

\textsuperscript{13} M. L. Kaul, "Adaptation of Recently Arrived Professional Immigrants from India in Four Selected Communities of Ohio", \textit{Journal of Applied Social Sciences}, vol. 7, pp. 131-45.

\textsuperscript{14} Robert B. Oxnam, cited in Marjorie H. Li and Peter Li, compilers and eds., \textit{Understanding Asian Americans: A Curriculum Resource Guide} (New York, 1993), p. 7. He said it for all Asian Americans but since the software boom it has applied particularly to Indians.
respectively. With a mean family income of $59,777 in 1995, the highest of any Asian group in America, and with an average per capita income that is more than 25 percent higher than the national average and second only to Japanese Americans among all ethnic groups, Asian Indians' economic power in America is indisputable.

While the ethnic group is widely dispersed in America, there are populations in excess of 50,000 in five states: California, New York, Illinois, Texas and New Jersey. The U.S. Congressional Caucus on India and Indian-Americans issued the following statement on October 25, 1994, regarding the economic and political power of the Indian-Americans: "Growing economically at a pace matched by only one other Asian group, Indians living in America now earn more than any other ethnic community in the United States and hence are positioned to exercise unprecedented political influence in the upcoming elections."

In the realm of politics, Asian Indians are playing an increasing role in America. A number of American cities and towns, including Teaneck, NJ, Hollywood Park, TX, and Burien, Wash., have elected people of Asian American descent as mayors. A number of Indians have also become prominent at a national level. Among those currently serving in the Clinton Administration are the following: Dr. Dharmendra K. Sharma, Administrator, Department of Transportation, Ms. Arati Prabhakar, Director, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Department of Commerce; and Ms. Preeta Bansal, counselor in the Office of the White House Counsel.

Kitano and Daniels, n. 3, p. 169.
However, this success story has not prevented racial animosity towards them. As a minority group, they've had to encounter oppressive sociopolitical experiences, and reciprocally they, in many cases, may socially have distanced themselves from the dominant group. Studies on Asian Indians in the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom suggest that they frequently perceive prejudice in work and social settings. In fact, working class whites often look upon them as competitors who have taken their jobs away from them. In New York, Indians have almost taken over the newsstand business and both in New York and Los Angeles a large number of corner stores are owned by them. As a white man said on TV to an Indian interviewer, this has earned them the wrath of other communities: “I don’t like Indian people because they own all the stores, but I don’t even have one....They are coming to America and taking our stuff and keeping us out of it.”

The educational qualifications of the average Indian are above the American average but they share with other Asian Americans the fate of not being able to use that advantage as a springboard to managerial positions. Though they have won accolades for their high income levels, what is often unnoticed is the fact that as individuals they earn less than their white counterparts. The higher family income is due to the fact that more family members in their households are employed. There is also the anomaly of the success of a certain portion of the

18 Introduction to Li and Li, n. 14, p. 12.
community eclipsing the condition of those who live on marginal incomes and need to be taken care of. The discrimination faced by Asian Indians falls in the category of "isolate discrimination". It has been defined by Feagin as "actions taken by individuals against other individuals".\textsuperscript{19} Since this kind of prejudice and discrimination is more difficult to detect and root out than institutional discrimination, it is bound to continue for longer. Not much attention has been paid to the social and psychological adjustment difficulties that these new Asian Indian immigrants may have been experiencing.\textsuperscript{20}

However, the Indians, again like many other Asian Americans, are not known to have high crime rates or too many family problems. Despite many mothers joining the workforce, the problems of divorce, of broken families and single parent households are far less than in other communities. In fact, in 1980, the number of households headed by a woman was least for the Indian Americans at 6.4%. Whites and Japanese figured in the second place with both having 10.1% of their households headed by a woman.\textsuperscript{21} The increasing political activism of Asian Indians in America comes out of a community that is very much centered on the family. Only 4.5 percent of Asian Indian households have no husband present, and only 1.3 percent of Asian Indian households are headed by an unmarried couple.

