

A Masala Identity: Young South Asian Muslims in the US

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Introduction

There has been a growing corpus of studies on South Asians in the US. However, the number of studies on Muslims in particular has remained rather limited even though they are an interesting and diverse group whose presence in the US dates back to as early as the 19th century. Today, South Asian Muslim communities in the US are a sizable group, characterized by a remarkable internal diversity, at an economic and social level, as well as at a cultural and sectarian level. But more particularly, this minority group provides, through its varied and complex nature, a wider perspective and understanding of the redefinition of Islamic traditions and the reinvention of collective identities, among the first (immigrant) as well as the second (US-born) generation. The focus of this study will be precisely on the second generation which presents an additional dimension: their experiences can be compared, if not contrasted (at least partially), with those of their peers in Great Britain, of North Africans in France or Black Muslims in the US, who have been described by Gilles Kepel as forming "a new proletariat of youngsters."¹

Since the US census does not ask any question about the religious affiliation of the population, it is very difficult to know the number of South Asian Mus-

lims in the country. A rough estimation can be established by adding the total number of Pakistanis (around 500,000) and Bangladeshis (about 100,000) to 12 percent of the total Indian Muslim population in the US (180,000), which amounts to 780,000. Most Indian Muslims are originally from Hyderabad, followed by Gujarat, while the rest hail from different regions of India (Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, etc.). As for Pakistanis, they mostly originate from the large metropolitan areas (Lahore, Karachi, Faisalabad, Hyderabad and Peshawar), the majority comprising Punjabis and Muhajirs (Muslims who have migrated to Pakistan from India during and after Partition). Interestingly enough, Muhajirs form only eight percent of the population in Pakistan but 30 percent of the total Pakistani population in the US. This discrepancy in figures can be explained by the fact that Muhajirs in Pakistan are mostly urban-based and belong to various ranges of the middle-class. Their social and economic profile exactly fits that of most South Asian immigrants in the US. Bangladeshis too come from the major cities like Dhaka and Chittagong. Sylhetis, known for their long history of migration, have also moved to the US in fairly large numbers.

South Asian Muslims, like their Hindu and other South Asian counterparts, are concentrated in certain

states: California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois and Texas. Owing to American policies which have encouraged, since the 1960s, the immigration of highly qualified people, South Asians have achieved a fairly high level of success in the US, even though the number of less qualified people have been also growing steadily since at least the 1980s.

As in the case of other South Asians, religion occupies a significant place in the construction of the identity of Muslims in the US. A number of reasons can explain this phenomenon. First of all, the historical legacy brought along by immigrants on American shores should be borne in mind. Since at least the end of the 19th century, religion has been successfully used by an emerging indigenous elite to win over the support of the masses. After independence in 1947, religion has continued to occupy in various degrees a major space not only in the private lives of South Asians but on the political scene as well. Immigrants from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh are the bearers of this trend whereby religion is seen as a significant driving force in the modes of identification and identity construction.

Secondly, this enhanced importance of religion in the lives of South Asian immigrants can also be attributed to the American context: most ethnic minorities in the US (Irish, Greeks, Jews) have traditionally seen in religion an efficient vehicle in their community formation and identity re-composition. Besides, the US offers to Muslims a space of freedom that may be very difficult to find elsewhere (in the Muslim countries included). The way religious freedom is defined in the US is fairly comparable to how India addresses the issue: the treatment of all religions on an equal footing. Muslims can then express rather freely a religiosity which, in its intensity, is close to that of many Americans, the conservative Christians in particular. But at the same time, Muslims suffer from a sentiment of discrimination against Islam in the US. Hence the

paradox of the situation: on the one hand, American relative tolerance in the religious field allows Muslims to practice their religion rather openly (as testified by the tremendous increase in the number of Islamic institutions all over the US as we shall see soon); on the other hand, the anti-Islamic prejudice of the population, perpetuated by the media and reinforced by events in the Middle East and in other parts of the Muslim world, have contributed to nurture the religious sentiment of Muslims: reacting to what is perceived as discrimination, they claim their identification to Islam even more intensively.

Another reason for this heightened religiosity of Muslims in the US lies in their concern for the transmission of their cultural heritage to their offspring. Religion is seen as a prime instrument for curbing the process leading towards Americanization.

The fourth reason that can be evoked is the general trend all over the world to assert one's specificity in reaction to globalization. The specter of standardization and the uncertainties engendered by modernity haunt more particularly the Islamic world which has tended to display over the past years various strategies (including the resort to religion) to assert its identity. The phenomenon of Islamic revival will be addressed below.

Fifthly, a dialectical link can be observed between migration and nation, as underlined by Peter van der Veer,² which in the case of Muslims, and also of other South Asians, expresses itself through religion: in other words, Muslims become more Muslim in the diaspora,³ while Hindus become more Hindu.

Last but not least, a phenomenon has taken place which can also be seen as an aftermath of all the reasons stated above: the impact exerted, even though often indirectly, by one particular organization on South Asian Muslim immigrants: the Jama'at-i Islami. Created in 1941 by Abul Ala Mawdudi in India, the Jama'at-i Islami represents today one of the major

fundamentalist organizations in the South Asian sub-continent. Mawdudi considered that Islam should regulate each and every aspect of one's life and proposed a definition of the Islamic State whereby *shari'a* (the Islamic law), as the ultimate law of the country, should be applicable to the various forms of law (constitutional, civil, criminal). The Islamic organization penetrated the American continent, following in the footsteps of South Asians as early as the 1960s. This period was marked by an Islamic revival throughout the world. Students in particular were influenced by the ideology of thinkers like Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb of Egypt. Some among these students migrated to the US and founded in 1963 the Muslim Student Association (MSA). Later on, many community organizations affiliated themselves with the MSA which remains to this date the most important student association in the US: in 1994, out of 239 student associations on American campuses, 189 were branches of the MSA. But the MSA, though initially very influenced by the Jama'at-i Islami endorsing its rhetoric in favor of a more rigorist Islam, cannot be considered as a mere representative of Mawdudi's movement in the US. All the MSAs in the US are in effect affiliated with one particular umbrella organization, the Islamic Society of North America, which is not dominated by South Asians anymore and which above all is not a branch of the Jama'at-i Islami in the US. All these groups can be at best defined as avatars of the Jama'at-i Islami. It is another organization which can be rightfully considered as the representative of the Jama'at-i Islami in America, the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA). Based in New York, it was created in 1968 by a small number of militants who were already affiliated to Mawdudi's movement before migrating. ICNA has now developed into a highly organized association. One of the most interesting features about ICNA is that it has managed to transform its image from that of a fundamentalist organization to that of an auto-

nous and "decent" organization promoting "honorable" ideas. Hence, while immigrants condemn the Jama'at-i Islami as being a fundamentalist organization, many of them (including those who are traditionally the opponents of the Jama'atis in the subcontinent, like the Barelwis⁴) nonetheless consider ICNA as a "good" organization and hence legitimize its very existence. The Jama'at-i Islami, via ICNA or via its (distant) avatars like the MSA or ISNA, has thus succeeded in influencing to some extent South Asian immigrants. The movement has taken advantage of the "cathartic" function of religion which can help socially and psychologically weakened individuals, like immigrants, to overcome their fears and their frustrations. As noted by Francis Robinson, fundamentalist organizations easily prosper indeed either in societies in transition (like South Asian societies) or among populations in transition like immigrants.⁵ Interestingly enough, Muhajirs, themselves former immigrants, who, as stated earlier, form a significant proportion of Pakistani immigrants in the US, were for a long time staunch supporters of the Jama'at-i Islami in Pakistan. Many South Asian immigrants belong moreover to the very social classes which traditionally back organizations like the Jama'at-i Islami in the subcontinent: the (lower)-middle-class. Mawdudi indeed was far from being a revolutionary like Sayyid Qutb of Egypt or Ali Shariati of Iran. He had a vision of society which did not call into question the class system, whereas on the contrary Sayyid Qutb and Shariati advocated egalitarianism as a basic norm for the Islamic social structure. Hence, just as many Hindu immigrants in the US have tended to endorse the Sangh Parivar's ideology,⁶ South Asian Muslims in the US undergo the influence of the Jama'at-i Islami.

Muslims from the subcontinent, as a result of this heightened religiosity, have established large numbers of mosques and Islamic institutions across the North American continent. As compared to other Mus-

lim groups, they have been particularly active in institutionalizing Islam in America: while there were already a certain number of mosques and Islamic organizations in the US before the arrival of Muslims from the subcontinent (that had been essentially set up by Arabs), the migration of South Asians has coincided, as stated earlier, with an exponential growth of such institutions (more than 1,000 today across the US). It is worth noting that the arrival of South Asians has engendered a split inside mosques, that were so far dominated by Arabs, between on the one hand the partisans of a cultural Islam (music tolerated in mosques for instance) and on the other the supporters of a more rigorist Islam, influenced by South Asians.⁷ If a more rigorous practice of Islam is usually referred to as (re)-Islamization, such a phenomenon can be also attributed to a process, known in South Asia as *ashrafization*, whereby social class is established through more orthodox practices.⁸ Most South Asian immigrants, as seen earlier, belong indeed to the middle-class while many of the early Arab settlers in the US hailed from the working class. By imposing "orthodox" practices, South Asians signified their superiority over their predecessors and tried, rather successfully, to establish a segregation along class lines. In New York today, apart from some exceptions, like the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, originally built to respond to the needs of UN officials and which attracts Muslims from very different ethnic backgrounds and, to some extent, from different social backgrounds as well, most mosques are instituted along class lines. To give an example, while the Ar-Rahman Foundation Inc. Masjid, located in Manhattan, mostly attracts taxi drivers and other working class people, the Islamic Center of Long Island has become the nodal point for South Asian professionals, physicians more particularly. True enough, this disparity takes its roots in spatial issues (taxi-drivers and physicians usually do not live in the same areas), but this very differentiation is

itself conditioned by class considerations. As a matter of fact, segregation along class lines does not only take place between mosques but inside mosques as well, worshippers from different social backgrounds often sitting separately.

In terms of internal organization and purposes, though these institutions were meant to ensure the transplantation and perpetuation of Islam in the American landscape, they have taken on some distinctive characteristics that make them rather different from similar bodies in the subcontinent. The role of mosques has indeed undergone some transformations. While in South Asia mosques are primarily spaces of worship, they have become in the US alternative and reassuring spaces of socialization for expatriates in search of "markers" in a foreign land. They have also aligned their mode of organization on that of American churches and synagogues (Sunday services and Sunday schools, summer-camps organized by mosques, celebrations of marriages inside the mosque, social committees for helping immigrants and so on).

As stated above, one of the prime concerns of immigrants however is to ensure the transmission of their cultural heritage to their children. It now remains to be seen how young South Asian Muslims⁹ respond to these pressures which come along with other (contradictory) pressures from the host society.

After briefly examining their academic performances and their professional aspirations, we will address questions pertaining to their identity formation process.

Academic Performances and Social Behavior of the Second Generation: a Model-minority?

American society tends to consider South Asian immigrants as a model-minority. This appreciation is also applied to their children who have been characterized by rather exceptional academic performances

and by a very low rate of juvenile delinquency. This success of South Asian youngsters success can be primarily attributed to their social background since many of them belong to highly educated and affluent families and by the unconditional support for their education that they receive from their parents. The highly competitive atmosphere predominant in the schools and colleges of South Asia, of India in particular, and to which most immigrants of the subcontinent have been exposed before migrating, is reproduced in the diaspora. South Asian first-generation immigrants, very keen to see their children achieving the same, or even a higher, level of success, exert strong pressures on their children. As for the quasi-absence of juvenile delinquency among South Asians, it can be partly explained by the omnipresent parental authority, a feature characterizing the whole Asian minority, including the Chinese and the Japanese.