The Asian Indians have shared to a large extent in the process which has enabled the Asian Americans to be


\textsuperscript{21} Kitano and Daniels, n. 3, p. 166.
considered a "model minority" in America. They have been near the top in contributing the factors, viz., income, employment, political participation, the relative absence of certain social problems, and marital practices, which have led to this status.

While the view, describing the Asian Americans as "model minorities" certainly reflects the viewpoint largely of the majority, it is important. Once legal and institutional constraints are removed, perceptions soar in importance in regulating majority-minority relations.

THE OLD AND THE NEW MINORITY

Some of the differences between the historical experiences of the two communities are obvious. Even though the Asian Indians faced discrimination and hostility upon reaching the United States, they still had a right to their earnings. They came in most cases to improve their material condition and so had relatively less social expectations from the people. Many did go back after earning a requisite amount. Even so, those who stayed back encountered widespread hostility, mob violence, official apathy, and social discrimination. The fact that the Indian men in the early years of the twentieth century were not allowed to go home lest they bring their families, with the result that many remained alone and lonely for long years, was mortifying. But at no stage were they deprived of sovereignty over themselves, the hallmark of working liberalism in a society. Many could and did pass themselves off as South Europeans or Mexicans. Till the Thind case in 1923, many Indians were granted naturalization by courts, owing to confusion over their racial status. The years when the Indians were legally deprived of rights to naturalization and citizenship were short--from
1923 to 1946--compared to the African American experience on this count. The black labour, till the Emancipation, had little right over its earnings, which created a tremendous gap between their asset base and that of other ethnic groups. It is also significant that though the record of the early Indian sojourners is scant, there is credible evidence to suggest that their hard work and honesty earned them higher credit rating. Since the assimilation of most ethnic groups in America has been dependent on displays of material success, as proof of their intellectual merit, the importance of this factor in gaining acceptance for Asian Indians is self-evident. The African Americans, on the other hand, gained little from their hard work on the plantations. More damaging, however, in the long run were the lores built up around the supposed laziness, intellectual incapacity and dishonesty of slaves by their masters. Even after the community was freed from the yolk of slavery, few whites were willing to employ or trust its members even in the North. The paucity of capital coupled with the paucity of opportunities proved to be truly daunting.

Second, the appreciation gained by the Asian Indians towards the end of the century has largely been the work of the immigrants of the second phase. The immigration laws of this phase were designed to attract professionally qualified men and women from India. In most cases, therefore, their skills and earning abilities were a function of their training and background in India rather than in America. Their advent in large numbers also coincided with the greater tolerance of

ethnic differences brought about by the Civil Rights revolution. Without the cultural baggage of slavery and constant struggles and armed with highly desirable qualifications they were in a better position to avail of the opportunities thrown up by a more open society.

Third, the Civil Rights movement seems to have failed in creating a colour-blind American consciousness. However, it seems to have created a hierarchy of sorts wherein prejudice against a group grows less as it moves away from a dark complexion to a fair one. Nothing else seems to explain the greater social accommodation shown to the Asian Indians when compared with blacks. Though instances of racial discrimination against them are not wanting, the Indians in general have been able to escape the necessity of remaining confined to ethnic enclaves in terms of housing. They are widely dispersed in suburban areas while even well-off blacks in places like New York find it difficult to move out of inner city ghettos and into suburban areas. It has been reported that segregation is as severe for blacks with incomes above $50,000 as for those below it.23 Nor can this be considered a result of black preferences for ethnic solidarity. "By large majorities, blacks support the ideal of integration and express a preference for integrated living and 95% are willing to live in neighborhoods that are anywhere between 15% and 70% black".24 The effect of residential segregation is reflected not only in housing but also in schools, health facilities and other public amenities. And

these amenities determine the quality of an individual's life. They also determine the opportunities an individual will have by either not bringing her/him into contact with opportunities that exist mostly outside the ghettos or by leaving her/him unprepared for them due to the low quality of infrastructure for human resource development available in the inner city. An essential factor in the process of the disappearance of separate ethnic identities is intermarriage amongst groups. It has been demonstrated that Hispanic and Asian groups, despite the recency of immigration of sizeable sections of them, and still under a much stronger influence of group and family attachment, show intermarriage rates approaching the European levels.\(^{25}\) And all this is the fallout of segregation rooted even now in the colour of one's skin.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, the Asian Indians were not torn by internal conflicts over the primacy of economic or spiritual goals. Whether as sojourners in the first phase of immigration, or as professionals in the second, the Asian Indians had only one goal in the United States, viz., to improve their economic status. The tenacity with which many of them hold on to their Indian identity and values in private life shows how successfully they have managed to adopt American values in the economic sphere while continuing with Indian values in other fields. The Asian communities, in particular, Asian Indians, have drawn sustenance from their known history and past. Hardayal Singh, an Asian Indian in New York, voiced this factor: "By birth I am Indian. India is a great country. I have the same respect for this country....Still, you cannot ignore your

birth country". Singh and his wife were also convinced that their young daughter should spend her formative years in India to imbibe Indian values. Their daughter described the rough behaviour she encountered from whites and blacks but it did not seem to shatter her self-esteem since she had what social psychologists call another “in-group” available. She could, and did, call upon her Indian identity as a counter to the rejection met in school and on the streets.

The tendency of Asian Indians to be strongly conscious of their ethnic heritage has been noted by scholars in the field. They have already established strong group support and source of identity through wide networks in the northern American continent. Several Indian associations have been established in large urban areas of United States and Canada. These groups provide financial and social support in times of need and organize social and cultural activities. This strong group identity may hinder quick assimilation in the host culture but also provides a cushion against the culture shock of coming to an entirely different socio-cultural context. The proximity in their time of arrival, the remembered and shared worldview and the lack of compulsion to interact with the white culture beyond strictly professional fields have all been factors in the creation of a sub-context within the larger American context. “The ethnic group becomes the context within which to engage in known lines of interaction and to affirm one’s past”. At least for the

26 Hardayal Singh, “Being Indian in Jersey City”, in Lee and Faung, n. 17, p. 115.
27 M. P. Fisher, The Indians of New York City: A Study of Immigrants from India (New Delhi, 1980).
28 Radha S. Hegde, “Swinging the Trapeze: The Negotiation of Identity among Asian Indian Immigrant Women in the United States” (pp. 34-
first generation of immigrants it provides a way to continue largely with their philosophical moorings acquired in India. The case is more difficult for the second generation immigrants since their Indian values are received at second hand and within a context that often militates against Indian teleology. However, strong family and kinship networks, characteristic of Asian society, are still helpful.

As chapters three and four bear out, the history of the African Americans in this century has largely been the history of a struggle on both material and spiritual fronts. The rejection met in the only homeland known to most of them has caused their energies to be directed towards fighting a legal battle as well as the creation of an identity for the community. At the beginning of the century when the community wished to turn its new-found freedom into equality, some of the best minds engaged in the task of vast and dedicated historical research to combat the stereotypes of blacks bequeathed by slavery and the reaction to Reconstruction. The popularity of the Back-to-Africa movement of Marcus Garvey, of Malcolm X, and the burst of Afrocentric activities and theories since the 1960s are testimony enough to the need felt by large sections of the community to create a past and an identity which are positive and respected.


29 Kavitha Mediratta, a second generation Asian Indian, described her American experience thus: "Throughout my life I've felt like an outsider, self-consciously aware of standing out and apart, a lone Indian in the largely Anglo American communities in which I grew up and have worked." Kavitha Mediratta, "How Do You Say Your Name?", in Pyong Gap Min and Rose Kim, eds., Struggle for Ethnic Identity: Narratives by Asian American Professionals (Walnut Creek, 1999), p. 77.

30 For a discussion of these points, see, Remisetty-Mikler, n. 16.
The struggle was most tragically manifested in the life of W.E.B. DuBois, one of the most brilliant men produced by American society. At the end of his life, DuBois was a disillusioned man who had left the United States to settle in Ghana.