But this idyllic picture does include some flaws. If many young South Asians do respond to their parents' expectations by for instance enrolling themselves into medicine or engineering, others show a preference for different subjects, like law, journalism, business, political science, etc., considered by parents, as less "noble" or riskier because they do not necessarily guarantee, like medicine for instance, a stable, well-paid and prestigious job. It is not uncommon to see South Asian youngsters start pre-medical courses so as to satisfy their parents and then reorient themselves towards other subjects due to a lack of motivation. This situation often engenders bitterness and disappointment among parents, leading in some cases (though not very frequently) to real generational conflicts. But on the other hand what constitutes the greatest challenge for many second-generation South Asians is to surpass the level of success attained by their parents when the latter already occupy very high social and financial positions. This situation potentially engenders feelings of distress and uncertainty as

youngsters are divided between their own aspirations and the reluctance to disappoint their parents.

During a conference organized by Indians in Houston, a number of young South Asians expressed themselves on this topic:

Another [second-generation Indian] said parental pressure also extended to careers, with the children's ambitions either ignored or overruled... And another said when he announced he wanted to take English literature as a major, "my mother wept." Another participant told about the son of a physician couple. He wanted a career as a teacher of history, she said, and his parents' first reaction was, "You will earn very little money." It is amazing how much of the American criterion for success we have incorporated into our lives — a big house, a big car — these seem to be only indications of success. What actually matters is that you can look back 20 years from now and say, "I did something that gave me satisfaction."¹⁰

In a way, the first as well as the second generation of South Asians simply align themselves with older groups of immigrants, the Europeans in particular of the beginning of the 20th century who would above all aspire to economic success while their descendants would consider their personal satisfaction as their prime objective. We shall also note that the American criterion of success as described above, embodied in particular by the possession of a big house and a big car, corresponds to the aspirations of South Asian immigrants, wherever they live, including in Europe, and whatever their level of instruction: whether it is in the US, in France or in Britain, it is very common to see South Asian immigrants, be they shop-keepers or doctors, driving Mercedes and BMWs. Following the economic liberalization in India, a similar behavior is becoming widespread in South Asia as well.

Confronted by these ostensible signs of success and wealth, many South Asians of the second generation react with indifference, if not with irony and derision. But the discrepancy at present between the

young South Asians in the US and their peers in South Asia should be noted: the latter, overwhelmed by a frenzy for consumption since the economic liberalization, in India at least, adopt a behavior similar to that of the first generation of South Asians in the US. A young South Asian female born in Buffalo (New York), who has decided to settle down in India, reacted thus:

Sitting on her bed in a modest third-floor, one-room apartment in south New Delhi, Munjal, a native of Buffalo, New York, says she hates the snobbishness of many nouveau riche upper-and-middle-class kids whose obsession with expensive clothes and gadgets is reminiscent of Americans in the 1980s.¹¹

However, the entire second generation in the US does not necessarily criticize the ostensible mode of living of their parents. They see on the contrary in this accomplishment a strong impetus for their own achievement and hope to fully respond to their parents' expectations. But it does remain that this relative opposition between parental and second-generation aspirations presents some interesting aspects because it hints at other conflicts, relative this time to the acculturation of young South Asians.

As for the question of delinquency, no indicator has shown so far the rise of violent or unlawful conduct among South Asian youngsters. But the following letter published in *India Abroad* is interesting as it illustrates that the perception of model-minority attached to second-generation South Asians is as prevalent among their elders as it is in the host society:

...I was crossing the field, and it was about 8 p.m. Some Indian teenagers were walking slightly ahead of me. The moment I came near them, they started teasing me. They were using dirty and malicious words.... One of them asked for my wallet. By that time, I realized that they were trying to rob me. *It was beyond my imagination that a group of Indian teenagers could perform such a vicious act.*¹²

Should this incident be interpreted as an isolated one or is it a prelude to future behavioral patterns, resulting for instance from a difficult integration or from a frustration linked to the refusal to satisfy the parents? It is too early to answer this question but what is probably the most striking in the letter above is that the author's prejudice, though "positive," has a very strong racial connotation: he seems to suggest that this type of conduct, abnormal for Indians, could have been understandable if it had emanated from other ethnic groups.

The other question that arises is that of gender distinction, not so much in terms of delinquency (I do not have any significant data on this issue), but rather in the field of education: in other words, are there any differences in the educational pattern of South Asian girls compared to that of boys? Do parents attach as much importance to the education of their daughters as to that of their sons?

In the subcontinent, but also in a country like Great Britain,¹³ a dichotomy is frequently perceptible in the education provided to boys and girls. Parents are still more concerned with marrying off their daughters than providing them with a good education. The situation appears as rather different in the US: most of the families I met expressed the desire to send their daughters to universities even when it meant financial, or any other type, of sacrifices.

The following case testifies to this: a 20 year-old South Asian Muslim female, studying in a good American university, born in the US, and whose family comes from Hyderabad, cannot help expressing her bitterness regarding the sternness and conservatism of her parents. But she also underlines the ambiguous attitude of the latter when the question of education arises:

I have received a very strict education. My parents are very religious, very conservative. [...] When I was still living at home, I could never express my opinion. [...]

My parents want me to have an arranged marriage. But they give so much importance to education that they have accepted to send me hundreds of miles away from home. Of course, they are very worried and want me to call them everyday but still they have made this sacrifice.

It is clear that this choice of educating daughters and of sending them miles away from home, so as to guarantee them the best possible future, leads to many misgivings. Parents are frequently faced with the following dilemma: the more the children study, the more they will be faced with the risk of acculturation. Despite this fear, parents do not try to curtail their children's education, not even their daughters'. But at the same time, they spare no efforts to ensure the transmission of cultural and religious values to their offspring.

Parental Efforts and Expectations or How to Curtail the Americanization Process

The inculcation of Indo-Islamic (and bourgeois) values to the children starts at an early age. From early childhood, families, with working mothers, try as much as possible to find South Asian baby-sitters. The presence of the grandparents is seen by the migrants as a definite advantage in terms of the transmission of cultural values. Grandparents are thus endorsed with the function of role-model.

In order to prevent the Americanization of their children, some parents send them back to their native country to accomplish partially or completely their schooling, in the best schools, like the Doon School of Dehra Dun in India, if they can afford it, or in some cases even emigrate while leaving their children behind. However this alternative is far from being unanimously approved within the South Asian community, giving rise to protests that are more and more commonly heard: the children who go to the US after doing their whole schooling in India are faced with difficulties of adaptation in the American system of

education. In a way, they have to endure the same experiences as their parents at the beginning of their immigration. But the foremost reason why most do not choose this option is that South Asians have usually migrated hoping to offer a better life to their families. They want their children, including their daughters, to pursue their studies in the US and thus increase their chances to find a job commensurate with their aspirations.

Hence most immigrants keep their children with them and look for other means to ensure the so-called transmission of values to their offspring. Parents usually try to exert a strict control over their children, keeping a close eye on their social contacts and outings. They encourage them to build friendships within their own community. Girls in particular are the focus of parental attention and even if there is no significant difference in their formal education, it is clear that in terms of freedom, the girls' margin for maneuver is much more limited than boys'.

Since the 1980s, in response to the concerns mentioned above, immigrants have established a system of Sunday schools in mosques and Islamic centers. New York, in particular, has seen a spectacular growth of such institutions. Summer camps are also organized during vacations.

The reputation of a middle-class family within the larger South Asian community is chiefly dependent on the success and conduct of children, on their propensity in other words to preserve their cultural and religious heritage. An ideal kid will be one who respects his parents, speaks his mother tongue, accomplishes his religious duties and accepts the idea of arranged marriages. Commenting on the latter issue, one Pakistani immigrant says:

I think the most important thing is my children's happiness, no matter whom they marry, whether it is a non-Muslim, or a non-Pakistani. The only problem is the community.

If the community's opinion is given far less importance in the US than in South Asia, or even in Great Britain, it is not totally absent from the American landscape. However, it is easier than elsewhere for families wishing to avoid it to keep their distance, in particular when they live in upper-middle class suburbs, without any ethnic concentration, and get hardly or not at all involved in community activities.

Reactions and Expectations of the Second Generation: from Conformism to an Identity Awakening

The external appearance of the second generation seems to indicate a total Americanization. This can be observed in their language, the accent in particular — which is sometimes difficult to understand even for the parents, but also in the aggressive way they express themselves, the phrases they use, such as *Jiz*, short form for Jesus, after sneezing, preferred to the more Islamic *Alhamdulillah*. This Americanization can also be noticed in their writing (the way they form letters), the way they dress, including paradoxically enough girls who wear the *hijab* (see below), even in their body movements and their movements in space, which, like language, reveals willful, almost aggressive manners; finally, it is noticeable in their spirit of independence and their need for privacy (illustrated for instance by their habit of locking themselves in their rooms which causes surprise and perplexity for parents).

But these external signs offer only an incomplete vision of this second generation of South Asians. In fact, a dichotomy seems to be characterizing such youngsters in their behavior and in the importance they give to cultural referents: the interest for one particular cultural system over the other undergoes in many cases an evolution in time. In a short story, Anu Gupta, a second-generation Indian, writes:

...I had "started" as a child who hated herself for being different, who then tried to be like everyone else, and who now, after college, is proud of who she is.¹⁴

This description corroborates my own observations. In other words, the period from childhood to teenage (school years) is characterized by a desire for conformism. The following period (university years) is marked by a search for the roots, symptomatic of an identity quest.

The school years: a period of conformism

During childhood, the way of life of the second generation appears to be modeled on that of their American peers of the middle and upper classes: studies in the best American schools, piano and tennis lessons alternating with TV watching during the week-ends, socializing with American children, mostly whites, since the latter go to the sorts of schools South Asians prefer to send their children to. They enjoy celebrating American festivals, in particular Halloween and Thanksgiving, and have a preference for American food. They like Hollywood films and American music (rock, rap, rhythm and blues, etc.). As noticed by Arthur and Usha Helweg,¹⁵ children exert pressures on parents to spend their vacations in the same leisure parks (Disneyworld for instance) or summer resorts as their American friends. Travels in the subcontinent rarely arouses much enthusiasm among children, in particular, if they have to remain confined in the family home. Personal experiences of children, from an early stage, during their stay in their country of origin are in fact determining, as they deeply contribute to mold their vision of their parents' homeland and will weigh on their will to preserve or not their ethnic heritage.

Their wish to appear "as normal as possible" is reinforced by their experiences in predominantly white schools, where they can be the victims of mockery, sometimes of a discriminatory nature. A youngster of Pakistani origin speaks about his school days in these terms:

When we were going to school, my brother and myself, we would be the only non-White kids. The other chil-

dren would call us “niggers.” They would look at us and make jokes on camels, even though they did not even know that we were Muslims. As early as in the second grade, I was ashamed to be a person of color. Later, I realized that these children were not necessarily racist, they were simply mean. We were better treated in high school and I had white friends. I wanted to be white like them.

A young Indian Muslim girl whose parents migrated from Gujarat says:

When I was little, I would always say that I was American. I hated to be asked where I was coming from.