Discussing the relationship between social and personal identity, Jean-Claude Deschamps and Thierry Devos argue, "The stronger the identification with a group, the more significant the differentiation of that group from other groups will be".\textsuperscript{31} In case of the Asian Indians there is not only the ease of identifying with their Indian ethnic group but also the desire to conform to the group they have chosen to join, i.e., the Americans. Significantly, the response from both sides is assuring, if not always totally up to their expectations. In the process, the sense of an identity is likely to be more diffuse as it spreads over and straddles both the groups in question. As a second generation Asian Indian has written:

My Father, meanwhile, often failed to get promoted even though he published scientific articles and won several federal competitive grants.... [His] immigrant and minority status, the vagueness of intellectual property rights in this country and the predominantly white bosses in the workplace were–all factors against him. My lack of an accent and the fact that I am more assimilated into American culture may account for the different reception I have received.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} Shay Sheth, "An Indian Boy in American Clothes", in Pyong Gap Min and Rose Kim, n. 28, p. 138.
The quick response from American society, appreciable within a generation, ought to be noted. In case of the African Americans, the identity with Africa is really not strong and acceptance from America is far below par. Their identity therefore is more sharply and intensely focussed upon the *ethnic* group. Moreover, the constant struggle over a viable identity has made the ethnicity of the community a perpetual topic of their discourse. This means that, according to the research of Dechamps and Devos, it is likely to promote a sharper sense of difference with other groups in society.

This is where the minority paradigm falls short in the study of African Americans. None of the immigrant groups that came to America, whether from Europe or Asia, was called upon to create a psychological and cultural homeland for itself. The community finds itself in the singular position of being forced to give cultural and psychological depth to an outsider status based actually on colour. The failure of the African Americans to improve their status materially since the 1960s to the expected extent is often attributed to the lack of efforts they make in schools and on the job. However, this is a relatively new phenomenon. At the turn of the century, Booker T. Washington had testified to the great value placed upon education amongst blacks. The demand for integrated schools, leading to better education, was one of the main planks of the Civil Rights protest. Yet, there can be no denial of the fact that since the late 1980s the performance of black school children has shown decline. There have been reports that in the segregated areas of inner cities, populated mostly by blacks, children find themselves under intense peer pressure to reject standard English, homework and learning as "white" traits.
This, naturally, shows up in lower grades in schools and to lesser opportunities as a result thereof.

But what needs to be highlighted is the fact that black children choose to reject "white" habits or rather define their identity in negative terms—as the opposite of whites. It is another reflection of the community's constant struggle to define to itself and to the larger society an identity for itself. Perceiving the continuation of racial prejudice even after legal equality was achieved, black identity at the end of the century is largely defined in anti-white terms. Being the only community of people in the United States who do not even have coherent memories of a cultural ethnicity, the African Americans have been forced to develop an ethnicity of their own.

The difference in the nature of their ethnicity is yet another significant fallout of the legacy of racism in the United States. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Asian Indians fall within the definition of, what may be termed, "cultural" ethnicity while the African Americans fall within a second one, which may be described as "minority" ethnicity. As such, the resources of ethnic networks and ethnic memories cutting across geographical boundaries available to Indians are not available to African Americans. Moreover, they have been forced to acquire an ethnic identity borne out of prolonged discrimination. In this sense the nature of African American "ethnicity" is the opposite of that of the Asian Indians. While the latter had to tone down their ethnic identity in favour of an American one, the former had, in fact, to tone down their American identity to create an ethnic one.

However, despite efforts throughout the twentieth century the African Americans have been unable to develop any
meaningful ethnic relationship with Africa and in spite of the Civil Rights movement, they have not been accepted as Americans. What this means in concrete terms is that the African Americans have a smaller philosophical domain from which to draw the material for their identity. They have been forced to back into themselves, so to speak, into their history and culture of past 400 years on American soil, the only history definitely belonging to them. The significance of a remembered homeland and history for the definition of identity in an alien social framework has been studied and stressed by scholars. S. Rushdie posits that migrants root themselves in memory and define themselves by their otherness.\(^{33}\) Though the African Americans in the twentieth century were not new migrants to America but their existence was framed very much within a social framework which insisted upon treating them as aliens. It is the comfort of known and accepted philosophies and ways of life in the face of the lack of acceptance in the new homeland which gives force to the dynamics of this process of rooting oneself in memories. This form of identity-creation was not available to the African Americans in the twentieth century when the memory of their homeland, in terms of personal experience, had faded and grown dim. Though African influence, in the form of musical strains and certain words and terms,\(^ {34}\) did survive it was overwhelmed by the pervasive influence of American culture.

Though the African Americans have been part of the evolving American culture over time and their provenance in the


\(^{34}\) See, Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago, 1987).
United States, as has been mentioned before, is as old as that of
whites, their experience in America has been in direct
opposition to the American Creed. As persons who have taken
part in all the landmark events of the American nation--the
American Revolution, Civil War, settlement of the West, the two
World Wars--and have woven the American tapestry
throughout along with the whites, they have been as much
subject to the intellectual environment of the United States as
the whites. As W.E.B. DuBois, rightly and bitterly challenged:

Your country? How come it yours?

As the only worldview available to them, the African
Americans have imbibed the American Creed as much as the
whites.\(^{35}\) As discussed in chapter 2, the American Creed or the
American Way, extolls personal responsibility for one's life, the
"go-getter" spirit in the individual, material success and
"whiteness". The only history available to the African
Americans, the history of slavery, does not fit this creed well.
There is little sympathy in the American Way for the loser or the
victim. black scholars, therefore, have been passionately
engaged in discovering or creating a history for the community
which can fit into this Creed. Hence, the effort to create a new
image of the slave in which she/he rebelled in a variety of ways
to assert her/his independence and struggle for freedom; hence,
also the current efforts to trace the source of all the Western
achievements back to Africa.\(^{36}\) However, these efforts have

\(^{35}\) See, Jennifer L Hochschild, *Facing up to the American Dream: Race, Class and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton, 1995).

received checks from eminent black scholars themselves who are more concerned with scholarly integrity rather than identity creation. The process, however, is far from over at the end of the century and the community continues to swing between giving primacy to economic achievement or identity creation in almost alternating phases.

The effect of the process at the moment, however, is negative to an undesirable extent. The hardening ethnic mould of the community, in an effort to become just another American minority, has led to its increasing preoccupation with questions of race to the exclusion of almost all else. There can be little doubt that racism against the community continues. But the efforts to create an “awhite” ethnic identity have led to the repudiation of valuable American traits, like stress on hard work, sacrifice, family values and personal relationships. Whether it is a liberal black leader like Jesse Jackson, or a militant like Louis Farrakhan, they have been forced to admit the demoralized state of the black community with high rates of female-headed households, unemployment and low educational achievements.

There is more at stake in this differentiation than merely the privileging of one minority above another in a plural society.

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A prominent black professor at Harvard University, Ronald Ferguson, has blamed the “hip-hop” culture and music, a typically “black” culture, for the declining educational standards of students in the community. The lyrics of this kind of music are noted for preaching violence and misogyny. According to the professor, the gap between reading scores for 17-year-old black and white students fell from 52.7% in 1971 to 20.3% in 1988 but went up to 26.1% in 1992. Hip-hop has been in vogue since the end of the 1980s. Professor Ferguson claims that there is immense pressure amongst the students to follow this culture to gain status. See, Tom Rhodes, “Gangsta Rap ‘Stunts’ Learning among Blacks”, Times of India (New Delhi), 4 July 2000, p. 13.
Though other groups of colour have experienced greater success and acceptance from the white groups in America, they have gone through enough race-oriented hostility to identify with the approach of the blacks. The African Americans do not have to struggle between a set of values to be unlearned to fit in with a new environment like the Asian Indians do. However, both communities have had to deal with negative stereotypes in the United States. The African Americans had first to fight down the slavery-time stereotype of being imbecilic, docile and submissive and later of a violent, lazy and socially irresponsible social group. The Asian Indians are also stereotyped as submissive, meek, insular though intelligent.

The impact of such stereotypes upon the victims has long been debated by academicians. Till the 1980s the general consensus was that it served to reduce the self-esteem of the individual. However, in the 1990s, some research has suggested that the effect of perceived racial discrimination affects the self-esteem of African Americans either less or not at all. On the other hand, it had significant negative impact upon the self-esteem of Asian Americans. This may suggest why Asian Indians, like other Asians, make greater efforts to conform and appear to assimilate more quickly.