The desire to be perceived as American as possible by their peers incites some children to even distort reality and fabricate a “new” image of themselves, as testified by the extract below of a short story written in the form of an autobiography:

I never talked about my heritage when I was younger; there is always that ever-present fear in children of not being accepted, or even harsher, of being cast out, ignored, ridiculed. So I tried to avoid the issue of being different. When my teachers asked me how my “turkey day” was, I was too ashamed to tell them that I ate cholay/bathura — not cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes. I pretended I got tons of Christmas gifts even though my parents only gave us each a few token presents. When my mom spoke Hindi to me in the grocery store, I hated it; I froze, tense with embarrassment and pretended not to hear. I would always look around nervously and then, down because I knew people were looking and I was afraid of their gaze.¹⁶

On this concept of conformism, a distinction should be made between young children for whom this aspect operates usually at only one level (the American peers) and teenagers for whom conformism functions at a double level, the peers and the family.

The Americanization of the youngest children does not necessarily stir up much concern among parents. The latter are still usually at the early stage of their economic integration, and do not have enough time to take care of the cultural education of their children.

More so, the acculturation of their children can even be perceived as a good “omen” for the future by those who are preoccupied with their own integration: the children being familiar from the start with the American system will not be faced with the same problems as their generation. Some parents even express a certain pride when they see the apparent ease of their children in the American environment. It is at the stage of their children’s puberty that parents, having themselves reached the level of economic integration they were aspiring for, start showing a real concern for cultural and religious questions and perceive the Americanization of their children, of daughters in particular, as a potential threat leading to an uprooting and to the progressive fading away of the ethnic heritage. They fear in particular that an exacerbated westernization might engender a rupture of the youngsters with their families or even lead them into alliances (marital or other types) which may not conform to the parents’ expectations.

South Asian youngsters comparing the behavior of their parents with that of their Asian friends’ (Chinese and Japanese for instance) see it as the least “liberal,”¹⁷ in particular in regards to the permissions granted for their extra-school and extra-family activities. Even though many parents in the US have a more liberal attitude than their peers in the subcontinent, they are not always aware of the changes that have taken place in their country of origin, in India in particular, where restrictions on the children have been partially alleviated, at least in the urban middle classes: to spend the night at friends’ house or to go to parties does not meet the same level of opposition as it used to in the big cities of the subcontinent.¹⁸

Yet, considering the level of conservatism of parents, the propensity to rebel is relatively low and this concern to satisfy their parents may culminate later, for some at least, in the acceptance of arranged marriages. This low propensity for rebellion observed in

the analysis of the relationships between generations in the diasporic context testifies as well to the acceptance by young South Asians of family authority. Family is invested without much resistance with its traditional role of socialization.

But it still remains that the second generation attempts to respond to the pressures of their peers as much as to that of their families. Such a situation leads to a compartmentalization of their lives by South Asian youngsters, which can result in a quasi-schizophrenic behavior. Ron Kelley writes about the observations of a convert to Islam:

The kids (of immigrant Indo-Pakistanis) come into the house wearing Levi 501's.... They take off their make-up and jackets. They put on their Indian clothes. They're kind of like pajamas. And then they eat Pakistani curry and their parents think everything's OK. They don't know that when their kids walk out of the house, they're totally American.¹⁹

Most young South Asians, "eager to please everyone" as I was told during one of my interviews, admit that they lie about some of their outside activities to their parents, in particular those pertaining to their meeting persons of the opposite sex. A young Bangladeshi male of the second generation says:

My parents don't like most of my friends and like even less the fact that I have girlfriends. Especially since none of my girlfriends has been so far either Bengali, or Muslim: they were either Whites, African-Americans or Hispanics.... My parents don't like me either to listen to rap music. So whatever they don't like, I do it behind their backs. Because I want them to be happy and proud of me.

But at the same time, this youngster regretting the lack of communication with his parents, adds:

If my parents were more open-minded, they would have in a way a greater control over me because then I would not do anything behind their backs.

In summary, during childhood, most young South Asians, are characterized by a conformist attitude vis-

à-vis the host society translating into a reluctance to draw any identity referents from their cultural heritage. Apart from a greater propensity for conformism noticeable among most children, regardless of ethnic origin (they want to appear "as normal as possible"), such an attitude can be explained, in the case of South Asians, by their isolation in American (upper)-middle class suburbs and their attendance at schools where most of their schoolmates are often whites. The discrimination at school usually reinforces the eagerness of children to mold their way of life on young whites. Children and young teenagers evolve between a "total" Americanization and a compartmentalization of their lives.

The university years: in search for their roots?

The parental awareness of what they consider as a necessity for the children to keep their ethnic heritage, which can be already noticeable during the high school years, and sometimes even earlier, is being reinforced, following an evolution parallel to the maturation of the child. In other words, when the child becomes an adult, the anguish of parents faced with the Americanization of the child increases considerably. In consequence, parents do not spare any efforts to "bring the children back into the fold of tradition," encouraging them for instance to go often to India, Pakistan or Bangladesh, hammering out endlessly the advantages of arranged marriages, and citing the problems of drugs, alcohol, single-parent families and divorce as so many reasons to refuse Americanization.

But if young South Asians who start going to college show a growing interest for their roots, the explanation lies less in the parental pressures than in their new environment. Whereas the school universe, mostly composed of white schoolmates, does not allow much contact with other ethnic minorities, South Asian in particular, the university milieu offers on the contrary multiple occasions for interaction with popula-

tions from various backgrounds. In several university campuses, located in particular in big cities like New York, gatherings along ethnic lines are almost spontaneous. These campuses constitute in a way microcosms of American society. South Asians thus tend to stick together.

One student of Indian origin from Queens College confirms this situation:

Here everybody goes spontaneously toward his/her ethnic group. Students, in particular recent ones, feel this way more comfortable. They share the same language,²⁰ the same culture. There are some Indians who remain isolated but they are rare.

But what is also very interesting about the way affiliations are constituted on the campuses is in terms of the relations within the South Asian group. It represents a good indicator in terms of the larger identity formation process of the second generation. Whereas in the first generation, the different South Asian subgroups (whether constituted on religious or ethnic lines) have tended to organize themselves separately, the second generation, as we shall see later, has a less parochial vision of ethnic affiliations and crosses much more easily ethnic and religious boundaries.

Beyond the South Asian factor and the identification along ethno-religious lines, it should be also noticed that the awareness of a latent racism in the white (and non-white) population does not provoke any further attempts for a total assimilation but creates on the contrary the conditions required for an identity assertion.

This assertion takes on different aspects: choice of friends (of the same national, sometimes even religious and ethnic origin), a new interest in the gastronomic specialties of the country, sometimes even of the region of origin, efforts for (re)learning the mother tongue if it is not mastered yet, reading of books by South Asian authors, interest for courses on Indian and Islamic civilizations, for concerts or exhibitions on

India, Pakistan or Bangladesh, participation in conferences debating subjects related to South Asia. Finally, the desire to undertake journeys to the country of origin for more or less extended periods needs to be underlined because the question is not anymore of simply going to the town or the ancestral village of the parents and meeting relatives but of traveling as well like tourists across the subcontinent, or even of working a few weeks for humanitarian organizations. It should be noted that beyond this identity awareness, the second generation is reproducing the behavior of the parents who also tend to believe that they are invested with a mission of aid (almost in a messianic way) for their country of origin as testified by their discourse as well as by the growing number of concrete projects financed by the diaspora aiming at constructing hospitals, orphanages, etc. in South Asia.

The passage through the university does not translate into a total de-Americanization, youngsters, for the most part, tending to claim, a "double" or multiple culture. They also pursue the "double life" they were leading during their high-school years.

For many young South Asians, the claim of a double culture and the schizophrenia resulting from the compartmentalization of their lives go together with doubts and identity questioning. In *Aavaaz*, an "ethnic" magazine,²¹ the following comment of a youngster illustrates this identity conflict:

...Your historical identity is mixed up. Who are your heroes.... George Washington and Abraham Lincoln or Akbar the Great and Mahatma Gandhi? Sitting in history class you identify with the American colonists fighting for independence in 1776. Then you realize that your ancestors had nothing to do with it. Which nation's past is your own? You don't know!²¹

Finally, the confusion of the parents themselves on how to educate their children — a too-strict attitude presents the risk of pushing them towards rebellion while too liberal a one can have the effect of favoring

a westernization to the extreme — contributes to reinforcing the malaise of young South Asians. They perceive themselves as an experimental generation, as expressed in Priya Agarwal's phrase of guinea pigs.²²

We shall also note the reproach that is often formulated by the youth who regret the inability of the parents to understand the difficulties engendered by the necessity to respond to the pressures from different sides. A young Bangladeshi says:

I am always embarrassed at the idea of telling my problems to my parents, especially to my father. I always have the feeling that he will not be able to understand me, especially when I am feeling depressed. My father is very stoical and thinks that my problems are insignificant compared to what he had to face when he was my age.

But it is not so much the absence of identity markers which causes the trouble in the minds of this generation than the difficulty to choose between a plethora of references. The study of two particular issues will help us to better grasp the various components of identity formation: the ethnic identification and the religious identification.

Emergence of a South Asian identity?

The first generation: separate organizations but labyrinthine associations

In order to understand the complexities of community formation, an analysis of the way relationships are built at the level of the first generation will be useful here. At the beginning of the immigration process, members of a group that originate from a particular region of the world, tend to congregate. Then, following the typical process of segmentation into smaller units as soon as the group becomes larger, separate organizations are constituted, along specific regional and religious lines.

An identical phenomenon can be observed in the South Asian community. In the case of Indians in particular, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians used to

participate in the same associations when they first arrived in the United States (1960s and 1970s). But as these organizations were dominated by Hindus, minority groups gradually left these associations to form their own organizations (from the 1980s onwards). Sikhs were mostly motivated by political reasons (many of them were backing the separatists' claim over the issue of the Punjab, in India, whereas Hindus were supporting the position of the Indian government); Muslims and Christians left for religious reasons, Hinduism occupying a space seen as much too important by minorities in Indian cultural associations (each meeting would begin for instance with a *puja*). The impact of the BJP/VHP on several Indian associations, has reinforced this trend, urging non-Hindus to leave.

Indian Muslims have therefore chosen to form their own associations or have joined the Pakistani cultural organizations. But alliances cannot be formed on the sole basis of religion: the linguistic factor is also a powerful one. As Hindus have constituted organizations along ethno-linguistic lines, South Asian Muslims have built their associations on the same pattern, along religious *and* linguistic lines.

This has resulted in Pakistanis and North Indian Muslims, including Kashmiris, forging closer linkages whereas North Indian and South Indian Muslims (in particular non-Urdu speaking Muslims) maintain fewer relationships and do not take part in the same associations. Many South Indian Muslims, Tamil and Malayalam speaking in particular — though very few in number in the United States — do participate in religious activities and identify themselves with Islamic causes but they take part more willingly in cultural activities organized by Hindus, sharing the same linguistic heritage, than in the activities of North Indian Muslims and Pakistanis, whom they meet only in mosques on Sundays (in the case of believers) and during religious festivals. Such behavior is further enhanced by

the fact that in India, South Indian Muslims are already better integrated into local societies than other Muslims, despite a somewhat similar degree of religiosity.²³ Besides, South Indian Muslims complain about what they feel as the ostracism of Pakistanis and of North Indian Muslims who will not shift from Urdu to English in their presence.