It is this appearance of easy assimilation and economic success that have reserved a place for the Asian Indians in the designated model minorities. But it, obviously, leads to stress and discomfort enough for the community to give scattered support to the multicultural attack on the “melting pot” model.

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38 See, Hegde, n. 28.
39 See, ibid. for anecdotal evidence to confirm the analysis with regard to Asian Indians.
of assimilation. The fury of the multicultural attack upon the old ideals of the “melting pot” has attracted a display of subgroup loyalty from other ethnic minorities too. The majority, and many amongst the minorities, fear that if the current levels of the immigration of coloured population continue, it may lead to the “disuniting of America”. The sense of belonging to a unique culture, woven around a patriotic reading of its history and culture is the force which has kept the disparate ethnic communities in America together, has rather formed the essence of Americanism. The critics of multiculturalism fear that it is spawning a kind of “minority syndrome” wherein each minority demands accommodation of its separate history and culture in school curricula which is likely to erode the sense of a shared Americanism. Many, including the Asian Indians, have sought to join the sections benefitting from the Affirmative Action programmes. However, one should recognize that the difference in racism displayed towards blacks and even other groups of colour varies widely in degree, if not in kind. Yellow and brown colours have begun to find not only economic but also social space in the American milieu to an extent denied to the blacks.

Though the concept and use of the term “assimilation” have been discredited since the 1980s the practice continues to flourish. The very celebration of Asian Indians as a model is due to their ability to quickly conform to “American” way of life, accept American philosophical tenets and not demand any special treatment in view of their difficulties as a new ethnic minority. Despite the disrepute of the concept, this kind of conformism, without any forced stifling of one’s cultural identity—or one may say lack of stifling beyond that demanded
from Europeans in the past—is necessary to hold a plural society together. However, the comparison jars at the difference in the failure of black assimilation for centuries. If the comparison between the old and the new minority proves the vibrant dynamism of the mechanisms of assimilation in America without damaging the immigrant groups, either materially or spiritually, it also shows up by contrast the failure of the process in case of blacks.

Till the 1960s blacks displayed as great and continuous a desire for assimilation as the Indians have done since then. Therefore the lack of assimilation—or integration—in their case cannot be blamed on a deliberate devotion to a separatist ideology. In their language and culture they came as close to the white majority as even many white groups would have found difficult. Multiculturalism, therefore, is their attempt to stand the laws of race relations on their head. Since all their attempts to find acceptance as Americans with dark skins—as just so many physically distinct individuals—floundered on the rocks of their group identity, they struggled to replace the basis of social and political interaction in America from individualist to collectivist. The struggle has a logic of its own, hardly clear in the rash of conflicts surrounding the issue. If all ethnic groups composing America interact in the public realm as distinguishable groups then the collective identity imposed upon African Americans would be equalized. Once differences, whether physical or cultural, would separate all groups from each other, the separation of African Americans would merely be a part of the general pattern and not a humiliating oddity as now.
Black emphasis on ethnic or subgroup identity above an American one, therefore, is the result of a very special set of circumstances unique to the community. As David Hollinger describes the desired strands of an American identity, he prescribes,

...voluntary over involuntary affiliations, balanc[ing] an appreciation for communities of descent with a determination to make room for new communities, and promot[ing] solidarities of wide scope that incorporate people with different ethnic and racial backgrounds...[and to] resist the grounding of knowledge of moral values in blood and history... 40

However, as Nathan Glazer has pointed out, this prescription does not take account of the African American condition, where affiliation is hardly voluntary, where the community of descent defines an escapable community of fate, where knowledge and moral values are indeed grounded in blood and history. And that is where all integrationist models and prescriptions break down. The effect of multiculturalism has been to make Euro-Americans more tolerant of diversity to the extent where brown and yellow colours have found acceptance but black is still excluded. Neither material achievements nor philosophical acculturation have been able to ensure its inclusion. Multiculturalism, consequently, ought to be understood as a response of the African American community to the historic pressures they have had to labour against. It is also another step in their quest for a social identity since their American identity, when within the country,

is a shallow one. It has its validity only in their experience and should be applied in its entirety to them only. For the others it is a matter of choice.