As far as Pakistanis are concerned, the question of Urdu appears different. The great majority of immigrants from Pakistan includes Muhajirs (or descendants of Muhajirs), whose mother tongue is precisely Urdu in most cases, and Punjabis who, while maintaining their mother tongue, will not refuse to speak Urdu (even substituting it for Punjabi to underline their cultural refinement). But Iftekhar Malik, in his study of Pakistanis in Michigan, notices that Pakistanis, whose mother tongue is Urdu, form a class apart, as they are very language-conscious, and thus isolate themselves from other Pakistanis, including Punjabis.²⁴

The polarization of cultural forces, even within the national community, is above all attributable to the growth of the group which breaks into smaller ethnic circles but also to a perception of the self as superior to the Other, the Muhajir as a matter of fact superior — because more refined according to the traditional stereotypes — to Punjabis and other Pakistani groups.

It should be also noted that relationships between Indian Muslims and Pakistanis do involve some strains as well. The 'Pakistanness' displayed by immigrants from Pakistan — symptomatic of the nationalism of individuals coming from a country recently created and somewhat ill appreciated — irritates Muslims coming from the other side of the border, who have tended to adopt a lower profile. And even the solicitude of Pakistanis towards Muslims from India, as expressed for instance after the destruction of the Babri masjid (a 16th-century mosque built by the Mughals in Ayodhya) by Hindu nationalists in 1992, though it may

be appreciated by some, has annoyed more than one. Finally, Partition and its aftermath is still an obsession, Indian Muslims accusing Pakistanis, the Muhajirs in particular, of being responsible for the current situation of their peers in India, deprived of the elite that massively migrated to Pakistan. But at the same time, they also sharply criticize the lot of Muhajirs in Pakistan, seen as the victims of discrimination. As for Pakistanis, not only do they regard Indian Muslims with paternalism but also question their Islamic commitments. These aspects should not be, however, too exaggerated, since a mutual understanding and proximity does exist between Pakistanis and Indian Muslims (from North India in particular). Thus, as immigrants progressively abandon the tradition of arranged marriages in the country of origin, seeking rather a partner within the South Asian Muslim community in the United States (something the second generation wishes for), the rate of inter-marriages between both communities will probably increase in the future. Considering the linkages between Indian Muslims and Pakistanis, it could be argued that a kind of global Urdu-speaking Muhajir pattern is emerging but the most important segment of Urdu-speaking Indian Muslims in the US, the Hyderabadis, fail to fit into the picture. Like the Muhajirs in Pakistan, Hyderabadis in India enjoy a particular status: they form an Urdu enclave in a predominantly Telugu-speaking region and, more important, some of them still contest the accession of the state of Hyderabad to India in 1948. But they have preferred to create their own associations in the United States, separate from those of Pakistanis and of other Indian Muslims, particularly in the region of Chicago where they live in quite significant numbers. As bearers of a particular history, speakers of a particular Urdu (Dakhni), and "settlers" from a particular region (South India), the pattern of their identity construction distinguishes itself from that of other South Asian Muslims.

As for Bangladeshis, they have tended to organize themselves separately, for instance establishing separate mosques in New York City. The Bangladeshis, who have migrated in the 1960s or 1970s, generally more secular, seem to prefer to frequent the associations of Hindu Bengalis, meeting other South Asian Muslims only during religious festivals. Their community behavior thus presents similarities with that of South Indian Muslims. On the other hand, the Bangladeshis who have migrated since the 1980s tend to be characterized by a higher degree of religiosity than their predecessors. The explanation for such a dichotomy in the respective behavior of the Bangladeshis of the two immigration waves does not lie so much in the difference in the level of instruction of both communities (recent Bangladeshi immigrants being generally less educated than their predecessors): there seems to be indeed an absence of correlation between education and religiosity in the United States since Indo-Pakistanis, have been, compared to other Muslims, both the most educated and the most active in establishing religious institutions. This intensified religiosity of recent Bangladeshi migrants seems to be more the result of the evolution in the home country: they have migrated to the United States at a time when fundamentalists in Bangladesh had started acquiring a prominent position in the political arena, influencing perhaps their own population. Whatever the case, it remains that Bangladeshis have preferred to create their own associations or mosques. This testifies to the fundamental dimension of religion as well as of language. As for the relationships of Bangladeshis with other South Asians, they remain tinged with mistrust, as a result of the events of 1971.

The rancor and conflicts — even if they do not take on a violent form — are thus perpetuated in the diasporic context. Religion and the (vague) feeling of belonging to a common geographical entity are not sufficient to ensure the cohesion of the group. Other

factors, language in particular, play a major role. Not to mention the class factor since Bangladeshis from the two waves do not participate in the same associations: the (upper)-middle-class Bangladeshis of the first wave do not include their less educated counterparts of the latest wave in their activities.

We shall also note the particular situation of the so-called twice-migrants. If immigrants from East Africa and South Africa often keep relationships with South Asians, who have directly migrated from the subcontinent, those who have migrated from the Caribbean Islands (Trinidad notably) or from Latin America (Guyana and Surinam especially) form separate associations. Emigration to these two regions of the world has been in effect of a different nature: Indians from Africa were mostly composed of traders and professionals; those from the Caribbean Islands and Latin America were above all indentured laborers. This has entailed a difference of approach in the attitude of South Asians from the subcontinent towards both these respective groups of population: while South Asians from the subcontinent hardly distinguish between themselves and immigrants from Africa, they question the "Indianness" and/or the Islam-ness of immigrants from Trinidad and Guyana. The latter construct their identity differently — as a reaction but also because most of them belong to the third or fourth generation: they claim to be part of a particular ethnic (Gujarati for instance) and religious (Hindu or Muslim) groups but answer negatively to the question: "Are you South Asian?" However, some immigrants from Africa may also express a loose attachment to the subcontinent, as a geographic entity, stressing above all their allegiance to a given ethnic group and religion, beyond considerations of space and time.²⁵

The recent geographical origin thus has a considerable importance in the construction of identities. The religious and linguistic factors together — though fundamental — are not sufficient enough to help to forge

a unity within a group. A fourth factor also emerges as already stated, that of social class, as testified by the discriminatory attitude of South Asians towards the descendants of indentured laborers while the descendants of traders and professionals from East Africa enjoy a much greater acceptance.

We have so far observed the first two steps of the evolution of community formation: when the members of a given community are in small numbers, they tend to stick together; later as the community enlarges, the main group tends to split. The third step corresponds to the awareness of the divisions that undermine the community and which reaches such a stage that unity becomes necessary (in order to achieve political prominence in the host country). If at present, South Asians are still in the second stage, efforts have been nonetheless undertaken to transcend the existing cleavages.

In fact, since the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque, if a widening of the gap between Hindus and Muslims has seemed to characterize the relationships between both communities, some do endeavor to think about and analyze communalist tensions in India and strive to promote unity between South Asians, at least within the Indian community, in the diaspora.

But so far, these efforts have been reduced to a few symbolic meetings between community leaders, without any concrete steps being taken. No significant umbrella organizations seem to have emerged which could promote unity between Indians, indeed between South Asians and elaborate common policies.

On the cultural front on the other hand, interactions between South Asians, beyond ethno-religious affiliations, are much more significant. In effect, if language has so far essentially appeared as a factor of division, it has also been a factor of unity, able to transcend religious boundaries. Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims can for instance share a common love for Urdu and henceforth attend together *mushairas*²⁶ or *ghazal*²⁷

and *qawwali*²⁸ concerts and forget for a while their divisions. But tensions between these immigrants do not disappear for all that since in many cases Sikhs and Hindus, who retain a nostalgia for Urdu, are the same people who have lived through partition — or whose family has lived through partition — and who have not necessarily, like Pakistanis, overcome the trauma of the biggest tragedy that has affected the subcontinent in the 20th century.

Another form of art has demonstrated its capacity, even more remarkably, to attract a South Asian audience, by largely transcending ethno-religious and national cleavages: the Bollywood movies. In the subcontinent itself, the Bollywood cinema is hailed (or at least has been hailed till recently) as one of the most efficient instruments for the promotion of communal harmony: this harmony can be observed in the industry itself (actors, directors, play-back singers, etc. working together regardless of ethno-religious background) as well as in the popularity of this cinema which largely crosses boundaries, Pakistanis for instance being particularly fond of Bollywood films. A similar scenario seems to take place in the diaspora: in the United States, each tour of Bollywood stars attracts a considerable number of people. In fact, Pakistanis even participate in India Day Parades on August 15 (commemorating India's independence in major American cities), since every year an Indian actor (or actress) is invited to lead the parade as the so-called Grand Marshall.

But it is above all in the second generation that real attempts for the promotion of communal harmony seem to become more significant.

The second generation: a transcending of cleavages?

I have visited a few colleges and universities in the United States. One in New York City, Queens College, is particularly interesting as far as ethnic relations are concerned: it shelters a multitude of South Asian clubs: there is an India Club, a Pakistan Club, a

Sikh Youth Club, and even a Guyanese Club, as if these clubs were representing not only a microcosm of American society but of the relationships between South Asians in New York as well. But as always reality is more complex and what we just suggested about the greater capacity of the second generation to cross ethnic and religious boundaries is not necessarily contradicted. This is exemplified by the fact that in Queens College, Sikhs and Bangladeshis share the same room. More interestingly, when I asked each group about the respective number of adherents in their clubs, each one approximately gave the same number (between 60 and 70). But this figure actually comprises the total number of adherents in all the South Asian clubs. Interactions between clubs are very frequent (participation in the same activities, common celebration of festivals, and so on) to the extent that students are less inclined to make a distinction in the number of their respective adherents. There is also a financial solidarity between the clubs which share the expenses for the organization of cultural activities. Thus, even though the very existence of the various clubs seem to indicate a sort of reproduction of ethnic cleavages, the youngsters seem to have been able to cross these types of boundaries. According to the students themselves, they reflected their parents' sensitivity to ethnic and religious differences at the beginning of their college years, but their subsequent university-level interaction with other South Asians helped them overcome those prejudices, at least partially.

The crossing of ethnic cleavages may even result in the constitution of a *South Asian* identity within the second generation, provided they are able to overcome Indian domination of South Asian associations. Such a domination might hamper the participation of other South Asians, not too willing to see reproduced, in the United States, the "Big Brother" attitude, often attributed to India in its relationships with its neighbors

in South Asia.

Be that as it may, progressive groups have been formed in the United States, especially on the initiative of the second generation who take up the defense of gay movements or battered women within the community, but also act to promote the concept of "South Asian" as a symbol of unity. However, associations like Sakhi, SALGA (South Asian Lesbians and Gays Associations), SAAA (South Asians Against Aids), YAR (Youth Against Racism), CSA (Concerned South Asians), ISPG (Indian Progressive Study Group), the editorial team of SAMAR (South Asian Magazine for Action and Reflection), LDC (Licensed Drivers Coalition), SAYA (South Asian Youth Action), etc., are largely dominated by Indians (mostly Hindus). The path leading to a real bridging of the gulf between Hindus and Muslims in the US, even within the second generation, thus seems to be still fraught with pitfalls.

On the artistic front a musical genre has emerged that seems capable of encouraging a sense of community, beyond all kinds of cleavages: *bhangra*. This music, originally Punjabi, has undergone such transformations in the diaspora that its very hybridity has contributed to bringing the community closer. This transformation originated in England where South Asian youngsters had the idea of mixing bhangra with reggae or rap. This mixing with Afro-American music is understandable not only because of the interaction in England between working-class South Asians and Jamaicans but also because the rhythms are compatible (which may not have been the case with rock or disco). This "neo-bhangra," a very creative music, has crossed the Atlantic and seems to enjoy in the United States (within the second generation) almost as much success as in Britain. The hybridity of neo-bhangra resides not only in the mixing of genres (South Asian and African-American) but also of languages (English, Hindi/Urdu, Punjabi). As for its im-

pact, it transcends all kinds of boundaries: ethnic (bhangra is played in Tamil or Bengali parties as well), religious (musicians and the audience comprise Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs), social (originally born in the working class, it has become increasingly popular in the middle class). The popularity of neo-bhangra can also be explained by the messages it conveys, comparable sometimes to those of rap music, but which primarily refer to the South Asian context: anti-caste and secular messages are thus repeatedly used. Dominated by males, this music is not, however, without ambiguity in the way it treats gender relationships (Apache Indian, a Punjabi from Britain, in his very popular song, *Arranged Marriages*, sings that he wants to marry a woman that will make him *rotis* and will serve him (*seva kari*). In any case, even though it may not possess all the ingredients necessary for the construction of an identity transcending cleavages, it provides a common platform for the youth to gather; a preliminary step, perhaps, to a more elaborated movement later on. Besides, the relationships that neo-bhangra can potentially initiate between groups may not concern South Asians exclusively but also other ethnic groups, like African-Americans for instance, all the more as the second generation is not as prejudiced against the latter as their elders.

Let us now turn to religion, the other component which plays a major role in the process of identity formation.

Islam, a Pillar of the Identity

Religious education: the different players

In the first generation, the religiosity of parents usually increases at the birth of the children and especially at their maturation. Parents perceive Islam as the most efficient instrument for perpetuating traditional values and for limiting the effects of westernization. Religion is endorsed with the role of not only inculcating values but also of providing distinct

landmarks to prevent the “disintegration” into American society.

At the beginning of post-1960s migration, the absence of Islamic teaching places reinforced the parents’ role as religious educators. Since then, even though the task of imparting religious education has fallen squarely on the parents’ shoulders, the role of Islamic schools has tended to increase over the years. A growing number of Muslim children go to these schools on Sundays to learn the Koran and the rudiments of Arabic language. However, the proportion of Muslim parents attracted by the concept of Islamic schools, to the detriment of secular schools, is still very low: they do not want to sacrifice the economic and professional future of their children, nor to threaten their social integration in the US. The type of teaching offered in full-time Islamic schools presents the risk of developing an isolationist behavior among children, hence most parents prefer to take care of the duty of imparting religious education to their children. Others opt for a system of tuition at home by “hiring” an imam for instance. If this latter procedure is still exceptional due to the scarcity of imams in the US who could fulfill this role, and also because Sunday schools offer a unique opportunity of inter-community meetings, it should be noted that it is molded on the own experiences of immigrants in their country of origin who learnt through this means the basic tenets of religion.

Children who are today in their twenties have learnt religious principles at home, whereas many of the youngest have been exposed very early to a more academic teaching. But it is too early to evaluate the impact of this teaching on the religiosity of the latter and on their identity construction; to know in other words, whether this identity presents a significant difference from that of their older peers.

In sum, despite the development of Islamic schools, parents still take on the role of inculcating

Islamic values and of transmitting the sentiment of a distinct identity to their children. However, the role of Islamic schools should not be underestimated because beyond the community aspects, they offer a teaching perceived as more rational by the children whose religious life at home is often limited to a few rituals conducted in a mechanical way which do not arouse their interest not only because they encroach on their favorite TV programs but also because they do not mean much for children in the US used to a type of learning that gives a significant place for reflection. But this apparently rational dimension and hence attractive role of Islamic schools should not conceal the fact that many of the latter (including the Sunday schools and the summer-camps) promote a discourse (heavily) tinged with fundamentalist tendencies. The harsh tone of the text given below, which can be found in the booklet for pupils of one Islamic school in New York, is a good illustration of this phenomenon:

Welcome to Crescent School. Surely you have chosen Crescent School to help your children to become the best practicing Muslims, as well as the best students they can be. You, as parents, have always wanted to have an Islamic school that would help save your children from the spiritual, moral and educational vacuum pervasive in so-called public schools. These poorly-run and ill-planned institutions have been annihilating our future generations and turning them into human garbage, literally. By selecting Crescent you have partially fulfilled your obligation towards Islam and your children.²⁹

As for summer camps, many are under the influence of avatars of the Jama'at-i Islami, like MYNA (Muslim Youth of North America) just as many summer camps for Hindu youngsters are more or less controlled by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a Hindu nationalist organization.³⁰

Religiosity and observance: the variety of behaviors

There is some similarity between the religious

practices of young South Asian Muslims and those of their parents. Whereas canonical prayers do not appeal much to the youngsters, they tend to give importance to fasting, and more generally to the month of Ramzan. The frequenting of prayer rooms in American universities represents a good indicator. During weekdays, only a handful of students accomplish their canonical prayers whereas the Friday prayer attracts a substantial number of young South Asians because of its communitarian dimension. But it is more particularly during the month of Ramzan that the number of Muslim students at prayer increases in a significant way. The youth thus perpetuates the importance given to this month by the first generation (and by other Muslims all over the world).

Koranic prohibitions on particular foods are, by and large, followed by the second generation. The latter tends to respect, like their own parents and like their peers in Europe, the ban on the consumption of pork.

The importance of the role of food in the construction of identity is expressed as follows by an 11-year-old Indian male:

I used to feel Muslim first because of the food, since this is what I first experienced: at school, we were served sausages for lunch that I could not eat and when I was invited to my white friends' house and the parents would say: "tonight, there are pork ribs for dinner," I would feel terribly embarrassed. Now in school there is a buffet system, so we have the choice of meals. And my friends have understood that I do not eat pork and so offer me something else. Now that I do not need to concentrate on what I eat, I feel American first.

As for the ban on alcohol consumption, it is more frequently violated, underlining again a convergence of behavior with the first generation as well as with the young Muslims of Europe. The consumption of alcohol, often considered as a *rite de passage* for teenagers of Western societies, constitutes one of the elements stressing the difficulty for youngsters eager to be accepted by the host society of respecting injunc-

tions and religious prohibitions. But the non-consumption can also be a means for young Muslims to mark their "otherness." One immigrant says: "my son is known among his friends under the name of *Arizona Iced Tea Kid!*"

However, all the members of the second generation do not necessarily choose to display a distinct identity; hence, many are faced with difficulties in their daily lives resulting from an apparent incompatibility between a certain lifestyle of the young Americans, and the austere Islamic ideal. Apart from the consumption of alcohol, there is the case of sports, in particular those requiring clothes which do not conform to Islamic norms, dancing parties, and modern Western music which not only goes against the Islamic ideology but also excites, according to Muslim traditionalists, sexual urges.³¹ Proms, those quasi-ritual parties marking the end of school and requiring a partner of the opposite sex, are also condemned by traditionalists. The response to these contradictory pressures, from the parents as well as from the youth, reflects an attitude of compromise: in sports, for instance, parents preoccupied above all with the education and professional success of their children and aware of the importance of sport in the American system, are rarely opposed to the sporting activities of their children. Besides, parents tend to rationalize their own behavior by putting forward the argument of mutual trust and thus justifying in their own eyes and in those of the community their attitude of a relative *laissez-faire*, and this is not only because they want to compromise but also because they fear that their children might rebel if they are too strict. As for the children, they do not want to sacrifice their participation in American culture for religious considerations, but on the other being keen to satisfy their parents, they once again compartmentalize their own lives.

This compartmentalization of the youth is made *vis-à-vis* the religion itself: the young Muslims who

drink alcohol or go to dancing parties do not necessarily deny their religious heritage, even less their identity as Muslims.

This identity as Muslims can take on two aspects: it can be "passive" in the sense that some young Muslims practice religion like their parents have taught them, mechanically, without finding in it any intrinsic interest. But, this way of practicing is mostly found among the youngest. With maturity comes either a desire totally to deny their religious heritage, or to attempt to rediscover it and thus ensure its survival in the context of the host country.

A Pakistani of the first generation says:

Here, youngsters can be better Muslims than in Pakistan because it is their personal choice and not because it is imposed on them by society, like in Pakistan. In Pakistan, people fast because of family and social pressures. Here if you fast, it is because you want it.... My son, for instance, who was born here, takes more time than I do for praying.

This implies an identity with a more intellectual dimension and lies within the scope of a deliberate construction process. Young Muslims will find an interest in religion but not necessarily in correlation with the teaching of their parents.

The teaching of parents retains an utmost importance since it helps to shape the religious behavior of the second generation. But the complex effects of the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another should also be acknowledged. According to M.K. Hermansen, the Muslims who practice Islam by mixing cultural traditions (like Barelwis and Shi'as) have a greater chance to transmit more effectively the religion and its rituals to their children. The nature of the transmission of the religion would thus determine its survival: if the transmission is performed through cultural procedures and vivid rituals, its impact on the second generation could be ensured.

This hypothesis seems to be verified in the case of

Shi'as. *Majlis*³² in particular, fulfills this role through the devotion and the emotion it arouses among participants. Children are exposed to it from their earliest childhood and become aware of the importance of the allegiance to the paradigmatic Muslim family or *ahl al-bayt* ("the Abode of the Prophet"), celebrated in the sacred history of Shi'ism, even in a non-Muslim environment. Shi'i parents inculcate to the children the idea of a close link of dependency between the obedience to the religious law and the love for the *ahl al-bayt* who accepted death in order to ensure the perpetuity of Islam. The effect produced by the *majlis* on the family, on the parents in particular, influences the behavior of the children:

As one Canadian Shi'a told me [Vernon Schubel], when he was very young, he would attend the *majlis* and watch his father cry. When he became a bit older, he would pretend to cry so as to emulate his father. Now he cries automatically upon hearing the *gham*.³³ It has become a response that is beyond his control, compelling evidence of the power of the Shi'i religion.³⁴

If Shi'i rituals, by their capacity to arouse interest among the young members of this sectarian minority, seem to have their perpetuity ensured, Barelwi rituals which do not produce a similar attraction for the children, do not seem to be promised with the same future. The rituals of the Barelwi tradition, because of their visibility and their tangible dimension, strike the minds of the youngsters and offer them the possibility of a faithful perpetuation of the tradition after observation within the family space. But in reality, the second generation expresses at best a limited interest, if not indifference, or even formulates in some cases open criticisms of rituals that it does not understand the significance of: young Muslims aspire indeed for rationalism and are not very inclined to perpetuate religion through socio-cultural traditions directly inherited from the country of origin. Such an attitude leads up to a distinct vision of Islam which not only furthers the gap

between generations in their respective perceptions of religion but also creates the conditions for the emergence of a redefinition of Islam. This process of redefinition engenders in some cases, even though still very much in minority, the attraction if not necessarily for a way of life close to that advocated by fundamentalist groups throughout the world, at least for an activism which seeks the revalorization of Islam.

A handful of budding "Islamists"

Young Muslims who want to reassert their Islamic identity still usually limit their behavior and practices to the private sphere. However, a minority, attracted by a rigorist interpretation of Islam, claims its Islam-ness in a more visible way. We shall concentrate on the question of the veil (*hijab*), particularly interesting when seen from France because of the contrast in the reactions to the veil observed on both sides of the Atlantic.

It should be first noted that traditionally women in the subcontinent do not wear the *hijab* like their Muslim peers of Europe or the Middle East: either they cover their heads with their *saris* or with their *duppata*; or they wear the *burqa*³⁵ which covers them from head to toe. If in some regions of the subcontinent, the *burqa* is still frequently worn, it tends to increasingly disappear in the urban areas where the families of young South Asian Muslims come from: their families usually belong to the westernized elite rather than to the traditional elite which, on the contrary, is still keen to maintain the system of the *parda* as a sign of respectability. But in the United States, most Muslim women, whether they belong to the first or to the second generation, cover their heads with a *hijab* (here in the sense of a scarf fully hiding the hair), thus opting for a way of veiling themselves which does not derive from South Asian culture but which has been adopted throughout the world (including now in the subcontinent) by all the adepts of a certain militant Islam. The word *hijab* takes on then a kind of generic meaning designating the female covering cloth in accord with

Islamic principles, independently from the ethnic and national origin of the woman wearing it.³⁶

Let us now consider some examples of young Muslims who have decided to live their lives as much as possible in conformity with the Islamic ideal. Except for a girl who was wearing the veil against the wishes of both her parents, all the other veiled girls or boys with traditional short baggy pants, I met, had at least one parent who was very religious. As opposed to North African families in France where the children suffer from the inability of their parents to inculcate an identity connected with their past or their country of origin,³⁷ young South Asians seem thus to be finding in the family sphere the necessary references for identity construction. However, the explanation for this asserted religiosity cannot be simply reduced to the continuation of family tradition.

As opposed to France, the veil has not aroused any spectacular hue and cry in the US, even less in New York. If sporadic oppositions are expressed here and there, in schools in particular, it has not become a "national issue." Conflicts, in the majority of cases, are settled in favor of the veiled person. A young Muslim female of Indian origin tells about the attitude of her former school faced with the religiosity of its Muslims pupils:

I went to a Catholic school for girls. One day, I started wearing the hijab. There was no reaction from the school authorities. Then, with other Muslim girls, we asked for the permission to have a prayer room. It was granted. But one day because we were wearing skirts that were longer than the school uniform, the school authorities told us that our skirts should be shortened. My mother told them she would inform the press. The school backed off.

It should be noted that many of the daughters of the families that are particularly religious go to Catholic schools, thus avoiding coeducation without putting into question their professional future in the US. Precisely, most of the young South Asians (boys in-

cluded) are not at all excluded from the economic system and go to universities, including the most prestigious ones.

Yet, we cannot systematically compare the young Muslims of New York to their peers in Europe. They all share the experience of an identity malaise, even though it acquires a less poignant dimension in the case of South Asians in the US. The exacerbated religiosity constitutes in most cases the ultimate expression of an identity crisis and lies within the scope of the emergence of the Islamic phenomenon throughout the world. It should also be noted that if young South Asians do not suffer much from discrimination at a personal level, what is perceived as an ambient hostility against Islam in the US exerts a definite impact on their identity construction.

As for the concern for rationality, it urges young Muslims to get interested in religion not so much through the intermediary of rites borrowed from South Asian tradition but rather through the (re)reading of religious texts (Koran and Hadith in particular), (re)interpreted in the light of their needs. Some, by engaging in comprehensive studies, are urged to push in a way the logic of the quest for sense and rationality to its paroxysm, opting for a lifestyle in accordance in their eyes with their interpretation of Islam. A common will seems to be characterizing the youngsters of the US or of France who aspire to revive an internal purity in reference to an Islamic past that has been altered by previous generations. This notion of purity takes on a double configuration because it not only refers to an aspiration for internal purification but also to a "pure" way of practicing religion, as testified by the following remarks:

What I love in the US is that we can practice the Islamic religion in the purest way, without all the cultural stuff of the first generation.

The emergence of an identity quest in some sections of the second generation, visible (in all senses of

the word) notably among veiled girls, also suggests the will to apprehend religion on a more rational mode in migration, as opposed to the mechanical practices of the Islamic religion in the country of origin. Even though this phenomenon involves only a minority of people, it is an aftermath of the migration process and affects not only the second generation but the first as well, a handful of immigrants also getting involved in the process of redefining Islam in the light of Reason. As for the wearing of the veil, it falls within the logic of the re-appropriation of Islam *vis-à-vis* the parents, who will fear less the "harmful" consequences on their daughters of an emancipation *à l'américaine*, and *vis-à-vis* the Self: the veil offers to young Muslim girls a form of protection allowing them in return to occupy sectors traditionally reserved for males, without fearing to violate the Islamic law. The wearing of the veil offers an internal pride which comes together, in some cases, with a feeling of superiority to other non-veiled Muslims, threatened, according to the veiled girls, by the risk of "disintegration" into the host society. But beyond these aspects of "inner pride" and spiritual quest, the phenomenon is also symptomatic of the impact exerted by movements like the Jama'at-i Islami on South Asians, already observed within the first generation and making headway within the second generation as well, as testified notably by the rhetoric of purity and purification. As noted earlier, the Jama'at-i Islami's ideology has (largely) penetrated several of the institutions that are meant to offer immigrants and their offspring the opportunity to preserve their ethno-religious heritage (mosques, schools, summer-camps, etc.).

However, this avowed Islam-ness is not always the result of a thorough reflection on religion or of a spiritual quest, or not even of the sheer impact of fundamentalist movements, but occasionally, if not frequently, betrays identity crises sometimes taken to their paroxysm. The following example, that of an 18-

year-old Muslim female,³⁸ is a case in point: The first time I saw her, she was wearing a hijab. Two weeks later, I saw her at a course on Islam in the university of New York, covered from head to toe with a burqa'. She was taking notes in the class without removing her gloves. The incoherence of her words and her aggressiveness made any discussion with her very difficult. I managed to find out that she was going to medical school but did not intend to practice because her husband would take care of her needs (she was not married at the time of the interview). When I expressed surprise at her choice of undertaking long and difficult studies, she answered that the community needed female doctors and if her husband died she did not want to become homeless. She added that she also wanted to improve her knowledge. During the discussion, in a totally ossified discourse, she repeated several times that Islam does not accept any compromise or adaptation. Finally, she justified the passage to the burqa' by ensuring that she had been guided by God, and that she was supported by her family in her choice. Her general behavior betrayed a desire to express her otherness as strongly as possible; she seemed to be guided by the spirit of revolt of a teenager undergoing an intense identity crisis. It would be interesting to see this girl in a few years: a radical transformation from her part would not be surprising and would corroborate the analysis of Farhad Khosrokhavar for whom Islam is often only one milestone among others in a whole set of individual experiences which gives a meaning to life.³⁹

Beyond this rather extreme case, it should be underlined that outfits, notably the hijab, often worn with jeans and in some cases with (outrageous) make-up, suggest not only a certain Americanization of Muslim girls but also a homogenization, through the physical appearance as a first step. The combination of the hijab with a pair of jeans or the hijab with a long skirt, rather unusual in the South Asian context, seems to

constitute the uniform of a youth, prey to doubt in a materialistic and individualistic society. This uniform, a visible symbol of a quest for identity, contributes at the same time to fabricate a communion between these girls, and by standardizing their physical appearance, it reinforces their efforts to break the *ethnic* barriers between Muslims, edified by their immigrant parents (while, as seen above, another segment is rather pre-occupied with the breaking of *religious* barriers between South Asians). In fact, it becomes difficult to distinguish by this feature alone. As I quickly realized, young South Asian girls wearing the hijab resemble their co-religionists from Egypt notably due to a similar skin color. But, nothing in the behavior of these girls suggests a submission to any particular authority: they are characterized on the contrary by voluntary, sometimes even provocative, manners. Whereas in the subcontinent, the behavior of an individual, of a woman in particular, often depends on the judgment of society, this concern disappears in the US, among the veiled girls at least. By not caring about the way the society considers them, the veiled girls demonstrate in a way their independence and almost paradoxically become closer to a certain form of American conception which precisely encourages the autonomy of mind. Of course, I am only evoking here the cases of girls who wear the veil of their own will and not in response to parental pressures. It could be argued that this behavior of indifference vis-à-vis the opinion of the host society implies sentiments of non-belonging of these girls to this society. But in fact, interviews reveal that most of these girls consider the US as the ideal country to live in and to practice their religion because of the freedom it offers. Furthermore, this deliberate identification with Islam is not necessarily the logical consequence of identity anxiety vis-à-vis the host society since, as opposed to the situation of Muslims in Europe, that of the Muslims in the US, in particular those from the subcontinent, is neither to

their disadvantage on the economic level, nor definitely confrontational on the cultural or political level. As for the community's opinion, above all concerned with the issue of social integration and economic success, and hence not necessarily approving of the wearing of ostensible religious symbols, it does not influence the behavior of the veiled girls.

We have so far mostly underlined the case of the female population by evoking the question of the hijab. Males present strong similarities in their behavior as well as in their motivation for (re)Islamization. The phenomenon answers the same quest for sense and identity, engendered and reinforced at the same time by the ambient hostility, or at least felt as such, against Islam in American society, by the education in the American system which calls for questioning of the self and of the surrounding milieu, and by the impact of movements like the Jama'at-i Islami. Above all, Islamization is perceived as an attempt to fill the void created by what is perceived as the failure of secular ideologies.

The religious conduct described above involves only a minority of Muslims in the US. However, if religion remains often confined to the private sphere, it does have a determining importance in the construction of the identity of young Muslims and in their will to perpetuate their heritage or on the contrary to melt themselves within the dominating culture. This importance of religion is even more enhanced when the question of marriage arises.

Marriage: the ultimate stake?

The question of marriage is essential because it not only represents the ultimate indicator of assimilation of a given community into the host society but also constitutes one of the main concerns — especially the marriage of girls — of the first as well of the second generation. This question will also enable us to evaluate the survival of the attachment to religion,

ethnic group, sect, class, caste, etc. We will in addition examine whether the tradition of arranged marriages, so widely spread in the subcontinent, endures in migration.

Parents' anguish and expectations

The following dialogue between a well-off, Pakistani, Sunni mother of three kids and myself represents to my mind a good illustration of the South Asian conception of marriage:

Q: Whom do you want your kids to marry?

A: Anyone as long as they are happy.

Q: Even non-Muslims?

A: No, no. They have to be Muslims. That's in fact my only requirement.

Q: Even non-South-Asians?

A: Yes. But to be frank, I would prefer someone from Pakistan. It will make things easier. But with time, I have changed. If at least, they are Muslims, I will be happy.

Q: Even African-Americans?

A: No, no. In fact, for the happiness of my children, it would be better if they are not too different from us, ... I mean, from them. Moreover, African-Americans are converts.

Q: You say, any Muslim, except African-Americans? What about Shi'as?

A: (hesitation) I would not prefer but I would prefer Shi'as to Ahmadis⁴⁰ or Ismailis.⁴¹

Q: And what about Sunni Pakistani poor Muslims?

A: Who would like a poor wife or husband for their children? No, I would prefer them to be of the same economic status.

A gap can thus be observed between ideals (marriages to non-Muslims, whatever their ethnic and socio-economic background) of the official and collective discourses (heard in mosques notably) and the (non)confessed desires of immigrants interviewed individually. The great majority of South Asian parents would like their offspring to conclude endogamous marriages, with two criteria in particular taking prece-

dence over the others: religion and class.

But if the above interview shows the preferences of the majority of immigrants on the question of the marriage of their children, it however suggests that the choice of the mate is left to the decision of the children. But reality shows another type of discrepancy, this time related to the behavior of parents and to the wishes formulated on the question of marriage for their sons and daughters: the pressures on the latter for arranged marriages are greater than on the former.

Regula Qureshi has analyzed the socialization process of young South Asian Muslim females in Canada, destined to increase their propensity to accept arranged marriages. Let us summarize this study, which coincides with my own empirical observations: traditionally, marriages are concluded between families rather than between individuals. The idea is inculcated in children from an early age that they will have an arranged marriage and that any free mixing of genders beyond the immediate family goes against Indo-Islamic values. This tradition is reproduced in migration. Girls especially are encouraged to adopt a certain type of behavior centered on the notion of modesty (in the manners as well as in the clothing). Their contacts are restricted within the school and family spaces. Activities within the domestic sphere are limited to homework and to the participation in household chores. Outings are often with the family, consisting in going shopping and visiting relatives or family friends. Young girls are encouraged to avoid intimate relations with the opposite sex. As in most traditional societies, the woman guarantees by the preservation of her virginity the honor (*izzat*) of the family. If she violates this principle, she takes the risk of seeing potential suitors of the community moving away.

In some extreme cases, to counter any possibility of a marriage which does not conform with their expectations, parents send their daughters to South Asia

or marry them off at an early age. Sometimes, the whole family even moves back to India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh.

Boys benefit from a much greater freedom than their sisters, even if parents also expect them to have, if not arranged, at least marriages that conform to Indo-Islamic traditions. Taboos on relations with the opposite sex are partially lifted, provided these relations will not lead to any deep attachment.⁴² Thus, although in some "liberal" families, the tradition of arranged marriages does not have much relevance in the diasporic context, the attachment for strictly endogamous or relatively endogamous (that is within the Muslim community) marriages remains alive in the majority of cases.

Marriage and the debates it arouses, far from staying confined to the family sphere, has been now spreading out in the public sphere (mosques, Islamic associations). These institutions encourage Muslims to break ethnic and social barriers and exhort them to insist on the religious dimension. The arguments against mixed marriages (with non-Muslims) are trotted out periodically in sermons, meetings between devotees, and Islamic magazines. I attended a meeting on this topic at the Islamic Center of Long Island. The arguments put forward were the following: increase in the propensity to move away from religion, higher percentage of divorces in mixed marriages, difficulty of transmitting the Islamic religion. Whereas the marriage of Muslim men with women of the Book (that is Jewish or Christian) is licit in Islam, it has been progressively discouraged in the US: the mother being usually endorsed with the role of inculcating religious values, the children will probably follow her religion rather than their father's. Besides, marriages of Muslims to non-Muslims reduce the chances for women of the Muslim community to find a husband of their own religious group. In fact, this issue is now seen as an acute problem within the Muslim community. The se-

lection of a husband for girls is becoming increasingly difficult not only because of the increase of mixed marriages among men but also because more men than women are willing to go back to their country of origin to get married whereas women are less inclined to do so for reasons explained below. Moreover, the spatial segregation, often separating men from women in mosques and Islamic organizations, makes interactions more difficult. Are South Asian Muslims of the US heading toward a situation comparable to that of the Parsis of London or Karachi who have seen the number of single women increase in their community because the latter do not wish to contract a marital union outside the community but are unable to find suitable boys within the community?⁴³ Or even a situation similar to that of (too) highly educated Muslim women in South Asia who also have difficulties finding a husband in their own community? In any case, there is now a growing awareness within the community of the situation it pushes its daughters into if it does not offer them the occasion of intra-community meetings.

Reactions and expectations of the second generation

There are no official statistics available on the percentage of mixed marriages in the US. According to my own interviews, many young South Asian Muslims, raised in the US, are not necessarily opposed to the idea of an arranged marriage. A young male of Indian origin said:

I have never had any girlfriend so far. My parents will not like it and I do not want to annoy them. I haven't thought about the question of marriage yet. If I don't find anyone, my parents will look for me.... If this system of arranged marriages has been working well for so long in India, it cannot be so bad.

Youngsters expect nonetheless a certain flexibility from their parents. They claim the right to be allowed to speak over the phone, exchange letters, even meet the future mate before marriage. These are all

changes that have been taking place gradually in the subcontinent for several years. But it is the principle of endogamy that the parents are the most concerned with, showing thus a resistance to assimilation. According to my interviews, young South Asians, in their majority, as their peers in Britain for instance,⁴⁴ express their will to marry Muslims, without insisting however on the ethnic dimension. But according to my observations, marriages between Muslims of different ethnic backgrounds are relatively rare. Marriages taking place outside the ethnic community are often marriages outside the religious group as well, in most cases with whites. Some, among the latter, convert to Islam, but not systematically. As far as the class issue is concerned, young Muslims, even the most religious ones who repeatedly hold discourses on the egalitarian nature of Islam, largely tend to marry within their own social class. In New York, you will not daily come across Muslim girls from a middle-class background who have married a (South Asian) taxi-driver or a newspaper vendor.

The question of marriage shows the relative absence of a rebellious mind and the will to satisfy the parents. The high rate of failures of (love) marriages in the US reinforces their acceptance of endogamous marriages, even of arranged marriages. Some even apologetically praise the arranged marriage system, because they need to convince the others (the host-society in the present case) as well as themselves of the validity of their choice.

The question of marriage reflects a deliberate reluctance to assimilation. Those expressing the wish to marry Muslims are not necessarily characterized by an enhanced religiosity and even less by a rigorous observance of the religious precepts. Yet, the attachment for the ethno-religious heritage remains.

There are no significant divergences observed in terms of endogamy between young South Asians of various sectarian affiliations. But those belonging to

sectarian minorities, whether they are Twelver Shi'as, Ismailis or Ahmadis, can be more easily persuaded to enter into endogamous alliances so as to ensure the perpetuation of the group. An analysis of the matrimonial ads in *India Abroad* from January to December 1996 showed the persistence of the importance given to the sectarian origin and class affiliation whereas the regional and even more the linguistic background have been somewhat relegated to the background.

The following interview with a Bohra girl born in the US corroborates our analysis:

Q: Do you go out with boys?

R: No, because there are not many Bohras here.

Q: You want to go out only with Bohras?

R: Yes.

Q: Do you want to have an arranged marriage?

R: No. But I do want to marry a Bohra. Because we will have more things in common. We will understand each other better.

Q: Are you very religious?

R: No, but I may become so later. That's why I want to marry a Bohra.... Children should grow up with only one religion.... If I do not find any Bohra here, I will go to Toronto or to London but not to India, nor to Kenya because I feel westernized.

The last sentence underlines the perception prevalent among the youth of the diaspora of their peers in the subcontinent and in East Africa as much more conservative than themselves. In East Africa, South Asians, who lived for the most part in strictly confined communities, tended to reproduce as faithfully as possible their ways of life in South Asia. But this interview reinforces nonetheless the idea of a preferential endogamous selection, even within the second generation, whatever their sectarian affiliation.

Reflections, reactions and "resistance"

Interviews with many young South Asians may suggest an acceptance of endogamous, even arranged, marriages, without much questioning. However, the multiplication of short stories and novels, as

well as of articles in ethnic magazines about not only marriage but also sexuality leads us to think that this problem represents a major issue, if not an "obsession," within the second generation, at least as intense as within the first one. It also infers efforts for a reflection on this topic as well as for a potential calling into question (albeit only by a minority of youngsters) of traditional schemas. Particularly concerned are those young girls, whose sexuality has been oppressed, even suppressed, under the cover of a culturo-religious preservation. In fact, most of the literature and articles on this theme have been precisely written by women.

For some youngsters, whether men or women, this work of reflection translates into an exploration of their sexuality. This can lead sometimes to behaviors perceived as deviant, or even sometimes totally un-Islamic, by the community. Homosexuality is an example in case. We shall recall that the concept of homosexuality in the subcontinent is till today not only taboo, but also invites confusion: words designating male sexuality do exist (*salingkamukta* in Hindi for instance, but there is no word in Urdu to my knowledge), but homosexuals are more frequently confused with the hijras (or *hijre*), or eunuchs. As for lesbians, their very existence is negated as testified by the absence of any word designating them.

In the American context, homosexuality is expressed more freely. It is of course impossible to evaluate the phenomenon in the South Asian community in the US, all the more since it is not always openly exhibited. However, as testified by the burgeoning of representative associations, not only has this recognition been growing since the 1980s but it has also become very organized, encouraged by the tolerance (as relative as it might be) of the American society in this matter. Interestingly enough, homosexuality represents in a way a powerful means of integration as it breaks down social, ethnic and reli-

gious barriers, bringing together individuals only linked by a "common" sexual behavior.

Selection of the spouse: return to the country of origin?

As underlined before, many young South Asians submit themselves to the will of their parents in terms of marriage, without showing much resistance. An evolution both in time and space, in the cases of arranged or semi-arranged marriages, has taken place, pertaining to the selection of the spouse. A difference of behavior in the selection pattern between males and females is noticeable.

At the early stage of migration, mainly because of the very low number of South Asian families in the US, the parents would go back systematically to the subcontinent to find a spouse for their child. However, these marriages between a person who has lived in the US and another who has spent her entire life in South Asia, have often caused tensions for the couple. An Indian Muslim immigrant tells the experience of her daughter (rather atypical however since the decision of the marriage was made by the daughter):

When she was 19, my daughter was fascinated by India, by Bollywood. She fell in love with the son of my sister or at least believed she was. They got married and her husband came here. But he could not adapt himself. He found the society too liberal. He was controlling my daughter too much. They finally divorced.

Apart from problems of intellectual and cultural compatibility, there is an imbalance in the relationship. If the husband is the migrant, he may feel for several reasons in a situation of inferiority: on the one hand, he will have to learn everything about the American way of life from his wife; he will be constrained to live with his in-laws whereas custom requires the opposite. In a reverse situation, a woman who migrates to the US will find herself at the mercy of her husband and her in-laws, whom she may hardly know, in a country totally foreign to her.⁴⁵ In fact, in South Asia

itself, whereas marriages of children with Indians, Pakistanis or Bangladeshis of the diaspora used to be perceived as a good "opportunity," negative stereotypes have been formed for a few years: young women of the diaspora are criticized for their westernization which supposedly urges them to place their career before their family lives. Horrible stories circulate about men marrying a woman in the country of origin for the dowry and then abandoning her after having dispossessed her of her jewels. These stories, as well as the numerous cases of men who had pretended to occupy professional jobs in the US while they were in reality working in a gas-station or in grocery store, have rendered the middle-class families, keen to enhance their social status via migration, more careful and less enthusiastic about marrying off their children to coreligionists or compatriots in the diaspora.

However, intercontinental marriages have not stopped for all that. But they seem to involve men more than women because the former fear the westernization of the latter and prefer women more respectful in their eyes of traditions. Besides, as underlined by Regula Qureshi, education and social status are often more important for men than marriage, and men can express themselves more easily than women as individuals without breaking the family ties.⁴⁶ Such a behavior reinforces the difficulties of women trying to find spouses within the community. It should be noted that according to the male conception, South Asian women in the US are the ones who, because of their paranoiac behavior, refuse to have any intimate relation with South Asian men that could lead to a marriage. The following dialogue, extracted from a novel, illustrates this view. A young doctor from New York, recently married in India, is going to the airport to pick up his wife. On the way, he talks with the taxi driver, Vyshna, who is also an Indian:

"Could you not meet an Indian woman living in the

US?," asked Vyshna as he turned into the airport.

"I've dated a few, but it just didn't work out. They had the attitude that I was going to take away their rights. We had a difference of opinion regarding the definition of the word 'independence', I guess."⁴⁷

South Asian girls of the diaspora seem to be outnumbering boys in terms of mixed marriages, as they believe South Asian men more likely to behave in a domineering manner. When they accept an arranged/endogamous marriage, they show a clear preference for spouses selected (by the parents or by themselves) in the US rather than in the subcontinent. They hope that a youngster from the diaspora will guarantee them a greater freedom than a husband freshly arrived from South Asia.

Such is the reason why the South Asian community tries to organize, via a variety of channels, meetings between youngsters of the same religious group, even of the same social, ethnic and sectarian groups. Professionals in particular are involved in such activities. Associations, like IMANA (Islamic Medical Association of North America) for instance, whose main purpose is to organize meetings between Muslims sharing the same occupation, now invites youngsters to participate in their annual conventions. Such associations have the advantage for parents of circumscribing the social opportunities of their children to a circle comprising Muslims mostly but also South Asians belonging to the same social background. For many parents, wishing to see their children marry (wealthy) South Asian Muslims without exerting on them pressure in favor of an arranged marriage, a "voluntary" selection of a spouse in this type of organizations is the ideal solution.

Conclusion

Young South Asian Muslims are characterized by a fairly high level of education, and are thus structurally integrated into American society, like the first generation. They differentiate themselves from many of their

peers in Great Britain, as well as from African-Americans in the US or from North African Muslims in France. But they do retain nonetheless an attachment for their so-called traditional values, as reflected in the importance given to family, an essential point of reference.

Islam occupies a notable place in their identity construction but apparently more in response to a quest for sense in a materialistic society than as the aftermath of a societal rejection that would lead to a logic of confrontation as is the case with many of their peers in Britain, with African-Americans in the US or North Africans in France. The discrimination, which nevertheless affects some young Muslims in the US, contributes indeed to reinforce their identity assertion but does not necessarily represent the main reason for this assertion. However, a distinction should be made between youngsters for whom Islam represents one element, even though potentially essential, of their identity, among others, but who will not for all that necessarily follow rigorously the precepts of Islam and those (in a minority), who, on the contrary, will not only call into question traditional teachings but also pursue the logic of their quest to the point of trying to adopt a way of life as Islamic as possible in a non-Muslim society. The effects of migration and of the education in the US urge many youngsters to refuse the accomplishment of rites, whose significance they do not understand, and to favor a certain rationalization. It is not Islam per se which is rationalized but the religion is apprehended on a more rational mode in migration, as opposed to the mechanical practice of religion still vigorous in South Asia. Finally, the impact of fundamentalist groups, like the Jama'at-i Islami, noticeable within the first generation, affects the second generation as well. The very redefinition of Islam in diaspora in a more rigid form testifies to it.

The importance given to Islam does not exclude an identification with the "ethnic" kin group. In other

words, some young Muslims from the subcontinent also stress their affiliation with other South Asians, beyond the religious belonging. When the question of marriage arises however, alliances within the religious kin group seem to prevail. The class factor also remains firmly entrenched, including among those who hail the egalitarian nature of Islam.

As a matter of fact, the conciliatory attitude of the youngsters toward their family and the place bestowed on Islam in the construction of their identity tend to incite them to perpetuate the tradition of endogamous, even arranged, marriages, even though in a less rigid form than in the subcontinent.

But this conciliatory attitude does not imply an absence of internal conflicts among children: they are often the victims of the misunderstanding of their parents, while submitted to the contradictory pressures from the family and the host society. These conflicts frequently engender an attitude of schizophrenia and a compartmentalization of one's life, often more marked in the second generation than in the first, in particular during the teenage years. Some youngsters (a minority) call into question the parental authority, either by opting for a radical rupture (by adopting a "deviant" sexual behavior for instance⁴⁸), or by drawing from Islam the weapons to fight it (by veiling themselves for instance against the wishes of the parents, or by showing their dissatisfaction for the mechanical rites upheld by their parents). In other cases, the identity malaise leads to creativity, testifying a dynamic identity construction, which can express itself in writing, as can be noticed in the burgeoning of novels and short stories produced by young South Asians (not necessarily Muslims), women in particular, or in music.

What of the young Muslims' attitudes to American society? The above analysis suggests a close link between the latter and the way identity is constructed, otherness being expressed *vis-à-vis* American soci-

ety, even in reaction. Intellectual progress leading to a certain form of identity construction, as well as to the setting up of organizations of a religious or cultural type, seems to result from the migration process, even if this process took place a generation ago.

Notes

¹ Gilles Kepel, *A l'ouest d'Allah*, Paris, Seuil, 1994, p. 12.

² Peter van der Veer, ed., *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.

³ Aminah Mohammad-Arif, *Salam America: L'islam indien en diaspora*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2000.

⁴ The Barelwi movement, very prominent in South Asia, in Pakistan in particular, embodies the popular representation of Sufi traditions. Cf. Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan and his Movement*, Delhi, OUP, 1996.

⁵ Francis Robinson, *Varieties of South Asian Islam*, Coventry, Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, 1988, p. 20.

⁶ See Sucheta Mazumdar, "The Politics of Religion and National Origin: Rediscovering Hindu Indian identity in the United States" in Vasant Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar, eds., *The Antinomies of Modernity*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2002; Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

⁷ I thank Yvonne Haddad for this piece of information.

⁸ The concept of ashrafization derives from its Hindu "counterpart" known as sanskritization whereby low-caste groups adopt the traditions of upper-caste groups, of Brahmins in particular, so as to enhance their status in society. This concept of sanskritization has been extensively studied by M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, London, Asia Publishing House, 1962.

⁹ Even though I am primarily dealing here with Muslims, the reader will quickly notice that I am sometimes referring, if necessary, to examples or statements of non-Muslim South Asians as well to illustrate my text since in many ways Muslim South Asians share, in their identity experiences, common characteristics with their non-Muslim peers.

¹⁰ *India Abroad*, August 30, 1996, p. 42.

¹¹ *Masala*, Fall 1996, p. 42.

¹² *India Abroad*, October 18, 1996, p. 3.

¹³ Danièle Joly, "Musulmans — Immigrants — Métropoles: la jeunesse pakistanaise musulmane de Birmingham," *Les Temps Modernes: Démocratie et minorités ethniques — le cas anglais*,

July-August 1991, 540-541, pp. 218-224.

¹⁴ Anu Gupta, "Crystal Quince," in Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, ed., *Living in America: Poetry and Fiction by South Asian American Writers*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1995, p. 108.

¹⁵ Usha and Arthur Helweg, *An Immigrant Success Story: East Indians in America*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990, p. 143.

¹⁶ Amita Vasudeva, "Journal Entry," in The Women of the South Asian Descent Collective, eds., *Our Feet Walk the Sky: Women of the South Asian Diaspora*, San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, p. 132.

¹⁷ It should be kept in mind that the concepts of liberal, conservative and traditional can be very relative: a behavior perceived as conservative in the US can be seen as very liberal in South Asia.

¹⁸ It should be noted that the study of diasporic populations allows us to better understand through comparison the dynamic of changes in the country of origin, in the most varied fields: food habits, attitude toward arranged marriages, religious practices, etc.

¹⁹ Ron Kelley, "Muslims in Los Angeles," in Yvonne Haddad & Jane Idleman Smith, eds., *Muslim Communities in North America*, New York, State University of New York Press, pp. 140-1.

²⁰ This is not really true for Indians, the subcontinent having a multiplicity of languages. In fact, the only language that Indians in America have in common is English.

²¹ *India Today*, August 31, 1989, p. 98.

²² Priya Agarwal, *Passage from India: Post-1965 Indian Immigrants and their Children*, Palos Verdes, Yuvati Publications, 1991, p. 4.

²³ Cf. Roland Miller, *Mapilla Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends*, Madras: Orient Longman, 1992 (1st ed. 1976), pp. 173-176.

²⁴ Iftekhar Malik, *Pakistanis in Michigan: A Study of Third Culture and Acculturation*, New York: AMS Press, 1989, p. 148.

²⁵ Some even seem to have kept a very static image of India: one immigrant from East Africa said for instance that he did not know Hyderabad was a city and not a state.

²⁶ Poetic gathering (Urdu poetry in particular).

²⁷ A lyrical song (often in Urdu).

²⁸ Mystical song of Sufi inspiration.

²⁹ "Principal's Welcome," *Crescent School: Student Book*, 1996, p.4.

³⁰ Sucheta Mazumdar, *op.cit.*

³¹ Yvonne Haddad & Adair Lumnis, *Islamic Values in the United States: A Comparative Study*, New York, OUP, p. 120.

³² A lamentation assembly.

³³ *Gham*. lit. "pain"; it refers here to the lamentations for the martyrs of Karbala.

³⁴ Vernon Schubel, "The Muharram Majlis: the Role of a Ritual in the Preservation of Shi'a Identity," in Earle Waugh, Sharon Abu-

Laban & Regula Qureshi, eds., *Muslim Families in North America*, Edmonton, The University of Alberta Press, p. 128.

³⁵ A long garment covering women from head to toe.

³⁶ Nadine Weibel, "Islamité, égalité et complémentarité: vers une nouvelle approche de l'identité féminine," *Archives de sciences sociales des Religions*, n°19, July -September 1996, p. 136.

³⁷ Farhad Khosrokhavar, "L'identité voilée," *Confluences – Méditerranée*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 16, Winter 1995-1996, pp. 69-84.

³⁸ Interview in December 1995.

³⁹ Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L'islam des jeunes*, Paris Flammarion, 1997, p. 314.

⁴⁰ Ahmadis are a heterodox sect founded at the very beginning of the 20th century. Their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1838-1908) claimed that he was himself a Prophet. Because of this claim which goes against one of the major tenets of Islam whereby Prophet Muhammad is considered as the last prophet, Ahmadis were declared non-Muslims in Pakistan and have been since then persecuted by the successive regimes. They are also particularly known for their proselytism all over the world. Cf. Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989.

⁴¹ Ismailis are a sect within the larger Shi'a group. As opposed to the dominant sect of Shi'as, that of the Twelvers who believe in 12 imams, they believe in only seven imams. There are divided into two main branches: Khojas (followers of the Agha Khan, based in Karachi) and Bohras (disciples of the Dai Mutlaq based in Bombay). Cf. Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrine*, Cambridge, CUP, 1990.

⁴² Regula Qureshi, "Marriage Strategies among Muslims from South Asia," in Earle Waugh, Sharon Abu-Laban & Regula Qureshi, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 183-212.

⁴³ Cf. John Hinnells, "South Asian Diaspora Communities and Their Religion: A Comparative Study of Parsi Experiences," *South Asia Research*, 14(1), Spring 1994, p. 70.

⁴⁴ Cf. Danièle Joly, *Making a Place for Islam in British Society: Muslims in Birmingham* Coventry, Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, pp. 214-218.

⁴⁵ Usha and Arthur Helweg, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-188.

⁴⁶ Regula Qureshi, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Bhargavi C. Mandava, *When the Oceans Meet*, Seattle, Seal Press, 1996, p. 197.

⁴⁸ Not of course that homosexuality is only and systematically the expression of a reaction to the parents' over strictness.